

# OVERBARKING

THE COMPLETE



**2022  
Hugo Award  
Finalist  
Best Related  
Work**

*The epic saga of how a culture war came to consume science fiction's most famous literary award*

**CAMESTROS FELAPTON**

The Complete Debarkle  
1880 to 2020

by Camestros Felapton

*Debarkle (the complete edition): 1880 to 2020 by Camestros Felapton*

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# Foreword to the Complete Edition

I began blogging in late May 2015 in part as a reaction to the impact of the Sad Puppy/Rabid Puppy campaign towards the Hugo Awards. By that point in the wave of internet arguments on the issue, many of the most important events had happened aside from the voting. However, it was already apparent that accounts of recent events were shifting, partly through active disinformation but often just through people misremembering who had said what and when.

I started to try to keep track of things in my own way but making use of the blog/fanzine *File770*'s regular "Puppy Roundup" posts and other sources. I didn't at that time have any intention of writing up an account of events, mainly because I thought other people would do that. Indeed, I assumed that there would be multiple lengthy retrospectives on events given the large number of professional writers involved in events.

As time passed, the shape of the events in 2015 became more clearly part of a broader cultural conflict in which the key figures of the Puppy campaigns were just minor players swept along by social and political tides. Following the changing politics through the following five years was made easier by seeing how the former Puppies were reacting to major political change in the USA and the world.

During that time, I was also researching about events in fandom that I had not witnessed but which had direct or indirect bearing on the events of 2015. From about 2017 I did begin to think about collating all of this information into a clearer account of what had occurred in 2015 but it was difficult to identify a clear beginning and end to the story. The chaotic year of 2020 helped clarify matters, in particular the aftermath of the US Presidential election. Although the former Puppies were not uniformly supporters of Donald Trump, they largely all believed that the 2020 US Presidential Election had to some degree been illegitimate. The parallels between their beliefs about the nature of US voting and their half-a-decade earlier claims about a science fiction literary award were notable. The January 6 2021 demonstrations that led to the storming of the US Capitol building by Trump supporters, clarified matters. There was a journey that people on the US right had taken over the past few years and the conflict over the Hugo Awards was one way that journey could be illustrated on a smaller scale.

On January 8 2021 I announced on my blog that I would be starting this project, saying:

*Neither GamerGate nor the Debarkle by themselves explain events and both were shaped by social forces that were hard to see. Yet, rather like the tracks made by invisible particles in a bubble chamber, the revealed shifts in attitudes and changing political coalitions that were also leading up to changes on a bigger scale. Within a short time, political upsets in the US and UK (Trump becoming the Republican Party POTUS nominee and the Brexit referendum) saw right-wing, populist, anti-rational positions taking hold of national policy. Where they motivated by the same thing as the Puppy movements? We can debate that but the Puppies generally thought so (Brexit more than Trump oddly).*

*Five years after peak-Puppy, in the hell year that was 2020 notable figures in the Debarkle were pushing firstly covid-19 conspiracies, followed by attempts to mobilise anti-lockdown protests, followed by anti-mask wearing propaganda, followed by anti-vaccine propaganda. In the wake of Donald Trump's election defeat, chief Sad Puppy Larry Correia was a notable booster of "steal" conspiracy theories and his posts on the topic were widely shared in conservative circles. Meanwhile, since late 2017, Vox Day was an early adopter and promoter of "QANON" the free-floating anti-rational meta-conspiracy theory and also an early advocate in 2020 of the need for Trump to seize power by force to ensure a second term.*

<https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/01/08/starting-february-debarkle/>

I should note here that I don't want this account to be taken as overstating the impact of the Puppy campaigns on US culture or politics. They were a minor event, all things considered, and they were not a root cause of later events. However, they were a microcosmic example of how wider political forces were playing out and the participants help illustrate the way disinformation and polarisation work in tandem to escalate political conflict.

On a final note, I habitually use an impersonal tone but this is clearly my perception of events. I've done my best to show my research but this is not intended as a definitive or final take on these events.

# Acknowledgements

*Debarkle* is a work that exists as public drafts. My approach was to research several chapters ahead but to write individual chapters directly on my blog. Those chapters were published with little or no change from how they were initially typed. Inevitably that meant they contained factual errors, confusing sentences, misspellings, poor grammar and typos. Thankfully I was ably helped by a small army of people.

Firstly, I'd like to thank multiple people who contacted me by email or by direct message with corrections or advice. Given the private nature of that correspondence I won't name them directly but they know who they are and the correspondence was gratefully received.

Secondly, all of the people who commented on the blog during the project. All comments were useful, including the negative comments. There were definitely times when I screwed up, including allowing some comments from a GamerGate supporter on to the blog which understandably upset many people. Frank criticism from people at the blog helped this project enormously. Helpful advice and general corrections also helped steer the project. Yes, this is very much a personal project but engaging with people and listening to other voices improved every chapter and also help me get through what was nearly a year's worth of writing. Among those many comments were a whole set that became known as the "Tyop Patrol", who provided swift feedback on the legion of misspellings I produced. So a special thanks to the commenters and Tyop Patrol members: -dsr-, Aaron Pound, Andrew, Bonnie McDaniel, Connie Collins, Cora Buhlert, dann665, David Goldfarb, Doris V. Sutherland, femmederesistance, fontfolly, frasersherman, George Phillies, Greg Hullender, Hampus Eckerman, Ingvar, James Davis Nicoll, jaynsand, Jenora Feuer, Jessica, JJ, Johan P, Kat Goodwin, katster, Lampwick, Laura (special thanks for footnote checks), Laura Resnick, lenorarose, Lurkertype, michaeleochaidh, Mike Glycer, Mister Dalliard, Msb, my dog is named hannah, Owlmirror, Passing Stranger, Paul Weimer, PhilRM, R.L., Rick Moen, rlewiston777, sfp476, Sophie Jane, Space Oddity, StefanB, Steve, stevejwright, stewart, sweetgumandpines, Uri, and Vicki Rosenzweig. Thanks also to Danny Sichel for a host of edits prior to publishing this complete version. Any remaining spelling mistakes, mispunctuation and grammatical errors are purely my fault.

Thirdly, a big and broad cheer of thanks to fandom and the multiple generations of fandom who have kept the strange anarchic experiment in democracy known as Worldcon going for decades. Special thanks to Mike Glycer for his support of the project and also his extensive blog archives, without which much of this project wouldn't have been possible.

Lastly, corrections and comments remain welcome for this project, and I'll update this text when necessary.

# 1: Introduction

*Welcome to an epic story of politics, conspiracies, fans, and rocket ships in which the political chaos of 2020 was presaged by a culture war for a literary award...*

## ***From January 6 2021 to January 7 2015***

At around 8 am Eastern Standard Time on the 6th of January 2021, the then-President of the United States sent a message on the social media platform Twitter:

*“States want to correct their votes, which they now know were based on irregularities and fraud, plus corrupt process never received legislative approval. All Mike Pence has to do is send them back to the States, AND WE WIN. Do it Mike, this is a time for extreme courage!”*

<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/06/do-it-mike-trump-leans-on-pence-to-reject-bidens-electoral-college-certification-455319>

The tweet combined falsehoods about the presidential election with a bizarre legal theory that the Vice President could invalidate the votes of the States. That day, the US Congress was set to confirm the electoral victory of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in a joint session presided over by Vice President Mike Pence. Later that day, Pence would state in a letter:

*“my considered judgement that my oath to support and defend the Constitution constrains me from claiming unilateral authority to determine which electoral votes should be counted and which should not.”*

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/read-pences-full-letter-saying-he-cant-claim-unilateral-authority-to-reject-electoral-votes>

Around the same time, President Donald Trump was wrapping up an hour-long speech to his supporters at a rally in Washington. He exhorted them to march on the Capitol building where Congress would be in session. Many pro-Trump supporters had already marched to the Capitol.

By 1:30 pm, police at the Capitol were already retreating as protestors advanced. By 2:13 pm, Mike Pence was escorted from the Senate Chamber for his own safety, as protestors had invaded the building. Violence continued, with lawmakers forced into hiding, multiple deaths, and the city of Washington, DC forced into curfew.

It was a shocking moment in American politics: a riot inspired by confused and poorly substantiated ideas in an attempt to overthrow US constitutional processes and democratic change.

Watching the news on the other side of the world, I was also following the opinions of a number of right-wing voices in the USA in attempt to understand what was going on from their perspective. After all, American conservatives had for years ascribed an almost sacred status to the US Constitution — and yet here were ostensible supporters of a Republican President attempting to overturn the outcome of the Electoral College.

One person I was reading was a writer for the right-wing media outlet *PJ Media/Instapundit*, who wrote in a comment at her own blog about her anger seeing major conservative news outlets condemning the protestors:

*“FUCK THEM.*

*Seriously, I think we should do the media next. Put the fear of Americans into them.*

*Saint Augusto bless us.*

*Anyone has helicopters?”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2021/01/06/we-will-work-until-we-cant/#comment-732567>

Here “Saint Augusto” and “helicopters” are references to a far-right meme about the use by Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet of “death flights”<sup>[1]</sup>, a form of extra-judicial killing by pushing victims out of aircraft.

The following day, alt-right ethnonationalist publisher Vox Day described Sarah A. Hoyt as the “only non-cuck at *Instapundit*”<sup>[2]</sup>. In this context, “cuck” is a derogatory term for mainstream conservatives referencing “cuckold” pornography. Day was applauding a post by Hoyt where she celebrated the actions of the protestors:



*“It’s time to ditch the Marquis de Queensberry [sic] rules. It’s time to stop fighting with our feet in a bucket. Yes, what happened today was very very bad. Yes, it means that what comes next will probably come with a butcher’s bill. I have sons in military age. I’m not thrilled.*

*BUT the fault is not of the protesters. The fault is of the corruptocrats, yes, including the Supreme Court Justices, every one of them who found it easier to roll over for fraud and not let the ridiculous level of fraud in the elections have its day in court.*

*If you’re going to clutch pearls and tut tut do so at those who passed the buck, refused to do their jobs or sided with the left in the hopes of being eaten last.*

*The angry Americans, many of them despoiled out of their livelihoods by the elite’s Covid-19 fun and games designed to destroy the economy so they could steal the election, are the least guilty here. It’s quite likely — if G-d watches out for fools, children, and the United States of America — they’ll be held up as heroes some day.”*

<https://pjmedia.com/instapundit/424440/>

Day himself had been a passionate supporter of Donald Trump from when Trump had originally announced his candidacy in 2015. As a promoter of the infamous “Qanon” conspiracy theory, Day was excited by the events at the Capitol. Among Qanon supporters there was a constitutional theory (widely regarded as nonsensical) that Donald Trump had the power to remain President by use of the Insurrection Act of 1807<sup>[3]</sup> and would be empowered to make the US military conduct new elections. Among the Qanon believers, this was referred to as Trump “crossing the Rubicon” — a reference to Julius Caesar bringing his legions to Rome. In a post on the day entitled “Pence Cucks...and Runs”, Day stated “The President clearly has no choice but to invoke the Insurrection Act.”<sup>[4]</sup>

The protestors in the capitol ranged from the extreme right-wing to neo-Nazis and were not homogeneous in their beliefs. Some were believers in the Qanon conspiracy theories, a kind of free-floating collection of beliefs and rationalisations that would shift from day to day. Others had more conventional conservative beliefs, but were convinced that the US Presidential election of November 2020 had been so deeply compromised by electoral fraud that the result had to be overturned.

The belief that the election had been fraudulent had become entrenched, despite a thunderous lack of evidence and repeated defeat of court challenges. When the Supreme Court refused to even hear a case raised by the State of Texas challenging the election results, many on the right felt betrayed.

Conservatives had taken great comfort from the appointment of three new Supreme Court Justices during the tenure of Donald Trump as President, and had regarded these as particular victories for the right. A conservative writer (who would later attend<sup>[5]</sup> the January 6 rally but not the subsequent protest) wrote of the appointment of Judge Amy Coney Barrett in October 2020:

*“Trump won my vote, (at that time) against my will and better judgment, because of his promise to appoint conservative, originalist, or textualist judges. We conservatives have been consistently betrayed by the Supreme Court for nine or ten decades now, and the Supreme Court overreach into legislative matters has been the single worst source of Satanic evil this nation has ever endured. Nor has the recent behavior of Justice Gorsuch amended matters.”*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2020/10/not-tired-of-winning-yet-cl/>

Amy Coney Barrett’s appointment a few weeks prior to the Presidential election was seen as a means to secure Trump’s victory with a clear conservative majority on the Supreme Court. When the court dismissed the Texas case due to a lack of standing, the sense of betrayal was more deeply compounded. On January 8, when all avenues preventing Joe Biden from becoming President had closed, Wright wrote:

*“There were several venues which could have examined and publicized and rectified such fraud: an independent judiciary, culminating the Supreme Court; local election officials, state officers, governors; state legislatures; police agencies, including the Department of Justice and the FBI; the Electoral College itself; the Congress; the Vice President, in his office as president of the Senate.*

*All these venues have failed, and failed outrageously.”*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2021/01/a-word-of-encouragement/>

And further on in the same essay he would say:

*“These dark days are meant to bring all this treason to light, and all frauds to stand naked. Yes, even the judges and politicians and public servants whom Trump’s faithful aid and support alone elevated to office, who now will not lift a hand, save to plunge a dirk in the spine. The ungrateful friend is the lowest and most loathsome of created beings. Even such as they, the love of heaven seeks to save.”*

ibid

And further on:

*“These dark days, these treasons, these lies, all had to be brought into the light. There are men I would have thought to be friends and staunch allies of patriotism, of the Constitution, of the cause of freedom, who strangled their own ideals, and stabbed friends and allies in the back, in a fashion none could have foreseen nor expected. This is bigger than Trump, bigger than any political party. It is bigger than the nation, bigger than the cause of liberty or law or Western Civilization itself. What happens in this nation over the next month will influence and establish the world over the next several generations. This is a war for the soul of the world.*

*Without these days of darkness, without the desperation and the appearance of victory for the worldly powers, they would never have shown themselves, never have flown their true colors, never have cast public votes for treason. The penalty for treason is the only criminal penalty written in the Constitution. It is death. They have written out their death warrants with their own hands. They have damned themselves by failing to keep faith with nation, law, sworn duty, patriotic love, personal honor, alliance, friendship, humanity. They have failed to keep faith with God.”*

ibid

Strong (if very verbose) stuff. Nor was this sentiment of *wrongness* held only by Trump supporters. Beyond the Qanonists, the MAGAist and die-hard Republicans, there were anti-left libertarians who also believed that the Democratic Party and the more nebulous forces of the left had conspired to “steal” the election. Solid proof was severely lacking but the lack of any substantive evidence did not prevent people circulating their own claims about the election.

One example shared by Hoyt, Wright and Day, was written by a right-wing former accountant who was expressly *not* a Trump supporter but who was also vehemently opposed to the left. Larry Correia is a prominent writer whose posts on Facebook and his own blog about the election were widely shared in the aftermath of November 4.

*“I believe most people on the right already believed that fraud happens in these machine cities, because duh. But I think most of us also believed that our votes still mattered because we could win by beating the margin of lawyer. But after this audacious fuckery? If they can pull off this level of blatant, clumsy, in your face bullshit and get away with it, no amount of regular votes will ever matter again. Even if we overcome Big Tech and the media controlling most information and get more people on our side, they’ll just stop the count when we are too far ahead and make more votes appear until they win. Then the media and Big Tech will declare nothing weird happened. Shut up.*

*So, I can’t say how this is going to go, but none of the ends from this point will be good. At best this marriage goes back to an abusive relationship with irreconcilable differences, and at worst it ends in a murder suicide.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2020/11/09/election-2020-the-more-fuckery-update/>

Correia’s examples included many easily debunked incidents, rumours, and some basic statistical misunderstandings. However, they would be widely shared and were just a small part of the lurid theories being passed around right-wing sources.

On Facebook, one friend of Larry Correia’s shared his post and stated:

*“And it’s not just a Red vs. Blue battle. What we’re dealing with are statistical anomalies so implausible, there is literally no way for them to occur in nature. They must be manufactured. In matters of medicine, or engineering, these would be gargantuan orange caution flags. Alerting us to the fact something very*

*not OK was going on. But we're expected to just \*ignore\* them for the sake of politics? With a giant, rancid dollop of "healing" to boot?"*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/5314110418615148>

This sense of imminent civil war did not spring up fully formed after the presidential election. Talk of a second US civil war comes and goes in right-wing discourse, but during the Trump years discussion had increased and it had even gained its own meme-friendly nickname: Boogaloo<sup>[6]</sup>.

In the comment sections and replies in these right-leaning outlets, a common meme was to frame the situation as four boxes. For example, in September 2020 Brad Torgersen posted an image of a rifle with text saying:

*"They tell us they will get rid of the ballot box.*

*They are already getting rid of the soap box.*

*Eventually they will get rid of the jury box.*

*Do not, under any circumstances, surrender the cartridge box.*

*We will need it. To restore the first three."*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/5011001542259372>

Hoyt, Day, Wright, Correia, and Torgersen were not significant figures in the events of January 6, but they do help illustrate some of the range of opinion among far-right voices on that day. Among them, they represent the Alt-Right/pro-Trump-from-the-beginning (Day), late/reluctant converts to Trump (Hoyt, Wright), as well as Trump-sceptical/anti-anti-Trump libertarians (Correia, Torgersen). Collectively, they show some of the stew of wild theories and frustration among the online right in the wake of Trump's electoral defeat.

So, if these five weren't the most significant voices or key players, why focus on these side characters? Why quote the redshirts from an episode of *Star Trek* and not stick with Captain Kirk? The short answer is that this group were a set of writers that I chose, early in Trump's presidency, to follow to help me better understand how the American right would change and adapt during what was bound to be a chaotic and idiosyncratic time. Why these five? For that, we need to take a trip to six years earlier.

## **January 7 2015**

*"The Hugo awards window (for 2015's nominations) will be open soon. As one of Baen's newest authors, I wanted to be be [sic] the first guy out of the gate with SAD PUPPIES 3. For those of you who don't know what SAD PUPPIES is, it's a (somewhat tongue in cheek) running effort to get stories, books, and people onto the Hugo ballot, who are entirely deserving, but who don't usually get on the ballot. Largely because of the nomination and voting tendencies of World Science Fiction Convention, with its "fandom" community. In the last decade we've seen Hugo voting skew more and more toward literary (as opposed to entertainment) works. Some of these literary pieces barely have any science-fictional or fantastic content in them. Likewise, we've seen the Hugo voting skew ideological, as Worldcon and fandom alike have tended to use the Hugo's as an affirmative action award: giving Hugo's because a writer or artist is (insert underrepresented minority or victim group here) or because a given work features (insert underrepresented minority or victim group here) characters."*

Brad Torgersen <https://web.archive.org/web/20181204082634/https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/01/07/announcing-sad-puppies-3/>

2015 saw an extraordinary cultural battle for control over a literary award. Framed by a group that had jokingly called themselves "The Evil League of Evil" (Hoyt, Day, Wright, Correia, and Torgersen), as a struggle against elites and the left, the campaign would generate months of controversy and argument.

The story behind the events of 2015 stretches back in time and its root causes had lasting implications both for the relatively narrow world of fandom and also into broader society. Like the events of 2020, they encompassed conspiracy theories, accusations of voting fraud, and passionate views about the roles and rights of women and people of colour, as well as questions about gender and sexuality.

At its heart it was a struggle about stories — specifically who gets to decide whose stories get heard.

However, this very question of what-the-struggle-was-about was itself subject to multiple and contradictory

stories. Even the own accounts of the protagonists/antagonists of the conflict shifted over time or contradicted themselves. Six years later, the differences and similarities in stance between the members of the so-called Evil League of Evil revolved around the same framing of world events as they had used for the Hugo Awards: that powerful “elites” were siding with left-wing ideologues to transform society using underhand means. This framing played directly into the hands of the most extreme sections of the right.

The events of 2015 showed how the extreme right could usurp a more conventionally populist campaign. However, it also showed how politically and culturally diverse people could come together and work against a reactionary movement.

Whatever the motives and rationalisations and claims of the Sad and Rabid Puppy campaigns were, the essence of their struggle was a struggle over the control of stories.

On one side was a campaign that worked for (intentionally or not) a principle that said that the control of stories should rest with middle-class, white, English speaking traditionalist men along with those others who were willing to ally themselves to that cause. The opposition to that was simply everybody who rejected that as a foundational principle.

Despite the politics of the Puppy campaigns, establishing that their functional objective was so utterly reactionary is not simple. Of the five people listed, one is a woman and an immigrant from Portugal, another is the son of an immigrant (coincidentally also from Portugal), a third (and with most extreme views on race) is an immigrant TO Europe who claims native American ancestry and claims to be a descendant of a Mexican revolutionary, a fourth is a former atheist. Politics can’t be understood by applying simple stereotypes. The people who led the Puppy campaigns had complex backgrounds, complex motives and ideas that shifted over time. Nevertheless, by accident or intent, the Puppy campaigns sought to turn science fiction back to a past where power rested with men.

## ***Debarkle***

The Debarkle series is yet another attempt to create a story. I had imagined that there would be many such accounts written in 2016 about the events of 2015. After all, it had been a conflict that included many professional and amateur writers! However, even though I went to some effort to document what had happened when (I am blessed with a poor memory which leads me not to trust it), I never could see where the story ended.

One place I considered finishing the story was in the final months of 2016. In that year N.K. Jemisin won the Hugo Award for the book *The Fifth Season* – a work that I regarded as one of the great science fiction novels. A few weeks later at the large commercial media convention DragonCon, Larry Correia and John C. Wright both won prizes in the first annual Dragon Awards — a new science fiction and fantasy award that had been established in the wake of the Puppy campaigns of 2015. Finishing there leant a kind of ‘happily ever after quality’ to the story with the Puppies going their own way and the Hugo Awards once again showing its ability to highlight books destined to be classics of the genre.

Yet that was not the right ending.

The problem with finishing the story there was it retained the idea that the conflict of 2015 was mainly about whether Hugo Awards should be going to one faction or another or one choice of book or another. Behind the conflict were wider political forces and cultural changes — strong currents pulling along people and events far beyond the little world of Hugo fandom. So, this version of the story (and I hope that others will write their own versions) ends much later — or rather, it begins there with this chapter and the attempted coup by supporters of Donald Trump in January 2021.

But we have a long way before we get there. We will first have to run back to the nineteenth-century, catch up with the World Science Fiction Convention, learn about Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America and learn quite how much candy there was in a piñata.

## **FOOTNOTES**

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death\\_flights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_flights)
- [2] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210204232601/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2021/01/give-girl-her-props.html>
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insurrection\\_Act\\_of\\_1807](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insurrection_Act_of_1807)
- [4] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210204234537/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2021/01/pence-cucks.html>
- [5] <http://www.scifiwright.com/2021/01/regarding-the-events-of-jan-6/>
- [6] (or Boog or various other names; there’s a good breakdown here <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/05/27/the-boogaloo-movement-is-not-what-you-think/> )

## 2: Notes, Caveats and Excuses

Before I start part 1 and delve into the early history of things, there are several notes, caveats, warnings and excuses I need to make.

Firstly, names. As far as is sensible, I will call people by their current, public, fandom name that they use. I will avoid dead-naming transgender people (obviously) but also just in general, it is simplest to refer to people by the name they are currently using. This makes sense for nom-de-plume, internet handles, or changes in proper names. However, this project includes historical references, and at times quotes may use older names; in those cases, I may add a footnote clarification. In other cases, we have people with multiple online personas and the connection between those personas was itself a significant topic within fandom. Where dual names are common knowledge and undisputed, I may make some reference to them if relevant (e.g., Vox Day will normally be called “Vox Day” in these essays but with reference to his father Robert Beale, I may use “Theodore Beale”).

‘Sad Puppies’, ‘Rabid Puppies’ and similar terms. Sad Puppies is not a well-defined group. I will try and stick to the following convention:

- *Sad Puppies/Sad Puppy leaders*: I will be referring to people who took active organising or quasi-official roles in at least one of the campaigns: Larry Correia, Brad Torgersen, Sarah A. Hoyt, Kate Paulk, Amanda Green and, to a lesser extent, Dave Freer.
- *Sad Puppy supporters*: anybody more generally advocating for or stating support for a Sad Puppy campaign. This is a much vaguer group. Any claims about this group are generalisations that will not consistently apply to everybody who might fit that label. Some use of weasel words and hedged claims is necessary.
- *People/authors nominated by the Sad Puppies*: this is the term I prefer to use for those people, in general, nominated by one of the Sad Puppy campaigns. In some cases (and to varying degrees) the individuals may also have been Sad Puppy supporters but not in all cases. I want to avoid “Sad Puppy nominees” because it implies an allegiance that may not have existed.
- *People/authors nominated by the Rabid Puppies*: Likewise with the people nominated by the Rabid Puppies. Indeed, it is especially the case with Rabid Puppy nominees, many of whom were unwillingly included in slates.
- *Evil League of Evil*: This ironic name was coined by John C. Wright to mean himself, Sarah A. Hoyt, Larry Correia, and Vox Day. Later, Larry Correia used the term to mean a broader group that formulated Sad Puppies 3 that may or may not have included Vox Day. I’m adding Brad Torgersen to the list as he definitely was part of the Sad Puppy 3 discussion.
- *Mad Genius/Mad Geniuses*: Each of the bloggers at *Mad Genius Club* at the relevant time.
- *Rabid Puppy/Rabid Puppies*: Generally, these aren’t named people and, in this context, I mean people following Vox Day’s direction. Day’s various sub-groups of supporters (Vile Faceless Minions, Evil Legion of Evil, Dread Ilk etc), I’m not going to bother keeping track of. Given that they boast about almost slavish obedience to their “dark lord”, I feel that I’m not infringing too much on their sense of individuality.

I’ll try to avoid the use of other groupings except to clarify quotes, e.g., ‘Barflies’ for regulars at the Baen’s Bar forums or terms like ‘Puppy Kickers’ which are poorly demarcated. However, while these are the conventions I will be using, the people I quote from the height of the kerfuffle will have been less specific in their usage.

Derogatory nicknames of individuals I will not use and I will attempt to change these even in quotes. So “Cameltoe is a stupid head” would be written as “[Camestros] is a stupid head”. However, I may miss some or there may be times where the reference is unclear or times where the nickname is particularly pertinent requiring explanation (e.g., if I was trying to explain that some Puppy supporters used sexualised nicknames then I would quote “Cameltoe is a stupid head” as an example).

Some caveats. The original blog version of this story was the first draft and, if you are new to my writing<sup>[1]</sup>, please note that I frequently misspell words and make grammatical and punctuation errors. Many of these errors are not typos, I really do spell that badly. I also have a bad habit of long, run-on sentences with multiple clauses (and occasional asides) that, with the addition of inconsistent punctuation, I may lose track of even as I write them resulting in an unintelligible mess and grammatical disagreement. I do not consider it rude for people to point out errors or ask for clarification on my blog. It’s fine. My life is a world of being copy-edited. I’m used to it and it is helpful for this project if you leave comments at my blog on any errors you find with Debarkle.

Likewise, while I have over five years of blog research behind this work the initial essays were unfiltered. Corrections and observations and your own memories are welcome in the comments at the blog — indeed they are important as many people participated. I'm fine with people telling me I got a fact wrong or events in the wrong order or offering a different interpretation of the facts. I will correct things! I'm unlikely to take the whole project in a new direction on your say-so though! Pushback and quibbles are fine. I'd also ask people in the comments to be somewhat tolerant of puppy-apologetics that may arise — I'd rather things I say get stress-tested, as it will make the finished product tighter.

This project will touch on many fan controversies. I'm not trying to restart old conflicts but I will inevitably touch on some sore spots, and not just ones involving the Puppies. I'll try to be diplomatic but be aware.

There is also a big and fundamental flaw to the approach I'm taking here. *Debarkle* uses the Puppy Kerfuffle of 2015 as a lens to look at extreme right-wing politics and fandom. The flaw in this approach is that it centres on some terrible people with some appalling and disturbing views. That also means that fans and fannish voices of all kinds get less centred in the narrative than they deserve to be. When I announced this project people did strongly suggest that I ensure that the voices of fans are enabled. I don't know how well I can achieve that and maybe to do that right requires a completely different approach<sup>[2]</sup>. I will try, though.

Another issue with this approach is that I will be quoting and discussing some extreme views including racism, misogyny and transphobia, as well as people advocating violence against people with left-wing views. Some quoted material will be distressing.

I'm being up-front in calling this a narrative rather than a history. I'm picking and choosing what to include. However, I aim to avoid factual claims that cannot be substantiated without quotes and links. In many cases this will mean linking to some websites (or archives of those websites) that promote conspiracy theories, anti-democratic propaganda and which promote hate based on race, gender, and sexuality. As a general rule, I do *not* encourage people to follow those links but they are provided so that people can see the full context.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] If you are not new to my blog then you know this already and also know that I like footnotes.
- [2] Once I was well underway with planning this, I thought of a completely different way of doing it. Instead of my approach of quotes and links and observations, you could do this history as a series of interviews of fans of all kinds, asking them what they thought and how they remembered things. I'd love to read that as a series or as an approach to fan events or distributed controversies like GamerGate or RaceFail, where the "aboutness" of the thing was also in dispute. It's also a project that I know I would be singularly useless at doing.

### 3: Part 1 Overview 1880-2010

Epic sagas need a summary of the pre-saga history. This one is a bit too long for the opening crawl text of *Star Wars*, so if it gets too dry, imagine it is being read by Cate Blanchett in the style of the first *Lord of the Rings* film.

Part 1 of our Debarkle saga is stories about the past. Most of them take place this century but some of the precursors to the events in our saga take place in the Twentieth Century. I can't hope to do justice to the full breadth of science fiction's history but I will be looking at selected events from that history that have repercussions to later events. What follows in this chapter is a whistle-stop tour over many decades up to the early 1990s to just briefly touch on some elements of the past that will re-appear later. We'll touch briefly on the roots of early fandom but mainly highlight some parts of US history that will be important later.

There is no fixed start to the history of science fiction. There is no point at which people haven't invented fantastical stories. In English literature, we can point to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or before that Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* but other candidates for the 'first' exist. So why pick 1880 as a starting point? This is a political story as well as a story about a fannish kerfuffle. In particular, while the Puppy Kerfuffle had a significant international dimension, it was an event that revolved around American politics.

By 1880 the Reconstruction era in the post-Civil War South was over. It was a decade in which the USA managed to have five different Presidents but also began the process of electrification and stepped further down the road of eventually becoming a global superpower. It was also a time in which advances in steam-powered sea travel were leading to even greater immigration to the USA, particularly from southern and eastern Europe.

For our story, 1884 marks the birth of one of the more idiosyncratic candidates for the founder of science fiction: Hugo Gernsback. Born in Luxembourg, Gernsback emigrated to America in 1904 to pursue a career as an inventor in the field of electronics and radio devices. That career would lead him into publishing as well as writing fiction. It was his role as editor of *Amazing Stories* that would lead him to be regarded as a seminal figure in shaping American science fiction and also American science fiction fandom.

Just as science fiction has no unique starting point, neither does fandom. For example, in 1891 The Royal Albert Hall in London held a "Vril-ya Bazaar"<sup>[1]</sup> for devotees of the popular-at-the-time book by Edward Bulwer-Lytton entitled *The Coming Race* — a fantastical tale about a subterranean civilisation of telepaths. However, for our narrative, the relevant iteration of the development of an organised science fiction fandom in the United States, Gernsback's Science Fiction League is an important pre-World War II example that spawned off-shoots in the UK and Australia. We will return to this history of organised fandom in the next Debarkle chapter.

In world politics, the first half of the twentieth century saw the decline of the powerful Empires of the nineteenth-century accelerated by World War I, economic depression and the rise of nationalism. The Russian revolutions saw the rise of the first Communist nation and conceptual shift in world politics to ideological conflicts. In Western Europe, political groups combining nationalism and militarism co-opted the mass-movement politics of socialist parties as counter-movements. In Japan, a similar extreme nationalist ideology fuelled territorial expansion and new imperialism.

In the US, the 1920s saw a resurgence of white supremacist movements, including a new version of the infamous Ku Klux Klan. Policies promoting systemic and overt racism against Black Americans led to further disenfranchisement<sup>[2]</sup>, particularly (but not exclusively) in the former Confederate states. The Democratic Party in the "Solid South"<sup>[3]</sup> exploited these policies to maintain political power. This was part of a long pattern of political racism which had included violence to undermine democracy. In 1898 in Wilmington, North Carolina, Southern Democrats used mob violence to overthrow the town government<sup>[4]</sup>. The 'Red Summer' of 1919<sup>[5]</sup> was followed in 1921 by the Tulsa Race Massacre<sup>[6]</sup> which led to massive destruction and "the single worst incident of racial violence in American history."<sup>[7]</sup>

Immigration policy in the US also attempted to enshrine a specific view of race for the country. The National Origins Formula used quotas as a means to limit immigration from southern and eastern Europe<sup>[8]</sup>. Using the census of 1910 as a baseline, the quota mandated that immigration from a given country could be no greater than 3% of the population of that background currently in the USA. As a large number of Americans were of Protestant Northern European descent, the numbers of people allowed to immigrate from

Northern Europe were much higher. Immigration from many Asian countries had already been restricted by earlier laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act<sup>[9]</sup>.

More positively, the 1920s also saw the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, which established the rights of women to vote<sup>[10]</sup>.

World War II marks a political and cultural boundary between the two (unequal) halves of the Twentieth Century. For our narrative, it was a defining period for many of the influential science fiction writers. The war was framed as an existential struggle against the unambiguous evil of the Nazi regime and also led to technological innovations in computing and nuclear weapons. The mass murder of civilians as an overt ideological policy was not an innovation by the Nazis but the horrific extent and systematic nature of the Holocaust re-shaped post-war attitudes on racism and eugenics.

In the aftermath of World War II, America emerged economically and culturally dominant but in a nuclear rivalry with the Soviet Union. The 1950s saw not only the anti-communist Red Scare aimed at rooting out communist sympathisers within politically or culturally powerful positions but also the less famous but more damaging (in terms of the number of people impacted) Lavender Scare targeting homosexuality<sup>[11]</sup>.

The period following World War II also saw a decades-long fight for civil rights by Black Americans. Protests against school segregation led to multiple legal rulings and counter-protests by white supremacists to maintain segregated education. In 1957 President Eisenhower deployed federal troops to ensure that nine Black children could attend their school in Little Rock, Arkansas<sup>[12]</sup> despite sustained attempts to stop them by protestors and the state government. The Montgomery Bus Boycott<sup>[13]</sup> and other forms of direct action against segregated business were met with a counter-reaction that was often violent. The murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till received national attention, as did the subsequent acquittal of his two murderers<sup>[14]</sup>.

In US party politics the post-war period led to a long period of ideological re-adjustments. Both the Republican and Democratic parties had their own progressive and conservative wings. Positions on the role of government, social welfare, military spending, and civil rights did not split simply along party lines in the 1950s. The massive cultural change and trauma (Cuban Crisis, the JFK assassination, the MLK assassination, the Vietnam War, the peace movement...) didn't change that overnight. The civil rights movement and subsequent legislation in 1964 and 1968 were passed by bi-partisan votes. However, Nixon's 'Southern Strategy' would mark a shift in the political balance within both parties.

The 1960s also saw a marked shift in immigration policy to the USA with the abolition of the racist National Origins Formula<sup>[15]</sup>. While this was a substantial reform, the new laws also prohibited gay people from emigrating to the USA.

Ronald Reagan's 1976 challenge to President Gerald Ford for the Republican Party nomination for president marked a major attempt by the conservative wing of the Republican Party to gain control. Unsuccessful in that election, Reagan would go on to win the nomination in 1980 and then win the presidency twice, marking a high point electorally for overt modern conservatism. Although beset by a series of political scandals (in particular Iran-Contra which somehow managed to touch on nearly every aspect of Reagan's approach to foreign policy)<sup>[16]</sup>, Reagan proved to be electorally popular and after two terms was succeeded by his Vice President George H. W. Bush.

Bush Senior became president at a remarkable point in the twentieth century — a century which had not been lacking in remarkable points. Post-war US foreign and military policy had been defined by the Cold War but with the reform and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, the status quo changed utterly. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war led to the Gulf War, the first major post-Cold War military conflict by the US<sup>[17]</sup>. Bush followed policies aimed at America and American business being the dominant force in the post-Soviet world. Bush also enacted bi-partisan liberalisation of immigration laws with the Immigration Act of 1990<sup>[18]</sup>, and also signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990<sup>[19]</sup>.

Bush Senior's tenure proved to be unpopular with the right of his party and his candidacy in 1992 was challenged by Pat Buchanan in the primaries<sup>[20]</sup>. The electoral landscape was further complicated by the independent candidacy of the eclectic populist Ross Perot. Perot's 1992 campaign was a mix of economic nationalism and novel ideas (such as electronic 'direct democracy') but in terms of overall votes, it did surprisingly well for a third-party with 18% overall but with higher concentrations in Maine and in Utah. However, Perot's votes were too widely distributed to win even a single vote in the USA's Electoral College system.

At age 18, with his first science fiction writing credit for an ongoing radio drama, Brad R. Torgersen casts his vote in 1992 for Ross Perot.<sup>[21]</sup>



## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://www.royalalberthall.com/about-the-hall/news/2016/march/5-10-march-1891-bovril-and-the-first-ever-sci-fi-convention-at-the-royal-albert-hall/>
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disfranchisement\\_after\\_the\\_Reconstruction\\_era](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disfranchisement_after_the_Reconstruction_era)
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solid\\_South](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solid_South)
- [4] <https://revealnews.org/episodes/the-evolution-of-all-american-terrorism-2/>
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_Summer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Summer)
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tulsa\\_race\\_massacre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tulsa_race_massacre)
- [7] <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/04/what-is-black-wall-street-history-of-the-community-and-its-massacre.html>
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Origins\\_Formula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Origins_Formula)
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese\\_Exclusion\\_Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Exclusion_Act)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteenth\\_Amendment\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Constitution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteenth_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution)
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lavender\\_scare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lavender_scare) a key figure in the hyped-up scandal being Roy Cohn, who would later mentor Roger Stone and Donald Trump [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy\\_Cohn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy_Cohn)
- [12] <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/central-high-school-integration>
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montgomery\\_bus\\_boycott](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montgomery_bus_boycott)
- [14] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmett\\_Till](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmett_Till)
- [15] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration\\_and\\_Nationality\\_Act\\_of\\_1965](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_and_Nationality_Act_of_1965)
- [16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran%E2%80%93Contra\\_affair](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran%E2%80%93Contra_affair)
- [17] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War)
- [18] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration\\_Act\\_of\\_1990](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Act_of_1990)
- [19] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americans\\_with\\_Disabilities\\_Act\\_of\\_1990](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americans_with_Disabilities_Act_of_1990)
- [20] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992\\_Republican\\_Party\\_presidential\\_primaries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Republican_Party_presidential_primaries)
- [21] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2012/01/02/iowa-caucuses-seriously-man-who-knows-right/#comment-296528>

## 4: An Inadequate History of Fandom and Worldcon 1939 – 2000

*'FOLLOWERS and glorifiers of the fantastical like to think that they are different, that they represent something new on the face of the earth; mutants born with an intelligence and a sense of farseeing appreciation just a bit higher than the norm. They like to believe that their counterpart has never before existed, that they have no predecessors. "No one," they say, "has ever seen our visions, dreamed our dreams. Never before has man's brain reached out so far into the limitless stretches of the cosmos about him.'*

*The Immortal Storm: A History of Science Fiction Fandom, Sam Moskowitz 1954* <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/1330615>

By the 1950s Science Fiction Fandom was so well established as a concept that notable fan, writer, and critic Sam Moskowitz felt that he could write a history of (mainly) US fandom<sup>[1]</sup>. As the opening paragraph (above) suggests, Moskowitz was observing many of the same features often attributed to science fiction fandom and fans. Moskowitz also noted that a common fallacy was to think of science fiction and fandom as being particularly American (or American-British) whereas it was a worldwide phenomenon, even if fan groups in other nations were necessarily closely connected. Nor was fandom simply people sharing reviews of favourite stories. Of the international fannish groups that Moskowitz identified, he included the pre-war German group *Verein für Raumschiffahrt* (which Moskowitz calls the German Rocket Group)<sup>[2]</sup> whose practical interest in rocketry "presaged the German "buzz-bombs" of the Second World War" (the group had come together as advisors for Fritz Lang's film *Frau im Mond*, and did later include a young Werner von Braun). Willy Ley was a former member of this group who had fled Germany because of the rise of the Nazis and who had also become a notable figure in US fandom and a science fiction writer.

Ley himself would famously document the overlap between pseudoscience and a willingness to take fantastical fiction as fact in his famous 1947 essay *Pseudoscience in Naziland*, pointing out how groups pushing unfounded esoteric beliefs helped foster Nazism.

*"The next group was literally founded upon a novel. That group which I think called itself Wahrheitsgesellschaft — Society for Truth — and which was more or less localized in Berlin, devoted its spare time looking for Vril. Yes, their convictions were founded upon Bulwer-Lytton's "The Coming Race." They knew that the book was fiction, Bulwer-Lytton had used that device in order to be able to tell the truth about this "power." The subterranean humanity was nonsense, Vril was not, Possibly it had enabled the British, who kept it as a State secret, to amass their colonial empire."*

*Pseudoscience in Naziland, Willy Ley, Astounding Science Fiction, May 1947, <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?115880>*

Fandom was/is a world of contrasts and eclectic ideas. While Ley's interest in the esoteric was primarily in debunking pseudoscientific ideas, part of the culture of fandom has long been an interest in the new and strange concepts.

Moskowitz's history also characterised fandom as a culture prone to feuds and disputes. Many of these were interpersonal conflicts played out between or within fan groups. Others, such as the First Staple War of 1934<sup>[3]</sup> were self-aware parodies of fannish disputes.

Fan activities included meetings and also self-produced magazines and, inevitably, conventions. In July 1939 the ambitiously named World Science Fiction Convention was held in New York with 200 attendees. The very first Worldcon (as the convention would be later called) had its own fannish controversy when the chair Sam Moskowitz excluded the left-wing fan group known as the Futurians. The dispute was motivated by political differences, inter-group rivalry and personal enmity particularly between Moskowitz and one of the Futurian founding members Donald Wollheim<sup>[4]</sup>. The exclusion of the Futurians raised the question from the very first Worldcon of who could attend and whether there was a segment of fandom too potentially difficult to allow in.

The first Worldcon (aka *Nycon* for New York convention) was followed by a second in Chicago in 1940 (*Chicon*, with Guest of Honour E.E. "Doc" Smith) and a third in Denver in 1941 (*Denvention*, with Guest of Honour Robert A Heinlein). The entry of the USA into World War II put an end to further Worldcons until 1946.

## ***A Golden Age and Beyond***

The war didn't place fandom in a cryogenic vault. In America, at least, it continued to develop and organise. Futurian Damon Knight led calls for a national fan organisation in 1941 that became the National Fantasy Fan Federation (or N3F)<sup>[5]</sup>. In the following decades, the group did include many notable fans and writers such as Forrest J. Ackerman, Bob Tucker, and Marion Zimmer Bradley<sup>[6]</sup> but attempts to create a kind of unified fandom were never likely to succeed.

The science fiction and fantasy community continued to be a culture of contradictions. It could be both patriarchal and also a space with many notable women. It was (is) a community fascinated by science but also fascinated by esoteric ideas which blurred fiction and claims of fact — a notable example being the publication in the 1940s of the so-called “Shaver Mysteries” which mixed claims of psychic powers with lost civilisations.

With the end of the war, science fiction conventions began again in earnest. As a prominent convention, Worldcon took on a role as a “gathering of the tribes”<sup>[8]</sup>. Run as a kind of perpetual relay race of new organising committees for each iteration, Worldcon itself was an odd experiment in social organisation, existing as a serial series of entities that take on the running of Worldcon. This was later codified as a nominal organisation as the World Science Fiction Society. In principle, the WSFS can have a completely different executive and membership every year and yet maintain a kind of organisational continuity. This kind of almost utopian anarcho-democracy led to Worldcons being oddly both slow to change and yet flexible. This mix of consistency and flexibility perhaps led to a degree of longevity for the WSFS that was otherwise difficult for organised fandom.

While Europe was recovering and the world's political landscape had changed utterly, America was entering a period of both economic prosperity and cultural hegemony. Notable editor John W. Campbell of *Astounding Stories* had been fostering and promoting talented science fiction authors since the 1930s (the July 1939 issue of *Astounding* featured A.E. van Vogt, Isaac Asimov and the following month, Robert Heinlein<sup>[9]</sup>) and was having a profound influence on post-war science fiction.

It was into this environment that Worldcon added a new feature to the annual convention: an award.

### ***The Hugo Awards***

The eleventh Worldcon was held in Philadelphia in 1953 and as an addition to the activities, a set of awards were given in a range of categories. The awards included best novel (*The Demolished Man* by Alfred Bester, which had been serialised in *Galaxy*), best magazine (award jointly to Campbell's *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Galaxy* edited by H. L. Gold). Awards were also given for cover artists and interior artists (Hannes Bok, Ed Emshwiller, Virgil Finlay), factual writing (Willy Ley), the best newcomer (Philip José Farmer) and ‘fan personality’ (Forrest J. Ackerman). The award categories mapped out a kind of sphere of interest for fans and Worldcon: novels, magazines, artists, fan activities, non-fiction and new talent.

Worldcon skipped awards in 1954 but picked up the idea again in 1955, handing best novel to a famously bad novel<sup>[10]</sup> *They'd Rather Be Right*. A more lasting innovation was the introduction of short-fiction categories for novelettes and short stories. An award for best fanzine was also given, which would also become a permanent category.

The term “Hugo Award” started as an unofficial nickname but by 1955 was already being used as the name for the rocket-shaped trophy by the organising committee<sup>[11]</sup>. Even so, it would be many years until it became the formal name of the awards. From 1955 onwards, the awards were given out every year with a gradual development in rules, voting methods and categories. While the categories evolved the broad space of stories, magazines, artists and fan activities continued. Dramatic performances were folded into the mix of categories and many years later other media but the overall domain of the awards has remained fairly constant.

Despite the early stumble, the Hugo Awards garnered a reputation for awarding notable works of science fiction. Overt fantasy was less recognised and inevitably there were some significant works that the Hugo Awards ended up ignoring for multiple reasons (notably *Lord of the Rings* for various reasons<sup>[12]</sup>). The finalists for the story categories (novel, novelette, short story) in 1956 is a veritable roll call of influential writers including Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Leigh Brackett, L. Sprague de Camp, C. L. Moore, Arthur C. Clarke, and Ray Bradbury.

An early feature of the Hugo Awards that added to their unusual character as a literary award, was the capacity for voters to simply reject all the finalists. The 1959 Worldcon voters chose to reject the choice of *The Fly*, *Dracula*, and the *Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* for best SF film<sup>[13]</sup>. More controversially, ‘No Award’ also topped the poll for ‘Best New Author’ rejecting a field of nominees that included Brian Aldiss<sup>[14]</sup>.

## ***Changing times***

The 1950s and 1960s rolled on. Science Fiction and SF fandom continued to both reflect society and anticipate social change. Women were always a significant presence within fandom and as authors and yet often marginalised or invisible in published fiction. In a similar way, science fiction could produce in 1953 a positive depiction (albeit framed as a tragic twist) depiction of a gay man in Theodore Sturgeon's short story *The World Well Lost* while more broadly avoiding the topic of sexuality altogether. The modal position of published science fiction and its leading edges are often remarkably different.

The multi-faceted nature of science fiction and science fiction fandom was not simply a function of a broad and intellectually curious community. Robert A. Heinlein won Hugo Awards for four novels. Three of them (*Starship Troopers* in 1960, *Stranger in a Strange Land* in 1962 and *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* in 1967) have variously been characterised as a Fascist allegory, an inspiration for the 1960s counterculture and a manifesto for libertarians.

The range and nature of the people winning or being nominated for Hugo Awards also shifted during the 1960s. Even so, some things remained constant. John W. Campbell's *Astounding Science Fiction* had damaged its reputation when Campbell used the magazine in 1950 to push the pseudo-scientific psychological theories of one of his writers, L. Ron Hubbard<sup>[15]</sup>. Dianetics (a forerunner of what would become the Church of Scientology) may have alienated readers but *Astounding* continued to win Hugo Awards for Best Magazine and under its new name of *Analog Science Fiction and Fact* would publish many Hugo-winning stories including in 1968 Anne McCaffrey's novella *Weyr Search* that kicked off her nominally science fiction *Pern* series.

### ***“The Great Breen Boondoggle”***

[content warning for discussion of child abuse]

Fan controversies can often seem petty or even intentionally silly, an appearance reinforced by comical names given to protracted disputes. The ‘Breen Boondoggle’ or Breendoggle was not one of those.

In 1964 Walter Breen had become infamous among science fiction communities in Berkeley, California as a serial sexual abuser of children. In Alec Nevala-Lee's account of events he describes the difficulty people had with trying to find a way to deal with Breen's actions.

*“In the meantime, the prominent fan Alva Rogers said that he felt “great reluctance” to exclude anyone from the community, and he had a novel solution to ensure the safety of his own children whenever Breen came to visit: “He wanted to protect his kids of course, but that the situation was adequately handled at his house by having them barricade themselves in their room.””*

<https://nevalalee.wordpress.com/2018/12/05/the-bad-pennies-part-3/>

With the Worldcon scheduled to be in California in 1964, organisers were concerned with whether to exclude Breen or not. The case for exclusion is clear but there were fears that if Breen was excluded then this would open up the possibility of much broader ranges of people being excluded and that exclusion might be ‘McCarthyite’. On a more practical level, organisers were concerned that Breen might sue for defamation if excluded (Breen would not be successfully prosecuted for his crimes until 1991). A further complication was Breen had recently married notable fan and author Marion Zimmer Bradley, who was defending Breen's reputation<sup>[16]</sup>.

In the end, the decision was made to exclude Breen but the discussion had been seen as controversial. In particular, looking back on the events from the current era, it is notable how some accounts dwell on the potential damage to the reputation of the adults rather than the impact on the victims.

Many years later and in a wholly different context, game designer Michael Suileabhain-Wilson coined the idea of the five geek social fallacies<sup>[17]</sup> — common social-cognitive errors that fannish communities make that foster abusive circumstance. Walter Breen is an extreme example.

## ***Shifting Fandoms***

As well as broad social change, the culture of fandom was affected by other influences in the 1960s. The appearance of the TV show *Star Trek* in 1966 brought intelligent and entertaining science fiction to mainstream culture. In the 1967 Hugo Awards, three of the five finalists in the Best Dramatic Presentation Category (and the one winner) were *Trek* episodes. Fans such as Bjo Trimble led a campaign to prevent the cancellation of the show after two seasons<sup>[18]</sup>.

Science fiction fandom expanded in multiple directions as did the range of people winning awards. From the late sixties onwards, there were always some women finalists in the main story categories and several

winners. However, it wasn't until the mid-1990s that there was an even split of gender in the finalist and even that didn't last. Women had always participated in fandom but men often had control.

The 1960s and 1970s brought in new perspectives and shifts of topics within science fiction. Much of this came from the so-called New Wave authors but environmental issues and attempts to engage with non-Western cultures were also present in Frank Herbert's *Dune*, originally serialised in *Analog*. Science fiction was broadening as a genre fuelled in part by social change but also by fandom's desire for novelty and authors experimenting with literary forms.

Film and television science fiction was also becoming more ambitious. Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* in collaboration with Arthur C Clarke presented a science fiction drama as serious cinema. Since the mid-60s the UK, the distinctly low-cost *Doctor Who* presented weird science fiction fantasy themes to a mass audience on a Saturday evening. The 1970s introduced *Star Wars* which spawned its own fandom, as well as associated comics and spin-off novelisations. The genre was expanding.

America's space program, aided in part by Werner von Braun, fuelled by Cold War rivalry with the USSR, eventually led to the 1969 moon landing. It was as if science-fictional dreams were coming true. In the Hugo Awards the 1969 Best Dramatic Presentation for *2001: A Space Odyssey* was followed in 1970 for an award for the news coverage of the very real Apollo 11 mission.

Advances in computer technology were also catching up with science-fictional dreams. In the mid 70s computing technology was moving beyond universities and large business and beginning to become accessible to the general public. 1977 marked the release of the Apple ][ computer as well as computers from Commodore and Tandy that were affordable for semi-serious hobbyists. Developments since the 1960s in networking computers over large distances were also becoming more widely accessible. Likewise, electronic devices for gaming were being marketed to households and as coin-operated machines. With limited and very abstract graphics, they were often accompanied by imaginative science-fictional titles and art, such as *Space Invaders*.

The 1980s brought more *Star Wars*, more computers and more video games. In the Hugo Awards, there was something of a changing of the guard. Many of the most notable figures from the "Golden Age" were drawing to the end of their careers. The 1983 finalist from Best Novel included works by Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein and Arthur C Clark, whereas Best Novella featured a later generation of writers such as Joanna Russ, Gene Wolfe, David Brin and George R. R. Martin.

### ***Dianetics Strikes Back***

Of the many writers that John W. Campbell mentored, L. Ron Hubbard chose the strangest path. After the initial success and backlash of *Dianetics* in the 1950s, Hubbard chose to re-imagine his pseudo-scientific psychological theories as a science-fictional religion. The Church of Scientology grew over several decades but not without controversy and legal troubles. Allegations of cultish and abusive behaviour within Scientology have dogged the organisation.

Scientology intersected again with the Hugo Awards in the mid-80s at around the same time that other notable authors championed by Campbell in the 40s and 50s were making their last appearances as finalists. A semi-serious suggestion was made to get L. Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth* a Hugo Award (he was still producing science fiction as well as operating his church)<sup>[19]</sup> led to nothing. However, in 1987 there was a more organised attempt to win a Hugo for Hubbard who had died in 1986. The book, *Black Genesis*, had been published three months before Hubbard's death and received enough nominations to be listed as a finalist. However, in the final voting, it was not only beaten by the other finalists but also received fewer votes than 'no award'.

The year-earlier Hubbard had established his own science fiction writing contest. The Writers of the Future contest was intended to foster new talent and promote aspiring writers and has a notable list of writers attached to it<sup>[20]</sup>.

### ***Towards a New Century***

Cheaper computing and connectivity led to new genres within science fiction (Cyberpunk) and new ways of fans interconnecting. Many fans were early adopters of computing technology and the 1980s saw fans using dial-up bulletin board systems (BBS) as ways of exchanging information or organising sub-groups of fans with niche interests.<sup>[21]</sup>

BBSs were not only used by fan groups. The technology also provided other kinds of groups with non-mainstream interests to organise and spread information. Among the many sections of the population experimenting with online technology in the 1980s were far-right hate groups<sup>[22]</sup>.

“While investigating the assassination of Denver radio talk show host Alan Berg by neo-Nazi White supremacists, the FBI began to unravel hate group telecommunications by tapping the modem telephone line of Robert Miles.”

<https://www.researchforprogress.us/topic/when-hate-went-online/>

The early 1990s brought the internet to many homes along with services such as CompuServe, Prodigy and AOL where people could organise their own interest groups. The capacity for fan groups to organise internationally and across time zones increased substantially.

Within the Hugo Awards the 1980s and 1990s saw more new writers and new works that would become influential and sources of debate. Notable winners include William Gibson (*Neuromancer* 1985), C. J. Cherryh (*Cyteen* 1989) and Connie Willis (*Doomsday Book* 1993). Author Orson Scott Card would enjoy particular success winning two years in a row for his book *Ender's Game* (1986) and its sequel *Speaker for the Dead* (1987), both published by the relatively new publisher Tor Books. The 90s saw other (relatively) new publishers appearing in the list of winners of Best Novel including Lois McMaster Bujold's *Mirror Dance* in 1996 published by Baen Books.

The arrival of the World Wide Web in the 1990s allowed even greater capacity for people to engage with other fans but also for media companies to promote films, games and books.

### ***A political coda***

In US politics the 1990s were dominated by the two-term presidency of Bill Clinton, the first US presidency of a post-cold war. For those of us with a tendency toward narrative disorder<sup>[23]</sup>, it was if the big story arc of the twentieth century had passed its finale but the next major plot line hadn't been worked out yet. Genuine fears about how information technology might fuel a more powerful state were held by political commentators on both left and right. America was now the dominant military super-power but its economic hegemony had been increasingly challenged by Japan, South Korea and China.

The broad popularity of Bill Clinton and third-party challenges by Ross Perot (and later his Reform Party) had proven difficult for the Republican Party to overcome in Presidential elections. However, Clinton's record of sexual harassment had led to numerous scandals that had enabled the Republican Party to do well in mid-term elections.

The Web helped fuel the spread of numerous conspiracy theories about President Clinton, supported by talk-radio and the new (launched in 1996) conservative cable news channel Fox News. Chief among those theories was the notorious so-called 'Clinton Kill List' — a perpetually growing list of people supposedly murdered at the orders of Bill Clinton or his wife Hillary (or even his mother<sup>[24]</sup>).

The bungled law enforcement operation at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas<sup>[25]</sup> in 1993 led to the deaths of 76 people (including 25 children). Among many right-wing communities, the event was perceived as a military assault on gun-owning Christians by the Federal Government, rather than a symptom of the systemic overuse of lethal force by law enforcement groups in the USA.

On April 19, 1995, two anti-government terrorists used a van packed with explosives to blow up a federal building in Oklahoma City<sup>[26]</sup>. The blast would kill 168 and injure hundreds of others. The terrorists, active in gun shows and inspired by the White Nationalist dystopian fantasy novel *The Turner Diaries*<sup>[26]</sup>, sought to gain revenge for the deaths at Waco.

The Oklahoma City bombing was, at that point, the deadliest terrorist attack on US soil.

## **FOOTNOTES**

- [1] <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/1330615>
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verein\\_f%C3%BCr\\_Raumschiffahrt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verein_f%C3%BCr_Raumschiffahrt) The extent to which we might regard it as a fannish group now is a different argument, but Moskowitz did.
- [3] [https://fancyclopedia.org/First\\_Staple\\_War](https://fancyclopedia.org/First_Staple_War) I was wholly unaware of this until recently and I think the whole thing is wonderful
- [4] <https://www.starburstmagazine.com/features/history-worldcon> and <https://nevalalee.wordpress.com/2016/07/27/days-of-futurians-past/>
- [5] [https://fancyclopedia.org/N3F#Early\\_1940s](https://fancyclopedia.org/N3F#Early_1940s), <http://n3f.org/about/history/>
- [6] <http://n3f.org/about/history/> and <http://n3f.org/about/bureaus-and-activities/>
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Sharpe\\_Shaver](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Sharpe_Shaver)

- [8] There is no shortage of modern usages of this term for Worldcon (i.e., post-2000), but the implication is that is an old sobriquet. I can't find an early citation for this usage. For the moment Jo Walton's 2008 piece is the reference <https://www.tor.com/2008/08/08/worldcon1/> which is infinitely better than the 12th reference Google offered me <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2017/08/26/worldcon-report-from-timothy-the-talking-cat/> that bloody cat!
- [9] <https://nevalalee.wordpress.com/2016/03/30/astounding-stories-3-the-legion-of-time/>
- [10] <https://www.tor.com/2010/10/31/hugo-nominees-1955/> To quote Jo Walton "But the good news is, nobody has to argue about what the worst book to win the Hugo is. Ever. I've been in Hugo loser parties where people aren't happy with what's won, and then somebody mentions *They'd Rather Be Right* and we all cheer up, because at least it's better than that."
- [11] <https://fanac.org/conpubs/Worldcon/Cleveland/1955%20-%20Cleveland%20-%20PR%204.pdf#view=Fit> A great deal of hard work, money and time went into the project of making this "Hugo", as some people have already dubbed the trophy
- [12] <https://thewertzzone.blogspot.com/2020/08/why-jrr-tolkien-never-won-hugo-award.html>
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Dramatic\\_Presentation#1958%E2%80%932002](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award_for_Best_Dramatic_Presentation#1958%E2%80%932002)
- [14] <https://www.tor.com/2010/11/28/hugo-nominees-1959/>
- [15] <https://nevalalee.wordpress.com/2018/05/22/the-doctors-dilemma/>
- [16] <https://nevalalee.wordpress.com/2018/12/05/the-bad-pennies-part-3/> all four parts are worth reading but contain disturbing information
- [17] <http://plausiblydeniable.com/five-geek-social-fallacies/>
- [18] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bjo\\_Trimble](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bjo_Trimble) and <https://intl.startrek.com/article/bjo-trimble-the-woman-who-saved-star-trek-part-1>
- [19] <http://www.scottedelman.com/2015/04/06/in-which-the-sad-puppies-prove-to-be-more-powerful-than-l-ron-hubbard/#more-19137>
- [20] <https://www.writersofthefuture.com/about-the-contest/>
- [21] <https://en.wikifur.com/wiki/1980s>
- [22] <http://www.eruditorumpress.com/blog/idsg-ep79-tom-metzger-part-2-the-origins-of-online-hate/> links to the IDSG podcast covering this topic and contains further useful links
- [23] <https://firesidefiction.com/narrative-disorder>
- [24] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140515041409/https://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/23/magazine/clinton-crazy.html> and <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/clinton-body-bags/>
- [25] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waco\\_siege](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waco_siege)
- [26] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oklahoma\\_City\\_bombing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oklahoma_City_bombing)
- [27] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Turner\\_Diaries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Turner_Diaries)

## 5: Dramatis Personae – John Scalzi

The *Dramatis Personae* chapters will take a biographical look at selected key figures in the Puppy Kerfuffle, some of whom will be people who were instrumental in one or several of the Puppy campaigns and others (as in this chapter) people that the Puppy leadership/Evil League of Evil regarded as their opposition.

With each of these chapters, I'll cut off the biographical history around the time that person in question enters the main narrative. Towards the end of the whole project, I'll cover where each of the featured ended up by the end of 2020.

Why start with John Scalzi and not start with at least one of the key Puppy figures? Partly it is because the previous chapters bring us to around the year 2000 and prior to that he had little impact on the world of fandom, Worldcon and the Hugo Awards but in the decade that followed he would be nominated several times in the Best Related Work, Best Fan Writer, and Best Novel categories of the Hugo Awards. He is a convenient shorthand for some of the changes of a new century.

This is a political story also and John Scalzi's blog *Whatever*<sup>[1]</sup>, has archives back to March 2002. As a self-described "Rockefeller Republican"<sup>[2]</sup> with a political stance based on the rights of the individual, it is notable that by the time we reach the key events of the Debarkle story (and I promise, we are getting there... eventually) Scalzi will be derided by conservative voices within science fiction as a leftist and as a "Social Justice Warrior". For me, that makes him of particular interest for a key question that applies mainly to the Sad Puppy leaders: did the conflict change their political views or did it simply reveal those views? That raises a broader question about individual politics and how it relates to character, community and deeper beliefs. I should add, that I don't have an answer to these questions. John Scalzi does have an answer about himself though:

*"In the past twenty years, I'm not sure my personal set of politics have changed all that much. I'm pretty sure what has changed is how people view them."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2018/09/11/1998-2018-whatever-20-20-day-eleven-personal-politics/>

Rather than include multiple footnotes, most of the biographical background to this chapter is from three sources:

- The Wikipedia page on John Scalzi, that he describes as 'generally accurate'  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Scalzi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Scalzi)
- His own current short biography <https://whatever.scalzi.com/about/a-brief-biography-of-john-scalzi/>
- A longer biography on his blog first published in 2003 <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2003/03/01/john-scalzis-biography/>

If a statement is unreferenced that it will be from one of those sources or it will be my own opinion. Referenced statements will be where I wanted to draw out a particular point not raised in those sources.

### *A mini-biography part 1*

John Scalzi was born in 1969, the grandson of an Italian immigrant and was raised by his mother in a single-parent family. He grew up in relative poverty and lived in multiple towns in California. However, thanks to a scholarship he attended the private boarding school Webb School of California. I'll stop there a moment and skip ahead to the present day. He's now a bestselling author. Now, I'm interested in this project in factual narratives, stories that join genuine facts together for some aesthetic effect that makes the selection of facts feel truer, perhaps because of familiarity. In this case, it would be easy to frame a narrative in terms of the Horatio Alger myth<sup>[3]</sup>. Notably, Scalzi doesn't do so and famously constructed an apt metaphor to explain the social dynamics of 'privilege' within US society:

*'So that's "Straight White Male" for you in The Real World (and also, in the real world): The lowest difficulty setting there is. All things being equal, and even when they are not, if the computer — or life — assigns you the "Straight White Male" difficulty setting, then brother, you've caught a break.'*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2012/05/15/straight-white-male-the-lowest-difficulty-setting-there-is/>

During college, Scalzi moved into journalism and wrote film reviews and other pieces in California. The story takes a more distinctly 1990s twist when he took up a job in Washington DC as an in-house writer for



the America Online (aka AOL) internet service. From 1998 he became a freelance writer and in 1999 published his first science fiction novel for free on his blog. Likewise, his second (and more famous) novel *Old Man's War* began in serialised form on his blog in 2002 where it was picked up by the executive editor of Tor Books, Patrick Nielsen Hayden.

### ***An historical aside 2000-2001***

Politically, the new century was tumultuous in a way that sharply contrasted with the idea of a new post-Cold War stability promised by the 1990s. The 2000 Presidential Election proved to be extraordinarily close. An effective statistical tie in Florida meant that the fraught question of recounts to determine which candidate would receive the deciding votes in the Electoral College ended up in the Supreme Court. Prior to that, recounts in Miami-Dade county had been actively disrupted by demonstrators organised by Republican Party operative Roger Stone<sup>[4]</sup>. It was an inauspicious start to what would be the two-term presidency of George W. Bush.

Just under a year later, terrorists belonging to the Al-Qaeda militant Sunni Islamist group hijacked multiple planes and intentionally crashed planes into the World Trade Centre twin towers in New York and the Pentagon building in Washington DC. It was the single deadliest terrorist attack in history and killed nearly three thousand people and injured tens of thousands. The event would have extraordinary repercussions on world events and would be the direct *casus belli* for two wars which in turn would lead to further wars and conflicts and massive loss of life across multiple countries. For many of the people we'll encounter in the story of the Debarkle it will be cited as a pivotal moment in their political views.

Although this time period was well into the point where many people were discussing events online, it falls into a somewhat patchy space for archives of discussion. With many people accessing the internet via services such as AOL or CompuServe, many forums and personal blogs are no longer available or only partially archived.

### ***A mini-biography part 2***

John Scalzi's own blog *Whatever* has continuous archives from 2002 onwards<sup>[5]</sup> and based on his existing online readership from AOL and his own blog, he continued to garner a significant presence as an online writer, discussing popular culture, politics and issues of the day. He was not the first notable science fiction writer to develop a significant online presence. Canadian author Robert J. Sawyer was an early adopter of the World Wide Web and the online service CompuServe as a means to engage with fans and promote his work<sup>[6]</sup>.

*Whatever* would cover controversial topics<sup>[7]</sup> and in the early 2000s that inevitably included the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq in the wake of the 9-11 attacks. In 2003 as the prospect of a US-led attack on Iraq loomed, Scalzi's position was deeply sceptical of George W. Bush's motives but largely in support of a swift war to depose Saddam Hussein<sup>[8]</sup>. It's not an opinion that has aged well<sup>[9]</sup> but I mention it not to engage in some Scalzi/centrist-bashing but to illustrate where a generally pro-Democratic Party, centre-of-the-political-spectrum opinion was at the time.

Within a few years, opinions of the war in Iraq had shifted enormously in the face of the reality of the chaos, death and incompetence of the Bush regime. In 2006, John Scalzi wrote this essay on the conflict:

*“Where everything fell down was in everything after deposing Saddam, where it's clear we didn't have the troops but more importantly, we didn't have the plans, to do a creditable job occupying the country. I think not having the plans is clearly the major issue; it's hard to point to a single thing that was done competently in Iraq after we took control of the place.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2006/11/05/catching-up-on-incompetent-war-administration/><sup>[10]</sup>

In terms of his science fiction career, *Old Man's War* was a commercial and critical success. The novel was a finalist for the 2006 Hugo Award and Scalzi himself won what was then called the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (now called the Astounding Award and which is given out as part of the Hugo Award process but is not technically a Hugo).

In 2007 he took another step in the organised world of science fiction. He put himself forward as a write-in candidate for the presidency of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America<sup>[11]</sup>. At this point, he was unsuccessful in his bid but that would change in the future.

And at that point, somewhere in the mid-2000s, I'll leave John Scalzi for the time being. We will meet him again in the next few chapters where his story will continue but we need to meet another character before we can continue.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/>
- [2] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2018/09/11/1998-2018-whatever-20-20-day-eleven-personal-politics/>
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horatio\\_Alger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horatio_Alger)
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brooks\\_Brothers\\_riot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brooks_Brothers_riot)
- [5] His AOL blog '*By The Way*' does have some archived pages on the Wayback Machine
- [6] I discussed this more in *The Hugosauriad* <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2019/08/05/hugosauriad-3-5-far-seer-by-robert-j-sawyer-a-fore-taste-of-the-cretaceous/>
- [7] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2002/12/03/unfair/>
- [8] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2003/02/14/a-threat-to-world-peace/>
- [9] for some opinions of mine that aged badly very quickly see <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2016/05/18/my-not-very-well-thought-through-brexit-post/>
- [10] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2006/11/05/catching-up-on-incompetent-war-administration/>
- [11] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2007/03/15/sfwa-president-im-a-write-in-candidate/>

## Second Chapter 5: Dramatis Personae — Vox Day

A curious fact about Vox Day is that in his list of the 10 greatest novels, his number two pick is *Foucault's Pendulum* by Umberto Eco<sup>[1]</sup>. Not only that, it is a novel he has mentioned several times and Eco is one of his favourite authors and one he has made the effort to read in Italian. He has a particular reason for liking it more than Eco's other novels:

*"Perhaps my subscription to the conspiracy theory of history is one reason I rate Foucault's Pendulum so highly, but I stand firmly by my high regard for Eco."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210216174524/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2013/10/top-10-novels-list.html>

If you haven't read the book, it is a long and complex work. Central to the story is a group of editors at an Italian publishing house who cynically create a conspiracy theory (lumping in the Templars, the Holy Grail etc) using a computer to spew out random, unconnected claims but then get caught up in their own deception. By the end of this saga, I'm calling Debarkle, Vox Day would have made himself the chief editor of his own publishing house and would be heavily promoting a conspiracy theory sourced from random statements on an anonymous web forum. On the way, Vox Day will promote extreme ideas in particular about women, race and immigration.

Like the proceeding chapter, this chapter will follow Vox up to around the mid-2000s. From there, the rest of the story (as far as it is relevant) will be carried in the main chapters as various characters react to events. I will be drawing on three main sources and any unreferenced statement will be either my opinion or drawn from one of these:

- Vox Day's Wikipedia page: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vox\\_Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vox_Day)
- Vox Day's verified page on his own version of Wikipedia called 'Infogalactic':

[https://infogalactic.com/info/Verified:Vox\\_Day](https://infogalactic.com/info/Verified:Vox_Day)

- The Rational Wiki page on Vox Day [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Theodore\\_Beale](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Theodore_Beale)

A general content warning applies throughout. Day has expressed many views that I know readers will find confronting and disturbing.

Vox Day was born in 1968, making him just under a year older than John Scalzi. He claims ancestors who fought in the US Revolutionary War<sup>[2]</sup> and a great-grandfather who was involved with the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa<sup>[3]</sup> as well as Native American ancestry.

Day's full name is Theodore Robert Beale and his father, Robert Beale was the former CEO of a computer hardware company specialising in networking and communication<sup>[4]</sup>. In 2006, Robert Beale was indicted for tax evasion after adopting a tax-protestor ideology. He was convicted in 2008 with the added complication of some of his supporters planning to kidnap and run their own trial of the judge.

Day grew up in Minnesota and attended the private Christian school Minnehaha Academy for his school years and then went on to study at the private liberal arts college Bucknell University in Pennsylvania where he studied Japanese, history and economics. Perhaps growing up with a father who was in a technical field but Day personally having less capability in STEM fields and more in the creative arts and humanities, led to Day feeling the need to show proof of his intelligence. Sometime in 1988, Vox Day met Donald Trump.<sup>[5]?</sup>

In the early 1990s Day put his energies into two creative fields. Firstly, he helped form the techno band *Psykosonik*. The band was not without some success with some charting singles<sup>[6]</sup>. The band's lyrics would touch on religion, technology and dystopian themes.

*"Digital disbeliever, there's a storm in the world tonight*

*Digital disbeliever, now it's time for you to come inside*

*Well, you can find the power, it's behind your eyes*

*Touch the chalice to your skull and enter paradise"*

<https://genius.com/Psykosonik-silicon-jesus-lyrics><sup>[7]</sup>

Day's second venture was a video game company called *Fenris Wolf*. Not unlike *Psykosonik*, Day's video game company enjoyed some moderate success. However, the company closed in 1999 after a legal dispute

with its retail publisher GT Interactive Software. Beale moved on to other things including a Christian fantasy called *Eternal Warriors: War in Heaven Book I*<sup>[8]</sup> under the name Theodore Beale (sequels followed in 2002 and 2006).

Day's other venture was as a columnist, first reviewing video games for a Minnesotan newspaper, much later (2008) as a book reviewer at the fantasy fanzine *Black Gate*<sup>[9]</sup> as well as on his own blog. However, the high-profile gig for Vox (under that name) was with *WorldNetDaily*.

*WorldNetDaily* is one of a multitude of conservative news/opinion websites that began in the late 1990s<sup>[10]</sup>. Fuelled initially by a mix of paleo-conservatism and opposition to President Bill Clinton, the Southern Poverty Law Centre would later describe WND as:

*“WorldNetDaily is an online publication founded and run by Joseph Farah that claims to pursue truth, justice and liberty. But in fact, its pages are devoted to manipulative fear-mongering and outright fabrications designed to further the paranoid, gay-hating, conspiratorial and apocalyptic visions of Farah and his hand-picked contributors from the fringes of the far-right and fundamentalist worlds.”*

<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/worldnetdaily><sup>[11]</sup>

Vox Day's dad, tax protestor Robert Beale, was an investor and board member of WND<sup>[12]</sup>. Initially, Day's WND column was a tech/IT column. His posts from August 2001 covered new compact memory cards for cameras and the utility of USB ports for your computer<sup>[13]</sup>. Day's next column was scheduled for September 14.

*“In response to a number of questions inspired by last week's column, we were working on a piece related to PC security, specifically the sort offered to one's e-mail communications by various encryption technologies, when we were interrupted by the horrifying events of Tuesday. The fatal hijackings and subsequent media response has been difficult to dismiss from our mind, so we have tabled the usual technology review for a week in favor of some reflections on these recent events.”*

<https://www.wnd.com/2001/09/10850/><sup>[14]</sup>

The thrust of the article was mainly a right-libertarian stance to the horrific terror attack, i.e., don't rush into giving more power to the FBI and other agencies or curtail personal liberties of Americans. However, it was directly in favour of military retaliation, which was a broadly mainstream position.

By 2002 the prospect of war with Iraq was high. Vox Day was broadly in favour of attacking Iraq but more on the general principle of Islamophobia and contempt for France and Germany.

*“Since we're doing this war anyhow, I sincerely hope we do it without the blessing of the U.N. and the hapless gang of Euroweenies. And if we need a few extra troops to occupy Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and any other former colony we happen to scoop up in the process, let's pull them out of Germany. If nothing else, it would be worth it just for the look of horror on French faces when they realize that Uncle Sam won't be around to keep the Hun at their feet any longer.”*

<https://www.wnd.com/2002/09/15370/> content warning for Islamophobic pro-war comments<sup>[15]</sup>

I haven't systematically surveyed all Vox Day's early columns at WND but I believe that after August 2001, the column shifted primarily to political commentary and the tech stuff either dwindled or went entirely. The twin themes initially were anti-Islam and anti-women. Articles with provocative titles like “The Morality of Rape”<sup>[16]</sup> or “Maybe Bush is Hitler”<sup>[17]</sup> or “Why Women Can't Think”<sup>[18]</sup>.

Vox Day had aspirations to be taken seriously as a fantasy writer. He had not had positive experiences with organised fandom. He attended the 1997 Minnesota Science Fiction Society convention (aka *Minicon*) where the guests of honour included Algis Budrys, the founder of Tor books Tom Doherty, as well as two up-and-coming editors at Tor, Teresa Nielsen Hayden and Patrick Nielsen Hayden<sup>[20]</sup>. Day claims to have decided then to never associate with fandom, saying in 2015 about the experience:

*“I turned my back on your freakish community and everything it stood for as soon as I had the opportunity to see it clearly for myself at Minicon in 1997. I dutifully did my panels and never went to another SF convention or attended another SF-related event ever again.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201108160521/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/08/those-who-serve-and-know-not.html> content warning for multiple issues<sup>[21]</sup>

However, there was another route for Vox Day into organised science fiction communities. Sometime in the early 2000s he joined the *Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America*. In 2004, he was selected to join the jury for the SFWA's Nebula Awards...but that is another story.

## FOOTNOTES

Warning: many of the links are to blogs which feature far-right statements either in the content of the post or in the comment section, including transphobic, misogynistic, homophobic, racist and specifically anti-Semitic comments. Links are included for context and verification but I'm not recommending that people follow them.

- [1] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210216174524/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2013/10/top-10-novels-list.html>
- [2] <https://web.archive.org/web/20201108101330/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/08/assimilationist-liars.html>
- [3] <https://web.archive.org/web/20150413182314/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2014/08/enoch-powell-still-right.html> "My grandmother is the daughter of a Mexican revolutionary and the Indian woman he married after he fled Pancho Villa's assassins" Note: I'm also not trying to link to provocative columns to provide citations for factual claims about Day but I don't have to try – the above three are a not atypical selection of columns from his blog.
- [4] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Robert\\_Beale](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Robert_Beale)
- [5] I'm not going to provide links to every time Vox Day has discussed his IQ. I'm speculating here but I think it is reasonable. Likewise, Day has talked about meeting Trump on more than one occasion, but given the volume of Trump content on his website, it is difficult to sift through. This link mentions the meeting in passing <https://web.archive.org/web/20170720014150/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/11/mailvox-election-and-non-problem-of-evil.html>
- [6] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psykosonik> "Psykosonik was featured on the *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation* soundtrack"
- [7] Three members of the band are credited with the lyrics, so what proportion is Vox Day's I don't know
- [8] <http://www.pretty-terrible.com/bad-life-decisions-make-me-read-theodore-beale/> Natalie Luhrs read the book in 2015 for charity.
- [9] <https://www.blackgate.com/the-appeal-of-adventure-fantasy/>
- [10] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WorldNetDaily>
- [11] not to get ahead of the main storyline, but WND was a major promoter of the 'birther' false claims about Barack Obama
- [12] <https://conwebwatch.tripod.com/stories/2004/update061604.html> notably at that time "Vox Day" and "Theodore Beale" were not publicly connected identities, so the article linked here is arguably a limited doxing. However, as Vox Day now publicly connects both his names, I don't see any current ethical issues linking to it.
- [13] <https://www.wnd.com/2001/08/10662/> and <https://www.wnd.com/2001/08/10566/>
- [14] I'm linking directly to WND rather than archive because I was having issues with WND archiving on the Wayback Machine. I don't recommend following the links as it provides ad revenue for WND.
- [15] see note 14
- [16] content warning <https://www.wnd.com/2005/12/33737/> and if you don't want to read it does say that rape is immoral but disputes what counts as rape.
- [17] <https://www.wnd.com/2004/01/22717/> Day concludes Bush isn't Hitler but because the USA under Bush is "semi-socialist", and because Bush isn't doing enough to roll that back and because socialists are Nazis (a common right-wing claim), that maybe this makes Bush Hindenburg.
- [18] <https://www.wnd.com/2005/02/29022/> overt ideological misogyny
- [19] <https://web.archive.org/web/20201108160521/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/08/those-who-serve-and-know-not.html>
- [20] <https://mnstf.org/minicon32/>
- [21] also the post skips us further ahead into the narrative. I assume, given the date that he was promoting the *Rebel Moon Rising* game from his company and the novelisation written by Bruce Bethke.

## 7: The SFWA

In our whistle-stop tour of the history of science fiction, we have met publishers, editors, writers, fans, fan clubs and conventions. However, the organised aspects of science fiction include other kinds of groups. Science fiction is many things but one thing it can be is a commercial endeavour, and the nature of capitalism means that the economic interests of fans, publishers, editors and writers are not always the same (even when a fan is also a writer, editor and publisher!).

In 1934, Donald Wollheim (who would later help lead the Futurians) sued Hugo Gernsback after Gernsback failed to pay Wollheim and other writers for stories they had written and Gernsback had published<sup>[1]</sup>. I doubt that was the first pay dispute between a science fiction writer and their publisher but it certainly wasn't the last.

A different Futurian, Damon Knight, would take a different step in protecting the interests of writers. In 1956, Knight along with writers Judith Merrill and James Blish established the Milford Writers Conference<sup>[2]</sup>. The concept was for a meeting of professional science fiction writers to share ideas and experiences. In 1965 he worked with writers connected with the conference to establish a professional association of writers called the Science Fiction Writers of America<sup>[3]</sup>. In 1991 the "SF" in SFWA was extended to mean "Science Fiction & Fantasy" to clarify the inclusion of the twin genres.

In 1966, the SFWA began the Nebula Awards as a new set of awards for science fiction writing<sup>[4]</sup>. While there has always been a fair amount of overlap between the Nebula and Hugo Awards, the Nebulas are intrinsically an award for writers chosen by their peers. Like the Hugo Awards, they have not been without controversy but a full account would fall outside of the Debarkle story. However, one overlap with the political thread to the Debarkle was the 1991 Nebula Awards. The outgoing SFWA President Ben Bova invited the Republican politician Newt Gingrich to give the keynote address<sup>[5]</sup>. The context was the awards were being held in Atlanta, Georgia and Gingrich was a congressional representative from Georgia at the time and had a specific interest in space exploration. Several SFWA members walked out.

Instead, I'm skipping ahead to the late 1990s. A change was in the air within publishing. In 1994 Jeff Bezos had started an online retailer for books<sup>[6]</sup> and other companies were taking online sales of books seriously also. With improved connection via the World Wide Web and more computing devices in people's homes, the electronic distribution of books was also becoming far more feasible (if practically a less than great reading experience). However, the capacity for an organisation like the SFWA to adapt to changing times was limited in the normal ways of a long-standing community.

In skipping ahead though, I encounter an issue with my window into the past. The late 1990s/early 2000s is a time in which the views and perspectives of some specific voices are readily and easily available. People who had active online platforms then and who maintained a continuity of platform into the present are easy to quote. Some of those people (John Scalzi, Charles Stross, Vox Day) are of particular interest to the wider narrative of the Debarkle. However, other relevant voices are less easy to include because either they didn't have a strong online presence at the time or because they were using platforms (such as AOL or CompuServe etc) whose archives are no longer available or simply because they didn't use what platforms they had to share their views on the ins-and-outs of the SFWA. In terms of both the time frame and their relevance to the Debarkle, contemporaneous accounts from somebody like George R. R. Martin (SFWA Vice President 1996-1998) and Catharine Asaro (vice-president 2002-2003 and president 2003-2005) would have added a wider perspective.

In 1998 Canadian author Robert J. Sawyer ran on a reform platform for president of the SFWA. His platform included the following objectives:

- 1. Allowing professional English-language fiction sales anywhere in the world to count for membership (currently, we allow sales in North, Central, and South America, so a sale to Guatemala counts but one to Great Britain doesn't).*
- 2. Accepting electronic sales as membership credentials.*
- 3. Establishing a Nebula Award for Best Script.*

4. Allowing first publication in English anywhere in the world to count for Nebula eligibility.
5. Allowing a SFWA Grand Master to be named every year (instead of only in six years out of every ten).
6. Adopting a mild requalification scenario, requiring one sale (short work or novel) to a professional market every five years, OR one book in print, OR one book under contract with a delivery date specified in the contract no more than three years in the future. The book-in-print clause would keep all the future Asimovs — seminal names who take long breaks from actually writing SF — continuously eligible for active membership, and the five-year window should ensure that our part-timers aren't unfairly discriminated against. Of course, no one would be kicked out of the organization — but, if such a bylaw change were approved, only those who passed requalification would be voting members.

<https://www.sfwriter.com/platform.htm><sup>[7]</sup>

The platform had elements of further internationalising the SFWA and reducing a USA-focus, adapting to electronic sales and an attempt to push the membership more towards active writers. This last point would prove to be controversial.

Sawyer's term of office was cut short when he resigned partway through his term and he was replaced by his Vice President Paul Levinson, who would go on to serve until 2001.

Skipping forward in time a little further, I already discussed that in 2007 John Scalzi offered himself as a write-in candidate for President of the SFWA in 2007. He said of the only nominee (a past and future SFWA President) Michael Capobianco:

*“Simply put, the professional organization of speculative fiction should not be headed by people who believe their job is to hold back the future. I believe strongly that Michael Capobianco sees it as his role to hold back the future and to maintain the status quo in publishing and in speculative fiction. That battle has already been lost; the publishing world has already irrevocably changed from when Mr. Capobianco last published. It's time that SFWA moves forward with leadership who understands this.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2007/03/15/sfwa-president-im-a-write-in-candidate/>

John Scalzi's platform also included some notable criticism of the Nebula Awards:

*“The Nebulas are one of the two major awards in literary science fiction, but their lustre has dimmed over the last several years; they are no longer the equal to the Hugo's in terms of relevance and timeliness, and their nomination process leaves them open to accusations of nomination via logrolling rather than literary quality. As a result, they are less useful to SFWA members in promoting their own Nebula-nominated work, and they are less useful to SFWA as a publicity-generating tool.”*

ibid

“Logrolling” was a reference to the appearance that SFWA members were trading nominations for each other's work on a quid-pro-quo basis. The nature of Nebulas as an award for writers voted on by writers meant that there is a likely correspondence between voting pattern and social networks.

Concern about relevance in both the Nebula Awards and the Hugo Awards led to speculation about an ageing demographic in the voting population of both awards. An essay at Tor.com by Patrick Nielsen Hayden explored the question, linking to a statistical analysis by blogger and Hugo statistician Nicholas Whyte. In the comment, British SF author Charles Stross questioned the causes:

*“Leading off at a tangent: in light of the age profile of Hugo nominees/winners, has anyone done anything similar about SFWA and the Nebulas? What's the average age of SFWA members, and what's the average age of Hugo voters? Could the perceived loss of relevance of the Nebulas over the past decade possibly be a harbinger of the same trend — age-related conservatism — hitting the Hugo's?”*

<https://www.tor.com/2008/08/11/dying-earth/comment-page-1/#comment-3341>

There would be further conflict in 2007 between the SFWA and the upcoming authors like John Scalzi and Charles Stross.

In August 2007 the Vice President of the SFWA Andrew Burt sent a demand to the text-sharing website Scribd to remove a wide range of works on the grounds that they violated the copyright of their authors. The

request was empowered by the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act, a law that regulates the online use of intellectual property.<sup>[10]</sup>

Notable blogger<sup>[11]</sup> science fiction author and former SFWA Director Cory Doctorow was outraged to discover that some of his own work that he had intentionally put on Scribd had been taken down as a result of the SFWA claiming it was infringing the copyright of its author (i.e., him).

*“In addition to the legal risks, SFWA’s actions have exposed it and its members to professional risk. For example, the page that used to host my book, Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom now reads, “The document ‘Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom’ has been removed from Scribd. This content has been removed at the request of copyright agent Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America.” Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom was the first novel released under a Creative Commons license, and I’ve spent the past four years exhorting fans to copy my work and share it. Now I’ve started to hear from readers who’ve seen this notice and concluded that I am a hypocrite who uses SFWA to send out legal threats to people who heeded my exhortation.”*

<https://boingboing.net/2007/08/30/science-fiction-writ-1.html>

Charles Stross called on Andrew Burt to be removed from his e-piracy role only to discover that the only person entitled to remove him from that role was the Vice President, i.e., Andrew Burt.<sup>[12]</sup>

Burt’s e-piracy committee was disbanded and John Scalzi was asked by the SFWA to chair a committee to develop a new policy. Following Scalzi’s report the SFWA established a new committee... only to have Andrew Burt be the chair of the newly formed copyright committee. Cory Doctorow was not happy<sup>[13]</sup>. Meanwhile, other authors who were hoping that the SFWA would do something about the genuine piracy at Scribd, (such as Hugo Award winners Robert Silverberg, Jerry Pournelle, and Harlan Ellison) were naturally angry at finding themselves appearing to be the bad guys in the dispute.<sup>[14]</sup>

Meanwhile, while the SFWA was struggling to cope with this changing world, technology add a new log on the fire. In November 2007, as this dispute was raging, the most powerful online book retailer released their first dedicated reader for eBooks.<sup>[15]</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://fancyencyclopedia.org/Donald\\_A.\\_Wollheim](https://fancyencyclopedia.org/Donald_A._Wollheim)
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milford\\_Writer%27s\\_Workshop](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milford_Writer%27s_Workshop)
- [3] <http://www.sfwaworld.org/about/who-we-are/>
- [4] <http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/nebula>
- [5] <https://nebulas.sfwaworld.org/award-year/1991/>
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon\\_\(company\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_(company))
- [7] As mentioned earlier, Sawyer was somewhat of an early adopter, and the generic domain name “sfwriter” is for his own website.
- [8] as discussed in Chapter 5 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/02/16/debarkle-chapter-5-dramatis-personae-john-scalzi/>
- [9] <https://www.tor.com/2008/08/11/dying-earth/> the comment thread has everybody in it. Nicholas Whyte’s analysis is here <https://nwhyte.livejournal.com/1073264.html?rfrom=nhw>
- [10] <https://boingboing.net/2007/08/30/science-fiction-writ-1.html>
- [11] <https://xkcd.com/239/> I’ll confess this is how I still picture Cory Doctorow
- [12] <http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/2007/11/sfwaworld-attempts-to-commit-public.html>
- [13] <https://boingboing.net/2007/11/29/science-fiction-writ-2.html>
- [14] <https://efanzines.com/File770/File770-151.pdf>
- [15] <https://www.pocket-lint.com/gadgets/news/amazon/137303-amazon-kindle-history-kindle-to-the-kindle-oasis>



## 8: Electrolite 2005/03/01

The rules for the Nebula Award have changed over time but at the point of time we have reached (the middle of the first decade of the 21st century), the process to select the finalists included both a nomination phase by members of the SFWA and also a jury. Each category had a jury that had the power to add additional nominees to the list of finalists so that works of note which might otherwise have been missed could be part of the final vote. The juries were drawn made up of SFWA members appointed by the President.

In 2005 Vox Day (as Theodore Beale) was included in a Nebula Award jury for the second time<sup>[1]</sup> having previously served on the jury for Best Novelette<sup>[2]</sup>. Coincidentally, over at his *WorldNetDaily* column in February 2005 he also touched on his thoughts about science fiction in a column provocatively entitled, *Why Women Can't Think*<sup>[3]</sup>. Day's target in the column was feminist academics but also suggests women are weaker academically:

*“As everyone who's ever attended an elite university knows, a shocking number of women there are academically cauterized into intellectual brain death. While men are listening to professors lecture on history, economics and engineering, far too many women are yammering on and on about their feelings in Women's Study classes. The less academically rigorous a subject, the more women you'll find in it – there were 20 times as many women in my political geography class (40) as my computer science engineering class (2).”*

<https://www.wnd.com/2005/02/29022/>

I don't know enough about US universities to say whether Day's alma-mater Bucknell University (a private liberal arts college in Pennsylvania<sup>[4]</sup>) counts as an elite university in an academic sense. Day also appears to be trying to lever in a STEM versus Arts/Humanities prejudice into the misogyny and yet Day's own academic background and abilities have not been in the maths and sciences.

Day's essay later wanders into the field of science fiction:

*“The mental pollution of feminism extends well beyond the question of great thinkers. Women do not write hard science fiction today because so few can hack the physics, so they either write romance novels in space about strong, beautiful, independent and intelligent but lonely women who finally fall in love with rugged men who love them just as they are, or stick to fantasy where they can make things up without getting hammered by critics holding triple Ph.D.s in molecular engineering, astrophysics and Chaucer.”*

ibid

Day was still framing things initially as if modern feminism is the cause of a kind of cognitive obstacle rather than him suggesting an innate difference between men and women cognitively. However, his next statement veers closer to a claim of innate differences. In the WND article, he doesn't cite any examples but he did have a particular book in mind, which we know from the Nebula post on his own blog.

*“The winner in 2001, *The Quantum Rose* by Catherine Asaro, is a mediocre romance novel in space. I tossed it aside after being introduced to the third consecutive strong, beautiful, intelligent, independent, but lonely woman in the book. It was as if Maureen Dowd was writing science fiction, and the results were about as good as you'd imagine. Meanwhile, neither Neal Stephenson nor JK Rowling has ever won the award.”*

see note [1]

Asaro's novel had won the Nebula in the same year that she won the election to become SFWA President. In a series of ironies, she was also President when Day was writing this and technically had appointed him to the jury. She is also a very clear counter-example to Day's thesis. While she certainly has been very successful at melding science fiction with romance (to the extent of being a finalist for the Romance Writers of America's own awards) she also has a PhD from Harvard in chemical physics<sup>[6]</sup> and has written 'hard' science fiction<sup>[7]</sup>. Day (as Theodore Beale) on the other hand was writing Christian fantasy and studied undergraduate history, economics and Japanese at what is probably a fine university but which was not Harvard<sup>[8]</sup>.

So, we have two Vox Day's. Firstly, the WND columnist and blogger Vox promoting quasi-libertarianism on a paleo-conservative news site. Secondly, Theodore Beale the writer of Christian fantasy and SFWA member. Vox's motives for joining the SFWA and volunteering for the jury do not appear to have a hidden motive or sinister intent.

Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden (both editors at Tor books) were also people with a strong online presence in 2005. At Patrick's blog *Electrolite*, he<sup>[9]</sup> posted a short post linking other blogs commenting on Vox Day's WND essay on *Why Women Can't Think*, as well as posts by Day on anti-Semitism, some background on Day and then finally pointed out that he had served on the Nebula award jury for 2005<sup>[10]</sup>. A discussion ensued.

At the heart of the discussion was the ongoing discussion about who gets to be part of science fiction as a community and in what role. Day's WND essay implied a lesser role for women. That essay in itself raised the question of whether somebody with Day's views could reasonably serve on a jury for a science fiction literary award. The broader question being part of that ongoing question of whether science fiction communities can exclude people from particular spaces — a question at least as old as the first Worldcon's expulsion of the Futurians or the later expulsion (for the safety of fans' families) of Walter Breen.

The comment thread is a long and interesting one, however what would develop eventually as a consensus appears very quickly. Patrick Nielsen Hayden comments about twelve comments down:

*"Mind you, SF has always been full of people with nutty opinions. Ray Palmer, for years the editor of Amazing, believed whack-job author Richard Shaver's contention that malign "disintegrant energy robots" hidden in caverns beneath the Earth were using ancient pre-human technology to control the planet's surface dwellers and make war on one another. Not only did Palmer publish multiple Shaver stories expanding on this theme, he and Shaver also promoted it as actual non-fictional true-type truth and recruited other writers to expand on it. By comparison, garden-variety misogyny and Jew-baiting seem almost prosaic.*

*This being the case, arguably SFWA is wise to make sure the crackpot demographic is represented in its deliberative bodies. (And Cloud Atlas is certainly an unexceptionable jury choice.) As with so many aspects of SF's subculture, one is left saying, on the one hand, hurray for our fine and broadminded tolerance; and on the other hand, eeuw."*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/006122.html#75538><sup>[11]</sup>

Other commenters struggled to make sense of how Vox Day projected himself. Anna Feruglio Dal Dan noted that

*"But what kills me is that he has kind words to say both about Pat Wrede and Lois McMaster Bujold on his site. Not to mention praising Charlie Stross and Umberto Eco. I don't know. Just doesn't compute."*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/006122.html#75555>

Charles Stross himself also noted

*"Oh dear. I've had email correspondence with Mr Beale; all I can say for sure is he didn't sound like a loon — a Christian conservative, certainly, but that's not a hanging offense in my world. Patrick's diagnosis of his public pronouncements as being "an exercise in "look at me, I'm outraging your sensibilities" very plausible. On the other hand, he's been asking for an interview, and this fracas isn't exactly encouraging me to say "yes". And on the gripping hand, I've been known to give credit where none is due. (I wonder if he already knows that my father avoided Auschwitz by coming down with a summer flu, and that I'm married to a feminist?)"*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/006122.html#75764>

John Scalzi also entered the discussion to argue that Day's politics should not be a reason to exclude him, particularly when the evidence pointed to him doing a reasonable job as a juror.

*"Not to be blandly practical-minded about this, but inasmuch as Mr. Beale and the rest of the Nebula novel jury members seem to have discharged their duty by selecting a novel that most would agree is of overall Nebula finalist calibre, and have done so with an apparent minimum of fuss, does it matter what his politics or personal opinions are, particularly in relation to being a Nebula jury member? The jury did make a reasonable selection, in my opinion."*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/006122.html#75573>

But others pointed out the inherent problem of Day's views in his role as a juror.

*"Depends, how do we know his misogyny didn't tip the scales one way or the other? Sure, the jury made a reasonable selection, but can we be sure he didn't vote against someone because they were a woman, liberal, a feminist, or Jewish?"*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/006122.html#75575>

Several broader themes also arose in the comments. Firstly, what kind of message the SFWA was giving to women members (or potential members) putting Day in a significant position. Secondly, did Day's role contribute to the "ongoing degradation of the prestige of the once-coveted Nebula Award". Thirdly, that it was impractical and unethical for the SFWA to have political criteria for membership or political background checks for jury membership.

More than eighty comments deep into the thread, Vox Day himself turned up.

*"As usual, one finds oneself swooning in awed wonder at the famously open minds of the liberal literati!*

*Christian? Yes. Conservative? No. I note with amusement that no one has bothered disputing my actual statements, as the two examples given would amount to a "few", wouldn't they? There's no shame in not wishing to wrestle with arcane mathematics when one can simply wave a wizard's wand instead; four extensive pages of critical notes from Pat Wrede was all it took to convince me to switch from writing mediocre science fiction to marginally less mediocre fantasy.*

*The reason I volunteered for the Nebula juries was to try to do my small part to rectify a situation where unreadable dreck is winning awards while far more noteworthy authors such as Neal Stephenson and others go unnominated. As for my having kind words to say about Bujold, Eco, Stross and Wrede, that should hardly come as a surprise as they are all very good writers and I am acquainted with everyone except Mr. Stross. "*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/006122.html#75895>

Along with Vox's own comments came others supporting Vox's claims. The comments shifted from discussing Vox's role as a juror to directly engaging with Vox over his views on women with continuing comments from people like Elizabeth Bear and Laura J. Mixon. Interestingly, John Scalzi still attempted to chart a more moderate course. When Charles Stross described Day's views as "a career-limiting move", John Scalzi pushed back on the comment, leading to further exchanges between himself and Laura J. Mixon and Charles Stross.

The comments extend long after that, with multiple exchanges but with little progress in the discussion. Some posts by Day's supporters crossed the lines and were subject to moderation using a technique known as "disemvoweling" – removing the vowels so as to retain the message but making it difficult to read<sup>[12]</sup>.

On March 8 the thread is still going although many people had left it. On March 9, Catharine Asaro added this comment:

*"The following is from myself and the Board:*

*The views expressed by Theodore Beale are his and only his and do not in any way represent the views of SFWA, its Board of Directors, or the Nebula coordinator who selected the jury. None of us were aware of Mr. Beale's views at the time he volunteered for the jury over a year ago, nor did we become aware of them until these past few days, after the 2004 jury had finished its deliberations. Mr. Beale is not a member of the 2005 Novel jury.*

*Sincerely*

*Catherine Asaro*

*President, SFWA"*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/006122.html#76515><sup>[13]</sup>

She followed that up with a longer personal comment which included a link to her paper “Complex speeds and special relativity” from the American Journal of Physics<sup>[14]</sup>.

Day would later declare that he had emerged unscathed from the encounter and in October 2005 suggested that he would run for President of the SFWA.

*“As for the Electrolyte uproar, do you seriously think it bothers me? Do you think that’s why I happily provide links to it. It bothers me so much that I’m planning to run for SFWA president and as part of my campaign I will cite issues raised in it. Do you truly believe that I am the least bit concerned about what that group of would-be TOR authors think? They didn’t do any stomping, indeed, many of them embarrassed themselves with their illogic and hypocrisy.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140618180409/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2005/10/mailvox-determined-to-see-what-is-not.html>

In 2012 Day was still replaying aspects of the same argument. In his role as ‘Theo’ on the fanzine BlackGate he was still citing Catherine Asaro’s *Quantum Rose* as the “the most egregious example” of an undeserving Nebula winner<sup>[15]</sup>.

There’s a common assumption (which I’ve held myself) that the comment thread marks the start of what would become a long-running feud between John Scalzi and Vox Day. It certainly is the first substantial argument but in the immediate aftermath, there was a degree of peace. True, Scalzi did coin the term “A Sphincto-Cranial Event”<sup>[16]</sup> to describes Day’s performance. However, Day did post a recommendation on his blog for people to read *Old Man’s War* and compared John Scalzi to Robert Heinlein<sup>[17]</sup>. In 2008, Scalzi included a promotion for Vox Day’s book *The Irrational Atheist* as part of his Big Idea series<sup>[18][19]</sup>.

The big feud was yet to come.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://web.archive.org/web/20060614130807/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2005/02/nebulous-nebulas.html> His ‘verified’ bio on Infogalactic says he was a Nebula juror twice: for the 2004 awards (i.e., 2005) and 2007 but not the earlier time.
- [2] <http://nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/006122.html#75509> shsilver (Steven H. Silver) ‘He was on the short fiction jury with me a few years back. He didn’t seem like a loon in our e-mail discussions. That year, we added “The Pagodas of Ciboure” by M. Shayne Bell and “Little Gods” by Tim Pratt.’ – The book mentioned was a finalist in 2002 <https://nebulas.sfwaweb.org/nominated-work/the-pagodas-of-ciboure/>
- [3] <https://www.wnd.com/2005/02/29022/> content warning for misogyny — although it is less extreme than future statements by Vox and closer to more mainstream anti-feminist right-wing punditry. The underlying beliefs are clear though.
- [4] [https://infogalactic.com/info/Bucknell\\_University](https://infogalactic.com/info/Bucknell_University) this is the entry on the university from Day’s own version of Wikipedia. However, it is just the 2017 version of the actual proper Wikipedia page.
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine\\_Asaro#Awards](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Asaro#Awards) e.g., “The Misted Cliffs,” finalist, [Rita Award](#), Paranormal, 2006
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine\\_Asaro#Biography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_Asaro#Biography)
- [7] the hard/soft distinction in science fiction is debatable at best, but for Day’s hypothesis it needs to be more than an aesthetic one. Taken to mean that the fiction includes deep concepts from maths, physics and chemistry as central themes of the work (i.e., requiring knowledge of the field by the author and interest in those fields by the reader), then Asaro has written hard science fiction.
- [8] And I don’t want to get caught in the same intellectual snobbery trap – I don’t have a Ph.D. and I went to a very plain North of England uni. No shame in that in itself.
- [9] The post doesn’t state an author but it was written by Patrick Nielsen Hayden. However, the moderator for the comments was Teresa Nielsen Hayden. *Electrolite* was later folded into Teresa’s blog *Making Light*, which became a group blog.
- [10] <http://www.nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/006122.html>
- [11] *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell was the novel added to the list of finalists by the jury that included Vox Day.
- [12] for example <http://nielsenhayden.com/electrolite/archives/006122.html#76060> an explanation of the term here <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disemvoweling>
- [13] The 2005 Nebula Awards here refers to the awards that would be given out in 2006 for works from 2005.
- [14] *Complex speeds and special relativity* <https://aapt.scitation.org/doi/10.1119/1.18258>
- [15] <https://www.blackgate.com/sff-corruption-part-i/>
- [16] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2005/03/06/a-new-euphemism-for-you/>

- [17] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140619151609/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2005/04/john-scalzi-channels-robert-heinlein.html>
- [18] <https://web.archive.org/web/20081207020938/http://whatever.scalzi.com/2008/04/08/the-big-idea-vox-day/> since deleted
- [19] There was this indirect exchange <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2006/09/09/dont-piss-off-krissey/> followed by a response by Day <https://web.archive.org/web/20070709002008/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2006/09/tale-of-two-women.html>

## 9: Dramatis Personae – Jim Baen (1943-2006)

The aim of the *Dramatis Personae* chapters is to introduce major characters in what would become the conflicts around the Sad Puppy campaign for the 2015 Hugo Awards. Jim Baen passed away several years before those events or the political polarisation that would help fuel them. However, as a talented editor and publisher, he shaped a small but significant publishing house (Baen Books) that inspired fierce loyalty among its writers and readers. The role of a subset of Baen Books authors and their perspective of the relationship between Baen and the Hugo Awards is absolutely critical in understanding later events. Would events have been significantly different if Jim Baen had not died an untimely death at 62? That is not a question this chapter or this work can answer.

Most of the biographical details come from two sources and if a factual claim doesn't have a footnote, then it was drawn from at least one of these places:

- The Jim Baen Wikipedia page [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim\\_Baen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Baen)
- David Drake's 2006 obituary for Jim Baen <http://david-drake.com/2006/jim-baen/>

For this chapter, I am also going to try to maintain a degree of clarity over the name "Baen". In general, "Jim Baen" will be used in the first mention in a paragraph and then shortened to "Baen" in subsequent uses within a paragraph. "Baen Books" will refer to the publisher and will only be shortened to just "Baen" when the context is clear (e.g., "Baen author, Eric Flint"). In later chapters, when the usage will be less ambiguous, "Baen" will refer to the publishing house.

Editors have a notable place in science fiction history. Hugo Gernsback and John W. Campbell helped shaped two eras of American science fiction and science fiction fandom and each have had science fiction awards named after them<sup>[1]</sup>. As the genre matured, the capacity for editors to be quite so influential naturally declined but inevitably, people with some degree of control over who and what gets published help shape the direction of science fiction and fantasy.

Jim Baen's editing/publishing career spanned from the early 70s to the mid-2000s and included magazines and books. After leaving home as a teenager, a period of homelessness and a stint in the army, Baen worked in a variety of jobs in New York before landing a role in the complaints department of Ace Books. From there he began to pursue a career in editing. In 1973 he became an editor at *Galaxy* and *If* magazines, both of which had been frequent Hugo finalists and winners in the Best Professional Magazine category over the years<sup>[2]</sup>. The commercial fortunes of the magazine were in decline due to multiple factors, including the rising cost of paper. With the merger of *If* and *Galaxy* in 1974<sup>[3]</sup>, Baen was tasked with raising circulation.

The Hugo awards dropped the Best Professional Magazine category from 1973, replacing it with a Best Professional Editor category. From 1975 onward to 1978<sup>[4]</sup> Jim Baen was a finalist in the category. In 1977, Baen was recruited by another highly influential editor/publisher Tom Doherty to return to Ace books to help revitalise the company's science fiction line. In 1979 (and again in 1980) Baen would once again be a finalist for Best Professional Editor in the Hugo Awards but this time for his role at Ace books.

Tom Doherty had bigger plans than reviving Ace books. In 1980 he founded his own publishing company *Tor* with the help of venture capitalist Richard Gallen<sup>[5]</sup>. Baen followed Doherty to Tor Books and began work on the new company's line of science fiction, including books under the imprint of "Jim Baen Presents". In 1981 Baen would once again be a finalist for Best Professional Editor in the Hugo Awards but this time for his role at Tor books.

As discussed before, the 1980s were bringing both political and technological change. Thanks to his author friend Jerry Pournelle, Jim Baen bought an IBM personal computer and because the keyboard layout didn't suit him, commissioned a programmer to develop an application to customise what the keys did<sup>[6]</sup>. Pournelle also brought Baen into a quite different technology-related venture: the Citizen's Advisory Council on National Space Policy. Initially started as an advisory group on space policy for Ronald Reagan's presidential transition team, the group would go on to meet several times in the eighties and nineties to discuss space policy. As well as astronauts, scientists and science fiction authors (such as Poul Anderson, Greg Bear, Robert A. Heinlein, Gregory Benford, Dean Ing and Larry Niven) it also included members of the military. Pournelle would credit the group with inspiring the Reagan administration's Strategic Defence Initiative (aka "Star Wars") and would later say "It is my belief that SDI was the final blow that ended the USSR."<sup>[8]</sup>

Pournelle would also introduce Jim Baen to the up-and-coming Georgia congressman Newt Gingrich, who Baen had seen speak at the science fiction convention Balticon<sup>[9]</sup>. Baen went on to publish the book *Window of Opportunity: A Blueprint for the future* by Gingrich (with help from the author David Drake) through Tor (“in association with Baen Enterprises Inc”). The book mixed technological optimism with conservative politics and excitement about computers and communication.

In 1983 Pocket Books attempted to recruit Jim Baen to set up a line of science fiction books. Instead, Tom Doherty and Baen negotiated a different arrangement. Baen would set up his own publishing company but the distribution of the books would be handled by Pocket Books’ parent company Simon & Schuster. With assistance and investment from Doherty, Baen was able to establish his own company *Baen Books*.

Tor continued to grow and in 1986 the publisher won its first Hugo Award for Best Novel with *Ender’s Game* by the up-and-coming author Orson Scott Card, followed with a second win in 1987 by the sequel *Speaker for the Dead*<sup>[11]</sup>.

Baen Books entered what has been described as a “friendly rivalry” with Tor. Jim Baen brought his taste in book cover art with him, colourful sci-fi art covers with bold text often heavily shaped.

*“Even more than had been the case at Ace and Tor, Jim was his own art director at Baen Books—and he really directed rather than viewing his job as one of coddling artists. Baen Books gained a distinct look. Like the book contents, the covers weren’t to everyone’s taste—but they worked.”*

<http://david-drake.com/2006/jim-baen/>

Baen Books recruited new authors, published established authors and reprinted notable books from earlier decades. In 1984 Baen Books published works by authors such as Brian Aldiss, Joanna Russ and Marion Zimmer Bradley, as well as works by authors who would become more associated with Baen such as David Drake. In the late ’80s and early ’90s, the publisher would promote new talents such as Lois McMaster Bujold and David Weber. Bujold’s *Vor Game* would win the Hugo Award for Best Novel in 1991.

Although Jim Baen’s politics were conservative<sup>[12]</sup> and his major love was military science fiction,<sup>[13]</sup> his publishing house covered a range of science fiction and fantasy sub-genres and had authors of diverse political views. In 1996 Baen’s senior editor and partner Toni Weiskopf bought a first novel from the author Eric Flint. A former activist in the ’70s and ’80s with the Socialist Workers Party<sup>[14]</sup>, Flint had turned his hand to writing and in 1992 won first place in the 1992 Writers of the Future contest<sup>[15]</sup>.

Baen Books became increasingly innovative in the field of electronic publishing. The publisher experimented with providing additional books and other materials in bonus CD-ROMs provided with hardback copies of books<sup>[16]</sup>. The company website allowed users to download some free copies of books, an innovation that helps spur on sales of physical books:

*“the give-away program, called Baen Free Library, is a volunteer effort with no overhead costs. But the two programs’ economic value to the company is incalculable. They have spurred sales of the company’s books, which are distributed through Viacom’s Simon & Schuster unit. Mr. Baen is particularly surprised that the electronic downloads have even stimulated sales of the company’s hardcover books.”*

<https://www.nvtimes.com/2001/03/19/business/media-publisher-s-web-books-spur-hardcover-sales.html>

With science fiction fans often keen to follow a series of books or to engage with works set in a common universe, the strategy of giving away electronic books with low overheads was intended to drive additional sales. It was also a strategy designed to encourage reader loyalty and also meant that Baen Books would produce many long-running series, such as Eric Flint’s *1632* series often written using author collaborations.

A further innovation in 1997 was the addition of a chat forum to the Baen Books website. Known as “Baen’s Bar”, the forum became an active community. Baen’s authors were encouraged to interact with readers by discussing their works or issues of the day. Authors also used the forum to post ‘snippets’ — extracts of work-in-progress to generate comments and feedback from readers<sup>[17]</sup>. Flint’s *1632* series would take this further with the *Grantville Gazette*, an electronic magazine intended to fill the gap between the canonical books in the series and fan fiction. Stories would be submitted in the Baen’s Bar forum for selection to go in the *Gazette*<sup>[18]</sup>.

*“It is not unusual for authors to call upon fans for help in keeping track of series details, or to solicit technical advice, but this is usually where it ends. There have been some instances in the past of series authors letting fan fiction feed back into the main storyline, such as Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *Darkover* series, and the FanDemonium publishing house for *Stargate* novels.”*

<https://grantvillegazette.com/article/publish-461/>

The Bar would also be a source of new talent.

*“Baen’s activity on the forums actually led to John Ringo becoming a published novelist. Ringo was a long-time participant in Baen’s Bar and had gotten to know Baen by discussing topics like the aquatic ape hypothesis. Although his novel A Hymn Before Battle had been rejected, he mentioned he had submitted it and it had been rejected when Baen told him the manuscript had been lost. Baen took a look at the manuscript, fired the reader who had rejected it, and told Ringo that if he made certain edits, Baen would buy it.”*

[https://fampeople.com/cat-jim-baen\\_2](https://fampeople.com/cat-jim-baen_2)

Ringo was to become one of a set of politically outspoken authors recruited in the early 2000s. Along with Tom Kratman and Michael Z. Williamson, they formed a set of writers who had served in the military in the 1990s and who now wrote military-inspired fiction for Baen. Tom Kratman’s works would include *A State of Disobedience* (about Texas seceding from the USA), *Caliphate* (a dystopian novel about an Islamic regime taking over Europe) and with John Ringo *Watch on the Rhine* (a story about ageing SS soldiers being rejuvenated to fight aliens)<sup>[19]</sup>.

However, military science with overt right-wing politics was only a subset of what Baen was publishing in the early 2000s. Baen was also publishing authors such as Catherine Asaro and Mercedes Lackey. Baen was also taking a stand against the increasing use of Digital Rights Management (DRM) for electronic media because he was convinced that DRM was an obstacle to readers. According to Eric Flint:

*“It is my opinion, and Jim Baen’s, that on top of everything else DRM is just plain stupid, even from the narrow economic standpoint of most of the people who advocate it. And, since the issue has a direct impact on the work and lives of authors, I will spend a great deal of time discussing the practical realities of DRM, as well as the various alternative economic strategies that some people and companies, Baen Books being foremost among them, in science fiction and fantasy have been adopting in its stead.”*

<https://ericflint.net/information/salvos-against-big-brother/>

Although Baen Books were a significant presence in American science fiction, the distribution deal with Simon & Schuster as well as the regional nature of book publishing, meant that Baen as an imprint was hard to find outside of North America. With the USA involved in two active wars in the 2000s, the company did maintain links with the US military to ensure people in service could access them<sup>[21]</sup>, as well as providing free books for disabled readers to mark Veteran’s Day<sup>[22]</sup>.

In March of 2006 Tor announced that it would follow Jim Baen’s lead with e-books and begin publishing their own e-books without digital rights management.

*“We’ve tested a lot of e-book waters, including various cockamamie schemes involving overpriced e-books laden with DRM. Oddly enough, a lot of those “books” didn’t even sell enough copies to pay for their file-conversion costs. Meanwhile, it hasn’t escaped our notice that Jim Baen has been doing something that works, that people like, and that makes money. I’m delighted to be doing this pilot program; I think Jim has been clueful on this issue for a long time, while almost everyone else in publishing has been staggering around on stage hitting one another over the head with inflated pig bladders.””*

Patrick Nielsen Hayden quoted here <http://www.scalzi.com/whatever/004052.html>

In June 2006, Jim Baen suffered a stroke and went into a coma. A day later he had died. In his career as an editor, he had acquired a personal fandom as well as wide-ranging professional respect as an editor. Baen Books though, would continue...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award) and <http://www.sfcenter.ku.edu/campbell.htm> as well as the former name of the Astounding Award [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astounding\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_New\\_Writer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astounding_Award_for_Best_New_Writer)
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Professional\\_Magazine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award_for_Best_Professional_Magazine)
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galaxy\\_Science\\_Fiction#1970s\\_and\\_after](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galaxy_Science_Fiction#1970s_and_after) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If\\_\(magazine\)#Decline\\_and\\_merger\\_with\\_Galaxy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If_(magazine)#Decline_and_merger_with_Galaxy)
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Professional\\_Editor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award_for_Best_Professional_Editor)



- [5] <https://www.worldswithoutend.com/author.asp?ID=3743> and <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/news-and-features/articles/building-brand-tom-dohertys-tor-books/>
- [6] <https://archive.org/details/byte-magazine-1983-06/page/n437/mode/2up?view=theater>
- [7] <https://www.jerrypournelle.com/slowchange/Citizen.html> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens%27\\_Advisory\\_Council\\_on\\_National\\_Space\\_Policy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens%27_Advisory_Council_on_National_Space_Policy)
- [8] <https://www.jerrypournelle.com/view/2008/Q1/view510.html#starwars> and for a different perspective <https://www.thedailybeast.com/from-lucifers-hammer-to-newts-moon-base-to-donalds-wallthe-sci-fi-roots-of-the-far-right?ref=author>
- [9] Acknowledgments to *Window of Opportunity* by Newt Gingrich, David Drake & Marianne Gingrich. Also <http://david-drake.com/2012/window-of-opportunity/>
- [10] <https://www.tor.com/2012/12/11/talking-with-tom-a-conversation-between-tom-doherty-and-le-modesitt-jr/>
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Novel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award_for_Best_Novel)
- [12] <http://www.walterjonwilliams.net/2011/04/1983-the-writers-life/>
- [13] <https://www.tor.com/2012/12/11/talking-with-tom-a-conversation-between-tom-doherty-and-le-modesitt-jr/> and <https://www.baen.com/interviews/intweis> “We do like to publish hard SF, what Jim Baen calls “real SF.” Of course, that’s not all we publish. We are known for our military SF (Jim essentially invented the subgenre), urban fantasy, space opera and alternate history, too.” 2005
- [14] <https://ericflint.net/about/>
- [15] see chapter 4 for background on the L. Ron Hubbard/Scientology-related contest <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/02/14/debarkle-chapter-4-an-inadequate-history-of-fandom-worldcon-1939-2000/>
- [16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baen\\_Free\\_Library](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baen_Free_Library)
- [17] <https://web.archive.org/web/20110721232920/http://www.learningfountain.com/baensbar.htm> and <https://ericflint.net/about-the-snippets/>
- [18] <https://grantvillegazette.com/article/publish-461/>
- [19] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom\\_Kratman#Published\\_works](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Kratman#Published_works)
- [20] <https://ericflint.net/information/salvos-against-big-brother/>
- [21] <https://www.stripes.com/news/navy-deal-with-publisher-brings-books-aboard-1.10637>
- [22] <https://boingboing.net/2006/11/15/baen-books-all-free.html>

## 10: 2006 A Baen sweep of the Hugo's?

Tor grew substantially in the 1980s but also faced severe commercial problems when its distributor went bankrupt. The crisis led Tom Doherty to sell Tor to St Martin's Press in 1987<sup>[1]</sup>. However, Tor already had two notable editors (Beth Meacham and David G. Hartwell) and would recruit others (Robert Gleason, Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden). From 1986 onwards there have been just a few years (1991, 1996, 1997, 2005, 2011, 2016) where a Tor novel was not a Hugo finalist. Partly this was due to a large number of science fiction books published but also the publishing house had a strong reputation. The Locus Award category for Best Publisher has been won by Tor every year from 1988 to 2020<sup>[2]</sup>.

Meanwhile, some authors at Baen Books felt that their publisher was not getting the recognition it deserved. In the 1990s Baen had some success at the Hugo Awards with two wins by Lois McMaster Bujold. In addition, Elizabeth Moon was a finalist in 1997 for her novel *Remnant Population*. It was a fraction of the number of finalists achieved by the 'friendly rivals' at Tor but then again, Baen published only a fraction of the works published by Tor.

Nonetheless, by the early 2000s some Baen authors felt the odds were stacked against them. Recently both Eric Flint and David Weber (two of the most notable Baen authors) have written about being made aware that they were unlikely to win a Hugo Award because of their publisher. According to Weber:

*"I was told 20 years ago by a reviewer who shall remain nameless for her own protection "You'll never win a Hugo. You're published by Baen." I'm not saying that was automatically true just because a reviewer who'd been around a loooong time said it. I'm saying that she HAD been around a long time and she DID think it was true."*

Facebook comment 19/02/2021 <sup>[3]</sup>

Eric Flint expressed a similar sentiment in the same comments, saying that "Like David, I have known for at least two decades that there was no chance I'd ever get nominated for a Hugo." Flint went on to explain:

*"I think the main factors involved in Hugo selection don't actually have all that much to do with politics. It's true that there's a definite bias both against and in favor of various publishers (and magazines). Being blunt about it, calling that bias "political" is giving it too much credit. It's really not much different from the biases involved in the formation and maintenance of high school cliques. Some of the girls and boys are cool, and others aren't."*

Facebook comment 19/02/2021 <sup>[4]</sup>

In 2013 notable Baen author John Ringo expressed a similar sense of being locked out of Hugo consideration in the early 2000s. However, Ringo believed there was a degree of active malice towards him.

*"I had twice the votes for the John Campbell nomination in 2001 as the next highest person. Mine were 'thrown out' since I was 'ineligible.' I was told 'But John, you've been writing FOREVER.' 'My first book came out last year. I've published six in this time but my first book was in 2000.' Think that was a 'mistake'? No. It was not a 'mistake.'"*

Facebook comment 04/09/2013 <sup>[5]</sup>

The sense of exclusion among Baen authors was accompanied by others noting the degree to which Tor sought to openly promote itself. Robert J. Sawyer writing about his Nebula Award win in 1996 noted:

*"Of the six finalists, four were published by Tor Books — and, in an effort to garner Nebula votes, Tor had sent free copies of all four titles to every one of the 900+ active members of SFWA. The other two nominated books — mine, and Walter Jon Williams's Metropolitan — were both published by HarperPrism. HarperPrism cooperated with Walter's agent in sending out copies of his hardcover novel to voters. I, on the other hand, was no longer a HarperPrism author, and they were doing nothing whatsoever to enhance my chances of winning."*

<https://sfwriter.com/nebwin.htm> <sup>[6]</sup>

However, most novels that were finalists in the Hugo Awards at that time were not published by Tor. Of the 107 finalists in the twenty-year period from 1985 (the year before Tor's first win) and 2005 (the year before Jim Baen's death), 24 were published by Tor (22%)<sup>[7]</sup>. However, Tor was the largest grouping with the next highest being Bantam with 17 finalists and along with size, Tor also had an increasing range of authors and books that spanned a wide set of sub-genres. In a field with changing demographic and shifting tastes, this would prove to be an added advantage.

Broad concern about the integrity of major science fiction awards was not a new phenomenon. In an earlier chapter, we already discussed the concerns about 'log rolling' in the Nebula awards. In the mid-1990s veteran science fiction contrarian (and rather excellent writer) Harlan Ellison even raised the issue in an episode of the cable-tv Sci-Fi channel's show *Sci-Fi Buzz*:

*"At this most recent convention, at which the most recent awards were given out something strange, wonderful and horrendous happened. People bought themselves some awards. Yes, folks, it's finally happened. Technology has finally caught up. People actually went on the internet and begged for votes. Now, I'm not going to mention the names. People will say, "oh, Ellison's sour grapes". Yeah, it's sour grapes, I suppose. I got \*\*\*\*\* out of one or two awards, I'll tell you that absolutely frankly. But that's not really what I'm caring about. What I'm caring about is that one vastly untalented person won a Hugo, or was it a Nebula? I think it was a Nebula. And another person went out on the Net, and begged for votes, said, "vote for me, vote for me, poor me, vote for me". Well, I guess the time has come for somebody to point this out. It's not really polite to talk about it. But, you know, then you know me. I have no sense of what I should talk about, what I shouldn't. So, I figured I would alert the rest of you to this. That, ah, beginning with the awards this year, the Hugos and the Nebulas are maybe not as valuable, maybe not as representative as we might like to think they are."*

<http://harlanellison.com/buzz/bw135h.htm><sup>[8]</sup>

Although Ellison's claims were interpreted during the Puppy Kerfuffle of 2015 as being in relation to Tor, the gist of his concern appears to be about the use of the internet to promote an author or work. We'll return to the Nebula Awards in later chapters.

Meanwhile, within the Hugo Awards there was another category that carried with it some Baen/Tor-related angst. The Best Professional Editor category had been running since 1973 when it effectively replaced the former Best Professional Magazine category<sup>[9]</sup>. Jim Baen had been a finalist seven times in his roles as an editor for *Galaxy Magazine*, Ace Books and Tor. However, he never won and was never nominated in his role as editor/publisher of Baen Books. To some extent, being a finalist in his role at Ace and Tor was unusual. Most finalists in the category were present in their roles as editors of magazines. There were a few other exceptions. David G. Hartwell was a finalist on several occasions for his role at Pocket Books and later at Tor. Likewise, Beth Meacham and later Patrick Nielsen Hayden would also be finalists on the basis of their roles at Tor. However, the only person to win on the basis of being a book editor was a posthumous win by Judy-Lynn del Rey in 1986, which was declined by her husband.

As early as 1979, George R.R. Martin had noted the shifting importance of book editors in science fiction due to the shift from magazines as the major medium for the genre to paperbacks:

*"The editors at today's big paperback publishing houses Avon, Bantam, Dell, Berkley, DAW, Del Rey, Pocket Books, and so on are the most influential people in SF today. It is they who can choose to pay five- or six-figure advances, or to pay nothing at all. They decide which titles get promotion, and how much. They build their lines as carefully as magazine editors tend their periodicals."*

Guest of Honour Speech Coastcon II March 10, 1979 <https://georgerrmartin.com/about-george/speeches/editors-the-writers-natural-enemy/><sup>[11]</sup>

A change to the Best Editor category was implemented for 2007. The category would be split into two: long-form and short-form. The short-form version would be for editors of magazines and anthologies. The long-form version would be for editors of books. The change also meant that there was a final opportunity for Jim Baen to win a Hugo Award, albeit posthumously.

Within the Baen's Bar online forum there was discussion about the Hugo Awards and external to the forum a webpage established by a 'Barfly' (the nickname for regulars at the forum) entitled "A Baen Sweep of the Hugos".

*"As noted at Toni's Table, the electorate for Hugo awards (and the Campbell award) is almost as small and fluid as that of a "Rotten Borough". Also noted there is that Baen hasn't won many such awards*

recently despite Baen being the #2 or #3 (depending on how you count/who is counting) speculative fiction (SF) publisher. This totally unaffiliated page is therefore set up so that loyal Baen Barflies can do a little consensus building and nominate appropriately with the goal of seeing Jim Baen nominated as editor and ideally also seeing a Baen author/artist win some other category of the 2007 Hugo awards.”

<http://www.di2.nu/files/Baensweep.html> <sup>[12]</sup>

The page noted a decline in participation in Hugo voting and set out three general objectives:

- Get Jim Baen nominated and voted for Editor (books) for 2006
- Increase the participation in the Hugo process
- Get some Baen works on the ballots

The strategy? Get people to join up.

*“I hope to do this by convincing a number of loyal Baen readers (aka Barflies) to register as attendees for Worldcon 2007 or as voting associates and, having done so, to nominate Jim Baen for the editor award and to nominate some Baen works/authors/artists for the other awards. **There is NO intention to produce a Baen “slate” and to insist (as if it were possible) that Barflies nominate and vote for the “slate”.***

*However, having said that, it should be noted that in order for a nomination to make it onto the final ballot it typically needs between 20 and 40 nominations so it isn’t as simple as just having one person make a nomination that everyone else can vote on. We need as many barflies as possible involved in the nomination process to increase the chance that we have something Baeny to vote on.”*

ibid

The 2007 Worldcon was held in Yokohama, Japan <sup>[13]</sup> and the location may have impacted the number of people participating in the Hugo Awards, even though people could purchase a cheaper non-attending membership. Whether this pro-Baen campaign was just one person or gained some traction among other Barflies is no longer possible to discern. However, the numerical impact of the “Baen Sweep of the Hugos” campaign was negligible. The nomination statistics showed few of the possible nominees below the cut-off for finalist status <sup>[14]</sup>. There were though, two Baen finalists: firstly, perennial Hugo finalist Mike Resnick’s novelette “*All the Things You Are*” from *Jim Baen’s Universe*; secondly Jim Baen himself in Best Editor Short Form.

Among the people nominated in other categories was John Scalzi for Best Fan Writer. At his blog discussing the news he also discussed the editor category. The blogger behind the “Baen Sweep of the Hugos” added in the comments to Scalzi’s post:

*“Not to diss PNH but I really hope people actually vote for Jim Baen for Long form editor. PNH can win it next year. Jim Baen can never win it ever if he doesn’t win this year. Given what Jim Baen has done to the SF market not having him win ever is a travesty.”*

<http://www.scalzi.com/whatever/005000.html> <sup>[15]</sup>

Final voting in the Hugo Awards uses a transferable vote system known as instant run-off (IRV) or alternative vote (AV) <sup>[16]</sup> and is sometimes called an Australian Ballot <sup>[17]</sup> because of its use in Australian parliamentary elections. Hugo voters rank their choice out of the finalists. The finalist with the least amounts of first preference votes is eliminated in the first round and those ballots then go to the second preference listed on them.

The first preference votes in the Best Editor Long Form fell accordingly:

- Jim Baen [Baen] 109
- Patrick Nielsen Hayden [Tor] 83
- David G. Hartwell [Tor] 78
- Ginjer Buchanan [Ace] 47
- Lou Anders [Pyr] 32
- No Award 15

Two Tor editors were finalists, Patrick Nielsen Hayden and David G. Hartwell <sup>[18]</sup>. IRV as a system is designed to minimise the impact of a split vote between candidates and as other finalists were eliminated,

Jim Baen gained an extra 47 votes. However, Patrick Nielsen Hayden gained an extra 75, beating Jim Baen by just two votes. The blog behind the “Baen Sweep” was understandably not happy and noted that:

“it seems clear to me that 200 people who voted in lock step could a) guarantee a nomination and b) almost certainly win any and all Hugo awards.”

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130709124014/http://www.di2.nu/200709/02a.htm>

With the death of Jim Baen in 2006, executive editor Toni Weiskopf took on the role of publisher at Baen Books<sup>[19]</sup>. The company continued to produce science fiction and fantasy, as well as seek out new talent. The role of Baen within the Hugos would continue during this decade, with Mike Resnick as a finalist for a short story in 2009 from *Jim Baen’s Universe*. Circumstances would change in the 2010s but that’s getting ahead of ourselves...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/news-and-features/articles/building-brand-tom-dohertys-tor-books/>
- [2] [http://www.sfadb.com/Locus\\_Awards\\_Winners\\_By\\_Category#pub](http://www.sfadb.com/Locus_Awards_Winners_By_Category#pub)
- [3] [https://www.facebook.com/eric.flint.52/posts/10218006078045417?comment\\_id=10218006451254747](https://www.facebook.com/eric.flint.52/posts/10218006078045417?comment_id=10218006451254747)
- [4] [https://www.facebook.com/eric.flint.52/posts/10218006078045417?comment\\_id=10218006451254747&reply\\_comment\\_id=10218007212273772](https://www.facebook.com/eric.flint.52/posts/10218006078045417?comment_id=10218006451254747&reply_comment_id=10218007212273772) and <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-2-20-21-im-picking-up-good-vibraniums/>
- [5] <https://www.facebook.com/john.ringo.90857/posts/10151560891450887> we will return to this thread in later chapters. “John Campbell” refers to the Astounding Award — an award for newcomers which is technically not a Hugo Award but is run alongside the Hugos following the same process. The name was changed in 2020. Hugo statistics for 2001 are here <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2001HugoStatistics.pdf> John Ringo does not appear in the list of nominees who fell short of being finalists but he does in the statistics for 2002 <http://www.thehugoawards.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2002-Hugo-Statistics.pdf>. In 2002 Ringo ranked 11th in the nominations. Aside from Ringo’s claim quoted, I’ve found no evidence to corroborate his account.
- [6] I assume the claim about books sent to SFWA members is correct but I haven’t verified it.
- [7] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/02/28/just-putting-this-here-for-later/>
- [8] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFR9TYxAVZQ&feature=youtu.be>
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Professional\\_Editor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award_for_Best_Professional_Editor) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Professional\\_Magazine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award_for_Best_Professional_Magazine)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Professional\\_Editor#cite\\_note-86award-42](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award_for_Best_Professional_Editor#cite_note-86award-42)
- [11] Martin expressly asks people to consider book editors for Hugos in the same speech. “The point is that you remember that they exist, as a class, when it comes time to fill out that all important Hugo nomination form”
- [12] “Toni’s Table” was a board within the Baen’s Bar forum overseen by Baen editor Toni Weiskopf. The author of the blog, Francis Turner, does not appear again in the Debarkle. In 2016 Mike Glycer at *File770* covered the “Baen Sweep” in this post <http://file770.com/suppose-they-gave-a-culture-war-and-nobody-came/>
- [13] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/2007-hugo-awards/>
- [14] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2007%20Nominations.pdf> Possible nominees listed below the cut-off included Eric Flint for Best Editor Short Form, Baen editors Toni Weiskopf and Jim Minz for Best Editor Long Form, David Mattingly for Best Pro Artist, as well as Charles Stross for a short story in the *Jim Baen’s Universe* magazine. *Jim Baen’s Universe* magazine also got 4 votes for best Semiprozine but was probably not eligible.
- [15] <http://www.scalzi.com/whatever/005000.html> “No, I’m not going to list who I’m going to vote for in what. For one thing, I don’t know yet (except in the Best Editor, Long Form category. You know I’m voting for Patrick Nielsen Hayden there, because, well). For another thing, too many friends are competing in too many categories. Having lots of friends nominated for stuff makes me squee.”
- [16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instant-runoff\\_voting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instant-runoff_voting)
- [17] traditionally “Australian ballot” meant a secret ballot [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret\\_ballot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret_ballot)
- [18] Hartwell had won the older form of the category in 2006 for his work at Tor Books but also two anthologies and the magazine *The New York Review of Science Fiction*. George R. R. Martin has an account of the background to the category changes here <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2016/02/09/yet-more-hugo-ruminations/>
- [19] <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2006/08/prweb422287.htm>

# 11: Dramatis Personae — Larry Correia

Larry Correia, a man whose fans have called him “The Mountain Who Writes” and “The International Lord of Hate” <sup>[1]</sup> and about whom it was probably not said that he would “END WRITING FOREVER” <sup>[2]</sup>. Writer of fast-paced action-filled fantasy and arguably Baen Book’s biggest star novelist to begin publishing there after the departure of Jim Baen in 2006.

As with earlier Dramatis Personae essays, this chapter uses two key sources

- Larry Correia’s Wikipedia page [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry\\_Correia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Correia)
- Larry Correia’s autobiographical page on his blog <https://monsterhunternation.com/about/>

Any unreferenced statement will be either my opinion or drawn from one of those links listed above.

The son of a Portuguese immigrant farmer, Larry Correia was born in the mid-1970s and grew up in rural California. This makes him the youngest of the people I’ve covered so far, although he is still within the same *generation X* demographic as Vox Day and John Scalzi.

While he was still in high school, his family moved to Utah. There, he converted to the Church of the Latter-Day Saints and spent two years as a Mormon missionary in Alabama. He’d considered joining the military but ...

*“However, Bill Clinton was our new president and was in the process of gutting everything. The recruiters were kind of ho-hum, and then they shot me right the heck down when we got to the part where I had severe allergies, asthma, and extremely flat feet.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/about/>

Instead, he took on an accounting degree. Before he finished his degree he was married and was hoping to start a career in law enforcement. Life sent him in a different direction and he ended up as an accountant in a large company’s Utah offices.

However, our story is getting ahead of itself. In the late 1990s while still at college, Larry Correia became active in gun forums. Firstly, on a forum called The Firing Line <sup>[3]</sup>, and later in the 2000s, a forum called The High Road <sup>[4]</sup>. These forums included some people we will encounter later including Marko Kloos and Peter Grant but also Correia’s future writing collaborator Mike Kupari.

Gun politics is almost uniquely American. Certainly, other nations have had debates on appropriate levels of gun control and there’s no universal international consensus on civilian gun ownership. However, by the 1990s gun politics in the USA had become a key political issue with strong partisan ideological divides and high-profile lobby groups.

The internet helped bring gun enthusiasts together in a way that paralleled the use of the internet by fan groups. Indeed, the inherent fannishness of these forums is hard to deny. Politics, specifically the “right to keep and bear arms” (usually shortened to RKBA <sup>[5]</sup>) was only a fraction of the wider discussion among forum members, which covered makes of weapons, tips for uses, pointless arguments about types of guns and free-wheeling discussions of popular culture or a mix of guns and popular culture <sup>[6]</sup>. At times the discussion would combine all these things.

*“I was talking with a friend of mine today about what we thought it would take to get our country away from liberalism and socialism. We talked a little bit about the blue and red election map, wherein Gore only won urban areas.*

*Then I thought of the movie Independence Day. With Will Smith, remember the Aliens come and start to blow up the biggest cities on the planet. They start with LA, NY, and Washington and work their way down from there. After a couple of days mankind comes back and kicks their butts. But think about it. Aliens could come down and obliterate every Liberal mega center in the country. Afterwards we would be totally set! Think about it, are there any big urban areas in America that are Conservative. Even Salt Lake City gives Utah its only Democrat congressman!*

*Maybe I can get on one of those big SETI radio sets and start sending taunts out into space. We would kick butt in every election after that!”*

Larry Correia “Strange thought. The movie “Independence Day”: Best scenario ever for Gun Owners?”

<https://thefiringline.com/forums/showpost.php?p=477125&postcount=1> <sup>[7]</sup>

The politics on the forums Correia followed was loosely libertarian, pro-police but sceptical and fearful of federal agencies — in particular the FBI and the BATF. Looming large among forum members was two critical incidents in the 1990s. The siege of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas in 1993 and the shooting of Sammy and Vicki Weaver at Ruby Ridge in 1992<sup>[8]</sup>. As President, Bill Clinton had also signed into law two notable pieces of gun control legislation, the Brady Bill which mandated background checks for gun purchases and the 1994 Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act commonly known as the Assault Weapons Ban<sup>[9]</sup>.

So, the gun discourse modulated between a fun collecting hobby, fears of tyrannical government and fears of home invasion<sup>[10]</sup>. The line between the scenarios about governments confiscating guns or violent criminals breaking into a house, between genuine fears or anticipatory fantasies was hard to tell<sup>[11]</sup>. However, the more practical enemy was the large gun control campaigns that were mobilising support in the wake of events like the 1999 Columbine High School massacre<sup>[12]</sup> and the Los Angeles Jewish Community Centre shooting<sup>[13]</sup>.

Like most communities in America, the members of the Firing Line forums were traumatised by the events of 9-11 in 2001.

*“... If we would have killed every last one of them the first time, destroyed their entire organizations, and ruined any country that dared to support them then today wouldn't have happened. I'm not in favor of peacekeeping missions. I believe in what the military was originally intended to do, and that is protect us. If that means killing our enemies ruthlessly, razing their land, and salting the earth, then so be it. El Qaeda had already declared war on us. It is about time that we declare war on them.*

*Bill Clinton was looking for a legacy. In my opinion, this is it. He let evil people hurt us, over and over again, and we never destroyed them. They have just been getting bolder, until today. And in the next New York senatorial election, somebody needs to make a bunch of posters of the picture of Hillary kissing Yassir Arafat on the cheek, and distribute them around Manhattan...”*

<https://thefiringline.com/forums/showpost.php?p=687171&postcount=6><sup>[14]</sup>

These forums were not all politics and guns. In 2002 on the High Road forum Larry Correia and another member called Nightcrawler (Mike Kupari<sup>[15]</sup>) began a serial story written directly within a forum thread. Called “Welcome Back, Mr Nightcrawler”<sup>[16]</sup> the story featured the imaginary adventures of the titular author in a secret counter-terrorism organisation. The story was popular in the forum and it led Correia to consider writing a novel in a more conventional way.

As well as accountancy, Larry Correia began running his own gun shop as well as providing gun training and in 2007 shifted to doing that full time<sup>[17]</sup>. He had already written his first proper novel, *Monster Hunter International*. Inspired by B-movies but also by a desire for competent heroes and accurate description of guns. However, once the book was finished, he couldn't find anybody willing to publish it. As a consequence, he took on the task of publishing the book himself as print-on-demand. It was finally released in 2008.

Correia remained active within gun-rights activism. In the wake of the Virginia Tech shooting, in which 32 people were killed<sup>[18]</sup>, multiple media outlets identified the wrong person as the killer<sup>[19]</sup>. Among those who and falsely attributed the murders to an innocent man was Geraldo Rivera at Fox News. On The High Road forum, Correia called for action:

*“Gentlemen, we've got a perfect opportunity right now for a coordinated assault. Geraldo Rivera's program picked the first Asian, VT student, that owned guns that they found on the internet, and threw him under the bus.*

*This guy is one of us. He's an ARFcom member. It is time to ZUMBO Geraldo.”*

<https://www.thehighroad.org/index.php?threads/keep-your-wits-about-you.270914/#post-3311945><sup>[20]</sup>

Meanwhile, in early 2008 *Monster Hunter International* began to enjoy some success. Correia's combination of well-paced action, gun combat and monsters quickly gained readers. He used his presence of the gun forums to promote his book and serialised parts of it on his blog<sup>[21]</sup>.

One of his readers was friends with the owner of the famous independent science fiction bookshop Uncle Hugo's.<sup>[22]</sup> That led to the novel being passed on to a science fiction publisher who eventually agreed to

publish it. Ironically, Correia's announcement that the print-on-demand version would soon be withdrawn led to a massive boost in sales of the original version.

In 2009, Baen Books published a new version of *Monster Hunter International*. Larry Correia was now a Baen author.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://benzwycky.com/2016/04/23/meeting-up-with-the-mountain-who-writes/> and <https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/04/15/larry-f-correia-international-lord-of-hate/>
- [2] [spoilers] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2018/05/20/faking-shared-history/>
- [3] <https://thefiringline.com>
- [4] <https://www.thehighroad.org>
- [5] <https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=RKBA&redirect=no> and <https://thefiringline.com/forums/showpost.php?p=285001&postcount=5>
- [6] Larry Correia discussing Scully's choice of gun in the X Files: <https://thefiringline.com/forums/showpost.php?p=288618&postcount=29> It's an interesting comment in terms of the development of the Monster Hunter books.
- [7] I think in context, the hope of every "liberal mega centre" being destroyed was meant in jest.
- [8] "Lessons of Ruby Ridge" <https://thefiringline.com/forums/showpost.php?p=1149264&postcount=50>
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun\\_control\\_policy\\_of\\_the\\_Bill\\_Clinton\\_administration#Brady\\_Bill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun_control_policy_of_the_Bill_Clinton_administration#Brady_Bill)
- [10] <https://thefiringline.com/forums/showpost.php?p=550455&postcount=1>
- [11] <https://thefiringline.com/forums/showpost.php?p=910761&postcount=40> a 'Mozambique drill' is when you shoot two shots at a person's centre of mass and then one at their head [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mozambique\\_Drill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mozambique_Drill)
- [12] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbine\\_High\\_School\\_massacre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbine_High_School_massacre)
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los\\_Angeles\\_Jewish\\_Community\\_Center\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Angeles_Jewish_Community_Center_shooting)
- [14] Larry Correia signed off with "Molon Labe", the Spartan phrase that had become popular among gun groups [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molon\\_labe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molon_labe)
- [15] [https://larry-correia.fandom.com/wiki/Dead\\_Six](https://larry-correia.fandom.com/wiki/Dead_Six)
- [16] <https://www.thehighroad.org/index.php?threads/welcome-back-mr-nightcrawler.207390/>
- [17] <https://larrycorreia.wordpress.com/2007/11/29/this-week-in-the-news-11-29-07/> "In local news, today is my second to last day as a corporate stooge. After five years of living in a cubicle crunching numbers for a mega-corporation, I'm about done. As of Friday afternoon, I'm on my own. Now I'm a full time Gun Monger."
- [18] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia\\_Tech\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Tech_shooting)
- [19] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media\\_coverage\\_of\\_the\\_Virginia\\_Tech\\_shooting#Inaccurate\\_media\\_reports](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_coverage_of_the_Virginia_Tech_shooting#Inaccurate_media_reports)
- [20] <https://www.thehighroad.org/index.php?threads/keep-your-wits-about-you.270914/#post-3311945> "Zumbo" here refers to the firing of Jim Zumbo from *Outdoor Life* magazine after he made critical remarks about people hunting with AR-15s and AK47s [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim\\_Zumbo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Zumbo)
- [21] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2008/08/28/on-self-publishing/>
- [22] <https://larrycorreia.wordpress.com/2008/02/23/monster-hunter-international-reviewed-by-don-blyly-of-uncle-hugos/>



## 12: Meanwhile...Obama 2008

Nothing occurs in isolation. Writers, readers, fans live their lives within the same political, economic and environmental changes as the rest of the world. The Debarkle story is a political story about science fiction fandom and so some chapters will divert from the main story to look at events elsewhere, either other issues within fandom or political issues too broad to easily encompass within other chapters.

Our story so far has brought us to the year 2008, which was an election year in the USA. It was also an Olympics year and 2008 saw Beijing host the Games of the XXIX Olympiad. The Channel Island of Sark becomes the last territory in Europe to abolish feudalism. Bitcoin is invented. Kosovo declared independence from Serbia <sup>[1]</sup>. Apple's iPhone turned one year old, as did the Kindle e-book reader, and Facebook opened its first international headquarters and was growing rapidly <sup>[2]</sup>. Also, the *io9* website started <sup>[3]</sup>.

In this chapter I'm going to survey two of the issues of the day in 2008 America but through a distorted lens. The focus is on the battle for marriage equality and the 2008 US presidential election through the eyes of three Gen-X men all involved in the world of science fiction and fantasy publishing. Two sat on the right of American politics (Larry Correia, Vox Day) and one, close to its centre (John Scalzi). They are not intended to be a representative sample of the US public or of the science fiction community. Rather, I want to look at these events at this point in time with this tiny and distorted sample to consider how the politics beyond fandom was shaping the views of three people.

These two issues were hardly the only ones being discussed. The sub-prime mortgage crisis that had begun in 2007 was already escalating into a much wider financial disaster. The sudden economic fragility was also highlighting how vulnerable many Americans were to healthcare costs. The Iraq war had proven to be an interminable conflict which, after initial victory, had descended into civil war and humanitarian abuses. Covering all of these issues is not possible within a single chapter and while the growing global financial crisis was a key part of the changing political landscape, for the coming phase of America's culture war it was an underlying rhythm but not the main theme.

Note that some of the views expressed are politically extreme and in particular some quotes and posts contain overt homophobia.

### *Marriage equality*

Activists had been campaigning for the right to marry to be extended beyond heterosexual couples from at least the 1970s <sup>[4]</sup>. Those campaigns had been met with a legislative counter-reaction with sets of laws affirming that a marriage had to be between a man and a woman (with the less obvious implication that the previous long-standing laws did not sufficiently state that). The 2000s saw a renewed legislative push to recognise a broader set of relationships and a reactive set of legislation in conservative states banning the concept. In 2008 the Supreme Court of California ruled against the state's existing law that forbade same-sex marriages. In response, a ballot initiative called Proposition 8 was put forward to amend the state constitution so that it would affirm "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognised in California." <sup>[5]</sup>. To add to the inherent divisiveness of adding active discrimination to a state constitution, the ballot initiative would be held on November 4 along with Californian state legislature elections, federal legislature elections and the US presidential elections.

America's right-wing regarded marriage equality as a powerful wedge issue and even attributed George W. Bush's successful 2004 re-election to the voter pushback against marriage equality.

*"The day after the Massachusetts Supreme Court created "gay marriage" I said that Bush would have an easy victory – not a landslide, just one that wasn't subject to 2000-style recounts – and that's pretty much what happened. Ohio, you'll note, had a marriage amendment on the ballot which brought out the social conservatives who obviously weren't interested in the Constitution Party. I think it was only as close as it was because the stock market has been flat throughout the campaign."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160112212639/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2004/11/forget-pollsters-listen-to-me.html>

Republican Presidential nominee John McCain spoke openly in support of the measure <sup>[6]</sup> as did former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich <sup>[7]</sup>. Bush's second term had left many on the right of the GOP feeling alienated from the party (see later in this chapter) and an overt socially conservative measure that had some broader appeal might help with voter turnout nationally even if Proposition 8 itself was purely a matter for California.

The Democratic Party's response was more wishy-washy, although Barack Obama having previously stated his opposition to marriage equality, spoke against Proposition 8<sup>[8]</sup>. Opinion was shifting though, not fast enough for the ballot measure but definitely changing. In March of 2008, John Scalzi discussed how science fiction had helped him conceptualise changing attitudes.

*“One other thing. I can't remember which book it was — I think it was 2061 — he had one character (I think it was Heywood Floyd) talking to another character, who was gay and celebrating an anniversary, and Floyd mentioned something about the gay character being in a relationship longer than most married couples he could think of. I do believe it was the first time I had ever thought about the idea of same-sex couples living as married couples, and I think I recall thinking that seemed perfectly reasonable to me. Leave it to science fiction, and to Arthur C. Clarke, to drop a then-radical social idea into my head and make it seem perfectly normal. And of course, now same-sex couples can get married, in several countries including in the US (albeit in the latter case in only one state; even so).”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2008/03/19/what-else-i-was-going-to-say-about-arthur-c-clarke/>

In particular, Scalzi was angry that Proposition 8 would end the actual marriages of people who had married after the State Supreme Court ruling:

*“They need to recognize what it is that they're doing, not to some potential marriage, but to a single, actual marriage that exists, now. I'm going to bold this next part, because I think it's that important: If the people voting for Proposition 8 couldn't stand personally in front of a married couple, tell that couple they shouldn't be married, and say that it is their right and duty to destroy that marriage, they should not vote for Proposition 8. It's really as simple as that.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2008/10/30/what-prop-8-threatens-existing-marriages-you-dont-say/>

That the ballot measure was a direct attack on the families of ordinary Americans, differentiated only by their choice of partner, is a mental shift in how people thought about marriage equality (as is the term “marriage equality”). The arguments for the proposition framed matters in terms of abstract legal concepts or in terms of vague social harm or judicial overreach.

However, Scalzi was far more disappointed in a different science fiction writer's opinion on the topic:

*“Somewhat related to this, Orson Scott Card brings the economy-sized jug of crazy sauce to the same-sex marriage discussion with this gem of a column. Whether he's declaring that same-sex marriage marks the end of democracy in America, or hinting that married heterosexuals should overthrow the government because now gay people can marry, or just flat-out declaring that “biological imperatives trump laws” — I think I'll call this the “forcible insemination get-out-of-jail-free card” hypothesis, because, hey, men got imperatives — this is OSC at his most foamy, and you really don't want to miss it. As much as I admire OSC as a writer, and I really do, as a social thinker he's far deep into my “oh, bless his heart” territory, and it seems unlikely he'll be making a run for that border any time soon.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2008/07/30/no-fair-youre-saving-what-the-amendment-does/><sup>[9]</sup>

The Hugo-winning author, Orson Scott Card, was also a member of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints. The LDS was a major donor for the Proposition 8 Yes campaign. Although Roman Catholic groups were bigger donors, the LDS's involvement in the campaign received a lot of coverage. In particular, 45% of out-of-state donations to the Yes campaign came from Utah. The No campaign, on the other hand, received many donations from California's tech industries<sup>[10]</sup>.

Proposition 8 passed on November 4 but it was a pyrrhic victory. The bitter campaign had brought out votes but had also shifted opinions in a different direction. The LDS in particular garnered a great deal of negative publicity as a consequence. The fierce and alarmist opposition to marriage equality was designed to mobilise turn-out but over the longer term, it self-characterised the opponents of marriage equality as fear-mongering opponents of individual liberty<sup>[11]</sup>.

Larry Correia didn't get to discussing his church's involvement until 2009 and did so in a characteristic manner.

*“The SLCPD is going through extra riot training. They're really excited about having the opportunity to baton some drag queens. If we're really lucky, the professional protestor class from Seattle will show up and start tossing Molotovs. Ironically though, this is Utah, not Hippieland, so that should prove really interesting.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2009/02/23/gay-protestors-to-descend-on-lds-general-conference-in-april/>

The propaganda war on marriage equality had backfired and the victors, by overstating the impact of marriage equality<sup>[12]</sup>, were alienating centrist views and highlighting the implied prejudice in their arguments. However, others on the right drew a different message. Proposition 8 passed in a vote on the same day that the Republican Party lost the Presidential election. Commenting on an article critical of social conservatives, Vox Day came to this conclusion:

*“In my opinion, David Frum’s analysis is factually incorrect and logically incoherent, and an intelligent observer will note that while the Republican pragmatists and moderates were obliterated – again – on Tuesday, it was culture war issues that not only triumphed in Democratic strongholds such as California, but downright dominated in battleground states that went for Obama such as Florida. This isn’t to say a cultural approach is a certain vote-winner in all circumstances; voters tend to be skittish of altering state constitutions and usually prefer to steer clear of the more comprehensive abortion bans, but there’s no question that the anti-homogamy, anti-abortion wing of the Republican Party is far more popular than the banker’s bail-out wing or the Israel First feather.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140618083207/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2008/11/battle-for-republican-soul.html>

For Day, “culture war” was the required strategy for the right.

### ***The US Presidential election***

As early as 2004, Vox Day was expecting the 2008 election to be a contest between Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush but he was open to the possibility of the eventual candidates (Obama and McCain).

#### ***“Democrats:***

*2-1 Hillary Clinton*

*5-1 John Edwards*

*8-1 Random Democratic senator*

*9-1 Barack Obama (or whatever his name is)*

#### ***Republicans:***

*3-1 Jeb Bush*

*5-1 Random Republican governor*

*6-1 Rudy Giuliani*

*9-1 John McCain”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160112212638/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2004/11/odds-for-2008.html>

For Day, Bush versus Clinton would be the epitome of a broken system — the defining proof of American decline. It would be a theme that would come up again.

However, Vox Day’s preferred candidate for the Republican party nomination was Ron Paul. At this point, Day was still overtly describing himself as a libertarian.

*“People often try to blame me for comments that are made here. This is an intellectually shabby tactic, as there are literally hundreds of thousands of my own words from which to choose, and yet they still have to try to put words in my mouth in order to attack me. But like Ron Paul, I am a practicing libertarian; a failure to respond to a comment is as likely to mean that I think it is completely insane as it is to indicate that I agree with it. (Most likely, it means I think it’s obvious, idiotic or irrelevant, but then, I AM a superintelligence.)”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160112225917/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2008/01/andrew-nails-it.html>

As a libertarian, we might have expected Larry Correia to also be keen on Ron Paul but he certainly was not enamoured of many of Paul's supporters. On The High Road forum in 2007, Correia expressed his frustration with the way conspiracy theorists were flocking to Ron Paul's support.

*"Okay, Paul supporters, when you start bringing up the Illuminati, Bildeburgs, the NWO, Adam Weisphet, the Masons, Black Helicopters, Cecil Rhodes, the Gnomes of Zurich, The council of 300, cattle mutilation, the illuminated ones, and the Reptoids of the Hollow Earth, the average American voter is going to look at you like you are a freak and a kook. And since you've appointed yourself as an evangelist for Ron Paul, by extension, you paint him as a freak and a kook."*

<https://www.thehighroad.org/index.php?threads/fred-thompson-mega-thread-merged.278967/page-3#post-3417472>

At the start of the year, John Scalzi also reviewed the prospective candidates. For him, the least objectionable Republican was John McCain. McCain's main advantage was that he wasn't George W. Bush.

*"In a matchup, I'll take any of the top Democratic contenders over any of the top Republican contenders, because aside from the fact that there are no Republican candidates who I have any interest in voting for (I find McCain the most congenial to me philosophically and the only one who, should he win, won't have me looking somewhat wistfully at the New Zealand immigration site to see if I have enough points to qualify), there's also the simple fact that no Republican administration is going to be as motivated as a Democratic one to stop doing all the fucktarded things the Bush Administration has done over the course of the last seven years. Sorry, guys, the dude has trashed your brand."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2008/01/11/your-big-fat-election-brain-dump-11108/>

Indeed, none of the three was particularly enamoured with George W. Bush<sup>[13]</sup>. In what was already a hyper-partisan political atmosphere, it is notable how much Bush had burned through whatever goodwill there was towards him.

Larry Correia's impression of Obama was initially limited:

*"So why am I talking about Disney channel cartoons? Because they are shockingly similar to the crap, I've been watching on the national news all week. Barack Obama is such a light-weight, that the only way I could see any sane person voting for him is because they despise Hillary. Does that man actually have any positions, other than walking up rainbows to eat fluffy cloud cake?"*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2008/01/10/a-little-bit-of-political-ramblings/>

Once Obama was the candidate, the fear-mongering shifted gears. Larry Correia in a post entitled "Barack's Brown Shirts", warned his readers that Obama would set up a rival organisation to the military:

*"Barack despises the military. Why else does he need a rival organization founded in his image? I haven't seen this speech get any attention at all, but he's talking about an expansion of governmental power that would make the Department of Homeland Security look like your neighborhood's Girl Scout Program. ZERO MEDIA SCRUTINY. Barack despises those of us in fly-over country, out here clinging to our guns and our religion. Do you really think, even for a split second, that he respects the things that you volunteer for now? Of course not. Unless you're marching for gay marriage for terrorists... Despite the fact that Americans are the most generous people in history, we're still too stupid to manage our own affairs, and we have to be told what to do."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2008/07/07/baracks-brown-shirts/>

The claim was one that had been circulating based on very selective quoting of a speech by Obama in which he called for an increase of recruitment to programs like the Peace Corps<sup>[14]</sup>. A spoiler for those readers still living in 2008, Barack Obama did not actually end up creating a Brown Shirt-like security organisation in either of his two terms.

*"My personal political leanings are pretty darn obvious to anybody that reads this (I own a machine gun store, not a lot of Democrats in that line of work) so you can be relatively certain that I don't like Barack Obama, but I think I actually hate him. Well, I suppose somebody could say that by saying that, I'm racist or something, but hell, I'm blacker than Barack Obama. My Mom's from Africa and I at least grew up poor. Let me see, how many times have I gone windsurfing on Maui... uh... NONE, but I have witnessed a crack dealer in Birmingham beat a man with a baseball bat and push him off a 2nd story*

*balcony, so maybe Barack can educate me on the “Black Experience”. No, I hate him because he’s a socialist idiot pretty-boy waste of precious oxygen.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2008/04/02/whv-i-would-rather-gouge-my-eyeballs-out-of-my-skull-than-vote-for-barack-obama/>

I don’t believe Larry Correia has ever expanded on the statement that his mother is from Africa and as a counter-argument to be called racist “*I’m blacker than Barack Obama*” is not a good example of debate technique<sup>[15]</sup>

Mind you, Correia wasn’t exactly happy with the Republican nominee either:

*“On the other hand, McCain is a joke. The best the Republican party could come up with is basically a democrat. Our main strategy for winning this election is that Barack will be too crazy for the democrats and independents that aren’t mentally ill, and they’ll vote for McCain. That’s one hell of a plan. McCain is proud of the fact that he “reaches across the aisle” and “brings people together”. Listen, John, we really don’t want to be brought together with Kennedy or Feingold. We want them to GO AWAY and quit destroying our country.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2008/05/10/this-week-in-the-news-2/>

Correia regained some enthusiasm once Sarah Palin was picked to be the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate:

*“I’ve already heard people saying that McCain was just “pandering” to the Republican base by, you know, picking an actual conservative republican. So out of the 4 people involved, we’ve got a Marxist, a Socialist, a Conservative Democrat, and finally we’ve got an actual Republican. This has to be terribly shocking for the media. For the first time in this campaign, I’m actually excited. John McCain actually picked a Republican. Maybe the press can go back to saying he’s a maverick again.”*

<https://www.monsterhunternation.com/2008/08/29/so-now-experience-matters/>

The defining far-right conspiracy theory of the Obama Presidency would prove to be the ‘birther movement’<sup>[16]</sup>. However, during the 2008 election, it was not a major focus for Vox Day. In August, after Hillary Clinton had conceded but before the Democratic National Convention, Day was confident Obama would lose.

*“If I were a Democratic strategist, I’d be thinking very, very hard about out how to get Obama off the ballot at or before the convention. If he’s this close to McCain in the polls after 18 months of nothing but favorable press, I think he’s in very serious trouble. Remember, at this point, Michael Dukakis was 16 points ahead. Moreover, the idea that Obama would crush McCain in the debates has pretty much vanished thanks to more idiotic off-the-cuff remarks in the last six weeks than Dan Quayle made in his entire political career.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20100113101522/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2008/08/equality-day-conspiracy-theories.html> [content warning for jokes about domestic violence]

In that same piece, Day makes a short reference to the possibility of Obama not being eligible through being born abroad. It wasn’t until 2009 that Day would start to really focus on the idea that Obama’s birth certificate was fake. By late October, Day was convinced that Obama was going to lose. Also, throughout Day’s 2008 election coverage there is a sense of this Presidential election not being the main event. Neither Obama nor McCain was Day’s expected candidates and both candidates were not quite “rebel” candidates but also not quite the obvious picks of the party hierarchy. The growing financial crisis also meant that Day expected whoever won to be a one-term President.

*“The economic situation means that whoever wins this year is likely to be a one-and-done president. Palin is the leading candidate for the Republican nomination in 2012, so unless the New York-Washington Republican axis can blame a McCain loss on her somehow – which is absurd in light of the stock markets’ meltdown, if Obama wasn’t such a ridiculous candidate McCain would be losing in a huge landslide – she will be the favorite to win the general election. So, expect a significant part of the “conservative” commentariat to devote itself to destroying Sarah Palin over the next few years while attempting to build up other, less conservative figures in the mode of Giuliani and Romney.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160112232018/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2008/10/whv-they-hate-palin.html><sup>[18]</sup>

Barack Obama would go on to win about 53% of the popular vote and over 60% of the electoral college in a commanding and decisive win <sup>[19]</sup>.

Naturally Larry Correia was very unhappy with the results:

*“All of the ageing liberal supreme court justices will retire now, so that Barack can replace them with 3 twenty-year old Ruth Bader Ginsbergs. Regardless of his crappy presidency, we’ll be dealing with that legacy FOREVER. The only good thing that may come from this is that the republicans might be forced to grow a pair. They abandoned their morals in order to be just like the democrats, and they paid for it. We need leaders. We need people with actual morals and a concrete philosophy. We need our party to step up and quit being more of the same.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2008/11/05/well-this-sucks/>

Vox Day took comfort in the Republican defeat as he had never liked John McCain in the first place. The defeat of McCain was, for Day, a defeat for the section of the Republican party he most disliked.

*“It must be understood that the East Coast elite would far rather lose the White House, House and Senate than lose its influence over the Republican Party. This is why, after a decade of advocating the abandonment of principle and political pragmatism in the name of retaining power, these impractical pragmatists are unembarrassed to continue advocating the very policies that were responsible for the Republican Party going from national dominance to abject defeat. If Republicans are wise enough to reject these “opinion leaders” and insist upon standard bearers who actually reflect the core values of the party’s base, don’t be surprised to see a few supposedly staunch Republicans defecting to the Democratic Party.”*

<https://www.wnd.com/2008/11/80571/>

Day, like Correia, was keener on Sarah Palin as a candidate or more generally as a template for a different kind of Republican candidate.

*“The battle for the hearts and minds of the Republican Party has begun. Sarah Palin only represents the first of what promises to be many internecine battles. And if she has any thought of leading the Republican Party against an incumbent Obama, she would do well to begin with demonstrating her strategic competence by leading the GOP’s conservatives against the liberals and moderates who have inerrantly steered the party into disaster and defeat.”*

<https://www.wnd.com/2008/11/80571/>

Larry Correia and Vox Day’s politics differ but in 2008 both were people who claimed to be libertarian and who regarded the Republican Party as a potential brake on the politics of the left. Consistent through the issues of 2008 was a dissatisfaction with the Republican Party. In particular, it was Sarah Palin’s quixotic Vice-Presidential campaign that was the aspect of the election to appealed to both of them. Palin barely registered in John Scalzi’s coverage of the election and beyond the Republican party, she was often seen as a figure of fun and lacking in credibility. However, even her missteps operated in a way that helps confirm and affirm the beliefs and political emotions of a section of Americans. She might not have been a good candidate but for a culture war, she was, for some people, the right genre for a candidate.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008>
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_Apple\\_Inc.\\_products#2005%E2%80%932009](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Apple_Inc._products#2005%E2%80%932009) , [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon\\_Kindle#First\\_generation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_Kindle#First_generation), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindle\\_Direct\\_Publishing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindle_Direct_Publishing) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook#2006%E2%80%932012:\\_Public\\_access,\\_Microsoft\\_alliance,\\_and\\_rapid\\_growth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook#2006%E2%80%932012:_Public_access,_Microsoft_alliance,_and_rapid_growth) .
- [3] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2008/01/02/promising-to-do-to-science-fiction-what-gawker-did-to-celebrity/>
- [4] <https://www.history.com/topics/gay-rights/gay-marriage>
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008\\_California\\_Proposition\\_8#History\\_of\\_the\\_ballot\\_initiative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_California_Proposition_8#History_of_the_ballot_initiative)
- [6] <https://www.usnews.com/news/campaign-2008/articles/2008/06/27/mccain-supports-efforts-to-ban-gay-marriage>
- [7] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73Q4V8WNF6k> as Gingrich keeps turning up, I thought I’d mention him here as well

- [8] <https://web.archive.org/web/20080731210556/http://www.sacbee.com/111/story/1051404.html>
- [9] The quote contained a link to Card's column which is now only available in archive version. Content warning [https://web.archive.org/web/20080822082726/https://www.mormontimes.com/ME\\_blogs.php?id=1586](https://web.archive.org/web/20080822082726/https://www.mormontimes.com/ME_blogs.php?id=1586)
- [10] <https://www.mercurynews.com/2008/10/24/opponents-of-gay-marriage-ban-ride-wave-of-donations/>
- [11] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2008/11/07/fighting-bigotry-with-snark/>
- [12] To quote Orson Scott Card's editorial "Biological imperatives trump laws. American government cannot fight against marriage and hope to endure. If the Constitution is defined in such a way as to destroy the privileged position of marriage, it is that insane Constitution, not marriage, that will die."
- [13] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2008/08/28/politics-makes-my-brain-hurt/> "And I'm no Republican shill. I think George Bush was domestically weak, not a true conservative, but I could admire his stance on killing terrorist scumbags. I think John McCain is basically a middle of the road democrat, but at least he's a grown up and not-a-Marxist. "
- [14] <https://www.factcheck.org/2008/11/obamas-national-security-force/> and he covered it again here <https://larrycorreia.wordpress.com/2008/07/26/ive-been-taken-to-task-by-an-obama-disciple-bring-it-on/>
- [15] Correia may have been trying to reference a claim made by Shelby Steele that Hillary Clinton was blacker than Obama <https://prospect.org/article/black-get/> Disgraced Illinois politician Rod Blagojevich made a similar claim <https://www.politico.com/blogs/ben-smith/2010/01/blago-im-blacker-than-barack-obama-024029> and I initially thought Correia was referencing that but the dates (2008 for Correia and 2010 for Blagojevich) don't match. For fans of foreshadowing, Blagojevich's statement was made while on the set of *Celebrity Apprentice*.
- [16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack\\_Obama\\_citizenship\\_conspiracy\\_theories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama_citizenship_conspiracy_theories)
- [17] <https://web.archive.org/web/20160112232009/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2008/10/death-by-ice.html>
- [18] It feels strange now to recall that Giuliani was once perceived as a moderate figure
- [19] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008\\_United\\_States\\_presidential\\_election#Results](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_United_States_presidential_election#Results)

## 13: Meanwhile...RaceFail'09

Early in 2009, an internet argument started up, primarily in the social media/blogging system called LiveJournal, over the question of race and racism within science fiction and fantasy. This chapter is not a summary of events in that argument. There are numerous overviews, summaries and guides to the discussion that became known as RaceFail'09 written by people who were involved, and for the ins and outs of the event, I will be linking to several of them. Many of them start with the observation that key or important posts have since been deleted, which is true and this was exacerbated by a move in 2017 by LiveJournal to start operating under Russian law (making LGBTQI content vulnerable to bans and government censorship), which led to many people closing accounts<sup>[1]</sup>.

I shan't be writing a definitive 12th anniversary retrospective of an event that I wasn't part of and whose boundaries and even key events are disputed. Moreover, this chapter has to fit in with a wider work that is concerned with the behaviour and beliefs of a set of right-wing authors who firstly, did not take part in RaceFail, secondly, largely ignored it at the time, and thirdly, held views utterly at odds with key participants. Nevertheless, RaceFail is part of the wider story of the Puppy Kerfuffle of 2015 and did involve some of the characters we have already met on the left/liberal/political centre of the story so far, including Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Charles Stross and John Scalzi.

In the meantime, let me start with some links and then a short and almost certainly wrong summary...

Firstly, some links. RaceFail'09 has had multiple attempts at documentation. Rather than footnote everything, here are several attempts to summarise events. I've picked summaries that I have found to be repeatedly linked to by others, so inclusion here isn't an endorsement of these as the 'best' summaries. If a claim doesn't have a footnote, then it is from at least one (and usually several) of these accounts or is my attempt at analysis or opinion.

- Fanlore wiki page [https://fanlore.org/wiki/RaceFail\\_%2709](https://fanlore.org/wiki/RaceFail_%2709)
- Geek Feminism page <https://geekfeminism.wikia.org/wiki/Racefail>
- The Dreamwidth<sup>[2]</sup> version of rydra-wong's RaceFail links <https://rydra-wong.dreamwidth.org/148996.html>
- Ann Sommerville's 'themed summary' <https://annsomerville.net/a-themed-summary-of-racefail-09-in-large-friendly-letters-for-those-who-think-race-discussions-are-hard/>

The normal place to start an account of RaceFail'09 is with a LiveJournal essay by author Elizabeth Bear entitled *whatever you're doing, you're probably wrong*<sup>[3]</sup> about how writers should tackle writing people who are, in various ways, something other than themselves. The advice included things like this:

*"1) For one thing, stop thinking about this person you're writing as The Other. Think of them as human, an individual. Not A Man. Not A Woman. Not A Chinese Person or A Handicapped Person or A Person With Cancer or a Queer Person. A person. Stop trying to make them universal, and make them unique."*  
<https://matociquala.livejournal.com/1544111.html>

The advice and Bear's assessment of her own background led to a degree of pushback from some people commenting on the post. In particular, blogger "Avalon's Willow" wrote an open letter in response to Bear's post (and the subsequent debate in the comments section) expressing her frustration with how often Black representation within science fiction popular culture fails in particular ways. She concluded:

*"It's about being fed up with all of that and not in the mood to pamper or pet someone who has far more privilege than they seem willing to admit to in the realms of fantasy and science fiction. And not wanting to watch them parade in a hairshirt when there are others who are actually hurting from a true lack of something."*

*"I'm not calling you a monster. I'm not calling you a racist. But I am calling you clueless and ill worded and more than a touch thoughtless. Your ability to think about things, sometimes, does not erase my pain or lack. And only thinking of how things come across, sometimes, is not enough to make me like you. In fact, I don't think there's anything that could make me like you, other than you somehow earning my respect. And that's never going to happen if you keep checking in with me (metaphorical me, the larger culture and audience of PoC me) to see how you're going. Cause then it looks like so much brownie points, so much patting yourself on the back, so much excuses and dissembling; so much pride."*



<http://seeking-avalon.blogspot.com/2009/01/open-letter-to-elizabeth-bear.html>

And from there matters escalated. On one side liberal or left-of-centre white authors and editors talking in terms of the *problem* of how to write inclusively and on the other people of colour (many of them women) arguing that the issue is an immediate one of systemic and often open racism within science fiction and fantasy publishing, fandom and popular culture but with the added noise, misreadings of tone, and bad-actors exploiting conflict that accompanies internet discussions. And that was the rough sense that I had of RaceFail'09 reading about it a few years later.

However, pointing at a particular post as the start of RaceFail runs into issues because, naturally, Bear's post was part of a wider ongoing discussion. For context, a preceding post by Jay Lake is also often cited as a starting point.

*"The blog is talking about current fighting in Gaza, but this is a question which runs rife through our field. I've spoke before here on the blog about being on a panel about cultural authority and appropriation a few years ago with an Australian writer, a Canadian writer, and a Scottish writer. Both the Australian and the Canadian were horrified at the thought that a white writer might use Aboriginal or First Nations material in their fiction, that we as white writers didn't have standing to do that. This baffled both me and the Scottish fellow. By this logic, the only culture I have 'standing' to comment on is middle aged, middle class, WASP male American culture. If I stuck to writing about that, I'd either be John Updike or unpublished. (Which of those possibilities is the more likely I leave as an exercise for the reader.) This line of thinking says I cannot write about female characters because I am not a woman, or Jewish characters because I am a Gentile."*

<https://javlake.livejournal.com/1692287.html>

You can follow that post back another layer to *The Edge of the American West* blogpost which was discussing not writing fiction but political discussion. Specifically, it was looking at how people framed arguments about the 2008-2009 Gaza War<sup>[4]</sup> in which Israel invaded the Gaza Strip to attack the military wing of Hamas and in the process killed over a thousand people and destroyed buildings in densely populated urban areas. *The Edge of the American West* post asked this question:

*"Serious question: are there good reasons why an individual's background or cultural positioning should provide that person more authority in a political argument?"*

<https://edgeofthewest.wordpress.com/2009/01/07/respect-mah-authoritah/>

Alternatively, "RaceFail'09" is itself a misleading name. The alternate title (likewise in fandom's ancient tradition of funny names for fannish conflicts) "The Great Cultural Appropriation Debate of DOOM" points to a longer discussion that has no definitive beginning at all but is associated with the Wisconsin science fiction convention<sup>[5]</sup> aka WisCon — a convention famous for engaging with feminism as well as issues around gender, sexuality and race. Much of the debate spread from a 2006 convention panel on the issue of cultural appropriation and a subsequent 2007 session featuring the panellists K. Tempest Bradford, Yoon Ha Lee, and Nnedi Okorafor, among others<sup>[6]</sup>. The panels were part of an ongoing discussion on the broad topic of cultural appropriation and would spawn multiple online discussions<sup>[7]</sup>.

Pulling back to a wider context still, we have multiple factors in play in the first decade of the 21st century:

1. Increased awareness among white middle-class English-speaking authors and editors of Northern European descent of broader issues of inclusion and representation.
2. The availability of internet technologies and new social media tools improved the connection of people with similar interests and backgrounds who were geographically spread out. This enabled many sub-groups of people to find people with common interests and experiences.
3. As a consequence of point 2, people from backgrounds that had been historically marginalised or excluded from popular culture to varying degrees being better able to organise, find common cause and express their opinions.
4. A tendency among internet-based communities — from old style Usenet groups, to forums, to blog-associated comment sections or groups on new social media platforms like Facebook — to establish defensive behaviour towards perceived attacks.
5. A radical shift in the relationship between authors and readers.

On point 5, science fiction fandom had a long tradition of a more democratic kind of engagement between readers, writers, editors and publishers through fanzines and conventions. However, the internet not only enabled greater engagement but also allowed many people to engage critically with media. Science fiction's

tendency towards the intellectualisation of populist entertainment would now also include readers bringing with them tools of literary criticism.

Amid these factors, there was also an answer to the political question asked in *The Edge of the American West* post. The question was, are there good reasons why an individual's background or cultural positioning should provide that person more authority in a political argument? A broad answer would be that it depends on the nature of the political argument but a specific answer could be that an individual's background, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, social class, disability does genuinely lend them more authority when the question at hand is about the experience of living as a person of that background. This was point that had been implied within Elizabeth Bear's post and also, in a more limited way, in general writing advice.

The broader implications of these issues were a shift in informal authority and that fandom is a land with no king. If fandom was truly going to engage with questions of race (and in particular if US fandom was going to engage with the question of the ongoing and historic oppression of Black Americans as the defining issue of the current age of science fiction) then the people with the right experience of the issues and with the right expertise (within a domain of literature that had always valued expertise as an inherent virtue) were not going to be white men.

Left-wing political movements had been struggling with these ideas since at least the mid-70s. Not unlike fandom, political movements have their combinations of formal and informal power. A view of society that accepts that racism has been endemic, would predict that racism would be pervasive even in communities that were expressly opposed to racism and even perpetuated by people actively opposed to racism. Presented in terms of social-hierarchies or using terms like 'institutional racism', these ideas can be portrayed as counter-intuitive or as part of radical epistemologies associated with the vague term "post-modernism". Yet it's uncontroversial to understand in the sciences that hidden or unintentional biases can distort data-collection methods, algorithms or experimental methods.

Within the sphere we are looking at with Racefail'09 we had broad communities linked by social networks, largely left of centre (but not exclusively) engaged in a process that was one part a radical restructuring of ideas, one part a semi-generational conflict, one part established people with (informal) authority being challenged, one-part ill-judged remarks and at least some part people acting badly on the internet. The latter two parts are hard to judge. A lot of material has gone and that can be spun as either people removing remarks they regretted or people covering up poor behaviour. I'm not in a position to untangle that.

All the recaps do point to an escalation of hostility when influential editor Patrick Nielsen Hayden made a comment on the subject which included a line which I'm quoting decontextualised<sup>[8]</sup>:

*"I wouldn't even split the problem into "authors" and "readers". Some people are smarter than others, to put it as baldly as possible."*

re-quoted with marginally more context here <https://copracat.livejournal.com/449470.html?thread=1437886#t1437886>

I believe, from the surrounding discussion that the intent wasn't to characterise the two sides of the ongoing argument in those terms. However, within the frame of the now sprawling argument, it was very easy to see it that way. Regardless, within the broader question of who does and does not have the power within science fiction fandom, Patrick Nielsen Hayden was a significant figure as an editor and as an online presence. The counter-reaction to the comment led him to delete his LiveJournal account. Teresa Nielsen Hayden characterised events in terms of attack by abusive trolls<sup>[9]</sup>. In terms of failures of communication, internet arguments are prone to two types of over-generalisations:

- A person criticising a broad group for actions of a subset of the group (or even an unrelated group).
- A person seeing criticism of a subset of a group and taking it as a criticism of a whole group.

Where groups and 'sides' are as poorly defined as the free-flowing and multi-platform argument of RaceFail inevitably both kinds of over-generalisation would occur.

Meanwhile, John Scalzi would become the next major figure to become embroiled. A specific dispute between an established (white male) author and a pseudonymous LiveJournal user had turned even nastier when the author revealed the pseudonymous person's legal name. A comment left on Scalzi's blog also revealed the user's legal name. Scalzi deleted the comment and wrote an angry post in response. That post also included Scalzi's summation of the RaceFail dispute so far:

*"This is of course intimately related to a long and to my mind absolutely goddamn pointless discussion that's been going on over at LJ for the last several weeks, which was supposed to be about something but in which that something has been primarily used as cover for a bunch of people to spend quite a lot of time being shouty to be shouty and being pissy to be pissy. Since it's happened to involve people, I*

*know one way or another, some other folks have asked me why I hadn't weighed in on it to this point. The reason I haven't is for the same reason I don't regularly stick my head into a bag filled with angry, feral cats. The fact that someone involved in that "discussion" got a nasty itch to use my site to settle a score basically confirms my opinion that any actual value that particular LJ crapfling might have ever had (which given its overall execution, wasn't much) has long since evaporated. And what we have left is people thinking it's a swell idea to drag their shit into my house."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2009/03/08/to-the-pathetic-toad-of-a-person-trying-to-use-my-site-to-settle-a-livejournal-score/>

Which naturally added even further fuel to fire. Again, it was an established white author with a lot of informal power within science fiction fandom being dismissive of an argument much of which was being led by women of colour. Three days later, Scalzi did something more remarkable — he apologised.

*"All right, here's the thing: I'm an arrogant schmuck, but I can also listen from time to time. After I went off earlier this week, a number of people I trust came to me and told me I was being unfair to a lot of people, and in varying ways walked me through stuff I missed or lacked context for, and asked me to engage that brain of mine and think about it. Well, I've thought about it. And at the moment, here's what I think:*

*1. The discussion was a big fat mess, and I still wish it had been better all the way around.*

*2. But a large chunk of it was a lot better than I had characterized it as being, and thus my characterization of the whole thing as a complete waste of time was based on ignorance, an assumption that the parts I tracked through were the majority of discussion (i.e., more ignorance), and a fair amount of pissed-offedness that an especially irritating if minor part of it showed up at my site."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2009/03/11/walking-myself-back/>

In the comments, Black fantasy author N.K. Jemisin wrote:

*"I was stunned to see this. Just stunned. In part because so few of these (unhedged, straightforward, grown-up-type apologies) have occurred among the pros who've been the nexus of this affair; I figured it was only a matter of time before you locked or deleted your blog in a huff and started calling people names. Also, because after your last post, I'd written you off as just another white guy afraid of self-examination, and covering that fear with nonchalance and arrogance. Hell, I'd written off most of SFdom because of this. This post makes me think better, not only of you, but of the industry's future. Thank you."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2009/03/11/walking-myself-back/#comment-134841>

If there was a Hollywood dramatization of RaceFail, that's probably where they would finish the story with peace and harmony breaking out. However, the arguments would continue and the broader discussion on race, representation and cultural appropriation did not stop.

In 2010, writer Nalo Hopkinson characterised the RaceFail discussion

*"When we people of color started to blow up, suddenly there were more of you paying attention. That's the thing. I've said that when you step on my foot once or twice, I might politely ask you to get off it. But by the thousandth time you do it, the excuse of "I didn't see you there" starts to sound a hell of a lot like, "I don't care enough about you to pay attention." The vehement response of people of color to RaceFail got more people paying attention, both white and of color. It showed us people of color that we do have a certain strength of numbers, that there are more of us than the one or two visibly of color people you'll usually see at a con. People of color in this community have started publishing ventures together as a result. Some white people in the community began addressing the issue and began creating forums for discussion."*

A Reluctant Ambassador from the Planet of Midnight, Nalo Hopkinson

[https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/en361fantastika/bibliography/2.9hopkins\\_n\\_2010guest\\_of\\_honour\\_speech\\_from\\_icfa.pdf/](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/en361fantastika/bibliography/2.9hopkins_n_2010guest_of_honour_speech_from_icfa.pdf/)

Later in the same essay she would say:

*"Some of you will recognize yourselves or friends of yours, or, hell, friends of mine in the actions I'm describing. It doesn't necessarily mean that I hate these people. Believe it or not, my default is towards*

*friendliness. People make mistakes. People say things they haven't thought through. People do things they later regret. People hurt other people. People propagate systemic inequities because they don't understand or care how the system works. I know that I do all those things. I'm learning that it's what you do after you make the mistake that counts. The people who took their courage into their own hands and apologized probably discovered that they didn't die from it. In fact, maybe they felt a little better than before."*

ibid

Despite the rancour and conflict, N.K. Jemisin would a year after it started, say that RaceFail had on balance been a good thing:

*"A lot of people I've met in the past year — clarification; a lot of white people — seem to think the "fail" part of RaceFail lay in the fact that it occurred at all. It was too angry for anything productive to happen, they say; there's a time and a place for such conversations but not now; there's a way to have such conversations but not this. The gist of the objections seems to lie in the belief that SFF could have, would have begun the changes that I've experienced this year, even if RaceFail had never occurred. The people involved could've raised their objections in a calm and reasoned manner, at which point respectful conversations would have taken place, and the genre would've listened. We're all smart, progressive people. We didn't need RaceFail to make us change.*

*To which I say: bullshit. If we didn't need RaceFail, then why did it occur? The angry questions that it raised didn't emerge from a vacuum; they've been here all along, and had in many cases been expressed already... I not seen the SFF culture change significantly until 2009 — the year before we maybe make contact? Come on, we're supposed to be talking to aliens by now, and instead we've only just started really talking to each other. If reasoned conversation was all it took to trigger change, the transformations of RaceFail would've happened a long time ago."*

<https://nkjemisin.com/2010/01/why-i-think-racefail-was-the-bettest-thing-evar-for-sff/>

And that would be a sensible place to end this chapter... except this is not the story of progressive change in science fiction but rather this is just a chapter in a story about the *backlash* to progressive change.

How did the overt right-wing of science fiction perceive RaceFail? At the time, it largely went unremarked. It wasn't until as late as 2014 that Vox Day would claim to have become aware of events<sup>[11]</sup>. Day used Teresa Nielsen Hayden's response to criticism of her husband, to portray both her and Patrick as the source of the conflict and as people creating disputes. By 2014 Day was well into his verbal war against John Scalzi, the Nielsen Haydens, and the SFWA but that's a story for another time.

In other parts of right-wing fandom (and looking at figures who will feature in this story in later chapters) a perception of RaceFail was certainly in place by 2012. At the blog of author Sarah A. Hoyt, South African/Australian author Dave Freer expressed this sentiment in a comment:

*"It's worth noting that the rent-a-mob — be they RaceFail or whore-on-wimmin are probably not book buyers — at least not of the kind of books we write and enjoy. So, their input is nearly as valuable as say mine on French sf... Oddly hasn't stopped the publishing establishment for lapping up every word and taking it as direction.*

*Thank heavens for Baen or I would probably have been among the great unpublished.*

*You know... if the major part of acquisition in publishing had really been about selling books and not about pleasing the editor's fine sensibilities... someone would have worked out that books that Jim Baen tossed out to sink or swim (he did put resources into a few, but most new authors got that (and the same happens elsewhere — but they didn't have the hill of ideological opposition from the book trade to climb. Everyone in it appears to have had a grudge against Jim's perceived political stance and taken it out the authors) that actually somehow survived the process and sold enough to get bought again... would have outsold their pushed darlings 16 ways to breakfast with same effort, and they'd have been rushing to buy them."*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2012/03/20/bring-back-that-wonder-feeling-2-2/#comment-9142>

The characterisation of events was in terms of an internet mob that forced the “publishing establishment” to concede to a political agenda. Notably, Freer also dismisses the people involved as not ‘book buyers’ i.e., not genuinely part of science fiction fandom.

By 2009 another key player in later events, Brad Torgersen, was a frequent commenter at John Scalzi’s *Whatever* blog. It is reasonable to assume that he encountered RaceFail as a phenomenon from John Scalzi’s posts on the topic but it was not a topic he commented on there. On his own blog, Torgersen posted an essay in August 2009 entitled *Brad R. Torgersen’s Final Word on RaceFail*, which appears to be a call for military discipline within fandom?

*“This will be my final fucking word on this whole RaceFail clusterfuck. If there is one thing the military does very well, it’s letting you know you are nothing special. You show up at Basic Training and from Hour Zero they drill it into you: you are nothing special, your civilian experiences are nothing special, your personal pains and hurts are nothing special, and any chips you carry on your shoulder are going to be knocked off, smashed to the ground, and stomped flat. Nobody gets a pass. Not for gender. Not for race. All are expected to perform to standard and meet the grade. Those who can’t or won’t get over themselves and acclimatize to the mission-first mentality, get their asses smoked via corrective PT, or are washed out because the last thing the military needs are a bunch of Special Cases walking around thinking the entire military needs to make an exception for them because they’re Special.”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2009/08/16/brad-r-torgersens-final-word-on-racefail/>

Brad’s post rejected the very idea of the discussion about race and privilege within fandom and writing.

*“So, I hope you’ll forgive me if I’ve run out of patience for people who whine. People who think they are Special. People who think they get a free pass because of their pain. People who expect other people to bend over backwards or tie themselves into a knot. There has been an ass-load of that bullshit throughout the entire stupid saga of RaceFail, going back to the beginning of the year. I’m not much for whining. I’m not much for people wearing their pain on their sleeves and expecting exceptions. That’s just weak. I don’t care who I offend by saying this, that’s just WEAK. You are WEAK for expecting the universe to cater to you and your personal pain. Be it racial or otherwise. That’s not the universe’s job. The universe has better things to do than stop and wait on your navel-gazing ass. Your mission — should you have the intestinal fortitude to accept it — is to suck it up and drive on.”*

ibid

It is possible that Brad had not engaged with any of the substance of RaceFail. The term “racefailers” is similar to Freer’s later use of the term to describe a group or a movement, which is not typical of how the term was used in other parts of fandom to describe an event (or sequence of events). The military framing of the post is also odd, particularly as much of the discussion (for example, Elizabeth Bear’s original post) had direct, actionable advice for aspiring writers of science fiction.

Brad’s post received 9 comments and I don’t believe gained much discussion beyond that.

While at the time, there was very little comment about RaceFail from characters we will meet later in the Debarke, there were some collisions. At the 2009 Worldcon<sup>[12]</sup> a panel on “Writing Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Geographic Terms” included L. Jagi Lamplighter, an author and editor who would later play a role in the Sad Puppy events. Her views on race received some substantial criticism:

*“So, for the record I am appalled and offended and just plain disgusted by her attitude and her condescension and her racism. Because make no mistake that is exactly what she has proven with her own words. No need for slurs or grandiose terrorist gestures when devaluing and disrespect will do. No need to listen to the words of those “girls” that are trying to tell you that your ass is showing. Because clearly, we aren’t enlightened enough to know that the best way to approach life is to seek harmony with people who will tolerate our differences by ignoring them.”*

<http://theangryblackwoman.com/2009/08/12/im-about-to-be-a-jerk-on-the-internet-or-racefail-goes-to-worldcon/>

The criticism of Lamplighter’s contribution to the panel resulted in attention being drawn on LiveJournal to her husband, author John C. Wright. Having converted to Catholicism in 2008, Wright was being overt about his attitudes towards homosexuality (which predated his conversion) and was surprised to discover an influx of visitors to his LiveJournal blog who took exception to his stance.

*“One thing I did discover, however, wading through the muck, is that this flash crowd was stirred up by the same folks that spent all yesterday telling my wife she was a racist because — wait for it — she does not approve of racism. There is logic for you.*

*Being both idle and malicious, one or two was enterprising enough to go through her friends lists, and hunt around for other material to scorn. Well, they found an old post of mine where I was complaining (in intemperate language) about the spinelessness of Sci-Fi channel bowing to political correctness. Not content to flame me there, the busy busybodies spent time sending links out to places here and there on the net, trying to generate some artificial outrage.*

*It was the same folks. Too bad, because I thought my wife and the other lady had settled the argument, and the Mrs. apologized.”*

<https://johncwright.livejournal.com/272698.html>

N.K. Jemisin’s assessment that the fury of RaceFail “shocked the whole genre enough to make it pay attention”<sup>[14]</sup> was partly in error. The seismic shock of RaceFail was felt sharply only within those parts of the genre already paying attention. The nature of the discussion of race and culture had gone through a permanent shift but there were more reactionary parts of fandom only partially aware that the discussion was taking place or (in the case of Vox Day) actively inimical to the discussion.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://mashable.com/2017/04/10/livejournal-russian-law/>
- [2] Dreamwidth is an alternative to LiveJournal that uses the same code base (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreamwidth>) that many people migrated their LiveJournal accounts to. Many summaries of RaceFail point to the original compilation of links by user rydra-wong on LiveJournal, which is not a dead link.
- [3] I’m not going to link to every post that is already included in the lists above but will pick out particular one
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza\\_War\\_\(2008%E2%80%932009\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_War_(2008%E2%80%932009))
- [5] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiscon>
- [6] The natural thing to do here would be to list the full set of panellists but in general I’m trying only to include a name that may turn up later. In most contexts that feels natural but here it looks weird.
- [7] <https://oyceter.dreamwidth.org/582262.html> and <https://oyceter.dreamwidth.org/582434.html> for a discussion of two parts of the session.
- [8] Decontextualised precisely because the quote took on a life of its own
- [9] again, sources present reactions to the comment <https://elspethdixon.dreamwidth.org/176244.html>
- [10] fuller accounts of the dispute between Will Shetterly and Coffeelandink are covered in most of the overviews linked at the start. It is a very relevant part of the story, but as none of the people directly involved turn up in later parts of the Debarkle, I’m leaving it out of this account for brevity. I had intended to include it because of Shetterly’s use of the term “social justice warrior”
- [11] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140325223254/http://voxdays.blogspot.com/2014/03/combatative-and-confrontational.html> in a comment Day explains why he is bringing up something from 2009 and says “Because it demonstrates that Scalzi has been giving them a pass for at least that long. Also, because this is the first, I’d heard of it.”
- [12] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/67th\\_World\\_Science\\_Fiction\\_Convention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/67th_World_Science_Fiction_Convention)
- [13] <https://skwidly.livejournal.com/107456.html>
- [14] from the essay quoted earlier <https://nkjemisin.com/2010/01/why-i-think-racefail-was-the-bestest-thing-ever-for-sff/>

# 14: 2010

It is time to place all the pieces on the board before we step off into the competing narratives of part 2.

The first years of the Obama administration may have seemed like a continuation of the last years of President Bush's term. The world economy was in free fall and the USA was still deeply embroiled in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Americans (indeed, many people globally<sup>[1]</sup>) had placed a lot of hope in Barack Obama to extricate the American economy and American foreign policy from both intractable problems. Neither was going to be resolved quickly.

The Bush administration had already begun to implement economic stimulus measures and support for banks and failing industries<sup>[2]</sup>. Obama continued to follow reactively a similar approach with economic stimulus and measures to prop up the dysfunctional financial system. Towards the end of 2009, the US was technically no longer in recession<sup>[3]</sup> but neither America nor the world economy, in general, was in a good place.

Populist sentiment against the banking industry crossed ideological lines. Vox Day (at this point still describing himself as a libertarian) wrote in 2010:

*"It's time for the federal government to start arresting and jailing the banksters, now, because I suspect the alternative to being prosecuted for their criminal financial rape of America is going to be even less pleasant. The sense of popular fury is palpably building even though Washington is still managing to hold things together through this last-ditch gigantic spending spree. Once it becomes obvious that it has failed – just to give one example, the FDIC reported today that in Q409 it managed to lose nearly half the \$45 billion in three years of pre-paid fees it collected – it is likely to get very ugly indeed."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20100227022717/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2010/02/arrest-banksters.html>

Right-wing and left-wing anger at the banks and Wall Street would end up being channelled in different ways. The left-orientated "Occupy Wall Street"<sup>[4]</sup> movement would not manifest until 2011 but with the finance sector not merely in chaos but also responsible for precipitating worldwide chaos, mass unemployment and the loss of many ordinary people's homes and savings, conventional capitalism as an ideology was also in trouble.

## **Tea and Protests**

Early in 2009, spurred on by right-wing commentators such as Rush Limbaugh and Michelle Malkin, multiple protests were organised to protest how the federal government was spending money<sup>[5]</sup>. On April 15 (aka "Tax Day"<sup>[6]</sup>), events were held in multiple American cities under the framing of "tea parties", invoking the Boston Tea Party of 1773 — a key event in the lead-up to the American Revolutionary War<sup>[7]</sup>.

Larry Correia attended the protest in San Antonio. He wrote up his feelings as a reaction to an Associated Press report on the protests that had described them as "whipped up by conservative commentators and bloggers":

*"I love that. Whenever anybody gets together with any sort of Liberal cause, then it is a "grass roots movement" including the ones put on by the professional protestor class. If a bunch of conservatives get together, then they must have been "whipped" on by bloggers and commentators. I also love how we have "angst", because, you know, not wanting to turn America into Big Dumb Canada is angst. Look, AP, Emo kids have angst. We've got disgust, indignation, and righteous anger."*

*The Tea Parties are about a bunch of people who feel disenfranchised by their government. We feel that our government is out of control (on both sides) and that we're spending ourselves into oblivion and turning away from freedom and toward socialism. People are getting tired of being pushed around."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2009/04/16/the-san-antonio-tea-party/>

At the Dallas April 15 event, the Governor of Texas, Rick Perry, raised the possibility of secession:

*"We've got a great union. There's absolutely no reason to dissolve it. But if Washington continues to thumb their nose at the American people, you know, who knows what might come out of that."*

<https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/article24534331.html#storylink=cpy>

Vox Day was far more sceptical about the Tax Day protests, expecting the movement to be co-opted by established Republican politicians.

*“I’d quite like to see a few Republican politicians punched in the face at these events. The damned whores did NOTHING when they were in power, so to see them attempt to coopt a popular movement in order to retrieve what they threw away is particularly disgusting.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20090418174013/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2009/04/tea-party-2009.html>

In 2010, Day would explain a particular factor that he believed would limit the effectiveness of the Tea Party Protests:

*“The Tea Party is mostly female because it is a mass entry into politics by a portion of the electorate that has historically been politically ignorant and inert. It is mostly middle class and female because it is made up of people who have the time and resources to get involved with political activism; these are the wives of the middle-class men whose economic interests have suffered and are less likely to be able to put in the time and effort involved.*

*Since it is a female-driven movement, we can be confident that it will quickly lose its focus and be seduced away from its nominal purpose by callous and cold-hearted men”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160113181759/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2010/10/why-tea-party-is-female.html>

At least initially, the Tea Party was concerned more with taxation, government spending and opposition to Obama’s healthcare reforms, rather than Vox Day’s desires for culture war issues and opposition to immigration. He was impressed by the electoral impact Tea Party activists were having within the Republican party. When Republican Senator Bob Bennett was ousted from the GOP ticket in 2010 after being deemed insufficiently conservative<sup>[8]</sup>, Day would write:

*“What the media and the Republican Party leadership fail to understand is that Americans are done with the game. They are beginning to understand that the Republicans are no more on their side than are the Democrats, and they don’t want more politicians who know how to play them.*

*Bennett’s defeat is an encouraging sign that the supporters of small government are beginning to recognize the push me – pull you game. But one positive sign doesn’t mean that the tea party will be successful; efforts to co-opt the movement began almost as soon as Republicans realized that it wasn’t going to disappear as quickly as Ross Perot. It must be expected that at least a few of the tea party-endorsed candidates will prove treacherous once safely ensconced in office and will cheerfully abandon their tea-party principles in much the same way that Sen. Bennett abandoned his previous commitment to term limits.”*

<https://www.wnd.com/2010/05/154817/>

Even Baen Books got on the Tea Party bandwagon by re-releasing (under a new title) a book entitled Taxpayer’s Tea Party by Georgia politician Sharon Cooper. Originally released in 1994 under the title Road to Rebellion, the original version had an introduction from Rush Limbaugh. The revised version had an introduction by Newt Gingrich<sup>[9]</sup>.

## **ACORN and Brown**

The Tea Party was an old style of political activism, even if mass protests were a tactic more associated with the left. The Obama years also saw a new form of activism more suited to the internet age. Epitomised by right-wing media figure Andrew Breitbart’s view that “politics is downstream of culture”<sup>[10]</sup>, the approach would make use of modern media techniques to reframe stories or generate new news events using stunts.

In 2010 Breitbart used selectively edited video to portray the USDA’s Georgia State Director of Rural Development, Shirley Sherrod as being racist towards white people<sup>[11]</sup>. The resulting news story led to Sherrod being sacked from her position, only to be exonerated when the full video of her remarks was released. As John Scalzi would comment at the time:

*“This has been a teachable moment for all of us, and the lesson learned here is: Andrew Breitbart is a lazy journalist and a self-justifying whiner, and on political matters (at the very least) one should trust him and his judgment about as far as you’d trust a hyena not to chew on the innards of a staked goat. Another lesson: You don’t really want Andrew Breitbart on your side, since in his effort here to show*



*the hypocrisy of the NAACP in condemning racist elements of the Tea Party, he's aided and abetted in the character assassination of a hard-working black woman who helps rural Americans keep their farms."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2010/07/22/sherrod-and-breitbart/>

Breitbart also used his website to publish a series of videos created by another new style of conservative activist, James O'Keefe <sup>[12]</sup>. The videos targeted the community organising group ACORN and were edited to appear as if O'Keefe was visiting the office dressed flamboyantly as a pimp, with another activist Hannah Giles as a prostitute. The resulting videos led to multiple investigations of ACORN after workers there had been recorded apparently helping people they believed engaged in illegal sex work.

Although the ACORN story was widely reported, the meta-story that was applied both by Breitbart and Fox News, was that the story was being hidden by the mainstream media. A view held also by Larry Correia:

*"Media is a giant joke. The American people know it. Everybody but the media seems to know it. When ACORN was caught on video breaking hundreds of laws in five different cities, the regular news wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. Even though this is an organization that was getting billions of dollars of tax money (and will be again at the end of October, but you didn't hear that on the regular news either) because it didn't fit with the ideological prism, then it didn't get reported. Thank God for the internet, talk radio, and people still having the ability to talk freely."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2009/10/21/the-media-is-a-bunch-of-idiots/>

Breitbart's wider strategy was to use various deceptive techniques to create an atmosphere of distrust in the wider news media.

## ***Mosque and Moon***

A quite different example of re-framing of an issue involved the Cordoba House project in Lower Manhattan. The plans to develop an Islamic community centre two blocks away from the site of the World Trade Center had been largely uncontroversial until May of 2010 when anti-Islam activist Pamela Geller began a campaign characterising the project as the "9-11 Mosque" a term that would be re-coined as the "Ground Zero Mosque" <sup>[13]</sup> — even though it wasn't a mosque or at ground zero.

Author Elizabeth Moon, who had been a Hugo finalist for Best Novel in 1997, wrote a post on her LiveJournal blog on September 11, 2010, entitled "Citizenship". It was a lengthy post of 17 paragraphs, most of which laid out her views on the nature of being a good citizen, particularly if you were an immigrant. The post then contrasted this with the plans for the mosque in New York:

*"When an Islamic group decided to build a memorial centre at/near the site of the 9/11 attack, they should have been able to predict that this would upset a lot of people. Not only were the attackers Islamic—and not only did the Islamic world in general show indecent glee about the attack, but this was only the last of many attacks on citizens and installations of this country which Islamic groups proudly claimed credit for. That some Muslims died in the attacks is immaterial—does not wipe out the long, long chain of Islamic hostility. It would have been one thing to have the Muslim victims' names placed with the others, and identified there as Muslims—but to use that site to proselytize for the religion that lies behind so many attacks on the innocent (I cannot forget the Jewish man in a wheelchair pushed over the side of the ship to drown, or Maj. Nadal's attack on soldiers at Fort Hood) was bound to raise a stink. It is hard to believe that those making the application did not know that—did not anticipate it—and were not, in a way, probing to see if they could start a controversy. If they did not know, then they did not know enough about the culture into which they had moved. Though I am not angry about it, and have not spoken out in opposition, I do think it was a rude and tactless thing to propose (and, if carried out, to do.)"*

<https://e-moon60.livejournal.com/335480.html> <sup>[14]</sup>

In the penultimate paragraph Moon would more widely criticise American Muslims (as well as some right-wing groups).

*"I can easily imagine how Muslims would react to my excusing the Crusades on the basis of Islamic aggression from 600 to 1000 C.E.... (for instance, excusing the building of a church on the site of a mosque in Cordoba after the Reconquista by reminding them of the mosque built on the site of an important early Christian church in Antioch.) So, I don't give that lecture to the innocent Muslims I*

*come in contact with. I would appreciate the same courtesy in return (and don't get it.) The same with other points of Islam that I find appalling (especially as a free woman) and totally against those basic principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution...I feel that I personally (and many others) lean over backwards to put up with these things, to let Muslims believe stuff that unfits them for citizenship, on the grounds of their personal freedom. It would be helpful to have them understand what they're demanding of me and others—how much more they're asking than giving. It would be helpful for them to show more understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship in a non-Muslim country. (And the same is true for many others, of course. Libertarians, survivalists, Tea-Partyers, fundamentalist Christians, anyone else whose goals benefit only their own group. There's been a huge decline in the understanding of good citizenship overall.)”*

ibid

The reaction to her post was not positive.

A great deal was written in the subsequent furore. Moon had previously been invited to be the Guest of Honour at the feminist science fiction convention WisCon but in the wake of her post, the organisers decided to withdraw the invitation <sup>[15]</sup>. At his long-running fanzine, Hugo-winning fan-writer Mike Glycer commented on the pragmatics of the decision to disinvite Moon:

*“A decision that leaves people debating whether WisCon has lived up to certain principles has its own costs, but it results in a more manageable outcome.”*

<http://file770.com/sf3-cancels-elizabeth-moon-as-wiscon-goh/#comment-52897>

Among the many responses to Moon's posts, was an open letter by author Jim C. Hines.

*“What troubles me most is your commentary on citizenship, and the implication as to who is and is not deserving of such. You use Muslim and immigrant interchangeably, as though the only Muslims in this nation are newcomers to our shores, ignoring those who have lived here and fought for this country in times of war for generations. And then you talk about how we “let Muslims believe stuff that unfits them for citizenship.” I would love to know what these forbidden beliefs are, and how you feel they unfit someone for citizenship.”*

<https://www.iimchines.com/2010/09/open-letter-to-elizabeth-moon/>

Hines's post inspired a comment from a certain Brad R. Torgersen, who chose to describe Moon's LiveJournal critics as “poo-hurling monkeys”.

N.K. Jemisin used Moon's essay as an example in a broader essay about the pushback in the genre against “political correctness”, concluding:

*“So, consider this a plea, on behalf of those of us who are sick of all the whining and doubletalk: please grow a pair. When you complain about political correctness, we hear “Man, if only we were still back in the good ol' days, when I could stomp all over other people with impunity!” That's what you really mean, so why not just come right out and say it? Own your selfishness and sadism. And when people hurt you back, or take legal action against you, or call you selfish or a bully or any number of other names, own that too, because you've earned it. Have the courage of your convictions. Don't downplay them, rationalize them, or pretend that you're the aggrieved party — because no matter how you try to paint yourself as a brave crusader against the thought police, or the innocent victim of the anti-bigotry hordes, nobody's buying it, except maybe your fellow whiners. Everybody else just thinks you're stupid and a coward, on top of being selfish and sadistic.”*

<https://nkjemisin.com/2010/10/the-harm-of-political-correctness>

As well as Moon's post, she cited as examples Brad Torgersen's comment and a post bemoaning “political correctness” by Dave Truesdale <sup>[16]</sup>, the former editor of the *SFWA Bulletin*. There's no definitive end to these discussions. However, Dave Truesdale's essay contains a kind of thesis about the genre in 2010:

*“Taken as a gestalt—the “smallness” and relative unimportance of many of the stories, the tired, lazy thinking on the part of many of the writers (primarily the new), the politically correct element (editorially, and in individual stories), and the fact that while I still love the good short story but I now desire the time to read more of what excites me (which I find in Classic SF/F and the Pulp Magazines), I decided to eschew reviewing the less than pro-paying markets to free up my reading time.”*

October 2010 <https://web.archive.org/web/20101216084752/https://tangentonline.com/news-mainmenu-158/1453-a-new-direction>

Truesdale's thesis was that the interest in the genre in issues of diversity (on multiple dimensions) and representation and avoiding discrimination and bigotry (wrapped up within the general term "political correctness") was creating an aesthetic shift in the genre towards "politically correct" stories focused on character, lacking in optimism about the future and weaker on core SFF themes that have become "window dressing". Ten years later, Truesdale would still be making the same observation:

*"Looking at short fiction over at least the past 10 years, a general observation can be made. It would appear that Woke Culture is as pervasive and cancerous as it has ever been for at least the past 10 years. The dearth of true originality when it comes to political or socially themed short fiction is becoming more and more apparent to those of us who have observed and studied the field for decades. Political Correctness has now infiltrated the field like a metastasizing cancer, to the point where long-time readers are beginning to voice complaints."*

December 2020 <https://tangentonline.com/news/tangent-online-2020-recommended-reading-list/>

## ***Hugos and Tor***

The 2010 Hugo Awards had an unusual (but not unprecedented) double win for Best Novel. China Miéville's *The City & the City* drew for top place with Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*. Miéville was one of several British winners in the past few years of the Hugo Awards. The transatlantic element was reinforced by the popularity of the regenerated classic science fiction TV show *Doctor Who*, which won Best Dramatic Presentation (Short) for *Waters of Mars*, wherein the Doctor faces water-borne aliens on "Bowie Base One" on Mars. In another pairing, the Best Dramatic Presentation (Long) was the film *Moon*, directed by Duncan Jones — David Bowie's son. A final (and odder) duality was two works (in different categories) entitled "Palimpsest".

Despite Worldcon being held in Melbourne, Australia that year, there was little Australian impact on the awards aside from Shaun Tan winning Best Professional Artist.

Despite all the talk of science fiction rapidly becoming progressive, the representation of women at the Hugo Awards was still far from equitable. In the main story categories (Novel, Novella, Novelette and Short Story) the finalists split 9 women to 14 men and the winners in these categories were all men. This was a partial improvement on 2009 finalists (4 women and 17 men) but a step back on winners (evenly split in 2009).

Two notable finalists (for our narrative)<sup>[18]</sup> in the Novelette category were *Eros, Philia, Agape* by Rachel Swirsky and *Overtime* by Charles Stross. Both of these stories were from the publisher Tor but specifically, they had been published by Tor's free online magazine Tor.com. Starting in 2008 Tor.com had begun to publish original fiction along with news articles and reviews, essentially operating as an old-style science fiction magazine but in the form of a modern media website. Prior to 2010, Tor had a total of 13 Hugo finalists in shorter fiction categories (i.e., not novel) over a space of 9 years. By 2014, Tor.com had increased that by 10 more in four years.

Tor.com as an online presence could also operate more flexibly than a multinational-owned publisher. At the same time, it could use blog-style articles to link in with publishing events. For example, the release of an authorised biography of Robert A Heinlein in 2010 was accompanied by a "symposium" of articles. Patrick Nielsen Hayden explained the idea:

*"we've convened a kind of online panel discussion of Heinlein and of the biography—of his work, his methods, and his legacy, and of what light the biography sheds on all of those."*

<https://www.tor.com/2010/08/11/robert-a-heinlein-the-torcom-blog-symposium/>

Among the twenty posts were essays by Jo Walton, John Scalzi and Charles Stross, as well as five essays by author Sarah A. Hoyt<sup>[20][21]</sup>, whose libertarian-themed novel *Darkship Thieves* had been published that year by Baen Books.

## ***Burritos and Presidents***

January 2010 was a busy month for John Scalzi. A dispute over eBook pricing between a major online book retailer and the publisher Macmillan (who own Tor) led to Macmillan's book's disappearing from the book retailer<sup>[22]</sup>. He also reviewed Apple's latest innovation the "iPad"<sup>[23]</sup>. More relevantly for our story, he announced he was running to be president of the SFWA.

Scalzi was running as part of a slate of candidates including Mary Robinette Kowal for vice-president. His resulting win was unsurprising as he was unopposed. He had described his plans in detail but the focus of them were structural issues that had been impediments for the organisation:

*“Most of these plans involve internal issues, which are really important to the organization but dead boring for the rest of you. I’m fine with this; I would be extraordinarily happy for SFWA not to have any major public drama during my administration, and to stick to what we know best and what we’re supposed to do: be an organization that benefits science fiction and fantasy writers.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2010/05/17/some-notes-on-being-elected-president-of-sfwa/>

His new status didn’t stop his blogging but he announced a policy to distinguish between his personal comments (via his blog or his Twitter) and when he was speaking in an official capacity (via SFWA’s website or social media). The new role didn’t stop his quirkier social media pronouncements. Indeed, what had begun as a minor joke about his enjoyment of burritos in 2009<sup>[24]</sup> became a regular feature of his Twitter account<sup>[25]</sup>.

Would he be extraordinarily happy for SFWA not to have any major public drama during his administration? Time would tell...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009\\_Nobel\\_Peace\\_Prize](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_Nobel_Peace_Prize)
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic\\_Stimulus\\_Act\\_of\\_2008](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_Stimulus_Act_of_2008)
- [3] <https://www.nber.org/news/business-cycle-dating-committee-announcement-september-20-2010>
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy\\_Wall\\_Street](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy_Wall_Street)
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tea\\_Party\\_protests#%22Porkulus%22\\_protests\\_and\\_%22First\\_Tea\\_Party%22\\_claims](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tea_Party_protests#%22Porkulus%22_protests_and_%22First_Tea_Party%22_claims)
- [6] Tax day – the day in the US on which individual tax returns have to be submitted  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax\\_Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax_Day)
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston\\_Tea\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston_Tea_Party)
- [8] <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/may/08/sen-bob-bennett-ousted-utah-gop-convention/>
- [9] [https://www.baen.com/Chapters/1439133638/1439133638\\_c.htm](https://www.baen.com/Chapters/1439133638/1439133638_c.htm)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew\\_Breitbart](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Breitbart)
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firing\\_of\\_Shirley\\_Sherrod](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firing_of_Shirley_Sherrod)
- [12] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ACORN\\_2009\\_undercover\\_videos\\_controversy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ACORN_2009_undercover_videos_controversy)
- [13] [https://web.archive.org/web/20100912103421/http://www.salon.com/news/ground\\_zero\\_mosque/index.html?story=%2Fpolitics%2Fwar\\_room%2F2010%2F08%2F16%2Fground\\_zero\\_mosque\\_origins](https://web.archive.org/web/20100912103421/http://www.salon.com/news/ground_zero_mosque/index.html?story=%2Fpolitics%2Fwar_room%2F2010%2F08%2F16%2Fground_zero_mosque_origins)
- [14] Moon references the “the Jewish man in a wheelchair” which is likely to be the murder of Leon Klinghoffer in the Achille Lauro hijacking [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achille\\_Lauro\\_hijacking](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achille_Lauro_hijacking), as well as the 2009 Fort Hood shootings [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009\\_Fort\\_Hood\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_Fort_Hood_shooting)
- [15] <http://file770.com/sf3-cancels-elizabeth-moon-as-wiscon-goh/>
- [16] <https://web.archive.org/web/20101216084752/https://tangentonline.com/news-mainmenu-158/1453-a-new-direction>
- [17] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/2010/09/2010-hugo-award-winners/>
- [18] all finalists are notable
- [19] <https://www.tor.com/2009/03/03/eros-phia-agape/> and <https://www.tor.com/2009/12/22/overtime/>
- [20] <https://www.tor.com/members/SarahAHoyt/>
- [21] In the comments to Hoyt’s essay on Heinlein’s women characters, you can also read criticism of her stance from N.K. Jemisin and Nick Mamatas <https://www.tor.com/2010/08/17/what-do-heinlein-women-want/comment-page-1/#comment-125611>
- [22] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2010/01/29/macmillan-books-gone-missing-from-amazon/>
- [23] I thought the same myself. I had tiny little netbook for portable computing, running Linux, and didn’t see the point of the iPad <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2010/01/27/obligatory-quick-assessment-of-the-ipad/>
- [24] The first burrito tweet was this one April 17, 2009 <https://twitter.com/scalzi/status/1537637523> but I believe the tweet that turned it into a thing was this one on April 29, 2009 <https://twitter.com/scalzi/status/1641641985> where he does eat a burrito, which spawned some discussion about burritos in Ohio. The first unconventional burrito was October 25, 2009 made with “Lil’ Smokies and American cheese”
- [25] 2010 burritos included a lasagne burrito and a jambalaya burrito. Twitter search terms: Burrito (from:scalzi) until:2010-12-31 since:2000-01-01

## 15: Part 2 Rise of the Puppies 2011-2014

[Content warning: this chapter discusses war and terrorism as part of the political context of 2011]

*Previously, on Debarkle:* In Part 1 I tracked the development of US science fiction and fantasy fandom, the creation of Worldcon, the ‘gathering of the tribes’ sci-fi convention, and the creation of the prestigious Hugo Award. In the 1960s the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America was created as an advocacy organisation for writers, which would go on to create the Nebula Award. Fast-forwarding to the 21st century, we met three aspiring SF&F writers: the journalist and liberal John Scalzi, the accountant and gun-rights activist Larry Correia, as well as the political columnist with extreme views Vox Day. In politics, I tracked briefly the aftermath of 9-11, the Iraq war and disenchantment with George Bush, the global financial crisis and the subsequent election of Barack Obama. In the online world of SF&F fandom, I discussed wide-ranging controversies on race and diversity looking at Racefail’09. By 2010, John Scalzi is the president of SFWA.

Welcome to 2011. The repercussions of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the ongoing Global Financial crisis led to waves of protests in multiple countries in the Middle East and North Africa that would be called ‘the Arab Spring’<sup>[1]</sup>. Meanwhile, in Europe, the Eurozone debt crisis extended the period of economic instability<sup>[2]</sup>. 2011 would also see the Occupy Wall Street protests in the US<sup>[3]</sup>.

In Europe, terrorism had been an ongoing fear through the previous decade. The largest attacks both being Al-Qaeda related with the 2004 Madrid train bombings (which killed 193 people) and the 2005 London bombings, which also targeted public transport and killed 52 people<sup>[4]</sup>. Receiving less news coverage, was a rise in far-right terrorism. In 2004 a nail bomb exploded in an area of Cologne frequented by Turkish immigrants<sup>[5]</sup>, injuring over twenty people. It wasn’t until 2011 that this attack was directly linked with a neo-Nazi terror group that had also been involved in multiple murders. 2011 would also see shootings in Italy<sup>[6]</sup> and in France<sup>[7]</sup>. A series of shootings in Malmö, Sweden from 2009 to 2010 would typify the kind of disparate, “lone wolf” style terrorism, with unclear motives and either loose or no connections to an organised group<sup>[8]</sup>.

The deadliest example of right-wing terrorism in Europe in this period occurred in July 2011 when Anders Breivik targeted the centre-left Norwegian Labour Party, firstly with a bomb attack in Oslo and then by a mass shooting of teenagers at a Labour Party-affiliated summer camp. Seventy-seven people were murdered, the youngest aged 14<sup>[9]</sup>. Breivik was later linked to a manifesto that outlined an ideology opposed to “political correctness”, “cultural Marxism”, Islam, and immigration, with many of the points borrowed from (or directly plagiarised from) American conservative sources<sup>[10]</sup>.

Breivik would become a recurring topic for Vox Day over several years. In 2011, Day stopped short of directly endorsing Breivik’s actions but his reaction was also some distance from a direct condemnation. Day called the attack “murderous” but not “bigoted”:

*“Second, Harris has recognized what so many people seem to find inexplicable. Breivik targeted the future politicians of the Labour Youth because the quislings of the Labour Party are responsible for Norway’s open borders and the subsequent Islamic immigration. While Breivik may or may not have been a bigot, it is clear that his murderous attack was not a bigoted act, but rather, an explicitly political one. This is something he addresses directly in the manifesto when he writes about how it is not the wild animals who are to blame for entering the zoo, but the zookeepers who hold the gates open and permit them to enter. (That being said, given the pictures of the Labour Youth that have been released, it wouldn’t be surprising if a significant percentage of the victims were not, in fact, ethnic Norwegians.)”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140619123452/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2011/07/sam-harris-on-christian-terrorism.html>

Day would go on to describe Breivik as a kind of “lunatic” and makes a direct reference to Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum* tagging Breivik as a species of lunatic who inevitably drags the Templars into his view of the world — as indeed Breivik had done in his manifesto. Nevertheless, Day placed the weight of blame for the attacks on immigration and called for the deportation of immigrants to avoid such killings in the future<sup>[11]</sup>. In his column at conservative news outlet *WorldNetDaily*, Day would draw a comparison between the Oslo murders and the USA, saying:

*“And when the separatist conflict comes to America, as history tends to suggest it eventually will, it should not be forgotten that primary responsibility for the bloodshed will lie with short-sighted immigration advocates such as Rep. Emanuel Celler, Sen. Philip Hart, Sen. Edward Kennedy and former President Lyndon Johnson.”*

<https://www.wnd.com/2011/07/325637/> <sup>[12]</sup>

In later years, Day would more directly support Breivik.

Larry Correia regarded the drawing of connections between Breivik's views and ideas drawn from American conservatism, as an attempt to slander conservatives.

*“Anybody remember how when a paranoid delusional Marx reading nutbag shot Gabby Giffords and immediately the news said it was the Tea Party's fault for our culture of hate? Or it was Sarah Palin's fault because she had a map of elections to win with targets on them? Or more recently, when a psycho collectivist, environmental extremist, racist nutbag in Norway murdered a bunch of innocent people, and for the first week all the of news was about he was a Conservative Christian spurred on by our culture of hate? The fact that he wasn't Christian in any sense of the word, and mainly used Christian as a term for western civilization, and wasn't conservative (extreme environmentalism coupled with a centralized command economy?) didn't slow the narrative.”*

<https://www.monsterhunternation.com/2011/08/05/the-new-tone/>

The shooting of US Representative Gabby Giffords had happened at the start of 2011<sup>[13]</sup>. Giffords herself survived despite being shot in the head, although barely. Six other people died in the attack. The killer was diagnosed as having paranoid schizophrenia after his arrest and deemed unfit to stand trial<sup>[14]</sup> but multiple accounts state his interest in a wide range of conspiracy theories promoted on the internet<sup>[15]</sup>.

Correia's main complaint about the media coverage of the murders was that gun-owners would get the blame:

*“Because I am sick and tired, because I'm a gun owner, for being blamed every single time a nut job goes on a rampage. But at least I'm used to it. I was a gun rights activist back when Bill Clinton was president. We've been blamed for every whackadoo, schizophrenic, off his meds, mopey-ass nitwit crying for attention that has ended up on the news.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2011/01/09/understanding-media-or-whv-are-vou-right-wingers-so-filled-with-hate/>

Correia's wider point was that political violence was often trivialised by the mass media who sought simplistic motives or misrepresented the views of the perpetrator. The extent to which Correia's own simplifications and misrepresentations in the post were unwitting or intended to demonstrate the approach of mass media is unclear.

In US domestic politics, the oddest development in 2011 was Barack Obama's long-form birth certificate. Doubts about Obama's birthplace had initially circulated during the Democratic Party primaries but had largely abated by the general election. However, pressure on Obama had increased from a surprising quarter after Obama's sweeping electoral victory:

*“Regardless, the issue remains potent in GOP circles. Potential Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump recently seized on the issue, saying he had doubts about the president's background. Following the White House's release of the long-form certificate, Trump told reporters in New Hampshire that he is “very proud” of himself for helping to bring about the release of the document.*

*“I've accomplished something nobody else was able to accomplish,” Trump said. “I'd want to look at (the birth certificate), but I hope it's true so that we can get on too much more important matters.” Obama “should have (released the certificate) a long, long time ago,” he said.*

*Trump, a billionaire business tycoon and reality television star, blamed the media for repeatedly bringing up the issue. Trump, however, has frequently raised questions about Obama's birthplace during his climb in recent GOP primary polls.”*

<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/04/27/obama.birth.certificate/>

With a Presidential election due in 2012, the issue of Obama's birthplace was going to remain a controversial one despite all the evidence establishing that he was born in the USA<sup>[16]</sup>.

Conspiracy theories were not a new feature of American politics and both right and left and people with only loose ideological connections have promulgated them. However, the impact of poorly substantiated beliefs, fuelled by internet communities would only increase.

## FOOTNOTE

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_the\\_Arab\\_Spring](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Arab_Spring)
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_debt\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_debt_crisis)
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy\\_Wall\\_Street](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy_Wall_Street)
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_terrorism\\_in\\_Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_terrorism_in_Europe)
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004\\_Cologne\\_bombing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Cologne_bombing)
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011\\_Florence\\_shootings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Florence_shootings)
- [7] [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2008/06/03/un-groupe-neonazi-a-l-origine-d-une-fusillade\\_1053066\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2008/06/03/un-groupe-neonazi-a-l-origine-d-une-fusillade_1053066_3224.html) [in French]
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009%E2%80%93Malm%C3%B6\\_shootings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009%E2%80%93Malm%C3%B6_shootings) also see this article for a discussion of the ambiguity between hate crimes and examples of right-wing terrorism <https://cco.ndu.edu/PRISM/PRISM-Volume-6-no-2/Article/839011/right-wing-extremism-and-terrorism-in-europe-current-developments-and-issues-fo/>
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011\\_Norway\\_attacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Norway_attacks)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011\\_Norway\\_attacks#Political\\_and\\_religious\\_views](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Norway_attacks#Political_and_religious_views)
- [11] <https://web.archive.org/web/20170125172403/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2011/07/campaigning-against-reality.html>
- [12] *WND* carried a range of different reactions to the killings, some more distancing than others: e.g., Ann Coulter describes Breivik as a “*New York Times*” reader <https://www.wnd.com/2011/07/326733/> to make a point, whereas Pat Buchanan condemns Breivik but takes a stance closer to Day's <https://www.wnd.com/2011/07/326069/>
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011\\_Tucson\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Tucson_shooting)
- [14] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jared\\_Lee\\_Loughner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jared_Lee_Loughner)
- [15] <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/01/12/a-very-american-conspiracy-theory/>
- [16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack\\_Obama\\_citizenship\\_conspiracy\\_theories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama_citizenship_conspiracy_theories)

## 16: Larry Goes to Reno

2011 was already starting to be a good year for Larry Correia. Early in January his 2010 book *Monster Hunter Vendetta* was number 5 on the Locus Bestseller list for paperbacks<sup>[1]</sup>. A week later, he posted on his blog a suggestion for his fans:

*“The Hugo Awards are fan-based awards given out at each Worldcon. Only people that have attended the prior Worldcon or bought a membership to the current Worldcon can nominate. However, this year Worldcon is in Reno, so I know a bunch of folks that read this blog are attending, and if you are, you need to vote! If you aren’t going, but you want to vote/nominate, then you can buy a supporting membership for like \$50.*

*You need to get your nominations in quickly. They are due by January 31st. The information is at the link above.*

*You can nominate up to 5 things for each category. I’m not telling you how to vote, but this is what I’m voting for. I think that all of these things are deserving of an award, and even getting nominated makes you look cool. I fully do not expect to win, because not even a single robot is raped during the events of MHI or MHV, but getting nominated would be neat and that actually doesn’t take too many votes.”*

<https://www.monsterhunternation.com/2011/01/14/hugo-awards-it-is-time-to-get-your-nominations-in-and-yes-im-eligible/><sup>[2]</sup>

Baen Books also listed *Monster Hunter Vendetta* in their Facebook post of eligible works<sup>[3]</sup>. However, Correia’s main hope was not a Hugo Award per se but the Campbell Award (now Astounding Award) for Best Newcomer — the “not a Hugo” administered alongside the main awards.

*“John W. Campbell Award: Larry Correia – debut novel: “Monster Hunter International” (2009) and sequel: “Monster Hunter Vendetta” (2010) from Baen – This one is for best new author that has come out in the last two years. And yes, I’m an egotist. But come on, I am pretty awesome.”*

*ibid*

Correia also recommended two other authors for the Campbell/Astounding Award, John D. Brown<sup>[4]</sup> and Dan Wells<sup>[5]</sup> both published by Tor and both Mormons from Utah. For other categories, Larry suggested other Baen authors and editors such as Sarah A. Hoyt, Michael Z. Williamson and Toni Weiskopf, as well as fellow Utah writers Brad Torgersen and Eric James Stone for Best Short Story, Howard Tayler for Best Graphic Story, as well as the podcast of Brandon Sanderson, Wells, and Tayler for Best Related Work<sup>[8]</sup>.

When the Hugo finalists were announced in April of that year, Correia was (rightfully) delighted:

*“Thank you very much to all of you that nominated me, and I’m especially thankful for all of the Barflies. You guys are awesome.”*

<https://www.monsterhunternation.com/2011/04/25/i-am-a-campbell-award-finalist/><sup>[9]</sup>

Larry was also delighted by some of the other finalists:

*“I’ve got several more friends among the other category’s nominees. Eric James Stone in Best Novelette, Mary Robinette Kowal in Best Short, Writing Excuses for Related Work, and Howard Tayler for Best Graphic Story.”*

*ibid*

Although he didn’t mention, in either this post or the earlier one, the most high-profile Baen finalist: Lois McMaster Bujold’s *Cryoburn*<sup>[10]</sup>.

The Astounding Award finalists do not typically get as much attention as the finalists for Best Novel. In early January (so unlikely to be related to any nomination), the website of the influential *EscapePod* podcast had published a negative review of *Monster Hunter International*, saying:

*“I don’t have space to cover all the flaws in this book, so I’ll just hit the highlights. Because it was self-published and only later picked up by Baen, Monster Hunter International shows no sign of an editor’s*



*pen. The characters are flat. The prose is stale and repetitive. The plot reads like something intended for a weekend of tabletop gaming, complete with prophetic visions from the storyteller to keep the protagonists on track.”*

<https://escapepod.org/2011/01/16/review-monster-hunter-international-by-larry-correia/><sup>[11]</sup>

Later in the year, Nicholas Whyte reviewed the novel provided in the 2011 ‘Hugo Packet’<sup>[12]</sup>. Whyte’s description of *Monster Hunter International* was not positive:

*“I do have little hesitation in putting Monster Hunter International last. It is relentlessly single-tone, derivative and predictable, and I can’t see how anyone could rank it above any of the other works included in the package. To an extent the John W. Campbell Award is about the future of the genre; books like this take us way back to the past, with the incidentals slightly jazzed up for the twenty-first century, and I think it would be embarrassing for the genre if Correia won on the basis of this.”*

<https://nwwhyte.livejournal.com/1781669.html>

In his ranking of the finalists, Whyte put Correia last and below ‘No Award’.

In later years, Correia would recount that either a “European snob reviewer” or a “British blogger” wrote either that “If Larry Correia wins the Campbell, it will END WRITING FOREVER” or that if Larry Correia wins the Campbell “it will end literature forever”. I have searched for reviews saying these things but have not found them<sup>[13]</sup>. It is likely that Correia had read Whyte’s review as he would note:

*“The other day when I was googling my name, I found one place that ranked the Campbell nominees. They placed me at #6. Out of 5. Apparently, I wasn’t “nuanced” enough for them. Or as they said, I was a relentlessly single tone throw back. Oh, how the literati elite hate me.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2011/07/23/alpha-reviews-and-john-brown-says-whv-i-am-awesome/>

And closer to the convention he would increase the number of people rating him sixth:

*“I am the least favored to win by the literary critical types, (in fact, I’ve seen a few places where they have ranked me #6 out of the 5 finalists) but that’s cool, because I am the only author eligible that has had a gnome fight or trailer park elves. (or as one critic pointed out, I am a relentlessly single tone throw back, and another said that if I win it is an insult and a black mark on the entire field of writing.) SWEET! I’m so unabashedly pulpy and just happy to entertain, and thus offensive, that I make the intelligentsia weep bitter blood tears of rage.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2011/08/13/my-worldcon-schedule-and-running-commentary/>

Worldcon shifting location every year is one of the distinctive features of the convention. The UK-based Worldcons have seen an improved representation of British authors. The proximity of Reno to Utah may have helped the chances of several Utah writers (Eric James Stone, Howard Tayler, Dan Wells, Brandon Sanderson and Larry Correia) on the nomination ballot. The popularity of the *Writing Excuses* podcast helmed by Sanderson, Wells, and Tayler could also have contributed. This is not to dismiss the relative talent of these finalists but just to acknowledge the complex dynamics of the Hugo Awards.

The 2011 Hugo Awards had the common characteristic of the old and the new. The headline Best Novel category had a gender split of four women and one man<sup>[14]</sup>. Among the finalists, Connie Willis and Lois McMaster Bujold were long-time Hugo favourites, whereas Mira Grant (aka Seanan McGuire) and N.K. Jemisin were relative newcomers. In the end, voters chose Connie Willis’s dual novels *Blackout/All Clear*, which by definition was a popular choice but was not well received by everybody. Fan-writer Abigail Nussbaum responded to the win by saying:

*“In other words, Blackout/All Clear’s win not only rewards bad writing, it rewards cultural appropriation and exploitative business practices. It definitely has my vote for the worst best novel Hugo choice ever.”*

<http://wrongquestions.blogspot.com/2011/08/2011-hugo-awards-winners.html><sup>[15]</sup>

Larry Correia attended Worldcon in person with his writing friend Brad Torgersen. At the time, he reported a largely positive experience at the convention, aside from the hot weather.

*“The Con itself was pretty interesting. This was my first Worldcon. There was a ton of fan stuff on the many panels, but not a real strong writing track. Sure, there were plenty of panels about writing, but it*

*seemed like most of that time was spent on defining terms and genre “rules” as opposed to anything useful to the aspiring writers in the audience, like business or creative advice. There was a very distinct divide between what I’ll call the academic writers and the commercial writers. (yeah, you get one guess where I fall in that continuum). I participated in a few panels and observed a bunch of others, but that topic needs its own blog post.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2011/08/23/worldcon-report/>

Several years later, Correia would add an addendum to the post saying that his experience was not as pleasant as his 2011 post depicted.

*“In 2011 I was still under the impression that I could be nice and keep my head down and play along and maybe eventually they would accept me. I was a new guy. All of my peers and friends in the industry told me to only talk about the positives, smile, and not say anything. I was afraid that if I talked about the negatives, it would be bad for my career.*

*So, in this post I left out the negatives and only talked about the positives. It was at that birthday party that I was pissed off and ranting, but Toni Weisskopf talked me down from saying anything.*

*Brad was my roommate, and I vented to him about assholes trying to pick fights, and he warned me off of being anything but nice, and gracious too. Wow, have times changed. “*

**EDIT-4/10/2015 to the above post**

At the time Brad Torgersen also reported the con as a positive experience and stated he was keen to attend the following year:

*“Next year is Chicon 7, which I am 98.7% likely to attend. Both because of the potential for my name to be on the Campbell short list, and because Mike Resnick is the Guest-Of-Honor. You don’t say thanks to your Writer Dad by being a no-show at his GOH Worldcon in his own back yard — Mike lives in Cincinnati. So, barring a disaster, I will be on-deck for next year’s Worldcon. I deliberately played spectator this time, because I was new to the experience. Next year? I’ll be more actively structuring my time, to include putting my name in for panels and other events. After my cover story comes out this December, with the beautiful Bob Eggleton painting that was displayed in Reno, I think any lingering questions about my street cred can be laid to rest.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110831211956/http://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2011/08/25/whirlkon-report-wrap-up/>

Brad’s multiple convention reports <sup>[16]</sup> portray a convention in which Brad was able to widely network with many fans and authors broadly sympathetic to his genre stance. The convention program <sup>[17]</sup> shows a mix of the old and the new. That program included a two-hour session by the SIGMA panel. SIGMA was the think tank of science fiction authors that consulted with the US Department of Homeland Security on potential threats and responses <sup>[18]</sup> and which was a kind of heir to (and shared many of the same authors as) Jerry Pournelle’s Citizen’s Advisory Council on National Space Policy <sup>[19]</sup>. The convention also had a significant presence from Baen Books as well as from Brad Torgersen’s publisher at the time *Analog* magazine and (as both Correia and Torgersen had noted) a major presence of authors from Utah. Major guests included the fantasy artist par-excellence Boris Vallejo <sup>[20]</sup> and comic book author/artist Bill Willingham whose *Fables* series as well as being a critical and commercial success, also reflected Willingham’s right-leaning views <sup>[21]</sup>. In short, it was a convention that had a lot to offer for a science fiction fan with right of centre views and this was reflected in the accounts of Larry Correia and Brad Torgersen at the time <sup>[22]</sup>.

What is also notable is an absence. By 2011 it was difficult to leave no trace of widespread discussion on the Internet. It is true that issues with some platforms (such as LiveJournal) with deleted accounts can make it hard to follow the full back-and-forth of a discussion as it happened <sup>[23]</sup> but the opposite is also true — it is next to impossible to erase a discussion altogether. Trawling through LiveJournal or web-searches, in general, provide almost nothing in terms of negative reviews or criticism of Larry Correia in 2011. There may be examples that have since been deleted but we can say with confidence that Correia’s Campbell/Astounding Award nomination did not result in a large or visible backlash within fandom. If anything, it was largely ignored <sup>[24]</sup>.

By December, Correia was thinking about the Hugo Awards again and described:

*“And while I’m thinking about it, if you’ve read Hard Magic and you are a Worldcon member or attendee, you should think about nominating it for the Hugo. I’m just saying... First off, it is actually really good and very original, and second, and far more importantly, the literati hoity-toity absolutely hate my guts, I’ll always just be an action-pulp-right wing-gun guy to them, and if I get nominated again their heads will explode. You have no idea how much joy I got from the reviews last year that talked about how if I won it would “end literature forever”.”*

<https://www.monsterhunternation.com/2011/12/18/random-updates-and-fun-with-internet-critics/>

Whatever critics might say about Larry Correia, he had the natural disposition of a novelist and we can read drafts and re-drafts of this claim about the time when he was a Campbell/Astounding Award finalist. A truer assessment at the time may have been that the “literati hoity-toity” were not paying any attention to Larry Correia. That would change and it would be Correia who would change it.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [http://www.locusmag.com/Magazine/2011/Issue01\\_Bestsellers.html](http://www.locusmag.com/Magazine/2011/Issue01_Bestsellers.html)
- [2] the comment about the robot is likely to be a reference to Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl* which was a joint Hugo Award winner in 2010
- [3] <https://web.archive.org/web/20180502193443/https://www.facebook.com/notes/10150397402515271/>
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Brown\\_\(American\\_author\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Brown_(American_author))
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan\\_Wells\\_\(author\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Wells_(author)) and [https://www.mormonwiki.com/Dan\\_Wells:\\_Mormon\\_Author](https://www.mormonwiki.com/Dan_Wells:_Mormon_Author)
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric\\_James\\_Stone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_James_Stone)
- [7] The stories suggested were actually novelettes and Brad Torgersen made an alternate suggestion in the comments <https://www.monsterhunternation.com/2011/01/14/hugo-awards-it-is-time-to-get-your-nominations-in-and-yes-im-eligible/#comment-13165>
- [8] Best Fancast wouldn’t be a category until 2012 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Fancast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award_for_Best_Fancast)
- [9] ‘Barflies’ was the name for regulars at the ‘Baen’s Bar’ reader forum run by Baen Books
- [10] <https://locusmag.com/2011/04/2011-hugo-and-campbell-awards-nominees/>
- [11] As I say in the main text, the timing rules out this review being related to Correia’s Campbell bid, but it does indicate a more critical reception for his work in 2011
- [12] The packet is a collection of materials (stories and sometimes whole novels) disseminated to Hugo voters with the cooperation of the finalists and their publisher.
- [13] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2018/05/20/faking-shared-history/>
- [14] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2011%20Final%20Ballot.pdf>
- [15] ‘Cultural appropriation’ was in reference to how Willis (an American) dealt with British WW2 history. Andrew Hickey goes into some detail here <https://andrewhickey.info/2011/07/16/hugo-blogging-connie-willis-may-be-the-worst-writer-in-existence/>
- [16] <https://web.archive.org/web/20110831210952/http://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2011/08/17/rolling-whirlkon-report-17-aug-2011/> and <https://web.archive.org/web/20110831214423/http://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2011/08/20/rolling-whirlkon-report-reno-nv-20-aug-2011/> and <https://web.archive.org/web/20110831213655/http://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2011/08/22/lucky-13/>
- [17] <https://renosf.org/downloads/program-grid.pdf>
- [18] [https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/tech/science/2007-05-29-deviant-thinkers-security\\_N.htm](https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/tech/science/2007-05-29-deviant-thinkers-security_N.htm) and <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/jun/05/sigma-science-fiction-us-security>
- [19] see chapter 9 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/03/02/debarkle-chapter-9-dramatis-personae-jim-baen-1943-2006/>
- [20] I don’t know that Larry Correia is a Boris Vallejo fan but it would be very odd if he wasn’t
- [21] <https://bleedingcool.com/comics/bill-willingham-on-sex-death-and-politics/>
- [22] see above but also see third-hand accounts <https://sandratayler.livejournal.com/691197.html>
- [23] See chapter 13 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/03/14/debarkle-chapter-13-meanwhile-racefail09/>
- [24] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2015/07/08/reason-hell-absence-of-evidence-is-not-evidence-of-absence/> any examples of pre-2012 negative reviews of Larry’s work would be welcome

# 17: Vox Day's Gamma Game

[Content warning: this chapter discusses some extreme political views that were expressly anti-women and also themes around sexual assault. In general, I'll avoid direct links to extremist sites and use links to critics, in particular RationalWiki and David Futrelle's 'We Hunted The Mammoth']

By 2010, Vox Day had experimented with a number of different roles including being a musician, running a video game company, being a columnist/pundit and writing Christian fantasy novels<sup>[1]</sup>. A new decade would take him into a new sphere: the world of Pick-Up Artistry.

As discussed in earlier chapters, Day had for some time been overtly anti-feminist and pushed an ideological stance that argued directly against votes for women. However, this kind of overtly ideological misogyny was just one of a number of different forms of online misogyny. Others included:

- a long-running “Men’s Rights” movement that promulgated the idea that men were being discriminated against by things such as equal pay legislation or in divorce courts and custody battles.
- “involuntary celibate” or “incel” online communities of disaffected men who believed they were being denied access to sex.
- misogyny within other male-oriented online spaces including bodybuilding and martial arts.
- communities offering dating advice for men and specifically the field of “pick-up artistry” (PUA) i.e., advice and tips on how to persuade women to have sex.<sup>[2]</sup>

In 2008, Day began to feature posts from the blog *Chateau Heartiste*<sup>[3]</sup> run by a blogger known as Roissy (aka ‘Roissy in DC’)<sup>[4]</sup>. Among the many ideas current within these spaces was the quasi-scientific concept of ‘alpha males’<sup>[5]</sup> and sexual hierarchies. In the context of these PUA spaces, the idea was that (heterosexual) men who project the attitudes and appearance of alpha males would be perceived as more attractive. Roissy’s pick-up advice was to be bold and assertive like an ‘alpha’ rather than weak like a ‘beta’. Day thought he could improve upon this simple (if confused) classification.

In January 2010 in response to a post by Roissy, Day presented on his blog are more complex “sexual-social hierarchy”.

*“I’m not claiming that this hierarchy is science or incontrovertible fact, it’s merely the lens through which I tend to view the current sexual-social hierarchy. I think it is a little more broadly useful from a theoretical perspective than the Game construct, even if it is less immediately applicable from a tactical point of view.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20100202105039/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2010/01/roissy-and-limits-of-game.html>

In Day’s scheme, there were Alphas (natural leaders), Betas (natural lieutenants), Deltas (most men), Gammas (a nerd stereotype), Lambdas (gay men), Omegas (wholly socially dysfunctional men) and also Sigmas. This additional category was one Day had carved out for himself — like Alphas but “lone wolf” types who are just *too cool* to get involved with the whole thing. It was, of course, nonsense — sociology based on watching American high-school shows<sup>[6]</sup> and regarding character cliches as deep truths about human behaviour.

In 2011, Day began a new spin-off blog project dedicated to what pick-up artists call “Game”, i.e., the strategies and techniques for picking up women. Despite the common theme of misogyny, it was still an odd choice for Day given his overt Christian beliefs, his apparent long-term and happy marriage, and his traditionalist morals. It is reasonable to assume (although hard to establish) that this new blog (entitled *Alpha Game*) was an attempt to draw in people from the already right-leaning PUA communities.

Day led off with a revised version of his renamed “socio-sexual hierarchy” and in general, his own posts on the blog would revolve around showing how his hierarchy applied in different circumstances or more general anti-feminism and misogyny. For more specific PUA tips (including complex flow charts on how to chat up women), other bloggers would write posts. The blog content would often be highly disturbing, particularly when related to questions of consent and the topic of rape. Other times, the posts would be more cringe-inducing descriptions of supposedly effective techniques. Some posts managed to be unintentionally disturbing in whole other ways, such as this account by Day that starts by a swimming pool:

*“I was sitting by myself near the side of the pool the other day, safely ensconced in shadows. Everyone in my party was otherwise occupied, sliding down the water slide or splashing about in the pool. Seeing I was apparently unaccompanied, a pretty little blonde wearing a red bikini approached me, drawn*

*insensibly to my masculine presence. I nodded to her and she was so forward as to sit down next to me, before addressing me in French.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111201013042/https://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2011/06/effortless-appeal.html>

The ‘twist’ in the story (I assume meant to parody some of the accounts on the blog as well as make a point about jealousy) is that the ‘blonde’ is a three-year-old and the encounter is wholly innocent<sup>[7]</sup>.

Roissy (sometimes named for his blog *Chateau Heartiste*) himself promoted a range of disturbing views on women including appearance, making them feel insecure, opposition to contraception, “ephebophilia”, as well as promoting racism and opposition to women’s suffrage<sup>[8]</sup>. For Day, the emphasis on ‘Game’ was a pillar to his overtly ideological misogyny. He regarded the very fate of Western Civilisation to be at the mercy of women’s libidos:

*“The logic is impeccable. Consider:*

- 1. IF women are permitted to have sex with whomever they please.*
- 2. AND women show an observable preference to have sex with men who do not exhibit civilization-building or civilization-maintaining behaviors.*
- 3. THEN men will increasingly cease to engage in civilization-building or civilization-maintaining behaviors.*

*After that, it’s just a matter of time before the civilization collapses and it’s back to the barbarism of mud huts, rape, and pillage. Or, alternatively, preventative action is taken regarding points (1) and (2). Which one is more feasible? Women often like to angrily demand of men of sufficient foresight if they want to control women’s sexuality. That’s the wrong and irrelevant question. The correct one is: do you like electricity, a reliable food supply, and the ability to live peaceably without having to shoot strangers on sight?”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170923042123/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2012/03/roissy-tells-murray-to-man-up.html>

Aside from criticising Charles “Bell Curve” Murray for not being racist enough, the central aspect of Roissy’s views that attracted Day was this idea of ‘Game’ (in the PUA sense) as a kind of rules-lawyering or psychological hack or weapon in Day’s political conflict with women. At his main blog he would quote Roissy approvingly:

*“That women’s behavior can be so analyzed means that women’s actions can be predicted, and subsequently that men with this knowledge can tailor their behavior to get the most out of their interactions with women. Knowledge is a powerful thing, and knowing what’s up does, in fact, shift the balance of sexual power in men’s direction by removing the inscrutability and whimsy that has been the prerogative of women since time immemorial. Game means that it is no longer simply a matter of dumb luck when men get sex and love.“*

Day quoting Roissy <https://web.archive.org/web/20160113182630/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2011/03/patient-explanation.html>

And would go on to say:

*“Game is no more limited to use by pick-up artists in night clubs than a screwdriver is limited to use by murderers in stabbing someone to death. Unless you seriously wish to deny that a) female behavior falls into patterns and is predictable to some degree, or b) knowledge of those patterns can be useful to men in a variety of applications, logic dictates that Game will be of use to nearly every man on the planet.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160113182630/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2011/03/patient-explanation.html>

Day even applied this notion in his fiction. His 2012 epic fantasy (Romans meet elves and orcs) *Throne of Bones*<sup>[9]</sup> was also intended to demonstrate his stance that the unfettered sexuality of women would lead to social collapse:

*“In Selenoth, human women have even less power over the world and themselves than they do in Westeros. This is because in Roman society, women had one primary role, which was to produce heirs for the noble families and soldiers for the legions. And they benefited greatly from being kept to that role, since Rome became vastly wealthy and featured lifespans that were not again witnessed until the*

*last 50 years of the modern scientific era. By contrast, even women have considerable autonomy and their societies are demographically dying as a result. Their long lives and powerful magic help mitigate this, to a degree, but the historical trend is readily apparent to Man and Elf alike.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20121211082412/http://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2012/12/its-not-historical-if-its-not-sexist.html>

Day goes on to claim that sexism isn't cultural but a kind of logical inevitability, almost (but never quite) grasping the idea that economic and social conditions impact culture.

I'll pause here for a moment to touch on a deeper issue about ideological racism and sexism. There are two fallacies that will come into play when looking at political extremism. The first is one I associate with libertarianism which is that all political extremism is indistinguishable or can be judged primarily by the outcomes of regimes based on extreme ideologies (e.g., comparing body counts for Stalin versus Hitler). The second is similar but one I associate with liberalism and is rooted in the Whig view of history as remorselessly progressive<sup>[10]</sup>, which sees extreme views as objectionable but essentially harmless. For example, in Chapter 8<sup>[11]</sup> Day's expressed views on women were seen as appalling but essentially laughable — after all, in modern America, nobody was going to successfully turn back the clock on women's suffrage. Drawing a false equivalence or dismissing some extremism as objectionable crankery runs the very real danger of ignoring the immediate harm and danger within the views — the harm that occurs within the existing social and political structures.

Day's cranky positions on women not cutting their hair<sup>[12]</sup> might be dismissed as a kind of historical throwback but they were part and parcel of views that portrayed women as the main cause of sexual violence and which portrayed women as people who habitually lied about sexual violence. As early as 2008, Day was saying:

*“I don't think it has occurred to many young women that the not uncommon act of saying one thing and doing another not only has the potential to turn would-be Nice Guys into Sexual Predators as is described in the linked article, it not infrequently has the effect of teaching young men to ignore absolutely everything that comes out of a woman's mouth.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160112232137/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2008/11/circle-of-bitterness.html>

And by 2010 was saying on his own blog:

*“And what did you expect the male reaction would be to the feminist attempt to transform every form of sex that falls short of explicit written consent confirmed by ex post facto notarization by a third-party into rape anyway? If rape has become a joke to men; it is only because women, specifically feminist women, have made it so. For example, it would take a heart of stone not to find vast amusement in Amynda's tale of her terrifying “near-rape” experience that involved neither rape nor actual sex.*

*It is simply absurd to pretend that no doesn't often mean yes. There is an abundance of evidence proving otherwise. And there's a word for men who take women at their collective word with regards to matters of sex, romance, and love. The word is “lonely”. Or, if you prefer, “loser”. Women aren't particularly attracted to nice men who treat them well, they're primarily attracted to bastards who don't give a damn about them, who simply want to nail them and nail them hard.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160113180216/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2010/01/mailvox-in-fairness-you-do-prefer-bad.html>

Day would actively promote the idea that women had essentially alien thinking<sup>[13]</sup> and that most claims of rape were untrue<sup>[14]</sup> as well as claiming that in general women respond in a “sexually positive manner” to violent male dominance<sup>[15]</sup>. Day and Day's AlphaGame blog would repeatedly portray men as blameless victims of false accusations of sexual and physical assault while portraying women as duplicitous and manipulative people who have to be dominated and manipulated both for a man's own self-worth and for the sake of civilisation.

Day's gender essentialism dovetailed with his race essentialism mixing America's old fears of miscegenation with modern internet culture. His socio-sexual hierarchy also led him to his trademark insult: “gamma”, i.e., a weak, insufficiently masculine man who is easily dominated by women and other men but who (as a consequence) is resentful and whiny (Day, once again, substituting a lazy character cliché for a psychological theory). Added to “gamma” was Day's interest in the outdated “r/K” biological model of animal reproductive strategy. In Day's version, some men are wolves (linking back to the discredited notion of alpha-male wolves) and some men are rabbits (in various ways inferior).

Meanwhile, Day was still pushing forward with his role as a presence within the science fiction and fantasy writing community. John Scalzi's blog remained a very popular site and many established and would-be authors (as well as fans in general) would comment on posts. Frequently, the comment sections would be much longer and more involved discussions than the posts themselves — particularly as Scalzi was busy with an active writing career and as President of the SFWA. With lengthy comment threads needing active moderation, Scalzi would often have to deploy the metaphorical “ban hammer” and with Vox Day often posting provocative comments, Scalzi was forced to deal with him.

Day was also finding allies within the SFWA. John Scalzi and Vice-President Mary Robinette Kowal were pressing forward with structural reforms as well as looking at issues such as institutional sexism. We'll look at this in more detail in later chapters but for the moment what is relevant is that Day's extreme views were seen by some as an anti-feminist bulwark against encroaching “political correctness”. Day was gaining attention as well as some kudos by baiting John Scalzi on Scalzi's own blog.

In October 2012 John Scalzi wrote a powerfully disturbing post entitled “A Fan Letter to Certain Conservative Politicians”<sup>[17]</sup> which was written from the perspective of a rapist who was celebrating the rhetoric and policies of some Republican politicians. Scalzi would later explain his thinking behind the post:

*“The predicate cause, I think clearly to most people who are following politics these days, was Indiana senatorial candidate Richard Mourdock opening his mouth wide enough to stuff in everything below his belt regarding abortion and rape during his debate the other night. It was the cherry on top of a whole summer of general stupidity regarding rape emanating from (as I delicately put it) certain conservative candidates, and I'd pretty much had enough of it at this point.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2012/10/28/a-few-process-notes-on-fan-letter/>

Scalzi deploying irony and satire to criticise conservative attitudes towards sexual violence inevitably drew a reaction from Vox Day. However, the use of satire appears to have caused some confusion for Day with him initially appearing to take Scalzi literally. The subsequent amendments to Day's response as people explained Scalzi's post to him were captured by another blogger Joe McKen:

*“Yes, it appears that ol' Vox found it perfectly unexceptional that a minor celebrity and a prominent icon in the sci-fi realm would out and announce his love of sexual assault on his well-trafficked website. Methinks Mensa needs to reconsider its membership criteria. But after having the eye-searingly obvious pointed out to him by some commenters, Vox rushed to revamp his post about half-a-dozen times (according to the number of times I refreshed my browser to see it had again changed)”*

<http://preliatorcausa.blogspot.com/2012/10/27-vox-dav-co-dont-get-satire-or-basic-decency-3892.html>

We can't know Day's internal state of mind but he would then post about (to varying degrees) John Scalzi on October 28, November 19, November 23 (twice – at Vox Populi and at Alpha Game), November 27, December 10 (again twice – at Vox Populi and at Alpha Game), December 13 and so on. The complaints were numerous: about Scalzi being a “gamma” (or in Roissy's scheme a “Beta”); about the relative web traffic; about Scalzi's work being derivative or mediocre; about “rabbit people”. As we will see, this carried on for long after 2012, revealing in itself the dangers of declaring one man a “gamma” whilst placing yourself near or at the top of a hierarchy of masculinity and then finding yourself with apparent *idée fixe*<sup>[18]</sup> on the supposed “gamma”.

December would bring a different explanation (or outcome, depending on how we see cause and effect in these events) for Day's frequent Scalzi-themed posts.

*“Yesterday, I sent a notice to the SFWA's head of the election committee, announcing that I am running for the office of president of the organization. It is highly unlikely that I will win, of course, but I would like to be able to say that I at least attempted to do my part to salvage an organization that is speeding rapidly into irrelevance.*

*One reason I am running is to restore the independence of what appears to have become a captive house award that Tor Books authors give themselves on an annual basis. This may not be the case, but the statistical evidence suggests that there has been considerable corruption in the awards process in the past and that the 2010 rules changes have actually made the problem worse.*

*The other reason can be seen in these two quotes by its current president, the Tor Books author John Scalzi. He condemned himself in the very words with which he criticized his predecessor, Michael Capobianco back in 2007.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130103033420/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2012/12/a-candidacy-is-announced.html>

Was the feud simply a means to get attention for a Presidential bid or was the Presidential bid just an extension of Day’s increasingly one-sided feud? It is hard to tell but among the reasons Day cited for running was that John Scalzi moderates his own personal blog:

*“Scalzi is also a fascist ideologue who actively attempts to shut down all debate he personally finds distressing at every opportunity. Consider the way in which he proudly declared that in 2012, he managed to avoid permitting anyone to present facts or arguments that might have disturbed the tender sensitivities of the rabby readers at Whatever.”*

ibid<sup>[19]</sup>

Of the twelve paragraphs in Day’s post, nine were either about, referred to or were quotes from John Scalzi. So whatever Day’s actual motives his post had many of the features of a personal grudge. However, Day also presented a kind of ideological call to arms:

*“Now, it should be made clear that John Scalzi is not the problem with the SFWA, he is merely one of the symptoms of the ideological disease that has been gradually killing science fiction and fantasy in the print world for the last thirty years. Thanks to technology, SF/F will survive, but not in its traditional form if its self-appointed gatekeepers continue to stress mediocrity and ideological conformity over the dangerous new visions that once characterized it.”*

ibid

Day had appointed himself the champion to fight the left and save science fiction. It was a declaration of a war that would last nearly five years.

## FOOTNOTE

- [1] see the second chapter 5 of Debarkle <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/02/18/debarkle-second-chapter-5-dramatis-personae-vox-day/>
- [2] see the RationalWiki article for an overview of the ‘Manosphere’ <https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Manosphere>
- [3] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Chateau\\_Heartiste](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Chateau_Heartiste). As the RationalWiki article notes, the name ‘Roissy’ is a likely reference to the French novel *The Story of O* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Story\\_of\\_O](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Story_of_O)
- [4] <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2012/07/12/heartiste-funny-like-a-clown/>
- [5] a full discussion of the use of the term is not feasible in this chapter. The use of the term for wolves is largely discredited, but is still used in describing some primates. The application of the term within the manosphere is nonsense [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpha\\_\(ethology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpha_(ethology)). See also <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2012/08/22/yo-dudes-alpha-males-are-a-myth-according-to-actual-experts-on-wolves/>
- [6] the TV Tropes hierarchy actually has more nuance than Vox Day’s <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/PopularityFoodChain>
- [7] I had to read it, so you all get to read it.
- [8] <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2012/08/20/heartiste-women-athletes-are-mannish-uggos-because-womens-natural-bodies-are-not-evolutionarily-designed-to-run-throw-fight-or-lift-optimally/#more-6051>, <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2012/08/14/heartiste-chris-brown-is-a-great-role-model-for-wannabe-alpha-males/>, <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2012/12/05/on-popes-pills-and-the-alpha-asshole-cock-carousel/>, [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Chateau\\_Heartiste#Ephebophilia](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Chateau_Heartiste#Ephebophilia), <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2012/11/13/as-men-force-is-the-greatest-weapon-we-have-we-must-use-it-says-racist-manosphere-asshat/>, <https://wehuntedthemammoth.com/2012/10/05/heartiste-on-the-evils-of-womens-suffrage-and-why-single-women-tingle-for-obama-or-maybe-dont/>
- [9] “I had two objectives of modest ambition. The first was to write a better epic fantasy than George R. R. Martin, or at least a better one than “A Dance with Dragons” turned out to be. The second is to demonstrate that by relying upon historical verisimilitude, conventional literary archetypes and traditional patterns of human behaviour instead of modern secular ideologies and the current assumptions of the cultural zeitgeist, an author can expect to produce a work of literary quality that is observably superior to the vast quantity of sewage being published today.” <https://www.wnd.com/2012/12/a-throne-of-bones/>. For a detailed review consider Steve J Wright’s 2017 read through <https://stevejwright.com/2017/08/23/a-throne-of-bones-by-vox-day-preamble-on-managing-expectations/>



- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whig\\_history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whig_history)
- [11] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/02/24/debarkle-chapter-8-electrolite-2005-03-01/>
- [12] <https://web.archive.org/web/20110411202950/http://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2011/04/women-dont-cut-your-damn-hair.html> and <https://web.archive.org/web/20111107002340/http://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2011/11/hair-equivalent-of-obese.html>
- [13] <https://web.archive.org/web/20160113181502/http://voxdays.blogspot.com/2010/09/never-be-nice.html>
- [14] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210122184824/http://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2013/10/rape-is-ex-post-facto-regret.html>
- [15] <https://web.archive.org/web/20201112024640/http://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2013/01/that-would-explain-fantasies.html>, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210301091020/http://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2011/05/rapebait.html>, <https://web.archive.org/web/20201027072009/http://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2011/09/killer-game.html>
- [16] my own longer discussion of Day's interest in this <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2017/11/04/weird-internet-ideas-rk-and-the-far-right/>
- [17] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2012/10/25/a-fan-letter-to-certain-conservative-politicians/>
- [18] the irony here of me writing yet another essay on Vox Day hasn't escaped me but then I'm not claiming to be a superior specimen of masculinity, have a genius-level IQ, or have mastered the arts of social dominance
- [19] Vox Day also actively moderates the comment sections of his blog

# 18: Meanwhile...2012 Romney versus Obama

[Content warning for racism, religious prejudice and accounts of mass shootings]

On May 16 2011 a minor sideshow in the Republican Party's bid to oust Barack Obama came to an end: businessman and TV celebrity Donald Trump announced that he wouldn't be running for president. Trump had been hounding Obama over the so-called "birther" issue but had been roundly mocked by Obama and discredited when Obama released the long-form birth certificate. Nonetheless, the flamboyant property developer had been posturing as a potential Republican candidate:

*"In spite of Trump's claims about being frontrunner in the polls, one published on Monday by the Politico website and George Washington University showed 71% of those surveyed thought he had no chance of becoming president."*

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/16/donald-trump-us-presidential-race>

Other potential candidates who would withdraw before the start of 2012 included Tea Party favourite and opponent of Occupy Wall Street, Herman Cain — the CEO of Godfather's Pizza. Conservative science fiction author John C. Wright regarded Cain quite favourably<sup>[1]</sup>, but Wright's future editor, Vox Day, was far more antagonistic towards the candidate:

*"Herman Cain is not the man with the courage of his convictions for whom pro-life conservatives have been waiting for more than 20 years. He is not the bold and principled leader that their courageous steadfastness merits. The Magic Negro, Part II: Republican edition, is the black version of Mitt Romney, only less intelligent, less monied and more closely tied to Wall Street. The fact that these two bank-owned, flip-flopping faux conservatives are presently leading in the pre-Iowa polls is a testament to the sad and muddled state of the Republican Party."*

<https://www.wnd.com/2011/10/359437/>

Something about Herman Cain really did not sit well with Day, even more than Day's general dislike of insufficiently nationalistic Republicans. Cain's candidacy was derailed in October 2011 due to an allegation of sexual harassment<sup>[2]</sup> and despite hiring the lawyer L. Lin Wood<sup>[3]</sup> to help refute the claims, Cain eventually withdrew.

Day's dislike of Cain was distinctive but not unique, he also had a long-term dislike of Mitt Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts. Romney was regarded as a relative liberal within the Republican Party and helped institute a public healthcare system when Governor with many features in common with the current Obama administrations scheme for a federal system. As early as 2008, Day had taken to calling Romney "Captain Underoos"<sup>[4]</sup> — a dismissive reference to Romney's Mormon religion<sup>[5]</sup>. Day had been critical of the idea of John McCain potentially picking Romney as running mate in 2008, making an unusual comparison of Romney to Hitler:

*"In general, there is something distinctly problematic about an outsider who wants to come in and lead. It seldom ends well, as the Germans learned after embracing an Austrian outsider. One of the reasons for the disastrous state in which conservatism finds itself, particularly the conservative media, is that so many of its self-appointed leaders are not really conservative and hail from very different social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds than the great mass of conservative America. Can it really be considered any great surprise that irreligious Ivy Leaguers, naturalized aliens and secular New York City Jews have failed to provide successful intellectual leadership for religious conservatives from the heartland?"*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20100114201729/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2008/07/captain-underoos-to-rescue.html>

Like Trump, Vox Day was also a subscriber to the "birther" beliefs that Barack Obama was not a natural-born US citizen<sup>[6]</sup> but was unsure of the quality of candidates that the Republican Party could run against him. The only possible saviour was the maverick libertarian, Ron Paul. Day, like Paul, was a believer in the anti-empirical economic theory known as Austrian Economics<sup>[7]</sup> and was convinced that government

stimulus spending and measures taken by the Federal Reserve bank to stabilise the economy in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, were going to cause the economic downfall of the USA.

*“You may not like him. You may think he is crazy and hypocritical and wrong on a panoply of issues. But the fact of the matter that he has been warning everyone about the eventual consequences of the credit boom that the Federal Reserve and the federal government created over the last fifty years, and the subsequent bust they have been desperately staving off since 2008. In doing so, they have made things worse, so much so that the USA may not survive as a nation when their efforts finally fail. This is not a Democrat vs Republican thing. It is an economic sanity vs insanity thing. Obama has been disastrous, as he has increased federal debt 92% since 2008. McCain would have done the same or worse. Romney and Gingrich would actually be worse than Obama in this regard. The economic Fimbulwinter is coming and there is only one national politician who even understands the core issues involved.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190610011139/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2011/12/whv-smart-people-support-ron-paul.html>

Without providing too many spoilers for the next few years, I can confirm that America did not fall into the economic equivalent of the Norse mythological end times.

Meanwhile, as the process of selecting a candidate continued into 2012, author Brad Torgersen was anxious about the possibility that the GOP would pick former House Speaker Newt Gingrich. In 2008, Torgersen had written in Mitt Romney rather than vote for McCain or Obama. Gingrich’s history of infidelity made him unacceptable to Torgersen. In the comments to his Facebook post, fellow author Kevin J Anderson anticipated a future irony within a possible Obama v Gingrich contest:

*“I rarely comment on politics, but this has really been making my head spin. If Gingrich is the nominee, Hardcore Christian family values voters will look at two candidates: One candidate who has never been divorced, who has a strong marriage, a loving wife, and two daughters he obviously adores, who has belonged to the same religion all his life. One candidate who is now on his third religion as well as his third wife, who broke his marriage vows repeatedly, who left one wife when she got multiple sclerosis, left another wife when she got cancer. And the Christian family values voters will choose the latter. So much for their principles. (I am not endorsing any candidate here; I just loathe the hypocrisy.)”*

[https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/359534047406168?comment\\_id=359805230712383](https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/359534047406168?comment_id=359805230712383)

Mormons no more uniformly vote for the same candidates than any other social grouping in America but in broad strokes, they sit in an unusual position. Largely traditional, often with socially conservative views and mainly concentrated in a state that would likely be Republican regardless, nonetheless Mormons often found themselves unwelcome by the dominant evangelical Christian faction of the Republican Party that sees the Church of the Latter-Day Saints as, at best, heretical and at worse an alien religion pretending to be Christian. However, those same socially conservative position of the church put them at odds with many on the left.

Brad Torgersen rightly objected to misinformed Facebook jokes about Romney’s Mormon faith in 2012:

*“Well, you know what? I am a gosh-damned Mormon!! And the yuks and snickers and ‘magic underwear’ comments that followed on simply reminded me that I am not sure who is worse: the evangelicals who are bigoted against me and mine, or the progressives who are bigoted against me and mine? Because really, this crap all looks the same after awhile regardless of the source. Guess what progressives, you’re behaving just like your hated rivals, the evangelicals, when you do this shit.”*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/302963653089023>

Although, he didn’t make similar comments about Vox Day’s jibes.

Larry Correia was never much of a Mitt Romney fan because of Romney’s past support of public healthcare and some gun control measures but Correia was also not keen on Gingrich<sup>[8]</sup>.

John Scalzi (a former ‘Rockefeller Republican’ who had anticipated voting for Obama again) made a small but surprising intervention into the nomination process. He donated \$50 to the campaign of John Huntsman in the interests of pluralism and a healthy electoral process:

*“What I would actually like is two candidates I don’t see as entirely unfit for office (note I say “I” here — I’m not particularly interested if you agree with my assessment) go and have a presidential campaign that doesn’t make me feel like it’s being waged at the level of two second-graders sticking their tongues*

*out at each other and talking to me like I jammed a cake mixer into my brain and clicked it over to the “high” setting. I figure a Huntsman/Obama election race is my best chance for a campaign that does not actively make my country stupider, either before or after the election.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2011/11/23/in-which-i-make-my-first-presidential-campaign-contribution-of-the-election/>

What the Republican Party lacked was a charismatic candidate who could garner enough support from the party’s right to win a nomination and yet still appeal to the broad electoral centre of US voters to beat Obama. The eventual compromise candidate was Mitt Romney but with the anti-tax “deficit hawk” Paul Ryan as Vice Presidential candidate.

Not that Obama was unbeatable. The flagship policy initiative of the Affordable Care Act (aka ‘Obamacare’) had been a bruising legislative struggle but the major provisions of the act were not due to be implemented until 2014<sup>[9]</sup>, so voters had not yet had a real opportunity to see the policy in action. Nor was the economy in great shape, although things had improved since 2008 the impact of the Global Financial Crisis was still in effect. Technically the Iraq War was over with an official withdrawal of US troops in 2011<sup>[10]</sup> but Iraq was still in civil disarray and internal violence was on the rise. Elsewhere in the region, there was a growing civil war in Syria<sup>[11]</sup> and instability in multiple countries.

In September of 2012, an attack on a US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya led to the deaths of four Americans including the US Ambassador to Libya, J Christopher Stevens<sup>[12]</sup>. The attack would become a cause célèbre for the Republican Party which would mount a number of investigations in an attempt to identify wrongdoing by the Obama administration and in particular to attempt to prove negligence by the then-Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.

The mass shooting in a cinema in Aurora, Colorado<sup>[13]</sup> led to renewed calls for gun control laws, in particular controls on so-called “assault weapons” and high-capacity magazines<sup>[14]</sup>. Larry Correia strongly disagreed:

*“As can be expected in the aftermath of any shooting that grabs headlines, two things are going to happen. 1. Liberals will knee jerk try to pin it on the right. 2. They’ll start bleating for more gun control. We got #1 when ABC news was trying to blame this on the Tea Party before the blood had even dried, and of course when that came back as untrue, just like it did with the Giffords shooting, they went right into #2.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2012/07/24/fisking-a-gun-control-editorial/>

Statistical coverage of US elections had increased by leaps and bounds during the 21st century. After surprising success at predicting the outcomes of the 2008 Presidential Election, the website *FiveThirtyEight* run by sports statistician Nate Silver had been acquired by the *New York Times*<sup>[15]</sup>. It was just one of many websites analysing and commenting upon polling information. The increased interest in polling also led to an increased interest in polling methodology.

Among conservative circles, the relatively poor performance of the Romney ticket in opinion polls often blamed on polls oversampling Democrat voters. Coverage of alternative polling figures where critics of the major polling companies produced “unskewed” poll results gained press coverage<sup>[16]</sup>. This belief ranged from claiming that the ‘skew’ in the polls was a faulty assumption, to something more like an active conspiracy theory, i.e., that polling companies were intentional skewing results in the hope of boosting Obama’s chances<sup>[17]</sup>. When Romney’s poll numbers improved in October 2012, Larry Correia felt vindicated:

*“I’ve been saying that the polls were crap and Romney was going to win for about four months now. My friends kept getting all despondent and bummed out, and I’d just tell them that that was what the media wanted them to feel. The narrative wanted conservatives to forget the Tea Party movement ever started, forget the 2010 midterms, forget the Wisconsin recall, hell, forget the Chick-Fil-A debacle boycott turned biggest fast-food sales day ever.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2012/10/18/see-i-told-you-so-time/>

Vox Day was so unhappy with how Romney became the candidate that he wasn’t keen on voting for him<sup>[18]</sup> but even Day thought that Romney would beat Obama by 305 electoral college votes to 233<sup>[19]</sup>. Meanwhile, John Scalzi was predicting Obama would win 294 to Romney’s 244 and in the comments to that post, Brad Torgersen went the other way with Romney 291 to Obama 247<sup>[20]</sup>. Torgersen was so confident of a Romney win that in the comments to his own Facebook post on the subject he stated that he expected Nate Silver would be discredited by the final result and also counselled that Obama would be wise to concede quickly and gracefully once the results became clear:

*“If he’s not... if he refuses, and we get dragged-out legalese or threats to force recounts and accusations of vote fraud.... can even Obama believe this won’t shred whatever good will is left for he and his Presidency?”*

[https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/122712491217261?comment\\_id=122760307879146](https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/122712491217261?comment_id=122760307879146) <sup>[21]</sup>

Vox Day’s prediction is even more surprising considering that he also thought that Romney was fighting a demographic uphill battle. The shifting population of many Republican states, including Texas, was presenting a future challenge for the GOP. Day thought the tipping point where Republicans might become unelectable as President might be as early as 2016. He predicted only one route out for them:

*“Unless, of course, the Republican party becomes the party of white nationalism and starts winning 75 to 80 percent of the white vote, which seems extremely unlikely given SWPL cultural influence, white female left-liberalism, and the party elite’s preference for irrelevance to “extremism”. So, my prediction of a US collapse by 2033 would appear to be progressing rather nicely.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20121109161439/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2012/11/the-last-republican.html>

In the end, none of these would be pundits was correct, although John Scalzi came closest. Obama won 332 electoral college votes. A decisive win. Vox Day was philosophical and Larry Correia took to quoting Robert Heinlein:

*“Bread and Circuses’ is the cancer of democracy, the fatal disease for which there is no cure. Democracy often works beautifully at first. But once a state extends the franchise to every warm body, be he producer or parasite, that day marks the beginning of the end of the state. For when the plebs discover that they can vote themselves bread and circuses without limit and that the productive members of the body politic cannot stop them, they will do so, until the state bleeds to death, or in its weakened condition the state succumbs to an invader—the barbarians enter Rome.”*

Robert Heinlein <https://monsterhunternation.com/2012/11/07/congratulations-obama-voters/>

Correia and Heinlein both left it unclear who they imagined the barbarians might be. However, Correia did have a theory of how Obama might have won so (to him) surprisingly:

*“Yeah, about the voter fraud, really, Cleveland? You get 100% turn out in your inner-city districts? I used to live in the inner city. I’m fairly certain you could hold a FREE all you can eat barbeque, with pony rides, a wet t-shirt contest featuring Playboy bunnies, and a Jay-Z/Led Zeppelin/50 Cent/Kayne/Beyonce/Elvis/Sinatra/U2 concert, which handed out a free Obamaphone to every visitor, and you still wouldn’t get 100% turn out. That’s cool though, because Philly did even better, because after they threw out 70 of the court appointed observers, not only did their super record banana republic level turn out beat every possible expectation, they also voted 99% for Obama. But Colorado was not to be outdone, because they had ten democrat counties with over 100% turnout? That’s even better than Venezuela or Cuba! Bravo.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2012/11/11/there-i-go-offending-people-again/>

Larry Correia provided no links or references to these claims but despite him pointing to his capabilities as an auditor, he did not appear to have actually checked any data<sup>[23]</sup>.

Correia’s primary concern about a second Obama term was gun control. Tragically, before the year was over the issue would once again dominate the headlines. On December 14, 2012, in Newtown, Connecticut a twenty-year-old man first murdered his mother and then went to the Sandy Hook Elementary School and murdered twenty-six people including twenty young children using an AR-15 style semi-automatic rifle. The horrific killings shocked America and brought renewed calls for gun control measures. Although, not all Americans felt that way. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee responded to the attack by suggesting that violence in schools was due to the secular nature of schools<sup>[25]</sup>.

Larry Correia responded to the ensuing political debate a few days later with what was to become one of his most widely shared posts. Entitled *An Opinion on Gun Control* <sup>[26]</sup> it outlined many of the key points of what he regarded as the futility and danger of gun control. The post did not directly address the murders and Sandy Hook Elementary School or that the weapons used by the killer had been bought legally by the killer’s mother.

The popularity of Correia’s post eventually led him to an appearance on Mike Huckabee’s own Fox News show, much to Correia’s delight:

*“For any of the new visitors interested in checking out my work, just click on any of the books linked over on the right.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2013/01/20/on-huckabee-tonight-on-fox/>

Vox Day pushed back on the moves towards gun control in a different way:

*“At this point, I think it is perfectly reasonable to question if Lanza had anything to do with the shootings beyond being one of the victims of the real shooters. But what about those grief-stricken parents? And why is the media still going on about assault rifles when they have nothing to do with what supposedly happened at Sandy Hook? I was entirely willing to reserve judgment, but the inexplicable anomalies are rapidly piling up again. The pattern is readily apparent and given the facts at hand, Occam’s Razor increasingly suggests a false flag. I don’t understand why anyone finds it hard to believe there are elements in the US government who don’t hesitate to murder US citizens, given that the Obama administration openly asserts its legal right to kill citizens at will without due process. Let’s engage in a little outlandish legal conjecture and assume that the shootings were real. What, one wonders, would have prevented the administration from legally placing the children of Sandy Hook elementary school on its secret kill list and then ordering their assassination?”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170911051940/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2013/01/more-questions-at-sandy-hook.html>

Day would continue to attempt to cast doubt on the truth of the mass murder for years afterwards<sup>[27]</sup>.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://www.scifiwright.com/2012/07/for-any-independent-or-undecided-voters-out-there/#comment-2691602339>
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman\\_Cain\\_2012\\_presidential\\_campaign#Sexual\\_harassment\\_allegations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman_Cain_2012_presidential_campaign#Sexual_harassment_allegations)
- [3] it’s not strictly relevant that he hired Lin Wood but the guy will turn up much later in this story
- [4] Day wrote a lexicon in 2008 for some of the nicknames he uses including “Lizard queen = Hillary Clinton” <https://web.archive.org/web/20180119031641/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2008/03/lexicology.html>
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple\\_garment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_garment)
- [6] <https://web.archive.org/web/20160113182804/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2011/03/obama-is-not-eligible.html>
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austrian\\_School#Fundamental\\_tenets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austrian_School#Fundamental_tenets)
- [8] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2012/01/26/out-of-touch-rich-guys-and-tax-time-fun/>
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affordable\\_Care\\_Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affordable_Care_Act)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq\\_War#2011:\\_U.S.\\_withdrawal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_War#2011:_U.S._withdrawal)
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian\\_civil\\_war#Timeline](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_civil_war#Timeline)
- [12] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012\\_Benghazi\\_attack](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_Benghazi_attack)
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012\\_Aurora\\_Colorado\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_Aurora_Colorado_shooting)
- [14] <https://edition.cnn.com/2012/07/23/opinion/webster-aurora-shooter/index.html>
- [15] It later moved to ESPN [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FiveThirtyEight#2012\\_U.S.\\_elections](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FiveThirtyEight#2012_U.S._elections)
- [16] <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/unskewed-polling-dean-chambers-poll-bias-skewed-obama-romney-2012-9?r=US&IR=T>
- [17] <http://drawandstrike.blogspot.com/2012/10/so-how-do-you-end-up-with-surprise.html>
- [18] Initially here <https://web.archive.org/web/20140618041730/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2012/08/mitt-romney-chicago-republican.html> and closer to the election, more overtly, saying “Therefore, I endorse not voting for anyone for U.S. president.” <https://web.archive.org/web/20160113190537/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2012/11/2012-presidential-endorsement.html>
- [19] <https://web.archive.org/web/20171014005606/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2012/11/romney-305-obama-233.html>
- [20] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2012/11/03/my-2012-election-prediction-obama-294-romney-244/>
- [21] to his credit, Torgersen conceded he’d been wrong in a comment at *Whatever* post-election <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2012/11/07/the-schadenfreude-pie-i-make-this-week-will-be-dedicated-to-right-wing-pundits/#comment-396705>
- [22] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012\\_United\\_States\\_presidential\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_United_States_presidential_election)
- [23] Colorado 2012 turnout data is available here <https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/Results/Abstract/2012/general/turnout.html> and the maximum turnout of

ACTIVE voters in any county was less than 98% and the turnout of registered voters was even lower. Other claims made by Correia may be in reference to these claims <https://www.factcheck.org/2013/01/voting-conspiracies/>

- [24] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy\\_Hook\\_Elementary\\_School\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy_Hook_Elementary_School_shooting) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reactions\\_to\\_the\\_Sandy\\_Hook\\_Elementary\\_School\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reactions_to_the_Sandy_Hook_Elementary_School_shooting)
- [25] <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/huckabee-fox-news-shooting-god-2012-12>
- [26] post is here <https://monsterhunternation.com/2012/12/20/an-opinion-on-gun-control/> The interview on Fox is available on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzyuvl5Ry4g>
- [27] this article doesn't mention Vox Day but covers some of the theories Day advanced [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy\\_Hook\\_Elementary\\_School\\_shooting\\_conspiracy\\_theories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy_Hook_Elementary_School_shooting_conspiracy_theories)

## 19: SP1—How to get Correia Nominated for a Hugo

*Cue plaintive sad background music:*

*“Hello. I’m Larry Correia, and I need your help. You too can tell stuffy literati types to go screw themselves.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2012/02/23/how-you-can-make-a-difference-getting-me-nominated-for-a-hugo/>

After his successful bid to be a finalist for the Campbell/Astounding Award in 2011, Larry Correia made a second bid to be nominated for a Hugo Award in 2012. The post listed his book *Hard Magic* as well as some works by other authors, as well as the blog *Elitist Book Reviews* and the podcast *Writing Excuses* for Best Related Work. As with his 2011 post, the main criterion for inclusion was that they were people he knew.

The post had no obvious impact on the final nominations, possibly because Correia had not posted his request until after the deadline for memberships with nominating privileges had passed. *Writing Excuses* was a finalist but it would probably have been nominated regardless, similarly *Schlock Mercenary*’s listing for Best Graphic Story. More significantly, Correia’s friend Brad Torgersen was a finalist for Best Novelette and for the Campbell/Astounding Award for Best new writer<sup>[1]</sup>. However, Torgersen had been a winner in the 2011 *Analog Reader*’s Poll, so may well have been a finalist regardless<sup>[2]</sup>.

On January 8 2013, with his blog receiving more attention than ever after his *Opinion on Gun Control* post, Larry Correia made a third attempt to persuade people to nominate him for a Hugo Award.

*“The Hugo awards are the most prestigious thing you can get in sci-fi/fantasy (other than fat royalty checks, obviously). Getting nominated for a Hugo is a great resume builder. I was a finalist for the Campbell award for best new writer a couple of years back, and though the Campbell is a separate award from the Hugo, it works through the same system, same voters, and is even given away at the same ceremony. Going through that experience was very enlightening.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2013/01/08/how-to-get-correia-nominated-for-a-hugo/>

Larry had learnt from the previous year and let his readers know that if they wanted to nominate then they would need to purchase a supporting membership before the end of the month. Larry also added an us-versus-them narrative to his nomination request:

*“The fact that I write unabashed pulp action that isn’t heavy handed message fic annoys the literati to no end. When I got nominated for the Campbell, the literati message-fic crowd had a conniption fit. A European snob reviewer actually wrote “If Larry Correia wins the Campbell, it will END WRITING FOREVER.””*

*ibid*

As discussed in earlier chapters there is little indication of any fits (conniption or otherwise) nor any reviewer claiming he would end writing forever but it was a clever line. Correia also added a more practical incentive.

*“In previous years, in order to have informed voters, they’ve sent out the “Hugo Voter’s Packet” which includes eBooks of every nominee’s stuff. This isn’t just best novel, but all the Campbell nominees’ books, all the short stories, novellas, novelettes, all of the supporting works, comic books, graphic novels, supporting works, and pretty much all of that. Heck, I got Schlock Mercenary stuff last time! Basically, you get more money worth of reading material than the cost of your supporting membership, plus exploding literati heads!”*

*ibid*

The Hugo packet was material collated by each year’s Worldcon from finalists to help members vote on the Hugo Awards. The 2013 packet would indeed contain a lot of great material<sup>[4]</sup>. The packet had become an



established part of Hugo voting in 2009, having originally been organised by John Scalzi as a way of encouraging interest in the awards<sup>[5]</sup>.

At this point, Larry Correia's Hugo post was not very different from similar posts by other writers making their eligibility known. In particular, John Scalzi's "award pimpage" posts<sup>[6]</sup>. However, Correia was determined to make this a bit more of a campaign than he had in 2012. He followed up his first post with a second one:

*"As promised, I will continue to bug you guys about this until the end of the month. If you are not aware of my life-quest to make literati critics spontaneously combust, please read this first:"*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2013/01/16/how-to-get-correia-nominated-for-a-hugo-part-2-a-very-special-message/>

The post went on to be framed as a kind of public service announcement with a link to a sad song by the performer Sarah MacLachlan who had also recorded a song for the SPCA about helping abandoned pets. After a genuinely amusing contrast between pulp novelists pitted against college English departments, Correa went on to say:

*"For as little as \$60 you can become a voting member of Worldcon and nominate something awesome and filled with dragons, explosions, guns, heroism, actual good and evil, and a plot where stuff actually happens. And unlike Sarah McLachlan's sad puppy commercial, your donation also gets you a whole big ton of free eBooks and all of the nominated works, worth more than the cost of joining."*

ibid

But as well as asking people to vote for him, Larry Correia promised that he would be listing in a future post other things "which normally don't have a snowball's chance in hell of winning" on his site for his readers to consider.

He finally concluded:

*"So please tell your friends. I will continue to bug you about this for the rest of the month. Do not make me play the sad puppy song again..."*

ibid

At the end of February, he added a third post:

*"Okay, for the many of you who I talked into registering to nominate/vote for the Hugos with my relentless onslaught of sad puppies, by now you should have received an email with your PINs for voting. (I just got mine last night). Now, obviously I want everybody to vote for what they think is the best in each category. I'm not going to tell anybody what to do. If you think some particular book/story is absolutely amazing, then put it up."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2013/02/28/hugo-nominating-there-is-only-ten-days-left/>

In that post, he listed some suggestions for other categories and solicited a few more from readers in the comments. That post was followed up another on March 2, suggesting Hank Reinhardt's posthumous book on knives for Best Related Work<sup>[8]</sup>. This was followed on March 6 with a single sentence reminder to vote. Although the term "sad puppies" in reference to the SPCA advert theme had cropped up in earlier posts, this short post is the first time it is capitalised, with Correia referring to the campaign as 'my Sad Puppies posts'.

The final 'Sad Puppies post' of the campaign was on March 9, the day before nominations closed, with just a short reminder in a longer update post on other topics.

Although the first two posts had an emphasis on confounding literary snobs, the main emphasis had been firstly on voting for Correia's *Monster Hunter Legion* but also on signing up as supporting members. Correia had suggested other works and had encouraged other suggestions but there was no formal slate or any serious attempt to coordinate votes. Nor was there much in the way of politics aside from a dig at works with "heavy-handed message fic about the dangers of fracking and global warming and dying polar bears and robot rape as a bad feminist analogy with a villain who is a thinly veiled Dick Cheney".

It wasn't that Larry Correia did not feel politically frustrated with the culture of SF&F fandom. On March 13, not long after nominations closed, Correia posted on his blog a long, rambling thread of comments from Facebook in which he, Brad Torgersen, and Baen authors Tom Kratman and Michael Z. Williamson argued with some internet "liberals". It was not a high-quality argument and hard to summarise. Any single quote is very much out of context and much of it is about who said what first. For the full context, you would need to read the whole thread, however, I want to quote some parts of it, not to highlight not the back-and-forth of

the discussion, but to pick out some themes from Larry Correia that would arise in later versions of the Sad Puppy campaigns. For example:

*“When I got nominated for the Campbell award the literati had a complete come apart, up to and including “if Larry Correia wins the Campbell, it will ruin writing forever” and then, interestingly enough, I started getting smeared everywhere. About what? Not my writing, but rather, my politics. (see, I owned a machinegun store before I ever became a writer so I’ve always been out of the closet). Then I had people voting against me who’d never even read a single one of my eligible works, simply because I was a right winger.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2013/03/13/political-fun-with-facebook/>

As previous chapters have discussed, there’s little evidence of this and Correia changes the unsubstantiated quote from “end writing forever” to “ruin writing forever”. Correia’s surprise at the political pushback on social media (such as it was) to his own political views on social media will be a recurring theme. For a long period of time (literally from 1998) much of his pronouncements about guns and politics had been within RKBA-themed online forums<sup>[9]</sup>. Those forums were not politically homogeneous but as general environments, they were sympathetic to his positions and style of argument. On Facebook and within spaces orientated around books and fandom, Correia was encountering a much broader range of political viewpoints and modes of argument.

Correia also repeatedly uses the term “SMOF”. The acronym (for “Secret Masters of Fandom”) is used within fandom both as joking conspiracy theory and as a term-of-art for people who do the leg work in organising conventions. For example, an aside in the post (indicated in bold to show it wasn’t part of the original thread), Correia combines multiple issues that had been bothering him:

*“No. Seriously. Bacigalupi is a communist who thinks mankind is a scourge on mother earth. So, it is sadly ironic that his politics are far less controversial than mine in SMOFdom. Man, I wish that this thread had happened before my Sad Puppies campaign.”*

**ibid** <sup>[11]</sup>

April rolled around and so did disappointment for Larry Correia:

*“So, the Sad Puppies Hugo stacking campaign was a success for almost everybody else I pushed, but me, as we didn’t get enough to break MHL into best novel. It will be interesting to see how close we got when the numbers come out after the awards.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2013/04/01/the-sad-puppies-hugo-campaign-sorta-successful-for-everybody-but-me/>

More popular picks from the suggestions listed had made it to the ballot. Once again, the podcast *Writing Excuses* was a finalist, as was the graphic novel *Schlock Mercenary*. Brandon Sanderson was not only a finalist but would end up winning Best Novella for *The Emperor’s Soul* as well as *Writing Excuses* actually winning Best Related Work<sup>[12]</sup>. This win for Sanderson/Wells/Taylor/Kowal podcast was also a sort of tangential win for Larry Correia who had been a guest at a live broadcast at *the Life, The Universe and Everything* writer’s convention in Utah in 2012<sup>[13]</sup>. Another positive in the set of finalists for Correia, was Baen Publisher Toni Weiskopf in the Best Editor Long Form category. She would not win in the final vote but did come second in the run-offs with the Hugo going to Patrick Nielsen Hayden of Tor. However, Correia’s own novel fell just short — getting sufficient votes to be listed at the top of the long list of nominated works that didn’t make the finals<sup>[14]</sup>.

The “SMOF” theme from his Facebook thread (see above) was continued in his post on the nominations:

*“My friends at Elitist Book Reviews are nominated, and deserve a win for having the best review place on the internet. If they lose, it will be because somebody in SMOFdom discovered I like them.”*

**ibid**

In fact, Elitist Book Reviews would come last out of the five finalists (but above No Award in the run-off). Correia would go on:

*“And for those of you that follow this stuff, it is pretty much what you expect, as in a big SMOF popularity contest where various people with lots of Worldcon factions politicking for them are instanoms, and everybody else is shut out. Luckily, only one of the nominees for best novel is a dying polar*

*bear story of global warming sadness and evil capitalism, which would normally win, but it will surely lose to Scalzi, who is liberal blogger who happens to write books too, and God help us if they ever start doing Doctor Who novelizations because that will be your five nominees a year.”*

ibid

*Doctor Who* novelisations by this point were older as a publishing phenomenon than Larry Correia<sup>[15]</sup>. The antipathy towards *Doctor Who* was due to the popularity of the revived series among Hugo voters, leading to multiple nominations in the Best Dramatic Short Form category as well as a Best Related Work nomination for a book about the series.

Correia would go on to use an apparently bitter tone about the other Best Novel finalists:

*“For the other Best Novel noms, Lois Bujold is awesome, but she’s won like 8 Hugos. Mira Grant is cool as heck. In person, she’s really great, and I like her, but notice that since she is beloved by SMOF, she is nominated in every Hugo category except Car of the Year. Saladin’s a nice guy, and beloved by SMOF (we were up for the Campbell at the same time), but I’m predicting he’ll come in last, because this is his only book and he’s not built up a huge SMOF backer faction yet, but just having nominated a guy with an ethnic name will make the SMOFers feel all warm and tingly inside and good about themselves, so that’ll be enough for them. (Note, I’m not actually placing any bets that the voters actually read all the works).”*

ibid

It is interesting that there is no indication that Larry Correia himself had read any of these works. For example, he is quick to dismiss Saladin Ahmed’s nomination as being due to his ethnic name but had not engaged with his book to see if, perhaps, it was really good. In fact, Mira Grant’s *Blackout* came last after Saladin Ahmed’s *Throne of the Crescent Moon* in the run-offs. Grant aka Seanan McGuire had indeed secured a record-breaking five nominations in four categories under her two writing names.

In the comments, Kevin Standlee (a long-term Worldcon volunteer and at the time Chair of the WSFS Mark Protection Committee<sup>[16]</sup>), pushed back on some of Correia’s SMOF-conspiracy theories.

*“I think you significantly overstate the significance of the SMOFS (“Secret Masters of Fandom”), which represent the perhaps 500 (at most) people who actively are involved in the organization and operation of Worldcon and who take an active interest in the rules of the World Science Fiction Society.*

*1. They don’t form a monolithic bloc, no matter what you seem to think. We (and I’d count myself among them) argue incessantly. Go look at the video of the past couple of WSFS Business Meetings (links to which are on the wsfs.org website) and you’ll see just the tip of the iceberg of the debates.*

*2. There were over 1300 people nominating this year, which is a lot more than the total number of people who could be considered “insiders.”*

*3. All it takes to be a SMOF is to work hard and get involved. Remember that 90% of success consists of showing up.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2013/04/01/the-sad-puppies-hugo-campaign-sorta-successful-for-everybody-but-me/#comment-28694>

The idea that things were happening because of just organic actions by Hugo voters rather than because of behind-the-scenes shenanigans was not something Larry Correia could wholly accept. Discussing the issue of *Doctor Who* again, Correia predicted that *Writing Excuses* was bound to lose despite being “insanely popular” and “very helpful” because it was up against *Chicks Unravel Time: Women Journey Through Every Season of Doctor Who* in Best Related Work. To support this claim Correia pointed out:

*“The one time there was a threat of a big upset was when Game of Thrones (Martin is another favorite with his own big fan faction) was going up against Doctor Who (not only that, but another fan favorite- Neil Gaiman directed episode!) So all of a sudden Game of Thrones wound up in a different category that year, and all the TV episodes together became long form, that way they could both win their respective Hugos and everybody was happy. Except for every other TV production team in the world that doesn’t have a Hugo Faction in place.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2013/04/01/the-sad-puppies-hugo-campaign-sorta-successful-for-everybody-but-me/#comment-28708>

This was a sort of funhouse mirror version of events. The first season of the HBO adaptation of George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* had in 2012 received more nominations as a whole series for Best Dramatic Presentation Long Form than any single episode had for Best Dramatic Presentation Short Form that year. Correia's version of events was even more absurd because in 2013 (the year now in question) the opposite had happened and a *Game of Thrones* episode was up against *Doctor Who* episodes. Both *Game of Thrones* and *Writing Excuses* would beat their various *Doctor Who* challengers that year, defying Correia's expectations.

Larry Correia's specifics about the Hugo Award were often shaky and his claims poorly thought out. However, the general concern about the Hugo Awards was not confined to Correia. Author Harry Connolly expressed some mild disenchantment with the awards<sup>[17]</sup>. However, he was sharply critical of what Correia had said about Saladin Ahmed:

*"That's grade-A horseshit right there. However small the nominating pool was, whatever value should be placed on the Hugo itself, they nominated the man's book because they liked the man's book. Attributing it to "an ethnic name" is racist bullshit."*

<http://harryconnolly.com/how-i-feel-about-the-hugo-awards-spoiler-meh/>

Justin Landon at *Staffers Book Reviews* had stronger complaints than Connolly and more coherent ones than Correia.

*"Looking at Correia and McGuire and the obvious (to me) impact they've had on the ballot leads me to believe that the Hugo Award, which has always been an insular convention award at its best moments, has become an easily manipulated (not maliciously mind you) process that provides undue efficacy to small and dedicated fan bases. Don't get me wrong, I don't particularly bear any ill will toward these fan bases, or the authors who engender them, but under this fundamentally flawed regime I ask myself. . . why does anyone care about the Hugos? Whys are often elusive, but the answer is they shouldn't."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130404093342/http://www.staffersbookreview.com/2013/04/can-we-stop-talking-about-the-hugos-now.html>

Landon was describing better the issue that Correia was clouding with diversions about SMOFs. Fandom is made up of fans and fans tended to be fans of particular things. This is true almost by definition of what a fan is. The nomination system of the Hugo Awards asked members to list five things per category. A consequence of that was if there was a large majority of fans who liked, for example, *Doctor Who*, then several individual *Doctor Who* episodes would gain more votes than other TV shows, even if the majority of voters didn't nominate *Doctor Who*. This structural flaw in the process didn't always produce a limited range of finalists but in some circumstances, it could.

Landon made clear that he did not believe anybody was acting maliciously but there was a problem and unspoken was the point that the problem was vulnerable to a group who were acting maliciously. What to do? Landon had a suggestion:

*"The only solution is a complete excoriation of the existing Hugo bylaws, a reordering on par with the British Fantasy Award that collapsed under its own skein of controversy a year ago. Or. . . the formation of a new award at Worldcon, one that truly represents not the whims of voting blocs, but the genuine interests of forwarding the genre. This award should recognize all the various forms of contributions in all the ways the tired mechanisms of the Hugo fail to. To put it even more bluntly, it's time for the most significant award in science fiction and fantasy be awarded not to the most convincing cult leaders in fandom, but to the individuals doing the best work. If we give a shit enough to try. Until then, I'm done talking about the Hugos"*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130404093342/http://www.staffersbookreview.com/2013/04/can-we-stop-talking-about-the-hugos-now.html>

Did science fiction need a very different kind of award than the Hugo Awards? Landon wasn't the only person who thought so.

In March of 2012, Baen author and Heinlein devotee, Sarah A. Hoyt had proposed a new more positive style of science fiction that she called "Human Wave" as a kind of antidote to the New Wave of science fiction that had begun in the 1960s as a challenge to the style promoted by John W. Campbell. In February of 2013 she was thinking about how this approach to writing could be better promoted:

Her essay firstly recapped what she meant by "Human Wave":

*“So, we’ve named the type of fiction we like – stories in which the human wins, or at least goes on fighting, and in which humans in general and often (gasp) Western Culture Subgroup humans are the good guys. Because we’re brats and pests, we named it Human WAVE to tweak the New Wave people as they drown in a morass of grey goo.”*

<https://accordingtohovt.com/2013/02/23/awards-rubber-rolls-and-humans-waving/>

After outlining some of the general issues with promoting a new literary movement, she advanced her core thesis:

*“But the thing is in indie publishing, and in all publishing as it moves to Amazon and other electronic venues, being able to put on the cover a little seal that says “winner of the blah blah award” (we’re not calling it a blah blah award. No, you can’t talk me into it.) does give you a huge leg up. Most of the readers who are rediscovering SF (or anything else) because they can finally find stuff they want to read, see the Hugo and it doesn’t say to them “Award given by small group of people who attend Worldcon.” They see “Award” which means someone other than the author’s cat read this masterpiece and approved of – or at least finished—it. That means they’re twice as likely to buy it.”*

ibid

Awards added kudos to a book and in a world where self-publishing eBooks had become viable, an award could help promote a book.

But were the Hugo Awards actually broken? After all, many of Larry Correia’s key predictions proved to be false in 2013. Was this just people observing the same generational transition from old to new that the Hugos had been experiencing since the 1960s? More relevantly, were the Hugo winners actually *good*? To answer that question we have to read some books and what better book to read than the Hugo-winning novel of the SFWA President?

## Footnote

- [1] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/2012-hugo-awards/>
- [2] [http://www.sfad.com/Analog\\_Readers\\_Poll\\_2011](http://www.sfad.com/Analog_Readers_Poll_2011)
- [3] see previous chapter
- [4] <http://file770.com/2013-hugo-voter-packet-released/>
- [5] <http://file770.com/hugo-voter-packet/>
- [6] e.g., <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2012/01/03/the-2012-award-pimp-page-post/>
- [7] I assume this is the advert <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IO9d2PpP7tQ> but it is a different song than the one Larry Correia listed.
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hank\\_Reinhardt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hank_Reinhardt)
- [9] again, see earlier chapters
- [10] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMOF> and [https://fanlore.org/wiki/Secret\\_Masters\\_of\\_Fandom](https://fanlore.org/wiki/Secret_Masters_of_Fandom)
- [11] I don’t believe Paolo Bacigalupi is a Communist (although I could be mistaken). His books do contain political and environmental themes but his blog at the time didn’t have many political posts (an exception here <https://web.archive.org/web/20081002053241/https://windupstories.com/2008/09/29/mccain-plus-palin-equals/>). A more likely explanation is that Correia was getting Bacigalupi mixed up with China Miéville ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China\\_Mi%C3%A9ville](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China_Mi%C3%A9ville)) who is a Trotskyist. Miéville and Bacigalupi were joint winners of the 2010 Hugo Award, which is around the time that Correia began paying attention to it.
- [12] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/2013-hugo-awards/>
- [13] <https://writingexcuses.com/2012/04/22/writing-excuses-7-17-guns-and-fiction/>
- [14] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2013HugoStatistics.pdf>
- [15] 1964 was the first but the influential *Target* series of novelisations started in 1973 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Doctor\\_Who\\_novelisations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Doctor_Who_novelisations)
- [16] Worldcon is technically organised by the World Science Fiction Society <http://www.wsfs.org/> but the WSFS has no permanent central organisation and is organised as a kind of relay race by each year’s convention. The Mark Protection committee keeps an eye on trademarks and is effectively the only ongoing continuity part of the WSFS
- [17] I believe this was originally on his LiveJournal but is now available here <http://harryjconnolly.com/how-i-feel-about-the-hugo-awards-spoiler-meh/>
- [18] <https://accordingtohovt.com/2012/03/21/what-is-human-wave-science-fiction-3/>



## 20: Redshirts

### Context

In Chapter 19 Larry Correia was bemoaning the state of the Hugo Awards after failing to be a finalist after the first Sad Puppy campaign. As discussed, Correia was not alone in being dissatisfied with the 2013 Hugo Awards but here I wander into one of the distortions of writing a historical project. In retrospect, because of later events, Larry Correia's Sad Puppy posts gain greater significance but at the time they were more of an addition to a wider list of complaints from more diverse sources.

Not long after the 2013 Hugo finalists had been announced, German fan-writer and indie author Cora Buhlert wrote a lengthy post as a round-up of the various people expressing unhappiness with the set of finalists. Buhlert herself was puzzled by the controversy:

*“Odd. I’d have thought that this year’s Hugo shortlist was pretty much uncontroversial. I mean, we have a healthy representation of women and writers of colour, most of the nominations went to works and writers that are popular or at least talked about, there are very few “What the Fuck?” nominees compared with other years (e.g. last year’s nominees included a filk CD and a Hugo acceptance speech from the previous year). Sure, there still are issues, particularly with certain categories, but there always are issues.”*

<http://corabuhlert.com/2013/04/04/hugo-nomination-reactions-or-why-the-fuck-is-this-controversial/><sup>[1]</sup>

Meanwhile, Ursula Vernon (the 2012 Hugo Winner for Best Graphic Story) was looking more broadly at Worldcon and its capacity to cope with shifting demographics. In particular, Vernon was concerned about how Worldcon was adjusting to the ageing of the convention but not because many of the fans were older:

*“Now, before anybody gets their bowels in an uproar about ageism or about how we’re blaming fandom’s intransigence on old people, let me hastily say that this is a symptom, not necessarily the cause.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20131113115854/http://www.redwombatstudio.com/blog/?p=5642>

Vernon contrasted Worldcon with two other kinds of fandom she was involved with both of which had an older demographic: gardening and birdwatching. As well as explaining how both gardening and birdwatching have much the same dynamics as science fiction fandom in general, Vernon contrasted these other communities with Worldcon.

*“The problem of Worldcon, sez I, and of a subset of SF fandom in general is not that it is full of old people. All my fandoms are full of old people. So far, it hasn’t been a problem. They’ve generally been glad to see me, and I’ve been glad to see them. The guy with the scope who got me my Elegant Tern was probably a contemporary of Jules Verne, and the guy who patiently got me onto a Cerulean Warbler in High Island was weathered like a megalith. And I would put any curmudgeon in SF, no matter how legendary, up against the late Henry Mitchell, who would have turned them into mulch and planted daffodils amongst their bones. No, the problem is that it is insular and intransigent and run by rules (Robert’s Rules of Order, ahem\*\*\*) that favor the status quo over change. It is that it has problems, and one of the manifestations of that problem is that young people aren’t showing up.”*

*ibid*

Vernon’s analysis tried to find a path between acceptance of the status quo and unfairly demonising older fans. Organised fandom was naturally going to skew older than fandom in a broader sense as it relied on people with the time, money and experience to run complex events as volunteers. Commercial pop-culture-orientated conventions could draw bigger and younger crowds but by their nature were not events controlled by fans.

Multi-Hugo-winning fan writer and a veteran of several decades of Worldcons, Mike Glycer<sup>[2]</sup> noted (amid a different Worldcon related controversy) that the term ‘SMOF’ was being used pejoratively in these broad discussions:

“However, as we have been going through an especially unhappy season with lots of blogging about the evil, nasty conrunners, some of which has been reported here, there’s been a trend back toward the word having a pejorative meaning in some circles.”

<http://file770.com/cornell-apologizes-for-smof-routine/>

Organised fandom was ageing but then organised fandom had always been ageing as that was a basic feature of a universe with a time axis orientated towards a direction of greater entropy. The question people were struggling with was whether Worldcon and the Hugo Awards could adapt quickly enough to changing societal expectations, particularly around issues of women, LGBTQI issues, disability and race/ethnicity. Looking through the majority of these posts, there were two different expectations:

- Worldcon (and hence the Hugo Awards) had an unfixable issue and hence would slowly fade into irrelevance due to the control of an ageing set of fans.
- An ageing fanbase was a self-correcting problem. Generational change will happen but fans (including older fans) will need to help this happen.

What nobody was predicting was a third option: a younger Generation-X set of fans/authors intentionally pushing back against social change in science fiction.

Could fans control the fate of fandom or was the future set by uncaring social forces? Were the Hugo Awards simply playthings of the past? That the 2013 Hugo Award for Best Novel (the highest-profile category) was a novel titled after a long-running<sup>[3]</sup> (but inaccurate<sup>[4]</sup>) joke about the original *Star Trek* series, did imply that the Hugo voters might be looking more to the past than the future. Or was it? As John Scalzi himself noted in 2013 after winning:

“Part of the “fun” of winning the Hugo for Best Novel is that after your book wins, people try to explain why it won, because for some reason the answer of “this is the book that largest number of people who voted for the Hugo Awards thought should win the award” is existentially unsatisfying.”

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2013/09/03/hugo-thoughts-2013/>

Other factors in the victory for *Redshirts* might have included:

- John Scalzi was the high-profile President of the SFWA
- John Scalzi had been active for left-wing causes — a claim made by Baen author John Ringo, which we will return to in a later chapter
- *Redshirts* was a compromise winner between an establishment choice (Lois McMaster Bujold) and ‘new blood’ candidates (Mira Grant or Saladin Ahmed)
- *Redshirts* was fun and populist and hence came top of what was just a popularity contest

It is hard to dismiss these factors but equally, each one would have worked as an explanation of why the novel would have lost<sup>[5]</sup>. The discussion about the operational and social mechanics of a Hugo win aren’t pointless but they miss the central question: was *Redshirts* a good Hugo win?

There had been some arguments that the 2011 Hugo winner *Blackout/All Clear* was a less strong winner than previous years<sup>[6]</sup> and more generally critics have attempted to identify stronger and weaker periods of Hugo Award winners. In considering what the future fate of the Hugo Awards should be (or what alternatives should exist) a central question is what the Hugo Awards should be rewarding? Larry Correia’s first Sad Puppies campaign characterised the awards as being insufficiently populist. A Guardian article from 2013 stated that the Hugo Awards were seen as being too populist<sup>[7]</sup>. What was generally agreed was that the Hugo Awards had a lasting status whether the critic writing about them felt that was deserved or not.

That status that is still attached to the Hugo Awards is nebulous<sup>[8]</sup>, but intrinsic to it is a long track record of rewarding novels (in particular) that have, in later years been seen as classics of the genre. A contemporaneous review of *Redshirts* asked the question of whether it was the best novel of 2012 by comparing it to three past Hugo Award-winning novels:

- 1961 – *A Canticle for Leibowitz* – Walter M. Miller, Jr.
- 1962 – *A Stranger in a Strange Land* – Robert Heinlein
- 1963 – *The Man in the High Castle* – Philip K. Dick<sup>[9]</sup>

They aren’t the three Hugo ‘greats’ I’d pick but they exemplify a way people evaluate the Hugo Awards: Will this novel be later regarded as a classic of the genre? Rather like how the inner working of a machine-learning algorithm might be a mysterious black-box so long as it produces good results, the quirky mix of voting rules and fannish arguments underlying the Hugo Awards can be evaluated as good and effective just so long as they keep picking stories that are well regarded in the future.



That was a tough standard for *Redshirts* to meet. For a start, it is (at least superficially) a comedy and the Hugo Awards had rarely awarded comedies in the novel categories. Not that science fiction or fans or fandom more generally was immune to comedy, quite the opposite<sup>[10]</sup> but arguably the very status of the Hugo Award put comedic novels at a disadvantage.

Secondly, *Redshirts* was seen as derivative (based on *Star Trek*) but also had an odd structure — the main plot followed by three ‘codas’ that were unusually written short stories tangential to the main plot. It was also written in a style that was distinctly that of John Scalzi but also, in particular, was often in the same sort of snarky/flippant tone used by Scalzi in his blogging and social media.

Many reviewers at the time were underwhelmed by it. Aidan Moher said of it that it was “fast, fun and forgettable” and that it was also “pretty, predictable and prosaic”<sup>[11]</sup>. Other reviewers complained about the poor world building<sup>[12]</sup>, others liked it in parts but found the meta-fictional aspects made it ‘lose its sparkle’<sup>[13]</sup>, whereas one reviewer simply stated that it ‘sucks’<sup>[14]</sup>.

## ***Redshirts***

When beginning this project to examine the history (and beyond) of the Puppy Kerfuffle of 2015, I decided to revisit *Redshirts* to see if (nine years after it had been published) it would feel hopelessly dated or whether time had improved it. Rather than re-read the physical book, I chose the audiobook, partly because during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 I had taken to exercise while listening to books on my phone. This was a wise choice because Scalzi’s metafictional homage to *Star Trek* is narrated by his friend Wil Wheaton, the former child actor who played Wesley Crusher in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

The premise of *Redshirts* is simple. A set of new ensigns start work as minor members of the crew of quasi-military starship of the kind made famous by *Star Trek*. In *Redshirts*, *Star Trek*’s federation is called the Universal Union and the homologue of the Enterprise is the Intrepid. Initially, the story takes the course that the basic premise (and title) suggest. The main characters are placed in the role of what would be minor, disposable characters in *Star Trek* and in the process, they get to comment on, joke about and be disturbed by the various plot holes, cliches and often senseless deaths that we might expect from a generic TV space opera. It is an entertaining idea and similar to the idea that won the film *Galaxy Quest* a Hugo for Best Dramatic Presentation in 2000.

If the story only went that far, then it could well have been an entertaining but perhaps forgettable novelette. Instead, this is just an introduction to a set of layers within which Scalzi gets to examine questions about writing, character, time and predestination. *Redshirts* is a class clown, using jokes as a front to express deeper anxieties and troubling questions.

The central character, Ensign Andrew Dahl, learns from the mysterious Jenkins (a crew member who has hidden himself away amid the service tunnels of the ship) that the answer to the strange goings-on aboard ship is the ‘narrative’: a suspension of normal reality in which events and behaviour warp to serve the needs of a storyline. There is an underlying horror to the circumstance that Dahl and his friends have found themselves in that Scalzi doesn’t entirely address but which the grieving and paranoid Jenkins has the strongest sense of.

There’s another element here, that I’d wholly missed the first time I had read this. Dahl and his friends are initially quite superficially drawn characters. Only after meeting Jenkins properly (who is a side character but who is given a more distinct personality) does Scalzi start drawing them out more. They still aren’t deeply drawn characters but it is more than simply being further along in the novel. Dahl gains depth as he attempts to take more control over events, as he essentially tries to assert that he isn’t a disposable character in a pulpy space opera.

Discovering that their lives (and deaths) are being intermittently hi-jacked by the plot of a 21st-century cheap knock-off of *Star Trek*, Dahl and his friends plot to travel back in time. The time travel process is absurd but only because the way the characters can time travel is by exploiting an absurd time travel plot from an earlier episode. For good measure, they also kidnap a member of the bridge crew, Kerensky, who is a kind of Chekov-like character who is prone to being attacked/injured during ‘narrative’ episodes only to fully recover by the end of an episode.

The shift back in time is consistent with classic *Star Trek* plots which place the crew in twentieth-century circumstances but in *Redshirts*, it takes the story into a different place as the characters learn about their parallel selves — the minor actors who briefly played them in the “real” TV show.

The ethics of creating a fictional character are normally inconsequential but *Redshirts* takes the premise needed for the initial parody aspect of the novel and begins raising questions about it. The deaths of the trope-redshirts are low stakes precisely because we, as viewers, have not engaged with them as characters. Kerensky’s numerous brushes with death are the lazy screenwriter’s way of creating dramatic tension but

only because Kerensky is a recurring character in the show that the audience knows. TV plays with a depressing aspect of our functional morality: we discount people we don't have a sense of as individuals. The trope-redshirt isn't just the unfortunate security guy on an away team but every single person we fail to see as a distinct individual who dies a needless death. One missing person, given a name and a personality on a news report, can raise more public concern than large numbers of people stripped of individuality by the sheer volume of death. Running through *Redshirts* is a spectre of death that is our own callousness towards people that we don't know.

The three codas that follow the main plot were criticised at the time as the most self-indulgent aspect of the novel. There is some merit to the criticism insofar as Scalzi uses them to demonstrate three ways of writing and names each coda after the narrative style used (first person, second person, third person) which also presents a minor puzzle of identity.

Returning to the novel, I feel the codas are not only the strongest part of *Redshirts* but retroactively uplift the whole novel. Firstly, they show a commitment to the central idea of the novel that a writer has a debt towards secondary characters. It is an impossible debt and maybe an absurd and incoherent form of guilt, but still, having raised the issue Scalzi attempts to rectify the fact that in telling Andrew Dahl's story he has created spinning tangents of other stories of other characters.

The codas follow three people. The first is a series of blog posts which is both a lazy strategy for Scalzi as they are essentially his daily writing style and also quite effective. The post follows the main writer of the TV show that the titular Redshirts have escaped from. Having learnt about the consequences of his lazy writing, the author (who unavoidably sounds like John Scalzi even if he is a distinct character) now struggles with writer's block.

The second story is more moving but a little hard to recap without explaining the major plot details of the story. Like the second it also deals with a person in the 21st-century associated with the show but raises both emotional questions and philosophical questions about identity. It presents a kind of Philip K. Dick-style question of unreality, to which we the readers already know the science-fictional explanation.

The final story closes the circle of the wider plot. The character Jenkins, whose role in the main plot was to info-dump the explanation of the narrative to Dahl, was driven to investigating the strange circumstances onboard the *Intrepid* after his wife was killed in an away mission. For the TV show, Jenkins was simply a grieving husband needed for a single scene. The third coda follows the actress who played his wife, another 'redshirt' killed due to lazy writing. Via events in the main plot, the actress had become aware of this otherworldly existence of a woman who looked exactly like her. It is a genuinely moving piece that is technically a short story but which only works within the context of the whole novel.

I found, in early 2021, that I was impressed and deeply moved by *Redshirts*. Yes, you can pick over the tics and standard plays that are the signatures of John Scalzi's writing but I'd contend as a novel it is a brilliant synthesis of Scalzi's multiple writing styles. He uses comedy and flippancy to hide a novel that is ambitious both as meta-fiction, and as homage, and as a reflection on the process of writing. Like onions and ogres, it has layers. Hiding depth in superficiality is an ambitious move and like a lot of Hugo Award finalists, *Redshirts* is not lacking in flaws but is full of ambition.

Not everybody will like *Redshirts*: comedy, in particular, is a personal taste and the comic aspect of the novel is the route into the deeper aspects of both the story and the writing. It is a novel worth reading nonetheless, especially for aspiring authors or for people looking to see what science fiction is capable of as a genre (and I'll contend that science fiction is neither the best nor most popular of genres but it is the most ambitious). I don't know if it was the best choice for a Hugo Award in 2013, indeed there is no way of knowing because there may be better novels that may still have gone unnoticed, but it was a worthy winner and a good addition to the roster.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] Cora Buhlert wrote several posts capturing the ongoing discussion in 2013, all of which are worth a read to get a sense of the debate but which collectively have too much material to cover here <http://corabuhlert.com/2013/09/16/yet-more-worldcon-and-hugo-reactions/> and <http://corabuhlert.com/2013/09/09/hugos-and-worldcon-redux/>
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike\\_Glyer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Glyer)
- [3] <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/RedShirt>
- [4] <https://web.archive.org/web/20130222074856/http://www.significancemagazine.org/details/webexclusive/4381371/Keep-your-redshirt-on-a-bayesian-exploration-of-character-deaths-in-Star-Trek.html>

- [5] SFWA President has not been much of a passport to a Hugo win in the past, political controversy is a mixed blessing, middle-of-the-road or populist is not typically a route to Hugo victory
- [6] see chapter 16 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/03/25/debarkle-chapter-16-larry-goes-to-reno/>
- [7] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/sep/02/hugo-awards-2013-science-fiction>
- [8] various attempts at Nebula Award puns have since been deleted.
- [9] <http://beamzine.com/redshirts/>
- [10] I already mentioned the Great Staple War of 1934 in an earlier chapter [https://fancylopedia.org/First Staple War](https://fancylopedia.org/First_Staple_War)
- [11] <https://aidanmoher.com/blog/review/2013/03/review-of-redshirts-by-john-scalzi-2/>
- [12] <https://dallaslibrary2.org/blogs/bookedSolid/2013/03/book-review-redshirts-by-john-scalzi/>
- [13] <https://www.britishfantasysociety.org/reviews/redshirts-by-john-scalzi-book-review/>
- [14] <https://www.michaeljohngrist.com/2013/10/why-redshirts-should-be-first-to-die-book-review/>

## 21: Dramatis Personae — N.K. Jemisin

Nora Ketiá Jemisin has some notable Hugo Award firsts: the first Black woman to win the Hugo Award for Best Novel, the first author to win three consecutive Hugo Awards for Best Novel. Those impressive wins are still a long way away in the history of the Sad Puppy Debarkle but within the story of a conservative counter-reaction to social change, they will play a key part. Jemisin's 2015 novel *The Fifth Season* is, I believe, exactly the kind of stand-out novel that future voters for Hugo Awards will use as a yardstick to compare later finalists. It is also a novel, that if events had played out differently in the history I am recounting, would never have been nominated.

As with earlier Dramatis Personae essays, this chapter uses two key sources:

- N.K. Jemisin's Wikipedia page [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N.\\_K.\\_Jemisin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N._K._Jemisin)
- N.K. Jemisin's own biographical press kit <https://nkjemisin.com/about/press-kit/>

Any unreferenced statement will be either my opinion or drawn from one of those links listed above. Also, like the earlier Dramatis Personae chapters, this biographical essay only follows its subject up to the current point in the narrative. For Jemisin it will take the reader to about 2013 but in the process, we will double back to years and events that we have already visited in earlier chapters. Readers should also note that this chapter is in the context of the history of a conservative/right-wing reaction within science fiction which will result in a different emphasis on events and included references to people who might not appear (or be of less significance) in a biographical essay of Jemisin for a different context.

Jemisin was born in the early 1970s in the Midwest but grew up in Alabama and in New York City. She trained as a psychologist but had a long interest in writing fiction. Like many of the people I'm discussing in these biographies, her shift towards writing professionally took a more substantial step in her early thirties.

In 2002 she attended the Viable Paradise writers workshop, based in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts<sup>[1]</sup>. Writer's workshops play an important role in publishing in part by supporting social networks as well as helping new writers navigate professional spaces. Of people who will appear later, Viable Paradise workshop has included attendees such as Myke Cole, Deirdre Saoirse Moen<sup>[2]</sup> and Marko Kloos<sup>[3]</sup>, as well as instructors such as Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Steven Gould, Laura J. Mixon and John Scalzi.

Jemisin's experience at Viable Paradise convinced her to work on short stories although her interest has been in novels. She acquired an agent in 2004:

*"I'd acquired her on the strength of a novel that I thought would definitely be my breakout. It had everything the genre seemed to want, and it was the best writing I'd ever done to that point. I quickly wrote a sequel, since it was burning in my brain, and then I waited. And waited. It didn't sell."*

<https://nkjemisin.com/2010/03/i-am-the-market/>

In the 2000s she started getting traction with her short fiction, with her work appearing at *Escape Pod* and in *Jim Baen's Universe* magazine<sup>[5]</sup>. Jemisin's 2009 short story in *Clarkesworld*, "Non-Zero Probabilities"<sup>[6]</sup> led to critical recognition as well as becoming a Nebula and a Hugo Award finalist in 2010. That same year would see the release of her first published novel<sup>[7]</sup>, which was also featured as a "Big Idea" post on John Scalzi's *Whatever* blog. Jemisin explained some of her thoughts about epic fantasy and how she had worked those into her novel:

*"Yeah, sure, there's a certain mental comfort food in the idea of putting the world back to rights. But there's always a part of me that wonders, **which** rights should it be put back to? Did the heroes make the best choice, or just the easiest one? Who gets to answer that question? But such questions aren't easy to answer, which is why I think a lot of fantasy simply doesn't try."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2010/02/26/the-big-idea-n-k-jemisin/>

Jemisin had been discussing these ideas about the hidden assumptions within fantasy (and speculative fiction more generally) for some time. In 2007 she took up a guest blogging spot at *The Angry Black Woman* blog to outline her perspective on the state of the genre:

*"Speculative fiction (SF) has been, historically, one of the most racist genres in American literature. Oh, it hasn't had as many Stepinfetchits or Uncle Toms as the mainstream, but there are few more powerful ways to wrong a people than to wipe it out of existence, and this is precisely what countless*

*SF novels have done. If the crew of the Space Navy Vessel Whozimawhatsit is all white; if a vast medieval epic spanning several continents contains no one browner than a tan; if the scientific accomplishments of ancient non-white empires are dismissed as alien leftovers; if China is the only country toasted by an invading space warship; all of these is a kind of literary genocide. (Yes, genocide.) And it's something that SF has not only done for years, but continues to do; shit like this gets published all. the. time."*

<http://theangryblackwoman.com/2007/04/21/no-more-lily-white-futures-and-monochrome-myths/>

In the same essay, Jemisin explained how she was not only changing how fantasy engaged with more authentically diverse worlds but was also challenging some of the genre's institutions. She picks up on a recurring theme from authors across the political spectrum at this time: the science fiction and fantasy genres are in trouble in terms of sales and in terms of an ageing fandom.

*"When I attend SF conventions, I don't just stand out because I'm black, but because I'm young; the core of the fandom is literally dying of old age. There's a lot of debate in the SF literary world as to whether the genre really is in trouble or not, but AFAIC, the signs ain't good."*

ibid

To exemplify her point, Jemisin had asked SFWA members on the organisation's LiveJournal<sup>[8]</sup> what the SFWA was doing to improve the demographics away from the "white and male". The response had been disappointing:

*"My question was a simple one, in essence: what has SFWA done to encourage diversity? My first answer was a resounding blog silence for about 24 hours. Later, SFWA members repeatedly pointed out to me that SFWA has had a handful of black (and female, and gay, and so on) members for years. Others pointed out that SFWA doesn't discourage anyone from joining the organization. Someone noted that SFWA donated money to another organization for a diversity scholarship, though did nothing itself. Others seemed quite incensed that I implied SFWA was racist (I hadn't). One accused me of trying to turn SFWA into the NAACP."*

ibid

Jemisin would become a regular blogger at *Angry Black Woman* using the handle Nojojojo. There and elsewhere she discussed issues around SFF as a genre, race, racism, immigration and feminism.

In 2008 an author received an Islamophobic rejection letter from *Helix* magazine, saying that "most of the SF magazines are very leery of publishing anything that might offend the sheet heads"<sup>[9]</sup>. Jemisin was one of several authors who, to publicly protest *Helix's* response, set up an author website publishing fiction as a counterweight to the ingrained issues like this within SFF publishing. Other authors involved included Ann Leckie, Yoon Ha Lee and Rachel Swirsky. At the site, Jemisin introduced her author statement with a brief anecdote

*"I will never forget the first time I heard a young cousin of mine—only a little older than 12, the "golden age" as they call it in this genre—say, "Why do you write that stuff? That's white people's stuff."*

*Science fiction and fantasy, he meant. White people's stuff."*

<http://transcriptase.org/statements/nkjemisin/#more-324>

Jemisin went on to say:

*"But there's another reason why my young cousin might've decided that SF/F is the sole province of one group of people, and that is because there's a stunning amount of bigotry rampant within the SF/F community itself. In just the past year I've seen prominent, bestselling SF/F authors calling for the criminalization of homosexuality, advocating the death-through-medical-neglect of Spanish-speaking immigrants (just the illegals, note, as if that's better), and trivializing rape and sexual objectification. The Helix incident is only the latest salvo in a long-running war by a few individuals in the SF community against several million other members of the human race."*

ibid<sup>[10]</sup>

However, this was a prelude to her wider point. What was worse, in her view, than the overt bigotry was the surrounding silence.

*“In neutral situations silence can have multiple meanings, positive and negative and in-between. To a member of a marginalized group, however, silence in response to bigotry can only be negative, because it connotes approval, or at best ambivalence. The golden age of 12 is also the much less shiny age at which many children of oppressed groups begin to understand bigotry, often through unpleasant personal experience. And these children are going to wonder why there’s such a disconnect between what the SF/F community says—e.g., that it’s progressive and welcomes diversity—and what it does—e.g., that so many of its members remain silent in the face of hate. And these kids are likely to conclude, as my cousin did, that SF/F is Not For Them.”*

ibid

The silence (or intellectualised civility) in the face of overt bigotry was a larger problem because it involved far more people. The silence allowed the overt bigotry to work its effect of making it clear that some people would not be welcomed in science fiction communities (of fans or of writers or of both). While people not targeted by overt bigotry might assume that the overt ideological racists (or misogynists or homophobes) were powerless minorities whose extreme views would never get an upper hand, there were people who were effectively enforcing prejudice in an immediate and direct manner. The overt prejudice and the surrounding silence all served to marginalise the already marginalised and silence some voices. Not everybody’s freedom of speech was given equal worth.

Towards the end of that statement, Jemisin would state:

*“I need to be able to look these kids in the eye and tell them that I’m an SF/F writer without feeling a twinge of shame as I say it. I need to see pride in their eyes, not confusion or concern, when they look back at me. Hell, I need to be able to look myself in the eye, with my self-respect intact.*

*So I will not let bigots bully me and mine out of this genre. I won’t let them do it to anyone else, either. I will fight back with everything I have.”*

ibid

Not surprisingly, in 2009 N.K. Jemisin was a major voice in the wide-ranging discussion of race and racism within science fiction known as RaceFail. I’ve discussed that in more details (including some of Jemisin’s statements) in Chapter 13<sup>[11]</sup>. As well as being engaged in the topic at her own blog and on LiveJournal, Jemisin was one of the most insightful commentators on the follow-up posts at *Whatever*<sup>[12]</sup>.

By 2013, Jemisin was a rising star. Her fantasy fiction was hitting a popular balance between the classic aspect of the genre with a refreshing new perspective. In online spaces, her outspoken politics was part of a wave of newer writers looking to bring the genre into a better future aesthetically, culturally and socially.

In May 2013, Jemisin set off on a 20-hour journey to the other side of the world as the Guest of Honour at the Australian pop-culture convention Continuum in Melbourne<sup>[13]</sup>. . .but that’s a story for another chapter.

## FOOTNOTE

- [1] <https://viableparadise.com/viable-paradise-experience/happens-viable-paradise/>
- [2] 2002 <http://www.zanzjan.net/cgi-bin/vp/vp-sales.pl?byvp=6>
- [3] 2008 <http://www.zanzjan.net/cgi-bin/vp/vp-sales.pl?byvp=12>
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viable\\_Paradise](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viable_Paradise)
- [5] <https://nkjemisin.com/bibliography/> The story from Jim Baen’s Universe was later reprinted at Tor.com <https://www.tor.com/2014/06/30/playing-nice-with-gods-bowling-ball/>
- [6] [http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/jemisin\\_09\\_09/](http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/jemisin_09_09/)
- [7] <https://nkjemisin.com/2010/02/its-february-22nd-do-you-know-what-that-means/>
- [8] <https://web.archive.org/web/20130601030742/https://sfwa.livejournal.com/8799.html>
- [9] <http://transcriptase.org/what-happened/>
- [10] the reference to medical neglect was a reported conversation between SIGMA members Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle <https://io9.gizmodo.com/larry-niven-tells-dhs-to-spread-organ-harvesting-rumors-370762> and original article here <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2008/2/29/2008march-science-fiction-mavens-offer-far-out-homeland-security-advice>
- [11] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/03/14/debarkle-chapter-13-meanwhile-racefail09/>
- [12] e.g., <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2009/03/16/taking-one-for-the-team-k-tempest-bradford/#comment-136312>

- [13] <https://nkjemisin.com/2013/05/off-to-the-other-side-of-the-planet/>

## 22: The SFWA Civil War Part 1

From 2013 to 2014, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America engaged in a series of very public controversies that dwelt on the issues of sexism, racism and public conduct of its members. Events in 2013 occurred in parallel with each other but really covered two distinct issues, whereas 2014 managed to synthesise new issues as well as the ongoing fall out from 2013.

We will get to the events of 2014 in due course. The two controversies of 2013 were:

- Sexism (and other issues) within the *SFWA Bulletin* — the official magazine of the SFWA
- Calls for the expulsion of Vox Day (Theodore Beale) from the SFWA

The controversies ran through the year and overlapped the end of John Scalzi's term as president and the presidency of Steven Gould. However, rather than present them intertwined together chronologically, I will look at them separately. There is a basic sense in which these controversies were distinct: it was entirely possible for either of them to have occurred in different years and have different outcomes. However, in another sense, they were absolutely part of a single phenomenon, something which would become clearer in 2014.

This chapter will focus on a key character in the Debarke: Vox Day. In the next chapter, we will replay the SFWA's stormy 2013 but this time follow the events around the *SFWA Bulletin*.

When we last looked at Vox Day, he had more overtly embraced the politics of the so-called 'Manosphere'<sup>[1]</sup> and had started an additional blog dedicated to 'game', i.e., pick-up artistry and misogyny. He had also escalated his rivalry with John Scalzi by writing multiple posts on his own blog referring to Scalzi as a rapist. Day, at the start of 2013, had also declared his candidacy for the Presidency of the SFWA.

At the end of 2012, Day had also ended his regular column at *WorldNetDaily*. He bowed out with a column claiming that many of his predictions had come true but that now he wanted to concentrate on writing his novels<sup>[2]</sup>. A different gig had come to an end for Day also. Under the pen-name of 'Theo', Day had been a regular reviewer at the fantasy fanzine *Black Gate*. However, in his bid to push boundaries, Day found himself in hot water after posting an essay in December 2013 entitled 'SF/F Corruption Part 1'. Ostensibly this essay was about online book retailers banning authors from reviewing their own books. However, he quickly pivoted to a complaint about the SFWA's Nebula Awards:

*"The problem isn't merely one of authors sockpuppeting and heaping praise upon themselves under false identities. I am a member of the SFWA, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association, and I have had the dubious privilege of sitting upon three of its Nebula Award juries in the past. More importantly, I have had access to the SFWA Forum, and its updated list of Nebula Award nominations, for more than ten years. And one of the things that rapidly became obvious to anyone who attempted to participate honestly in the system between 2000 and 2010 was that the Nebula Award is, first and foremost, a means for various small groups of people to shamelessly and dishonestly promote the works of themselves and their friends."*

<https://www.blackgate.com/2012/12/27/sff-corruption-part-i/>

Complaining about 'logrolling' in the Nebula Awards has been so commonplace that this opening salvo was not really controversial in itself. These were more truism that had been often cited but Day rapidly drifted to his older bête noire, former SFWA President Catharine Asaro's 2002 Nebula winner *Quantum Rose*. He then was highly critical of Jo Walton's 2012 Nebula winner *Among Others*, and bemoaned why the likes of "Neal Stephenson, Charles Stross, and China Miéville" hadn't won. In the comments, people noted an obvious pattern in Day's choice of 'bad' winners and the authors who Day felt had been overlooked. Day expanded his thesis in the comments and promised to name more names in part ii. He claimed that two forces were corrupting the Nebulas, Tor Books and a group of women. He eventually said this explicitly:

*"Correction: have corrupted the Nebula. I've got no shortage of rec lists proving it. The same women were always recommending the same authors every chance they got"*  
ibid.

As Jo Walton went on to point out to Day, she wasn't even a member of the SFWA and hence couldn't possibly have been promoting her own book on the SFWA forums nor could have it been promoted as a form of quid-pro-quo 'logrolling'. Day partly backtracked claiming that the reason for his suspicion was because



“your book was published by Tor Books is enough to make its Nebula Award suspicious on its face, given that the SFWA President and Vice-President are both closely associated with Tor.” Although Day had claimed a major scandal was brewing which he christened “Nebula Gate”, his evidence appeared to be little more than a negative impression he had of a book he hadn’t read because it was published by one of the biggest publishers of science fiction in the US (and because of the gender of the author). Day also was confused about when Catherine Asaro had won her Nebula Award, incorrectly stating that “She just happened to win while she was President of the organization.”

Day had some general support in the comments at *Black Gate*. Notably, the editor and founder of *Tangent* magazine, Dave Truesdale added weight to Day’s concerns:

*“Theo is correct when it comes to the inbred logrolling. As SFWA Bulletin editor from 1999-2002, I can attest to this first hand. A small clique and their “in” friends control quite a bit of what goes on in SFWA (at least it did back then and I have no reason to doubt that things have changed).*

*This is why the Hugo, to my mind, is the more desired award and better represents the feeling of genre readers. Vote-trading, at least to some small degree, always occurs, but Nebula Award voters have honed this aspect to a fine art.”*

Dave Truesdale, *ibid* <sup>[4]</sup>

With Day’s announcement of a run at the SFWA presidency, his motives behind attempting to gin up a “Nebula Gate” based mainly on discontent from a few years prior and antipathy towards Tor Books, was so that he could cast himself as an anti-corruption candidate. In a blog post announcing the first five posts of his platform, four of the five were about the Nebula Awards and the fourth demanded greater transparency:

*“ELIMINATE THE APPEARANCE OF CORRUPTION IN THE AWARD PROCESS: Closing the nomination process to the membership and the public made the appearance of corruption worse, not better. Reducing the number of recommendations to reduce logrolling was a good idea, hiding the results from the membership created more harm than good.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130627145739/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2013/01/sfwa-platform-first-five-points.html>

Overall though, his five points were not overtly ideological or extreme. His third point calling for an expansion of SFWA membership to self-published writers based on online sales was an idea others had proposed and the SFWA would later implement a similar idea.

Meanwhile, Day continued to write a multitude of post targeted at John Scalzi accusing Scalzi of being a rapist and calling the commenters at the *Whatever* blog ‘rabbits’<sup>[5]</sup>. Meanwhile, Scalzi had been joining in with a project run by author Jim C. Hines where Hines would mock sexist cover art in genre books by posing as close as he was able to the absurd positions women were often shown in<sup>[6]</sup>. In January 2013, Hines and Scalzi, along with authors Patrick Rothfuss, Charles Stross and Mary Robinette Kowal, recreated the cheesy Baen cover of Poul Anderson’s *Young Flandry*, inverting the picture of a fully-dressed young man surrounded by scantily-clad young women, to a besuited Kowal surrounded by scantily-clad bearded sci-fi authors. This led to further confusing accusations from Day around Scalzi’s sexuality. However, if Day had been primarily motivated to run for SFWA President as a way to have a direct contest with Scalzi, he was to be disappointed when Scalzi declined to run again<sup>[8]</sup>.

Day would continue to troll Scalzi through his blog amid other posts on politics, promoting paleo-diet food bars (‘primal cocoanut’<sup>[9]</sup>), sowing fears about the swine-flu vaccine<sup>[10]</sup> and saying women shouldn’t be allowed to vote (even Margaret Thatcher<sup>[11]</sup>). Scalzi responded by using Day’s trolling to raise money for charities dedicated to a range of causes, leading to international media coverage<sup>[12]</sup>.

The media coverage portrayed Day as a troll and his apparently obsessive behaviour and doubling down on his more reactionary views would appear to be a bad strategy for getting elected President of the SFWA. It is true that Day had long held animosity to Tor Books and to Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden because of the roasting he received on Patrick Nielsen Hayden’s blog in 2005<sup>[13]</sup> but Day had managed to remain relatively amicable towards John Scalzi for nearly seven years. So why was Day acting out now?

The answer is visible in this Salon article from the time:

*“Here’s how you beat the trolls: Turn their hatred into cash for charities they despise. That’s what science fiction writer John Scalzi has done — and in the process, he’s raised more than \$50,000 in pledges for Emily’s List and the Human Rights Campaign, specially chosen to earn the ire of a blogger Scalzi calls “my racist sexist homophobic dipshit.””*

[https://www.salon.com/2013/02/06/sci\\_fi\\_writer\\_makes\\_50000\\_for\\_charity\\_off\\_of\\_his\\_troll/](https://www.salon.com/2013/02/06/sci_fi_writer_makes_50000_for_charity_off_of_his_troll/)

Actually, it's not the text of the article that helps explain Day's behaviour but rather the image at the top of the article. To illustrate the conflict between Day and Scalzi, Salon used images of books by each author. Vox Day's *Throne of Bones* published by an obscure Christian press would not have normally got such publicity. Day began his more severe trolling of John Scalzi on 27 October 2012, it was in some ways opportunistic but it was also just 12 days after Day had announced that *Throne of Bones* would be published in December<sup>[14]</sup>.

Politics and Day's animosity to Tor and dislike of John Scalzi were still part of the picture. Day had wanted recognition for his writing, he had put effort into engaging with the Nebula Awards as a jurist and with broader fandom as a reviewer at *Black Gate*. However, even the relatively mild shifts towards gender equality in the SFWA were going to make it unlikely that Day, whose extreme views on women had been known among many SFWA members since 2005, would ever win a Nebula. What Day could do though was make use of the animosity towards him both to antagonise his detractors and promote his fantasy novel to a right-wing audience.

Day was keen for his novel to tap into a Christian market but to make use of the more violent aesthetics of works such as George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones*. The darker aesthetics of Day's fantasy novel even caused some problems for Day's publisher who was told by one Christian writer's organisation that it would lead to the published being taken off their list of approved publishers<sup>[15]</sup>. At the time, Day took this phlegmatically saying that he was used to being 'blackballed' by publishers.

In the meantime, John Scalzi endorsed author Steven Gould's run for the SFWA presidency<sup>[16]</sup>. Gould was a longstanding member of the SFWA and like Scalzi was also a teacher at the Viable Paradise writer's workshop.

Beyond the SFWA Officers election, other conflicts were raging within the SFWA and in science fiction, which we will reach in the next chapter. Author Sarah A. Hoyt, feeling that the left within SFF had gone too far, declared in April of 2013 that:

*"The civil war turning hot just means one side is not being iced out. It's a sign of freedom, and a sign this field might yet become healthy again."*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2013/04/13/when-the-civil-war-turns-hot/>

Naturally, Day agreed. By this point, Day had been busy stoking the fires and given his strong views on women, sexuality, race and immigration, he had become an increasingly polarising figure in his election campaign. In response to Hoyt's civil war theme, Day took an even more apocalyptic tone:

*"The gatekeepers are failing, the gates are swinging open, and the right-wing horde is rapidly approaching the citadel. It won't be long before the sneering writers of SF/F cease their endless snarking and start crying out for mercy."*

*At that point, it will fall to us, we established writers of the right who have somehow managed to surmount every obstacle and survive every stone and missile hurled our way throughout what passes for our literary careers, to remind them that it was their decision to declare "no quarter". We didn't make the rules, we are merely playing by the ones they established. I won't take any pleasure in their suffering, but neither will I shed any tears."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130429135705/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2013/04/the-ideology-war-in-science-fiction.html>

On May 3, the SFWA announced the results:

*"SFWA is pleased to announce the results of this year's Board elections.*

• **President:** Steven Gould

• **Vice-President:** Rachel Swirsky

... "

<https://www.sfwaworld.com/2013/05/03/sfwaworld-election-results/>

If science fiction was in a civil war the first battle had not been a victory for the right<sup>[17]</sup>. The war was far from over and nor was the impact of Day's presidential campaign. However, Day's immediate reaction was

phlegmatic. Gould had won 444 votes, nearly ten times Day's 46 votes but Day had had little expectation of winning<sup>[18]</sup>.

Meanwhile, in Australia...

N.K. Jemisin was the Guest of Honour at the Continuum convention in Melbourne. Her headline speech dove into the issue of racism. Australia's history of white supremacy isn't America's but it is no less shocking and no less violent. It was not until the 1960s that the right for Indigenous Australians to vote in Federal and State elections was fully recognised<sup>[19]</sup>. Jemisin's speech started with her father's fears for her safety if she visited Australia:

*"This is not a safe country for people of colour. It's better than it was, certainly, but when the first news story I saw on turning on my first Australian TV channel was about your One Nation party's Pauline Hanson... well. Still got a ways to go."*

<https://nkjemisin.com/2013/06/continuum-goh-speech/>

Jemisin's theme was not to castigate Australia but to highlight the long struggle and efforts to improve:

*"And Australia may have classified the peoples of the Koorie and other nations as "fauna" until very recently, but Australia has also made tremendous strides lately in rectifying this error. I've listened in fascination to the Acknowledgements of Country made at nearly every public event I've attended since I've been here. I've marvelled that indigenous languages are offered as courses for study at some local universities. I am awed that you don't shove all of your indigenous history into a single museum, where it's easy for people not of that culture to avoid or ignore, because that's what happens in the US. So as horrified as I am by the nastier details of Australian history... I am also heartened, astonished, inspired, by the Australian present. You've still got a long way to go before Reconciliation is complete, but then again, you've started down that path. You're trying."*

ibid

And this comparison with the macro scale of a nation coming to terms with its long history of racism served as a segue into talking about the current struggles at a smaller scale of the science fiction community. Jemisin focused on the struggles consuming 2013. Her main focus was the issue around the SFWA's magazine but within that issue, she looked at Vox Day's election campaign:

*"Now, to put this in context: the membership of SFWA also recently voted in a new president. There were two candidates — one of whom was a self-described misogynist, racist, anti-Semite, and a few other flavors of asshole. In this election he lost by a landslide... but he still earned ten per cent of the vote. SFWA is small; only about 500 people voted in total, so we're talking less than 50 people. But scale up again. Imagine if ten per cent of this country's population was busy making active efforts to take away not mere privileges, not even dignity, but your most basic rights. Imagine if ten per cent of the people you interacted with, on a daily basis, did not regard you as human. Just ten per cent. But such a ten per cent."*

ibid

Bringing her speech back to the initial theme, Jemisin offered a proposal:

*"So I propose a solution — which I would like to appropriate, if you will allow, from Australia's history and present. It is time for a Reconciliation within SFF."*

ibid

Vox Day did not respond well when he learnt of Jemisin's speech.

In a post entitled *A Black Female Fantasist Calls for Reconciliation*, Day insulted multiple people including Teresa Nielsen Hayden and John Scalzi. He answered Jemisin's specific point about him by quibbling over her term "self-described". Now it is true that up to that point, Day had not literally described himself as a misogynist or as racist and hadn't really described himself as an anti-Semite<sup>[20]</sup>. He has also never called himself "a few other flavours of asshole". In Day's terminology, Jemisin was using 'rhetoric'. Day's ideological objection to women was well known and he was quite open about it. Likewise his belief in racial theories and racial separation. Day often cloaked himself in a kind of 'philo-Semitism' pro-Israeli position common to American evangelical conservatives but he was also critical of what he regarded as an excessive Jewish influence in American politics. Jemisin's "self-described" term was disputable but the categories that followed were defensible<sup>[21]</sup>.

Day took his racial-cultural determinism even further in the post saying:

*“Being an educated, but ignorant half-savage, with little more understanding of what it took to build a new literature by “a bunch of bearded old middle-class middle-American guys” than an illiterate Igbotu tribesman has of how to build a jet engine, Jemisin clearly does not understand that her dishonest call for “reconciliation” and even more diversity within SF/F is tantamount to a call for its decline into irrelevance. Nor do the back-patting Samuel Johnsons wiping their eyes and congratulating her for her ever-so-touching speech understand that.*

*There can be no reconciliation between the observant and the delusional.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130624073226/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2013/06/a-black-female-fantast.html>

This was all bad enough but Day promoted his response via an official SFWA Twitter account designed to allow members to promote matters of interest. He also took to the SFWA boards to argue his point, arguing with author and fan-writer Jason Sanford and demanding an apology from Jemisin<sup>[22]</sup>.

The SFWA forum moderators took down his posts and locked his account. Meanwhile, having spent the last several months alienating much of the SFWA membership and trolling its President, the backlash to Day calling Jemisin an “ignorant half-savage” was substantial.

Canadian author Amal El-Mohtar called for Vox Day’s expulsion from the SFWA:

*“I believe the act of singling out this particular post for dissemination by SFWA Authors to be an act of deliberate, malicious trolling with intent to cause embarrassment to SFWA’s officers and the organization as a whole. I further believe this act should have consequences that SFWA is in a position to deliver.”*

<https://amalelmohtar.com/calling-for-the-expulsion-of-theodore-beale-from-sfwa/>

Others agreed. Jim C. Hines was more ambivalent and was unsure whether the SFWA even had the power to expel members but after considering the rules thought that it could be done<sup>[23]</sup>. Author and fan-writer Foz Meadows made a more stark statement of the issues at stake:

*“If Theodore Beale isn’t cast out of the SFWA immediately, then that organisation is worth nothing.”*

<https://fozmeadows.wordpress.com/2013/06/14/reconciliation-a-response-to-theodore-beale/>

By this point, the SFWA presidency had shifted with John Scalzi’s term in office officially coming to an end. The new SFWA President, Steven Gould, now had to consider the expulsion of his electoral opponent Vox Day. The board appointed an investigator to collect evidence and produce a report. Meanwhile, Day was threatening legal action.

The SFWA board forwarded their report to Day as part of the due process of considering his expulsion. Day responded by posting sections of it on his blog and crowd-sourcing responses from his followers.

On August 14 Day announced he’d been expelled from the SFWA<sup>[25]</sup> but this was just one of the conflagrations facing the organisation.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] See chapter 17 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/03/27/vox-days-gamma-game/>
- [2] <https://www.wnd.com/2012/12/11-years-of-failure/>
- [3] <https://web.archive.org/web/20130102011454/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2012/12/nebulagate-2012-winner-responds.html>
- [4] Truesdale’s years at the *Bulletin* can be found here <https://www.sfwa.org/about/current-officers/prior-sfwa-board-officers/>
- [5] the use of the term ‘rabbits’ by Day is something I explained back in 2017 here <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2017/11/04/weird-internet-ideas-rk-and-the-far-right/>
- [6] <https://www.jimchines.com/cover-posing/>
- [7] <https://www.jimchines.com/2013/01/group-cover-pose-reveal/>
- [8] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2013/01/14/i-am-not-running-for-sfwa-president-again-again-again/>
- [9] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140617173844/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2013/02/the-ripped-life.html>

- [10] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140617132231/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2013/01/vaccine-safety-and-swine-flu-vaccine.html>
- [11] Vox: "I would absolutely deny women such as Jeanne Kirkpatrick and Margaret Thatcher the vote if the responsibility was given to me." He also claims to have met both of them  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119100652/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2013/01/i-am-still-not-conservative.html>
- [12] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/feb/05/trolls-prompt-author-charity-donation>
- [13] see chapter 8 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/02/24/debarkle-chapter-8-electrolite-2005-03-01/>
- [14] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140618173900/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2012/10/introducing-arts-of-dark-and-light.html>
- [15] <https://web.archive.org/web/20130115194625/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2013/01/what-is-christian-fiction.html>
- [16] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2013/02/25/my-endorsement-for-sfwa-president-steven-gould/>
- [17] I was going to say "for the Confederacy" but that would require too many layers to unpack.
- [18] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140618203951/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2013/05/sfwa-opts-for-status-quo.html>
- [19] <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-06/indigenous-recognition-timeline-of-australian-history/6586176?nw=0>
- [20] he had once said that a pro-Israel group were using criteria so broad for the term that he would be classified as an anti-Semite
- [21] I spent some time collecting links from Day's posts prior to this point in 2013 to see exactly how defensible Jemisin's classification of Day as a misogynist, racist, anti-Semite was. It's easier to find links demonstrating this from 2014 onwards but there's no shortage prior. I'm not posting them all here.
- [22] <https://web.archive.org/web/20130615192846/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2013/06/sfwa-forum-moderated-posts.html>
- [23] <https://www.jimchines.com/2013/06/racist-takes-dump-in-sfwa-twitter-stream-news-at-11/>
- [24] Day's lengthy response can be read here in PDF form [http://milobookclub.com/mart/SFWA\\_response.pdf](http://milobookclub.com/mart/SFWA_response.pdf) It is mainly a list of all the times SFWA members said rude things about him. Day also uploaded the SFWA report in full to his website where it can still be read [http://milobookclub.com/mart/SFWA\\_report.pdf](http://milobookclub.com/mart/SFWA_report.pdf)
- [25] <https://locusmag.com/2013/08/beale-expelled-from-sfwa/>

## 23: SFWA Civil War Part 2

*Previously on Debarkle: the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America became embroiled in a culture war when it had to expel the far-right author Vox Day but this was only one front in what some people were calling a Civil War within science fiction...*

The worlds of science fiction writers and science fiction fans aren't wholly different. Authors (and editors) can be fans and some fans become authors. For example, SFWA Grand Master, Robert Silverberg was recognised by Hugo Award voters as the Best Fan Writer of 1951 <sup>[1]</sup>. Even so, it is a measure of the size of ructions in one adjacent world when it impacts another.

In 2013 at the long-running fanzine/website *File770*, multi-Hugo Award-winning fan writer Mike Glycer was taking notice:

*“SFWA has a fanzine, too,” I’ve heard pros joke, meaning the SFWA Bulletin. Since I’m not a member I don’t see it, and ordinarily never think about it unless an issue contains something controversial about fandom, for example, Gene Wolfe’s complaint about the financial support he received as GoH of the 1985 Worldcon, or the dialog – by Resnick and Malzberg, come to think of it – saying the Worldcon will keep deteriorating unless it becomes more like Dragon\*Con.”*

<http://file770.com/one-resignation-many-ripples/>

Glycer’s post outlined a series of controversies that had hit the *SFWA Bulletin*:

*“Consecutive issues have been criticized by a number of members who found some contents sexist – a Resnick/Malzberg dialog about “lady editors” in #199, a babe in a chainmail bikini on the cover of #200, an article suggesting Barbie as a role model for women writers in #201, and most explosive of all, the new Resnick/Malzberg dialog in #202 counterattacking critics of the earlier piece”*

*ibid*

Mike Resnick was a multi-Award-winning writer, editor and fan who had been active in the SFWA, as well as in Worldcon for many years. In the comments to his post, Glycer described Resnick’s long-standing social influence in fandom:

*“Resnick has enjoyed a long run of popularity because he has befriended and entertained large numbers of convention-goers as a panellist, toastmaster, and storyteller. He has a big, bold alpha male personality – and, of course, it’s sometimes overwhelming, since he’s used to dominating a room, a stage, an audience. But if you look around our field, a lot of people have achieved popularity without being perfect.”*

<http://file770.com/one-resignation-many-ripples/#comment-130212>

The sequence of issues of the SFWA’s professional magazine had built up a groundswell of objections from members. The outgoing President, John Scalzi responded by commissioning a task force to look at the *Bulletin*’s issues and its future. Scalzi had been very apologetic about the furore but as Mike Glycer would later point out, Scalzi had good reason to take some of the blame:

*“There are two reasons I wanted to quote from Scalzi’s post. First, it shows he exercised some actual review over the material before publication and reports the casual inspection he made of the Resnick/Malzberg dialogue. He had a more direct role than was generally known. His responsibility wasn’t simply that of a ship’s captain being held accountable for whatever the crew does on his watch. He’s supplied these details to make clear why ‘This is on me.’”*

<http://file770.com/the-process/>

In letting Resnick and Malzberg reply to their many critics via another column in the *Bulletin*, Scalzi had effectively elevated their response via an official outlet of the SFWA, further embroiling the SFWA with a set of opinions that had they been posted on personal blogs would have received much less attention. In a bid to avoid appearing censorious, the SFWA had tripped up badly.

An SFWA Taskforce to deal with the *Bulletin* issue was announced which included the incoming President Steven Gould and Vice President Rachel Swirsky<sup>[2]</sup>. Meanwhile, the list of authors and fans talking about the issue had grown substantially. At his blog, Jim C. Hines posted an ongoing list of blog posts on the issue<sup>[3]</sup>. Hines's initial list had thirty entries but it grew to over sixty within days. Eager to involve himself, Vox Day re-posted Hines's list saying:

*"...I'm not a fan of either Resnick or Malzberg. I merely support their right to write opinion pieces and freely express their opinions in them, regardless of how offensive these delicate, fainting flowers may find those opinions to be. Of course, in the present SFWA, such support for free speech renders me a radical extremist,"*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20131107200438/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2013/06/seriously-fascist-womens-association.html>

Typically, when Day posted links to blogs, he was being critical of, the blog would then receive a surge in visits from pseudonymous trolls adding further fuel to the fire.

With widespread attention focused on the issue of the *Bulletin*, Day was trying to insert his own issues into the fuss. Indeed, when N.K. Jemisin had used Day as an example during her Continuum speech (last chapter) it was as a side point on the broader issue of there being an entrenched wing of the SFWA resisting change specifically on issues to do with race, gender and professional conduct.

However, the strongest statement on the entrenched sexism of a section of the SFWA was not Jemisin's speech but a blog post from former SFWA vice president Mary Robinette Kowal. Entitled "Dear Twelve Rabid Weasels of SFWA, please shut the fuck up", the strong words took some people by surprise because Kowal was known as a person who had positive connections across a broad section of fandom.

*"I spent four years in office and the first year I almost quit because I got so tired of getting hate mail. Then I realized that it was coming from the same dozen people, every single time. All the other members were lovely. It was easier to shrug off being called "impertinent," or "wannabee" (Did I show you the Hugo I won since then), or "Nazi," when it became clear that the vitriol didn't represent all of SFWA, just a dozen rabid weasels. However, I am sick to death of putting out the fires that you people start."*

<https://maryrobinettekowal.com/journal/dear-twelve-rabid-weasels-of-sfw-please-shut-the-fuck-up/>

Kowal did not name the twelve people. Some people assumed that one was Vox Day but in fact, he was not<sup>[4]</sup>. Vox Day, meanwhile, felt he could identify exactly who Kowal was targeting: Jerry Pournelle. Specifically, Day claimed that Kowal was misrepresenting Pournelle and that the issue at hand was one of organisational overreach, i.e., that the SFWA had been attempting to impose codes of conduct on its members beyond official SFWA events:

*"Second, no one is complaining about anyone asking people not to sexually harass anyone. They are objecting, quite reasonably, to the insane idea of setting up SFWA as a sexual harassment police with self-declared jurisdiction over every SF/F convention on the planet. They are objecting to the abuse of the organization by a number of vocal nonentities attempting to use it for their own ideological purposes. If anyone is going to "Shut the Fuck Up", it should be irresponsible nobodies like the Puppnette who have absolutely nothing of any value to say, either on their blogs or in their books, and who have contributed nothing to the organization except to bring it to the brink of self-implosion."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20131109133514/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2013/07/a-never-will-be-attacks-jerry-pournelle.html>

Along with the ongoing issue of the *SFWA Bulletin* and the looming expulsion of Vox Day, a discussion had broken out on an SFWA-related forum about sexual harassment by an SFWA member. According to Jerry Pournelle's account:

*"Meanwhile, over at the SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of America) members site, there began a complicated conversation about sexual harassment. The discussion was heated but mostly involved hypothetical cases. Then there came a report of an incident involving an editor I once worked with and a female editor I have never met, at a convention party. The offended party posted something on line, and a SFWA official reposted that in the SFWA discussion. Since neither party was a member of SFWA and the event was not an SFWA event, I failed to understand why this was SFWA business; and in what must have been a fit of absence of mind, I said so."*

<https://www.jerrypournelle.com/chaosmanor/randall-garrett-and-the-arthur-clarke-prediction-about-love-and-marriage/>

On the forum, Pournelle had also related an anecdote about a since deceased author's regular behaviour at conferences:

*"After a few drinks, he would roam the convention parties looking for women he did not know, making certain that this was someone of age ( most often late twenties or older ). He would then approach, stand well out of reach without any physical contact, bow, and say "HI. I'm Randall Garrett. Let's F—." This happened many times at many conventions between 1970 and about 1980, after which he was disabled until his death in 1987. His habit was known to nearly everyone of importance in the science fiction community. I know of no one who encouraged him, and many told him to stop it, but he persisted, giving the argument that he never made physical contact, he never pursued or persisted unless he was actively encouraged to continue, and he was doing no more than offering casual recreational sex."*

ibid

Pournelle stated that he had relayed the anecdote not to condone the behaviour but merely to illustrate an issue. However, Pournelle's comment, along with private comments by other SFWA members (including Brad R. Torgersen) had been screen captured, transcribed and posted on to a Tumbler account<sup>[5]</sup>.

Brad Torgersen was a lot younger than the other 'old guard' members perceived as being the 'other side' in this ongoing conflict. Torgersen not only deeply admired Mike Resnick but regarded him as a mentor and would routinely refer to him as a father figure. In June of 2013, Torgersen would publish an essay on his blog entitled "Writer Dad: Mike Resnick"

*"If the genre tends to be a bit cliquish, I think the circle of Mike Resnick's Writer Children is just about the best kind of club one could hope to belong to. For the simple fact that being Mike's Writer Son demands that I keep up my game! Mike's spent time on me. I want to make sure that Mike never has to regret it. That he never has to look at what I am accomplishing in the field and shake his head, thinking, if only that boy would work harder, make better decisions, maybe take better care of his opportunities"*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2013/06/30/writer-dad-mike-resnick/>

Torgersen had other reasons to dislike the SFWA. In a post critical of Mary Robinette Kowal's statement, Baen author Michael Z. Williamson also posted criticism of the SFWA from other Baen authors including Larry Correia. In addition, he included this quote from Torgersen:

*"During the three years I've been a member of SFWA, I've seen the organization erupt in several significant 'turf war' conflicts that have each seemed (to my sensibilities) to have everything to do with ideology, and almost nothing to do with helping me as a novelist and a short fiction writer protect or advance my career. I thought SFWA would be my 'union' capable of enhancing or protecting my interests. It's not really been so. At least in my very limited experience.*

*Especially not when I stumbled across an e-mail exchange between several SFWA members who were essentially discussing ways to turf my chances on the Nebula, Hugo, and Campbell ballots in 2012.*

*Why should I pay money to remain a member of an organization that seems (too often?) to be infested with personalities who explicitly want to hurt my career? Or at least want to blunt my opportunities?"*

quote from Brad Torgersen <https://web.archive.org/web/20130818164023/http://www.michaelzwilliamson.com/blog/item/sfwa-boldly-snatching-obscurity-from-the-jaws-of-relevance><sup>[6]</sup>

Nor were Torgersen, Williamson, Day and Correia the only younger authors siding with the older "rabid weasels" in the spreading conflict. However, to look at another nexus of opposition, I will need to digress a little...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] Retro Hugo awarded in 2001 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Fan\\_Writer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award_for_Best_Fan_Writer)
- [2] <https://www.sfwa.org/2013/06/01/sfwa-bulletin-task-force-announced/>
- [3] <http://www.jimchines.com/2013/06/roundup-of-some-anonymous-protesters-sfwa-bulletin-links/>
- [4] <https://nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/archives/015221.html#1381892> "RSHD" stood for "racist sexist homophobic dipshit," a term John Scalzi was using for Day.



- [5] <https://web.archive.org/web/20130702031015/https://specfriction.tumblr.com/> There's some ethical questions about reposting these but given that they have been thoroughly aired for years and as Pournelle repeated what he said publicly, I decided it was OK to do so.
- [6] This claim by Torgersen that some SFWA members attempted derail his Campbell bid does not come up very often. I don't have details beyond this.

## 24: Dramatis Personae — Sarah A. Hoyt and the Mad Genius Club

I'm pausing in the midst of a raging culture war within the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America to look at a different group of people. As a group, they are very relevant to events in 2015 and beyond. For the SFWA Civil War, aside from calling it a 'Civil War' they had little impact but the conflict marks a point where a set of writers associated with the blog titled 'The *Mad Genius Club*' begin to assert a viewpoint on the arguments running through US (mainly) fandom.

As with other Dramatis Personae chapters I will rely on Wikipedia for biographical details as well as author websites and bios.

The *Mad Genius Club* was a collective writer's blog that was established in October 2008<sup>[1]</sup> as a place for a group of writers to share experiences and offer tips and advice to people. The initial roster of authors was Australian writer Rowena Cory Daniells, Portuguese/American writer Sarah A. Hoyt, South African writer Dave Freer, American writers Laura Resnick and Louise Marley, and British writer John Lamshead<sup>[2]</sup>. That roster would change gradually over the years and by 2011 several people had left and new writers Kate Paulk (an Australian living in the US) and Amanda S. Green had joined<sup>[3]</sup>. 2011 also marked a shift for the blog to a new WordPress format and a new URL.

The list of people involved with *Mad Genius Club* continued to evolve and it is important to note it was always a site where individual bloggers expressed their own views rather than some consistent blog-wide position. Not every author associated with the blog would have endorsed the views expressed by fellow bloggers.

For the major events of the Puppy Debarkle the writers associated with *Mad Genius Club* (MGC from here on) relevant to events were

- Sarah A. Hoyt
- Dave Freer
- Kate Paulk
- Amanda Green
- Peter Grant

Of those, the most significant were Sarah A. Hoyt and Dave Freer.

**Sarah A. Hoyt.** Sarah A. Hoyt was born in the early 1960s and grew up in Portugal. With a talent for languages, she discovered a love for the works of Robert Heinlein at an early age. She married an American (fellow writer Daniel Hoyt) and moved to the USA but regards herself as being 'born American' in spirit<sup>[4]</sup>. She has said that earlier in her career, she was shy about her politics but over time she has become more outspoken and as well as writing political commentary on her blog, she posts at the conservative-libertarian sites *Instapundit* and *PJ Media*. She has been published by a number of companies including Bantam Spectra, Ace and Baen, as well as publishing independently.<sup>[5]</sup>

**Dave Freer.** Dave Freer was born in South Africa at the end of the 1950s. He lived there for much of his adult life including a career as an ichthyologist but moved to Tasmania in 2010. He's published with Pyr and independently but most of his books have been published by Baen, including multiple collaborations with Eric Flint.<sup>[6]</sup>

Of the others: Kate Paulk is an Australian writer who works in software testing, who emigrated to the USA; Amanda Green is an American and writes under a number of names in various genres; Peter Grant is another South African but one who emigrated to the USA. Grant is a gun enthusiast who met and befriended future authors Larry Correia and Marko Kloos on gun forums in the 2000s<sup>[7]</sup>.

### *Culture<sup>(war)</sup> Club*

MGC started as a 'no politics zone'<sup>[8]</sup> but a blog about writing naturally touched on thorny questions about sex, gender, race and so-called "political correctness"<sup>[9]</sup>. There was some criticism of the SFWA insofar as the organisation catered poorly for independent authors and was perceived as dealing clumsily during the period when major publishers were in conflict with online book retailers<sup>[10]</sup>.

The events around the *SFWA Bulletin* (see the last chapter), elicited a stronger response, although the sea change in tone was a little earlier. In chapter 22 (SFWA Civil War Part 1) I quoted Sarah A. Hoyt calling the culture war disputes at the time a ‘civil war’. That post’s initial issue was about criticism of author Orson Scott Card’s positions on homosexuality<sup>[11]</sup>. Hoyt’s overall position on homosexuality and gay marriage was far more progressive than Card’s but she was angry at the treatment (in her view) that Card was getting within science fiction communities:

*“BUT all that is to our purpose nothing, because the point is not whether I agree or disagree with Mr. Card or whether or not homosexuals are unable to participate in other communities because of dual loyalties.*

*No, the point is that as people talked more and more about what Card said, Mr. Card – who is to the left of me by some miles – became a pariah in science fiction. No, wait there. People attempted to make Mr. Card a pariah in science fiction... for saying that he didn’t think homosexuals could be good practitioners of their religion.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2013/04/13/when-the-civil-war-turns-hot/><sup>[12]</sup>

Hoyt’s wider thesis was that publishing (and in particular science fiction publishing) had become controlled by the left and was enforcing conformity that was stifling the genre.

*“Again, the fact that to get published we had to go through a funnel of ideologically left editors and publishers (with the obvious exception) didn’t help.*

*So in a way, the civil war in the field has been going on forever. It’s only that it was a cold civil war. The rest of us wanted to get published. We kept our mouths shut. If we opened them only Baen would take us, and Baen has a limited number of author slots. (Plus some of the stuff we wanted – and by that, I mean I wanted – to write is not Baen-like.) “*

*ibid*

To this end, the new wave of self/independent publication of eBooks was seen by Hoyt as a way for conservative and right-libertarian authors to sidestep left-wing gatekeepers in traditional publishing. It also meant that authors like herself could be freer to push back against what she regarded as a censorious and controlling left.

When the issue with the *SFWA Bulletin* broke, Hoyt would lament:

*“When did the two sides exchange places, again? When did the left, once upon a time the purveyor of free love, freer skin and the more pervy the better stories become the purity squad, and when did the right decide that there would be something wrong with believing in the constitution?”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2013/06/01/give-me-that-old-time-religion/>

This was followed by a longer (and I will say confused at times) defence of the Malzberg and Resnick columns, once again turning to a war metaphor to describe the situation:

*“And this is the war in sf – between the increasingly irrelevant establishment trying to silence all the opinions they don’t like, and the rest of us who frankly m’dear don’t give a d\*mn what they don’t want us to say. Complicated by the spiralling down of the traditional houses (thank G-d not Baen) putting everyone under stress it keeps getting nuttier and nuttier. They want to tell us what we can say and think. We want to tell them to shut up.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2013/06/05/that-aint-no-ladv/>

At The *Mad Genius Club* proper, Kate Paulk also had a strong opinion on the SFWA argument about the *Bulletin*. Paulk blamed feminists women for the issue, introducing a colourful term for their motivation:

*“Here’s the problem, in a rather crass nutshell. The Interchangeable Feminists have succumbed to the feminist flavor of the Glittery Hoo Haa. Unlike the romance version where the glitter unaccountably activates when the heroine takes off her glasses (presumably blindness is sexier), the Feminist Glittery Hoo Haa is a thing of mysterious magical powers allowing the possessor to be better than everyone at everything she tries, without having to work at it. She doesn’t even have to wiggle it to get magical results. All she needs to do is let HR departments know she has one (they seem to be shy creatures in*

*the wild, hence the Interchangeable Feminist insistence on proclaiming they have one), and she's on a fast track to promotions without having to actually do the work involved. That's what underlings are for."*

[https://madgeniusclub.com/2013/06/06/storm\\_in\\_a\\_b\\_cup/](https://madgeniusclub.com/2013/06/06/storm_in_a_b_cup/)

In Paulk's opinion, Mike Resnick and Barry Malzberg had done nothing wrong and neither had the editor, Jean Rabe. Paulk concluded:

*"So... Maybe instead of the witch hunt against all who offend the FGHH, we should be hunting the possessors of the FGHH and destroying the blasted things before the Hoo Haas cause any more hoo haas. Because of all the SFWA shitstorms I've seen, this has to be the most pathetic."*

ibid

Hoyt had further posts in June defending the *Bulletin* issues<sup>[13]</sup> but July would add a new dimension to their quixotic campaign against feminism.

On June 28 2013, John Scalzi turned his blog over to a guest post written by writer and artist Elise Matthesen<sup>[14]</sup>. Her post explained the steps she had to take after being sexually harassed at a convention (specifically at the feminist science fiction convention WisCon). Matthesen had been harassed by an editor at a major publishing house and her post discussed her contact with the HR and legal departments at that publisher. The issue of sexual harassment at conventions and within publishing was not a new one but Matthesen's post would eventually have a significant impact, leading to the resignation of editor Jim Frenkel from Tor Books<sup>[15]</sup>.

In some ways surprisingly and in other ways predictably, several of the *Mad Genius Club* members decided to fold this sexual harassment story into the wider culture war argument they had with the SFWA. The process started with an addendum to a regular post from Dave Freer, who partly blamed the harassment on the power of publishers but was also dismissive of the claims and contrasted it with 'real' harassment<sup>[16]</sup>.

At her own blog, Sarah A. Hoyt followed Freer's theme of what constituted 'real' harassment<sup>[17]</sup>. Her examples of what was NOT inappropriate behaviour at a convention included this anecdote:

*"Some years ago, at a con, I entered the backroom of the barfly suite, where there were only a dozen guys. They were watching a racy movie and started to turn the channel, then said, "Oh, thank G-d, it's Sarah" and kept it on. Was I disrespected? Were they objectifying me by watching nudie females? Ladies, gents and dragons: Watching nudie other sex (or same, depending) is what humans do, and often one of the only pleasures when you live in interesting times. For me to make the leap from what the guys were watching to an insult to me personally would require me to assume that I was one with the skinny little things pretending to have sex on the screen. The only reason for commonality there would be we have similar genitals."*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2013/07/03/what-is-harrasment/>

And what constituted real harassment in Hoyt's opinion? "Harassment is giving liars the ability – unexamined – to render someone a pariah" and in her opinion that is what had been done to Mike Resnick in the *Bulletin* scandal.

Back at MGC, Amanda Green was also angry about the situation, saying that while she condemned sexual harassment, she thought that there was "also no excuse for this snowballing trial by social media"<sup>[18]</sup>. Kate Paulk also folded this new issue into her previous SFWA theme:

*"Now it's possible that the Fainting Feminist Hoo Haas are such pathetic specimens that they think any kind of compliment is "harassment". I don't know. All I can say is that I haven't been harassed at any cons, and I have it on good authority that I'm not so ugly that would explain the discrepancy."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2013/07/04/matters-of-perspective/>

In 2013, the irony of the denizens of *Mad Genius Club* rushing to even a half-hearted defence of a Tor editor would not have been apparent, although even then they would normally be expected to side with authors over people with positions of authority in major publishers.

By August, Vox Day had been expelled from the SFWA<sup>[19]</sup> and this prompted a continuation of the antipathy towards the organisation at MGC. Kate Paulk expressed confusion as to why Day had been expelled saying that it had "something to do with the SFWA Twitter account" and defended Day by seeing that he was only stating his opinions. Paulk also referenced an earlier scandal:

*“Considering that a leading light of the industry can publicly grope a female author at an awards banquet and not even get a mild, “that was bad form” from the organization formerly known as SFWA, it’s clear that the real reason for Mr Beale’s eviction was his outspoken personal views.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2013/08/15/the-organization-formerly-known-as-sfwa/>

Paulk’s comment was in reference to an incident in the 2006 Hugo Award ceremony when in an apparent ‘joke’ Harlan Ellison grabbed Connie Willis’s breast on stage. The ensuing controversy did lead to some action by the SFWA but not directed at Ellison. In 2013 Mike Glycer had also discussed the precedent around the incident in relation to Beale’s expulsion as it had led to a censure of an SFWA member:

*“n 2006, after Harlan Ellison groped Connie Willis onstage during the Hugo Awards ceremony, Moles became upset with colleagues he felt were defending Ellison in a private SFWA newsgroup. He made some of their comments public on his blog...Some members attempted to get Moles expelled from SFWA. He was censured instead.”*

<http://file770.com/sfwa-discipline/> <sup>[20]</sup>

Paulk citing the Ellison incident was highly disingenuous; after all, Paulk and other members of the MGC had been criticising the current (2013) leadership of the SFWA for their moves to push back against sexism and harassing behaviour in a change from the previous approach.

Paulk went on to compare the SFWA to Nazis:

*“So, since Mr Beale has been ejected from the Disorganization Formerly Known As SFWA for what amounts to thought crime, it’s obvious to me that the group needs a new name. When I suggested this to Sarah, she suggested the Selective Science Fiction Writers Association, SS for short. And gosh, wouldn’t you know it, that particular acronym would work remarkably well with what the group leadership seems to think. Just replace “Jew” with “conservative” and they’re set.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2013/08/15/the-organization-formerly-known-as-sfwa/> <sup>[21]</sup>

When the SFWA gave Vox Day a copyright-takedown notice because he had republished their report on him, Kate Paulk was once again incensed saying the SFWA was trying to “make the terms of their expulsion vanish down the Internet memory hole by that item most beloved of corrupt media executives, the DMCA takedown”<sup>[22]</sup>.

2013 marked a shift in the content at *Mad Genius Club*. While much of the material was still orientated around the problems of being a writer, events surrounding the SFWA had led to multiple posts taking an anti-feminist position. This would continue into 2014 and beyond.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] I believe this is the first post but it is phrased like the reader should already know what the general idea of the blog was <http://madgeniusclub.blogspot.com/2008/10/introduction-monday-dave-freer-enter.html>
- [2] According to the second post on the blog <http://madgeniusclub.blogspot.com/2008/10/to-blog-or-not-to-blog.html> which doesn’t list Lamshead but he had an introductory post the same month <http://madgeniusclub.blogspot.com/2008/10/my-names-john-and-i-am-fantasy-writer.html> On another note, Laura Resnick is the daughter of Mike Resnick, but had long since left MGC when that blog involved itself in the SFWA controversy around Mike Resnick’s column at the *SFWA Bulletin*
- [3] based on the blogging roster at the old URL
- [4] <https://accordingtohojt.com/2014/07/04/i-was-born-american/>
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah\\_A.\\_Hoyt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah_A._Hoyt)
- [6] <https://www.davefreer.com/about-dave/> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave\\_Freer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave_Freer)
- [7] <https://bayourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2013/05/my-first-novel-is-published-at-last.html>
- [8] <https://madgeniusclub.blogspot.com/2008/11/dave-freer-posting-i-am-really-good-at.html>
- [9] <https://madgeniusclub.blogspot.com/2009/07/situation-makes-me-kind-a-nervous.html>
- [10] for example, Amanda Green reposted at Sarah A. Hoyt’s blog in 2012 <https://accordingtohojt.com/2012/03/03/and-the-lemmings-march-on-by-amanda-s-green/>
- [11] specifically this essay by Card <http://www.nauvoo.com/library/card-hypocrites.html>

- [12] Hoyt describes Card as being to the left of her because he has in the past advocated for Democratic Party causes. She would also regard her more 'liberal' position on sexuality as not being further left because it was grounded in her libertarian beliefs, which she regards as being right-wing.
- [13] <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2013/06/10/moo-like-this/> and <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2013/06/11/the-mote/>
- [14] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2013/06/28/reporting-harassment-at-a-convention-a-first-person-how-to/#comment-485695>
- [15] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Frenkel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Frenkel)
- [16] <https://madgeniusclub.com/2013/07/01/stuck-in-the-middle/>
- [17] <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2013/07/03/what-is-harrassment/>
- [18] <https://madgeniusclub.com/2013/07/02/tilting-at-windmills-or-when-did-i-return-to-junior-high/>
- [19] Chapter 22 SFWA Civil War Part 1 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/04/09/debarkle-chapter-22-the-sfwa-civil-war-part-1/>
- [20] I'm curious about the position of those SFWA members who asked for SFWA to censure Moles in 2006 on the issues consuming the SFWA in 2013
- [21] On a pedantic note, Day was insisting he was not a conservative in 2013 and preferred 'libertarian' then. He has claimed to have never been a conservative.
- [22] <https://madgeniusclub.com/2013/08/22/tofkasfwa-the-gift-that-keeps-on-giving/>

## 25: The SFWA Civil War Part 3

*Previously on Debarkle: Towards the end of John Scalzi's terms as SFWA President, a series of controversies arose over sexism and racism within the organisation. A common theme was resistance to change from a group of SFWA 'old guard'.*

[content warning: a later section discusses issues around child abuse]

By August 2013, the expulsion of Vox Day from the SFWA was seen by some as putting a line under the controversies that had been consuming the SFWA that year. Cora Buhlert rounded up events with a blog post that finished with:

*"But at least the SFWA saga had come, if not to a "happily ever after" then at least a "happy for now" ending."*

<http://corabuhlert.com/2013/08/16/sfwa-drama-comes-to-a-conclusion/>

However, in many ways, Vox Day's behaviour had been a loud but minor sideshow. The core group of objectors to the SFWA's more progressive direction still had the same objections and issues. What was lacking was a nexus on which another round of arguments could be had.

Elsewhere, other people had been drawing their own conclusions, including (as we saw in the last chapter) some of the writers at *Mad Genius Club*. A different take on the situation came from Baen author John Ringo, who saw ulterior motives in John Scalzi's behaviour during the year.

*"If anyone has been wondering why Scalzi has been picking the rather stupid fights he's been picking lately: [link to an announcement of John Scalzi's Redshirt's winning a Hugo Award] That's why. There's nothing wrong with Scalzi's writing. This is a reasonably good novel (from what I've heard) with no real SF or literary merit beyond being a reasonably good novel. But he's been speaking truth to power about the degradation of women in SF along with other idiocracy and so he's beloved by all the has been liberal neurotics who control the Hugo voting and balloting. Look to many more in the future as long as he toes the Party line. Huzzah."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180519182929if/https://www.facebook.com/john.ringo.90857/posts/10151560891450887>

Ringo was convinced that there was nothing particularly special about *Redshirts* and that it had only won because John Scalzi had been appeasing the people who 'control' the Hugo voting. Why the Hugo Awards would have an overtly pro-feminist establishment, while Scalzi had been struggling with an apparently anti-feminist old guard at the SFWA was unclear, doubly so as some of the figures pushing back at the SFWA were also Hugo Award veterans (for example, veteran author Robert Silverberg). For Ringo, a feminist/liberal cabal was a simpler answer to why he had not made any impression on Hugo voters. Meanwhile, in the comments to Ringo's post, Larry Correia assured people that he would mount another Hugo Award campaign in 2014:

*"So I'm totally going to do it again this year. Bigger. Because I am motivated entirely out of spite."*  
ibid

January brought news of one possible consequence to the SFWA in-fighting: a break-away organisation? The Society for the Advancement of Speculative Storytelling announced its first permanent president. At *File770*, Mike Glyer carried the story with additional information:

*"Judging by a comment on Lou Antonelli's blog, SASS seems to have coalesced in reaction against the hostile exchanges then happening in the SFWA Forum per se, and not in support of any particular outcome. "[The] group is for people sick of PC bullshit ..." he said initially, then amplified, "This group is a safe haven for people to meet together over their common love of speculative fiction. If someone WHO BELONGS TO SASS attacks anyone in the group for something that [has] NOTHING to do with speculative fiction, they don't need to belong SASS. They can join other outfits."*

<http://file770.com/burstein-named-sass-president/>

The board of SASS included Vice-President Brad Torgersen and Secretary Lou Antonelli. Without wanting to throw in too many spoilers for the story of the Debarkle, I won't tease readers with how this organisation would go on to develop. After a flurry of activity in 2014, the blog for the organisation remained silent until 2020, when Louis Antonelli announced that he was standing for the SFWA board (he lost)<sup>[1]</sup>. Whatever trauma 2013 had thrown at the SFWA, it wasn't going to break into rival organisations.

Meanwhile, after the resignation of its editor and furore over the *SFWA Bulletin*, the organisation decided to restart the magazine and in December 2013 began the process of finding a new editor to work within a new set of guidelines. In February 2014, that process had become too much for Dave Truesdale, editor of *Tangent* magazine and a former editor of the *SFWA Bulletin*. Believing the magazine was going to become dominated by 'political correctness', Truesdale began to organise a petition.

Blogger, reviewer and fan-writer Natalie Luhrs was sent a version of the petition but to her surprise, discovered that Truesdale had originally been circulating a long and more inflammatory version of the petition. Both versions carried a similar theme that the SFWA's new model for the *Bulletin* amounted to censorship and an attack on free speech. Luhrs naturally was puzzled as to how either concept made sense for an edited professional magazine:

*"Ultimately, though, Truesdale's argument is thoroughly dishonest. He's trying to get people riled up over someone editing the publication and he's doing so in an incredibly offensive and gross manner. He's claiming that this is a free speech issue when it isn't. SFWA is not the government. They can't stop you from saying whatever damn fool thing you want. All they can do is stop you from saying it in their publication."*

<http://www.pretty-terrible.com/oh-dear-sfw-bulletin-petition/>

In the comments to Luhrs's post, former SFWA Vice-President, Mary Robinette Kowal pointed out that Dave Truesdale was not even a member of the SFWA. Even more notably, author Robert Silverberg added a comment to explain both his support and involvement in the revisions to the petition:

*"Neil Clarke seems to see no difference between the authors of a piece revising it before it is made public and the imposition of a board of review to make sure that the editor of a publication does not print anything that might offend any part of the membership of the group that receives that publication. The first is the normal revision of a draft that any writer does before releasing material to be seen by others. A number of us saw flaws in the original Truesdale draft and asked that they be removed, and they were. The second is the formal statement that the organization's own editor is not to be trusted to apply common sense and appropriate taste to the work of editing. One would hope that readers of SFWA's magazine would not take offense at anything they read in a publication that is intended to help them in the pursuit of their professional careers, but the appropriate way of objecting to such offensive material would be to write a letter of protest to the magazine, not to force the editor to be overruled in advance by a committee that determines what might be deemed offensive."*

Robert Silverberg at <https://www.pretty-terrible.com/oh-dear-sfw-bulletin-petition/#comment-25204>

Despite the lack of clarity in the petition's thesis, it attracted some notable signatories including Harlan Ellison, David Gerrold, and Gene Wolfe, as well as Jerry Pournelle, Larry Niven, David Brin and Gregory Benford. Naturally, Mike Resnick and Barry Malzberg (whose columns in the *Bulletin* had been central to the arguments in 2013) were signatories, as was Brad Torgersen as a former Nebula Award nominee<sup>[2]</sup>. However, given the length of even the amended version, it isn't entirely clear what people were endorsing. The text is more of an essay, including a set of emails between Truesdale and the SFWA president. However, towards the end there is a more conventionally petition-like section that shows the intent of the petition:

*"In light of the preceding correspondence we, the undersigned, object to the new SFWA requirements for editor of the SFWA Bulletin, as set forth on the SFWA website. Specifically, we have the following objections: A "review board" implies a group of persons, as yet unnamed, who can veto content submitted by members if the board deems it "offensive" to a sub-group of SFWA. This opens the door to censorship of opinions that do not jibe with the personal beliefs of those on the review board, whereas SFWA should be open to the airing of many varieties of opinions, especially on such sensitive subjects as sexism, racism, religion, and politics. The proposed requirements are so vague that they leave many critical questions unaddressed. Several among them: Given that it is our strong belief that there should be no "advisory" or "review" board, who would hypothetically sit on this board and how would they be chosen? Would advertising copy (book or magazine covers) be subject to review as well, especially*



*in the high dollar advertising rates the Bulletin charges for its special Nebula issue? The editor of the Bulletin should have discretion over its contents; that is why he or she is chosen as editor. There should be no advisory or review board. In view of these considerations, we ask that SFWA (1) withdraw this slate of requirements for the Bulletin and (2) open a discussion where all viewpoints can be considered on this matter before drafting any further sets of guidelines for SFWA publications.*

<https://tangentonline.com/news/news-news/sfw-a-president-endorses-bulletin-censorship/>

The petition received broader coverage at places such as *File770* and *The Daily Dot*<sup>[3]</sup>, as well as support from the *Mad Genius Club*<sup>[4]</sup>. Meanwhile, Brad Torgersen had his own ideas about how to fix the SFWA. His plans including stricter rules for membership so that it would only be for professional authors and higher fees. He also called for the organisation's "front men" to be employees (rather than elected officers), hired to run the SFWA like a business and thought the Nebulas should be abolished. He also wanted a strict 'no politics' rule:

***"5. No politics, no politics, no politics.***

*SFWA should not, as an org, concern itself with who is sitting in the U.S. White House, nor the U.S. Senate, nor the U.S. Congress. It should not concern itself with overseas military operations, nor domestic social welfare programs, nor city and municipal elections. SFWA should also not concern itself with social studies and humanities department theory, to include sex and sexism theory, transgender theory, race and ethnic theory, and so forth. The SFWA ought to be a business org dedicated to protecting and expanding the business opportunities of its members. Anything outside of business concerns would be strictly off the table. Something for individual members to pursue on their own time, outside the walls of the org. This will most likely not ever happen because the present SFWA body is increasingly dominated by amateur and pro-am voices who want to make SFWA into an explicitly political organ with explicitly political doctrines, to include the org's own magazine — its content, its editorial slant, etc. Ideally, the SFWA Bulletin would be neither Mother Jones nor The National Review. Alas, the reality is that the Bulletin is going to reflect the loudest opinions and voices in the present org, regardless of whether or not these opinions have anything to do with business, or whether the voices have any qualifications to speak on business matters."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170605192106/https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2014/02/19/how-to-fix-the-sfw-a/>

The blame for the SFWA's move leftwards (as Torgersen perceived it) was due to these less established authors. That a younger (and more diverse) membership was more likely to be less well-established writers escaped him, even though he was still a relatively new writer.

Despite some high-profile support, Truesdale's petition had little impact. The SFWA President noted its existence and moved on<sup>[5]</sup>. However, discontent was still rumbling around the same forums where many of the SFWA's old guard could be found. This became clear with the release of screenshots of discussion from a list-server thread used by several long time SFWA members and people associated with the organisation. In an article on the issue, *The Daily Dot* used this cautionary tagline:

*"When you're going to rant about how sci-fi publishing is being invaded by women and minorities, make sure you're not doing it on a public forum."*

<https://www.dailydot.com/irl/sfw-a-sexism-sci-fi-nebulas-mary-kowal/>

The article highlighted some derogatory comments by editor and agent Sean P Fodera, that specifically targeted Mary Robinette Kowal. Fodera blamed Kowal for the "whole anti-sexism matter" and went on to suggest she was hypocritical because of how she dressed. Fodera's reaction was to threaten to sue people for libel because of the article<sup>[6]</sup> but unsurprisingly that fuelled only more commentary and mockery. Eventually, Fodera apologised but the incident illustrated how entrenched the problem with sexism within the SFWA and publishing was. Any moves on issues such as the representation of women, casual sexism or sexual harassment were still likely to get significant and organised pushback from influential people including famous authors or people with influence in publishing.

## ***2014 brings a more shocking scandal***

[content warning for issues around child abuse]

Peace may not have broken out exactly at the SFWA but the pushback had demonstrably failed. However, Vox Day was still looking for ways to foment scandal and bad publicity for the organisation that had kicked him out in 2014. To do that he would need to exploit a different issue.

On June 3 2014 Tor.com published an essay celebrating the life and work of Marion Zimmer Bradley. The article covered many biographical details about the writer (who had died in 1999) and talked about the influence of her work. However, what was glaringly missing was the history of child sexual abuse by her husband Walter Breen and her defence of Breen's actions over several years. It was a shocking and unjustifiable omission but it was also an aspect of Marion Zimmer Bradley that many of her readers simply were not aware of.

Writer Deirdre Saoirse Moen rightly took Tor.com to task for hiding this aspect of Marion Zimmer Bradley's life from the essay<sup>[9]</sup>. Saoirse Moen followed up her first post on the issue by making contact with Zimmer Bradley's (now adult) children. What she learnt from them was even more deeply shocking than what was already public (if rarely spoken about) knowledge. Marion Zimmer Bradley's daughter had replied to Saoirse Moen's emails explaining that not only had Marion Zimmer Bradley enabled Breen's abusive behaviour but that Zimmer Bradley was also herself an abuser who had abused her own children.

Saoirse Moen's posts on the issue made international headlines. The Guardian newspaper covered the shocked reaction among the writers and fans:

*"The world of science fiction and fantasy is in shock, following news that the daughter of the bestselling late fantasy author Marion Zimmer Bradley has accused her mother of abusing her as a child. Authors such as John Scalzi, G Willow Wilson and Jim Hines have reacted to the allegations against a woman who had been regarded a pillar of the SFF community with horror. The writer Janni Lee Simner has announced she will be donating her earnings from a story set in a fictional world created by Bradley to an anti-abuse charity."*

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jun/27/sff-community-marion-zimmer-bradley-daughter-accuses-abuse>

The revelations were very difficult for many people to cope with. As with many famous authors, Zimmer Bradley had been an influential writer for people at a seminal time in their lives. Her fantasy works often dealt with sexual issues that many people have said helped them understand their own issues.

Not one to let a tragedy go by without making use of it, Day decided that the revelations could be used to demonstrate that he had been right all along. Having spent over a decade bemoaning the evils of women science fiction writers, here, at last, was a genuine example of one who had behaved undeniably monstrously<sup>[11]</sup>. For an added bonus to Day's narrative, the revelations had been precipitated by that hagiographic article at Tor.com for which he could blame Patrick Nielsen Hayden (and John Scalzi as well for no good reason).

Whether Day only considered using claims of paedophilia against the SFWA once the revelations about Marion Zimmer Bradley occurred or whether he had already been considering it was unclear. Day would later state that he regarded using false accusations of paedophilia as a useful rhetorical attack<sup>[12]</sup>. Homophobic groups have also attempted to claim paedophilia is an inherent danger in recognising basic human rights of LGBTIQI people, a tactic Day would have been familiar with.

Day sent off an indignant letter to the SFWA, conflating a variety of issues with Marion Zimmer Bradley and his own recent expulsion:

*"First, as a tolerant and inclusive organization, does the behavior which SFWA tolerates include abnormal sexual behavior such as homosexuality, child abuse, torture, and incestuous rape by its members? Second, will the SFWA Board be purging Marion Zimmer Bradley from SFWA's historical membership list and removing all references to her, her estate, and her estate's agent from the SFWA web site? Third, will the SFWA Board be retroactively expunging from the Nebula Awards list Marion Zimmer Bradley's 1976 Best Novel nomination for The Heritage of Hastur and Mary C. Aldridge's 1990 Best Short Story nomination for "The Adinkra Cloth", published in Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine. As a former life member of SFWA expelled by the current SFWA Board for a tweet deemed inappropriate, I should be very interested to hear SFWA's formal position on homosexuality, child molestation, torture and incestuous rape by its members. I look forward to reading your response."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140617121758/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/06/contamination-by-association.html>

As a new salvo in the SFWA conflict, it didn't gain much traction except with Day's own followers. Zimmer Bradley had died in 1999, long before the current board had much sway. Furthermore, he was now demanding of the SFWA that they take steps to censor member's behaviour (or in this case an ex-member)

for actions outside of the organisation. Despite his supposed concern for child safety, Day's letter contained no concrete proposals that would further the cause of protecting children from abuse.

However, Day had two other targets to use to help portray the SFWA as in some way sympathetic to child abuse. The first was an attempt to use author (and SFWA Grandmaster) Samuel R. Delany's frank discussions about his sexuality and his sexual experiences as a child to cast him as abusive or as endorsing abuse. Delany would later speak about this at length in response<sup>[13]</sup>.

Day's third target had some more substance. Ed Kramer was an editor of fantasy and horror fiction and co-founder of the major pop-culture convention Dragon\*Con in Georgia. Kramer had been arrested in 2000 on charges of child molestation and had spent over a decade fighting those charges. In the process, he had enlisted the support of many people within science fiction communities who believed he was either innocent or being treated unjustly by the court system. Famous names who had provided him with some support included Harlan Ellison and former SFWA President Robert Sawyer — unwise of them but at no point were they endorsing his actual crimes.

In December 2013, Kramer's trial finally started<sup>[15]</sup> and he had pleaded guilty<sup>[16]</sup>. In June of 2014, Day noted that according to the membership directory that he had access to, Kramer was still a member of the SFWA<sup>[17]</sup>. In fact, as was later revealed, Kramer was not still a member in 2014 as he had let his associate membership lapse.

Day would continue on this line of argument but at the time gained little traction. In the context of the disputes of 2013, a focus on Zimmer Bradley (who had received some support from no less than Robert Heinlein at the time of Breen's expulsion from Worldcon) or Ed Kramer (associated with Dragon\*Con, a convention favoured by many right-leaning authors) or indeed on SFWA's external reprehensible actions were not beneficial to the idea that the SFWA should mind its own business when it came to author behaviour.

However, this tactic in 2014 was more of a trial run for Day. The idea of using child abuse claims as a kind of rhetorical weapon was one Day was experimenting with and would use again in the future.

## FOOTNOTE

- [1] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210126101109/http://sasswritersgroup.blogspot.com/>
- [2] <https://tangentonline.com/news/news-news/sfw-a-president-endorses-bulletin-censorship/>
- [3] <http://file770.com/petition-targets-sfw-a-bulletin-oversight/> and <https://www.dailydot.com/parsec/fandom/controversial-email-inflames-sexism-debate-sci-fi/>
- [4] <https://madgeniusclub.com/2014/02/13/sfw-a-can-haz-glittery-hoo-haa/>
- [5] <https://www.sfw.a.org/2014/02/11/presidential-statement-regarding-sfw-a-bulletin/>
- [6] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2014/02/16/a-note-to-sean-fodera/>
- [7] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2014/02/20/sean-fodera-makes-an-apology/>
- [8] see the "The Great Breen Boondoggle" section of chapter 4 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/02/14/debarkle-chapter-4-an-inadequate-history-of-fandom-worldcon-1939-2000/>
- [9] <https://deirdre.net/2014/06/03/marion-zimmer-bradley-gave-us-new-perspectives-all-right>
- [10] <https://deirdre.net/2014/06/10/marion-zimmer-bradley-its-worse-than-i-knew/>
- [11] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140613131847/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2014/06/pink-sff-is-worse-than-you-think.html>
- [12] <https://web.archive.org/web/20161117133439/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/11/throw-out-oed.html>
- [13] <https://medium.com/difficult-subjects/samuel-r-delany-on-nambla-and-consent-c80c63d879fc>
- [14] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_E.\\_Kramer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_E._Kramer)
- [15] <http://file770.com/kramer-trial-slated-to-begin-today/>
- [16] <http://file770.com/kramer-seeks-more-freedom/>
- [17] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140626004153/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2014/06/sfw-a-still-harbors-child-molesters.html>

## 26: Sad Puppies (Season Two) crosses the streams

January 2014, somewhere in Utah...

Larry Correia had learned a lot from his three previous Hugo campaigns<sup>[1]</sup> and Sad Puppies 2 had a lot more structure than his earlier attempts. Correia's initial posts were light-hearted attempts to get readers of his blog to sign up for the 2014 Worldcon as associate members. The location would be London, so unlike Nevada (2012) and Texas (2013), it was less likely that many of his fans could easily attend. Correia did have fans in Europe, but Baen Books were not well distributed outside of North America and were not well known as an SFF publisher.

The second post contained a funny cartoon complete with a jovial Larry Correia and a moose and some practical information about the advantages of a Worldcon membership even if you couldn't actually attend the convention.

*"But wait. There's more! Normally all of the voters are sent a packet of all the nominated works to read, so you get more than your membership costs worth of eBooks. Sure, most of them are screeds about corporate greed, global warming, dying polar bears, or whatever the left wing cause of the day is, but that's why we need to nominate some works that are actually entertaining."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/01/14/sad-puppies-2-the-illustrated-edition/>

Correia couldn't know it at the time but the Hugo Packet for 2014 would turn out to be a marvellous deal (at least for fans of the Wheel of Time saga<sup>[2]</sup>).

This stage of Correia's campaign gained more publicity than previously. In some cases, he was cited as just an additional example of authors engaged in Hugo Award promotion<sup>[3]</sup> but his post was also picked up by Mike Glycer at *File770*, who had some mixed feelings about it but agreed on one point:

*"Along the way, Correia called on people to nominate his editor at Baen, Toni Weiskopf. Now that's something I can agree with – Toni Weiskopf should be competing for a Hugo. She's a terrific developer of talent."*

<http://file770.com/larry-correia-makes-vulgar-blog-post-his-word/>

Weiskopf added a comment to the *File770* story saying that she was glad to see that people were taking Correia's post in the way it was intended. However, the pricklier side of Larry Correia came out a bit more in a reaction post to the *File770* coverage. Some of it retained the good humour but Correia also recounted what he saw as the Worldcon reaction to his 2011 Campbell/Astounding Award nomination:

*"Then my name showed up on the shortlist so they looked me up... Hoo boy. It was the end of the freaking world. Most of them didn't actually read my book to know they needed to vote against me. They found out I was an outspoken, right wing political blogger, and gun rights activist. Critics came out of the woodwork. Smofers actively campaigned against me. If you voted for Larry Correia, you were a bad person. I was accused of misogyny, racism, hatey-hate-mongery, and why wouldn't I keep my Jesus out of their uterus! My favorite post however was from a British blogger who said that "if Larry Correia wins the Campbell, it will end literature forever"."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/01/23/some-reactions-to-sad-puppies-2-rainbow-puppy-lighthouse-the-huggening/>

If critics had come out of the woodwork in 2011, what they said and wrote has become nigh on impossible to find since, nor does this account match his reactions at the time and the quote from the 'British blogger' appears to be made up<sup>[4]</sup>. The emotion expressed appears genuine though and Correia's memories of his experience with the Reno Worldcon had grown more negative over time.

Correia also conceded that some Baen authors had gained Hugo recognition in the past but still felt that Baen was being unfairly excluded in part because:

*"average Correia/Ringo/Kratman/Hoyt/Williamson fan would rather set themselves on fire than sit through a Worldcon, especially when it is competing with DragonCon"*

*ibid*

This post had more allusions to politics than the earlier ones but it was not the primary theme of any of these initial posts. Correia was applying his other skills to the campaign though. He had tracked the number of fans who had told him they had signed up in 2013. He put this figure as 100 of his fans<sup>[5]</sup>. Because of the way nomination rights work, those 100 fans would be eligible to nominate in 2014.

Meanwhile, in the comments to Correia's reaction post, "VD" suggested that forty-thousand words were a low bar as a word count for a novel. Another commenter speculated if "VD" was (perchance) Vox Day<sup>[6]</sup> and if so, maybe they should campaign to get *him* a Hugo? Correia was amused by the idea:

*"So many heads would explode at SFWA that astronauts could see the crater from space."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/01/23/some-reactions-to-sad-puppies-2-rainbow-puppy-lighthouse-the-huggening/#comment-34016>

An idea was forming...

Phase one of Sad Puppies 2 was to get Correia's fans to sign-up before the deadline for eligibility to nominate closed at the end of January. Phase two was to get them to nominate things. Two things were established for the beginning. Correia wanted people to vote for his novel *Warbound* and to vote for Toni Weiskopf as Best Editor Long Form. That left a lot of other categories to play with. To that end, Correia started to crowdsource suggestions on his blog. In the comments, Vox Day<sup>[7]</sup> made some suggestions about which works might be suited. In the end, he picked out two candidates for Best Novelette: *Opera Vita Aeterna* (from his collection *The Last Witchking*) and *Qalabi Dawn* (from his collection *The Wardog's Coin*) — both of which were set in the world of Selenoth from his attempt at a *Game of Thrones*-like Christian fantasy, *A Throne of Bones*<sup>[8]</sup>.

Correia would continue with multiple reminders to his readers about the campaign into March. On March 25 he had a provisional slate together.

- *Best Novel*
- *Warbound, the Grimnoir Chronicles* – Larry Correia – Baen
- *A Few Good Men* – Sarah A. Hoyt – Baen
- *Novella*
- *The Butcher of Khardov* – Dan Wells – Skull Island Expeditions
- *The Chaplain's Legacy* – Brad Torgersen – Analog
- *Novelette*
- *The Exchange Officers* – Brad Torgersen – Analog
- *Opera Vita Aeterna* – Vox Day – *The Last Witchking*
- *Best Fanzine*
- *Elitist Book Reviews* – Steve Diamond
- *Graphic Story*
- *Schlock Mercenary* – Howard Tayler
- *Best Editor Long Form*

- *Toni Weiskopf*
- *Best Editor Short Form*
- *Bryan Thomas Schmidt*
- *Campbell Award*
- *Marko Kloos*
- *Frank Chadwick*  
<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/03/25/mv-hugo-slate/>

The list was mainly people he had befriended such as Dan Wells, Howard Tayler and Brad Torgersen. Marko Kloos, he knew from their old gun forum days and Sarah A. Hoyt was a fellow Baen author. The main impact of Correia's crowdsourcing was the inclusion of Vox Day in the Novelette category. Vox Day endorsed Correia's slate, blaming John Scalzi for the development in campaigning:

*"It should be interesting to see how this all turns out. But after John Scalzi – how entirely unsurprising – laid the groundwork for the open politicization of the Hugo Award, it was inevitable that what had always been done quietly behind closed doors would come out in the open."*  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140330041659/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/03/the-sad-puppy-hugo-slate.html>

Day also had some additions to Correia's list:

- *Best Short Story*
- *Port Call – Michael Z. Williamson – Baen*
- *The Krumhorn and Misericorde – Dave Freer – Baen*
- *Dog's Body – Sarah A. Hoyt – Baen*
- *Failsafe – Karen Bovenmyer – Iron Dragon Books[9]*
- *Best Related Work*
- *Writing Down the Dragon – Tom Simon – Bondwine Books*
- *On Training for War – Tom Kratman – Baen*
- *A Terrible Thing to Lose: Zombie Science and Science Fiction in John Ringo's Under a Graveyard Sky – Tedd Roberts – Baen*
- *Best Professional Artist*
- *Kirk DouPonce*  
**ibid**

Prior to this, Vox Day had shown little interest in the Hugo Awards. He had made legal threats at the SFWA but with his expulsion settled, there was little he could do in that arena anymore. However, the Hugo Awards were something that was also valued by people he regarded with deep antipathy: Teresa Nielsen Hayden, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Tor Books and John Scalzi.

On March 31, Correia warned people it was the last day to nominate and also stated:

*“If you have registered and not received your PIN, then there are shenanigans afoot. I already know of people who registered before the cut off, but were not given their PIN because “we didn’t process your registration in time”. You might think that’s bad, but us trained auditors calls that evidence. If that has happened to you, I’d really like to know about it.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/03/31/today-is-the-deadline-for-sad-puppies/>

In the first quarter of 2014 Larry Correia had been engaging with fandom beyond Baen in other ways as well.

At Tor.com, writer Alex Dally MacFarlane posted an essay entitled *Post-Binary Gender in SF: Introduction* which was to kick off a series looking at gender in science fiction. The essay started with an objective and a definition:

*“I want an end to the default of binary gender in science fiction stories.*

*What do I mean by “post-binary gender”? It’s a term that has already been used to mean multiple things, so I will set out my definition: Post-binary gender in SF is the acknowledgement that gender is more complex than the Western cultural norm of two genders (female and male): that there are more genders than two, that gender can be fluid, that gender exists in many forms.”*

<https://www.tor.com/2014/01/21/post-binary-gender-in-sf-introduction/>

Larry Correia decided to write a long post in response. Much of it involved knocking over strawman arguments of his own making that had not been arguments McFarlane had made<sup>[10]</sup> and, in an unintended irony, mistakenly decided that Alex Dally MacFarlane was a “he”. His reply also included his own ideas about how he imagined the Hugo Awards worked:

*“The typical Worldcon voter, when presented with 5 nominees for a category, and their clique’s personal favorite writer isn’t on there, and not having actually read any of the works, will go through the authors and rank them according to the order that best assuages their hang ups. Oooh, a paraplegic transsexual lesbian minority abortion doctor with AIDS who writes for Mother Jones? You’d need a wheelbarrow to carry all the Hugos. Quality? Popularity? Staying power? Influence? Isn’t that what makes something a classic? Not to the modern literati. We have to elevate works by people according to what they checked on their EEOC form. Meanwhile, hatey-McHatertons like me read books and like them, even when we don’t know anything about the author. I didn’t know what sex Lois Bujold or Wen Spencer where the first time I read one of their books, but I knew the writing was good. I couldn’t tell you what writers are gay or like to cross dress either, but I can tell you who I enjoy reading.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/01/28/ending-binary-gender-in-fiction-or-how-to-murder-your-writing-career/>

Jim Hines decided to engage with Correia’s fisking<sup>[11]</sup> with his own counter-fisk: picking through Correia’s counter-argument with his own counter-arguments, creating what Hines called “fiskception”.

*“Cismale gendernomrative fascist? Whatever. What Correia is displaying here is his awareness that he’s making an assumption, his awareness that the assumption might be wrong, and his unwillingness to do 30 seconds of research to verify his assumption. Or just read the bio at the end of MacFarlane’s article. Either because he’s lazy, or because he doesn’t see any need to treat people he disagrees with respectfully. Or both.”*

<http://www.jimchines.com/2014/01/fiskception/>

Correia then responded with a further stab at both MacFarlane’s essays and Hines’s response. Neither set of Correia’s responses cast him in a good light beyond his normal audience.

In April, The Guardian newspaper carried Damien Walter’s regular column on science fiction. Walter’s topic that Friday, was “*Science fiction needs to reflect that the future is queer*“. He discussed the role of sex and gender in science fiction. In one paragraph, Walter discussed the recent set of posts by MacFarlane, Correia and Hines.

*‘When author and historian Alex Dally Macfarlane made a call earlier this year for a vision of post-binary gender in SF, her intelligent argument was met with predictably intractable ignorance from conservative sci-fi fans. For writers and fans like Larry Correia, whose virulent attack on MacFarlane was excellently dissected by Jim C. Hines, sex is a biological imperative and the idea of gender as a social construct is a damn liberal lie! But Correia boils it down to a much simpler argument. However*

*accurate a queer future might be, SF authors must continue to pander to the bigotry of conservative readers if they want to be “commercial”.*

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/11/science-fiction-needs-to-reflect-queer-fluid-gender-identity>

By now, readers may have spotted a pattern. Larry Correia often starts something with humour but makes use of put-downs, bold assertions and partial quotes, and stretches a point or sometimes wholly misrepresents what has been said (perhaps through not understanding, perhaps deliberately). Responding in kind or even with much milder criticism is met with an even more aggressive response. So it was with this article.

Correia opened his response with “So I got slandered in the Guardian last Friday” and later continued with:

*“Anyways, my name showed up as the poster child for hate mongery and villainy in the Guardian (a liberal tabloid that passes for a major newspaper in Britain). I’ve been in a lot of American news things but this was a first for me, so on Friday afternoon I had to discuss with my fans on Facebook what I should put on my new business cards. We finally decided on **Larry F. Correia, International Lord of Hate**. Almost went with *The Hatemaster* because of the 70’s super villain vibe, but that looks too much like *The Hamster* when you’re reading fast.”*

<https://monsterhunting.com/2014/04/15/larry-f-correia-international-lord-of-hate/>

The whole post is over 2,600 words long, in response to two sentences in an article that in total was less than 700 words. It was in a style that his readers enjoy, a mix of insults and a few counterpoints and colourful language but the thrust of it is that he (Larry Correia) had in some way been defamed. Walter may well have missed some of the nuances of Correia’s original argument but Walter made a better effort at summarising what Correia had said than Correia had made of MacFarlane’s original piece, Hines’s counter-fisk or Walter’s column.

In the gradually forming coalition, writers connected with the *Mad Genius Club* also joined in. Dave Freer stood up for gender roles:

*“To which I reply in tones redolent of the fragrant effluvia of cows I have been working with: ‘You’re smoking your socks, Sunshine. Somewhere in a future so remote that present readers would have little to identify with, maybe technology will do away with men in the role they always have occupied. But if sf (particularly sf set ‘near-future’ – like the next 200 years) wants to reflect any form of plausibility, men will still be the ones doing the cows. The fishing. Or the plumbing. The crew on the salvage tugs. Probably most of the bleeding and dying, most of the jobs that require a long neck and strong back, mental and physical flexibility. Any number of other jobs which attract little or no interest from the vast majority of women, because they’re dirty and hard. Yes, there will be women doing them. There are now. But damned few. Gender roles are not fragile, and Damien Walter and all his ilk better hope they aren’t in future, or they may have to find out just how hard those hard men are for themselves. I’d pay good money to watch them slither around the cattle yards.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2014/04/14/cow-manure-and-truth/>

Sarah A. Hoyt joined in:

*“But there goes some critter named Damien Walter, in this outmoded tabloid that Brits seem to think is a newspaper – something called *Al The Guardian* though heaven only knows what they’re guarding and if they think it’s the right to say who’s the world’s worst person, I want them to tell me they and whose army – calling Larry all sorts of things, accusing him of hate, and furthermore putting words in his mouth that Larry didn’t say.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2014/04/13/i-need-a-secret-lair-and-minions-and-piranhas/>

However, it was Amanda Green who drew a connection between Walter’s column and the Hugo Awards.

*“I’ll start by noting that the germs for this post were planted earlier when a so-called “journalist” writing for the Guardian called out Larry Correia, putting words into Larry’s mouth that Larry never said. I’m not going to defend Larry here because he can defend himself much better, and much more entertainingly, than I can. However, it was interesting that the article, with its attack on Larry, came out around the time the Hugo slate was being narrowed down. Hmm, if I believed in coincidences — or conspiracies — I’d say someone had an agenda he was trying to further.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/11/science-fiction-needs-to-reflect-queer-fluid-gender-identity>



As it happens, the 2014 Hugo Award finalists were announced a few days later. Correia's slate scored 7 out of the 12 items listed<sup>[13]</sup>. Some of the 'misses' were due to a lack of homework on Correia's part: Marko Kloos was not eligible for the Campbell/Astounding Award because of past published work. Howard Tayler's *Schlock Mercenary* was of dubious eligibility for Graphic Story as he hadn't released a new volume. In the comments at *File770*, Tayler himself expressed some unease about being on the Sad Puppies slate:

*"I'm not sure why Larry put me on his Sad Puppies slate. It's certainly not something I asked for, nor is it something I've EVER asked for. I like it when fans read and recommend my work, but I don't campaign for that. I certainly don't think that Schlock Mercenary not winning a Hugo (five times in a row!) is somehow a sign of Great Injustice somewhere. Because that's just ridiculous. Not winning means it's not good enough. That's okay. I can keep making it better. And other people will keep making other excellent graphic stories, and thank you, Hugo Awards, for encouraging an ever-raising bar."*

<http://file770.com/somewhere-puppies-are-smiling/#comment-217888>

The nomination statistics would later show how the other items on both Correia's and Vox Day's additional slate had performed. The campaign certainly had made an impact but not a consistent one, with voters picking between the choices.

Correia himself had 184 nomination votes for his novel, the third most voted for<sup>[14]</sup>. Others got fewer votes (at the nomination stage) than that but success was dependent on which category they were in. Vox Day's novelette received 69 votes which were 23 votes less than Brad Torgersen's novelette. Sarah A. Hoyt's short story *Dog's Body* came fifth out of the nominees in its category but fell foul of a rule that required a work to receive at least 5% of the nomination vote to qualify (the story only got 4.4%).

We will return to the 2014 Hugo Awards in a later chapter. At this point, Larry Correia was very happy with how his campaign had proceeded.

*"Thanks to the Monster Hunter Nation and other caring individuals a great victory was struck today in the war against the scourge that is Puppy Related Sadness!"*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/04/20/a-blow-has-been-struck-against-puppy-related-sadness/>

However, Correia was quick to spot a downside:

*"Already there is all sorts of outrage coming from the usual suspects, with allegations of, I kid you not, "ballot stuffing" For everyone who has been involved in this process, you know how especially ironic and hilarious that actually is, since behind the scenes I've been collecting counts of Sad Puppies nominators the whole time to see if the process was rigged because there have been some really suspicious things that have happened in the past to other author friends of mine. Can't help myself. I'm a retired auditor. But the London committee appears to be totally honest. Great."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/04/20/a-blow-has-been-struck-against-puppy-related-sadness/>

At this point, Correia wouldn't have had access to official numbers but claiming voting irregularities with this level of success would have been a stretch. Also, it was actually true that people had mentioned "ballot stuffing" in connection to the Sad Puppy results. There was a single comment at the io9 announcement of the results saying:

*"It is HILARIOUS\* that Vox Day got a nom. Can you say "ballot stuffing"? \*When I say "hilarious" I mean "awful" and "frustrating" and "insane".*

<https://io9.gizmodo.com/1565148661>

More substantially, Natalie Luhrs had summed up the Sad Puppies campaign using the term.

*"What I agree with, even less, is the campaign that went on to stuff the ballot box on the part of Larry Correia and Vox Day. They each wrote a post, shortly before the nominating deadline, exhorting their readers to submit a particular ballot... I would be extremely interested to know how many ballots match that list in all respects. I would also be interested to know how many supporting memberships were bought for spouses, children, and extended family who did not actually submit those ballots. It would be ridiculously easy to game the nominations that way. Ridiculously."*

<https://www.pretty-terrible.com/obligatory-hugo-nomination-reaction-post/>

It was a reasonable question, although a look at the final nomination statistics suggests that the potential number of identical ballots would have been low. Luhrs had good reason to suspect that both Correia and Vox Day might indulge in brigading tactics. Outside of book fandom, a newer, different but related fandom was in an uproar in 2014 and Vox Day was in the middle of it...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] 2011, 2012 and 2013 see Chapter 16 and 19 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/03/25/debarkle-chapter-16-larry-goes-to-reno/> and <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/03/31/debarkle-chapter-19-sp1-how-to-get-correia-nominated-for-a-hugo/>
- [2] we'll get to that
- [3] <http://corabuhlert.com/2014/01/10/hugo-dust-up-2014-earlier-every-year/>
- [4] see Chapter 16
- [5] Correia had 101 nominating votes for Best Novel in 2013 <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2013HugoStatistics.pdf> It could be that he simply took the figure from the nomination statistics
- [6] spoilers...yes it was
- [7] see note 6 <https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/02/20/sad-puppies-2-the-debatening/#comment-35257>
- [8] see Chapter 22 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/04/09/debarkle-chapter-22-the-sfwa-civil-war-part-1/>
- [9] Technically this work was also a late suggestion by Larry Correia on his own blog but wasn't listed on the 'slate' per se <https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/03/27/last-minute-hugo-slate-thoughts/>
- [10] e.g., "Have you ever gone into Barnes and Noble, went to the clerk at the info desk, and said "Hey, I really want to purchase with my money a science fiction novel which will increase my AWARENESS of troubling social issues."? No? This is my shocked face."
- [11] <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/fisking#English>
- [12] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/01/29/5687/>
- [13] <http://file770.com/somewhere-puppies-are-smiling/>
- [14] also, it was the second most voted for: Neil Gaiman's *Ocean at the End of the Lane* came second in the nominations but Gaiman withdrew the work <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2014HugoStatistics.pdf> – nomination figures are given at the end

# 27: Vox Day, Racism, Sexism and Opera Vita Aeterna

[content warning for extreme views on race, gender and sexual violence]

Larry Correia's second Sad Puppies slate was not very different from the first. There were a lot of Mormon men (because of his writer connections in Utah) and seven of the twelve people listed were people Correia had recommended in previous years. Marko Kloos was new but Correia knew him from gun forum days and had been promoting his book. Sarah A. Hoyt was also new but she was a fellow Baen author and they had a lot in common politically (and coincidentally, both had family connections to Portugal).

Vox Day was different though. Nominally, he had called himself a libertarian in the past but his views on women and race were more extreme than Correia's. I don't know if there was any communication between them other than the comments left by 'VD' at Correia's blog but the additional works that Vox Day listed on his own blog, look more like works that Correia would have listed if he had the time.

After the initial stages of the campaign and the announcement of the finalists, Correia would offer a new rationalisation for his campaign.

## *“Short Version:*

*1. I said a chunk of the Hugo voters are biased toward the left, and put the author's politics far ahead of the quality of the work. Those openly on the right are sabotaged. This was denied.*

*2. So I got some right wingers on the ballot.*

*3. The biased voters immediately got all outraged and mobilized to do exactly what I said they'd do.*

*4. Point made.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/04/24/an-explanation-about-the-hugo-awards-controversy/>

Certainly, the impact of Sad Puppies 2 was receiving more negative publicity than any of Correia's three previous campaigns. However, prior to this campaign, he'd never had somebody like Vox Day before. Dan Wells, Howard Tayler, Brandon Sanderson, Toni Weiskopf may well have benefited from Correia's campaign but none of those people was antagonistic to the rest of the ballot. As Mike Glyer had said in his post on the Sad Puppies 2<sup>[1]</sup> initial campaign post, it was a net positive to have Toni Weiskopf on the ballot. Why hadn't she been on the ballot before? Well, as Larry Correia had himself pointed out, Baen readers were a small subset of Worldcon attendees, Baen's books were not well distributed beyond North America and the publisher had in recent years increased its focus on the military science fiction sub-genre (which had lots of fans but with fewer overlaps with other sub-genres). Politics and sub-genre were somewhat conflated in the mil-SF space (particularly with Baen's trifecta of Ringo, Kratman and Williamson).

Even so, Correia had gained a slot as a Campbell/Astounding finalist in past years. Hoyt had not been a Hugo finalist before but in terms of some kind of entrenched bias against her, she had been promoted at John Scalzi's blog<sup>[2]</sup> and had a high-profile set of essays at Tor.com<sup>[3]</sup>.

The politics of Sad Puppies 2 wasn't exclusive to a single nominee but what shifted the balance was not Correia or Hoyt (two of the three most obviously political entries on his slate) but Vox Day. Larry Correia wasn't unaware of that and in the same post I quoted above, was open about the central cause of the controversy:

*“The Controversial Slate: For the record, I'm only the second most hated man who got a nomination. The most despised is Vox Day by far, however, I'm the one who suggested him to my fans who were participating in Sad Puppies 2. So if he's their devil, I'm the antichrist. Let's back up. The reason Vox is so hated is that he is the only person ever kicked out of SFWA. He makes me look cuddly and diplomatic. He was expelled from SFWA because the powers that be decided he was a racist, in fact, it*

*was so obvious that he was racist that it only took a thirty page thesis explaining how stuff he said was actually racist, including the leadership of SFWA searching through the vile cesspool that is Stormfront until they found some Nazi skin head who used similar words, and then holding him accountable for things that posters said in his blog comments (us right wing bloggers don't believe in censorship so we don't "manage" or "massage" our comments like they do) then they kicked him out for misusing their Twitter account."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/04/24/an-explanation-about-the-hugo-awards-controversy/>

It does not take a thirty-page thesis to show that Vox Day could be reasonably described as a racist even in 2014. Only a couple of days before Correia's post, Day was overtly saying racial segregation was inevitable and that to be "pro-segregation" was like saying one was "pro-biology":

*"To talk about being pro-segregation or anti-segregation is a category error. It's no different than claiming to be pro-biology or anti-gravity. It's a normal human dynamic, and as such, it can be resisted with effort, but only for a short time from the historical perspective."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140425064058/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/04/the-inevitability-of-segregation.html>

Day had been fine-tuning and adapting his ethnonationalist politics over time but by 2013 he had already been quite clear that his preference was for people to live in racially homogeneous segregated states. In 2013 he thought this was compatible with his libertarian beliefs on the grounds that he believed that without government intervention, people's natural preferences could lead people to choose this arrangement without force.

*"With regards to race, I would be more than content to see the U.S. federal government and other governments across the West firmly respect the right to self-determination, the right to free speech, and the right to freedom of economic association on the part of individual, as well as the political sovereignty of the several States.*

*This would likely lead to legal segregation in some states, most likely beginning, ironically enough, with the States where Hispanics are expected to soon be the majority. In most of the rest, I expect a return to Constitutional federalism and the concept of democratic laboratories would merely lead to bans on enforced desegregation and government violations of the freedom of association; history indicates that people have a tendency to naturally segregate as that is how most of the various population groups were formed in the first place."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130821133804/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2013/08/mailvox-answering-simple-question.html>

At this point, one of the few points of differentiation between Day's stated beliefs and those of more overt and recognisable White Supremacists is that Day hoped that this segregation would occur peacefully and that a race-war would be regrettable, whereas the more stereotypical White Supremacists were eagerly anticipating such a calamity. It was certainly possible to enumerate points of difference between Day's views and those of neo-Nazis or groups like the Klan but the shared assumptions and beliefs were also numerous. Day's expectation of a coming race-war akin to the 'helter-skelter' like ideas of Charles Manson<sup>[4]</sup> was of a 'more in sorrow than in anger' kind.

*"It may already be too late for a peaceful return to historical segregation patterns. But if history is an even remotely reliable guide, the West will return to them one way or another. And keep in mind that my expectations of the future have nothing whatsoever to do with my personal preferences, any more than I wanted to see the global financial system seize up when I predicted the 2008 economic crisis six years before it happened."*

ibid

Correia, who very much resented liberals putting him in a box or making assumptions about his character based on his religion, the state he lived in or his gender, may also have missed how fine-grained Vox Day's preference for racial/ethnic segregation was. Again, Day would fine-tune and clarify these ideas over time but none of them was new in 2014 or only made clear in subsequent years. Day has a consistent belief that he has explained relatively clearly again and again. His concerns about immigration to the US may have pointed at contemporary concerns about immigrants from Mexico, or refugees from the Middle East or Africa (as was common across US politics) but his analysis was clear. The United States, as a project and the 'libertarian' rights-based ideal of the constitution (as claimed by libertarians and libertarian-like

conservatives), was, in Day's views, an ethnicity-specific project only suited for a specific ethnicity. Very, very specific:

*"As I noted in a previous post, the influx of Irish, German, and Scandinavian immigrants distinctly transformed the political culture of America in a fundamentally anti-Constitutional manner, not despite but because of their assimilation. In this essay, we can see the way in which the Jewish European immigrants of the post-WWII period have had a predictably inimical effect as well as predict the ultimate outcome of the much larger and more recent wave of Central American immigration. I find this piece to be fascinating because while I hadn't read Glubb before, I had reached very similar conclusions on the basis of my own historical readings."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20100916182350/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2010/09/immigration-and-fate-of-empires.html>

Day often says that he is not a racial supremacist — that he believes that societies of different races are just different rather than one being better than the other. He even points to his own family background which includes some ancestors of Mexican and Native American background to cast himself as not being conventionally 'white'. However, Day is disingenuous. He separates two beliefs to maintain this belief. Connect them (and they often appear together) and the implication is clear what his beliefs entail based on his assumptions about the world.

1. He believes that Western society is "the most humane civilization the human race has ever known" and also that the freedoms enshrined in the libertarian/conservative perception of the US constitution are ideal.

2. He believes that "the West" is a civilisation SPECIFICALLY for white people/people of European descent AND that specifically, the USA (in the sense above) is a project that is intended to work for people of ENGLISH descent.

In Day's view, the fall of the USA from grace (which matches his theological beliefs about the fall of the world from grace and its control by Satanic forces) was precipitated by non-Anglo immigration. For Day, the Irish (among others) led to a weakening in the Constitution, later mass immigration from southern Europe (in Day's view) being even worse and as he openly states (in 2010 note), post-WWII Jewish immigration was even worse.

Libertarians like Correia and Hoyt shared a belief that the USA (in an idealised form as a constitutional republic base on natural rights and rose-coloured spectacles version of capitalism) had drifted off course and become dominated by left-wing and state-centric beliefs. Day had similar beliefs (he has since shifted from the libertarian aspects) which made him easy to see as an ideological partner but underneath was a theory that the shift away from the ideal was a racial one. Day's theory of US politics was explicitly anti-Semitic in that he blamed American Jews for post-WWII departures from the capitalist ideal<sup>[5]</sup>. Day's views aren't identical to those of the nineteenth-century 'Know Nothings'<sup>[6]</sup> but the similarities are substantial.

So on race alone, asking people to ignore Day's politics was already a big ask. He had also spent a year accusing the popular author John Scalzi of being a rapist. He had also aligned himself overtly with the growing online misogynist movement<sup>[7]</sup>. Day's views on women writing science fiction were widely known<sup>[8]</sup>. Nevertheless, Correia was shocked by one outcome of his campaign:

*"The libel and slander over the last few days have been so ridiculous that my wife was contacted by people she hasn't talked to for years, concerned that she was married to such a horrible, awful, hateful, bad person, and that they were worried for her safety."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/04/24/an-explanation-about-the-hugo-awards-controversy/>

Correia didn't connect these concerns with his alliance with Vox Day but it seems likely that Day's extreme views on women may have led people to be concerned about who Correia was aligning himself with. Day was on record with a number of disturbing views from his Pick-Up Artist/Manosphere-related blog 'AlphaGame', including:

- "Women not only lie about rape, but women USUALLY lie about rape."<sup>[9]</sup>
- "it's time to stop pretending that rape is the worstest crime ever in the history of the world"<sup>[10]</sup>
- "So, get your rape on, boys. The ladies, they love the rape."<sup>[11]</sup>
- "Apparently Sharia has the solution for ending rape culture. Just hang the women. That will kill three birds with one stone, as it should also take care of the growing problem of false-rape accusations as well as teenage pregnancy."<sup>[12]</sup>

- [on women] “when it comes to what sexually attracts them, even the nice, well-bred ones are more insanely twisted, from the male perspective, than the average serial killer”<sup>[13]</sup>

- and on his main blog “Because female independence is strongly correlated with a whole host of social ills. Using the utilitarian metric favored by most atheists, a few acid-burned faces is a small price to pay for lasting marriages, stable families, legitimate children, low levels of debt, strong currencies, affordable housing, homogenous populations, low levels of crime, and demographic stability.”<sup>[14]</sup>

Day’s claim that the term “marital rape” is oxymoronic hadn’t been made at this point<sup>[15]</sup> but it wouldn’t be hard to infer from his already stated views. That Larry Correia was falling into the orbit of Vox Day was not an unreasonable worry for friends of his wife. Day’s views could be described as “politics” but they were politics of a distinct and immediate personal nature rather than abstract ideology or partisan party alignment.

Larry Correia’s assessment of Day’s beliefs at that time (and note, the dot points all predate Correia’s post) was as follows:

*“I didn’t really know the guy that well before he started pissing so many people off, but having been character assassinated myself, I’ve learned never to take the internet’s word about somebody’s character. Having actually talked with, and then gotten into long arguments and debates with Vox, he is a contrarian, can be a jerk is extremely opinionated, but I honestly don’t think he’s a racist (He’s also not a white guy, but most of the people attacking him don’t know that). We’ve had some long, heated debates on different subjects now, but since I’m not a panty twisted liberal, I can handle differing beliefs.*

*We disagree about a lot. I disagree with him on some fundamental philosophy. His “rabid hateful” views on homosexuality match about a third of America, most staunch Catholics, and he’s far more moderate on the issue than any devout Muslim or average European villager. So I disagree with him, but he’s not the out there whackadoo his detractors make him out to be, but then again, these same people say I want to drag gays to death behind my truck, so take the hate with a grain of salt. He thinks I’m nuts on several topics, but the dude is smart, and he can write. As for the people saying he “bought” the awards... Holy moly, you’ve got no idea what his day job is. If the man wanted to simply buy votes, he’d be up for everything from Best Novel to Motor Trend Car of the Year.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/04/24/an-explanation-about-the-hugo-awards-controversy/><sup>[16]</sup>

Whether they had discussed Day’s views that immigrants from Southern Europe (for example, Portugal) had undermined the constitution, is unclear. However, Correia was confident that he wasn’t an “out there whackadoo”, although oddly, he only mentions Day’s views on homosexuality rather than his views on race and women. Day is quite capable of being thoughtful, eloquent and polite and as we have seen, even he and John Scalzi managed to maintain a relatively civil communication for some years.

Even if we assume a degree of cluelessness and a lack of curiosity on Correia’s part, adding Vox Day to his slate as a way of demonstrating that Hugo voters were politically motivated was very much putting a finger on the scales.

Even so, arguably even the very worst person might write compelling fiction. Correia had made brief mention of Roman Polanski in his post as an example of a person who had committed a terrible crime and still received awards. If Vox Day’s novelette was truly good, shouldn’t Hugo voters put aside their dislike of Day’s views? As Correia had said in that post “Truly brilliant works of art have been created by people who are bat shit crazy.”

Correia had read the story and had liked it:

*“I was surprised by how good it was. I found it to be a really good story (it is actually about love and friendship, with a moral philosophy based on Thomas Aquinas, so not really what you’d expect from such a supposed hatemonger of hatey-hate). I plugged it to my fans earlier this year, which meant that a lot of them had read it as well.”*

*ibid*

But he was also clear about his motives:

*“Yes, I will totally admit that I knew this would spur additional outrage. And oh, how I was proven right. His existence offends them. They aren’t going to read his work. They’re proud to admit it. In the spirit of the awards, a certain Tor editor—who has no problem marching with communists—is pushing for everyone to automatically vote No Award over Vox. Stay classy, noble Social Justice Warrior, but once again, there’s no bias.”*

ibid

Nevertheless, let's read it and see...

### ***“Opera Vita Aeterna”***

I suppose *“A Work of Everlasting Life”*? An elf approaches a human monastery belonging to the Order of St Dioscurus<sup>[17]</sup>, a holy order of the Catholic-like human land of the setting. The elf's arrival is unusual and the Abbot speaks to him to discover why he is visiting a human monastery. The elf explains that he is seeking a different order of human monks. A monk of this order had visited his lands and defeated one of the powerful Magisters of his college using the power of his god. The elf was attempting to learn more about the god. The Abbot explains that the monastery worships the same god and so the elf elects to stay and learn more over the winter. When spring arrives, the elf who has spent much of the time in the library is keen not only to stay but to work:

*Bessarias put his hand to his mouth and coughed twice. “What I should very much like to do, Lord Abbot, if you are amenable to the idea, is to contribute a newly illuminated manuscript to your library. However, it will take me a considerable time to copy and complete it, and I do not wish to impose upon your hospitality any longer than you and your brothers can endure.”*

Excerpt From: Vox Day. *“Opera Vita Aeterna.”*

The elf's only condition is that he be allowed to ask the Abbot any questions about the holy scriptures he will be working on.

Unfortunately, the elf's work at the monastery is interrupted by a demon in the shape of a talking fox who attempts to persuade the elf to return home. The elf refuses. Years pass and the elf continues to work on copying all of the Sacred Scriptures. Each year the demon returns and the elf refuses to go with him.

One day the elf sets off with a party of monks to visit a city seven days walk away, to collect writing supplies. However, when the elf returns to the monastery, he discovers that all the remaining monks have been murdered by goblins. Also, because the monastery hasn't been ransacked, he concludes the goblin attack must have been organised by the demon in a bid to make the elf return home. The elf enters the chapel of the monastery and finds the Abbot dead.

*“If there was such a thing as a soul, if the incorruptible not only had a beginning but could begin with something so insignificant as a single human life, then somewhere, somehow, Waleran would know of it and the knowledge would grieve him. Bessarias was still within the walls of Saint Dioscurus and his vow still bound him. So instead, the sorcerer slowly lowered himself to one knee and did something he had never done before. He did not lower his head. He stared directly into the painted face of the pathetic wooden god as he addressed it in a voice full of scorn and fury.*

*“I don't know you. I don't believe in you. I have no use for you, you sad wooden fraud. But my friend served you with all the loyalty you could ask of any Man. So, if you exist, if you have any power at all, I ask this one thing of you, one thing only, and then we are done. Let it be as he believed. Give him that promised life beyond the grave. Welcome him into your Heaven. Walk with him in your golden streets and give him the answers he could not find here”*

Excerpt From: Vox Day. *“Opera Vita Aeterna.”*

Surprisingly, this isn't the end of the story. Instead, a final section skips forward in time and we meet two new characters who are visiting a different monastic library. There they discuss a book called the *Sacra Incognita* whose author is unknown but which contains thirty-six faces drawn into the illuminated letters. They speculate that the faces must have been the fellow monks of the copyist and the copyist himself. The younger of the two says of the book:

*“This is immortality, Father. The body dies, the soul ascends, but the mind lives on forever through these words. Thank you for bringing me here. I shall never forget it, not if I live one hundred years.*

Excerpt From: Vox Day. *“Opera Vita Aeterna.”*

The final paragraph reveals that in a letter on the open page of the book is a picture of the face of the dead Abbot. The implication being that the elf was the copyist of the book and had finished the work.

Without a doubt, I have read worse stories. There's a plot and two characters of a sort. The story attempts some philosophical questions such as whether elves have souls but doesn't dig down into that as a topic.

There is a discussion between the Abbot and the elf on the question of whether perfect things can have a beginning but the debate is interrupted.

One of Day's favourite writers is Umberto Eco, so the inclusion of a monastic library and philosophical questions may be a bit of a nod to *The Name of the Rose*. Certainly, he is trying for something quieter here than people might expect from a Larry Correia recommendation. True, the whole monastery is slaughtered (aside from the elf and the people he is travelling with) but the murders happen 'off-screen'.

It is also a relief that Day is not overtly deploying his alpha/sigma-beta-gamma 'socio-sexual hierarchy'<sup>[18]</sup> here. All the characters are male (with one caveat) but the monks are monkish and while maybe the elf character fits into Day's charismatic-loner 'sigma' category that he carved out for himself; it's not belaboured. I say one caveat because the demob who initially appears as a fox is given a gender-neutral "it" initially but is later given "he" when the dialogue establishes that he is a demon rather than a fox.

As an incident in a wider story, the novelette would be at worst redundant. What could be an interesting development of the Abbot and the elf isn't given space to develop. On the Apple Books reader on my laptop, the story comes to 24 pages but it takes three pages just to get the elf into the monastery and four pages for the coda at the end. So we only get a short snippet of philosophical argument between the elf and the Abbot. Now I will concede that maybe many readers of high fantasy aren't after a story about the arguments of Thomas Aquinas reframed into a fantasy setting and yet, that is the one and the only thing that distinguishes the story from being a random snippet lifted from a fantasy novel.

The philosophical part is teased as a question as to whether elves have souls but I believe that is a question Day considers in other parts of his Selenoth books<sup>[19]</sup>. Instead, the snippet we get has the elf launch straight into a question of existence. The Abbot having agreed to answer any questions the elf might have about the text he will copy; the elf starts with the first sentence:

*"The elf laughed and raised his glass in a salute, like a swordsman preparing to address his opponent. "Granted. Now, your sacred manuscript starts with the phrase 'In the beginning,' does it not?"*

*"To be sure." The abbot smiled and responded with his own half-empty glass.*

*"But my thought is that, contra the text, the world cannot have had a beginning. That which exists has always existed. It does not exist at certain times and not exist at others. And every incorruptible thing naturally has the capacity to exist always because its existence is not, due to its incorruptible nature, limited to any determinate time. Therefore no incorruptible thing sometimes is, and sometimes is not, whereas everything which has a beginning does not exist prior to its existence. So, either there are no incorruptible things to be found in the world, or no incorruptible thing ever begins to exist."*

**Excerpt From: Vox Day. "Opera Vita Aeterna."**

In short, incorruptible (or changeable) necessarily can exist forever so the elf argues that if the world is incorruptible then it must have always existed. The Abbot counters the more obvious flaws in the argument (why assume the world is incorruptible) but by the time the two of them clear brush around their argument and start to approach the question of souls...they are interrupted by the demon arriving at the gates. That would be a neat bit of writing, particularly having a demon interrupting, except we never return to the argument! It reads like we are heading towards Thomas Aquinas's discussion about the incorruptibility of the human soul<sup>[20]</sup>. 'Incorruptibility' doesn't mean here 'can't become bad' but more like (in modern terms) free from entropy, a point the Abbot and elf touch on.

Day opts for mediocrity rather than a bold failure. Maybe he suspected that his audience would only cope with small doses of theology. Writers like Gene Wolfe or even Tolkien, who have woven Catholic themes into fantasy works have done so with broad subtlety. In Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, Eco makes more overt use of Aquinas's philosophy but he does so to play out more modern ideas around reasons and how meaning attaches to signs and symbols. All three of those writers are not famed for brevity in dealing with these ideas (although Wolfe has written brilliant short stories).

Day's described his earlier novel *Summa Elvetica: A Casuistry of the Elvish Controversy*, as an attempt to grapple with these questions:

*"However, I did have this insanely ambitious idea for bringing religion back into high fantasy, inspired by an essay I'd written for Ben Bella's Revisiting Narnia anthology, entitled "CS Lewis and the Problem of Religion in Science Fiction and Fantasy." I knew no one else would ever even consider publishing it, so I said I would write it if it was of any interest to him. He said yes, so I got to it.*



*Unfortunately, I completely failed. Originally, the plan was for this massive structural subtext in which each fantasy race represented a different medieval philosophical school, but I just couldn't pull it off. The intellectual scope was far too grand; it took me a year just to get a decent grasp of Thomas Aquinas via the Summa Theologica. So, the book went from being philosophically vast to atomic; the novel is essentially nothing more than a single Aquinas-style argument concerning whether elves have souls naturally united to them or not."*

<https://speculativefaith.lorehaven.com/on-the-throne-of-bones-a-q-and-a-with-vox-day/>

That element is still present in "*Opera Vita Aeterna*" as a kind of stub, but without it, what is left? The characters are thin and the story is slight. It isn't that the theology has to take second-fiddle to action or magic or world-building or mythic scope or atmosphere. Instead, we have some events and a lot of padding.

I enjoyed six pages of this. I'll concede that is six pages more than I expected and that made me a bit sad because there genuinely are signs of Day being able to write something good.

Is this novelette in any sense close to something award-worthy? No, not even close, True, that is a subjective judgement but to be worthy of award implies a question less prone to individual taste:

In what way does this novelette stand out from any other novelette in SF/F at the time?

There are no strong answers that relate to the content of the novelette and I'd argue the situation is even worse for "*Opera Vita Aeterna*". It is barely even a stand-alone work and frankly, there are better 20+ page sections of fantasy novels that would work as better novelettes than this one. It maybe passes muster as an incident in a broader novel but it really doesn't work as short fiction. If somebody said to me "this was an early work by a writer who later wrote good short fiction" then I would find that believable. Is it comparable to the quality of writing of Larry Correia, Sarah A. Hoyt, Marko Kloos, Howard Tayler, and Dan Wells? No, and again not just 'no' but not even close. It wasn't for me maddeningly awful in a throw-the-iPad-across-the-room way nor was it laughably bad but it was resoundingly mediocre.

Actually, it is worse than that. Consider who is the audience for this? It isn't people looking for Larry Correia-like stories. It is pitched at people who like high fantasy and like philosophical themes and like the kind of metaphysics that tries to deduce what substance gods or angels are made out of. Hey! That's me! I'm the audience for this! Sure, there's the implicit sexism of an all-male cast, and the fantasy races having ingrained natures sounds like a perfect playground for Day's beliefs, but those elements are no worse in this story than they are in a whole pile of fantasy works by less ideologically obnoxious writers<sup>[21]</sup>.

Of course, I'm dancing around a point that Larry Correia had already confessed to. "*Opera Vita Aeterna*" was not on the Sad Puppies slate because of the "superior quality" of the work. It was put there to troll the voters and provoke a reaction. When the reaction was received, Correia claimed this was proof of political bias. Interestingly, to find the 'bias', Correia chose to nominate a mediocre work by the most singularly controversial person he could find within science fiction, whose stated views included dismissing over 50% of the population.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] see chapter 25
- [2] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2010/01/07/the-big-idea-sarah-a-hoyt/>
- [3] <https://www.tor.com/author/sarah-a-hoyt/>
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helter\\_Skelter\\_\(scenario\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helter_Skelter_(scenario)) because we can't escape bizarre science fiction connections, Manson was such a fan of Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, that he named his son after the central character.
- [5] Day scoffs at being called anti-Semitic because he is pro-Israel but he is pro-Israel because he regards it as a Jewish racial state. His views on Jewish people in countries other than Israel is that they are a negative influence because (in his view) they are in the wrong state.
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Know\\_Nothing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Know_Nothing) is an example of 'racist politics are simplistic but not simple', the Know-Nothings eventually split over the issue of slavery
- [7] see chapter 17 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/03/27/vox-days-gamma-game/>
- [8] see chapter 8 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/02/24/debarkle-chapter-8-electrolite-2005-03-01/>
- [9] <https://web.archive.org/web/20131018191043/https://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2013/06/the-next-time-youre-tempted-to-white.html>
- [10] <https://web.archive.org/web/20131110225559/https://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2013/10/rape-is-ex-post-facto-regret.html>
- [11] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140110061032/https://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-perfect-woman.html>
- [12] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140425221215/https://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2014/04/ending-rape-culture.html>

- [13] <https://web.archive.org/web/20111007195130/https://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2011/09/killer-game.html>
- [14] as this quote comes up a lot, Day has noted many times that he didn't exactly say that throwing acid in women's faces is justified, because he personally does not agree with the 'utilitarian metric'  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140618142044/http://voxdays.blogspot.com/2012/06/scientist-beats-up-pz.html>
- [15] 2016 <https://web.archive.org/web/20160425035427/https://alphagameplan.blogspot.com/2016/04/affirmative-consent-law.html>
- [16] I don't think I noticed Correia's reference to Vox Day's day job before. Whatever it was, it impressed Correia.
- [17] I guess a random bit of something Latin-sounding but could be a Castor and Pollux reference?
- [18] see chapter 17 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/03/27/vox-days-gamma-game/>
- [19] which I haven't read in full
- [20] <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1075.htm#article6>
- [21] which maybe says more about the conventions of the genre that it does about Day

## 28: GamerGate 2014 meets Vox Day

[content warning for descriptions of internet harassment and extreme misogyny]

A fun fact that I learnt from Wikipedia is that the word “gamergate” means a worker ant that can reproduce sexually and the term is pronounced something like “gamma-gate”<sup>[1]</sup>. That will be about the only wholesome fact in this chapter. For the rest of it, the chapter covers what Wikipedia entitles the “GamerGate Controversy”. What this chapter is not going to be able to do is give a full and authoritative account of the controversy. Instead, I want to look at some of the precursors to GamerGate that influenced later events in the Debarkle story and where GamerGate intersected with some of the key players in the Sad Puppy Hugo Award controversy.

The major events in GamerGate ran from August 2014 and into 2015 and beyond. However, for this chapter, I will only be looking at 2014. It is also a distorted view of the controversy. Vox Day presents himself as a significant figure in GamerGate but third-party accounts do not. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the Debarkle narrative, the influence of GamerGate on Day and the political and personal coalition that arose from that is important. I’m getting ahead of myself, though.

I will not be referencing every factual claim about GamerGate but instead I’ll be using four main sources for key events and for establishing the significance of events:

- The RationalWiki article on GamerGate <https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/GamerGate>
- RationalWiki’s timeline of events [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_GamerGate](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Timeline_of_GamerGate)
- Wikipedia’s entry on the controversy [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GamerGate\\_controversy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GamerGate_controversy)
- The equivalent entry at Vox Day’s version of Wikipedia (Infogalactic)

<https://infogalactic.com/info/GamerGate>

The Infogalactic entry is interesting because it is one of the few pages on the Wiki that is a substantial re-write of the Wikipedia page. The Wikipedia page itself was one of the areas of conflict in the GamerGate controversy, including a protracted edit war as different groups attempted to frame what the nature of the controversy was.

Readers will note that what I haven’t done yet is introduce the topic and that is because the nature of the controversy, even down to a short précis to introduce the topic, was itself made into a partisan factional conflict. I’ll illustrate with a comparison:

Here is the opening of the Wikipedia entry:

*“The **Gamergate controversy** concerned an online harassment campaign, primarily conducted through the use of the hashtag #GamerGate, that centered on issues of sexism and anti-progressivism in video game culture. GamerGate is used as a blanket term for the controversy as well as for the harassment campaign and actions of those participating in it.”*

‘Gamergate controversy’, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 22 April 2021, 04:29 UTC,

Here is the Infogalactic version:

*“The ‘**Gamergate controversy**’ occurred when the publication of a sex scandal in August 2014 led to industry reactions that confirmed longstanding rumors of a cultlike clique in the video game industry that conspired to promote unqualified friends as industry experts, write false news stories to promote a political agenda, and blacklist developers and fellow journalists who did not share their politics. The indie clique was also accused of rigging award shows to promote games that members of the clique had invested in.”*

‘Gamergate’, Infogalactic: the planetary knowledge core, , 12 May 2018, 11:20 UTC

Now to be clear, I firmly believe that there is an external reality and that ‘truth’ is meaningful. One of those two paragraphs is a better description of events than the other and it should be no surprise that it is the first of the two. However, if we are looking for a point where the growing bifurcation in the perception of reality became tangible in the way that would dominate our lives from 2016 onwards, then I would point to these two paragraphs<sup>[2]</sup>. Even so, when considering many of the foot-soldiers in this particular front in the culture

wars of the last decade, it is reasonable to assume many of them were convinced that they were genuinely fighting against the “false news” of elite cliques of insiders who operated in a way that was “cult-like”.

But before we dive further into the events of GamerGate, we need to look at some of the historical background.

### ***Fans, Chans and Gamers***

There are multiple roots to the GamerGate controversy. I’m only going to pick out those that are either immediately pertinent to making sense of events or those that would have an influence on other events in the Debarkle history (up to and including the event we opened with in the introduction: the storming of the US Capitol building on January 6, 2021).

One clear influence was the development of a self-identified ‘gamer’ culture. The history of commercial video games has been broad and diverse, with games variously marketed at children, families and adults. A significant proportion of people buying and playing video games have always been women. By 2014 smartphones, tablets such as the iPad, and handheld gaming devices had further increased the market for video games covering wide demographics. However, a section of the market had been developing since the 1990s that focussed on young men<sup>[3]</sup> with sufficient resources and time to spend on high-end gaming devices (consoles or PCs) and games that taxed those devices in terms of speed and quality of graphics. Around this developed a competitive culture with all the typical features of fandom including the more toxic qualities. This was further fuelled by games with online multiplayer aspects. However, it was also culture with a very dysfunctional relationship between the companies that produced the games and the players, which itself created a climate of mistrust.

However, gamer culture was only partly based on video games. The Web also offered spaces in which gamer culture could propagate in particular via the video-sharing platform YouTube and by community spaces such as the various game-orientated subreddits on the discussion platform Reddit.

This is only part of the story though.

In 1999 at the University of Central Arkansas, a Japanese student called Hiroyuki Nishimura set up a kind of bulletin board service that he named 2channel<sup>[4]</sup>. The site was created for Japanese fans to discuss pop culture or indeed any topic they liked. However, by being hosted in the USA, 2channel (or 2chan, as it became known) could skirt the stricter internet censorship laws of Japan. As a consequence, the site became something of a free-for-all in terms of content, as well as a popular place for Japanese nationalist and racist politics. The hosting provider of 2channel was a Philippines-based American called Jim Watkins.

The popularity of 2chan led to the creation of similar so-called image boards<sup>[5]</sup> for English-speaking users, most notably 4chan, which was created by Christopher Poole in 2003<sup>[6]</sup>. 4chan helped spawn the hacktivist group Anonymous<sup>[7]</sup>, whose often absurd campaign against the Church of Scientology is in its own way a kind of clash between phenomena spawned from fannish cultures. 4chan’s weakly moderated communities were a breeding ground for unusual interests, meme, pornography and right-wing extremism. The site was also vulnerable to people exploiting it to share child pornography and other illegal activities that in principle were banned.

In 2013, frustrated by even the relatively weak restrictions on 4chan, programmer Frederick Brennan established 8chan as a rival imageboard intended to have even fewer restrictions.

The ironic meme culture, shock tactics, use of racist slurs and brigading<sup>[8]</sup> tactics popularised in Chan culture were also influential in more moderated spaces such as YouTube and Reddit and influential on Gamer culture in general.

### ***GamerGate Precursors***

During the 2010s a kind of ecosystem of environments feeding into each other with varying degrees of moderation had evolved. YouTube and Reddit being mainstream web services with darker reaches and some toxic communities. We have 4chan and 8chan (and a variety of other Chans) and we have spin-off places like Encyclopedia Dramatica<sup>[8]</sup> and Kiwi Farms<sup>[9]</sup> which help people wishing to engage in trolling and harassment coordinate. At the same time, the internet was home to a growing “manosphere” of assorted forms of semi-organised misogyny, as we discussed in chapter 17. With more women asserting themselves in spaces that many male internet users regarded as theirs, many women found themselves targets of specific harassment campaigns.

in 2007, programmer and game developer Kathy Sierra became a major target for harassment after writing about the underlying motives of internet trolls in general. The campaign was led by white supremacist Andrew “weev” Auernheimer.

*“Inspired by her touchy response to online commenters, Weev said he “dropped docs” on Sierra, posting a fabricated narrative of her career alongside her real Social Security number and address. This was part of a larger trolling campaign against Sierra, one that culminated in death threats. Weev says he has access to hundreds of thousands of Social Security numbers. About a month later, he sent me mine.”*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/magazine/03trolls-t.html?pagewanted=all>

The campaign against Sierra eventually led her to withdraw from conferences and eventually from public appearances, essentially ending her public career.

In 2010, a group of 4chan users began a harassment campaign of an eleven-year-old<sup>[10]</sup> after the child spoke about their sexual activity in a YouTube video. Despite the obvious vulnerability of their target, the harassment included revealing personal details and the use of fake calls to law enforcement to bring police round to their target’s family home. The incident is not normally discussed in the context of GamerGate but for our context, it is notable that Vox Day reacted to news coverage of 4chan manipulating the police into harassing with amusement, describing the incidents as being “absolutely hilarious”<sup>[11]</sup>. The tactics of highlighting a potential victim, ‘doxing’ to reveal personal information to aid further harassment, and using fake police complaints, continued to be deployed in future harassment campaigns.

In 2012, media critic Anita Sarkeesian launched a Kickstarter campaign to fund a video series that would analyse video games from a feminist perspective. Her Kickstarter led to a protracted harassment campaign against her and other women. The harassment campaign backfired as the additional publicity led to her project being funded quicker.

In 2013 video game developer Chloe Sagal was targeted by Kiwi Farms. The harassment campaign would last for years and it may have contributed to their suicide in 2018<sup>[12]</sup>.

Also in 2013 Zoë Quinn’s text-based interactive story game *Depression Quest* gained many positive reviews at game review sites<sup>[13]</sup>. Their attempts to get the game distributed on the game service Steam led to yet another harassment campaign organised at the imageboard WizardChan.

In July 2014 (just a few weeks before the ‘start’ of GamerGate), game developer Brianna Wu published an opinion piece at the gaming/pop-culture magazine *Polygon*, outlining with four case studies the range of harassment women in the game industry were facing:

*“The industry is currently in the midst of a massive cultural shift. There’s a growing disconnect between the nearly half of gamers that are female, and overwhelmingly male population of games journalists and game developers. When you wonder why women aren’t rushing to fix that balance, remember this is the fucking emotional and even physical minefield they’re signing themselves up for. Growing a thicker skin isn’t the answer, nor is it a proper response. Listening, and making the industry safer for the existence of visible women is the best, and only, way forward.”*

<https://www.polygon.com/2014/7/22/5926193/women-gaming-harassment>

## ***The “Quinnspiracy”***

On August 15 2014, Zoë Quinn’s former boyfriend Eron Gjoni began posting accusations about Quinn in the comment sections of multiple mainstream websites. The accusations included specific claims about people Quinn had slept with, one of whom was games journalist Nathan Grayson who had written for the game website Kotaku. Within days Gjoni’s accusations had been picked up by groups at 4chan and other similar communities and spun it into a specific claim: that Quinn had slept with games journalists to get positive reviews. Later both Kotaku and even Gjoni himself debunked the specific claim that Quinn had slept with Grayson in exchange for a positive review, in fact, Grayson had only written about Quinn once and that was before they had a relationship<sup>[14]</sup>.

At this point, the harassment campaign against Quinn escalated into doxing with information about their family’s phone numbers released. Action taken by moderators on Reddit and on other sites to crack down on breaches of rules against harassment and doxing in discussions about Quinn was then cited as evidence of collusion between Quinn and website owners. The common term for the surrounding campaign was the ‘Quinnspiracy’.

Vox Day comes into the picture via an interesting route. As noted above, Day had been broadly supportive of 4chan in principle, as well as harassment campaigns. However, Day’s first GamerGate-related post doesn’t mention Quinn or the surrounding campaign as such. Instead, Day claimed that 4chan and Reddit were undergoing a kind of leftist crackdown with a takeover by “SJWs”<sup>[15]</sup>. Day compared these events to his expulsion from the SFWA.

*“My purging from SFWA was, as I warned at the time, a small harbinger of much bigger things to come. Don’t think you’re safe simply because you’re not controversial. It’s not only the controversy they hate, or even the open resistance, it is the mere fact of failing to kowtow to their dogma.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140823080924/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/08/another-purge.html>

Day hadn’t pulled these complaints directly from 4chan but instead from the forum of one of his manosphere allies, Roosh V aka Daryush Valizadeh. Roosh was (his views have changed in some ways) a particularly disturbing Pick-Up Artist blogger with extreme views on rape<sup>[16]</sup>. Day was directly quoting from a thread on Roosh’s forum already dedicated to accusations against Quinn. What is relevant here is that even at this early conspiratorial fear-mongering of SJW takeovers was the central story. Quoting from the original comment Day had picked up:

*“The next day a mod who wasn’t outed contacted us. To our horror he told us that the new mods are complete SJWs and openly call for permabans for a lot of 4Chan “board culture”.*

*As we dug deeper, we found out that the same thing was happening to a lot of subreddits. Normally we would say fuck em. But they told us that tons of non SJW mods had their accounts sieged and them IP banned.”*

unknown commenter at RooshV Forum, quoted by Vox Day

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140823080924/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/08/another-purge.html>

A cycle ensued: the harassment campaign against Quinn (and later others) provoked either action from moderators or threats, which was then spun as a feminist or leftist crackdown on the discussion of ‘issues’ (eventually “ethics in game journalism”) and as attacks and censorship against gamers.

Day’s first “Quinnspiracy” post was on August 21, six days after Eron Gjoni’s first accusations against Quinn. Unsurprisingly Day once again managed to make the issue about himself:

*“As for Zoe Quinn, she’s the same sort of no-talent nobody that has been getting serially promoted for simultaneously possessing a vagina while feigning an interest in games for as long as I can remember. I’m old enough that I can remember one of the early girl game pioneers, Brenda Laurel, putting her hand on my leg and expressing an inordinate amount of interest in whatever I was saying back when CGDC was still at the Santa Clara Westin, the only thing that is different now is that a) Laurel had genuine talent and b) the Johnny Wilsons and Chris Lombardis and Mike Wekslers and Terry Colemans of the gaming media had integrity.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20171107072226/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/08/kotaku-and-quinnspiracy.html>

I will stress again that Day was a minor player here and little more than an observer. However, a second theme in the wider campaign is visible — diminishing the relevance and significance of Quinn as a developer. Initially, this might look paradoxical, after all, if Quinn was a nobody then why all the ensuing fuss? The tactic of diminishing the targets of the campaign (reducing them to the term “literally who?”) served three roles:

- as a kind of denial that a harassment campaign was targeting them
- as a way of implying that the victims of harassment were claiming that they were being attacked as a way to gain sympathy and publicity
- as way of further denigrating the victims as nobodies

This diminishing strategy was used on Quinn initially and then, as the campaign widened on the former target of Anita Sarkeesian and then onto Brianna Wu and other women or other people in the games industry pushing back against harassment.

By August 27 both Quinn and Sarkeesian had moved out of their respective homes due to doxing and fears of violence.

## ***GamerGate***

On August 28 the actor Adam Baldwin christens the widening campaign “GamerGate” on Twitter. Baldwin (no relation to the more famous Baldwin actors) was a conservative-leaning actor who had gained some celebrity status in science fiction circles because of his role in the space-adventure series *Firefly*.

Baldwin is also our second point of connection between GamerGate and the Debarkle story. However, I’ll need to flashback a year. In 2013, the publicity around Larry Correia’s ‘Opinion of Gun Control’ post (see chapter 19) led to Correia being invited onto a radio show hosted by actor Sean Astin of Lord of the Rings fame. That appearance led to Adam Baldwin contacting Correia on Twitter, leading them to become friends.

Baldwin is even name-checked in Correia's April 2014 announcement on the success of the Sad Puppies 2 campaign, as they both were attending ComiCon and had dinner together.

Correia himself was not an active campaigner for GamerGate and in 2014 touched on the issue in a blog post only once in that year, after Anita Sarkeesian cancelled a talk at Utah State University after major threats to her safety:

*"Anita Sarkeesian was scheduled to speak about how women are portrayed in popular media, and especially in video games. Late Monday, someone sent an email to about a dozen USU offices threatening a deadly massacre if she were allowed to speak. It threatened "the deadliest school shooting in American history."*

<https://www.deseret.com/2014/10/20/20550872/utah-gun-law-that-canceled-usu-speech-is-an-embarrassment>

The university was not allowed by Utah law to ban the concealed carrying of firearms on campus, a rule that Correia regarded as right and proper. On the GamerGate issue, Larry had this to say:

*"I've never gotten into GamerGate here on the blog, but basically Anita Sarkeesian is a professional victim, Social Justice Warrior, who thinks you are enjoying yourself wrong, and if you disagree you are a racist, homophobic, misogynist. If you are a regular blog reader who followed Sad Puppies at all, same thing, same crusaders, same song, different industry."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/10/21/fisking-the-deseret-news-anti-ccw-article/>

Correia may not have been actively pushing the GamerGate campaign through his blog but as his comment above suggests, his Sad Puppy campaign and GamerGate were "the same thing, same crusaders". GamerGate campaigner Daddy Warpig had been a follower of Correia even prior to GamerGate but as the campaign continued, GamerGaters found their way to Correia's blog via numerous routes.

*"We're fighting the good fight across the internet. We won't win soon, but we'll fucking win."*

Commenter "@GamersGate2014" <https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/10/14/french-grimnoir-cover-prints-on-sale-25-off/#comment-47370>

Meanwhile, Day was still pushing his usual misogyny and self-promotion:

*"Notice that it's all the same lunacy that we've seen in the SFWA, only not quite as out of control because there are more barriers to entry. Quinn-van Valkenberg tends to remind one of a female John Scalzi, albeit with less talent for self-promotion. Game development is hard work and requires some logical thinking as well; it's not just a simple case of scribbling a few short stories, sending them to a female friend who will publish them in some barely qualifying market, then calling yourself a writer and spending the next twenty years going to cons, talking about books you're never going to write, and relentlessly trying to push the industry leftward. The SJW problem in gaming and their tedious, decades-long crusade for More Women tends to revolve around the journalists because that's the one area where absolutely no talent or mastery of the subject is required anymore."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140830002956/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/08/a-female-dev-on-quinn-debacle.html>

Day had multiple motives for aligning himself with GamerGate at this time. As well as the misogyny, trolling and anti-SJW rhetoric, Day had something to sell:

*"My own game now in development, FIRST SWORD, came under some criticism from the likes of Manboobz and other petty SJWs a few months ago because I made it clear there will be no female fantasy gladiators. Historically speaking, female gladiators were the light comic relief between the real action; they were often set against midgets, for example. These complaints had no more effect on my design decisions than complaints about prostitutes had on Rockstar or complaints about scanty armor on female characters have had on every game company everywhere. But it is more than a little ironic to see that there are pinkshirts who will actually complain about the fact that I am refusing to design female slavery, in which women would be literally bought and sold as property, into a game."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140913231652/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/09/video-game-sex-war.html>

The game was intended to be a gladiator-themed fighting game set in Day's fantasy world of Selenoth but we'll come back to the company developing the game in Chapter 33<sup>[18]</sup>. The relevant point to the story of GamerGate is that those involved were a toxic mix of the cynical and the credulous. 4chan culture was

replete with people attempting to get an emotional rise out of other users. At the core of it was people who gained genuine pleasure from internet feuds regardless of the content. That pleasure from pointless arguments wasn't created by the internet<sup>[19]</sup> but modern technology allowed such feuds to be more toxic and far more damaging. Beyond that were people who saw GamerGate as a front in a culture war where aggressive tactics and spreading less-than-true propaganda were justified by a righteous cause. Further beyond that were a larger, more gullible mass of people who identified as gamers who were falling for a hyped-up story that they and their hobby were under attack. It was a perfect environment for grifters to find ways of monetising the gullible or using GamerGate as self-promotion.

The attempts to monetise GamerGate started early. Just over a week after the first accusations against Quinn, a far-right activist and YouTuber Davis Aurini began soliciting funds to make a critical documentary about Anita Sarkeesian at a price tag of \$15 thousand dollars a month<sup>[21]</sup>. YouTube itself was a major platform for self-promotion. GamerGate aligned you-tubers such as the Internet Aristocrat and Sargon of Akkad used the controversy to boost their profile<sup>[22]</sup>.

Vox Day gained two major allies as part of the career-boosting power of GamerGate. One, Mike Cernovich<sup>[23]</sup> was, like Day, a blogger who up to this point had been mainly focused on pick-up artistry and general anti-feminism. Cernovich had little impact on the later Sad Puppy events of 2015 but would play a significant role in political events of 2016 and beyond.

The second (and more famous) figure was Milo Yiannopoulos, at that time a journalist at the right-wing website *Breitbart*. Yiannopoulos also latched onto GamerGate relatively early and prior to the adoption of the 'GamerGate' name. His first piece for *Breitbart* on the issue was on September 1, 2014, and explicitly framed the issue in the title as "Feminist Bullies Tearing the Video Game Industry Apart".

*"It's easy to mock video gamers as dorky loners in yellowing underpants. Indeed, in previous columns, I've done it myself. Occasionally at length. But, the more you learn about the latest scandal in the games industry, the more you start to sympathise with the frustrated male stereotype. Because an army of sociopathic feminist programmers and campaigners, abetted by achingly politically correct American tech bloggers, are terrorising the entire community – lying, bullying and manipulating their way around the internet for profit and attention."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20181018100006/https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2014/09/01/Lying-Greedy-Promiscuous-Feminist-Bullies-are-Tearing-the-Video-Game-Industry-Apart/>

Yiannopoulos also latched on to one of the recursive claims that helped fuel GamerGate's growth:

*"Let's be honest. We're all used to feeling a niggling suspicion that "death threats" sent to female agitators aren't all they're cracked up to be. And indeed there is no evidence that any violent threat against a prominent female figure in the media or technology industry has ever been credible – that is to say, that any feminist campaigner on the receiving end of internet trolling has ever been in any real danger. Even in the most famous American case, that of Kathy Sierra, there is no evidence the target was ever at risk."*

*ibid*

A common right-wing talking point is to minimise or outright deny the level of discrimination, intimidation, violence or even deaths that groups targeted for hate face (women, historically racially discriminated against groups, LGBTQI people, disabled people and others). This tactic extends beyond the more overt bigots towards the broader and more libertarian inclined right who regard measures to prevent attacks on victimised groups as government overreach. Minimising or denying the problems is intended to undermine calls for legislation against hate crimes but it is also used to either implicitly or explicitly claim that advocates for victims are lying and that news stories about hate crimes are somehow leftist propaganda.

With GamerGate, Yiannopoulos was taking this denial a step further. Women (on the whole) were being targeted for harassment but if women complained about the harassment, then they would be depicted as exaggerating or lying, which was then cited as examples of how "feminists" were attacking "gamers"...which of course helped fuel further harassment.

In October 2014 Kathy Sierra (see above) explained the dynamic in a blog post that was republished in *Wired*.

*"It begins with simple threats. You know, rape, dismemberment, the usual. It's a good place to start, those threats, because you might simply vanish once those threats include your family. Mission accomplished. But today, many women online — you women who are far braver than I am — you stick*



*around. And now, since you stuck around through the first wave of threats, you are now a much BIGGER problem. Because the Worst Possible Thing has happened: as a result of those attacks, you are NOW serving Victim-Flavored Koolaid.”*

<https://www.wired.com/2014/10/trolls-will-always-win/>

The very act of pushing back against a harassment campaign is used as fuel for a harassment campaign and as that campaign is fundamentally aimed at discrediting the victim in the eyes of other people on the internet, the pushback is cited as evidence that a victim is a terrible person, which is used to draw other (more gullible and easily influenced) people into the campaign. Any steps that are taken against a harassment campaign (copyright takedown notices, appeals to moderators of forums or even just publicly complaining about it) are then cited as attacks on a community and as authoritarian censorship. In the classic bully move, these kinds of actions are regarded as fine when in-group figures do them<sup>[25]</sup>.

Yiannopoulos quickly became an active participant in GamerGate, using *Breitbart* to further fuel the controversy with the release of details of a game journalist email group. Several journalists were using the group to discuss the growing GamerGate issue and this discussion was framed as further evidence of games-media plotting against gamers.

As 2014 progressed the focus of GamerGate became the targeting of advertisers of gaming magazines. The strategy was to punish critics of GamerGate, using the logic that the “corrupt” journalists must be the ones criticising GamerGate on the grounds that GamerGate was a campaign against corruption. These email campaigns scored some notable successes with chip-manufacturer Intel withdrawing its advertising from the game magazine *Gamasutra* in October 2014. However, coverage of GamerGate in mainstream media was increasing which led to it being harder for GamerGate’s framing as being about “ethics in journalism” to fool tech companies into effectively cooperating with a campaign that was being openly manipulated by troll-communities and right-wing extremists.

Pushback from the owners of various platforms where GamerGate was being coordinated was slow and insufficient to prevent the campaign from spreading. 4chan enforcing rules against users posting personal information of others had led to a shift of GamerGate traffic to the smaller rival 8chan. That increase in traffic was both good news and bad news for 8chan — the increased traffic made the site harder to run but also the increasing attention being paid to GamerGate meant increased media attention to the kind of content being hosted on 8chan.

In November 2014, *The Daily Dot* revealed the extent to which 8chan was hosting child pornography and paedophile content.

*“On numerous public forums, 8Chan users share graphic images of children, plus links to hardcore child pornography. No content is hidden. Thousands of posts are accessible within two clicks of the homepage. 8Chan’s founder, Fredrick Brennan, created the site in response to what he sees as the ongoing and vast loss of free speech on the Internet. On 8Chan, “anyone can say what they want and mean,” Brennan told the Daily Dot.”*

<https://www.dailydot.com/debug/8Chan-pedophiles-child-porn-gamergate/>

It is not clear if Vox Day was an active user of 8chan at that time and, of course, many users of the imageboard may well have been unaware of the extreme material in other sections of the site. However, Day continued to promote 8chan as a source and its founder Brennan as an authoritative source, sending more of Day’s followers to 8chan.

In the mess of misinformation in 2014, Day could breathlessly pass on claims that were simple fabrications. On November 6 2014, Day publicised a supposed leak from the head of Gawker Media that owned the games site *Kotaku* (a major target of GamerGate). He expressed some scepticism about the supposed leak which implied that the media group was infiltrating GamerGate but summarised his position:

*“From what I’ve seen, more people than ever are lining up behind it as it becomes increasingly obvious that #GamerGate is not about harassing women given the fact that there hasn’t been any harassment beyond that supposedly directed at LW1, LW2, and LWu back in August.*

*GamerGate concerns one thing and one thing only. People designing, developing, and playing the games they want to design, develop, and play. Everything else flows from that.*

*The thing is, it doesn’t actually matter if this is fake, real, or a real plant meant to sow discord. The lesson for #GamerGate is the same. Ignore the moderates, ignore the placators, ignore the tone-police,*

*and keep doing what you're doing. The only thing a 4GW organization has to do in order to keep succeeding is a) don't stop, and, b) don't centralize."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20141105005547/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/11/gamergate-is-doomed-again.html> <sup>[26]</sup>

A few days later Day cited 8chan's founder, Fredrick Brennan (aka "hotwheels"<sup>[27]</sup>) that the leak was in fact a fabrication. However, as Day had made clear in his first post on the leak, that the leak was fabricated was neither here nor there:

*"I found it hard to believe that anyone, even a drama queen like Denton, could be that melodramatic, so it's not exactly shocking. But I also think it will be amusing if anyone thinks this will have any effect whatsoever on GamerGate. Death threats, media attacks, fake leaks, drinking the blood of innocents, it makes no difference at all."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201111191051/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/11/hotwheels-explains-nick-denton-fraud.html>

GamerGate continued to grow and remained a major news story through 2015 and into 2016 with its capacity to cause harm undiminished for many months. However, even before the end of 2014, its influence was waning rapidly. Early victories depended on several factors:

- Isolated victims whose protests against being targeted were used to fuel further attacks
- Corporations failed to understand what was going on and hence conceded to demands from what they took to be a consumer-led campaign
- The lack of any central, identifiable GamerGate leadership made it easy for supporters to rationalise any harassment as being a minority of GamerGaters or as external provocateurs

However, as GamerGate's enemies list grew in size and began to encompass figures such as the founder of Wikipedia Jimmy Wales, harassment victims were less isolated and mainstream media coverage became more focused on the harassment aspect. The impact of GamerGate led to mass media coverage which led to people (including potential advertisers) being better informed. The consumer revolt aspect of GamerGate undoubtedly existed — discontent among gamers was a ready motivation to draw people in. However, GamerGate as a campaign had little or no intrinsic connection between the events and actions in the campaign to any positive outcomes.

Ignoring much of the above from the misogyny, the harassment, the connection to far-right extremists or child pornography and somehow cutting away all the overtly shitty bits of GamerGate and focusing just on the idea of it being a campaign about "ethics in journalism", GamerGate was unfocused, lacked clear demands and had poor connections between the actions activists were taking and making progress in those vague demands.

At Vox Day's Wikipedia semi-clone, Infogalactic, the article on the controversy gives us access to a parallel world where pro-GamerGaters won the frantic edit wars that occurred at the real Wikipedia in 2014. The Infogalactic<sup>[27]</sup> article was written by a former Wikipedia editor who regarded the eventual Wiki version as misleading<sup>[28]</sup>. It stands as an attempt to describe GamerGate in its best light while still retaining links to common facts with the rest of reality. Yet, you can read this more positive spin on the article and still be none the wiser as to what the supposed "ethics in games journalism" campaign was supposed to do or how it was supposed to do it. Under the user name "Fennis", Vox Day commented on the article saying:

*"The article is much improved. Well done. However, too much of it is about the reaction to #GamerGate, criticism of #GamerGate, and the impact of #GamerGate versus #GamerGate itself. Now, perhaps that is appropriate for a page dedicated to the GamerGate controversy, but none of it is actually related to what #GamerGate is. My suggestion is that we have two separate pages, one about #GamerGate per se, and another about the overall controversy. The media may not be able to describe #GamerGate, but those of us who are GamerGaters certainly are. As it stands, there is more discussion of the Literally Whos than there is of any GamerGate figure, operation, or meetup. Remember, we are NOT limited by the Wikipedia notion of "reliable sources". "*

Fennis 19:16, 21 October 2016 (UTC) <https://infogalactic.com/info/Talk:GamerGate>

GamerGate continued on for many months, well into 2015 and 2016. Nearly five years after Vox Day's comment at his own encyclopaedia, no "separate page" about GamerGate per se was ever created. As a campaign about "ethics in journalism," it achieved nothing other than to cause a lot of emotional pain and to leave many of its more naive supporters confused and frustrated.

However, in other ways, GamerGate was far, far from being a giant fuss with no positive outcomes. For Vox Day it meant new followers (and for Larry Correia as well). It was a radicalising and polarising fight

that helped recruit many people into a nexus of political allies, including online misogynists, ironic imageboard trolls, white nationalists and supporters of radical internet free speech. It also promoted a central and abiding myth. Gamers were told that their hobby was ‘really’ run by a cult-like clique that conspired to promote unworthy people and spread propaganda to promote a left-wing agenda and blacklist people from work who did not share the objectives of that agenda. It was a myth that was easy to apply to other industries or, indeed, to the world in general.

We aren’t done with GamerGate in this story but for now, we still have more of 2014 to catch-up on.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GamerGate>
- [2] not that there weren’t many precursors, including views on climate change or the Iraq war. Within SFF fandom kerfuffles, RaceFail09 did have a recursive aboutness dimension to the argument but did not resolve into factional camps defined by how they described what RaceFail09 was. Notably, while the factions in the Sad Puppy kerfuffle had warring narratives, the very concrete issue of who did and didn’t win the Hugo Awards makes it a much easier subject to point at saying “that’s what this was” (or it should but as this is chapter 28, maybe not...)
- [3] not that only young men have expensive consoles or play so-called AAA games, just that the underlying commercial decisions had that focus. In fact, according to Pew Research centre’s 2015 report, more women in the US-owned a game console than men <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/10/29/the-demographics-of-device-ownership/>
- [4] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2channel#History>
- [5] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imageboard>
- [6] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4chan>
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anonymous\\_\(hacker\\_group\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anonymous_(hacker_group))
- [8] A site initially created to record disputes on LiveJournal but which evolved into a more toxic site that encouraged harassment [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopedia\\_Dramatica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopedia_Dramatica)
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiwi\\_Farms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiwi_Farms)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jessi\\_Slaughter\\_cyberbullying\\_case](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jessi_Slaughter_cyberbullying_case)
- [11] <https://web.archive.org/web/20100809002128/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2010/07/dont-f-with-4Chan.html>
- [12] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiwi\\_Farms#Suicide\\_of\\_Chloe\\_Sagal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiwi_Farms#Suicide_of_Chloe_Sagal)
- [13] for example <https://www.ign.com/articles/2013/02/19/a-game-about-suffering>
- [14] <https://kotaku.com/in-recent-days-ive-been-asked-several-times-about-a-pos-1624707346>
- [15] “social justice warriors”
- [16] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Roosh\\_V#Rape](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Roosh_V#Rape)
- [17] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2013/01/12/quick-update-talking-guns-with-movie-stars-and-crashing-my-truck-into-a-lake/>
- [18] Day also mentions his work on a cooking game called *Hot Dish*. His role in this game would lead to detractors of day on Reddit to rename him “Teddy Spaghetti”. Also, spoilers, the game *First Sword* was never finished.
- [19] see for example SF fandom’s great staple war as discussed briefly in Chapter 2
- [20] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Davis\\_Aurini](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Davis_Aurini)
- [21] <http://wehuntedthemoth.com/2014/08/24/a-proposed-new-anti-anita-sarkeesian-documentary-promises-to-give-voice-to-the-loudest-silent-majority-the-world-has-ever-known/>
- [22] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Sargon\\_of\\_Akkad](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Sargon_of_Akkad)
- [23] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike\\_Cernovich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Cernovich)
- [24] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milo\\_Yiannopoulos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milo_Yiannopoulos)
- [25] e.g., our Debarkle protagonists, Vox Day and Larry Correia have both cited the moderation of comments at blogs such as John Scalzi’s *Whatever* or at Tor.com as evidence of left-wing authoritarian censorship but both of them (naturally) moderate the comments at their own blogs
- [26] “LW1, LW2 and LWu” is an application of the dismissive “literally who” term to the first three targets of GamerGate, Zoë Quinn, Anita Sarkeesian and Brianna Wu. “4GW” means “fourth-generation warfare” or the kind of distributed cell-like insurgency that Day believes will dominate modern warfare.
- [27] or, as I like to call it, “Voxopedia”
- [28] From the discussion page “Speaking as a veteran editor, this is what I had hoped to see on Wikipedia when the editor disputes were resolved. Instead, even after Arbitration and all that, it turned into a sort of no-man’s land. Even after two years, it will probably remain as a prominent scar on Wikipedia for quite some time.”

- [29] [additional note] Zoë Quinn uses they/them pronouns which have been corrected in the main text but not changed in quotes

## 29: Dramatis Personae — Mike Glycer and File 770

Our story begins before our protagonists do. In 1951, two years before Worldcon would host the first Hugo Awards, a party in a hotel room during the ninth Worldcon was sufficiently rowdy to attract the attention of the hotel detective. The party decamped to room 770 and carried on and on to apparently mythic levels fuelled by gin and creme-de-menthe<sup>[1]</sup>. Aside from an unstoppable party, this New Orleans based con, also managed to snag the world premieres of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *When Worlds Collide*<sup>[2]</sup> which overall sounds like an interesting Worldcon to visit with a time machine. The numbers ‘770’ took on an added meaning in fannish circles to indicate fan fun.

In the 1970s a young Los Angeles-based fan, Mike Glycer, began writing for and editing multiple fanzines. His own fanzines either focused on the news (e.g., *Organlegger*, *Sylmarilion*)<sup>[3]</sup> or on longer articles including reviews and opinion pieces (e.g., *Prehensile*)<sup>[4]</sup>. Produced variously from mimeographed copies to offset-printed, the fanzines mixed text and cartoons with fannish humour, reviews, gossip, and the inner workings of fandom.

By the late 70s, Glycer was becoming widely recognised as a fan writer and fanzine editor, with fan award nominations, and a role as a toastmaster at conventions. His longer-form fanzine *Scientifriction*<sup>[5]</sup> would win the FAAN Award for Best Fanzine Single Issue in 1980<sup>[6]</sup>. That particular edition (#11) opens with lots of comical one-sentence examples of what the term “scientifriction” could mean. I was particularly struck by the prescience of one of the possible sources of fiction:

*“It’s what occurs when you have a Westercon and a John Birch Society convention simultaneously, at the same hotel.”*

Scientifriction #11 ed. Mike Glycer July 1979 <https://fanac.org/fanzines/Scientifriction/Scientifriction11.pdf>

That is not literally would happen in the events of the Debarkle but perhaps an apt metaphor for the events in the more virtual setting of the 2010s.

However, Glycer’s longest-running fanzine grew out of the earlier news-focused fanzines. Entitled *File770* after the eponymous party room, the mimeographed newszine promised to cover events in fandom while noting that the ‘act of reporting on fandom is certain to offend a number of people.’ With that in mind the first issue outlined an editorial approach:

*“As to File770’s manner of presenting information, an editor is no better than his/her source. News will be attributed to its source. If I blow it, bitch at me. If my source blows it, just send me the facts and save your bitching for him. Those who wish to comment to me on a DNQ/DNP basis, mark the material accordingly. I will tend to regard everything else as permissible to print, if newsworthy. Concerning the objectivity of File770, when you are riled up by its presentation, or by any opinion published therein, I’ll seldom refuse an interesting rebuttal. Boring rebutters will be out of luck, but I feel that given the newszine’s opinion-influencing nature, my opinion should be just one of several available to you. (As this zine develops, I hope to find a group of commentators to take turns discussing the matters in fandom that affect them, and give them free rein — short of libel, of course...)”*

Mike Glycer File770 #1 January 6 1978 <https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/File770/File77001-06.html?>

The fanzine also offered some differences from other fan news coverage:

*“The other changes in F770 from the usual, here you’ll find some premeditated effort to supply basic data. It won’t always be of general interest, I suspect, but it will be something you can use to formulate your own ideas about how fandom interacts, and how it is changing. On the side of graphics, I am soliciting photos for publishing — events at cons, close-ups of various fans.”*

ibid

In later years Glycer would cite the fifth issue of *File770* as one of his favourite ones<sup>[7]</sup>. Among other topics, that issue carried a column by Dan Goodman critical of Harlan Ellison’s using his Guest of Honour spot at that year’s Worldcon in Phoenix, to protest Arizona not ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment. The issue

also carried dual columns by Victoria Vayne and Jeanne Gomoll arguing against and for the need for women-specific places in fandom. Glycer introduced the columns stating:

*“If you are one of the fans who is not in the least curious about the progress of feminism in fandom, you’re certainly not reading this. The rest of you will have noted in passing that one of the jobs I’ve had to take on as newzine editor is to dispel my own ignorance in this area. I had a lot of pointed questions based on the appearance of events in AWAPA, Ellison’s ERA activities, and things like A Room of Our Own. I corresponded with several people on the topic, and asked the two of them to express their points of view for File770. Victoria Vayne does so in the guise of her running column, while Jeanne Gomoll’s thoughts were specifically generated in reply to a letter of mine, but phrased for general reading, a point mentioned to explain the direction of the essay she provided. They are presented in this order because it seems the way the finished pieces naturally fit.”*

Mike Glycer File770 #5 <https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/File770/File77005.pdf>

The point is not that the fanzine was a paragon of feminism or even progressive politics but rather that a newzine had a responsibility to engage with issues of the day and in the process, the editor had to get to grips with those issues also.

By 1980 *File770* had its first appearance as a Hugo Award finalist for Best Fanzine, competing against *Locus* magazine which had already won the Hugo in that category four times in the 1970s. Mike Glycer was also a finalist in the Best Fan Writer category. Over the next few years, both the fanzine and Glycer would be finalists in these categories. In 1984 *File770* won its first Hugo Award beating David Langford’s *Ansible* as well as *Izzard*, the fanzine created by Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden. *File770* would go on to be a repeat finalist and winner in multiple decades and Glycer a multi-Award-winning fan writer.

The challenge for a fanzine to continue to stay relevant across the changing generations of fandom was substantial. By the 20th anniversary edition of *File770*, the typed layout had shifted to fully justified word-processed columns and next to the traditional fanzine postal address was a CompuServe email address. The format had changed in 1991 to a proper desktop publishing approach to take advantage of cheap photocopying rates<sup>[8]</sup>.

The 20th anniversary edition contained a guest editorial by E. Michael Blake which considers the seismic shift in the medium of fan writing:

*“A couple decades ago, there was some grumbling over technology changes that seemed to make fanzine publishing too easy, in the eyes of some — as though one had to master the arcana of mimeo, ditto or hecto in order to make a real fanzine. But photo-copying brought pubbing within the reach of a great many more people, and generally made it possible to use a wider variety of graphics. To me, as a sometime-reader of fanzines, it didn’t seem to make any end-user difference in what made a fanzine: the content and delivery systems were the same.*

*Does this mean that the controversy over paper-versus- website zines will similarly blow over? I don’t think so. Now, it appears, there is a radical difference in the delivery system and the potential for quite a lot of difference in content. From the end-user standpoint, this is probably terrific, if the end-user happens to be online — and, qualms over elitism notwithstanding, it seems likely that a great many end-users are, or eventually will be. Still, even if the trend ultimately favors web publishing, the fannish community should not actively encourage this by allowing webzines and paperzines to compete for the same award. There’s just too great a difference in kind.”*

E Michael Blake File770 #122 <https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/File770/File770122-08.html?>

The issue wasn’t a new one. In issue #116 in 1997, *File770* had been discussing the status of Sci-Fi Weekly a popular website that didn’t fit neatly into Hugo Award categories for magazines.<sup>[9]</sup>

*File770* would gain its first webpage via CompuServe and an archive version dating back to the year 2000 is still available<sup>[10]</sup>. The website was essentially secondary to the fanzine and was there as a means to promote the fanzine. In 2004 Mike Glycer began contributing at Victor Gonzalez’s Trufen.net, a blog-like site dedicated to shorter fandom news with occasional longer features. The approach with trufen.net was to have a faster-moving approach than the format of traditional newzines. Glycer describes the symbiotic relationship between writing for both this blog format and *File770*:

*“Eventually Trufen.net may be universally read, but for now it still makes sense to run in File770 things I already posted there. They will be new (if not “news”) to most of you. Having Trufen as an outlet, and*

*Victor's encouragement has definitely given new impetus to my fan writing. I hope this will translate into several issues of File770 in 2005. "*

Mike Glycer File770 #144 February 2005 <https://efanzines.com/File770/File770-144.pdf>

By *File770*'s 30th anniversary edition, the fanzine had acquired a blog-style WordPress website with its own domain name <sup>[11]</sup> Yet, while technology and formats had changed, Glycer's original mission with the fanzine had stayed consistent. Well sourced news, basic data, fan art and photos, along with occasional longer pieces. Consistent topics from the early days up to (and beyond) its shift towards a blog-style fanzine included Worldcon and the Hugo Awards, fan disputes, other fanzines, popular culture, essays about Ray Bradbury, as well as the more sombre topic of fan obituaries. The fanzine had also always encouraged an active letters page. In the older versions, the fanzine would carry the postal addresses of contributors and in the era of email, the email addresses. In the age of blogs, the stories posted gained comment sections but the site also continued the tradition of publishing guest responses to previous stories. While the volume of content at the blog version of *File770* was variable for some time, from mid-2010 the number of posts per month would (with some wobbles) increase and increase.

Among those common topics, the Hugo Awards have a special place within *File770*'s repertoire of topics. Aside from the number of times both the fanzine and its editor have been a finalist or have won Hugos, the longevity of the fanzine and its consistent coverage of the awards, the associated data, as well as the various events and controversies surrounding them and Worldcon, made the fanzine a key place for Hugo news over the years. In turn, the Hugo Awards as an expression of trends and cultural changes within science fiction helped shape *File770* as a fanzine.

The milestone 150th issue in June 2007 illustrates those connections. This was the year that Worldcon was hosted in Japan but to many people's surprise, there was little impact on the set of finalists from Japanese fans. Also of concern was the surprising gender breakdown of the finalists that year:

*"In fact, there are people all over the Web asking if the composition of the 2007 final ballot means democracy also has failed in domestic fandom. This year just one of 20 nominated works of fiction is by a woman, Her Majesty's Dragon, a novel by Naomi Novik. What happened? "*

Mike Glycer File770 #150 June 2007 <https://efanzines.com/File770/File770-150.pdf>

The gender imbalance was not just some lingering impact of institutionalised sexism. As Glycer observed the result was notable for how male-skewed it was compared to past results:

*"I would expect there to be some relation between gender and what people think is the best sf. But if male readers exclusively nominate women who write masculine adventures, how did it come to pass that in 1993 literally half the fiction nominated for the Hugo — 10 of 20 works — was by women? Or that fiction by women earned 72 Hugo nominations between 1993 and 2006? Or that five especially successful women accounted for 35 of the nominations — Lois McMaster Bujold, Nancy Kress, Maureen McHugh, Ursula K. Le Guin and Connie Willis — and not always for "masculine adventures."*

ibid

The 2007 Hugo Awards had another contentious finalist: John Scalzi. As a high-profile professional author, his nomination for Best Fan Writer was seen as inappropriate by some fans. This was the same year that he had made a bid to be SFWA President as a write-in candidate. When other fan writers had taken exception to him appearing as a finalist, many had felt the pushback online from some of Scalzi readers was unwarranted.

*"This category has not been used to reward nonfiction by well-known sf writers since its earliest years. History shows the Best Fan Writer Hugo for many years now has been generally used to honor a segment of our community who are not "working professional writers." Scalzi started trailing his coat for a Best Fan Writer nomination on February 7 when he argued, "Nominating well-known pros could make the category more competitive." Why are we supposed to need his help? Because, said Scalzi, the Best Fan Writer category is "desperately moribund." After all, it's had the same winner every year since 1989."*

ibid <sup>[12]</sup>

The category did not become dominated by professional authors in later years, although the distinction between fan writer and professional writer also became blurred in other ways as people found new ways to earn money from writing online.

In that same issue Glycer pointed to a key aspect of how the Hugo Awards and voting for the Hugo Awards were changing:

*“When I became a fan in the early 70s it was possible for someone willing to invest the time to read most of the fiction eligible for a Hugo. For one reason: nearly all short sf and many of the novels appeared in a few prozines. However, there was never a time when that kind of complete familiarity with the field was an implicit prerequisite for voting. By now, most of us have accommodated ourselves to a prolific genre that publishes so many works so widely distributed (online and well as in print), that we will never have the time and money to read more than a part of it.”*

ibid

The curve of this history of a fanzine and its editor bends back towards the Debarkle. In 2013, *File770* naturally was covering events in what I have been calling the SFWA civil war (see preceding chapters). Mike Glycer was not wholly impressed with Vox Day:

*“Vox Day sounds just like one of those overly talky, self-congratulatory villains from a 1940s serial, and his flock of followers could profit from a dose of what Manly Wade Wellman used to write about.”*

<http://file770.com/behind-the-kefuffle-kurve/>

A year later the site was covering Day’s expulsion having followed events in the preceding months<sup>[13]</sup>.

It is time to start pulling the strands together.

Larry Correia’s Sad Puppies 2 campaign led to coverage of his attempts to win a Hugo at *File770* (see chapter 26) and some unhappiness from Correia about the subsequent attention. However, if I can pick one point where the various strands start to really coalesce in a way that presages 2015, a *File770* story in April 2014 helps illustrate the process.

Amid the multiple controversies around the SFWA, author John C. Wright announced in his signature style that he was leaving the organisation. *File770* had the story:

*“Wright’s resignation prompted Brad R. Torgersen, a Hugo nominee in 2012 and a double-nominee in 2014 with an assist from Larry Correia’s “Sad Puppies” campaign, to declare that he will be leaving SFWA too:”*

<http://file770.com/wright-quits-sfwa-torgersen-to-follow/>

Mike Glycer was surprised to note a comment from former SFWA President Michael Capobianco telling Wright that recent events with the Hugo Awards had nothing to do with the SFWA. While true, Glycer was puzzled why Capobianco would think Wright wouldn’t know that.

However, the confusion was more widespread. At Larry Correia’s blog, commenters also were confusing the Hugo Awards with the Nebulas and seeing the events at the SFWA as inherently tied to Correia’s Hugo Award campaign<sup>[13]</sup> In the comments at *File770*, Wright turned up to defend stridently his use of ‘man’ as a generic term for people.

Of the internet arguments we have covered so far, they have all been spread across multiple places. However, each of them had a few places where the discussion was most intense. For RaceFail, the network of LiveJournal sites provided one of the more distributed examples. For GamerGate, the imageboard 4chan and 8chan, as well as the subreddit KotakuInAction, were major loci. For the SFWA disputes, its own forums and an older legacy forum were key sites.

However, the Hugo Awards with their lack of a single organising focus and quasi-anarchic structure didn’t have an obvious natural online home for discussion. In the past, this role had been filled by the slower-speed process of fanzines carried physically by post. What would happen in the online decade of the 2010s if the Hugo Awards were to have their own online fight on the scale of the SFWA wars or at the scale of RaceFail, or (the gods of fandom forbid) on the scale of GamerGate? Where would that play out?

Time would tell.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://fancyclopedia.org/Room\\_770](https://fancyclopedia.org/Room_770)
- [2] [https://fancyclopedia.org/Nolacon\\_I\\_Remembrance\\_\(Moskowitz\)](https://fancyclopedia.org/Nolacon_I_Remembrance_(Moskowitz))
- [3] [https://fanac.org/fanzines/Organlegger/index.html? https://fanac.org/fanzines/Sylmarillion/index.html?](https://fanac.org/fanzines/Organlegger/index.html?https://fanac.org/fanzines/Sylmarillion/index.html?)
- [4] <https://fanac.org/fanzines/Prehensile/index.html>



- [5] <https://fanac.org/fanzines/Scientifriction/index.html>
- [6] discussed at BlackGate in 2019 <https://www.blackgate.com/2019/10/13/golden-age-of-science-fiction-scientifriction-11-edited-by-mike-glyer/> and available here <https://fanac.org/fanzines/Scientifriction/Scientifriction11.pdf>
- [7] <https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/File770/File77073-04.html?>
- [8] as explained in the 30th edition <https://efanzines.com/File770/File770-152.pdf>
- [9] <https://efanzines.com/File770/File770-116.pdf>
- [10] <https://web.archive.org/web/20000524070543/Http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/mglyer/f770/index.html>
- [11] <http://file770.com/a-30th-birthday-present-for-file-770/> I believe this is the first post at the *File770* site, with the older posts in the archive being imports from trufen.net and an earlier blog named after Mike Glyer's older *Prehensile* fanzine
- [12] David Langford had been a regular winner of the category but is also a fiction writer, so there was some debate whether he was a precedent or not [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Langford#Literary\\_career](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Langford#Literary_career)
- [13] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/04/28/a-letter-from-john-c-wright/#comment-38926>

## 30: Hate, Myth and Puppies

This chapter comes in two parts. The first part is intended as a brief overview of events related to the controversial blogger commonly known as Requires Hate. It is a sketch of a common understanding of a set of events and opinions about a real person. The second part takes a step away from the reality (and the real people hurt by those events) to look at the myth that followed. It is the myth-based-on-reality version of Requires Hate that would become a topic within the events of the Debarkle.

2014's fandom controversies were not confined to the SFWA or Larry Correia's Sad Puppy campaign. A distinct issue arose around the review blog Requires Only That You Hate. The blog's author was a pseudonymous writer, who had worked through a variety of different handles over the years. Under the name "A Cracked Moon" the reviewer had fallen a few votes short of being a 2013 finalist for the Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer<sup>[1]</sup>.

While the reviewer had used several names over the years, they became more generally referred to as "Requires Hate" — a name that was suggestive of the signature style of the reviews. In particular, the blog had published several reviews heavily criticising books by notable authors for racism and mishandling themes of gender, sexuality and sexual consent. Those reviews had led to high-profile internet arguments. In particular, Requires Hate's reviews had used violent rhetoric towards authors. The extremity of the attacks was viewed as both excessive and trolling by many people but was also defended by some as a hyperbolic way of expressing legitimate issues.

During 2014 matters came to a head when the Requires Hate identity was linked with the pseudonymous science fiction writer Benjanun Sriduangkaew<sup>[2]</sup>. Sriduangkaew was a Thai writer whose fiction was receiving a lot of positive critical acclaim. Sriduangkaew's work had led her to become a finalist for the Campbell/Astounding Award for Best New Writer in the 2014 Hugo Awards. With speculation already circulating that Sriduangkaew and Requires Hate were one and the same, the connection was confirmed by editor and author Nick Mamatas who had been an advocate for Sriduangkaew's work.

While Requires Hate's high-profile disputes with famous authors were widely known, during the controversy several other people who had known her online made credible claims about her engaging in bullying or emotionally abusive behaviour. In dual online apologies in her Requires Hate persona and in her author persona, Sriduangkaew acknowledged that she had hurt people emotionally by her actions online<sup>[3]</sup>. With many people digging into her internet history, her earlier online presence on the social media/blogging platform LiveJournal under the moniker Winterfox and also on an RPG forum known for 'toxic' internet culture, had also been revealed. In addition, Sriduangkaew was targeted by online harassment sites including Encyclopaedia Dramatica and Kiwi Farms. Sriduangkaew's real name and identity were also exposed, helping fuel further harassment.

Author Laura J. Mixon attempted to establish a long-standing pattern of behaviour by Requires Hate in a report that classified a set of interactions by her under various names over several years. While extensive, the report would come under a range of criticisms for its methods, accuracy and the ethics of singling Sriduangkaew out.

In a different timeline, discussion of Requires Hate and the Mixon Report would likely have been a massive topic within fandom in 2015. Events would prove otherwise. However, as a consequence, many of the interconnected issues within this topic were left unresolved. In particular

- how fan-spaces should respond to allegations of bullying
- the role of race and gender and power disparities in fan spaces and in online disputes
- the extent to which people can change and which people have the right to forgive

Multiple narratives surround the issue and unpacking even some of them is beyond the scope of this chapter. Indeed, with many of the original posts no longer available (and many that are, including the Mixon report, only available in archive form) it would be a substantial challenge to re-examine events.

However, while there was a real person in these events and real harm caused to many people, it is a quasi-fictional person that begins to play a role in the events of the Debarkle. The quasi-fictional person is Requires Hate the myth, a character based on people's superficial reading of the events above and extrapolated into a personification of supposed left-wing intolerance. In reality, there was little or no interaction that I can find between the real blogger known as Requires Hate and the key figures gathering in support of Larry Correia's Sad Puppy campaign. However, as the scandal progressed in 2014, "Requires

Hate” would be cited by supporters of the Sad Puppy campaign as an example of what they claimed to be fighting against.

In this mythological version, Requires Hate was characterised not as an outlier in terms of vitriolic rhetoric or behaviour but rather in her choice of target. For example, here is Larry Correia:

*“The fun part of this for me is watching all of the politically correct writers freaking out this week about how her behavior is totally unacceptable. How career sabotage, fake reviews, slander, libel, trolling, doxing, and threats are the worst things ever... Yet, I wonder... Where were all these people when it was me getting attacked?”*

*Oh, that’s right. I’m on the other team, so anything goes against non-SJWs.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/11/10/sjw-cannibal-feeding-frenzy/>

And a few days later:

*“You know, all the stuff Requires Hate did to the wrong people. The threats, harassment, and slander weren’t special or unique. My side is used to them. Hell, according to the SJWs I’m a racist, sexist, homophobic, wife beating, rape apologist. None of those things are true, but it doesn’t matter to the SJWs. I’m a foe, and thus must be shunned. They stick as much stuff like that out there as possible in order to build a narrative about their targets. It is pervasive. The uninformed read those things and believe them.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/11/14/why-i-dont-like-social-justice-warriors/>

At Mad Genius Club, Dave Freer also had strong opinions on the matter:

*“Yes, they’re up in arms because they finally figured that one of their leading SJW (Nominated for Hugo? Much better than Larry, naturally. I mean he just taught hundreds of victims how to defend themselves. She abused victims and was thus adored by the SJW. Much more deserving./sarc off) was actually also attacking them. Now, the little graphs are pure GIGO, of course (I can explain, but trust me. Math-stats is something you can trust me on). We’ve had the same sock-puppet here. Winterfox IIRC. So, I suspect, have many others... but we, and anyone else not among the chosen ones, the darlings of the Traditional Establishment, are not going to rush off and tell the enablers and encouragers of this conduct that we don’t like it. We just deal with it and move on, because it happens to us all the time.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2014/11/10/we-build/><sup>[4]</sup>

Again, Freer, like Correia, claimed that the style, intensity and volume of abuse that was being attributed to Requires Hate in the Mixon report were commonplace for writers like himself. For Freer, it was not the violent language or the people saying they were victimised (he implies that they should just “deal with it and move on”) but the criticism of racism or homophobia or misogyny that were the issue. He followed up this claim a week later:

*“They’re trying to please, to “be good”, but the perpetrator will find something to give them a beating about. So they will try even harder to second guess and oblige the perpetrator’s every whim. They are, de facto, entrapped slaves. It’s vile behavior, whether done by a man to his partner, or ‘Requires Hate’ or Rose Eveleth to an unsuspecting scientist (yes, a week on, and SJW behavior has changed... not at all. See how they learn and fix). It’s remotely possible the abuser is unaware of their own behavior, but it is more likely that they enjoy it, and rationalize its acceptability – ‘he deserved it.’ ‘I only hit her because I love her’, ‘it’s because I want more women in science, he deserves it’ or ‘I’m punching up.’*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2014/11/17/mirror-mirror/>

What had angered Freer on this specific occasion was the controversy over a sexist shirt worn by a scientist in an interview about the Rosetta Project<sup>[5]</sup>. One of the people who had criticised the shirt was the podcaster Rose Eveleth<sup>[6]</sup> which is why Freer mentions her directly after Requires Hate. In reality, the scientist in the shirt did face a social media storm but what Freer avoids discussing at all is that it was Rose Eveleth who was the one who faced a sustained bullying campaign and death threats:

*“Science and tech writer Rose Eveleth was not a fan of the outfit, pointing out on Twitter how the choice reflects the pervasive attitude about women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields*

(STEM). *The relatively mild critique was not well-received by men on the Internet, however, who responded with death threats and assertions she should kill herself.*"

<https://www.mic.com/articles/104278/woman-calls-out-scientist-s-sexist-shirt-gets-death-threats> [7]

Eveleth had not done any of the things that Requires Hate had been accused of and yet Freer lumped together criticism of pin-up style pictures on a shirt with claims of systematic internet bullying and with domestic abuse by men towards their wives, while wholly ignoring that the only real name he used was actually the victim of a bullying campaign.

At Sarah A. Hoyt's blog, there was a similar sentiment in the comment section that being targeted by trolls was easily dealt with. One of the regular visitors at her blog commented on the Requires Hate allegations, saying:

*"The problem isn't really that people have been hurt. The problem is that it got used to hurt people she classifies as the "wrong" people like you said. It's OK to hurt us, but their own? That's unacceptable. The irony is that when a troll attacks one of us? We smack them down and move on. It's really not that difficult...provided you're not afraid of being labelled as something you're not."*

T.L. Knighton <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2014/11/07/and-so-its-come-to-this/#comment-216474>

Sarah A. Hoyt reiterated the same theme in another post:

*"And of course their problem...is not that she did all those things, but that she used the tactics against the "wrong people" i.e. fellow "social justice warriors", people who want to eliminate patriarchy and who are sure white privilege is hiding under their bed, ready to pounce out as soon as they relax — People who think that everyone who doesn't think like them commits thought crime and should be silenced. That is, they are upset because tactics they sanction and use against people like us are being used against them.*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2014/11/14/table-settings-at-the-cannibal-feast/>

In the same month, Hoyt would work Requires Hate into a long post complaining about Barack Obama.

The consistent presentation of Requires Hate by Hoyt, Freer and Correia was that conservative writers were routinely facing such bullying and that the nature of the "bullying" was criticism about racism or other "social justice" issues, and therefore that they were all just as much the victims.

As we will see when we move into the events of 2015, this pattern would continue. A mythical "Requires Hate" only loosely based on actual events, would stalk through the rhetoric of not just the Sad Puppy campaigns but even some of their opponents. The mythical version was cited as a kind of counter-balance to the existence of Vox Day as if the primary complaint about the real person had been one of ideological intolerance.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2013HugoStatistics.pdf>
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjanun\\_Sriduangkaew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjanun_Sriduangkaew)
- [3] the apologies are still available and can be read here <https://beekian.wordpress.com/2014/10/20/the-things-that-we-do-on-mistakes-on-apologies/> and here <https://requireshate.wordpress.com/2014/10/15/apologies-and-finality/> for reference and obviously should not be taken as objective statements about the facts of the issue other than that they exist.
- [4] Freer claims that Winterfox (if he recalls correctly) had left comments at *Mad Genius Club*. If that is true, then I can't find them under that name using the Google search terms "Winterfox site: <http://madgeniusclub.blogspot.com/#8221>; or "Winterfox site: [HTTPS://madgeniusclub.com/#8221](https://madgeniusclub.com/#8221);
- [5] <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/nov/14/rosetta-comet-dr-matt-taylor-apology-sexist-shirt>
- [6] Rose Eveleth [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose\\_Eveleth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose_Eveleth)
- [7] see also <https://jezebel.com/woman-gets-death-threats-for-tweeting-about-disliking-a-1658337612>

# 31: The Hugos Go to London

[Content warning for discussion of sexual assault, misogyny and transphobic language]

2014 was a busy year in the history of the Debarkle, with Larry Correia's Sad Puppy 2 campaign, Vox Day's involvement in GamerGate and the rest of fandom having its own controversies. Day had already started the year with a different problem: the Christian publisher who was selling his epic fantasy *Throne of Bones* had been sold and the new owners were not interested in Day's book which didn't fit the mould of the Christian Booksellers Association<sup>[1]</sup>. Day explained:

*"I have reacquired all the publishing rights to the Selenoth and Quantum Mortis books and will be re-releasing them through the publishing arm of Alpenwolf. Alpenwolf will continue to release hardcovers as well as eBooks and the books will continue to feature covers from the two artists who provided the six existing covers, JartStar and Kirk DuPounce."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140105041325/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-new-marcher-lord-press.html>

Alpenwolf was the Finnish game development company whose only work at the time appeared to be Vox Day's gladiator-management game set in his fantasy world. The idea of the game company being involved in eBooks wasn't new — Day had proposed in 2013 that the game would offer eBooks as in-game rewards<sup>[2]</sup>.

By February, Day's plans had coalesced into a publishing company called *Castalia House*, named after the fictional country in Herman Hesse's novel *The Glass Bead Game*.

*"We are working off the new publishing models which will provide authors better royalty rates than they can get anywhere without self-publishing, and we are encouraging the participation of the various readerships involved. We are intentionally keeping prices down with an eye to maximizing the ongoing technological disruption of the existing publishing companies; we do not view every free reader of one of our books as a lost potential customer, but rather, as a reader who has been rescued from the confining intellectual chains of the SF/F gatekeepers."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140212103150/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/02/the-new-iron-dream.html>

Castalia was (and remains) a corporate section of the game development company and while Day was chief editor, he has said that he is not the owner<sup>[3]</sup>. Castalia House as an entity would allow Day to publish sympathetic authors as well as provide an outlet for both fiction and non-fiction.

Meanwhile, as well as the Sad Puppy campaign, Larry Correia was in the thick of even more internet arguments with other science fiction and fantasy writers. As well as the previously discussed fight over non-binary genders [see chapter 26], in June 2014 Correia decided to weigh in on the topic of rape and self-defence. Correia's argument was very much focused on the use of guns for self-defence and dismissive of the idea of education playing a role in reducing cases of rape and sexual assault, which Correia called in the title of his post "The Naive Idiocy of Teaching Rapists Not To Rape". That led to John Scalzi saying on Twitter that Correia's post title was:

*"The Naive Idiocy of Writing a Headline That Makes You Look Like Rapist Excusing Asshole"*

<https://twitter.com/scalzi/status/479299658590588928>

The resulting Twitter exchange<sup>[5]</sup> would later be summed up by Scalzi as:

*"This evening, in sum: The Naive Idiocy Of Apparently Not Being Able To Understand the English Language Past the Fourth Grade Level."*

<https://twitter.com/scalzi/status/479466568804757504>

A more substantial response was written by author Jim C. Hines at his own blog:

*"Correia is right that there are a lot of different kinds of predators out there. When it comes to sexual assault, the majority of them are men, and they're far more likely to be someone the victim knows. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, yet for as long as I've been working with rape survivors and speaking*

*out about rape, there have been countless people insisting that the Only True Solution is to turn all women into gun-toting ninjas.*

*I don't understand the fear some people — again, this seems to be primarily men — have when it comes to looking at other solutions. Instead of reading the research, they just proclaim that education will never work, because reasons. They ignore the pervasiveness of rape myths, the myriad approaches to things like bystander intervention, the utterly broken way our legal system treats rape, and all of the other factors that contribute to the prevalence of rape in our society.”*

<http://www.iimchines.com/2014/06/lc-on-rape-and-self-defense/>

In a pattern that we have discussed before, Correia cast himself as being victimised because people criticised what he was saying and attempted to shift the whole argument on to the topic of Samuel R. Delany:

*“So what was the horrible misogynistic thing that I did which was so terribly insulting and awful bad that it caused all these SFWA officer alumni to unite in my condemnation? I called Scalzi a “pussy”. So, the Word Police swooped in, declaring that this was the most hurtful misogynistic trigger outrage this week. (of course, these same people shower praise on, quote from, and give lifetime achievement awards to sci-fi author, Samuel Delany, who praises paedophile organization NAMBLA, so their outrage meter may need some calibration)”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/06/19/correia-uses-a-bad-word-and-it-is-the-worst-thing-ever-siw-outrage-of-the-week/>

Correia's line of attack in June 2014 was very much in tune with the strategy Vox Day would employ against the SFWA in July of the same year (see Chapter 25) — that criticism from the establishment of the SFWA was invalidated by the taint of being insufficiently opposed to paedophilia<sup>[6]</sup> without really engaging with the claim.

Elsewhere back in March, the Hugo Awards categories were a matter of some debate for Mike Glycer at *File770*. Reprising his argument from 2007 (see chapter 29) that established professional authors were distorting the Best Fan Writer category. This time Glycer pointed to the fact that neither John Scalzi's website nor that of author Frederik Pohl acknowledged their fan writer Hugo awards<sup>[7]</sup>. The post received a lengthy comment from John Scalzi.

However, it was a different and very short-lived controversy that would capture more attention for the Hugo Awards.

Worldcon is a movable feast and while the majority of Worldcons have been American, the convention has been held outside of the US and outside of North America. In 2007, Worldcon had been held in Japan (see chapter 29) and in 2014 Worldcon was to be held in London for the third time (and in the UK for the seventh time)<sup>[8]</sup>. Eager to make a big splash, the co-chairs of the convention decided to invite UK TV celebrity, Jonathan Ross, to be the MC for the Hugo Awards.

On a superficial level, the idea had some merit. Ross was famous, witty and not unknowledgeable about science fiction. His role as MC would encourage more press coverage of the Hugo Awards. *Loncon* (as London-based Worldcons are known) issued a press release when Ross's role was confirmed:

*“Ross has had a long career as a TV and radio host and is also a film critic, comics writer, and video game developer. He has been a champion of science fiction and fantasy in all its forms throughout his career, and is one of the genre's most vocal enthusiasts Ross' wife, screenwriter Jane Goldman, won a Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation (Long Form) in 2008 with Matthew Vaughan for the screenplay for Stardust. Loncon 3 co-chair Steve Cooper said: “We're thrilled to announce that Jonathan Ross will be our host for the 2014 Hugo Awards Ceremony. Ross loves science fiction and fantasy as much as any of the fans who will be nominating and voting for the awards.””*

Loncon 3 press release cited at <http://file770.com/loncon-3s-hugo-mc-withdraws/>

However, “a long career as a TV and radio host” included a long career of disparaging jokes about women and cruel pranks, which had previously led to him being suspended from his radio show. Whatever superficial merit the idea had, Ross was a walking bundle of PR disaster risks who was as likely to bring as much negative publicity to the Hugo Awards as good publicity. Nor was this unknown: as *File770* reported, people within the team organising *Loncon* had raised multiple objections:

*“Loncon 3 Exhibits Division head Farah Mendlesohn wrote on her LiveJournal (in a post since taken private) that she spent all week arguing with co-chairs Steven Cooper and Alice Lawson against Ross’*

*selection because of his “public abuse of women.” The chairs made it clear this was not something for the committee to decide. Therefore on February 28 she resigned as division head so she could continue to criticize the decision. (For complex reasons she still intends to work as Project Manager for the Exhibit Hall.)”*

<http://file770.com/loncon-3s-hugo-mc-withdraws/>

British author Charles Stross also saw some of the obvious pitfalls:

*“The problem I see is that while fandom is in the process of cleaning house, inviting him — or anyone with a controversial media profile — to be Hugo toastmaster is like rolling out a welcome mat at the Worldcon front door that says “muck-rakers welcome”. There’s a lot of muck to be raked, even before we get into Daily Mail photographers stalking cosplayers: just look at the recent SFWA fracas (plural), the Jim Frenkel/harassment scandal at Tor, and so on. Worldcon should be safe space for fans, and inviting a high-profile media personality who has been targeted by the tabloids is going to cause collateral damage, even if nothing happens, simply by making many fans feel less safe.”*

<http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/2014/03/the-latest-hugo-awards-storm.html>

Hugo finalist Seanan McGuire expressed her concern, fears and anger at the decision on Twitter, although the UK/US time difference meant he had already withdrawn before she learned he was the proposed MC. Her fears were also reflected by many other fans.

The growing backlash was rapidly cut short when Jonathan Ross withdrew from the role as MC via Twitter. The controversy lasted about seven hours, at least for the substantive aspects of it. What followed was the meta-controversy in which the manner of the announcement, the pushback and then Ross’s withdrawal were debated and characterised. The ostensibly left-wing British magazine *The New Statesman* headlined their article on the issue as “Jonathan Ross and the Hugo awards: why was he forced out by science fiction’s self-appointed gatekeepers?”

*“hurtful names were flung, people were “crying”, and the (vocal contingent of) the SFF community became a childish clubhouse hurling abuse from a crack in the door because they thought he would be mean to them if they let him in. They thought he would make fat jokes, be rude to women, disrespect the community and – as punishment not only for previous gaffes but for gaffes not yet made – he didn’t deserve the honour. Jonathan Ross resigned from his post after being called various words your office internet is likely to block and wished everybody a lovely convention. It was horrific to watch.”*

<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2014/03/jonathan-ross-and-hugo-awards-why-was-he-forced-out-science-fictions-self-appointed>

The rest of the article framed the issue in terms of whether Ross was being excluded from fandom by American fans who perhaps didn’t understand British humour. What also became clear was the involvement of Hugo-winning author and comic book writer Neil Gaiman. Gaiman was a friend of Ross and apparently had helped broker the invitation for Ross to be the MC of the Hugo Awards.

*““What was peculiar about the attacks was they had constructed an ad hominem straw man to attack, who was sexist, sizeist, hates women and likes making everyone feel bad,” said Gaiman. “It doesn’t bear any resemblance to Jonathan. While he has occasionally said things that make you go ‘Oh god, your mouth opened and that thing came out’, he is a consummate professional.””*

*ibid*

It is, looking back on it, a very odd defence. Even Ross’s defenders accepted that he had made many inappropriate remarks in the past and indeed, had a habit of doing so. However, anticipating that he might do so again and in the process cause controversy at the Hugo award ceremony was dismissed:

*“Damning him for things he has allegedly done and might possibly be about to do but had not yet done? It’s all a bit Minority Report.”*

*ibid*

The ensuing controversy caused some delight for Vox Day who dismissed the Worldcon as a “freakshow” and used the incident to make more disparaging comments about John Scalzi and the Nielsen Haydens.

At Sarah A. Hoyt's blog, a guest post tied together everything from the erosion of freedom caused by seatbelt laws to public healthcare as a deliberate attempt to secure power. The crowning example of this move being the Jonathan Ross case:

*"But why the hell should we let that stand in the way of a good outrage and Hoo Haa Glitter Explosion? Look, Ross could have brought exposure to the genre like it hasn't seen since the Golden Age. That exposure would likely have meant the Hugo would actually MEAN something like it hasn't in decades. Instead a few people who are members of the International Coalition of the Perpetually Butthurt threw a collective hissy fit — not over anything he's actually said, but over what he MIGHT have said. I mean WTF? Are we living in a freaking Phil Dick story?"*

*It's time those of us with a brain — and a sense of humor — told these idiots to STFU.*

*First, because they're part of the problem, the self-inflicted wound that's killing SF. Our demo is trending older and older, and these silly twits are doing everything they can to drive away younger readers.*

*Second because this kind of exclusionary crap is the same sort of stuff that was done to most of US when we were younger."*

Patrick Richardson at <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2014/03/06/for-your-own-good-a-guest-post-by-patrick-richardson/>

In April, in his post explaining the controversy around the Sad Puppy 2 Hugo finalists, Larry Correia would also use a similar line about the Jonathan Ross case: "Jonathan Ross *might* say something in the future. Outrage."<sup>[11]</sup> That using past behaviour to object to somebody taking on a future role is both typical and common across political divides (or indeed non-political ones) was ignored and instead portrayed as being a unique feature of left-wing censoriousness.

Meanwhile...aside from controversial hosts and Sad Puppy nominees, the rest of the Hugo finalists had their own newsworthy aspects. In the Campbell/Astounding Award, Benjanun Sriduangkaew was a finalist, precipitating events that we covered in an earlier chapter. In Best Novel, the whole of the multi-volume *Wheel of Time* series had been nominated as a single work.

*The Wheel of Time* was an epic multi-book fantasy adventure following a band of friends as they prepare for an apocalyptic battle against the ultimate evil. The series had reached eleven books with the protagonists not much closer to the end, when the series author, Robert Jordan, died from a rare blood disease. To finish the series, Brandon Sanderson was given the task of completing the final book based on Jordan's unpublished text<sup>[12]</sup>. With the series complete, fans made the argument that the series as a whole could be nominated as a single work for the Hugo Award.

The argument rested on a clause in the World Science Fiction Society's constitution:

*"Simply put, because no portion of The Wheel of Time has ever been nominated for a Hugo, the entire series became eligible as a single work when it was completed. I've contacted the Hugo Administrators for this year and they declined to rule on this interpretation, preferring to wait and see if the nominations received require one. So if more folks nominate just A Memory of Light, that will make the ballot. If more nominate for the entire series, then the series will be listed. If it doesn't make a difference either way, then they won't need to rule."*

<https://dragonmount.com/news/events/robert-jordan39s-final-year-of-hugo-eligibility-r693/>

The rule existed because, for much of the history of the Hugo Awards, novels were published serially in magazines. It was a novel but not wholly unprecedented interpretation to apply the rule to a work of the length of *The Wheel of Time*. However, for there to be a definitive ruling on the eligibility of the series, it would first need to be nominated.

At Tor.com, Leigh Butler encouraged fans to nominate the series in January of 2014:

*"Therefore, O my Peeps, I exhort you: if you can and will, please consider nominating the Wheel of Time series as a whole for the Hugo Award for Best Novel, and spread the word so that others might do the same."*

<https://www.tor.com/2014/01/07/the-wheel-of-time-hugo-award-robert-jordan/>

This was Butler's personal opinion but Tor was also the publisher of *The Wheel of Time*.



The series was successful in becoming a finalist both in terms of votes and in terms of a ruling on its eligibility. Fans of the series would get another pleasant surprise later in the year.

*“Ever since the announcement of the 2014 Hugo Finalists, we’ve been getting questions on all fronts about the Wheel of Time. Since 2006, the Worldcon has been making a collection of e-texts of the nominated works (subject to their authors’ and publishers’ willingness to make them available) available to Hugo voters, so that those voters can make informed choices. But no work as long as Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson’ Wheel of Time has previously been a finalist. In answer to many inquiries, we’re happy to be able to say that the entire Wheel of Time will be made available in the Hugo Voters’ Packet.”*

<https://www.tor.com/2014/04/21/the-wheel-of-time-and-the-hugo-voter-packet/>

This was quite literally a big deal, although in other ways the Hugo Packet was lacking in 2014. Orbit Books (which published the Hugo finalists *Ancillary Justice* by Ann Leckie, *Parasite* by Mira Grant, and *Neptune’s Brood* by Charles Stross) declined to allow the full-versions of works they published to be included in the Hugo packet<sup>[13]</sup>.

It would be wrong though to characterise Tor.com as only looking at Tor-connected works for the Hugo Awards. In the final month of voting, Tor.com published a glowing review of Larry Correia’s *Warbound*:

*“I hope Warbound gets the Hugo—if for no other reason than maybe it’ll someday catch Hollywood’s eye so that Guillermo del Toro can make the film. But if not, Larry Correia will keep doing what he does: blowing things up with style. He’s as stubborn as his protagonists, and in the end, no, Correia absolutely isn’t everyone’s cup of tea. Maybe that’s because he’s not tea—he’s Red Bull mixed with Pop Rocks and shaken real hard. But if you figure he’s all fights, big-muscled brutes, and gung-ho firepower—a reputation well earned, to be sure—you’ll still be surprised.”*

Jeff LaSala <https://www.tor.com/2014/07/14/warbound-grimnoir-chronicles-larry-correia-appreciation-hugo-nominee/>

As voting drew to a close in July of 2014, Vox Day posted his voting intentions which he encouraged others to follow:

- *BEST NOVEL*
- *Warbound by Larry Correia*
- *No Award*
- *The Wheel of Time by Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson*
- *Left off ballot: Ancillary Justice, Neptune’s Brood, and Parasite.*
- *BEST NOVELLA*
- *The Chaplain’s Legacy by Brad Torgersen*
- *The Butcher of Khardov by Dan Wells*
- *No Award*
- *Six-Gun Snow White by Catherynne M. Valente*
- *Left off ballot: Equoid and Wakulla Springs.*
- *BEST NOVELETTE*
- *“Opera Vita Aeterna” by Vox Day*

- *“The Exchange Officers” by Brad Torgersen*
- *“The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling” by Ted Chiang*
- *No Award*
- *Left off ballot: “The Waiting Stars” and “The Lady Astronaut of Mars”.*
- *BEST SHORT STORY*
- *No Award*
- *I recommend leaving the ballot otherwise blank. This category is illustrative of how far the genre has fallen.*
- *BEST EDITOR, LONG FORM*
- *Toni Weiskopf*
- *Sheila Gilbert*
- *Ginjer Buchanan*
- *No Award*

Day called for people to vote ‘no award’ for the whole Short Story category. Elsewhere, people were recommending that people should vote ‘no award’ above Vox Day’s novelette.

The results were announced at the Hugo ceremony on the 17th of August and the results were not good for the Sad Puppy campaign:

*“Meanwhile at Monster Hunter Nation HQ, it’s time to lie back and stop thinking of England. No matter what people hoped or feared would happen as the Hugo Awards were announced, only one of the 7 shortlisted nominees endorsed by Larry Correia finished ahead of another nominee in their category – basically, they ran last.”*

<http://file770.com/hugo-statistics-dress-sad-puppies-in-black-armbands/>

Vox Day’s novelette did particularly badly, coming sixth out of a set of five finalists by beaten in the run-offs by ‘no award’. In Best Novel, Larry Correia finished better, coming fifth in the run-off against ‘no award’ and beating it by 1161 to 1052. The winner of Best Novel was Ann Leckie’s space opera *Ancillary Justice*, which we’ll look at in the next chapter. The only one of Correia’s picks that did better than coming fifth or lower was Toni Weiskopf who came fourth in the Best Editor Long Form category<sup>[14]</sup>.

Correia’s reaction was mixed. He did make an honest attempt to reassure his followers that he believed there had been no fraud. He went on to claim that he had proved his point:

*“I do enjoy the constantly moving goal posts of the perpetually outraged, like how Sad Puppies somehow turned into a crusade for racism/sexism/homophobia in their heads. I never expected to win the Hugo. My stated goals this entire time was to get some political untouchables onto their sainted slate, so that they would demonstrate that there was serious political bias in the awards.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/08/18/hugo-aftermath-post/>

Correia’s stated goals had not ‘the entire time’ been to get political untouchables onto the ballot nor had he ever explained how that would demonstrate a more general bias. Nor had Correia included on his list more obvious writers with a better track record of writing success than Vox Day, controversial political views and eligible works — in particular Michael Z. Williamson in Best Short Story and Tom Kratman in Best Related

Work. Both those authors were afterthoughts on Vox Day's additional slate and hence didn't get enough votes to be finalists.

Elsewhere, other supporters of Correia's Sad Puppy campaign had thoughts on the significance of the results. At *Mad Genius Club* one of the authors included in Vox Day's additional Sad Puppy slate, Dave Freer, had his own theory about the results:

*“As the reading population, logic states, is a reflection of the demographics of the total population, and maybe 10-15% of that group could count as left wing. Stretch to 25% who will put up with it... still leaves 75% who are unrepresented, for whom the Hugo Award was at best meaningless or actively signalled a book they would not want to read. Now, obviously, even if you personally are further left than Pol Pot or Kim il from-too-much-caviar or Stalin, as an author signalling that 75% do not want to read your book is **not** a win. By Larry making this bias obvious, by having to recruit nominations, despite being a very very popular author... The previous Hugo winners, the current nominees, the normal greying crew of voters, the Worldcon organizers and the Hugo organizers were caught in a trap. The only way to win (to establish that this was NOT true, there was no left wing bias) was to LOSE. To have a right wing, (or several of them) author (or editor) win (no matter how good the various proponents were. It was like an international road-race which somehow only Germans won... once this was publicized, even if the best runner was German – if he won, your race's credibility was in the toilet, now and always) That would re-establish the credibility of the award as essentially picking 'best' rather than left wing flavor of the month lose and 75% of your sales. It was kind of a lose or lose badly equation for the left wing of sf/fantasy, lose and have a Damian in tears surrounded by exploding heads, or 'win' and lose badly by destroying your credibility. The best option would have been to divide and rule and get behind say Toni Weisskopf and Brad Torgersen. But that would take brains.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2014/08/18/a-different-modest-proposal/>

The mechanics of Dave Freer's suggestion are hard to fathom. Was he suggesting that voters not vote for the works they liked but instead vote for right-leaning finalists for the sake of appearances? Did he think there was some sort of centralised decision made on how people voted?

Brad Torgersen was more keen to lay the problem at the feet of what he called “affirmative action”.

*“But at what point does the affirmative action go too far? Almost becoming a mockery of itself?”*

*I noted with unhappiness the “squee” that erupted from some individuals when an all-female Nebula list hit the internet airwaves earlier in the season. As if merely ensuring all the winners had vaginas was a triumph unto itself? So, do we oscillate? For fairness? One year, it's all penises, the next, back to all vaginas again? But wait, what about trans people who have neither penises nor vaginas? Clearly the frontier needs to be pushed again. And so on, and so forth.*

*One might get the sense that in this kind of affirmative action environment, the merits of the story proper are definitely riding in the back seat. One might be correct about that, too.”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2014/08/21/fear-and-loathing-at-the-awards-table-5-sad-puppies-2-post-mortem/>

For Brad, a set of Nebula finalists that were all women (and that some people were happy about it) was ipso facto proof of “affirmative action”. He also claimed that Larry Correia wouldn't care if a Tongan gay socialist Democrat won a Hugo, just as long as being Tongan, gay, socialist, or Democrat, weren't the main reason why they won. Yet, the primary evidence offered by Correia, Torgersen and Freer for the supposed bias in the Hugos was the kind of people who were winning it. There was a vague claim that unworthy books had been winning for some time but these dates preceded the very recent trend towards more demographically diverse finalists<sup>[15]</sup>.

A missing piece of the argument from Correia et al was some analysis of the works that were being nominated instead of their choices. Correia had talked vaguely about polar bears and robots being raped as examples of where the Hugos were going awry but there was initially no serious critique of current finalists or winners. Vox Day had been doing this for some time with his model of “pink” versus “blue” science fiction, which was essentially about stereotypical feminine or masculine values<sup>[16]</sup> (which Day summed up as “women ruin everything”). Correia had no model of his own but in 2014 supporters of his campaign did identify a core trio of works that were 2014 Hugo finalists as exemplifying what was wrong with the Hugo Awards. We will look at those next chapter.

Brad Torgersen also made clear in the same essay that Sad Puppies would continue but that Larry Correia wouldn't be running it. Torgersen couldn't say who would "pick up the torch" next but acknowledged that it could be him.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] 'Christian book' here is a narrowly defined segment of the book market, rather than the wider sense of fictions with Christian themes. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CBA\\_\(Christian\\_trade\\_association\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CBA_(Christian_trade_association))
- [2] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140618090414/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2013/06/announcing-first-sword.html> and an article in 'Digital Book World' <https://web.archive.org/web/20130610014259/http://www.digitalbookworld.com/2013/new-ebook-sales-channels-selling-through-in-game-stores/>
- [3] Day's role in Alpenwolf and Castalia is unclear, although the former cited Day's previous experience as its main qualifications as a video game company [https://web.archive.org/web/20180823231640/http://alpenwolf.com/?page\\_id=49](https://web.archive.org/web/20180823231640/http://alpenwolf.com/?page_id=49) Whatever his nominal or financial role may be, it is reasonable to say that he presents himself as making policy decisions for these companies. The name "Castalia" is an example: if Day isn't in charge, why is the name taken from one of his favourite books? <https://web.archive.org/web/20150927043927/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/09/the-demonic-demon.html>
- [4] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/06/10/the-naive-idiocy-of-teaching-rapists-not-to-rape/>
- [5] saved here by somebody sympathetic to Correia's response <https://twitchy.com/2014/06/19/monster-hunter-author-larry-correia-targeted-for-departing-from-rape-culture-orthodoxy/>
- [6] specifically on Samuel R. Delany's views, Doris Sutherland wrote a longer discussion in 2019 that unpacks many of the issues <https://dorisvsutherland.com/2019/09/23/samuel-r-delany-and-nambla/>
- [7] <http://file770.com/the-invisible-fanwriter-hugo/>
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Worldcons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Worldcons)
- [9] his announcement is here <https://twitter.com/wossy/status/439815287236743168>
- [10] <https://web.archive.org/web/20140311065715/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2014/03/sobutthurt.html>
- [11] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/04/24/an-explanation-about-the-hugo-awards-controversy/>
- [12] <http://file770.com/how-the-wheel-of-time-gave-birth-to-spare-tires/>
- [13] <http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/2014/05/some-news-about-the-hugo-voter.html>
- [14] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2014HugoStatistics.pdf>
- [15] as discussed in chapter 29, the representation of women among Hugo finalists had not been a uniform rise since the 1960s and 2007 had been notably low on women finalists.
- [16] <https://web.archive.org/web/20131207014513/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2013/12/pink-sf-vs-blue-sf.html>

## 32: Justice, Dinosaurs and the Water that Falls on You from Nowhere

Larry Correia and Vox Day's Sad Puppies 2 campaigns gained them some nominations but they were trounced in the final voting. Correia's writing friend and ally, Brad Torgersen blamed the results on "affirmative action". Eight of the thirteen categories that had gone to a sole person had been won by women<sup>[1]</sup> but Torgersen had a very broad sense of what he meant by "affirmative action" (see chapter 31). The claim that deserving authors were not being sufficiently recognised by the Hugo Awards had a related claim that undeserving authors were being disproportionately recognised by the Hugo Awards because of "politics".

The 2014 Hugo Award winners would provide the supporters of the Sad Puppy campaigns with some examples.

In the Best Related Work category, Kameron Hurley's essay "*We Have Always Fought: Challenging the Women, Cattle and Slaves Narrative*"<sup>[2]</sup> had received some pushback in the comments<sup>[3]</sup> at Larry Correia's blog (and elsewhere) for its claim that women had historically always been involved in combat. However, as much as that essay was disliked by some Sad Puppy supporters, the thrust of their argument was that science fiction stories were being negatively impacted by left-wing politics.

Three stories in particular came under increased scrutiny by Sad Puppy supporters:

- *Ancillary Justice* by Ann Leckie (winner of the 2014 Hugo Award for Best Novel)
- *The Water that Falls on You from Nowhere* by John Chu (winner of the 2014 Hugo Award for Best Short Story)
- *If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love* by Rachel Swirsky (finalist for the 2014 Hugo Award for Best Short and winner of the Nebula Award for Best Short Story)

Of the three, the greatest ire was directed at Swirsky's story. The story was negatively critiqued by Dave Freer, Sarah A. Hoyt, Kate Paulk, Vox Day and John C. Wright as variously not being science fiction and employing negative stereotypes of southern Americans or working-class people. This latter claim was not supported by the actual text of the story. I discussed the critiques of the story in relation to the Sad Puppy campaigns in a previous project about dinosaur fiction in the Hugo Awards<sup>[4]</sup>, so I won't repeat that analysis in full here. However, it is worth noting that some of the ire targeted at the story may have been due to Swirsky being Vice President of the SFWA from 2012 to 2014, a period that took in most of the recent controversies at the SFWA including the expulsion of Vox Day as a member.

For our purposes the key objections from right-wing critics of *If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love* were:

- It wasn't science fiction — this is really the only objection in common with non-partisan critics of the story (I disagree but there is at least a reasonable critique there).
- It was gay dinosaur porn — this is simply false. There is no sexual element (other than a romantic relationship) and the protagonists are of opposite genders. There is a homophobic slur used against one character.
- It is an attack on working-class people — this is a huge stretch. A character is attacked in a bar and left in a coma as a consequence. The attackers use ethnic and homophobic slurs. No other details about the attackers are given other than that they were male and 'soaked in gin'.
- The story absurdly portrays working-class people drinking gin — this is a ridiculous claim. The only detail about the attackers is that they were 'soaked in gin'. That this detail might contradict the other absurd assumption that the attackers are working-class was then used to claim that the story was inconsistent.
- It is an attack on people from Southern US states — like the working-class claim but with even less supporting evidence in the actual text.
- The story is attempting to make it appear that hate crimes motivated by racism or homophobia are common.
- The story won a Hugo award — it was a Hugo Award finalist but didn't win, although it did win a Nebula Award. Confusion on this distinction was common.

The short, sparse, lyrical story that is *If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love* worked its way into the psyche of the set of people supporting the Sad Puppy campaign. In January 2015, Sarah A. Hoyt described her feelings about the story as bothering her "like an aching tooth to which the tongue keeps returning"<sup>[6]</sup>. The power of the story to discombobulate its right-wing critics was itself proof-positive of its inherent notability.

The actual winner of the Hugo Award for Best Short Story also had a theme of marriage but (unlike some of the weird claims about *If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love*) did actually feature a gay couple but also wasn't in any way pornographic, although it is clear (and why shouldn't it be?) that the couple has a physical relationship.

John Chu's *The Water That Falls on You from Nowhere* follows Matt/何德培, a Chinese-American man dealing with the question of how to come out to his family and introduce his partner Gus to them at Christmas. There is an added complication for Matt in that it has recently become much harder for everybody in the world to lie because of the titular water that falls on people from nowhere.

*"The water that falls on you from nowhere when you lie is perfectly ordinary, but perfectly pure. True fact. I tested it myself when the water started falling a few weeks ago. Everyone on Earth did. Everyone with any sense of lab safety anyway. Never assume any liquid is just water. When you say "I always document my experiments as I go along," enough water falls to test, but not so much that you have to mop up the lab. Which lie doesn't matter. The liquid tests as distilled water every time.*

*Uttering "this sentence is false" or some other paradox leaves you with such a sense of angst, so filled with the sense of an impending doom, that most people don't last five seconds before blurting something unequivocal. So, of course, holding out for as long as possible has become the latest craze among drunk frat boys and hard men who insist on root canals without an anaesthetic. Psychologists are finding the longer you wait, the more unequivocal you need to be to ever find solace."*

<https://www.tor.com/2013/02/20/the-water-that-falls-on-you-from-nowhere/>

The how and the why of this magical phenomenon is never explained, which gives the story a sense of a vignette about people coping with life within the events of some much bigger story. The backstory and eventual resolution (if there ever would be one) to the aquatic lie-detector test is left for the reader to imagine. It's a clever trick, giving a further contrast between the very personal aspects of the plot and the unresolved sense of some much bigger, world-spanning event.

The first part of the story introduces us to Matt and his partner Gus, and Matt's dilemma about how to introduce Gus properly to his family. The role of the fantastical water helps cement the fundamental truth of their relationship, both to exemplify how the water functions and also to show us the core "what if..." question at the heart of the story, which is often integral to the classic science fiction short. The "what if..." isn't the plot device of the water but rather, what if we could actually know without all the surrounding self-guessing and doubt, whether we truly are loved and whether we truly love. Rather than introduce creepy mind-reading powers, Chu uses the mysterious water as a kind of universal critical friend that provides a hard intervention when we go into a spiral of self-doubt.

Having set up the situation (gay man off to a family gathering to both come out and introduce his very traditional family to the man he is going to marry), Chu uses the reader's expectations against us. We expect an inter-generational and a cross-cultural conflict when Matt tells his parents but instead, the emotional dynamic is not that at all. Matt finds that the primary obstacle he has to face is his sister.

Sibling expectations, protectiveness of parents and the unresolvable list of grievances that siblings maintain about each other are the actual obstacles that Matt must face as he navigates his sister's disapproval. His sister's objection is a kind of homophobia by proxy — she expects her parents to be upset (because they are old-fashioned) and hence is angry at Matt for bringing Gus to the family gathering. It is a clever complication because at the heart of his sister's issues is her own internal model of their parents' beliefs and emotions — the kind of self-deceiving models that the lie-punishing water can cut through but only if people engage with each other directly.

*"She slaps me again. My cheek hadn't stopped stinging from last time.*

*"Do you love Mom and Dad? Dump that slab of beef. Find a Chinese woman to marry. Put your penis in her vagina and make Mom and Dad a grandson. Make them happy."*

*She turns to leave but not two steps stomp by before she whips around. Coming out to Mom and Dad, she hasn't ordered me not to do it yet.*

*"And you're not coming out to Mom and Dad." With that command, she leaves.*

*No water. She must mean it. She'll never leave me alone with Mom or Dad."*

**ibid**

I shan't reveal the end, the story is freely available and it is well worth reading. It is heart-warming, positive while still being honest about human failings.

So not surprising then that Vox Day hated it.

In the run-up to the final voting in the 2014 Hugo Awards, Vox Day posted mini-reviews of each of the short story finalists before concluding that the only correct way to vote was to just vote for 'no award'. On the topic of John Chu's story, Day said:

*"Homosexual angst story about a Chinese man afraid to come out about his white boyfriend to his family, written by a homosexual Chinese man. It would appear someone took the advice to "write what you know" a little too literally. The writing isn't bad and it would be the best story of the lot (which isn't saying anything at all) if it had anything to do with science fiction or fantasy. Which it doesn't."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140720053601/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/07/hugo-recommendations-best-short-story.html>

Day didn't attempt to explain how psychic lie-detecting rain fall is NOT fantastical.

While Day's reaction to the story was contemporaneous with its Hugo success, others cited it as an indictment of the Hugo Awards only in 2015 when the next Sad Puppy campaign was in full swing.

Brad Torgersen characterised the story as a kind of trolling, an attempt to stick it to people who want science fiction or fantasy in their science fiction and fantasy:

*"One might also conclude that "The Water That Falls On You From Nowhere" was a very up-front "stick it" story, in the same manner. Knowing TOR.COM, they hang their social justice cred on a shingle at the door. Because somebody has to rescue the genre from all the dirty nasty straight white capitalist cisnormative men! Frankly, that story belonged in an issue of The Sun. In fact, I don't know why the author didn't send it to The Sun. It would have been an instant pick-up for them, and would have been in the running for bigger mainstream literary prizes as a result."*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/03/29/nail-house/#comment-8030>

A story featuring not just a gay character but a gay character in a loving relationship dealing with an emotional issue directly related to them being gay? From Torgersen's perspective, it was a kind of provocation.

At least John C. Wright had never attempted to deny that he had strong objections to gay people.

*"I was not able to make it past this paragraph. Same semi-magical realism neither realistic nor magical, same half-grim half-playful tone of voice as the other two stories, the same lack of any science-fictional element, no speculation, and a gratuitous sexual abnormality tossed in apparently as an easy way to score social justice warrior checkbox-marked points, got it. Pretentious crap."*

*These stories and those like them are not only not science fiction, they are the direct opposite in theme, in character, in tone, and in idea as to what science fiction stories are.*

*These stories do not add wonder. They drain it.*

*All the short stories I read last year were crap."*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2015/04/in-which-a-morlock-chides-me/>

Chu's story could be called 'magical realism' but then the term is very broad. The titular water that falls from nowhere is not a metaphor or an intrusion of folklore or pre-modern ways of experiencing the world. Instead, Chu introduces the water as a very real physical phenomenon that people are learning to live with. Where many (small c) conservative readers struggled was that fantastical element introduces the story but is not resolved within the story. By the end we know little more about the water than we did at the beginning, the cause of the water is not discovered, a solution to lie-induced rain is not found nor do people find a new way of living with it. Instead, the arc of the story is Matt's relationships (with Gus, his sister, and his parents).

Chu presents us with a story in which characters live their lives within (and interacting with) a fantastical element. This, we are told, is not science fiction or fantasy and is in some way a daring challenge to the

genre even though that description could just as well apply to say, Ray Bradbury's *Rocketman* from the 1950s. Presenting ordinary people engaging with their lives amid the fantastical is just one of the many modes of the genre and indeed, a venerable mode for the genre.

The criticism of both *If You Were a Dinosaur...* and *The Water That...* revealed an underlying desire by some notable people associated with the Sad Puppy campaign for strict boundaries and rules for genre work. This need for strict genre conventions would manifest at the *Mad Genius Club* website (see chapter 24) quite separate from politics, as stern advice for aspiring writers. The theory being that readers have deep genre expectations and that violating those expectations will upset readers.

In 2014, *Mad Genius Club* blogger Kate Paulk would apply that style of reasoning to the eventual winner of both the Nebula and Hugo Awards for Best Novel, *Ancillary Justice* by Ann Leckie.

*"I started reading the novel winner. Went "wait, what?" This kind of cutesy games with pronouns was being done back in the sixties and they're still calling it ground-breaking? No, it's not. It's confusing to readers who want to be able to tell who is whom (and in extreme cases, what). In addition to that, it's clunky, sends confusing as hell signals (snow plus tavern then suddenly science fictiony trappings then we're back to all the fantasy 'medieval tavern' signals. Screw that)."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2014/05/22/nebulous-honors/>

Short stories may be at the heart of the Hugo Awards but the big headlines are with the novel and *Ancillary Justice* was a very talked-about book in 2013 and 2014. Part of that was the way Breq, the protagonist of the novel, dealt with grammatical gender. This aspect of the novel caught the attention of the famous linguistics blog *Language Log*:

*"This novel's take on sex and gender is mostly traditional. There's the familiar sexual near-binarity (female XX versus male XY), and the well-attested distinction between languages with various degrees of morpho-syntactic gender marking versus languages that don't mark gender at all. And there's the familiar biological and cultural variation in the nature and extent of gender signalling in appearance and behavior, amplified by the assumption of thousands of years of history on multiple distant planets.*

*What's different — and confusing at first — is that the unmarked gender in the narrator's native language is translated into English with she/her/hers, yielding phrases like "She was probably male"."*

<https://languageblog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=11589>

*Ancillary Justice* is a novel that follows two tracks, a forward-facing plot that follows Breq on their course for revenge and a retrospective track that explains the series of events that set Breq on that course.

We learn that Breq is not who they appear to be. Once they had been the central AI computer of a military spaceship belonging to the Radch empire. The empire is a ruthless, hegemonic culture that imposes its will on multiple planets and is ruled by a self-cloning near-immortal emperor. An added brutal twist of the empire is that it draws military levies from conquered nations in the form of people that become dead proxies controlled by ship AI's.

The story untangles both the brutality and the richness of Radch culture in a way that borrows from classic space opera but which also has its own introspective approach to plot. However, fundamentally this is a story with space wars, evil empires, AIs and a central character on a quest for righteous revenge. Intrinsicly, there should have been little for the more conservative voices in science fiction to object to.

Indeed, *Elitist Book Reviews*, the book blog review site that Larry Correia had nominated multiple times for a Hugo Award, gave *Ancillary Justice* a largely positive review.

*"The prose is clean with the feel of Le Guin or other writers of that era, without being overbearing. The writing doesn't draw attention to itself, but I still found myself stepping back to study what Leckie was doing because it seemed so effortless yet evocative."*

<https://elitistbookreviews.com/2014/02/28/ancillary-justice/>

However, gender and pronouns were genuinely an issue that people talked about with the book and that was seen as 'politics' by people like John C. Wright:

*"The book in question in this case, ANCILLARY JUSTICE, has been described the same way by both advocates and detractors. It is bit of insane feminist trash with a lame space opera plot tacked awkwardly to it. Space Opera is a particularly attractive genre to me, and I have read everything from*



*GALACTIC PATROL* by E.E. Doc Smith to *PLAYER OF GAMES* by Iain M. Banks, and, unfortunately, have tried my hand at it myself, which means my toleration for untalented attempts or high jackings in my favorite genre is limited.”

John C. Wright in a 2014 comment at <http://www.scifiwright.com/2014/11/what-went-wrong-with-sff/>

Later in 2014, Wright would call the book “a story about pronouns and modern feminist piety, utterly unimaginative and bland”<sup>[8]</sup>. Wright had certainly formed strong views about the novel, so it is a little surprising that Wright would mention in 2015 that he had not ever read the book<sup>[9]</sup>. That people had mentioned feminism and pronouns in reviews was sufficient for Wright to evaluate the book as preachy feminism. It is true that the character Breq uses pronouns unconventionally but the way they are used in the book is far from a ‘politically correct’ usage. Instead, the character repeatedly appears to misgender people. While it is true that this raises questions about how language and gender interact (as discussed in the *Language Log* article) the story does not draw any overt conclusions.

No work is perfect nor universally acclaimed. There was certainly scope for considering how much fantastical or speculative elements should be in a story for it to count as science fiction or fantasy. Some of those lines might well exclude *If You Were a Dinosaur...* or *The Water That Falls...* but neither story was unprecedented in their low-key use of fantastical elements. *Ancillary Justice* also is not beyond criticism, although it was unimpeachable science fiction in terms of common conventions. The notable thing about many of the objections to these works from the coalition of right-wing voices that had gathered in support of Sad Puppies 2 was their thinness and that they were often objectively false.

However, a narrative had been established and a coalition had formed. All the movement needed now was a name and that was at hand.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] i.e., not counting dramatic presentation categories or semiprozine. Counting the Astounding/Campbell also, then the figure would be 9 out of 14 <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/2014-hugo-awards/>
- [2] <https://aidanmoher.com/blog/featured-article/2013/05/we-have-always-fought-challenging-the-women-cattle-and-slaves-narrative-by-kameron-hurley/>
- [3] mainly by the anti-feminist commenter known as Fail Burton/James May, e.g., “Essentially 3 Hugos were won for a single blog post by Kameron Hurley asserting white males have erased women warriors from history. In order to illustrate her point, she used paintings rather than images from the 165-year history of photography. That is the Orwellian nuttery of the PC in a nutshell: awards for a defamatory sexist post based on myths.” <https://monsterhunternation.com/2014/08/19/nor-com-gencon-isnt-racist-a-fisking/#comment-45501>
- [4] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2019/08/20/hugosauriad-4-5-extinction-event-1-queen-of-the-tyrant-lizard-by-john-c-wright/>
- [5] <https://www.sfgwa.org/about/current-officers/prior-sfgwa-board-officers/>
- [6] <https://accordingtohoht.com/2015/01/31/if-you-were-a-grown-up-my-love/>
- [7] that specific phrase “stick it to people who want science fiction or fantasy in their science fiction and fantasy” was used not by Torgersen by a Sad Puppy supporter at his blog, referring to “*If You Were a Dinosaur*”... <https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/03/29/nail-house/#comment-8027>
- [8] <http://www.scifiwright.com/2014/11/what-went-wrong-with-sff/> he would say similar things about Mary Robinette Kowal’s novelette *Lady Astronaut of Mars* but mistakenly claimed it won Best Short Story
- [9] A reviewer had favourably compared Wright’s *Golden Age* books to *Ancillary Justice*. Wright commented “I have not had the pleasure of reading ANCILLARY JUSTICE” <http://www.scifiwright.com/2015/06/reviewer-praise-for-the-golden-age/>

# 33: Dramatis Personae — Brad, John and the Evil League of Evil

[content warning for language and prejudice on race, gender and sexuality]

2014 had been a tumultuous year for science fiction: ructions at the SFWA had carried over from 2013, while in the adjacent world of video games GamerGate was in full swing, and meanwhile, Larry Correia's Sad Puppies 2 campaigns had caused controversy at the Hugo Awards.

In his regular pop-culture column at the Guardian newspaper, critic Damien Walter summed up the growing culture war in science fiction:

*"In recent months the community of science fiction readers and writers has been embroiled in an escalating war of words over the genre's political soul, catalysed by the nominations for this year's Hugo awards. Allegations of bloc-voting arose as a slate of little-known writers appeared among the nominees, after a concerted campaign by a small group of writers to get the books on the ballot."*

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/may/30/science-fiction-real-life-war-worlds>

Walter continued:

*"A startling conspiracy theory was at the heart of the campaign. It alleged that a powerful clique of liberal writers and editors had taken control of science fiction, and worse, were politicising a genre that should exist purely for entertainment. They were filling the genre with heavy-handed "message fiction" and excluding conservatively minded writers. So conservatively-minded fans should vote for those writers to redress the imbalance."*

ibid

In response, author John C. Wright (who had recently signed up with Vox Day's new publishing venture, Castalia House) responded with one of his signature long posts, mocking Walter's claims:

*"But that is not enough! I also hereby decree, declare, announce and enact the creation of the Evil League of Evil! A subdivision of the Technocracy! Also, I am creating a Vast Right-wing Conspiracy, and joining Opus Dei, an order of Anti-science Albino Assassins, who takes orders directly from the cyberpope in the Vatican! I hereby will vote Vox Day our Supreme Dark Lord, declare Larry Correia to be our International Lord of Hate, decree Sarah A. Hoyt to be our Beautiful but Evil Space Princess whom we all love and obey, and — let me see, all the good positions are taken — perhaps I can be the Evil Brain in a Jar just like my ancestor, Simon Wright. Perhaps Sarah A. Hoyt will carry me around in a handbag, as she walks the grounds of her secret base hidden in a cold volcano cone, commanding innocent and cringing minions to be flogged with electric whips, or sent screaming to the Agony Vat."*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2014/06/the-evil-league-of-evil-is-given-pious-advice/>

The term "Evil League of Evil" was borrowed from the 2008 Joss Whedon-produced web series *Dr Horrible Sing-Along Blog*<sup>[1]</sup> and clearly meant to be humorous. Nevertheless, the phrase was picked up by others. Vox Day shifted "league" to "legion" and identified other members<sup>[2]</sup> and even had a cartoon of the six key members he identified<sup>[3]</sup>. The humorous nicknames varied but the list was approximately these names:

- Vox Day aka The Supreme Dark Lord
- Larry Correia aka The International Lord of Hate or The Mountain that Writes
- John C. Wright aka The Evil Brain in a Jar, Living Brain, the King in Yellow, Speaker to Morlocks
- Sarah A. Hoyt aka the Beautiful but Evil Space Princess
- Brad Torgersen aka The Token Liberal or The Cuddly Care Bear with a Flamethrower
- Tom Kratman aka The Grand Strategikon

Of the six, Baen and Castalia House author Tom Kratman would have the least influence on later events, although he was often vocal in support of the campaigns that followed<sup>[4]</sup>. In addition to these six, *Mad Genius Club* blogger Kate Paulk (aka Kate the Impaler) was sometimes included<sup>[5]</sup>.

Each of these names has appeared in earlier chapters but Vox Day, Larry Correia and Sarah A. Hoyt have had specific chapters about each of them<sup>[6]</sup>. Two key figures who have not had their own chapters are Brad Torgersen and John C. Wright.

### ***John C. Wright the Living Brain***

According to his own 'About' page, John C. Wright studied the 'Great Books' program at St. John's College in Annapolis<sup>[7]</sup>. From there he studied law but was unsuccessful and became bankrupt. After that, he worked as a journalist and later as a technical writer. He is married to fellow author L. Jagi Lamplighter (or, as he prefers to say, 'authoress').

Wright was regarded as a hot property in the early 2000s, with a degree of critical acclaim for his debut novel *The Golden Age* in 2002<sup>[8]</sup>. His 2005 novel *Orphans of Chaos* published by Tor Books was a Nebula Award finalist in 2006.

He had always been politically conservative, leaning towards libertarian, but for much of his life he was an atheist. However, fatherhood and the political turmoil around 9-11 caused Wright to increasingly question whether he had judged Christianity too harshly. Midway through this first decade of a new century, Wright decided to put his doubts to the test through prayer:

*"But it was impossible, logically impossible, that I should ever believe in such nonsense as to believe in the supernatural. It would be a miracle to get me to believe in miracles. So I prayed. "Dear God, I know (because I can prove it with the certainty that a geometer can prove opposite angles are equal) that you do not exist. Nonetheless, as a scholar, I am forced to entertain the hypothetical possibility that I am mistaken. So just in case I am mistaken, please reveal yourself to me in some fashion that will prove your case. If you do not answer, I can safely assume that either you do not care whether I believe in you, or that you have no power to produce evidence to persuade me. The former argues you not beneficent, the latter not omnipotent: in either case unworthy of worship. If you do not exist, this prayer is merely words in the air, and I lose nothing but a bit of my dignity. Thanking you in advance for your kind cooperation in this matter, John Wright."*

*I had a heart attack two days later. God obviously has a sense of humor as well as a sense of timing."*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2007/09/total-conversion-2/><sup>[9]</sup>

Luckily for him, Wright's wife belongs to a Christian denomination that practices faith-healing:

*"Well, God answers prayers, even blasphemous ones, sometimes with a dreadful sense of humor. Three days later, I was stricken out of the clear blue with a heart attack. As I lay on the floor writhing and dying, my wife, a good Christian woman, called her Church, and a man who makes his living praying for the sick and healing them offered to heal me, which he did on the spot and in that same moment. The pain went from being all-consuming to nothing in the time it would take you to snap your fingers. Astonished and clutching my chest at the sudden and complete surcease of pain, and curious as to what had afflicted me, I went to the hospital emergency room. I was not worried, but I wanted an examination to tell me what had happened. The doctors ordered major heart surgery, for it seemed that I had five blocked arteries in my heart. So I was in one hospital and then another for several days."*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2012/06/interview-with-infocatolica/><sup>[10]</sup>

While Wright prepared for and then recovered from surgery for blocked heart valves, he had other spiritual experiences in the hospital. By 2007 Wright had converted to Catholicism and combined his previous conservatism with Catholic theology, embracing a kind of traditional Catholicism.

Wright would adopt intentionally archaic language as a reaction against what he perceived as encroaching political correctness. This was particularly true for language around race, gender and sexuality, with Wright employing terms such as 'octoroon'<sup>[11]</sup>, 'authoress', and 'negro'<sup>[12]</sup> as well as commonly referring to Muslims as 'Mohammedans'.

Wright's political arguments would often revolve around his belief that gay people engaged in 'perverse and unnatural' behaviour, when he wasn't demonising Muslims and Islam or complaining about the decline of Western civilisation. Extending his ideas to fiction, Wright argued for men to show traditional male virtues and women to exemplify femininity in a broad sense:

*“Feminine in general means being more delicate in speech, either when delivering a coy insult or when buoying up drooping spirits. Femininity requires not the sudden and angry bravery of war and combat, but the slow and loving and patient bravery of rearing children and dealing with childish menfolk: female fortitude is a tenacity that does not yield even after repeated disappointments and defeats. And, believe you me, dear reader, a woman in love has a very clear-eyed view of the faults and flaws of her man, and if her love is true, she does not yield to despair or give up on him. The female spirit is wise rather than cunning, deep in understanding rather than adroit in deductive logic, gentle and supportive rather than boastful and self-aggrandizing. The strong feminine character is solid in faith in all things.”*

<https://www.scifiwright.com/2013/11/saving-science-fiction-from-strong-female-characters-part-1/>

Which for Wright did not exclude women characters from action roles in books or films but that they should be suitably feminine in such roles.

In late 2014, Wright’s retrogressive views on femininity, sexuality and popular culture would collide when the animated series *The Legend of Korra* ended with the main character (a woman) holding hands with another woman. Wright was very angry as a consequence, addressing the producers of the show in a letter on his blog.

*“Mr DiMartino and Mr Konietzko: You are disgusting, limp, soulless sacks of filth. You have earned the contempt and hatred of all decent human beings forever, and we will do all we can to smash the filthy phallic idol of sodomy you bow and serve and worship. Contempt, because you struck from behind, cravenly; and hatred, because you serve a cloud of morally-retarded mental smog called Political Correctness, which is another word for hating everything good and bright and decent and sane in life.*

*I have no hatred in my heart for any man’s politics, policies, or faith, any more than I have hatred for termites; but once they start undermining my house where I live, it is time to exterminate them.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20141229160245/http://www.scifiwright.com/2014/12/the-perversion-of-a-legend/>

Unsurprisingly, the backlash among the wider science fiction community was significant, to the extent that Wright deleted the content of that post. Later, sometime in 2015, the content of the post was replaced with a defence of his beliefs and work in connection with the events around the 2015 Hugo Awards. That included this clarification of his ‘tolerance’ for homosexuality:

*“I also believe homosexuals who get baptized and live their lives in imitation of Christ receive His abundant grace and dwell after this life with Him in paradise, there to be arrayed in more splendor than any crowned king, transfigured in shining glory unimaginable to human eyes, and made beautiful and fair with the radiance of divine love, exalting in infinite joy forever.*

*I think lust is a sin and that pride is a worse sin. Any man who demeans a homosexual for being afflicted with same-sex sexual attraction is guilty of pride. Look to your own sins, Pharisee. It is akin to mocking a drunk afflicted with alcoholism.”*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2014/12/the-perversion-of-a-legend/> revised version

By this point in his career, it had been a long time since any new work by Wright had received much critical acclaim. He was still being published by Tor Books but he was now focussing his efforts on new fiction and non-fiction for Vox Day’s Castalia House.

### ***Brad Torgersen the Cuddly Care Bear***

Brad R. Torgersen was born in the mid-1970s and his first foray into science fiction writing was as an unpaid scriptwriter for a community radio drama<sup>[11]</sup>. The events of 9-11 persuaded Torgersen to join the US Army Reserves, eventually reaching the rank of Chief Warrant Officer in an HR role<sup>[12]</sup>.

His first and longest presence in online fandom was through a 1980s tabletop *Star Trek*-themed combat game *Star Trek: Starship Tactical Combat Simulator*<sup>[13]</sup>. As a fan of the game, Torgersen set up a website as a resource after the game went out of print. His STSTCS website was a labour of love in which he set out to preserve and continue a particular vision of *Star Trek*.

*“By the time the television series Star Trek: The Next Generation debuted—riding on the success of the most popular Star Trek feature film to date, Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home—communication had faltered between the game creators at FASA and the powers-that-be of Star Trek. Following a policy that angers me to this day, the television and film producers of the Star Trek franchise pretty much*

ignored or overlooked *the STSTCS*, just as they have ignored or overlooked most of the hundreds of *Star Trek* novels that have been written over the last fifty years.”

<http://www.ststcsolda.space/>

Torgersen also felt that this distancing between a major media franchise and a role-playing game was for a specific reason:

*“Moreover, there is evidence to support the claim that Gene Roddenberry himself was behind the death of FASA’s Star Trek license. Always the proclaimed pacifist, and never comfortable with the military aspect that his self-created “star fleet” implies, Gene apparently became unhappy with the “militarized” nature of the FASA role playing universe. (Side note: how Gene expected to film a whole SF television series set on an armed star vessel—populated by folks with titles like “Captain” and “Lieutenant”, doing galactic battle in the name of the Federation—and not have it seem “militaristic”, is truly beyond me.)”*

ibid

Torgersen’s shift from dedicated fan to up-and-coming author came via the Writers of the Future contest—the competition to celebrate new writers established by L. Ron Hubbard (see chapter 4) and loosely (or not) connected to the Church of Scientology<sup>[14]</sup>. Torgersen’s short story was published in the annual *L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future* (in Volume 26)<sup>[15]</sup> which helped him sell a story to *Analog Science Fiction and Fact* magazine. His career was helped by being mentored by veteran author and editor Mike Resnick who he had first met at the Writers of the Future award ceremony<sup>[16]</sup>.

From there, Torgersen earned a finalist spot in the Campbell/Astounding Award for Best New Writer, a Nebula finalist spot for Best Novelette (2012)<sup>[17]</sup> and a 2014 Association for Mormon Letters Award for Best Short Fiction<sup>[18]</sup>. Torgersen had made significant steps onto a very mainstream establishment path into science fiction, describing it as:

*“I’ve walked across the “name bridge” that’s formed when I mention to other professionals—in passing—that Mike knows and has worked with me.”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2013/06/30/writer-dad-mike-resnick/>

Torgersen had also been an active presence in the comment section at John Scalzi’s *Whatever* blog at this time (initially under a pseudonym and then under his own name) commenting on many of the issues of the day (see earlier chapters). He also befriended fellow Utah-based author Larry Correia.

However, events within the SFWA would prove troublesome for Brad Torgersen (see chapters 22-25). Having invested social capital with older, more established science fiction writers connected with the SFWA, the internal conflicts that dogged the organisation particularly from 2013 to 2014 left Torgersen associated with a subset of SFWA members with rapidly dwindling influence.

At the blog of Baen author Michael Z. Williamson, Torgersen described his frustration with the SFWA in 2013:

*“Well, truth is, I joined in 2011. But after three years, I am going to quietly let my SFWA membership lapse. If I had to hang quotes around a reason why, my quotes would hang around this:*

*During the three years I’ve been a member of SFWA, I’ve seen the organization erupt in several significant ‘turf war’ conflicts that have each seemed (to my sensibilities) to have everything to do with ideology, and almost nothing to do with helping me as a novelist and a short fiction writer protect or advance my career. I thought SFWA would be my ‘union’ capable of enhancing or protecting my interests. It’s not really been so. At least in my very limited experience. Especially not when I stumbled across an e-mail exchange between several SFWA members who were essentially discussing ways to turf my chances on the Nebula, Hugo, and Campbell ballots in 2012.*

*Why should I pay money to remain a member of an organization that seems (too often?) to be infested with personalities who explicitly want to hurt my career? Or at least want to blunt my opportunities?”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130818164023/http://www.michaelzwilliamson.com/blog/item/sfwa-boldly-snatching-obscurity-from-the-jaws-of-relevance>

Torgersen had perceived himself as a liberal, although his ‘liberal’ views were more those of somebody who might have been deemed ‘liberal’ in the decade before he was born. The politics of the 2010s were not

running in accord with his perspective and the career path he had worked so hard to establish no longer looked so rosy.

### ***The ELoE and their Publishers***

Each of the six authors normally included as the “Evil League of Evil” had been published by more than one publisher, although the bulk of Larry Correia’s work was with Baen Books. However, by the end of 2014, the six were associated with two key publishers in terms of an aesthetic and direction for the genre. Correia, Hoyt, and Torgersen were being published by Baen, of which Torgersen was the newest addition to the Baen stable. Vox Day and Wright were now being published by Castalia House. Tom Kratman was a long-standing Baen author but was now also writing for Castalia House.

Of the two publishers, Castalia was open in its role as part of a culture war. In October 2014, the Castalia House blog posted an article under the tag of ‘policy’, stating:

*“As a publishing house founded to counteract the baleful influence of the cultural Marxists who successfully invaded and took over the science fiction and fantasy publishing industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Castalia House has followed the developments of #GamerGate with more than a little interest. It is clear to us, as it may not be clear to many of the participants on either side, that the intrepid gamers of #GamerGate are now engaged in the same struggle that the science fiction writers of America lost before they’d even realized it was upon them.”*

<http://www.castaliahouse.com/on-gamergate/>

As well as publishing science fiction, Castalia House was also heavily promoting the works of American paleo-conservative theorist William S. Lind. Lind was a major propagator of the quasi-anti-Semitic conspiracy theory about the threat of ‘cultural Marxism’. Lind’s perspective was a clear antecedent to Vox Day’s claims about science fiction’s institutions and the so-called ‘social justice warriors’, as shown in this 2003 piece by the Southern Poverty Law Centre:

*“”Political correctness looms over American society like a colossus,” William Lind, a principal of far-right political strategist Paul Weyrich’s Free Congress Foundation and a key popularizer of the idea of cultural Marxism, warned in a 1998 speech. “It has taken over both political parties and is enforced by many laws and government regulations. It almost totally controls the most powerful element in our culture, the entertainment industry. It dominates both public and higher education. ... It has even captured the clergy in many Christian churches.”*

<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/cultural-marxism-catching>

Castalia House was also publishing Lind’s speculative fiction novel *Victoria: A Novel of 4th Generation War* a kind of watered-down *Turner Diaries* about a coming civil war in the USA where veterans fight off the forces of political correctness<sup>[19]</sup>. Both Castalia and Vox Day were also enamoured with Lind’s conception of “fourth-generation warfare” or 4GW. Lind had described 4GW in terms of three components:

- A non-national or transnational base, such as an ideology or religion.
- A direct attack on the enemy’s culture.
- Highly sophisticated psychological warfare, especially through *manipulation* of the media, particularly television news.

Vox Day regarded culture phenomenon such as GamerGate, cultural Marxism and 4GW as all interconnected.

*“In other words, it is not a tool used to establish Marxism, but rather a perversion of Marxism aimed at the culture rather than the political economy. Anyone attempting to understand the pinkshirts of #GamerHate must first understand that cultural Marxism is real and that it is the underlying basis for the SJWs’ current attack on the game industry. And it is worth pointing out that any #GamerGaters attempting to defeat them would do very well to understand that they are presently engaging in a 4GW struggle, and that in that struggle, they are the insurgents.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20141029175455/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2014/10/what-cultural-marxism-is-and-isnt.html>

To that end Castalia House could act as a proxy for what Day overtly regarded as a species of warfare.

Baen, on the other hand, was not at war nor expressly committed to an ideological framework. It is true that Baen had dabbled with publishing political non-fiction and that those works had been right-wing but as Baen

apologists would frequently point out, their stable of authors were politically diverse and one of their most prolific authors, Eric Flint, was an avowed socialist.

Baen though had issues with the Hugo Awards, as discussed in chapters 9 and 10. Baen's chief publisher, Toni Weiskopf, also had concerns about the ideological conflicts within fandom and publishing. Sarah A. Hoyt republished a speech by Weiskopf where she outlined her concerns:

*“So the core of science fiction, its method, is still a valid way of creating the cultural artifacts we want. But is it necessary to engage those of differing political persuasions to get this method? I feel the answer is probably yes. You don't get a conversation with only one opinion, you get a speech, lecture or soliloquy. All of which can be interesting, but not useful in the context of creating science fiction. But a conversation requires two way communication. If the person on the other side is not willing to a) listen and b) contribute to the greater whole, there is no point to the exercise.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2014/03/10/the-problem-of-engagement-a-guest-post-by-toni-weiskopf/>

Weiskopf tied this engagement directly to awards:

*“But are the popular awards worth fighting for? I'm not sure our side has ever really tried, though there are indications that previous attempts to rally readers of non-in-group books were thwarted in ways that were against the rules of the game. And yet, to quote Heinlein, “Certainly the game is rigged. Don't let that stop you. If you don't bet, you can't win.”*

*I think the problem is that folks just really feel they have no possible conversation with the other side any more, that the battle for this part of the culture isn't worth fighting. And I think again SF is mirroring the greater American culture. Our country is different because it, like science fiction fandom, was built around an idea—not geographic or linguistic accident, but an idea—we hold these truths to be self evident. And it is becoming more and more obvious that the two sides of American culture no longer share a frame of reference, no points of contact, no agreement on the meaning of the core ideas.”*

*ibid*

The six ELoE shared a common goal of fighting back against the perceived advance of the left within science fiction and also a shared understanding that the 'left' in this case was not so much a movement about public healthcare or higher taxes but one engaged in social issues particularly around gender, sexuality and ethnicity. They were not though ideologically or strategically following a single set of beliefs or necessarily operating in close coordination.

The name was a joke but also was offered with a serious challenge to fandom in general: *pick a side*.

### ***The Debarkle at the end of 2014***

2014 had seen culture wars on multiple fronts. Within science fiction, loosely-related events had played out over the past two years, including two Sad Puppy campaigns in the Hugo Awards and a series of conflicts within the SFWA. The details of those conflicts had varied but many figures crossed between them: John Scalzi, N.K. Jemisin, the Nielsen Haydens on one hand or Vox Day, Larry Correia, Sarah A. Hoyt on the other (as well as many others, of course).

In broader national politics, the Democratic Party suffered in the 2014 mid-term elections. Republicans regained the Senate and increased their majority in the House of Representatives. Among the many issues at play (the economy, public healthcare), an unusual one was the Obama administration's response to an outbreak of Ebola in several West African countries. Later research found that fears of the virus helped boost Republican votes<sup>[20]</sup>. The outbreak resulted in over 11 thousand deaths including two Americans.

However, the biggest marker of the election was apathy. Less than 37% of eligible voters took part, fuelled in part due to disappointment and in part due to new voting restrictions<sup>[21]</sup>.

There were multiple storms on the horizon...

## **FOOTNOTES**

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dr.\\_Horrible%27s\\_Sing-Along\\_Blog](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dr._Horrible%27s_Sing-Along_Blog)

- [2] in numerous posts <https://web.archive.org/web/20150120000023/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/01/burning-down-house.html>
- [3] a link to the image [http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-4ysz-WcysQc/VdtXD6bneVI/AAAAAAAAABg/JatB\\_fjIh1g/s640/ch05\\_960.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-4ysz-WcysQc/VdtXD6bneVI/AAAAAAAAABg/JatB_fjIh1g/s640/ch05_960.jpg)
- [4] Kratman’s combative reactions to critical comments led to people using the nickname “Tank Marmot” so as to avoid him name-searching.
- [5] e.g., <https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/04/30/a-mad-genius-goes-to-ravencon/> and also this list at the pro-Sad Puppy subreddit TorInAction [https://www.reddit.com/r/TorInAction/comments/3in33v/the\\_evil\\_legion\\_of\\_evil\\_membership\\_list/](https://www.reddit.com/r/TorInAction/comments/3in33v/the_evil_legion_of_evil_membership_list/)
- [6] For reference
  - Second Chapter 5: Dramatis Personae – Vox Day <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/02/18/debarkle-second-chapter-5-dramatis-personae-vox-day/>
  - Dramatis Personae – Larry Correia <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/03/06/debarkle-chapter-11-dramatis-personae-larry-correia/>
  - Dramatis Personae — Sarah A. Hoyt and The *Mad Genius Club* <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/04/16/debarkle-chapter-24-dramatis-personae-sarah-hoyt-the-mad-genius-club/>
- [7] <https://www.scifiwright.com/about/> a longer bio is here <https://www.scifiwright.com/2006/05/my-nebula-biography/> and for more on the course of study see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St.\\_John%27s\\_College\(Annapolis/Santa\\_Fe\)#Great\\_Books\\_program](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._John%27s_College(Annapolis/Santa_Fe)#Great_Books_program)
- [8] [http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/wright\\_john\\_c](http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/wright_john_c)
- [9] Wright’s account is slightly different in this interview <http://www.scifiwright.com/2012/06/interview-with-infocatolica/> but in ways that give credence to the story rather than throw doubt on it (i.e., the exact wording of the prayer is different but the meaning is the same)
- [10] again details differ between accounts, I’ve picked the other version
- [11] <https://www.scifiwright.com/2010/01/jim-crow-and-cover-art/> he’s actually trying to be supportive in that one
- [12] <https://www.scifiwright.com/2010/01/the-crazy-years-and-their-empty-moral-vocabulary/>
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brad\\_R.\\_Torgersen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brad_R._Torgersen)
- [12] [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Brad\\_R.\\_Torgersen&oldid=1015850694#Military\\_service](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Brad_R._Torgersen&oldid=1015850694#Military_service)
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star\\_Trek:\\_Starship\\_Tactical\\_Combat\\_Simulator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek:_Starship_Tactical_Combat_Simulator)
- [14] it is a matter of discussion how loose the connection is [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writers\\_of\\_the\\_Future#Connections\\_to\\_Scientology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writers_of_the_Future#Connections_to_Scientology)
- [15] <https://www.writersofthefuture.com/the-anthology/anthology-volume-26-2010-content/>
- [16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nebula\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Novelette](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nebula_Award_for_Best_Novelette)
- [17] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astounding\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_New\\_Writer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astounding_Award_for_Best_New_Writer) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nebula\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Novelette](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nebula_Award_for_Best_Novelette)
- [18] <http://associationmormonletters.org/blog/2015/03/aml-awards-for-2014/>
- [19] unfortunately, the only reasonable summary is TV Tropes <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Literature/Victoria>
- [20] <https://psmag.com/news/ebola-fears-helped-gop-in-2014-election>
- [21] <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/state-voting-2014>



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# Volume 2

## 34: Part 3 Twenty Fifteen

The story so far...<sup>[1]</sup>

In 2005, right-wing columnist Vox Day and aspiring fantasy author Theodore Beale were revealed to be the same person and also a member of the jury for the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America's premier science fiction awards known as the Nebula. The after-effects of the lengthy blog discussion on his extreme views on women led to a long-running feud between Vox Day on the one hand and the notable editors at Tor Books Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden on the other. Day's feud would also come to encompass best-selling science fiction author and later SFWA President John Scalzi.

In 2013 the SFWA was embroiled in internal conflicts around the issues of sexism and author behaviour. Those conflicts covered several issues but would lead to the eventual expulsion of Vox Day from the SFWA after he used an SFWA Twitter account to promote an essay where he called Black American fantasy author N.K. Jemisin a "half-savage". Many right-leaning authors regarded Day's expulsion and the outcomes of other controversies as attacks by left-wing forces.

In 2011, gun-rights advocate and aspiring fantasy author Larry Correia sought to promote himself and his debut novel as contenders for Worldcon's famous Hugo Awards, with Correia gaining a finalist spot for the special Campbell/Astounding Award for Best New Writer. Correia followed this up with an increasingly sophisticated set of campaigns intended to promote himself and his publisher Baen Books for Hugo Awards. Supporters of Baen Books had long felt unfairly shunned by Hugo Award voters and suspected that Baen's populist and often right-leaning output was being unreasonably looked down on by influential people within fandom.

In 2014, Correia's Hugo campaign was entitled Sad Puppies 2 and on Correia's slate was a story by Vox Day in a bid to make so many heads explode at the SFWA that "astronauts could see the crater from space." Hugo Voters would place Day's story sixth out of five, with the "no award" option beating Day.

In the aftermath, of the failed Sad Puppies 2 campaign and the SFWA controversies, a loose coalition of right-leaning science fiction writers had formed that went by the joking name "The Evil League of Evil". There was no official membership but the most common list of names was:

- Vox Day
- Larry Correia
- John C. Wright
- Sarah A. Hoyt
- Brad Torgersen
- Tom Kratman

Each of the authors had work published by several publishers but they were also each closely associated with the publishing houses Baen Books or Vox Day's own Castalia House.<sup>[2]</sup>

Meanwhile, also in 2014, a major hate campaign began in the field of video games, which became known as "GamerGate".

### *The Political Context at the Start of 2015*

We will touch on some of the political events of 2015 as we move through the year. However, the events of 2014 had already shaped events towards a politically fraught difficult one.

2014 had seen an Ebola outbreak in West Africa<sup>[3]</sup> and a revolution in Ukraine which led to increasing tensions between the European Union, USA and Russia<sup>[4]</sup> and the eventual annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia<sup>[5]</sup>, and parts of Ukraine with majority ethnically Russian populations declaring breakaway states<sup>[6]</sup>. The conflict would have a worldwide impact when a Malaysia Airways passenger plane flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was shot down over Ukraine, killing everybody on board<sup>[7]</sup>. As a consequence, 2015 began with tensions and rhetoric between Western nations and Russia at a high point not seen since the end of the Cold War.

Regional conflicts in the Middle East in the apparent unending chain of events that began with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, intensified during 2014 and would lead to further violence in 2015. The paramilitary group variously named ISIS, ISIL or Daesh<sup>[8]</sup> had become a major presence in Northern Iraq and in parts of Syria. The conflict with ISIS further embroiled the USA, Russia and other nations in conflicts within Iraq and Syria and would also inspire terrorist attacks around the world.

Within the USA, 2014 saw the shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown by police which led to massive protests in Ferguson, a suburb of St Louis, Missouri<sup>[9]</sup>. These protests and protest against the death of Eric Garner, who died while held in a chokehold by police in New York<sup>[10]</sup> led to greater prominence to a loose

coalition of campaigns collectively known by the slogan Black Lives Matter<sup>[11]</sup>. The prominence of the movement's campaign against police violence (with a specific focus on police violence towards Black Americans) would have increased prominence in 2015.

The acronym "BLM" would confusingly play a part in a wholly different stand-off between protestors and law enforcement in 2014. The US Federal Bureau of Land Management founds itself in a tense dispute with a rancher in Nevada by the name of Cliven Bundy who refused to pay for his use of Federal land to graze his cattle<sup>[12]</sup>. Bundy's stance against what he regarded as the unconstitutional ownership of land by the US government took in a hodgepodge of American far-right beliefs including elements of the so-called Sovereign Citizens movement and the broader Tax Protest set of right-wing beliefs<sup>[13]</sup>. When the Bureau of Land Management attempted to confront Bundy, he called for a "Range War" which led to extremist militia groups joining his cause. The Bureau backed down to avoid violence.

Right-wing domestic terrorism had continued in 2014, including a shooting at a Jewish community centre in Kansas<sup>[14]</sup> as well as unrelated shootings in Pennsylvania<sup>[15]</sup> and Nevada<sup>[16]</sup>. In California, six people were murdered by a self-identified "incel" in an evening of violence fuelled by hatred of women<sup>[17]</sup>.

2015 opened with the world unsettled. The impact of the 2003 Iraq invasion and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis was still very present. The hope of social reform by the Obama administration was foundering against the reality of institutional violence. The internet, and in particular Facebook and YouTube were increasingly becoming a major source of news for many people, further fuelling fear and distrust.

It was going to be a long year. The first of many long years.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] see earlier chapters for all of this
- [2] In 2016, Vox Day provided his own bullet-point summary of events up to and including events in 2016 <https://web.archive.org/web/20170119064543/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/05/sjws-never-learn.html> Notably, he starts with the Electrolite argument we covered in Chapter 8 <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/02/24/debarkle-chapter-8-electrolite-2005-03-01/>
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western\\_African\\_Ebola\\_virus\\_epidemic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_African_Ebola_virus_epidemic)
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution\\_of\\_Dignity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolution_of_Dignity)
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annexation\\_of\\_Crimea\\_by\\_the\\_Russian\\_Federation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annexation_of_Crimea_by_the_Russian_Federation)
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donetsk\\_People%27s\\_Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donetsk_People%27s_Republic) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novorossiya\\_\(confederation\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novorossiya_(confederation))
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia\\_Airlines\\_Flight\\_17](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia_Airlines_Flight_17)
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_State\\_of\\_Iraq\\_and\\_the\\_Levant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_State_of_Iraq_and_the_Levant)
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting\\_of\\_Michael\\_Brown](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_Michael_Brown)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing\\_of\\_Eric\\_Garner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_Eric_Garner)
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Lives\\_Matter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Lives_Matter)
- [12] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bundy\\_standoff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bundy_standoff)
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign\\_citizen\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_citizen_movement)
- [14] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overland\\_Park\\_Jewish\\_Community\\_Center\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overland_Park_Jewish_Community_Center_shooting)
- [15] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014\\_Pennsylvania\\_State\\_Police\\_barracks\\_attack](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Pennsylvania_State_Police_barracks_attack)
- [16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014\\_Las\\_Vegas\\_shootings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Las_Vegas_shootings)
- [17] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014\\_Isla\\_Vista\\_killings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Isla_Vista_killings)

## 35: January

[content warning: discussion of terror attacks, Islamophobic slurs, transphobia and racism]

January 2015 started as a normal year: fireworks over Sydney Harbour, global warming inching further to disaster and America embroiled in seemingly endless wars. On January 7, Europe and America were shocked by the mass shooting at the offices of the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical magazine in Paris. The attack was an Al-Qaeda connected terror operation in retaliation to the magazine's satirical cartoons about the Prophet Mohammed. Although condemned by many Muslim groups, the attack would be exploited by far-right groups to promote Islamophobia and attacks on immigrants. Naturally, Vox Day blamed the attacks on "diversity" and renewed his support for overt anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and anti-left violence by appealing to the example set by a far-right mass child-murderer:

*"But the first shots in Reconquista 2.0 have already been fired; they were fired in Norway by Anders Breivik. And that is the terrible point to which multiculturalism and diversity and tolerance has brought the West: the choice between Breivik and Hebdo. Many have embraced the hashtag #JeSuiCharlie, but as Iowahawk wisely noted, never bring a candlelight vigil to a gunfight."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150111022547/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/01/this-is-what-diversity-looks-like.html>

Day would also use the attack as a pretext to attack fantasy author Saladin Ahmed, calling him a "token Mahometan" and "an affirmative action nominee for the Hugo, Nebula, Crawford, Gemmell, and British Fantasy awards" as well as suggesting he was homophobic<sup>[1]</sup>.

While the horrific attack in Paris was the major news story of January 7, 2015, it was a lesser event in the history of the Debarkle. Overshadowing world events was an essay by Brad Torgersen. In big bold letters, his blog announced:

*"Announcing SAD PUPPIES 3!"*

Torgersen went on to explain:

*"The Hugo awards window (for 2015's nominations) will be open soon. As one of Baen's newest authors, I wanted to be the first guy out of the gate with SAD PUPPIES 3. For those of you who don't know what SAD PUPPIES is, it's a (somewhat tongue in cheek) running effort to get stories, books, and people onto the Hugo ballot, who are entirely deserving, but who don't usually get on the ballot. Largely because of the nomination and voting tendencies of World Science Fiction Convention, with its "fandom" community. In the last decade we've seen Hugo voting skew more and more toward literary (as opposed to entertainment) works. Some of these literary pieces barely have any science-fictional or fantastic content in them. Likewise, we've seen the Hugo voting skew ideological, as Worldcon and fandom alike have tended to use the Hugos as an affirmative action award: giving Hugos because a writer or artist is (insert underrepresented minority or victim group here) or because a given work features (insert underrepresented minority or victim group here) characters."*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/01/07/announcing-sad-puppies-3/>

Like Larry Correia's earlier campaigns, Torgersen complained that the Hugo Awards had become too literary rather than entertaining. However, Torgersen was more upfront about the political aspect. While he didn't cite examples, just like Vox Day he regarded many Hugo finalists as there due to "affirmative action" because of either who wrote it or because of aspects of the characters.

Torgersen went on to explain the purpose of the earlier Sad Puppy campaigns:

*"Likewise, the Hugos tend to be a raw popularity contest, for all definitions of "popular" that include "Trending with Worldcon." Which may or may not have anything whatsoever to do with actual sales success on the open market. And that was Correia's original point: if the Hugos really are the preeminent award in SF/F how come the Hugos so often ignore works and people who are, in fact, successful ambassadors of the genre to the consumer world at large? What the heck is going on here?"*

ibid

Torgersen's solution was the creation of a slate (the term he used) for a variety of Hugo categories and to encourage a "few dozen" people to vote for it. The Hugo Awards may not have been "affirmative action" but

Torgersen was going to affirmatively take action to boost some authors he felt had been systemically discriminated against.

In the comments, people began suggesting works for Torgersen to include. Torgersen confirmed that his own novel *Chaplain's War* (an extension of an earlier short story) was eligible for the Hugo Awards<sup>[2]</sup>. A few days later, he had second thoughts and explained: "I am probably going to recuse myself from SAD PUPPIES 3"<sup>[3]</sup>. He also had another stab at explaining the approach of the campaign:

*"SAD PUPPIES isn't about nepotism. It's about trying to put people (and works) on the list that would not ordinarily wind up on the list. No offense to Leckie, but she was the beneficiary of a lot of affirmative action voting. I'd like to see some people (who would never show up on the affirmative action radar) get at least a Hugo nomination, for being better-than-good writers who have gifted the genre with some tremendous work. Right now, too many nominations are made purely because the author is (gay/transsexual/female/non-white) or the main characters are (gay/transsexual/female/non-white) and this allows the voting body to give itself warm fuzzies for being progressive/inclusive."*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/01/07/announcing-sad-puppies-3/#comment-6584>

The logic was clear even if the supporting evidence was thin. From his perspective too many Hugo finalists were being chosen by voters because either the author or major characters were one or all of:

- gay
- transgender
- women
- people of colour

Instead, Sad Puppies 3 would aim to get people and works nominated that would not otherwise get nominated. It is a small leap of logic to assume that meant people who were not gay, transgender, women or people of colour (i.e., cis-straight white men, who had dominated Hugo Award nominations for decades) but it was still a leap — that wasn't quite what his words implied and also none of the Puppy campaigns previously nor Torgersen himself was known for logical consistency. Nevertheless, there was a reasonable inference that Torgersen was expecting a whiter, straighter and more male result from the campaign.

How would this be accomplished?

*"I think it's fair for somebody to push back and say, 'Okay, you go ahead and nominate for whatever reasons you like, it's time for a different bunch of us to do the same; and do it in a coordinated fashion that somewhat offsets the predictable biases and tendencies of the usual Hugo voting body.'"*

*ibid*

I believe it is fair to assume that Torgersen was not aiming to sweep the Hugo Awards but rather create a balancing force against what he perceived as a bias. Intent and actions are different things though.

Fellow Evil League of Evil member, John C. Wright alerted his blog followers to Torgersen taking up the mantle of Sad Puppy leader<sup>[4]</sup> and that they should leave suggestions of works to nominate at Torgersen's blog. Inevitably, many people suggested various works by John C. Wright, including Wright's wife L. Jagi Lamplighter<sup>[5]</sup>.

Vox Day (as "VD") also turned up in the comments a few days later, not to make any specific suggestions but he did assert that "At least one of my short stories published in 2014 is qualitatively better than any of the short stories that were nominated last year."<sup>[6]</sup>

Prior to Torgersen's announcement of Sad Puppies 3, Day had produced a less ambitious eligibility post of the kind that many award contenders release at that time of year. His list included one novel he wrote (*Quantum Mortis: A Mind Programmed*<sup>[7]</sup>), three short stories and an essay from his blog (for Best Related Work). However, he didn't at this point note his eligibility in other categories such as the editor categories. The wider purpose of both Day's posts and Torgersen's later post was to encourage people to sign up for 2015 Worldcon (known as "Sasquan") membership so that they would be eligible to nominate works. Day made this effort more explicit:

*"If you want to get in on the action, you can join Sasquan 2015 here. I tend to suspect \$40 for two years of voting rights will provide even more entertainment bang for your buck than it did last year. Also, note that you can buy two memberships, so long as the second one is marked "Guest of X"."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150107183420/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/01/for-consideration-2014.html>

Naturally, Day did not overtly order people to buy two memberships so as to gain two votes.

Torgersen's announcement caught the eye of not just the Evil League of Evil. Mike Glyer at *File770* noticed the arrival of Sad Puppies 3 the same day saying "if you felt something pushing against your "Worldcon fandom zeitgeist" today — that's because the dogs are off the leash!"<sup>[8]</sup>.

The next day editor and proprietor of the venerable *Amazing Stories*, Steve Davidson was also expressing his concern about yet another Hugo campaign.

*"In putting forth a Hugo Awards Voting slate specifically to support a political agenda (as opposed to the marginally acceptable custom of touting works that are eligible through qualification), the argument is advanced that there are authors, editors and artists who are deserving of nomination yet never make it to the ballot. Rather than blaming this on the staggering volume of works eligible each year, or a lack of proper and effective promotion and advertising on the part of publishers, blame is placed on the politics of fandom: "Hugo voting skew ideological, as Worldcon and fandom alike have tended to use the Hugos as an affirmative action award..."*

<https://amazingstories.com/2015/01/oh-fandom-youre-just-not-voting-right/>

Davidson overtly avoided naming Torgersen and the Sad Puppy campaign in the hope of preventing the argument over the slate becoming personalised. German indie-SF author and fan writer Cora Buhlert had broader questions about Hugo self-promotion in general, noting the trend of Hugo discussions getting earlier each year. The first eleven paragraphs of her post were not related to the Sad Puppy campaign specifically but the wider discussion on self-promotion. Only after that did she move on to Torgersen's complaints:

*"What always strikes me about those arguments – apart from the fact that the best antidote to nominating authors because of their demographics and political views rather than the merit of their work is apparently nominating authors because of their political views rather than the merit of their work – is that the Sad Puppies genuinely seem to believe that their ideas of what makes a work good or entertaining are universal and that everybody else nominates works they don't actually like, just because the author has the right credentials or the work ticks the right boxes. After all, it can't possibly be that people nominate works the Sad Puppies find boring, because – gasp – they actually enjoy them."*

<http://corabuhlert.com/2015/01/13/hugo-awards-debate-2015-earlier-every-year/>

Brad Torgersen responded to the multiple posts announcing a third set of unhappy hounds with a new post by paraphrasing conservative thinker William F. Buckley Jr's famous maxim about conservatism<sup>[9]</sup>.

*"SAD PUPPIES simply holds its collective hand out — standing athwart "fandom" history — and yells, "Stop!"*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/01/16/why-sad-puppies-3-is-going-to-destroy-science-fiction/>

Torgersen also made another attempt to outline the objectives of the Sad Puppy campaign. This time he listed three.

1. "Get works and authors onto the Hugo ballot who might not otherwise be there; regardless of political persuasion. "
2. "Encourage people who are SF/F consumers (but not "fandom" according to Worldcon) to participate in the nomination and selection of works."
3. Get "Hugo categories re-structured so that consumer sectors like gaming are not ignored."

There was no indication that Torgersen had any idea how to achieve point-3 and it seems to be an evolving idea. He finished with this paragraph:

*"If SAD PUPPIES happens to make a few people cry a Grinchy boo-hoo-hoo along the way, and if we give the Hyper-Progressive Pissypants Club (HPPC) heartburn because we're ruining things by trying to get the larger SF/F consumer world involved . . . well, that's just a cross we're prepared to bear — with a large cup of soda in one hand, and a big bucket of theater popcorn in the other."*

*ibid*

The campaign was going to be fun (according to Torgersen) and if some people got upset, well...that was their problem.

Torgersen followed that post up with a third on January 21. This was following a similar strategy that Larry Correia had adopted for Sad Puppies 2: have a series of posts in January to encourage people to sign up for Worldcon memberships in advance of nominations opening. This third post also unveiled a logo for the Sad

Puppy campaign. Created by an online artist Artracoon, the logo featured three puppies in space suits and sad expressions, with a limp rocket flying/descending in an arc behind them. Torgersen introduced the characters by name:

*“And when the three puppy astronauts — Ray, Isaac, and Frank — observed the lay of the alien land on Hugo World, they let out a forlorn howl. For they saw nothing but tedious ‘message’ fiction, depressing talk-talk stories about amoral people with severe ennui, and literary MFA novels. Not a rocket ship nor a ray gun in sight. ‘Can someone please give us some explosions?’ the puppies cried in unison. ‘I mean, we were promised explosions! And kick-ass laser battles! And all we got were some lousy t-shirts that said, This is what a feminist looks like! We don’t want that stupid crap! We came to have fun! At least give us loud bowling shirts with babes on them; like the one that comet guy wore!’”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/01/21/how-you-can-aid-the-valiant-sad-puppies-3-campaign/><sup>[10]</sup>

In the comments, notable GamerGate figure Daddy Warpig announced:

*Some people in #GamerGate got the word today:*

*Yo, #GamerGate!*

*SJW invaded sci-fi / fantasy publishing long ago. They rule with an IRON FIST. This makes puppies sad. :(*

*— Daddy Warpig (@Daddy\_Warpig) January 21, 2015*

*And yes, I am registered as a Supporting member. Awaiting nomination suggestions with bated breath. (MH: Nemesis for best novel. Because obvious reasons.)*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/01/21/how-you-can-aid-the-valiant-sad-puppies-3-campaign/#comment-6904>

Although Larry Correia had officially retired from leading the Sad Puppies, he also put out a call to action with the Sad Puppy 3 logo front and centre.

*“Last year I did a big push with several blog posts and cartoons (featuring Wendell as our spokesman) to try to get people who aren’t typical Worldcon attendees to participate. We managed to get people and things despised by SJWs nominated to almost every category. The ensuing public freak out was hilarious and proved my point.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/01/21/sad-puppies-3-only-a-few-days-to-register-to-vote/>

Correia went on to explain that he was swamped with a big writing project and hence had handed over the campaign to his friend Brad Torgersen. In the comments, Torgersen explained again what he was fighting against:

*“As Nathan notes, the real scrimmage is in the nominations. The SJWs have very specific criteria for theirs: they want gay authors, female authors, transexual authors, non-Caucasian authors. AND THIS IS A HARD RULE which they will seldom break.*

*You can be none of the above, but your book or story must focus on:*

*Gay characters, female characters, transexual characters, and non-Caucasian characters.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/01/21/sad-puppies-3-only-a-few-days-to-register-to-vote/>

Elsewhere, other blogs were rallying in support of Sad Puppies 3. The *Mad Genius Club* had multiple posts discussing the campaign to some degree. On January 17, Cedar Sanderson dedicated half her weekly *Mad Genius Club* post to explaining the Sad Puppies 3 campaign:

*“Keep in mind something, because no matter how much you hear it, this isn’t about politics. This is about making the Hugo more relevant to the greater fandom, as Brad discusses below, and it’s about keeping the Hugo great. It would be truly sad to lose the award of once-greatness into the morass of thinly-disguised revenge porn and poorly written (but socially relevant! To... someone, I’m assuming at least the author, although then again, marketing being what it is...) books that have turned the Hugo*

*award on the cover from must-buy to EW, putting this down now. So let's work on finding some really great books to nominate, and gathering interested voters who care. I'm an example of someone who didn't vote for years, and last year, I finally did it. I'll do it again this year."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/01/17/walking-the-plank/>

The claim that "this isn't about politics" does not make a lot of sense given Torgersen's stated aims and objections. Sad Puppies 3 had been expressly opposed to what Torgersen regarded as an ideological bias in the Hugo Awards. Looking at Sanderson's statement as generously as possible, her focus was on the supposed "literary" bent in the Hugo Awards (hence what is probably a swipe at the 2014 Hugo short story finalist *If You Were A Dinosaur, My Love*) but also that the campaign would not only promote conservative or right-leaning authors.

There really isn't a way of reading many of these early claims by Sad Puppy supporters without understanding that they were holding ideas that were incompatible. Sarah A. Hoyt on January 22 was already complaining that Brad Torgersen and Sad Puppy supporters were being unfairly maligned:

*"You see, the SJW who was sensitivity-bombing Brad Torgersen's thread the other day was saying that we don't have LGBT, Women, People of Interesting Nationalities, Little Brownz Peoples People of tan People who are barely darker than I People who are not extremely pale in science fiction and fantasy because we don't write for them. It's sort of a faith in "if we write it, they will come." It's a little dopey faith, but very, very sincere."*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2015/01/22/a-stranger-reflection/>

And yet, the campaign was overtly (according to Torgersen) there as a counterbalance to people who had been voting for books by authors (or featuring characters) who were women, gay, transgender or people of colour.

A few days after Cedar Sanderson's Mad Genius post, fellow blogger Dave Freer added to the roster of Sad Puppy posts at the site. Freer regarded the socio-political pendulum as having swung too far left after 2007 and that somebody needed to correct this:

*"I don't really care where you sit on the political spectrum, what is happening in sf/fantasy needs the brakes put on that pendulum. Over the years there have been some great writers from across the spectrum, and we're all poorer for losing that. Yet that's exactly what has happened. I'd hard put to put an exact date on it, but when the Hugo and Nebula awards slipped over into being entirely left wing, and gradually further and further left-wing."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/01/19/the-winter-of-our-discontent/><sup>[11]</sup>

Freer was convinced that this correction had already begun, that a cultural shift was occurring that would pushback at the new left-wing orthodoxy:

*"It all shapes up for pretty mess. I reckon in the next ten years the pendulum will swing very hard and far. I hope those on the winning side of that bit of future history will have the sense to not push the pendulum higher when sense says to damp it. It's probably 30 years off, at least, so I'll be dead. Not my problem any more."*

*ibid*

Freer's advice to the leftists he imagined were controlling science fiction?

*"If you are one of the other side, try panic. It looks good on you. Seriously, if you don't want far left wing intersectionality crushed... and books and authors who write what you want to see, driven out, and get what you've handed out, you better start damping that pendulum down. I think last year's Hugo Awards was about your last real chance, but you could all get together in your little cabals and nominate something other than the totally improbable usual suspects."*

*ibid*

Freer believed that the left was coordinating in "cabals" to nominate the kinds of works the Sad Puppy campaign was opposing. This more conspiratorial set of beliefs was a quieter (and deniable) subtext in Torgersen's posts but was an inevitable next step in trying to rationalise the incompatible beliefs behind Sad Puppies 3.



At *Mad Genius Club* the posts by Sanderson and Freer were followed by pro-Sad Puppy posts by Kate Paulk and Amanda Green<sup>[12]</sup>, as well another one from Freer:

*“You see I think the Hugo organizers and regular Worldcon fans have the whole damn thing all wrong. It’s a book which is great and popular with a wider audience that lends cachet, legitimacy to the award, and recognition to Worldcon, not the other way around. Redshirts and Ancillary Justice wins did little for their authors, and damage to the Hugos. Being seen to be fair and reasonable OUTSIDE their circle counts. Inside is irrelevant -they believe it anyway. It’s up to the very small minority of sf readers who go and support the Worldcon and Hugo status quo to play nice if they want credibility, and, um, support for what is a shrinking Con, and one heading for being as marginalized and irrelevant as some the literary left-wing Cons.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/01/26/perspectives-what-if-youve-got-the-whole-damn-thing-all-wrong/>

Meanwhile, Brad Torgersen and Larry Correia were still drumming up support. Part of that led Correia onto the Google+ Hangouts/YouTube show “Geek Gab” hosted by Correia fans and GamerGate supporters Brian Niemeier and Daddy Warpig.

Warpig invited his audience to take part:

*“If you want to be involved in either embarrassing or infuriating social justice warriors who have had an iron grip on science fiction and fantasy publishing for a good decade and a half or two decades now, get involved in nominating for the Hugos, get involved in voting for the Hugos.”*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1CP9IbbYUg><sup>[13]</sup>

Correia’s writing advice on the show was simple: “story first, message fiction second”. This was a return to Correia’s theme from earlier Sad Puppy campaigns, that the winning Hugo stories were not good stories. Combining Correia’s thesis with Dave Freer’s point that it is the quality of the works that lend cachet to award, not vice-versa, a clear challenge was emerging for Sad Puppies 3. While the various members of the so-called Evil League of Evil had their own personal criteria for success, Freer had unwittingly hit the nail on the head for the Sad Puppies 3 campaign. To succeed it would need to not just get different works on the ballot than usual or finalists that would discombobulate “SJWs” but to actually get demonstrably BETTER works on the Hugo ballot than would otherwise have been picked.

To do that, Sad Puppies 3 would need not just a slate of works but a carefully curated set of works that somehow was not the works by gay people, transgender people, women and people of colour<sup>[14]</sup> that would otherwise have been nominated, while not actually objecting to works by gay people, transgender people, women and people of colour, and also getting all those supposed great works by conservative authors who were unfairly discriminated against onto the ballot while still being politically diverse AND getting BETTER works onto the ballot. It was a tall order!

Work had started in Torgersen’s first Sad Puppy post, with readers making many suggestions but what process would be used to winnow those suggestions down to a viable slate was unclear. The task of picking the Sad Puppy slate would not be complete until February arrived...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] obviously, Saladin Ahmed isn’t homophobic. Day’s claims can be read here <https://web.archive.org/web/20150122044343/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/01/a-pink-sf-pet-on-oscar.html> He also manages to work in a dig at Benjanun Sriduangkaew as well (see chapter 30)
- [2] <https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/01/07/announcing-sad-puppies-3/#comment-6531>
- [3] <https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/01/07/announcing-sad-puppies-3/#comment-6585>
- [4] <http://www.scifiwright.com/2015/01/only-you-can-make-literati-heads-explode-torgersen-sad-puppies-3/>
- [5] <https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/01/07/announcing-sad-puppies-3/#comment-6551>
- [6] <https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/01/07/announcing-sad-puppies-3/#comment-6613>
- [7] *Quantum Mortis: A Mind Programmed* is actually a rewrite of the 1968 novel *The Programmed Man* by Jean and Jeff Sutton. Day does credit the original writers and I don’t know how different the two books are [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean\\_Sutton#The\\_Programmed\\_Man\\_\(1968\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Sutton#The_Programmed_Man_(1968)). In the comments, there is a side discussion about whether the book is suitable to be nominated. Notably, commenter Markku argues against it saying that “But still, I wouldn’t get behind that plan. I mean, Opera was the genuine item. This is purely trolling. If the organization being trolled was SFWA, then fine – they deserve it. But Worldcon doesn’t, at least judging by their behaviour so far.” This is notable as Markku Koponen is the Finnish man behind AlpenWolf, the video game company that owns Castalia House. He confirms this aspect in a later comment: “Also, being the one who is ultimately financially responsible for the company, I would be

remiss not to mention my fear that this will bring the war to the Sutton estate, who most assuredly didn't sign up for THIS. They gave us the go-ahead with the story, no strings attached. No royalties demanded." Vox Day assures him that the book won't actually be nominated.

- [8] <http://file770.com/torgersen-volunteers-to-be-leader-of-the-pack/>
- [9] [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/William\\_F.\\_Buckley,\\_Jr.](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/William_F._Buckley,_Jr.)
- [10] "comet guy" covered in Chapter 30
- [11] Freer's essay is difficult to follow with leaps of rhetoric and off sideswipes at Cora Buhlert and later at Benjanun Sriduangkaew where he mocks her surname
- [12] <https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/01/22/give-the-puppies-a-happy/> and <https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/01/27/oh-noes-the-sky-is-falling/>
- [13] my transcription – edited for clarity
- [14] it is notable that disability wasn't one of the categories the Sad Puppies objected to but I think this was them not remembering to add it to their list

## 36: February Part 1 — the slates

As January came to an end, Vox Day's followers, the so-called 'Dread Ilk', were chomping at the bit. With one day left for registration for the 2015 Worldcon, Day encouraged his followers to sign up to support the Sad Puppies 3 campaign.

*"We have the momentum. Last year, the Dread Ilk showed up in respectable force without me doing anything more than putting up a single post with a modified version of Sad Puppies 2. This year, we're locked, loaded, and ready to be all that we can be. Trust me on that. About which more soon...."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150202033301/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/01/sad-puppies-last-dav.html>

Matters were in hand; a process was underway. In the meantime, what Day needed was discipline from his followers. In the comments, Day spelt this out:

*"There will be a lot of good works that are not on the slate, but I would encourage everyone to stick to it regardless. The closer everyone sticks to it, the more effective it is. Just a little more discipline last year, or to be precise, six of the 93 votes that supported Larry and did not also support Sarah A. Hoyt, would have had Sarah on the short story and novel ballots."*

ibid

And...

*Most libertarians aren't [good at following orders]. But in this case, the orders are a massive force multiplier. That's why it's important to back the whole slate as is. Otherwise, what happens is things like last year when about half of those who supported Larry went off the reservation and ensured that neither Sarah [Hoyt] nor anyone they supported made it. And she would have had a good shot at winning in the story category too.*

ibid

In the meantime, Day's troop should just register, wait for orders and "keep their powder dry".

Meanwhile, the Evil League of Evil had been busy carefully curating a slate...or maybe not...or maybe it was just Brad...actually, we don't know. What we do know is that on February 1, Brad Torgersen presented the Sad Puppies 3 slate.

*"And here it is! After much combobulating, the official SAD PUPPIES 3 slate is assembled! As noted earlier in the year, the SAD PUPPIES 3 list is a recommendation. Not an absolute. Gathered here is the best list (we think!) of entirely deserving works, writers, and editors — all of whom would not otherwise find themselves on the Hugo ballot without some extra oomph received from beyond the rarefied, insular halls of 21st century Worldcon "fandom.""*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20181030111223/https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/02/01/sad-puppies-3-the-2015-hugo-slate/>

The slate that appears on the archived post above is actually a revised version. There were numerous tweaks and changes. One of the first changes was the withdrawal of Juliette Wade's novelette *Mind Locker* from the slate<sup>[1]</sup>. We will look at the fuller story of that in a later chapter but it was just one of several changes before a definitive version was established on March 2. Even so, the bulk of the slate remained unchanged. *See below the footnotes for the slate.*

Notable inclusions were Jim Butcher's *Skin Game*, a novel in the popular urban fantasy series *The Dresden Files*. Larry Correia (apparently reluctantly) had been drafted in with *Monster Hunter Nemesis*. There was no overt media tie-in fiction in Best Novel but Kevin J. Anderson had been a prolific author of tie-in fiction. Marko Kloos was a carry-over from previous Sad Puppy campaigns but his novel *Lines of Departure* was notable for being published by 47 North, an imprint of a major online book retailer — so while not quite self-published in a strict sense, it was a break from the traditional model of publishing.

Unlike Sad Puppies 2, Vox Day had not been included in the slate. However, Day's publisher, Castalia House, had multiple nominees including works by fellow ELoE members John C. Wright and Tom Kratman. Some of these had been suggested as comments in the original Sad Puppies 3 post, such as Ken Burnside's *The Hot Equations*, an essay on the science of military science fiction that had been published in the anthology *Riding the Red Horse* edited by Vox Day and Tom Kratman.

What was unexplained was the overall rationale for the selection. Torgersen has explained the objectives of Sad Puppies 3 but it was not immediately clear how those objectives translated into this slate. The named nominees were largely men but not exclusively, and in the short story category, three out of five of the authors were women. Tom Kratman, Larry Correia and John C. Wright each had outspoken right-wing views but it was not overtly a slate dedicated to a narrow ideology (aside from the implied conservatism of the whole project). Torgersen had also included stories from his favourite magazine, *Analog*, as well as promoting his “writing dad” Mike Resnick and Resnick’s magazine, *Galaxy’s Edge*.

The slate also was unclear about the distinction between the supposed Hugo bias towards the literary rather than classic science fiction action. The headline Best Novel category had an emphasis on populist fiction but the shorter fiction included some stories with a more literary bent. The graphic story entry was a single independent webcomic whose inclusion was something of a mystery. The movie choices were all popular movies but then again none of them was an unlikely pick for the Hugo Award.

The relative quality of the picks is an issue that would become a topic later in the year. In the meantime, the Sad Puppies 3 campaign was about to have the biggest surprise twist the very next day.

On February 2, beneath a new logo drawn by the same artist as the Sad Puppies 3 logo, Vox Day announced Rabid Puppies 2015.

*“What follows is the list of Hugo recommendations known as Rabid Puppies. They are my recommendations for the 2015 nominations, and I encourage those who value my opinion on matters related to science fiction and fantasy to nominate them precisely as they are. I believe these various and meritorious works put not only last year’s nominations, but last year’s winners, to shame.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150202122454/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/02/rabid-puppies-2015.html>

Day’s slate was very similar to Torgersen’s and clearly based on it. Day had changed the order in which some nominees were presented but the main change was additions. Categories such as Short Story, which had only four Sad Puppy nominees, had an additional recommendations to fill all five slots.

Best Novel also had an interesting change: *Trial by Fire* by Charles Gannon was replaced on the Rabid Puppies slate by *The Chaplain’s War* by Brad Torgersen. On his own blog, Torgersen had recused himself from the Sad Puppies slate but had not withdrawn from the Hugo Awards in general. Was he happy to be on the Rabid Puppies’ slate? As far as I am aware he had no objection to it. A comment on the post under the name “The artist, also known as Brad” appears to be from Brad Torgersen<sup>[2]</sup> but does not comment on his inclusion.

Across the two slates, the only member of the Evil League of Evil not included somewhere was Sarah A. Hoyt, although her three fellow bloggers at *Mad Genius Club* (Amanda Green, Cedar Sanderson and Dave Freer<sup>[3]</sup>) were included in Best Fan Writer. Day had included himself in two categories, Best Editor Long Form and Best Editor Short Form.

What was not clear from either Torgersen’s or Day’s posts, was to what extent these were two collaborating campaigns or two rival campaigns. To what extent had the so-called Evil League of Evil developed the slates together?

Also on February 2, Larry Correia promoted the Sad Puppies 3 slate.

*“Slate-ening? Oh well, run with it. Here is our suggested slate!”*

*Brad Torgersen is this year’s banner carrier in our ongoing war against Puppy Related Sadness. Now that the registrations for memberships to nominate for the Hugo are closed, here is what the Evil League of Evil authors came up with in discussion.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/02/02/sad-puppies-3-the-slatening/>

Correia provided more reasoning behind the picks by talking about each of the Best Novel choices

*“So this year we are expanding the slate to encompass an even wider cross section of people who would normally be shunned. A lot of thought went into this, and I’ve got stuff to do, so today I’ll illustrate our thought process by going over just one category. Let’s start with the big category of best novel:”*

*ibid*

Aside from a generic comment about the books, his details all focused on the worthiness of the authors. What was notable, was that he described this as “our thought process” and when discussing his own inclusion in the slate, he had this to say:

*“I actually told Brad and the rest of the ELoE that I was perfectly fine with Monster Hunter Nemesis not being on the ballot. Because when the SJWs aren’t blaming my motivations on homophobia or racism or something, then obviously SP was all about me trying to buy myself a Hugo Award (seriously that’s dumb, I did statistical analysis most of my life, so knew going in the odds of winning were nil). Plus, believe it or not, I really don’t enjoy having mobs of angry SJWs telling tens of thousands of complete strangers that I’m a wife beating, rape apologist. I’m perfectly happy to bow out and screw with them from the sidelines.*

*Then the ELoE told me tough luck, and that if I dropped out, my fans (who make up the back bone of the growing Sad Puppies contingent) would get mad at me. Plus, John Wright said that MHN was my best book, and his vote for best book of 2014. And you really can’t argue with somebody who writes like John.”*

*ibid* <sup>[4]</sup>

While much of Correia’s statement there is dubious, the idea that it was Correia’s fans who were the backbone of the Sad Puppy voters made a lot of sense. This would actually be the fifth year Correia had encouraged his readers to participate in the Hugo Awards to promote his work.

Correia finished his post with a dig at the number of Hugo nominations Mike Glycer had received over his decades as a fan writer and fanzine editor. In the comments, Correia elaborated more on the involvement of the Evil League of Evil.

Asked why Sarah A. Hoyt wasn’t included, Correia replied:

*“Sarah is part of the ELoE, so you’ve got to take it up with her. All of us tried to veto ourselves, but some were not allowed. (like Kratman pretty much got drafted).”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/02/02/sad-puppies-3-the-slatening/#comment-51251>

And later he explained:

*“Which is one reason we did the whole big suggested slate. The ELoE has been talking about this for a while. Nobody can know of everything, but between us, we were able to argue about a whole bunch of interesting things for you guys to look at.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/02/02/sad-puppies-3-the-slatening/#comment-51253>

Further down he expanded on his reasoning:

*Greg, we get 5 slots, and we cast a wide net. (you can read the basic reasoning here). If we loaded the whole thing with Baen authors, then we’re right back to where we were before, with the SJW assholes denying there is any problem with the awards, and anybody who is standing against them is just trying to make it a “Baen” thing. Believe it or not, we’re not just Evil, we’re Clever.*

*Instead, I’m proving the same point, only have guys from other places, including indy, so now they can’t say that. (or they will, and they’ll just look like assholes to all the undecideds, which is kind of my whole goal)*

*And Kratman is on there. He really didn’t want to be, but he is. He wrote a fantastic, deserving novella.*

*Believe me, I’m perfectly happy to not be on there. And the way this is looking, we’re going to be growing this in the future. There are dozens of worthy authors who’ve been ignored for way too long. Basically the ELoE told me tough crap. It was my fans who started it, and just logistically I can’t afford to piss them off by dropping out. Once we get enough people to consistently mess with the SJW’s owning the noms, I’ll be glad to drop off, and I’d love to see Ringo and Weber get nominated. Hell, I’d also like to see Flint, Williamson, and Hoyt among others. Not to mention I’d like to see greats like Zahn or Stackpole get some love.*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/02/02/sad-puppies-3-the-slatening/#comment-51262>

Of course, there was nothing stopping the Sad Puppy slate from recommending six, seven or tens of possible choices. What was restricted to five slots was the choices of the people voting and restricting it to no more than five would reduce the impact of split votes. Correia was being a little coyer about slate voting

discipline than Day had been. When asked specifically about including more works than available slots, Correia described that as “diluting your fire”<sup>[5]</sup>.

Correia never explicitly stated who he regarded as the “Evil League of Evil” in this context but at this point, the term typically included Vox Day. As we will see later, there were some attempts to distance the Sad Puppies 3 campaign from the Rabid Puppies campaign but at no point was it stated that Day had zero input into the original Sad Puppies 3 slate. It is an unproven but reasonable hypothesis to assume that Day was consulted on the specifics.

Two days into February and the Hugo Awards were facing not one but two right-wing campaigns (in intent if not consistently in content) and people had begun to notice...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <http://file770.com/an-account-of-juliette-wades-withdrawal-from-sad-puppies-3/>
- [2] In-context comments from “The artist, also known as Brad” present as if they are from Brad Torgersen and neither Vox Day nor Brad Torgersen has said that they are not Torgersen.
- [3] In the first version of the Rabid Puppies slate, Dave Freer was included but not in the final version.
- [4] There is a parcel of other dubious claims in that quote that we have covered in other chapters. I’m not going to unpack them every time now.
- [5] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/02/02/sad-puppies-3-the-slatening/#comment-51262>
- [6] Chapter 33 covers this in detail

## THE SLATES

- Sad Puppies 3 (March 2 version)
  - **Best Novel**
  - *The Dark Between the Stars* – Kevin J. Anderson – Tor
  - *Trial by Fire* – Charles E. Gannon – BAEN
  - *Skin Game* – Jim Butcher – ROC
  - *Monster Hunter Nemesis* – Larry Correia – BAEN
  - *Lines of Departure* – Marko Kloos – 47 North
  - **Best Novella**
  - “Flow” – Arlan Andrews Sr. – Analog magazine November 2014
  - *One Bright Star to Guide Them* – John C. Wright – Castalia House
  - *Big Boys Don’t Cry* – Tom Kratman – Castalia House
  - **Best Novelette**
  - “The Journeyman: In the Stone House” – Michael F. Flynn – Analog magazine June 2014
  - “The Triple Sun: A Golden Age Tale” – Rajnar Vajra – Analog magazine July/Aug 2014
  - “Championship B’tok” – Edward M. Lerner – Analog magazine Sept 2014
  - “Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust, Earth to Alluvium” – Gray Rinehart – *Orson Scott Card’s InterGalactic Medicine Show*
  - **Best Short Story**
  - “Goodnight Stars” – Annie Bellet – *The Apocalypse Triptych*
  - “Tuesdays With Molakesh the Destroyer” – Megan Grey – Fireside Fiction
  - “Totaled” – Kary English – *Galaxy’s Edge* magazine, July 2014
  - “On A Spiritual Plain” – Lou Antonelli – *Sci Phi Journal* #2
  - “A Single Samurai” – Steve Diamond – *Baen Big Book of Monsters*
  - **Best Related Work**
  - *Letters from Gardner* – Lou Antonelli – Merry Blacksmith Press
  - *Transhuman and Subhuman: Essays on Science Fiction and Awful Truth* – John C. Wright – Castalia House
  - “THE HOT EQUATIONS: THERMODYNAMICS AND MILITARY SF” – Ken Burnside – *Riding the Red Horse*
  - *Wisdom From My Internet* – Michael Z. Williamson
  - “Why Science is Never Settled” Part 1, Part 2 – Tedd Roberts – BAEN
  - **Best Graphic Story**
  - *Reduce Reuse Reanimate* (Zombie Nation book #2) – Carter Reid – (independent)
  - **Best Dramatic Presentation (Long Form)**
  - *The Lego Movie* – Phil Lord, Christopher Miller
  - *Guardians of the Galaxy* – James Gunn
  - *Interstellar* – Christopher Nolan
  - *The Maze Runner* – Wes Ball
  - **Best Dramatic Presentation (Short Form)**
  - *Grimm* – “Once We Were Gods” – NBC
  - *The Flash* – “The Flash (pilot)” – The CW

- *Adventure Time* – “The Prince Who Wanted Everything” – Cartoon Network
- *Regular Show* – “Saving Time” – Cartoon Network
  - **Best Editor (Long Form)**
- Toni Weisskopf – BAEN
- Jim Minz – BAEN
- Anne Sowards – ACE/ROC
- Sheila Gilbert – DAW
  - **Best Editor (Short Form)**
- Mike Resnick – *Galaxy’s Edge* magazine
- Edmund R. Schubert – *Orson Scott Card’s InterGalactic Medicine Show*
- Jennifer Brozek (for *Shattered Shields*)
- Bryan Thomas Schmidt (for *Shattered Shields*)
  - **Best Professional Artist**
- Carter Reid
- Jon Eno
- Alan Pollack
- Nick Greenwood
  - **Best Semiprozine**
- *Orson Scott Card’s InterGalactic Medicine Show*
- *Abyss & Apex*
- *Andromeda Spaceways In-Flight Magazine*
  - **Best Fanzine**
- *Tangent SF On-line* – Dave Truesdale
- *Elitist Book Reviews* – Steve Diamond
- *The Revenge of Hump Day* – Tim Bolgeo
  - **Best Fancast**
- “The Sci Phi Show” – Jason Rennie
- Dungeon Crawlers Radio
- Adventures in SF Publishing
  - **Best Fan Writer**
- Matthew David SurrIDGE (*Black Gate*)
- Jeffro Johnson
- Amanda Green
- Cedar Sanderson
- Dave Freer
  - **The John W. Campbell Award**
- Jason Cordova
- Kary English
- Eric S. Raymond

## **RABID PUPPIES (FINAL VERSION)**

- BEST NOVEL
  - *Monster Hunter Nemesis* by Larry Correia, Baen Books
  - *The Chaplain’s War* by Brad Torgersen, Baen Books
  - *Skin Game* by Jim Butcher, ROC
  - *Lines of Departure*, by Marko Kloos, self-published
  - *The Dark Between the Stars* by Kevin J. Anderson, Tor Books
- BEST NOVELLA
  - “One Bright Star to Guide Them” by John C. Wright, Castalia House
  - “Big Boys Don’t Cry” by Tom Kratman, Castalia House
  - “The Plural of Helen of Troy” by John C. Wright, *City Beyond Time* / Castalia House
  - “Pale Realms of Shade” by John C. Wright, *The Book of Feasts & Seasons* / Castalia House
  - “Flow” by Arlan Andrews Sr., *Analog* November 2014
- BEST NOVELETTE
  - “Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus” by John C. Wright, *The Book of Feasts & Seasons*/ Castalia House

- “The Journeyman: In the Stone House” by Michael F. Flynn, *Analog* June 2014
- “Championship B’tok” by Edward M. Lerner, *Analog* Sept 2014
- “The Triple Sun: A Golden Age Tale”, by Rajnar Vajra, *Analog* July/Aug 2014
- “Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust, Earth to Alluvium” by Gray Rinehart, *Orson Scott Card’s InterGalactic Medicine Show*
- BEST SHORT STORY
  - “Turncoat” by Steve Rzasa, *Riding the Red Horse*
  - “The Parliament of Beasts and Birds” by John C. Wright, *The Book of Feasts & Seasons*
  - “Goodnight Stars” by Annie Bellet, *The Apocalypse Triptych*
  - “Totaled” by Kary English, *Galaxy’s Edge*
  - “On A Spiritual Plain”, Lou Antonelli, *Sci Phi Journal* #2
- BEST RELATED WORK
  - *Transhuman and Subhuman: Essays on Science Fiction and Awful Truth*, by John C. Wright, Castalia House
  - *The Hot Equations: Thermodynamics and Military SF* by Ken Burnside, *Riding the Red Horse* / Castalia House
  - *Wisdom From My Internet* by Michael Z. Williamson, self-published
  - *The Science is Never Settled* by Tedd Roberts, Baen Free Library
  - *Letters from Gardner* by Lou Antonelli, *Sci Phi Journal* #3
- BEST GRAPHIC STORY
  - *Reduce Reuse Reanimate* by Carter Reid, (independent)
- BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION (Long Form)
  - *Coherence*, James Ward Byrkit
  - *Guardians of the Galaxy*, James Gunn
  - *Interstellar*, Christopher Nolan
  - *The Maze Runner*, Wes Ball
  - *The Lego Movie*, Phil Lord and Christopher Miller
- BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION (Short Form)
  - *Supernatural*: “Dog Dean Afternoon”
  - *Game of Thrones*: “The Mountain and the Viper”
  - *Grimm*: “Once We Were Gods”
  - *The Flash* – “The Flash (pilot)”
- BEST EDITOR (Short Form)
  - *Vox Day*, *Riding the Red Horse*, Castalia House
  - Jennifer Brozek, *Shattered Shields*
  - Bryan Thomas Schmidt, *Shattered Shields*
  - Mike Resnick, *Galaxy’s Edge*
  - Edmund R. Schubert, *Orson Scott Card’s InterGalactic Medicine Show*
- BEST EDITOR (Long Form)
  - *Vox Day*, Castalia House
  - Toni Weiskopf, Baen Books
  - Jim Minz, Baen Books
  - Anne Sowards, ACE/ROC
  - Sheila Gilbert, DAW
- BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST
  - Kirk DouPonce



- Carter Reid
- Jon Eno
- Alan Pollack
- Nick Greenwood
- BEST SEMIPROZINE
  - *Orson Scott Card's InterGalactic Medicine Show*, Edmund Schubert
- BEST FANZINE
  - *Black Gate*, John O'Neill
  - *Tangent SF On-line*, Dave Truesdale
  - *Elitist Book Reviews*, Steve Diamond
  - *The Revenge of Hump Day*, Tim Bolgeo
- BEST FANCAST
  - "The Sci Phi Show", Jason Rennie
  - Dungeon Crawlers Radio
  - Adventures in SF Publishing
- BEST FAN WRITER
  - Jeffro Johnson
  - Matthew David Surridge
  - Amanda Green
  - Cedar Sanderson
  - Daniel Enness
- THE JOHN W. CAMPBELL AWARD
  - Eric S. Raymond, "Sucker Punch", *Riding the Red Horse*
  - Rolf Nelson, The Stars Came Back
  - Jason Cordova, *Kaiju Apocalypse*
  - Kary English, Flight of the Kikayon

## 37: February Part 2 — Reactions

In early 2015, Milo Yiannopoulos was an unlikely rising star of American conservatism. Young, gay, British (but of Greek and Irish descent) and irreverent, Yiannopoulos did not fit the conventional stereotype of conservatism but his style suited *Breitbart News Network*, the online right-wing media outlet<sup>[1]</sup>. *Breitbart* was just one of a panoply of websites pushing the same confusing mix of social-conservatism, nationalism, libertarianism (selectively when convenient), anti-immigration and culture-war anti-leftism. However, *Breitbart* was attempting to distinguish itself from the rest of the spectrum of outlets (from Fox News to *WorldNetDaily*) by appealing to a younger demographic. Young, stylish, and with a faux anti-establishment demeanour, Yiannopoulos represented a new way to package old ideas.

In 2014, Yiannopoulos had found the perfect cause. GamerGate (see chapter 28) had presented Yiannopoulos with the perfect story for his agitprop style and within a few weeks of the harassment campaign/culture war beginning, Yiannopoulos was both an active participant in GamerGate and the writer of major articles about it. Yiannopoulos's involvement, in turn, helped drive traffic to *Breitbart*. Naturally, the apparent irony of a supposed journalist exploiting gamers to drive traffic to a political website and raise his own media profile was not an issue for the "ethics in game journalism" crowd.

Yiannopoulos would continue to exploit GamerGate through 2015 but he was already looking for other controversies to exploit in a similar way. On February 4, Larry Correia put out a call to his fans for them to gather links showing "SJW attacks".

*"Hey, Monster Hunter Nation and Sad Puppies Supporters, I've been approached by a major media outlet gathering information about our little corner of the culture war.*

*I mentioned bias, and specifically anti-conservative bias among the voters. They asked if I had links to blog posts, comments, etc."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/02/04/i-need-your-help-gathering-links-to-sjw-attacks-in-sci-fi-for-a-news-reporter/>

Correia made a specific point of requesting links from one notable Sad Puppy supporter:

*"James May/Fail Burton specifically, I know you are like the archivist of their racist Twitter posts. Time to bust out the files."*

ibid

Under the names James May/Fail Burton, this commenter had already established a reputation of posting long and detailed denunciations of feminism and anti-racism beliefs which he regarded as being anti-male and reverse racism<sup>[2]</sup>. May would reply in the comments with a collection he had made of quotes<sup>[3]</sup> saying:

*"As anyone following this could predict, the actual numbers of racist, sexist and supremacist quotes by social justice warriors from within the core institutions of SFF literally number in the thousands compared to statistical zero by the so-called women-hating racist white supremacists they oppose. In short, the enemy SJWs have devoted thousands of Tweets and blog posts about doesn't even exist and never has in SFF, not in 100 years. That is about what one might expect from an ideology created by paranoid and bigoted psychopaths."*

James May <https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/02/04/i-need-your-help-gathering-links-to-sjw-attacks-in-sci-fi-for-a-news-reporter/#comment-51489>

The major media outlet that had approached Correia for dirt on "SJWs" was, of course, *Breitbart*. Yiannopoulos and fellow *Breitbart* writer Allum Bokhari, published an article on February 5 entitled "The Hugo Wars: How Sci-Fi's Most Prestigious Awards Became a Political Battleground". The article began with a litany of evils from the left that they described as "the spectre of political intolerance" before eventually getting to their version of recent events in science fiction, recapping the recent controversies in the SFWA (see earlier chapters). These events were caused, they claimed, by "a small group of social justice-minded community elites who sought to establish themselves as the arbiters of social mores". They went on to name names:

*"But Scalzi is, if anything, merely the moderate ally of a far more radical group of community elites. He hasn't gone nearly as far as former SFWA Vice President Mary Kowal, who handles political disagreement by telling her opponents to "shut the fuck up" and quit the SFWA. Or*

*former Hugo nominee Nora Jemisin, who says that political tolerance “disturbs” her. Or, indeed, the prolific fantasy author Jim C. Hines, who believes that people who satirize religion and political ideologies (a very particular religion, and a very particular ideology, of course) should be thrown out of mainstream SFF magazines.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20181224150517/https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2015/02/05/the-hugo-wars-how-sci-fis-most-prestigious-awards-became-a-political-battleground/>

Yiannopoulos and Bokhari overtly characterised the Sad Puppy campaign as a fightback against a small but powerful set of leftist elites.

*“Wherever they emerge, social-justice warriors claim to be champions of diversity. But they always reveal themselves to be relentlessly hostile to it: they applaud people of different genders, races, and cultures just so long as those people all think the same way. Theirs is a diversity of the trivial; a diversity of skin-deep, ephemeral affiliations.*

*The diversity that writers like Correia and Torgerson have set out to protect is different. It is a diversity of perspectives, of creative styles, and, yes, of politics. It is the kind of diversity that authoritarians hate, but it is the only kind of diversity that matters.”*

ibid

The *Breitbart* article enthused many Sad Puppy supporters including *Mad Genius Club* blogger and Best Fan Writer candidate Amanda Green:

*“The Breitbart article hits the proverbial nail on the head with the above observation. In a field that ought to welcome everyone and welcome what they write, there is a group that is doing its best to shout down and, according to some, ruin the careers of those who do not toe the line when it comes to who they are and how diverse they make their stories. They sneer at white males of a certain age and attack women who do not fall into step with the rest of the sisterhood. These folks have forgotten that “wrong think” has long been the foundation of science fiction and fantasy and the field has been populated with writers from every political spectrum. That, apparently, is no longer something these folks want. Well, if SP3 does anything, it shows that there is a large group of authors and readers who don’t give a flying rat’s ass about being preached to in their stories. What they want is a story that engages them, entertains them and makes them think. Story has to win out over message because what good is the message if no one reads the story?”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/02/10/tuesday-links-and-a-few-thoughts/>

Green was also busy trying to square the circle of the numerous claims Sad Puppy supporters were making about the campaign:

*“There is the key where SP3 is concerned. It isn’t a slate — and I hate that word because this isn’t a slate. It is Brad’s recommendations for the first round of Hugo voting. He has repeatedly stated that. They are his recommendations, just as others for years have made recommendations, yet he gets pilloried for daring to put a “slate” together. But more importantly, those included in SP3 come from more than just the conservative political spectrum. There are libertarians on it and — gasp — liberals. Their political beliefs aren’t important. What is, is the quality of their work, something those attacking SP3 completely overlook.”*

ibid

Torgersen’s list was being called “a slate” because he had called it a slate but more than that, as Larry Correia had pointed out, strategy mattered. The objectives of the slate were not going to be achieved if people didn’t use it literally as a slate. However, this transparently disingenuous argument that the Sad Puppies 3 slate was not actually a slate, would continue throughout the year.

Meanwhile, people less supportive of the slates also had a lot to say. Mike Glycer offered a prescient warning at *File770*:

*“Ladies and gentlemen – your 2015 Hugo final ballot!*

*Or it will be if Brad Torgersen and Vox Day get their wish.”*

<http://file770.com/sad-puppies-wag-their-tales/>

In the comments to Glycer's post, Jim Hines also made prescient connection:

*"So basically, it's about ethics in Hugo nominating?"*

Jim Hines <http://file770.com/sad-puppies-wag-their-tales/#comment-245238>

Echoing the GamerGate slogan just a few days before one of the leading lights of GamerGate (Milo Yiannopoulos) would name Hines as a member of a "radical group of community elites".

*File770* also picked up the Yiannopoulos story once *Breitbart* published it. Glycer scoffed at the level of basic ignorance in the article of past political feuds within fandom, saying:

*"Indeed, once readers discover Bokhari's and Yiannopolous' wilful obliviousness to actual fan history, can anyone believe they are devoted to portraying a true and accurate account of today's science fiction scene?"*

<http://file770.com/larry-correia-channels-his-inner-dogberry/>

A broader defence of the Sad Puppies 3 slate was that it was no different than recommendation lists that many book bloggers would put out in relation to the Hugo Awards. Fan writer Jason Sanford's 2015 list was targeted by Vox Day as an "SJW Hugo slate" even before Day's own Rabid Puppy slate was announced<sup>[4]</sup>. Sanford hit back with his own blog post highlighting the difference:

*"I've never organized a campaign to stuff the Hugo Awards ballot. Have I stated the authors and stories I'm voting for? Yes. I've done this for many years. Have I encouraged others to consider the stories I liked and, if they also like them, consider them for a nomination? Yes. Because that's what you do in the marketplace of ideas and beliefs which we call life. It's part of what we call "Having a damn opinion!"*

...

*But I've never picked my nominations by race or ethnicity or the author's political views. In fact, I've selected stories written by authors whom I likely disagree with on many issues. For example, in 2012 I selected Brad Torgersen's Analog novelette "Ray of Light" as one of my Hugo, Nebula and Locus Award selections."*

<http://www.jasonsanford.com/blog/2015/2/dont-straw-man-me-dont-vote-for-my-award-picks-simply-because-i-liked-them> <sup>[5]</sup>

A more pertinent reaction to the Sad Puppies 3 slates was from some of the people included in it. Juliette Wade had asked for her novelette "*Mind Locker*" to be not included as soon as the slate had been released. A few days later, author Dave Creek also asked for his novella "*The Jenregar and the Light*" to be removed from the slate. On Facebook, Creek explained his motivation:

*"I'm declaring that I'm not a "Sad Puppy. "In case you don't know what that means, here's a bit of background. Larry Correia, Brad Torgersen, and Vox Day released their picks for the Hugo and Nebula Awards on February 1. They call them the "Sad Puppies" and maintain that the Hugos, in particular, are broken, and that many deserving writers and editors who should receive acclaim go unrecognized. All well and good, as far as it goes. I have a story on that list. I'm not mentioning the title because my aim here is not to promote myself. I was glad at first for the recognition. But I wasn't informed I was being considered for the list, and not told after the fact that I'd been placed on it. I only found out about it when Jason Sanford wrote about it on his blog."*

<https://www.facebook.com/davecreek/posts/10152797018734473>

After discussing the politics of both Vox Day and Larry Correia, Creek stated that "being linked to Larry Correia makes me uncomfortable, and I wouldn't want to be in the same room with Theodore Beale". Creek's withdrawal reduced the number of novellas on the Sad Puppy slate to three. The Rabid Puppy slate had already included an additional story from John C. Wright ("*The Plural of Helen of Troy*") but added yet another one when Creek withdrew ("*Pale Realms of Shade*") to ensure that there were five slate entries for the five available slots in the nominations.

Meanwhile, Mike Glycer's coverage of the shifting slate drew some ire from the Evil League of Evil. In the comments to the *File770* post covering Dave Creek's withdrawal, Brad Torgersen dropped by to explain a few of the changes:

*“In Dave’s case, it was at his request. Ditto for Juliette Wade. So far, Dave and Juliette are the only two to have declined for other-than-technical reasons. Rennie indicated Sci Phi Journal didn’t have enough issues (in 2014) to qualify. Amy Turner Hughes is a very good new writer who is a Writers of the Future winner, but her story technically won’t reach print until this year; thus she’s not yet eligible”.*

**Brad R. Torgersen** <http://file770.com/author-dave-creek-declines-sad-puppydom/#comment-245519>

Meanwhile, in the comments, Mike Glycer responded to a comment from a Sad Puppy supporter suggesting Creek was being racist towards Larry Correia and Vox Day. Glycer stated:

*“But then, from start to finish, Sad Puppies is a bunch of dishonest posturing, crippled by moral self-contradictions.”*

**Mike Glycer** <http://file770.com/author-dave-creek-declines-sad-puppydom/#comment-245559>

That drew an angry response from Torgersen:

*“Mike, I don’t mind people criticizing the project simply because they don’t like the project. That’s fine. Nobody has to like it. But your accusation that this is merely dishonest posturing and moral self-contradiction is itself a piece of dishonest posturing. Sad Puppies 3 has been clear in its intent from the start. The slate of works and authors covers a political range I’d call exemplary, compared to other recommendation lists which skew heavily to one side. And all Sad Puppies 3 has ever done is encourage fans to get involved. Period. Not, “Let’s ruin the Hugos!” Not, “Let’s burn it down!” No. “Get involved and vote for the authors and works you want to see on the ballot!” The end.”*

**Brad R. Torgersen** <http://file770.com/author-dave-creek-declines-sad-puppydom/#comment-245798>

Baen author Michael Z. Williamson, John C. Wright, Larry Correia and Sarah A. Hoyt each in turn dropped into the comments to dismiss Mike Glycer’s opinion. Williamson, Wright and Hoyt each used a very similar set of words to state that they had never even heard of Mike Glycer before. Quite why then they were commenting on his post was unclear, doubly so when Glycer patiently pointed out that both Wright and Williamson had definitely heard of him and *File770* before because they had left comments there before. Torgersen, Williamson, Wright, Correia and Hoyt were each dismissive of Glycer’s multiple Hugo nominations and cited them as evidence that the Hugo Awards were broken while either ignoring or demeaning the fact that they were nominations for fanzines and fan writing over decades.

A different way of looking at the potential impact of the Sad Puppies 3 slate was being developed at the blog *Chaos Horizon*. Brandon Kempner explained his approach:

*“At Chaos Horizon, I try to use data mining to predict the Hugo and Nebula awards. The core idea here is that the best predictor of the future is the past. I make the assumption that if certain patterns have been established in the awards, those are likely to continue; thus, if we find those patterns, we can make good predictions.”*

<https://chaoshorizon.wordpress.com/2015/02/16/modeling-hugo-voting-campaigns/>

Kempner also made this observation based on past analysis of results:

*“At this point, I think the effectiveness of campaigning is clear. If an author (or group of authors and bloggers) decides to push for a certain text (or texts) to make a final Hugo slate, and if they have a large and passionate enough web following, they can probably do so.”*

*ibid*

Kempner’s analysis used the relative success of the previous Sad Puppy campaigns to predict that at least Correia’s *Monster Hunter Nemesis* and Butcher’s *Skin Game*, would make it to the final ballot. What Kempner was not in a position to do was to judge the impact of the Rabid Puppy slate as it had no precedent in past voting.

Correia and Torgersen were determined to keep the pot-boiling in the meantime. One of Correia’s regular blog features was to run a “book bomb”. These involved picking an author he wanted to promote and encourage his fans to buy the author’s book online in a short period of time.

*“The way a Book Bomb normally works is that we pick one good book worthy of more attention, which is available on Amazon, and then we get as many people as possible to buy it in the same day in order to boost it up through the ratings. As the rating climbs, it gets in front of more people, until it ends up*

*on an Amazon bestseller list, where lots of people who aren't involved in the Book Bomb see it. Success breeds success, the author gets lots of new readers, but more importantly, the author GETS PAID."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/02/25/book-bomb-short-stories-from-the-sad-puppies-slate/>

The above quote is from the Sad Puppies Book Bomb for the Short Story category, which had to work a little differently as the shorts appeared in different forms online (some as stand-alone texts, some in magazines and some in anthologies) but the general principle was the same. The idea that the Sad Puppies 3 slate was a marketing exercise was not explicitly stated as an objective of the campaign but running through the thinking was Correia's belief that he should be helping fellow authors get paid.

Nor was Correia sticking only to promoting the Sad Puppy slate. With many works available for free online, Correia encouraged his fans to pick up some other stories:

*"But since you guys like free short stories, in addition to the Sad Puppies slate, there is the even More Evil RABID PUPPIES SLATE, prepared by Lord Voxemort the Malevolent. There are a couple of short stories on there I'd encourage you to take a look at, and here they are, FREE for your convenience:*

*The Parliament of Beasts and Birds by John C. Wright. Which I have read, and it is great... But this is John C. Wright we're talking about, who I think is one of the best wordsmiths alive.*

*Turncoat by Steve Rzasa, which I've not read yet, but I've heard that it is really good."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/02/26/book-bomb-results-more-free-stories-and-sad-puppies-slate-update/>

The Sad and Rabid Puppies had certainly made a splash but in wider fandom, the reaction was more of an exasperated sigh than a fierce backlash. People were busy considering their own picks for the Hugo Awards and the previous Sad Puppy campaigns had led to only a small (but visible) impact on the final ballot. However, the 2015 Sad Puppy campaign was already significantly different:

- It was being actively promoted on multiple blogs
- It was providing supporters with other ways of taking collective action (e.g., book bombs)
- It was building on support developed in 2014 both in general and in actual numbers of people eligible to nominate
- Vox Day's Rabid Puppy slate overlapped in content significantly and Day's followers were experienced in GamerGate/4chan-like online "raids" — coordinated online activity

With the benefit of hindsight, the impact of the dual Puppy slates was likely to be substantial.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milo\\_Yiannopoulos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milo_Yiannopoulos)
- [2] May's hypothesis being that criticism of racism and sexism was racist and sexist because it amounted to attacks on white men. It didn't make a lot of sense but he used a lot of words to explain it.
- [3] No longer available and to be honest, the world is no poorer for that as a result, but here is an archive version of the quotes  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20150211070037/http://www.jamesmaystock.com/essays/Pages/SFFRacistQuotes2.html>
- [4] <https://web.archive.org/web/20150205040026/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/02/an-sjw-hugo-slate.html>
- [5] Of Sanford's actual picks (<http://www.jasonsanford.com/blog/2015/2/my-hugo-and-nebula-award-nominations>) only one made it to the final ballot: *The Three-Body Problem* by Cixin Liu. This would prove to be a particular notable choice.

## 38: March

The late February death of actor Leonard Nimoy was greeted with sadness by science fiction fans. The actor whose iconic performances as Spock in *Star Trek* had stretched from the show's initial pilot episode in 1964 to the reboot of the film franchise in 2013<sup>[1]</sup>. On March 12, Sir Terry Pratchett died at the age of 66. The acclaimed fantasy writer and humourist died of early-onset Alzheimer's. Although Pratchett's novels and he himself had received many awards in his long career, he had not won a Hugo Award — although his novel *Going Postal* had received enough votes to be a finalist in 2005, he had declined the nomination<sup>[2]</sup>.

With Hugo Award nominations set to close on March 10, Brad Torgersen and Larry Correia were still looking for ways to promote the Sad Puppies 3 slate. On March 8, two days before Hugo nominations would close, the pair of Sad Puppy leaders appeared on *The Adventures in Sci-Fi Publishing* podcast<sup>[3]</sup>. The tone was generally light-hearted, with Correia emphasising that the campaign had a humorous element and a sense of fun. The political aspect was downplayed. The podcast itself was one of the few 'neutral' venues to give the Sad Puppy campaign much publicity and a couple of episodes later they had a counter-balancing interview with fan-writer Paul Weimer from the *Skiffy and Fanty* podcast<sup>[4]</sup>. While acknowledging many of the flaws with the Hugo Awards, Weimer politely pulled apart many of the claims that Torgersen and Correia had made in the earlier episode.

Despite their controversial nature, at this stage, the twin Sad and Rabid Puppy campaigns had not received a great deal of third-party coverage. Ever conspiracy-minded, Vox Day was concerned that the lack of reaction pointed to the possibility of secret shenanigans. In the comments to his own post reminding his followers to nominate, Day stated:

*"It wouldn't surprise me if we did well, and it wouldn't surprise me if we were shut out entirely. There hasn't been nearly enough whining and crying and gnashing of teeth, which makes me suspect the existence of a stealth SJW slate."*

Vox Day <https://web.archive.org/web/20150311045459/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/03/rabid-puppies-final-notice.html#c39196900093737571><sup>[5]</sup>

At his blog *Chaos Horizon*, Brandon Kempner made a stab at predicting the Hugo Best Novel finalists<sup>[6]</sup> which drew an analysis from Vox Day. Kempner had used 2014 data to estimate the likely impact of the Puppy slates, but Day pointed out that in 2014 his so-called "Dread Ilk" (a cadre of Day's online followers) had not got involved in the Sad Puppy 2 slate until after nominations had closed.

*"First, he probably isn't aware that the Dread Ilk did not get involved until AFTER the nominations were closed. So he's probably missing about 120 votes right there. Furthermore, we know that an unknown number of Dread Ilk, and an equally unknown number of new Sad Puppies, got involved this year. So, my guess is that his 330 estimate should be at least 500 for the combined Puppies and could be even higher. If we assume his 2,350 estimate is correct, and I find his reasoning to be perfectly plausible there, then the Puppies will represent between 20 and 25 percent of the 2015 nominating vote."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150315051535/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/03/the-ghosts-of-machine-are-pro-puppy.html>

Day wasn't claiming a Puppy sweep was inevitable. He was still concerned that there could be a "650-strong stealth SJW slate that will lock out the Puppies entirely across the board" but he had not seen any evidence of one<sup>[7]</sup>.

The dual slate approach of Sad and Rabid Puppies also meant that the broader campaign really could include nominees with different perspectives on the Hugo Award. Sad Puppies 3 semiprozine nominee *Abyss & Apex* (not included on the Rabid Puppies slate) ran a positive editorial endorsing Torgersen's campaign but projecting the editor Wendy S. Delmater's views about the award:

*"I'd like to close this editorial with a comment from "the SAD PUPPIES: some responses to the fallout" post on Brad R. Torgersen's blog. It addresses the concern of some that SP3 is "vote buying" or bad motives like squashing diversity of any kind. No, the Hugos are The People's Choice Award of the genre. Thanks to SP3, people are realizing they can vote. If that makes the usual suspects a little concerned (most of whom I know and love and have voted for in the past, like fellow editors Ellen Datlow, Neil Clarke, Gardner Dozois, Sheila Williams, and John Joseph Adams), I say bring it on. Authors and publishing houses who have campaigned in the past, however quietly, must feel like the Redcoats did*

*during the American Revolutionary War. They may have done things the old fashioned way, and thought the revolutionaries guerrilla tactics uncouth. But, if I recall correctly, the revolutionaries won. And today, we're allies with England."*

[https://web.archive.org/web/20150426184546/http://www.abyssexpazine.com/2015/03/sad\\_puppies\\_3/](https://web.archive.org/web/20150426184546/http://www.abyssexpazine.com/2015/03/sad_puppies_3/)

Delmater saw the Sad Puppy campaign as at worst "uncouth" and potentially a force for good that would shake up the awards. On the topic of the closely related Rabid Puppy campaign, her editorial was silent.

Elsewhere a different Hugo-related conflict entered a new phase and in doing so brought a new player into our narrative. In 2015, George R.R. Martin was one of the most notable fantasy authors in the world. The HBO television series *Game of Thrones* (based on Martin's *A Song of Fire and Ice* books) was a pop-culture phenomenon and a few weeks away from starting its fifth season, while Martin's fans were desperately hoping that he was close to finishing the next book in the series entitled *The Winds of Winter*<sup>[8]</sup>. However, Martin's fame was a relatively recent aspect of a long and successful career in writing. That career included a long connection with Worldcon and the Hugo Awards including several wins for shorter fiction and nominations for his novels<sup>[9]</sup>. So it was not out of character for Martin to discuss likely contenders on his blog.

On March 8, a few days short of nominations closing, Martin posted on his blog some recommendations for different categories. Most were unremarkable but Martin's choice for Best Fan writer was both more notable and controversial:

*"BEST FAN WRITER. There have been arguments in the past about what, precisely, constitutes fan writing, and who should or should not be eligible for this award. LAURA J. MIXON is a professional writer, and a very talented one, with half a dozen strong novels under her own name and her pseudonym of M.J. Locke... but this year she published online, in a non-professional and unpaid capacity, 'A Report on Damage Done by One Individual Under Several Names,' a detailed, eloquent, and devastating expose of the venomous internet troll best known as 'Requires Hate' and 'Winterfox.' It's not your usual sort of fan writing, admittedly... but it wasn't done for money, and it wasn't published professionally, and it's a terrific piece of journalism, an important piece that speaks to issues of growing importance to fandom in this internet age. So I'm nominating Mixon for Best Fan Writer, and I urge you to do the same."*

<https://grrm.livejournal.com/410394.html>

While much of the coverage around the *Requires Hate* controversy (including Mixon's own report) had discussed some of the issues around singling out one person within a fandom for formal criticism of their behaviour, Martin's endorsement was more direct. As Mike Glycer would point out<sup>[10]</sup>, Martin's Hugo recommendations had generally not been influential in the recent past but nevertheless, in the anarchic and leaderless world of Worldcon fandom, it was a close to an official endorsement of Mixon's report as possible. If Laura Mixon became a finalist for Best Fan Writer on the strength of her report on *Requires Hate* then it might turn the category into a kind of referendum on the contents. There was no capacity for the Hugo Awards to censure an individual but for better or worse George R. R. Martin was pointing to a way of doing so.

Meanwhile, meanwhile... Worldcon, in its 2015 regeneration as Sasquan, had announced that it would have a genuine spaceman at the convention<sup>[11]</sup>. A different convention, gaming convention *GenCon*, found itself at odds with the governor of Indiana over so-called "religious freedom" legislation that would allow businesses to discriminate against LGBTQI+ people<sup>[12]</sup>. The governor, a Republican by the name of Mike Pence, would ignore their plea. While from the spiralling abuse vortex that was now GamerGate, Milo Yiannopoulos attempted to find a third culture war front by targeting comics books, after Marvel released a story arc for *Thor* in which the position of God of Thunder is held by a woman<sup>[13]</sup>.

The Hugo Awards themselves fell into a scheduled period of silent activity. Nominations closed on March 10 and the finalists were set to be announced on April 4. In between time, nominating votes had to be collected from the online submissions and from postal votes. Because the nomination stage is an open process in which members might vote for anything (eligible or not), there is significant work to be done to count the votes. Worldcon members may have misspelt names and some works go by multiple titles. The eligibility of works is also a thorny question and even prior to the nominations closing some potential finalists had tricky eligibility questions. Andy Weir's popular near-future space adventure *The Martian* had been a *New York Times* bestseller in 2014 and its mix of heroic impromptu engineering and engaging writing would have made it a potential Hugo winner that would be popular with both the Sad Puppy audience and



broader science fiction fans. However, the book had already been published by Weir first as a blog serial and then as a self-published eBook in 2011<sup>[14]</sup> making *The Martian* ineligible for the 2015 Hugo Awards. Confusingly Weir himself was still eligible for the Campbell/Astounding Award for Best New Writer for 2015.

A more subtle eligibility question had also become apparent before nominations closed. One of the crowd-sourced picks for the Sad Puppies 3 slate had been “*Tuesdays With Molakesh the Destroyer*” by Megan Grey in *Fireside Fiction* magazine. The story had been published in late 2014 but in an edition that was dated January 2015. It was on this official publication date that awards like the Hugos and the Nebulas typically judged eligibility and the story had already been deemed ineligible for the Nebulas awards that year. It was going to have to wait until the 2016 award season to be eligible.

With more stories having complex and unconventional publishing histories, determining the eligibility of nominees was becoming a difficult task for the volunteers who worked as Hugo administrators. In addition, not everybody with enough votes to be a finalist actually wants to be a finalist. As mentioned above, Sir Terry Pratchett had turned down a Hugo nomination in 2005. Consequently, the announcement of Hugo finalists takes place in two stages. First, the finalists are notified confidentially. If some finalists decline the nomination (for any reason) then a new finalist is included based on the votes. Only when the complete set of finalists is confirmed is there a public announcement. As a consequence, nominees are asked to not make public statements about being a Hugo finalist until the official announcement is made.

In late March of 2015, the Hugo Awards were in a twilight state of rumours. Finalists were being notified and while people largely kept their new-found status quiet, inevitably there was gossip and hints circulating through fannish and professional networks.

On March 24 at her blog, editor and long-time fan Teresa Nielsen Hayden made a post entitled “Distant thunder, and the smell of ozone”:

*“I’ve been keeping an ear on the SF community’s gossip, and I think the subject of this year’s Hugo nominations is about to explode.*

*Let me make this clear: my apprehensions are not based on insider information. I’m just correlating bits of gossip. It may help that I’ve been a member of the SF community for decades.*

*If the subject does blow up, I may write about it in this space. In any event, watch that space.”*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/archives/016177.html>

Nielsen Hayden did not have any details to give and in some ways fannish controversies are the norm in an expect the unexpected sort of way. In the comments, people picked out two likely possibilities for 2015 Hugo controversies: Requires Hate/Mixon report on the one hand and the Sad/Rabid Puppies on the other. If it was the latter, then either notable Sad Puppies being finalists or them NOT being finalists because of eligibility reasons could both be sources of extended controversy. On March 25 in the comments to the post, Teresa Nielsen Hayden expanded on her expectations:

*“Less callout culture; more sad puppies and identity politics. And I’m pretty sure it isn’t limited to the novel category. It may affect the entire ballot.*

*You know what? I find myself missing Jim Baen. His aesthetics were not my aesthetics, but he had a real understanding of fandom and the greater SF community. I like to think he’d have seen the danger in associating with a semi-anonymous bunch of irresponsible, resentment-driven malfesants who have no stake in the well-being of the SF world. Larry Correia and the other sad puppies might have listened to him.*

*The hardcore GamerGate contingent favors tactics like verbal abuse and intimidation (including death threats), doxing, identity spoofing, and a wide range of dirty tricks. Some of them find it amusing to call down SWAT teams on their targets. This is not just your everyday People Behaving Badly on the Internet.*

*When you invite thugs into your argument, you’re not using them as shock troops; they’re using you as cover. And you’re pretty much guaranteeing that at some point in the future, you’ll wind up feebly protesting that you had no idea they’d do that. And maybe you didn’t; but you did know they were thugs.*

*[...]That's how it tends to happen inside the community. From what I'm hearing now (but haven't been hearing about earlier), we either have outside involvement, or there's been a depth of conspiracy within the community that's a scandal in its own right. It's possible we have both."*

<https://nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/archives/016177.html#4044779>

Her speculation would be quickly (if partially) confirmed. Baen author Michael Z. Williamson announced on Twitter that his self-published book of jokes and anecdotes "Wisdom From My Internet" was a Hugo finalist for the Best Related Work category. He quickly withdrew his announcement when he was told that he was supposed to wait until the official announcement of the finalists<sup>[15]</sup>.

This one public leak was a minor mishap in terms of etiquette but was a canary in a coal mine for the potential shape of the 2015 Hugo Awards. Williamson's book was on both the Sad and Rabid Puppy slates and while Williamson did have his own fanbase, it was a very improbable finalist for the Hugo Awards. The book was little more than snark and jokes culled from Facebook and other social media and only vaguely related to science fiction. The joke name of the publisher was "Patriarchy Press" and the whole enterprise looked an awful lot like trolling. It was, by most measures, one of the weakest entries on the Sad Puppy slate and an odd choice given that Williamson had written creditable eligible science fiction stories in 2014. In addition, the Sad Puppy slate for Best Related Work had included four other works, each of which was at least superficially more plausible contenders for the category than Williamson's book of second-hand jokes. If Williamson was a finalist, then it was likely the other four works from the slates were also finalists! And if the Sad/Rabid Puppies had swept all the nominations for one category then what about the other categories...

Rumours of Sad Puppy victories were appearing closer to the source as well. At *Mad Genius Club*, Kate Paulk led her March 26 post with this statement:

*"There are... interesting whispers and things floating around the Internets in places that are rightfully private. I'm not at liberty to reveal what those whispers are saying, but I can say this much: the announcement of the Hugo nominations on April 4 should be interesting indeed, and will potentially kick Sad Puppies Three into the final phase of encouraging everyone who's eligible to read the nominated works if they haven't already read them, and then make sure they vote. Word is that the Hugo committee had to sort through more nomination ballots than ever before, which means that competition for the actual award is likely to be stiff."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/03/26/carefully-on-tip-toe-stealing/>

And if Sad Puppies 3 was a success then what about another sequel? Paulk had an answer for that as well:

*"Because in a fit of even greater insanity than usual, yours truly, Kate the Impaler of the Evil Legion of Evil, will be picking up the banner for Sad Puppies 4 and running with it. I even promised not to impale anyone with it (it's such a pretty flag, and getting blood and... stuff... all over it would make those poor sad puppies even more sad. Even the Evil Legion of Evil has standards, you know. We're completely against letting Sad Puppies stay sad. We want them to be happy)."*

ibid

Brad Torgersen was also in a combative mood, showing up on author Pat Cadigan's page after she speculated on March 25 that the Sad Puppies were likely to be complaining about losing. Cadigan had said posted:

*"So I've heard there's this group calling themselves Sad Puppies who are complaining about not getting on the Hugo ballot. Memo to Sad Puppies: Man up and stop whining. I was a pro for thirty-four years before I won my first Hugo and I didn't go around crying about it. Here's a clue about Real Life: you got \*nothing\* coming. Better writers than you have come and gone without getting a single trophy. Put on your big boy/girl pants and work harder at your writing. If you write better stories, maybe someone will want to put them on an awards ballot. S. Nobody likes a crybaby."*

<https://www.facebook.com/PatCadigan/posts/10153237251516757>

Cadigan's statement had not been a prediction about the results but rather a statement about the general attitude of the Sad Puppy campaign but Torgersen took exception to it.

*"Administrative note: Sad Puppies 3 is not a vanity project, it is a deliberate attempt to do openly what has been done for a long time now behind closed doors. Ergo, rally people to vote for deserving works and authors. In our estimation, the SP3 slate contains numerous established and new writers (across*

*the spectrum) who'd otherwise struggle to find recognition. Likewise, we're hoping to change the short televised category so that it contains something other than Dr. Who. Sometimes, when a thing seems stuck in a rut, you have to nudge it out. Or, in our case, blast it out with dynamite."*

Brad Torgersen comment on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/PatCadigan/posts/10153237251516757>

The comments quickly filled with many people supporting Torgersen's campaign including Sad Puppy nominees Tom Kratman, Lou Antonelli, and author/editor L. Jagi Lamplighter, the wife of Sad Puppy nominee John C. Wright. Among the kinds of negative comments were people questioning who Pat Cadigan was (on her own Facebook page) or stating that they had never heard of her. This style of comments was an approach used in a set of comments used by Evil League of Evil members to attack Mike Glycer at his *File770* blog after he had made negative comments about the Sad Puppy slates (see chapter 37) and was similar to the "literally who" style of harassment used by GamerGate towards critics.

Author and SFWA Vice-President<sup>[16]</sup> Cat Rambo took some of the commenters to task for their behaviour in the comments:

*"I gotta say. Dogpiling someone who's going through cancer is not the best way to convince anyone your group has any sort of human kindness on your side. In my opinion, a lot of you should be heartily ashamed of yourselves."*

Cat Rambo comment on Facebook, *ibid*

Torgersen and Kratman responded in ways that reflected their personalities:

*"It was Cadigan who decided to unload some rhetorical buckshot, at a target she clearly misunderstood. Myself and the others have posted corrections. I am sensitive to the fact Cadigan's going through the nine oncological hells. But just because Pat is sick, doesn't mean Pat can't get the facts wrong."*

Brad Torgersen comment on Facebook, *ibid*

*"Her own Facebook page or the front page of the New York Times, Cat, wrong is wrong and – for her sake, if for no one else's, and \_precisely\_ because she's ill – she deserves the boon of having her errors corrected."*

Tom Kratman comment on Facebook, *ibid*

There were no factual errors in Cadigan's post, just her opinion of the Sad Puppies but the relative lack of pushback against the Sad Puppies meant that this one short Facebook post was quickly targeted with hundreds of comments.

On his own blog, Torgersen cited both Teresa Nielsen Hayden and Pat Cadigan as examples of people attempting to delegitimise the Sad Puppies or of misunderstanding the campaign. Torgersen would go on to say:

*"There are people who find the very existence of Sad Puppies 3 to be an affront to their personhoods. A sinister outside force come to trouble their precious genre and its establishment. For the people deliberately misconstruing the purpose and thrust of Sad Puppies 3, it's all about getting out in front and shaping a narrative. They're smart. They know that truth can be overwhelmed with lies if you just spin your narrative adroitly, and with enough volume."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170308033107/https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/03/29/nail-house/>

Torgersen only cited the *Making Light* post and Pat Cadigan's Facebook as evidence of a counter-campaign to the Sad Puppies and as noted above, even Vox Day and the denizens of the *Mad Genius Club* had overtly stated how little counter-reaction there had been.

On March 30, Torgersen followed up with a post specifically attacking Teresa Nielsen Hayden's comments at *Making Light*. Taking much the same tone, it attacked the "SMOFs"<sup>[17]</sup> in much the same way that Larry Correia had done in previous campaigns. In the comments, Sad Puppies 3 nominee and editor of *Abyss & Apex Magazine* Wendy S. Delmater corrected Torgersen's usage:

*"My understanding the term SMOF is that these are the people who RUN conventions. They do the work behind the scenes. Just so you understand that an entire network of hard-working volunteer fans should not be lumped together with mud-slingers."*

Wendy S. Delmater, *ibid*

Torgersen would later devise a new term “CHORF” for “Cliquish, Holier-than-thou, Obnoxious, Reactionary, Fanatics”<sup>[18]</sup> and use it to replace the term “SMOF”.

Delmater also raised the issue of GamerGate in her comment, overtly attacking its worst aspects and attempting to distance it from the Sad Puppy campaign:

*“The inflammatory label “gamergater” is almost impossible to prove or disprove. That and the suggestion that we are mostly interested in military SF were eventually shaped into a consensus that SP3 supporters may be physically dangerous (you know, like me, the 60-year-old grandmother). While most of the whole GamerGate thing is indeed an internet kerfuffle, the \_worst\_ of the trollish GamerGaters really are misogynist and criminally dangerous stalkers. Hey, look, we know that real people have been stalked and threatened over this and other issues and we (this should be obvious) do not support criminals . We are for ethical things like the rule of law.”*

Wendy S. Delmater , *ibid*

Vox Day responded soon after with a stern warning:

*“Wendy, you are casting false aspersions in ignorance. I strongly suggest you stop doing so. I am a GamerGater and I have been since before it was called GamerGate. What you are saying is absolutely false. You do not know anything of the kind. Look it up.”*

Vox Day, *ibid*

Delmater had her own stern response for Day:

*“Point of information: I am a personal friend of Frank Wu, Brianna’s husband, who I have published. I have no idea where you get your information, and apologies if you trusted your source(s), but mine is from the horses’ mouth. They actually had to leave for a while. Frank has no reason to lie to me.”*

Wendy S. Delmater , *ibid*

Unfortunately for Delmater, she was already embroiled in a campaign with open ties to GamerGate, including Larry Correia’s overt endorsement of GamerGate and Vox Day’s active participation in it.

Naturally, John C. Wright, Vox Day and Larry Correia each had their own posts attacking Teresa Nielsen Hayden’s comments at *Making Light*. Each of them framed the *Making Light* post and the subsequent comments as part of a wider pushback against the Sad Puppies and yet...this single comment thread was the only primary evidence of any kind of Sad Puppy reaction presented. For Correia, the one post was one post too many and it had tipped Brad Torgersen over the edge:

*“So the Powder Blue Care Bear of the Evil Legion of Evil has finally been pushed too far, and out comes the flame thrower.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/03/31/sad-puppies-update-the-melt-down-continues/>

Correia also cited Nielsen Hayden’s speculation as proof positive that there was an inner cabal running things:

*“So here we are now, a few days away and Teresa is worried. Why? Because as an insider, the people she already knew were SUPPOSED to get Hugo nominations haven’t been contacted... But if there wasn’t insider info and insider cliques, and most of the noms aren’t predestined forgone conclusions, how does she even know she’s supposed to be so worried and upset?”*

Whoops. “

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/03/31/sad-puppies-update-the-melt-down-continues/>

Nielsen Hayden had directly stated that she was correlating gossip and rumours and in addition leaks were happening from the Sad Puppy camp. Her insights were vague but astute, yet they didn’t require any special “insider cliques” to draw from.

By March 30, less than a week after Nielsen Hayden’s speculation, posts by Sad Puppy leaders and people connected to the campaign were more than sufficient to draw a grim conclusion:

*“The Hugo Award nominees won’t be announced until April 4, but you don’t need to be Nostradamus to see what’s coming. The Sad Puppies slate of nominees essentially swept all the Hugo Award categories with the exception of Best Novel.*

*Don’t believe me? Then wait until Saturday and find out. Or you can examine the evidence. Brad R. Torgersen and Larry Correia, who organized the campaign, have both written posts claiming a pending victory without actually stating that their slate won (since the nominations are technically sealed until the 4th). I’m sure they’ve received the same private messages I’ve had from people who either made the final ballot or know of people who made the list. Add in that some of the nominees from the Sad Puppies slate have outed themselves, and that Kate Paulk is already gearing up to run a Sad Puppies 4 campaign — and yeah, it’s obvious where all this is going.”*

<http://www.jasonsanford.com/blog/2015/3/yes-the-sad-puppies-campaign-swept-the-hugo-awards>

On March 24 Teresa Nielsen Hayden had predicted an explosion, Jason Sanford now had another prediction:

*“I predict a backlash is about to wash over the Sad Puppies. And when it does, it’ll be interesting to see what happens next in our genre.”*

ibid

They were both correct...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonard\\_Nimoy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonard_Nimoy)
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terry\\_Pratchett](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terry_Pratchett) and <https://news.ansible.uk/a218.html>
- [3] <http://www.adventuresinscificpublishing.com/2015/03/aisfp-289-larry-correia-brad-r-torgersen-sad-puppies/>
- [4] <http://www.adventuresinscificpublishing.com/2015/03/aisfp-291-anti-sad-puppies-with-paul-weimer/> and also Weimer’s own blog carried some of the many points he made <http://skyseastone.net/jvstin/?p=4154>
- [5] There are similar comments later in the month at *Mad Genius Club* on this post: <https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/03/26/carefully-on-tip-toe-stealing/> (which appears later in the chapter for other reasons)
- [6] <https://chaoshorizon.wordpress.com/2015/03/01/2015-hugo-prediction-version-4-0/>
- [7] It is worth comparing Day’s numbers here with an analysis done in September 2016 at *Rocket Stack Rank* <http://www.rocketstackrank.com/2016/09/reanalysis-of-slate-voting-in-2016-hugo.html#rabidvsad>
- [8] Spoilers: he wasn’t close to finishing it [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Song\\_of\\_Ice\\_and\\_Fire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Song_of_Ice_and_Fire)
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_R.\\_R.\\_Martin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_R._R._Martin)
- [10] <http://file770.com/george-r-r-martin-makes-a-suggestion/>
- [11] <http://file770.com/nasa-astronaut-named-sasquan-special-guest/>
- [12] [https://files.gencon.com/Gen\\_Con\\_Statement\\_Regarding\\_SB101.pdf](https://files.gencon.com/Gen_Con_Statement_Regarding_SB101.pdf)
- [13] [https://www.salon.com/2015/03/24/the\\_new\\_gamergate\\_angry\\_white\\_men\\_are\\_trying\\_to\\_shut\\_down\\_diverse\\_comics/](https://www.salon.com/2015/03/24/the_new_gamergate_angry_white_men_are_trying_to_shut_down_diverse_comics/)
- [14] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Martian\\_\(Weir\\_novel\)#Publishing\\_history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Martian_(Weir_novel)#Publishing_history)
- [15] Williamson’s announcement has gone but this Tweet from the *Book Smugglers* review blog refers to it <https://twitter.com/booksmugglers/status/580720241837256704>
- [16] If I have my timings right, she was VP at this point of 2015 and President later in the year <https://www.sfga.org/about/current-officers/prior-sfga-board-officers/>
- [17] “Secret Masters of Fandom” a semi-ironic term used for people with experience running conventions but used by Larry Correia as a term for an inner cabal attempting to control fans
- [18] Yes, apparently Torgersen was not aware of what the word “reactionary” means and did devise a term for his imagined opponents that was unintentionally ironic <https://web.archive.org/web/20171103235744/https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/03/31/chorf-its-a-word-now/>

## 39: April Part 1 — the Finalists

Steve Davidson at *Amazing Stories* got the ball rolling. By April 2, two days from the official announcement, the rumours and leaks all pointed to some significant impact on the nominations by the Sad and Rabid Puppy campaigns. Davidson offered what he saw as a short-term solution to a longer-term problem:

*“I’m going to place ANY nominee that is associated with advancing a political agenda BELOW No Award. If that means that No Award is my top pick in one or more categories, then so be it. (I’ll read the works in the voters pack so I can rate the works as #1 behind No Award, #2 behind No Award, etc.)*

*This will be a default position. I don’t want to play the Sad Puppy’s game – nor anyone else’s who decides that they can use the Hugo Awards for purposes other than originally intended – so I’m not going to. I don’t care what side of the political spectrum the voting slate comes from, nor what its motivations are, nor what the agenda is – good, bad or indifferent. If a work is on a voting slate (NOT an eligibility list) then it goes below No Award.”*

<https://amazingstories.com/2015/04/ill-casting-final-hugo-vote/>

Intentionally or not, if the Sad Puppy slate had a major impact on the 2015 Hugo nominations then there was a real danger of the Hugo Awards becoming dominated by slates in the future. Davidson suggested that the only viable immediate response was to make use of the Hugo Awards get-out clause. In the final voting, members always have the choice for voting “no award” — a “none of the above” choice that can win a whole category if popular enough. Hugo voters had used the option regularly as a way of registering a protest vote but ‘no award’ (sometimes jokingly called *Noah Ward*) had only won on rare occasions.

Davidson was right to prepare himself mentally for the announcement.

The Puppies had swept the Hugo finalists. *File770* had the news:

*“A total of 61 final ballot nominees appeared on Brad Torgersen’s Sad Puppies 3 list or Vox Day’s Rabid Puppies list. Only 24 nominees did not come from either list.*

*Six Hugo categories are completely filled with nominees from the two slates. The only category totally without puppies is Best Fan artist — doubtless because neither Sad Puppies nor Rabid Puppies recommended any fan artists.”*

<http://file770.com/instant-analysis-of-the-2015-hugo-nominees/>

In fact, the Puppy supporters had technically voted for even more finalists than that. Some of their choices had been deemed ineligible and other finalists had declined their nomination. One of those declined nominations came from a surprising quarter. Larry Correia’s *Monster Hunter Nemesis* had actually received enough nominating votes to be a finalist but Correia had declined the nomination.

*“I refused the nomination for one simple reason. The Sad Puppies campaign isn’t about any one person. I felt that ultimately my presence would be a distraction from the overall mission.*

*The reason I refused my nomination is that as long as the guy who started Sad Puppies stayed in, the more our opposition would try to dismiss the whole campaign as being all about my ego, or some selfish personal desire to get award recognition. Nope. I really meant it when I said I don’t care about winning anything for myself. I hope this proves that once and for all.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/04/04/sad-puppies-update-the-nominees-announced-and-why-i-refused-my-nomination/>

Correia had included his work on the Sad Puppies 3 slate to encourage his followers to vote for the Sad Puppies 3 slate. It was, as he had said earlier in the year, a strategic move. However, by extension, as “strategy” it only made any sense if the intention was to encourage people to vote for a slate and a slate with a political objective:

*“This is just one little battle in an ongoing culture war between artistic free expression and puritanical bullies who think they represent \*real\* fandom. In the long term I want writers to be free to write whatever they want without fear of social justice witch hunts, I want creators to not have to worry about*

*silencing themselves to appease the perpetually outraged, and I want fans to enjoy themselves without having some entitled snob lecture them about how they are having fun wrong. I want our shrinking genre to grow. I think if we can get back to where “award nominated” isn’t a synonym for “preachy crap” to the most fans, we’ll do it.*

*That’s what I want. Strategically, we get there faster without them trying to spin it as all about me.”*  
ibid

In the headline Best Novel category, the combined Sad and Rabid Puppy slates had won three of the five finalist positions but would have won four out of five if Correia had not withdrawn. The Sad Puppy-nominated Baen book *Trial by Fire* by Charles E. Gannon and the Rabid Puppy-nominated Baen book *The Chaplain’s War* by Brad Torgersen both fell a few votes short of being a finalist. The addition of Correia’s withdrawal meant that despite everything, once again no Baen novels were Hugo finalists. In an added irony, one of the two Tor published novels in the finalists was the Sad/Rabid Puppy-nominated *The Dark Between the Stars* by Kevin J. Anderson.

In the next chapters, we will look at some of the immediate and later reactions to the Puppy sweep of the finalists. However, in this chapter, I want to concentrate on the shifting nature of the finalists.

In the days that followed many of the people co-opted by Torgersen and Day as nominees for their slates discussed their inclusion. Matthew David Surridge, a writer at *Black Gate* fanzine and a nominee on both the Sad and Rabid Puppy slates for Best Fan Writer, explained that he had declined a nomination. In a lengthy post he explained his fundamental objections to Torgersen’s campaign and noted that:

*“Had anybody contacted me to explain the thinking behind the Puppy campaign and ask if I wanted me to be on the slate, I would have politely refused. In retrospect, I certainly should have sent everybody involved e-mails asking to be withdrawn from the Puppy lists in February. I want to sincerely apologise to everybody involved with both Puppy campaigns for not taking action at that time; and while I’m at it, I’ll also apologise to the Hugo organisers for letting things go as far as they did.”*

<https://www.blackgate.com/2015/04/04/a-detailed-explanation/>

Surridge had discovered accidentally that he was on the slates in February but thinking that it was unlikely that he’d be a finalist, he had ignored them. When contacted by the Hugo administrators, he declined. Surridge declining meant that Laura Mixon, author of the report on *Requires Hate*, became a finalist, which also meant that Best Fan Writer had one non-Puppy-nominated finalist.

Meanwhile, fans had questioned the eligibility of several of the Puppy-nominated finalists. On April 13, the list of finalists was revised. In Best Novelette, John C. Wright’s *Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus* was deemed ineligible because it had been published online in 2013. That story was replaced by a non-slated work, *“The Day the World Turned Upside Down”* by Thomas Olde Heuvelt. In Best Professional Artist, Jon Eno was disqualified and replaced with a different Puppy-nominated finalist, Kirk DouPonce. In Best Novella, works by John C. Wright and Tom Kratman had also been challenged as ineligible because they had been published prior to 2013, but the administrators ruled that the 2014 versions were sufficiently different.<sup>[1]</sup>

On April 14, there were two more high-profile withdrawals. Annie Bellet pulled her short story *Goodnight Stars* from the Hugos, saying:

*“I am withdrawing because this has become about something very different than great science fiction. I find my story, and by extension myself, stuck in a game of political dodge ball, where I’m both a conscripted player and also a ball. (Wrap your head around that analogy, if you can, ha!) All joy that might have come from this nomination has been co-opted, ruined, or sapped away. This is not about celebrating good writing anymore, and I don’t want to be a part of what it has become.”*

<https://anniebellet.com/hugo-story-withdrawn/>

On the same day, Larry Correia’s writing friend and previous Sad Puppy nominee Marko Kloos withdrew his novel *Lines of Departure*. Kloos explicitly linked his withdrawal to Vox Day’s role in the results:

*“It has come to my attention that “Lines of Departure” was one of the nomination suggestions in Vox Day’s “Rabid Puppies” campaign. Therefore—and regardless of who else has recommended the novel for award consideration—the presence of “Lines of Departure” on the shortlist is almost certainly due to my inclusion on the “Rabid Puppies” slate. For that reason, I had no choice but to withdraw my*

acceptance of the nomination. I cannot in good conscience accept an award nomination that I feel I may not have earned solely with the quality of the nominated work.

I also wish to disassociate myself from the originator of the “Rabid Puppies” campaign. To put it bluntly: if this nomination gives even the appearance that Vox Day or anyone else had a hand in giving it to me because of my perceived political leanings, I don’t want it. I want to be nominated for awards because of the work, not because of the “right” or “wrong” politics.”

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150417191239/http://www.munchkinwrangler.com/2015/04/15/a-statement-on-my-hugo-nomination/>

Ironically, Bellet’s withdrawal did not improve the ballot any. Late in the nomination process, many Puppy supporters had become aware that Megan Grey’s “*Tuesdays With Molakesh the Destroyer*” was ineligible as it was officially published in 2015. The slates had added other stories as replacements so there was effectively seven Sad/Rabid Puppy-nominated stories to choose from. With Grey’s story removed, John C. Wright’s “*The Parliament of Beasts and Birds*” had gained a spot. With Bellet’s story also removed, Steve Diamond’s “*A Single Samurai*” was added. The whole category was still Sad/Rabid Puppy nominees but the net effect was the field had shifted from 3 women and 2 men to 1 woman and 4 men.

Kloos withdrawal, though, had a dramatic impact on the set of finalists. His novel was replaced by *The Three-Body Problem* by Cixin Liu translated into English by Ken Liu. Translated works had been Hugo finalists before but it was unusual and the novel which had been hugely popular in China, was a genuinely different novel. The net effect of the change was that the Best Novel Category now had three finalists that were on neither the Sad or Rabid Puppy slates and only two that were.

There were two further last-minute changes. Edmund R. Schubert (Editor, Short Form) of the magazine *Orson Scott Card’s InterGalactic Medicine Show* withdrew, as did the fanzine *Black Gate*. However, both of them had left it too late for the ballots to be changed<sup>[2]</sup>.

This left the choice like this { \*on a Puppy slate }<sup>[3]</sup>

- **Best Novel** (1827 nominating ballots)
  - *Ancillary Sword* by Ann Leckie (Orbit US; Orbit UK) [*Not slated*]
  - \**The Dark Between the Stars* by Kevin J. Anderson (Tor Books) [Sad & Rabid Slates]
  - *The Goblin Emperor* by Katherine Addison (Sarah Monette) (Tor Books) [*Not slated*]
  - *The Three-Body Problem* by Cixin Liu, translated by Ken Liu (Tor) [*Not slated*]
  - \**Skin Game* by Jim Butcher (Roc Books)
- **Best Novella** (1083 nominating ballots)
  - \**Big Boys Don’t Cry* by Tom Kratman (Castalia House)
  - \**Flow* by Arlan Andrews, Sr. (*Analog*, Nov 2014)
  - \**One Bright Star to Guide Them* by John C. Wright (Castalia House)
  - \**Pale Realms of Shade* by John C. Wright (The Book of Feasts & Seasons, Castalia House)
  - \**The Plural of Helen of Troy* by John C. Wright (City Beyond Time: Tales of the Fall of Metachronopolis, Castalia House)
- **Best Novelette** (1031 nominating ballots)
  - \**“Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust, Earth to Alluvium”* by Gray Rinehart (*Orson Scott Card’s InterGalactic Medicine Show*, May 2014)
  - \**“Championship B’tok”* by Edward M. Lerner (*Analog*, Sept 2014)
  - *“The Day the World Turned Upside Down”* by Thomas Olde Heuvelt, translated by Lia Belt (*Lightspeed Magazine*, April 2014) [*Not slated*]
  - \**“The Journeyman: In the Stone House”* by Michael F. Flynn (*Analog*, June 2014)
  - \**“The Triple Sun: A Golden Age Tale”* by Rajnar Vajra (*Analog*, Jul/Aug 2014)
- **Best Short Story** (1174 nominating ballots)
  - \**“On A Spiritual Plain”* by Lou Antonelli (*Sci Phi Journal* #2, Nov 2014)
  - \**“The Parliament of Beasts and Birds”* by John C. Wright (*The Book of Feasts & Seasons*, Castalia House)
  - \**“A Single Samurai”* by Steven Diamond (The Baen Big Book of Monsters, Baen)
  - \**“Totalled”* by Kary English (*Galaxy’s Edge Magazine*, July 2014)
  - \**“Turncoat”* by Steve Rzasa (Riding the Red Horse, Castalia House)



- **Best Related Work** (1150 nominating ballots)
  - \* “**The Hot Equations: Thermodynamics and Military SF**” by Ken Burnside (*Riding the Red Horse*, Castalia House)
  - \* *Letters from Gardner* by Lou Antonelli (The Merry Blacksmith Press)
  - \* *Transhuman and Subhuman: Essays on Science Fiction and Awful Truth* by John C. Wright (Castalia House)
  - \* “**Why Science is Never Settled**” by Tedd Roberts (Baen.com)
  - \* *Wisdom from My Internet* by Michael Z. Williamson (Patriarchy Press)
- **Best Graphic Story** (785 nominating ballots)
  - *Ms. Marvel* Volume 1: “No Normal” [*Not slated*]
  - *Rat Queens* Volume 1: “Sass and Sorcery” [*Not slated*]
  - *Saga* Volume 3 [*Not slated*]
  - *Sex Criminals* Volume 1: “One Weird Trick” [*Not slated*]
  - \* *The Zombie Nation* Book #2: “Reduce Reuse Reanimate”
- **Dramatic Presentation (Long Form)** (1285 nominating ballots)
  - *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* [*Not slated*]
  - *Edge of Tomorrow* [*Not slated*]
  - \* *Guardians of the Galaxy*
  - \* *Interstellar*
  - \* *The Lego Movie*
- **Dramatic Presentation (Short Form)** (938 nominating ballots)
  - *Doctor Who*: “Listen” [*Not slated*]
  - \* *The Flash*: “Pilot”
  - \* *Game of Thrones*: “The Mountain and the Viper”
  - \* *Grimm*: “Once We Were Gods”
  - *Orphan Black*: “By Means Which Have Never Yet Been Tried” [*Not slated*]
- **Best Editor (Short Form)** (870 nominating ballots)
  - \* Jennifer Brozek
  - \* Vox Day
  - \* Mike Resnick
  - \* Edmund R. Schubert <sup>[withdrew]</sup>
  - \* Bryan Thomas Schmidt
- **Best Editor (Long Form)** (712 nominating ballots)
  - \* Vox Day
  - \* Sheila Gilbert
  - \* Jim Minz
  - \* Anne Sowards
  - \* Toni Weiskopf
- **Best Professional Artist** (753 nominating ballots)
  - Julie Dillon [*Not slated*]
  - \* Kirk DouPonce
  - \* Nick Greenwood
  - \* Alan Pollack
  - \* Carter Reid
- **Best Semiprozine** (660 nominating ballots)
  - \* *Abyss & Apex* Wendy Delmater editor and publisher
  - \* *Andromeda Spaceways In-Flight Magazine* Andromeda Spaceways Publishing Association Incorporated, 2014 editors David Kernot and Sue Burtsztynski
  - *Beneath Ceaseless Skies* edited by Scott H. Andrews [*Not slated*]

- *Lightspeed Magazine* edited by John Joseph Adams, Stefan Rudnicki, Rich Horton, Wendy N. Wagner, and Christie Yant [Not slated]
- *Strange Horizons* Niall Harrison Editor-in-Chief [Not slated]
- **Best Fanzine** (576 nominating ballots)
  - \**Black Gate* edited by John O'Neil<sup>[withdrew]</sup>
  - \**Elitist Book Reviews* edited by Steven Diamond
  - *Journey Planet* edited by James Bacon, Chris Garcia, Alissa McKersie, Colin Harris and Helen Montgomery [Not slated]
  - \**The Revenge of Hump Day* edited by Tim Bolgeo
  - \**Tangent Online* edited by Dave Truesdale
- **Best Fancast** (668 nominating ballots)
  - \**Adventures in SciFi Publishing* Brent Bower (Executive Producer), Kristi Charish, Timothy C. Ward, Shaun Ferrell & Moses Siregar III (Co-Hosts, Interviewers and Producers)
  - \**Dungeon Crawlers Radio* Daniel Swenson (Producer/Host), Travis Alexander & Scott Tomlin (Hosts), Dale Newton (Host/Tech), Damien Swenson (Audio/Video Tech)
  - *Galactic Suburbia*, Alisa Krasnostein, Alexandra Pierce, Tansy Rayner Roberts (Presenters) and Andrew Finch (Producer) [Not slated]
  - \**The Sci Phi Show* Jason Rennie
  - *Tea and Jeopardy* Emma Newman and Peter Newman [Not slated]
- **Best Fan Writer** (777 nominating ballots)
  - \*Dave Freer
  - \*Amanda S. Green
  - \*Jeffro Johnson
  - Laura J. Mixon [Not slated]
  - \*Cedar Sanderson
- **Best Fan Artist** (296 nominating ballots)
  - Ninni Aalto [Not slated]
  - Brad W. Foster [Not slated]
  - Elizabeth Leggett [Not slated]
  - Spring Schoenhuth [Not slated]
  - Steve Stiles [Not slated]
- **The John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer** (not a Hugo, now called The Astounding Award) (851 nominating ballots)
  - Wesley Chu [Not slated]
  - \*Jason Cordova
  - \*Kary English
  - \*Rolf Nelson
  - \*Eric S. Raymond

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/2015/04/2015-hugo-award-finalist-list-revised/>
- [2] <https://web.archive.org/web/20201108115836/http://sasquan.org/hugo-awards/nominations/>
- [3] <http://file770.com/entering-the-lists-2/>

## 40: April Part 2 — Early Reactions

Even explosions have stages. The pressure was palpable on the eve of the Hugo finalists announcement for those who had some presentiment of events. Kary English was one of the few women included on the two Puppy slates and she'd been included twice: for her short story "*Totalled*" and for the Campbell/Astounding award for Best New Writer.

Reacting to Steve Davidson's post at *Amazing Stories* (see Chapter 39), English wrote a post entitled *The Disavowal*, discussing politics and her relationship with the Sad Puppy slate. In it, she listed that she disavowed racism, sexism, homophobia, "political litmus tests", and also "judging a group based on the actions of a few". She also stated her dislike of internet controversies:

*"I loathe internet drama. I almost said no to Sad Puppies because I knew drama would follow. There is vitriol on both sides, and I disavow it. I will not take part in the vitriol, and I will do what I can to keep the kerfuffle to a minimum."*

<http://karvenenglish.com/2015/04/the-disavowal/>

Framing the likely drama in terms of the internet belied the likelihood that the Puppy slates would have been a major fandom drama in most eras of the Hugo Awards. However, English's instinct that drama would follow was wholly correct. So why participate in the Sad Puppy campaign? Unlike some of Torgersen's picks for his slate, English had been contacted by him. She explained her decision:

*"I said yes to Sad Puppies this year because I saw the seeds of change. I saw an organizer who wanted to broaden the slate. Sad Puppies includes greater political variety, more women, more people of color and more non-het writers than it ever has before, and I wanted to support that growth."*

*Change comes in baby steps. Is Sad Puppies as diverse or inclusive as I'd like it to be? No, not yet, but I said yes in support of that first baby step. My view is that when someone makes a good faith effort to be more ecumenical, when someone reaches across the aisle and extends a hand to the other side, someone has to cross over. Insularity breeds more insularity. Brad made a gesture, and I wanted to support it."*

ibid

English regarded Sad Puppies 3 as a move by a right-leaning faction in fandom towards more progressive politics. It is an odd conclusion to draw given Torgersen's repeated and overt statements that the slate was overtly opposed to what he called "affirmative action"; yet the mixed, muddled and often confused messaging of his campaign allowed people to pick out quite different features that they could insist was the signal and then claim the contradictory features were simply noise.

Many of Torgersen's picks for the slate were based on his professional network. Four out of the five Sad Puppy picks for Best Novelette were from Torgersen's main platform for his work, *Analog* magazine — the venerable science fiction magazine that had once been helmed by the influential (and reactionary) John W. Campbell. Others, like Carter Reid (the author of the webcomic slated in Best Graphic Story) were part of Torgersen's Utah connections or people he had worked with on writing projects. So while Torgersen and the so-called Evil League of Evil had their own political agendas and their own strategies, the recruits for his slate had often been enlisted on the basis of personal trust networks and Torgersen's nice-guy image.

Torgersen then took his professional network and used it to create a social media explosion.

At the pro-GamerGate right-wing news outlet *Breitbart*, Milo Yiannopoulos's co-writer Allum Bokhari was triumphant about the Sad/Rabid Puppy sweep of the Hugo Awards on the day it was announced.

*"What a time to be alive! Liberals write for Breitbart, a cartoon girl in green and purple is a symbol of terror for the authoritarian Left, and now an online campaign with a manatee for a spokesperson is exposing political cliques in the world of science fiction and fantasy publishing."*

<https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2015/04/04/hugo-awards-nominations-swept-by-anti-sjw-anti-authoritarian-authors/><sup>[1]</sup>

The *Breitbart* article also attempted to push the duality of the aims of Sad Puppies 3 and the nature of the slate, stating first:

*“Brad R. Torgersen, who managed this year’s Sad Puppies campaign, spoke to Breitbart London about its success: ‘I am glad to be overturning the appletart. Numerous authors, editors, and markets have been routinely snubbed or ignored over the years because they were not popular inside WSFS or because their politics have made them radioactive.’”*

*ibid*

...and then condemning critics of the Sad and Rabid Puppy campaigns who claimed that the campaigns were anti-diversity:

*“Perhaps the most bizarre allegation is the claim that supporters of the Sad Puppies constitute their own clique, and are trying to achieve dominance for conservative and libertarian authors. The presence of liberals and progressives like Anne Bellet, Kary English, and Rajnar Vajra on the nomination slate appears to have escaped critics. Correia, Hoyt, Torgerson and others have always maintained that their goal is to end political intolerance in sci-fi, not reinforce it.”*

*ibid*

Eagle-eyed readers will note that Vox Day is not listed in the names saying that their goal is to end “political intolerance” even though Day was quoted in the article.

Science fiction fan, author, journalist, and Hugo Award winner Charlie Jane Anders covered the Puppy Hugo sweep at influential pop-culture news site *io9*. Anders saw the outcome as potentially destroying the Hugo Awards.

*“But this year’s list of nominees seems to herald the beginning of the Hugos becoming “political” in the sense that each “side” will have its own recommended slate of nominees. People won’t get to spend months chewing over the best things they read in the previous year and grappling with their own consciences about what to nominate — instead, each side will have to decide early on which standard-bearers to double down on. Either that, or we’ll see some other solution.”*

<https://gizmodo.com/the-hugo-awards-were-always-political-now-theyre-only-1695721604>

The Sad and Rabid Puppy slates had shown that with a degree of discipline, a coordinated campaign could control the nomination process of the Hugo Awards. The likely outcome of that would not be some rebalancing of the nominations or slower pace of social change in the make-up of the finalists, but rather the likelihood that 2016 would see counter-slates. The finalists then would be determined by whichever slate could drum up the most numbers.

At the Sad Puppy-sympathetic *Mad Genius Club*, Cedar Sanderson had hosted a post with live coverage of the announcement of the Hugo finalists on April 4. As the full extent of the sweep became clear she commented:

*“Pretty cool, isn’t it? I no longer feel like my vote has just vanished into a black hole.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/04/04/2014-hugo-nominations/#comment-54921>

At his own blog, Sad Puppy organiser Brad Torgersen was also delighted:

*“We at SP3 offer our hearty congratulations to all of the authors, editors, and artists included. The Hugo is the most venerable touchstone of the field of Science Fiction & Fantasy. We’re glad to see that this year’s ballot is unusually cosmopolitan in its composition, featuring numerous veteran authors and editors, as well as many new authors and editors who are adding their unique flavor to the field as a whole.”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/04/04/stealing-the-enterprise/>

In this initial version of the finalists, the “unusually cosmopolitan” composition included six works by John C. Wright alone and eight works from an obscure one-year-old Finland-based publisher *Castalia House*. In the Best Novella category, four of the five finalists were from Castalia.

British author Charles Stross put his effort into explaining who and what Castalia House was and why fans should be worried. The issue at hand was not Torgersen’s Sad Puppies but Vox Day’s Rabid Puppies and Day controlled Castalia. On the topic of Day, Stross explained:

*“Over a period of years, he’s built an international coalition, finding common cause with the European neo-Nazi fringe. Now they’ve attempted to turn the Hugo Awards into a battlefield in their (American)*

*culture wars. But this clearly isn't the end game they have in mind: it's only a beginning. (The Hugos, by their very nature, are an award anyone can vote in for a small fee: it is interesting to speculate on how deep Vox Day's pockets are.) But the real burning question is, "what will he attack next?"*"

<http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/2015/04/the-biggest-little-sf-publishe.html>

With his own publishing house, Day in principle could manufacture SFWA-qualifying authors and takeover the organisation that had expelled him<sup>[2]</sup>.

The reactions to the Puppy event were spreading across fandom. Elizabeth Sandifer's blog had caught the wave of the new-found popularity of *Doctor Who* by producing long-form essays that examined the political, literary and esoteric aspects of the long-running series. Her reaction to events was direct:

*"The Hugo Award Nominations have just been successfully hijacked by neofascists."*

<https://www.eruditorumpress.com/blog/the-day-fandom-ended>

As with Charles Stross's post, Sandifer avoided the misdirection of the confused messaging of Torgersen's Sad Puppy campaign and focused on the true big winner of the Hugo finalists. After providing some of the more extreme positions that Day had advocated, Sandifer stated:

*"They are, obviously, preposterously vile things to say. But they are so vile that they defy the usual rhetoric with which we respond to loathsome views. They are not positions or claims that polite society is really equipped to engage with. They are so far outside the bounds of what is socially acceptable in 2015 that it is difficult to imagine many forums in which they would even be permitted to be aired. I'd go with something glib like "even Fox News would sack someone who publicly expressed those views," but even that seems insufficient. Truth be told, I have trouble thinking of any mainstream groups or organizations where someone who publicly espoused those views would not be ostracized."*

ibid

Sandifer regarded the impact on fandom as severe:

*"To be frank, it means that traditional sci-fi/fantasy fandom does not have any legitimacy right now. Period. A community that can be this effectively controlled by someone who thinks black people are subhuman and who has called for acid attacks on feminists is not one whose awards have any sort of cultural validity. That sort of thing doesn't happen to functional communities. And the fact that it has just happened to the oldest and most venerable award in the sci-fi/fantasy community makes it unambiguously clear that traditional sci-fi/fantasy fandom is not fit for purpose."*

ibid

She had a solution, though, one that rested on two features of the Hugo Awards. People could still buy supporting memberships that would give them voting rights in the finals of the Hugo Awards and people could vote for "no award".

*"If science fiction and fantasy are genres you care about, and if you can spare \$40, I highly encourage you to join and, when the Hugo Ballot is released, vote No Award in all categories. Because otherwise, and especially if there are any awards in the six categories in which every nomination is neo-fascist endorsed, the cultural legitimacy of the Hugo Awards and of mainstream science fiction fandom will be permanently compromised."*

ibid

Her proposal was to *No Award* everything — even works that she admired and which hadn't been on a slate such as the critically acclaimed *Doctor Who* episode *Listen* and the graphic story *Ms Marvel*. With the dual slates having such a huge impact on the finalists, all categories were essentially compromised. If fans reacted by essentially nullifying the whole year's worth of finalists, then future slates would look like a futile idea.

Deirdre Saoirse Moen was also proposing "no award" as a strategy but more tactically. Within a few hours of the Hugo finalists announcement, she had produced "The Puppy-Free Hugo Award Voter's Guide" — a list of the categories showing which finalists were not on a Puppy slate and where people who wanted to vote 'no award' above the slated-finalists should use that option.

*"Follow, or don't, your choice. If you are voting the strict ix-nay uppy-pay slate, here's the options in each category:"*

<https://deirdre.net/2015/04/04/the-puppy-free-hugo-award-voters-guide/>

On the category of Best Fan Writer, she listed Laura J. Mixon (the author of a report critical of the writer Requires Hate) but also stated that Mixon had also campaigned for the award, which “IMHO makes her no better than the Puppies”.

At the blog of Teresa Nielsen Hayden, her husband Patrick covered the connections between the Puppy campaigns and GamerGate by citing Tweets from GamerGate enthusiast Daddy Warpig. He also made four observations:

*“(1) To the best of my knowledge, the campaign to get a slate of specific people and works onto the Hugo ballot hasn’t done anything that violates the rules.*

*(2) As anyone over the age of ten knows, it’s generally possible to do things that are dubious, or scummy, or even downright evil, without violating any laws or rules.*

*(3) Merely running a campaign to get a slate of specific people and works onto the Hugo ballot doesn’t really rise to the level of “evil”, but it’s definitely “dubious” at the very least. Which is to say, it violates a lot of people’s sense of how one ought to behave, and if you do it you’ll incur widespread disapproval. Prepare to deal.*

*(4) However, running a campaign to get a slate of specific people and works onto the Hugo ballot and reaching out to #GamerGate for support in this...in effect, inviting a bunch of people who traffic in violent threats, intimidation, and “SWATting” to join our community...well, that rises all the way to “downright evil”.*”

<http://nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/archives/016194.html#016194>

As earlier chapters showed, the connections between the Puppy campaigns and GamerGate were deeper than just Daddy Warpig. Having said that, it is unclear whether these overtures brought in any additional GamerGaters into the Puppy campaign, given that there was already a significant overlap with followers of Vox Day and, to a lesser extent, Larry Correia.

A long thread of comments ensued including a flying visit from Brad Torgersen. However, I want to focus on a comment from the blog host Teresa Nielsen Hayden, who had also been thinking about the strategic response to Puppy sweep:

*“It’s too late to salvage the 2015 ballot, but not the 2015 Hugo Awards. Supporting memberships are still being sold, and they can vote. Want to strike back against the Sad Puppies and everything they represent? Buy a supporting membership. Vote for the nominees you love or like or find worthy. Do it with no agenda beyond your love of SF. Next year, buy one early enough to nominate. We’ve been worrying about bringing on a system of warring slates. It’s unnecessary. You don’t need a slate to beat a slate. What you need are a lot more votes, chosen according to the individual voters’ preferences. It doesn’t matter if their distribution is unfocused, as long as there are enough of them. Even if block voting campaigns manage to wedge a few nominees onto a ballot, the combined votes of all those supporting memberships applied to the five nominees in each category is going to swamp any slate-based voting that doesn’t represent a sizeable fraction of actual fannish taste.*

...

*I love the idea of beating the SP’s covert elitism with an answer that’s more democratic, draws more fans into voting for the Hugos, and finds its winners in the combined preferences of many more voters.”*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/archives/016194.html#4071202>

Whatever voting approach people followed (No Award everything, No Award only the slated finalists, or just vote for stuff you find worthy), the key would be getting more people to vote.

The Puppy impact on the Hugo Awards was attracting the attention of the broader news media. However, with two interrelated campaigns (the Sad and the Rabid Puppies) and confused messaging from people involved in the Sad Puppy campaign (either as organisers, supporters or conscripted nominees), the accounts often confused details.

An April 6 news story (two days after the finalist announcement) in *Entertainment Weekly* attempted to capture the gist of events but badly mangled many of the details:

*“The Hugo Awards have fallen victim to a campaign in which misogynist groups lobbied to nominate only white males for the science fiction book awards. These groups, Sad Puppies and Rabid Puppies (both of which are affiliated with last year’s GamerGate scandal), urged sci-fi fans to become members of the Hugo Awards’ voting body, World Science Fiction Convention, in order to cast votes against female writers and writers of color.”*

Archive of the original version, later corrected <https://archive.is/X2HPi#selection-1761.0-1767.174>

To defend the claim that Rabid Puppies was a misogynist group would not have been difficult but to make that claim about the Sad Puppies was more of a challenge. “Affiliated” was a strong term to use for a nebulous group like GamerGate but the connection between the two groups had already been asserted by the GamerGate-friendly outlet *Breitbart*.

Neither group of Puppies had overtly stated that people should vote against female writers or writers of colour, although Brad Torgersen’s “affirmative action” claims could easily be read that way and Vox Day’s track record on the issues could be easily found. However, both campaigns definitely had nominated women and people of colour. That the journalist had misunderstood the twist in the events was made more clear when the article cited Annie Bellet’s *Goodnight Stars* as an example of a finalist that had made it *despite* the Puppy intervention instead of *because* of it.

The *Entertainment Weekly* article had drawn in part from Elizabeth Sandifer’s blog article (see above) which had focused (correctly) on Vox Day’s Rabid Puppies and Day’s extremism. Both Brad Torgersen and Larry Correia objected to the article and it was corrected the same day. The new version began:

*“CORRECTION: After misinterpreting reports in other news publications, EW published an unfair and inaccurate depiction of the Sad Puppies voting slate, which does, in fact, include many women and writers of color. As Sad Puppies’ Brad Torgerson explained to EW, the slate includes both women and non-Caucasian writers, including Rajnar Vajra, Larry Correia, Annie Bellet, Kary English, Toni Weisskopf, Ann Sowards, Megan Gray, Sheila Gilbert, Jennifer Brozek, Cedar Sanderson, and Amanda Green. This story has been updated to more accurately reflect this. EW regrets the error.”*

<https://ew.com/article/2015/04/06/hugo-award-nominations-sad-puppies/>

The correction did not mollify either Larry Correia or Brad Torgersen. Correia saw it as an example of how the media would attack conservatives:

*“So, SMOFs and Moderates, read that article. Hell, just read the headline... If you’ve paid any attention or have even an iota of honesty in your soul you know that article in a national publication is total bullshit. Now do you understand why it is so very tempting for my side to just say to hell with it and hoist the black flag?”*

*EDIT 2, they’ve already changed the article because the EW lawyers freaked out. That should tell you something. I’ve got the original cached. Since they changed it, here is the original. See moderates? This is what happens when you cross the Social Justice crowd. The truth become irrelevant and they spread whatever they can about you to get you shunned and destroyed.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/04/06/a-letter-to-the-smofs-moderates-and-fence-sitters-from-the-author-who-started-sad-puppies/>

In the same post, Correia also blamed the general claim of GamerGate involvement on Teresa Nielsen Hayden. As the GamerGate connections were undeniable, Correia changed the claim to one that GamerGate were “behind” (i.e., organising) the Puppy campaigns. He also warned:

*“Oh, quick note moderates and SMOFs, if you don’t want GamerGate to get involved in the Hugos, don’t blame me. Tell your Social Justice idiots to shut up on Twitter! TNH is the one invoking and provoking them, not me.”*

ibid

Brad Torgersen also objected to the GamerGate connection:

*“The error-laden article quickly went viral — especially among opponents of Sad Puppies 3. Twitter (which I generally avoid and ignore) lit up like a Christmas tree, and quickly I had friends and other authors contacting me to say, “Entertainment Weekly has run a hatchet piece on you! Better jump on it!” So I read the piece. I noted the errors. I also noted that the piece made an explicitly inductive link between Sad Puppies 3 and last year’s great nerd controversy: GamerGate. The reasons for this were pretty obvious. Words like “racist” and “misogynist” are presently code for “not part of the human equation” thus any man or woman who can be successfully labelled these things, is cut off from polite circles, perhaps even driven out of the workplace, or worse. These words tend to be used as general-purpose ideological grenades, when the thrower of said grenades lacks sufficiently real evidence of wrong-doing — but wants to see the target squirm and suffer anyway.”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/04/07/fort-living-room/>

Torgersen also rejected the claim of racism and sexism, citing a specific piece of evidence:

*“Obviously, anyone who tries to make a coherent case for me being racist or sexist . . . has over 21 years of contradictory evidence to overcome. You cannot have lived my life, and be a racist or a sexist. It is an ontological impossibility. I’ve seen too much of the elephant, to borrow a phrase. Plus, my wife probably would have thrown me out on my butt a long time ago — she being the far more astute judge of character, than either a low-rent tabloid blogger or a pernicious and vindictive SF/F personality.”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/04/07/fort-living-room/>

Meanwhile, *The Guardian* also had coverage of the Hugo Awards. Guardian columnist Damien Walter already had past experience with Larry Correia in 2014 (see chapter 26) and had a better grasp of the dual campaigns than *Entertainment Weekly* had shown. Interestingly, Walter downplayed the ideological element of the campaigns and focused on an underlying motive:

*“What the Hugo awards are vulnerable to isn’t the bitter argument between liberals and conservatives, but the clever manipulation of such differences by self-promoters. Most writers, even in relatively commercially genres like sci-fi and fantasy, sell remarkably low numbers of books. It’s not surprising, then, that some writers ramp up political arguments as a way of gaining the attention they crave, and pulling publicity stunts like block-voting campaigns. Some involved with the block vote no doubt believe they are on a righteous crusade against liberals in sci-fi. But that only makes them more easily exploited by those who are only interested in gaining status and selling books.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/apr/06/are-the-hugo-nominees-really-the-best-sci-fi-books-of-the-year>

Conversely, in a piece at *Salon*, Arthur Chu saw the Sad Puppies as part of a broader tapestry of conservatism in the internet age but also part of an older strain in American conservatism, comparing them to the 19th-century reactionary “Know-Nothings”<sup>[3]</sup>.

Conservative magazine *National Review* also linked GamerGate and Sad Puppies as twin phenomenon:

*“The response to the social-justice Left in the gaming world was “GamerGate,” an online movement that (and this is an understatement) “punched back twice as hard” against the left-dominated gaming media. The resulting online battles were extraordinarily vicious, with claims and counterclaims of online bullying, “doxing” (exposure of personally identifying information on the web), and general internet hand-to-hand combat.*

*In science fiction, the response was “Sad Puppies,” a movement led by conservative author Larry Correia. Why Sad Puppies? Because “boring message fiction is the leading cause of Puppy Related Sadness.” Correia and his Sad Puppies targeted the Hugo Awards, prestigious writing awards voted on by members of “Worldcon,” the World Science Fiction Convention. Correia had known that the social-justice Left had campaigned against him previously, so he countered with his own campaign — assisted by leading conservative and libertarian authors.”*

<https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/social-justice-warriors-arent-so-tough-when-even-sad-puppies-can-beat-them-david/>

Not every high-profile response was in a newspaper or magazine. George R.R. Martin may have been at the apex of his fame as a fantasy writer in 2015 but his social media presence was still his humble (technologically) LiveJournal blog. Having enjoyed a long history with the Hugo Awards and Worldcon, Martin was desolate with what he was calling “Puppygate”:



*“Call it block voting. Call it ballot stuffing. Call it gaming the system. There’s truth to all of those characterizations.*

*You can’t call it cheating, though. It was all within the rules.*

*But many things can be legal, and still bad... and this is one of those, from where I sit.*

*I think the Sad Puppies have broken the Hugo Awards, and I am not sure they can ever be repaired.”*

<https://grrm.livejournal.com/417125.html>

## **FOOTNOTES**

- [1] The “cartoon girl” reference is to the GamerGate mascot “Vivian James”  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Fine\\_Young\\_Capitalists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fine_Young_Capitalists)
- [2] Day didn’t do this but it wasn’t an unreasonable suspicion.
- [3]  
[https://www.salon.com/2015/04/06/sci\\_fis\\_right\\_wing\\_backlash\\_never\\_doubt\\_that\\_a\\_small\\_group\\_of\\_deranged\\_trolls\\_can\\_ruin\\_anything\\_even\\_the\\_hugo\\_awards/](https://www.salon.com/2015/04/06/sci_fis_right_wing_backlash_never_doubt_that_a_small_group_of_deranged_trolls_can_ruin_anything_even_the_hugo_awards/)

## 41: April Part 3 — Battle Lines

The sweep of the Hugo nominations by the Sad and Rabid Puppy slates caused an eruption of discussion and comments within fandom and beyond into both the mainstream and right-wing press. Partly this was fuelled by parallels with GamerGate which was still in full swing but also the connection with high-profile figures such as George R.R. Martin meant that the normally minor news of the Hugo finalists was now folded into a narrative of a growing culture war in popular media.

Of the members of the Evil League of Evil, Larry Correia had already enjoyed a brief brush with media fame after being interviewed about his opposition to gun control on Fox News in 2013 (see Chapter 18). Likewise, Vox Day was not unfamiliar with the spotlight and was also used to being cast as the villain. For Brad Torgersen, the level of attention was something new and unlike both Correia and Day, he had two day jobs (his main career and his role as a US Army reservist) to worry about. Also, Torgersen's writing ambitions had followed a more traditional career arc through publishing short fiction in notable science fiction magazines. The Sad Puppy slate that he had helped curate reflected his professional writing network and that slate was now the subject of fierce public scrutiny.

After the initial confusing and shocked reaction to the Puppy sweep, people had begun to pick out the different issues. The Sad Puppy campaign was the most public-facing of the two slates but Vox Day's Rabid Puppy slate had a bigger impact, with nominees that were only on his slate winning finalist positions. Even so, as erroneous press coverage (see chapter 40) demonstrated, it was hard to make sense of the confusing and possibly contradictory messages behind the campaigns. Torgersen had offered what appeared to be an anti-diversity rationale in the early days of the campaign but as Sad Puppy defenders were keen to point out, the slate had not been exclusively white men. However, Vox Day's slate had not been exclusively white men either and it was a much easier task for critics to point out public statements by Day that could reasonably be described as racist and misogynistic. Likewise, Day's publishing business Castalia House was a significant part of the Sad Puppy slate and also included multiple nominations for John C. Wright, whose stated views on homosexuality and Islam were far from positive.

Brad Torgersen had a problem. Both he and Larry Correia had been adamant in 2014 that they would not disavow Vox Day after he had been included in the Sad Puppies 2 slate and they weren't going to budge on that. However, the whole enterprise was quickly becoming mired in negative publicity about Vox Day. Larry Correia posted a defensive piece stating that he was not Vox Day and explaining the difference:

*"Look at it like this. I'm Churchill. Brad is FDR. We wound up on the same side as Stalin.*

*SP3 has been accused of trying to sweep the nominations. First, we didn't have 5 in most of the categories, and when we did, it was because we had a ton of good suggestions and honestly thought all of them were awesome. Second, we did not expect to do as good as we did. Our showing was a surprise. Some of the categories were not swept by SP, but rather a combination of SP and RP noms, and SP had no control over that. Note, that isn't an apology. That is a clarification. They are fans too, they spent their \$40 like everyone else, and they voted for what they wanted."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/04/16/im-not-vox-day/>

Brad Torgersen used the same analogy:

*"Nobody on Sad Puppies 3 signed up to be Rabid Puppies.*

*We are not Rabid Puppies. Larry and I are not Vox Day. As Larry said, that's like saying Roosevelt and Churchill are Stalin.*

*We're driving on the same freeway, but our destinations appear to be drastically different. Different cars. Different driving styles. We don't want to be pulled over because the guy in the other car is doing 110 MPH. We can't control the other driver(s) on the freeway.*

*Anyone who can't see this is either a) not examining the details closely enough, or b) using the fallacious guilt-by-association argument to try to "win" this thing. I get it. Vox is kryptonite. Everybody hates him. Many of the people on the SP3 slate hate him, and are profoundly annoyed that Rabid Puppies has turned out to be something of a spoiler in a larger, more principled argument."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20171124024402/https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/04/16/we-are-not-rabid/>

What was notable in the denials of both Correia and Torgersen was what they did not say. They were clear that Day was not on the Sad Puppy slate and that the Rabid Puppy slate was a different campaign but they did not say that Vox Day had no involvement in the initial Sad Puppies 3 slate. Naturally, people were already digging into this.

Author Naomi Kritzer pulled together the relevant quotes around the ironically-named Evil League of Evil (see chapter 33) and posted an essay entitled *Vox Day's involvement in the Sad Puppies slate*. While there was no proverbial smoking gun, two points were clear:

- The Evil League of Evil were consulted on the Sad Puppies 3 slate
- Vox Day was a member of the Evil League of Evil

Kritzer concluded:

*"I mean — I'm totally willing to believe that the final say here was Brad Torgersen's, and the ELoE was acting entirely in an advisory capacity, suggesting fan writers and pro artists Brad might not have thought about and no one on his suggestions thread mentioned.*

*But what I'm not willing to believe, given that collection of posts, was that Vox Day had nothing whatsoever to do with the Sad Puppies slate."*

<https://naomikritzer.com/2015/04/13/vox-days-involvement-in-the-sad-puppies-slate/>

Kritzer had specifically referred to the Rabid Puppies as "put up by honest-to-God neo-fascist Theodore Beale, who writes as Vox Day" and plenty of other bloggers were pointing out the long litany of Day's views on women and on race. *Doctor Who* critic and William Blake scholar, Elizabeth Sandifer took time to write a lengthy analysis of the crisis in the Hugo Awards entitled "Guided by the Beauty of their Weapons" after a line from a Leonard Cohen song[1]. Part One was a recap of recent events and Part Two looked at what the Sad Puppies wanted. She focused on a post by Brad Torgersen from February in which Torgersen expressed his dissatisfaction with the state of science fiction. Torgersen's post was to become infamous as his "Nutty Nuggets" post after he used an extended metaphor about breakfast cereal:

*"Imagine for a moment that you go to the local grocery to buy a box of cereal. You are an avid enthusiast for Nutty Nuggets. You will happily eat Nutty Nuggets until you die. Nutty Nuggets have always come in the same kind of box with the same logo and the same lettering. You could find the Nutty Nuggets even in the dark, with a blindfold over your eyes. That's how much you love them.*

*Then, one day, you get home from the store, pour a big bowl of Nutty Nuggets . . . and discover that these aren't really Nutty Nuggets. They came in the same box with the same lettering and the same logo, but they are something else. Still cereal, sure. But not Nutty Nuggets. Not wanting to waste money, you eat the different cereal anyway. You find the experience is not what you remembered it should be, when you ate actual Nutty Nuggets. You walk away from the experience somewhat disappointed. What the hell happened to Nutty Nuggets? Did the factory change the formula or the manufacturing process? Maybe you just got a bad box."*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/02/04/sad-puppies-3-the-unraveling-of-an-unreliable-field/>

For Torgersen, science fiction had ceased to be like a reliable and consistent box of cereal and had instead branched off into new and weird varieties. What he was now facing was people (like Elizabeth Sandifer) with all the experience and tools of contemporary literary criticism employing them to what he had written. As Sandifer would write:

*"There are several things worth noting here. First and most obvious is the spectacle of a grown man complaining about how he just can't judge a book by its cover anymore. Second, and hardly something that Torgersen has tried to hide, is the basic political aspect to this complaint. Observe the list of things that Torgersen does not want in his science fiction: racial prejudice and exploitation, sexism and the oppression of women, gay and transgender issues, the evils of capitalism and the despotism of the wealthy."*

<https://www.eruditorumpress.com/blog/guided-by-the-beauty-of-their-weapons-an-analysis-of-theodore-beale-and-his-supporters>

However, Torgersen and the Sad Puppies were not the main focus of the essay but rather the extreme politics of Vox Day. Sandifer documented several of the extreme positions Day had advocated and went on to say:

*“These are merely the most chilling highlights of a lengthy career of saying absolutely appalling things. The rabbit hole stretches down at horrifying length. But these quotes are sufficient to establish the sheer awfulness of Beale’s views. These are not merely the sort of sexist and racist views that lurk within mainstream discourse. These are views so gobsmackingly outside of the realm of what it is socially acceptable to think and say in 2015 that it is impossible to imagine them getting aired in any major newspaper. Fox News wouldn’t touch them. The Republican Party would demand the resignation of any elected official who said them. It is difficult to imagine any area where such views could openly hold major sway.”*

ibid

At the time (early 2015), the claim that the Republican Party would censure an official with Day’s level of political extremity was a reasonable one. Sandifer, like Kritzer, was overt about calling Day a neo-fascist but went further by discussing the fascistic elements within the Puppy campaigns in terms of aesthetics and tropes such as the golden age myth and the stab-in-the-back myth:

*“All of these tropes are, of course, immediately visible in the Sad/Rabid Puppy narrative of the Hugos. Torgersen’s paean to the olden days of science fiction is straightforwardly the golden age myth. The claim that a leftist cabal of SJWs, the details of which are, as is always the case with these things, fuzzy, but which at the very least clearly includes John Scalzi, Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden, and the publishing house Tor have since taken control of the Hugos is a classic stab-in-the-back myth. And the Puppy slates feature heroic men (Torgersen and Beale) who speak truth to power and call excitedly for the people to rise up and show their freedom by voting in complete lockstep with them. It’s a classically fascist myth, just like GamerGate (gaming used to be great, then the feminist SJWs took over the gaming press, and now GamerGate will liberate it) or Men’s Rights Activists (of which Beale is one).”*

ibid

Of course, Kritzer’s and Sandifer’s analyses were just two of many posts on the topic of the Sad/Rabid Puppies being published in April. Every day there was more, some from significant figures in the campaigns (such as Sarah A. Hoyt or John C. Wright), some from supporters (such as the bloggers at *Mad Genius Club*), some from finalists who were more ambivalent about the way things turned out (such as Kary English) but also many from critics of the Puppy campaigns, including multiple posts from George R.R. Martin. Keeping up with the storm of words was a problem.

Mike Glycer’s solution was to start round-up posts at *File770* about the Puppy impact on the Hugo Awards. From April 8 these round-ups became a daily event. Each one had a punning title referencing genre fiction or popular culture with allusions to puppies worked in[2]. The initial round-ups generated tens of comments, including comments from notable Puppies such as Vox Day. During April, the number of comments for each post grew haphazardly. By mid-April, it was not uncommon for the number of comments to be over a hundred. By the end of April, some Puppy round-up posts were receiving three hundred or more comments as the discussion around events increased.

One major topic was the use of “no award” as a voting strategy. As discussed in the previous chapter, several people had proposed the use of the Hugo Awards none-of-the-above option to send a clear message that a slate campaign would not win anybody a prestigious Hugo. Not every opponent of the Sad Puppies was happy with that idea. George R. R. Martin was firmly against the No Award Strategy:

*“This comes in two flavors. The hardliners propose we vote NO AWARD for everything. Every category, even the ones where the Puppies have no nominees. No Hugo Awards at Sasquan, whatsoever. We’ll show them. Rather than letting them move into our house, we will burn it to the ground. “We had to destroy the village in order to save it.” It worked so well in Vietnam.*

*All I’ve got to say about this idea is, **are you fucking crazy?***

*The other approach is less radical. Vote NO AWARD in all the categories that are All Puppy. In the others, chose between the nominees (there are a few) that did not appear on either the Sad Puppy or Rabid Puppy slate, and place all the rest, the SP/RP candidates, under No Award.*

*That’s less insane than the “No Award For Everything” idea, but only a little bit. Sorry, I will not sign on for this one either. For a whole bunch of reasons. For starts, the Puppies are already proclaiming that “No Award” equals victory for them (though sometimes it seems as though they believe anything*

*that happens constitutes victory for them). Also, near as I can tell from reading the blogs, it appears that some of the Sad Puppy candidates never consented to joining their slate, and that none of the Rabid Puppies were ever asked if they wanted to be included (I am ninety per cent certain that none of the films or TV shows in the two Dramatic Presentations category were ever contacted). There are also a whole bunch of people — all the editors except Vox Day, for starts — who may or may not have been contacted. No one has said, no one talking about it, we just don't know."*

<https://grrm.livejournal.com/418643.html>

Meanwhile, Brad Torgersen was confident that the No Award Strategy would not prevail:

*"Oh, no question, "No Award" is going to be featured prominently in any category where Sad Puppies 3 (with the counter-slate Rabid Puppies) occupies all five of the available slots. I won't be surprised to see "No Award" take third, or perhaps even second, place. But I doubt very much that "No Award" will claim first place in any category. Because there simply aren't enough fans — even WSFS stalwarts — who are willing to turf an entire category out of spite. There are too many worthy works in all of the categories. Including works not on the SP3 or RP slates. And SF/F fans are like cats: notoriously averse to being herded. Plus, as a few pros have demonstrated, there is plenty of principled logic to support reading and voting for a work or a person on a slate despite disliking the slate itself. Why punish a good writer or editor or artist, simply for being on a list? It's not like all the people participating in the nomination period dutifully went down the rows, reliably checking all the items without a second glance. Not for SP3, and not for any other suggested lists either — and there were many such lists, though perhaps not quite so extensive as ours."*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/04/08/sp3-solomon/>

Vox Day had other ideas about the No Award Strategy — if deployed, there would be a retaliation in kind. In a comment on one of *File770*'s Puppy round-ups, Day stated:

*"If No Award takes a fiction category, you will likely never see another award given in that category again. The sword cuts both ways, Lois. We are prepared for all eventualities."*

Vox Day comment <http://file770.com/all-the-colors-of-kibble-48/comment-page-1/#comment-250236><sup>[3]</sup>

Martin, Torgersen and Day had each offered reasons for not adopting the No Award Strategy in ways that matched their personalities. The question was whether opponents of the Sad Puppies would follow George R.R. Martin's lead. The success of the Sad Puppy slate had upset not just so-called Social Justice Warriors but many long-standing Worldcon participants and Larry Correia's dismissive attacks on "SMOFs" in previous campaigns had not won him any friends amongst fandom's old-guard. If the Puppy finalists were going to win any rockets, then finalist to beat was the infamous Noah Ward. To do that, Torgersen was going to have to persuade people beyond the committed supporters of the Puppy campaigns.

However, the No Award Strategy even if successful was at best a temporary solution. As Vox Day's threat indicated, the Rabid Puppies had the numbers to repeat their slate success in 2016 or beyond. As GamerGate had demonstrated, a culture-war campaign could have significant impact on an industry. Day was busy on his blog recruiting minions and casting himself as a mastermind of strategy where he simply could not lose, no matter the outcome:

*"It's called Xanatos Gambit, George. Look it up. Anything that happens IS a victory for us. That's why "the trufans and SMOFs and good guys" are so upset. Deny us Hugos? Whoop-de-damn-do. We were never going to even be nominated anyhow. Change the rules? Make our point AND, as a bonus, make future Awards less legitimate. No Award everything? See: 2016 Hugos. No Award us? See: 2016 Hugos and you. Leave well enough alone and simply vote on the merits? Some of ours win a few richly deserved Hugos."*

*Of course, what George and HIS SIDE don't seem to grasp, that Brad Torgersen tried to explain to them yesterday, is that not only are priorities of the Rabid Puppies not those of the "trufans and SMOFs and good guys", they are not those of the Sad Puppies either. Brad and Larry and Sad Puppies aren't the bad guys."*

*We are. We are the reavers and the renegades and the revolutionaries, and we don't give a quantum of a damn about pieces of plastic or the insider approval they represent."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150413141524/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/04/george-martin-knows-were-right.html> <sup>[4]</sup>

Had Day already won?

Earlier in April, science fiction publisher and technology expert Brad Templeton had detailed a variety of responses that could be employed to counter the success of the Puppy slates in 2015 and beyond<sup>[5]</sup>.

- Fighting slates with slates
- Eliminating the supporting membership, or boosting it: i.e., either make it harder for people to vote in the Hugo Awards or make it easier.
- Allowing fewer nominations than slots: in 2015 members could nominate 5 works/people for 5 possible finalist slots. If members could only nominate 4 things for 5 slots than a sweep of finalists by a slate would be harder.
- Elimination Nomination: reforming the voting process for the nomination stage so it was more like the kind of elimination ballot used in the final voting.
- Voting for No Award
- Committee Actions: things that the Worldcon committee could do without rule changes
  - Downplay the Hugos
  - Run a replacement award
  - Change the counting of the 2016 Hugos
  - See what happens
  - Add human judgement to counter efforts to abuse the rules
  - Create a different award that's harder to game
  - Delegate jurors: shift to a jury award

Templeton wasn't endorsing all of these ideas but simply laying out the space of options that was available. At the blog of the Nielsen Hayden's, *Making Light*, people began discussing the options.

Cryptographer and computer security expert Bruce Schneier<sup>[6]</sup> authored a guest post for *Making Light* where he discussed Brad Templeton's list of ideas. Both Schneier and Templeton were members of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a group concerned with civil liberties in the digital age.

*"I'd like to limit this thread to that: discussions of various voting systems and how changing to them might help and hurt. I am less interested in the politics of the Hugo elections and the bureaucratic processes of WSFS than in these voting systems as a theoretical construct. I understand that these are inexorably linked, but think there's value in discussing the voting systems issues separately.*

*The Hugo selection process is best thought of as two separate elections. The first is the nomination election, in which voters use an entirely write-in process to select a slate of five nominees in each category by simple plurality. The second is the actual Hugo election, where voters select a winner from the five nominees in each category using an "Australian ballot" instant-runoff system"*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/archives/016199.html>

In any simple voting system, the candidate with the most votes does not necessarily have the support of 50% or more of the voters. In the second round of the Hugo voting, this issue was addressed by using preference voting and elimination rounds in the counting but the nomination round was done by a simple approval method of voting. It was this feature of the nomination round that Puppy slates had exploited. Could a similar system of preferences and elimination rounds be included in the nomination stage and could it be done in a way that was easy for people to nominate with and for administrators to count?

By April 13, the thread had garnered 538 comments from fans and voting system enthusiasts. Schneier collated the discussion into five options (with option 3 having four sub-options:

- **Option 1:** *Change the number of candidates a person can nominate.*
- **Option 2:** *Change the number of winners of the nomination election.*
- **Option 3:** *Change the mechanism by which the winners are selected.*

- **Option 3a:** A Satisfaction Approval Voting (SAV) system<sup>[8]</sup>
- **Option 3b:** A Proportional Approval Voting (PAV) system<sup>[9]</sup>
- **Option 3c:** A Reweighted Approval Voting (RAV) system<sup>[10]</sup>
- **Option 3d:** A Single Transferable Vote (STV) system<sup>[11]</sup>
- **Option 4:** Banning Slates. We create a rule outlawing slates.
- **Option 5:** Making the Voting Tallies Public Throughout the Process.  
<http://nielsenhavden.com/makinglight/archives/016206.html>

The new thread would run to over a thousand comments but in the process the participants thrashed out a bespoke voting system for the Hugo Award nomination stage. Named Single Divisible Vote – Least Popular Elimination, the system aimed to be simple for members to use but at the same time reduce the impact of slate voting. An alternative idea was a proposal for a “long list” of works that would be produced part way through the nomination process, that would give members some feedback on the works that were already showing up in the nomination process.

These ideas, along with adjusting the number of works members could nominate and the number of finalists per category (options 1 and 2 above), would still take more work to become solid proposals but that is a story for a later chapter.

The *Making Light* thread was a hothouse of detailed proposals but elsewhere people were looking at other kinds of responses.

Left-wing Baen author and editor Eric Flint was in the unenviable position of being a critic of the Sad Puppy campaign which otherwise had a lot of support from notable Baen authors and which was campaigning for the chief publisher of Baen Books, Toni Weiskopf, to win the Best Editor Long Form Hugo. Flint accepted that there were genuine issues with the Hugo Awards but felt that the Sad Puppies had misunderstood the underlying causes. Flint’s counter-suggestions included adding Hugo categories for longer novels and series<sup>[12]</sup> or the adoption of a radically different approach:

*“But I personally think the best solution, if there is one at all, is to scrap the whole existing set-up. Of all the awards handed out for literary merit, the only ones that seems to maintain any sort of ongoing more-or-less objective relationship to the real world are those given out for often broadly-defined achievement. They’re not awards given out for “best XYZ of year ABC.” Instead, they are achievement awards handed out for a body of work, that may be anchored to something specific but takes other considerations into account, and perhaps most importantly is not tied to an annual cycle.”*

<https://ericflint.net/hugo-controversy/comments-on-the-hugos-and-other-sf-awards/>

Flint himself had been a prolific creator of popular series and had used those books to collaborate with new authors. However, his style of books were unlikely to ever be the focus of a literary award for the reasons he had outlined.

Mary Robinette Kowal had a more immediate approach to helping the Hugo Awards. In response to Vox Day’s threats of retaliating against the 2016 Hugo Awards if the No Award Strategy was successful in 2015, she said:

*“...why is anyone afraid that this will happen?”*

*My dear fandom, people from the larger SFF community, fans of my work, fans of Larry Correia’s work... there are more of us.*

*So this is my call to action for all of you — Become more inclusive. Invite your friends and family to participate. Buy a supporting membership for someone who can’t afford it. Welcome people who like different work than you do. Ask them to recommend a book. Read it. Recommend something to them. Talk about why you like it.”*

<https://maryrobinettekowal.com/journal/talk-with-me-about-being-a-fan-of-science-fiction-and-fantasy/>

Nor was this just an empty call for harmony and inclusiveness, Kowal was prepared to put money behind a proposal:

*“And to my readers — If you can afford it, I encourage you to buy a membership to Worldcon and become part of fandom. If you cannot afford it... **I will buy a supporting membership to Worldcon for ten people, chosen at random, who cannot afford it.** I am in no way constraining how that member nominates or votes. All I ask is that you read the nominations and join the conversation.”*

ibid

Other authors matched her pledge so that eventually she had enough to offer a hundred supporting memberships for people who asked. When Sad Puppy supporters expressed scepticism about the offer and implied it was a vote-buying strategy, Kowal made her offer in the comments at Brad Torgersen’s blog:

*“Since I’ve been invoked... Yes. The drawing is completely random. I mean it when I say that ANYONE who wants one can apply and that I will not be selecting for politics. That’s not the way I roll. I believe that SFF should be more inclusive and diverse. Diversity is not just about race. It’s about different experiences and about valuing those different experiences.”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/04/10/sad-puppies-3-were-they-contacted/#comment-10096>

Not all the proposals being made were of the same bi-partisan practicality as Kowal’s. Author and Worldcon Guest of Honour David Gerrold had his own suggestion:

*“This year — this stuff, this little turd in the punch bowl — the community will survive it. Whatever happens, the Hugo will survive. With an asterisk, perhaps. (Maybe we’ll hand out official asterisks with the trophies this year.) But the one thing that is growing more and more likely ... the architects of this squabble will have indelibly damaged themselves in the eyes of the SF community. There are invitations and acknowledgments that will never be offered — not because it’s a blacklist, but because nobody wants to hang out with assholes.”*

<https://www.facebook.com/david.gerrold/posts/10205360779551319?pnref=story>

April 2015 had arguably been the longest month in the history of the Hugo Awards. These three chapters have covered only a fraction of the debates and conversations that took place over those weeks. While there were still several months to follow of debate before the winners of 2015 would be announced, by the end of April the shape of what was becoming called the Puppy Kerfuffle was becoming clear.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://genius.com/Leonard-cohen-first-we-take-manhattan-lyrics>
- [2] The complete set can be found here <http://file770.com/the-compleat-litter-of-puppy-roundup-titles/>
- [3] This comment was to book critic Lois Tilton and was part of an argument in which Day was claiming that Amazon rankings demonstrated that the Puppy finalists were better than recent Hugo winners. I’d considered including that side debate in this post but in the end, decided that it was such a silly claim by Day that it really deserved no more attention than this footnote.
- [4] Xanatos being the affable antagonist in the 1990s cartoon series *Gargoyles*, who in early episodes would habitually explain how his apparent setback during the episode was in fact the next stage of his plan.
- [5] <https://ideas.4brad.com/hugo-awards-suborned-what-can-or-should-be-done>
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce\\_Schneier](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Schneier)
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic\\_Frontier\\_Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_Frontier_Foundation)
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satisfaction\\_approval\\_voting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satisfaction_approval_voting)
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proportional\\_approval\\_voting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proportional_approval_voting)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sequential\\_proportional\\_approval\\_voting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sequential_proportional_approval_voting)
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single\\_transferable\\_vote](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_transferable_vote)
- [12] <https://ericflint.net/hugo-controversy/more-on-the-hugos/>



## 42: May

At the blog of Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden, the mammoth thread on voting reform for the Hugo Awards continued into May. The proposed voting method for the nomination stage was still labouring under the lengthy acronym of SDV-LPE and while the algorithm had been fine-tuned and tested the public-relations work in selling the idea to Worldcon members was only just beginning. Voting method expert Jameson Quinn presented his way of explaining it to a lay audience:

*“This system uses the same ballots as the current system; you just vote for all the works that you think may deserve a Hugo, up to a maximum of 5.*

*When counting the votes, the system eliminates one candidate at a time, until there are 5 left. At each step, it is designed to look for the two candidates who do the least to increase the “representativeness” (or “diversity”) of the candidate pool, and eliminate whichever of those two has the fewest supporters.*

*Thus, when you add a candidate to your ballot, you are essentially doing two things. First, you have 1 “representativeness point” to spread among the candidates, to protect them from even being considered for elimination; and so adding a candidate to your ballot redistributes that point. This means that if a group of voters all vote for the same 5 works, their “points” will all be spread five ways, and so those 5 works will probably end up eliminating each other. But second, once two candidates are selected for possible elimination based on representativeness, your ballot will count fully for whichever of them you supported (if any). This means that, if you voted independently and not as part of a slate, it is unlikely that adding an additional candidate to your ballot will cause any of the candidates already on there to be eliminated if it wouldn’t have been otherwise.*

*In other words: While it is theoretically possible that you’d prefer the results of voting “narrowly” — for just one or two of your favorite candidates — rather than “broadly”, in practice it is very likely to be safe to vote “broadly”, and simply vote for all candidates whom you think may deserve a Hugo.”*

<https://nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/archives/016206.html#4125080>

The debate now shifted to a formal proposal for the Worldcon business meeting (to be held in August) to change the rules to the new system. A new thread was started using wording written by Keith “Kilo” Watts. The “to-do” list still included:

*Name of the system*

*How to handle ties*

*How to handle withdrawn nominations*

*Best way to present at the business meeting*

*The final formal proposal language itself*

<http://nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/archives/016246.html>

The bigger work to come for all the proposals to change the rules was persuading members. A further obstacle was that any rule change could not be enacted for 2016. Worldcon operated a three-stage process for constitutional change: voted on in the first year, ratified in the second and implemented for the third year. This meant that even if the various rule changes were agreed to in 2015, they wouldn’t impact the nomination process until the 2017 Hugo Awards began.

Elsewhere, Vox Day was sceptical that any kind of change in the rules would make any difference to his style of Hugo campaigns, short of eliminating the cheaper supporting membership option altogether:

*“There is one thing and one thing only that will work. Ban supporting memberships. And even then, you’ll merely return to the days of log-rolling where the whisper candidates who have manufactured “buzz” dominate.*

...

*In the game industry, very smart people spend a lot of time attempting to anticipate very smart griefers. In 25 years, I have never seen a system that will stop them cold without constant management and post-release tweaking. I'm designing a system for a technology company right now that has multi-level monitoring-and-response built into the system for precisely that reason."*

Vox Day, comment at File770 <http://file770.com/time-considered-as-a-helix-of-semi-precious-puppies-55/comment-page-1/#comment-257363>

Voting in earnest had begun for the 2015 Hugo Awards, with ballots listing the finalists released on May 1<sup>[1]</sup>. People had until July 31 to vote and so there were many weeks to go before the fate of the Puppy campaigns would be decided and a few weeks after that until the results would be announced.

April had been a mixed month for the public-relations campaign of the Sad Puppies. Their apparent victory in the nomination stages was more than the leaders had expected and the scale of the controversy was possibly more than they had planned for. Nevertheless, they had started as winners. Brad Torgersen had gained some sympathy after the error-prone *Entertainment Weekly* article (see chapter 41) had falsely claimed that the Sad Puppies had only nominated white men. After anti-GamerGate campaigner Arthur Chu had referred to Torgersen's wife and child as "shields"<sup>[2]</sup>, Torgersen compared himself to a prisoner in a gulag<sup>[3]</sup>. However, both Correia and Torgersen had used April to argue with George R.R. Martin and his posts about the Puppy campaigns. Correia, in particular, followed his normal style of internet argument in an attempt to discredit Martin's characterisation of the Sad Puppies<sup>[4]</sup>. While their responses pleased their followers, they reacted to Martin's posts on "Puppygate" as if he were a major opponent rather than a potential ally in opposing the No Award Strategy<sup>[5]</sup>.

The Sad Puppy campaign needed to start May with some positive presentation of their views. Unfortunately, things quickly went badly wrong.

One of the lingering side-questions in April had been whether the people Brad Torgersen had chosen for his slate had all been contacted by him, and if they had, what he had said. At *File770*, author Juliette Wade gave an account of her experience. Wade had been on the very first iteration of the Sad Puppies 3 slate but had immediately asked to be removed. She explained that she had been contacted beforehand by Torgersen but she had not understood that he was asking her to be on the Sad Puppies slate.

*"I did not notice the word "slate" or think anything of it at the time. We then discussed his upcoming work duties (army reserve stuff). Then on February 1 the Sad Puppies list was posted, and I was alerted to it by my friend Lillian Csernica. I remember feeling cold and a little sick. I immediately IMed Brad at 6:28 pm."*

<http://file770.com/an-account-of-juliette-wades-withdrawal-from-sad-puppies-3/>

Wade's version of events did not cast Torgersen in a very bad light, although she did describe him as being disingenuous. In an odd decision, Torgersen decided to leave a comment on the post:

*"Juliette's a colleague at Analog and I've been hoping for three years to see her name finally appear on the Hugo ballot. It's unfortunate that Juliette's fears — at being shamed, shunned, and ostracized, for appearing on the "wrong" list — caused her to withdraw when the slate was released. Which says far, far more about Sad Puppies' detractors, than it does about Juliette, or me for that matter.*

*Once again, the Are your papers in order? factor rears its ugly head. Nobody should have to be afraid of being on a list of suggestions. But Juliette (and a few others) were. Because they didn't want to be punished for an association. Brilliant, folks! Just brilliant. Let's make hard-working authors afraid of having the "wrong" people put those authors forward, for recognition.*

*If you can't see the problematic nature of this atmosphere that's been created — by the field's progressive fans and pros alike — you're not paying attention."*

Brad Torgersen comment <http://file770.com/an-account-of-juliette-wades-withdrawal-from-sad-puppies-3/comment-page-1/#comment-256133>

People were quick to point out that Wade had said nothing about any fears. Torgersen replied with further elaborations on Wade's thinking and why she had withdrawn out of fear of reprisal. A repeated response from the Sad Puppy leaders to finalists on their slate withdrawing had been that they had done so out of fear

of reprisals. Torgersen was sticking with that messaging in his comments on Wade's post at *File770*. That position unravelled when on May 3 Juliette Wade also left a comment.

*"Brad Torgersen, you are pretty brazen, trying to speak for me, and I would appreciate it if you never attempted to do so again. I was entirely unaware of the Sad Puppy connection because I had deliberately been avoiding looking at your wall, much less your blog, for going on two years. My maintenance of our friendship was out of courtesy. I guess I was too idealistic, thinking that Sad Puppies might be over and that you would just be talking to me about some Hugo recommendations, but I do like to think the best of people. It should not be my responsibility to go and look up whether a person is being dishonest every time they say they like my work. Just to be clear, you have clearly got no idea of my motivations and are trying to spin them to your benefit. I was appalled by your actions in the Sad Puppy business last year and obviously made a mistake in thinking that you should be taken at your word (with the understanding that people include all relevant and important information when they are informing someone of something, which you did not do in this case.) I would never, ever have wanted to associate with Sad Puppies after last year, because of the depth of my anger over their behavior. I felt sick that you had deceived me and betrayed my confidence, and the fact that you denied having done so is irrelevant. You, and your actions, were what I was avoiding in pulling myself off the list."*

Juliette Wade comment <http://file770.com/an-account-of-juliette-wades-withdrawal-from-sad-puppies-3/comment-page-2/#comment-256184>

Torgersen and Correia had objected to their campaign being called misogynistic, homophobic and racist. Having undermined himself on the first of those points Torgersen promptly undermined himself on the homophobia. Posting a joke on Facebook about how both he and Larry Correia like women he added "We're not sure about Scalzi on that count. If you know what I mean."<sup>[6]</sup>

John Scalzi pointed out the problem:

*"If Brad Torgersen wants to insult me, insinuating I'm gay won't work. It's not an insult to be gay. Be an insult to be a Sad Puppy, however."*

<https://twitter.com/scalzi/status/595075792465502208>

Torgersen attempted an apology but missed the gist of John Scalzi's point. In a comment on his own blog, Scalzi explained:

*"Two, the apology is for insinuating about my sexuality, but apparently not for suggesting that there is anything at all wrong with being gay. Which is to say Torgersen appears to be apologizing for the not offensive thing (insinuating regarding my sexuality), and not about the actual offensive thing: The homophobia that asserts that being gay is such a shameful thing that implying that I am so is an insult that rates an apology. Allowing that "even Scalzi" doesn't deserve to be called gay does appear to apply that to Torgersen, being gay is a real problem. There's a lot left unexamined, here."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/05/04/id-rather-like-men-than-to-be-a-sad-puppy/#comment-784102>

Meanwhile, author Myke Cole (who also had a military background) castigated Torgersen as an officer:

*"You have long held the position that homosexuality is immoral behavior, and most recently made denigrating jokes regarding the orientation aimed at Mr. John Scalzi. Your moral positions are your own, and I will not question them. However, I will remind you that you are a military officer and charged with the leadership of men and women of \*all\* walks of life, religions, creeds, sexual orientations, socio-cultural backgrounds and ethnicities. Every single one of these people has the right to believe that you will faithfully discharge your duties as an officer, not spend their lives carelessly, not make them endure unnecessary hardship, that you will care for them with compassion and dedication. On or off duty, you are \*always\* an officer."*

<https://archive.is/gvgvZ#selection-133.0-139.608>

Cole did not cite any examples that Torgersen had a long-held position that homosexuality is immoral behaviour<sup>[7]</sup>. For defenders of Torgersen and the Sad Puppy campaign, Cole's letter was seen as an attack on Torgersen's military career. Torgersen had frequently employed his military background and family circumstance as a way of adding an element of personal integrity to his claims about the Sad Puppies. In the subsequent arguments, that question of his personal integrity came under question in two ways, firstly on

whether those substantial claims about the Sad Puppies 3 slate were true and secondly whether his marriage and rank lent any credence to his claims.

Vox Day's advice to Torgersen was unambiguous:

*"Does no one listen or learn? Never, EVER apologize to SJWs! Case in point: "The apology was worse than the initial attempted slur — it reinforced the fact that Torgersen thinks calling someone gay is a slur."*

*I repeat. NEVER APOLOGIZE TO SJWs. They will see it as fear, take the apology, and use it as a club with which to beat you. Never back down to them, never retreat, never apologize. Notice that this was all posted AFTER Torgersen apologized to Scalzi."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150506072017/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/05/never-retreat-never-apologize.html>

In the comments to John Scalzi's post on Torgersen's homophobic comment, Rachel Swirsky had another concern with how the multitude of arguments were being conducted:

*"Please, please, please, please stop with the "put down" rhetoric about the puppies, and the "you know what has to be done about rabid animals" and "take the dog out behind the barn."*

*It's vicious and horrible. The puppies and how they've acted toward me and others sucks. But good lord, let's keep threats of violence, however unserious, out of it. Please."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/05/04/id-rather-like-men-than-to-be-a-sad-puppy/#comment-784139>

Even without comments about putting down rabid dogs, the debate was becoming polarising. For the Sad Puppies this was strategically damaging but for Vox Day it was less of a problem. While it was easy for people to mock Day's "Xanatos gambit" claims, there was a sense in which the final outcome of the Hugo voting was less important for his objectives. Day had commercial goals and political goals. His commercial goals were to promote his right-wing publishing house to a right-wing audience. At *File770*, he boasted:

*"I don't despise the institution nor am I trying to destroy it. It's just in the way at the moment. I am going to disrupt the publishing houses, but even that's just a side effect of the very thing I told SFWA about two years ago. It will be live well before the end of the year and the model conservatively predicts we'll be selling 10k SF books per day within two years."*

Vox Day, comment <http://file770.com/the-paw-of-oberon-54/comment-page-2/#comment-257005>

Day was still convinced that video games would become the main outlet for selling books and that Castalia House and its video game parent company AlpenWolf would lead the way (see earlier chapters). The conflict and "war" rhetoric were all about adding to publicity and attention.

The political goal was not so very different from the commercial goal. Day had long been critical of mainstream conservatives and their willingness (as Day perceived it) to work with centrist and moderate left institutions. The Rabid Puppy campaign was intended to radicalise.

*"You all really need to stop crying about the fact that someone who doesn't belong to your community and has been attacked by part of your community for over a decade doesn't care if your community is destroyed. I don't care about your institutions. I don't care about your feelings. I don't care about your gentlemen's agreements. I don't care if you have the feelbads or if you're laughing at how adorable I am."*

*I'm simply going to do what I'm going to do, and so are my 346 Vile Faceless Minions. At this point, very little would change if I got bored and retired to a monastery tomorrow. The cultural war in science fiction is finally out in the open."*

*You haven't destroyed Brad Torgersen by your attacks on him. You just turned him and dozens of people like him into me."*

Vox Day, comment <http://file770.com/the-paw-of-oberon-54/comment-page-1/#comment-256981>

Whether either strategy was genuinely working in his favour was a whole other question but in May 2015 he was convinced that the conflict worked in his favour:

*“I didn’t say I don’t care about anything. But I’m not here because I care about the Hugos or your opinion. I’m here so that neutral parties can clearly see the difference between me and you, between Rabid Puppies and the SJWs. I’m here to help people choose their side.*

*The comparison is not quite as flattering to you as you probably think it is. For every five neutrals exposed, I estimate that three join us, one joins you, and one stays neutral. Sure, these run-ins tend to inflame those already on your side, but that’s a price worth paying.”*

Vox Day, comment <http://file770.com/the-paw-of-oberon-54/comment-page-2/#comment-256987>

Writer and Sasquan Guest of Honour David Gerrold had a very different perspective on the idea of there being a two-sided conflict.

*“Vox Day set out to hurt the SF genre by damaging our award system. Whether Brad and Larry cooperated or colluded with him is irrelevant. The seeds of dissension have been planted and the crop is coming in nicely. We’ll harvest in August and then we’ll begin the next chapter. Some people have suggested that there is equivalence by talking about “two sides.” Nope. There’s one side, and then there’s a lot of confused, hurt, and outraged fans who were looking forward to the usual Worldcon where we only complained about what the committee did wrong. (That’s a tradition. Even the best run conventions get complaints that they were too well run. I’m not kidding.)”*

<https://www.facebook.com/david.gerrold/posts/10205517432107535>

Gerrold discussed ways forward but also pointed to the one substantial obstacle to any kind of reconciliation.

*“The SFWA expelled Vox Day for his unprofessional behavior. Fandom as a community, and the Worldcon as an institution, should have the same power to invite someone to the egress. Other conventions have taken steps to protect themselves from toxic and disruptive individuals — and based on the back-and-forth conversations I’ve seen, and as unpleasant a discussion as this will be, maybe it’s time to have a discussion about the mechanisms for shutting down someone who has publicly declared his intention to destroy the awards.”*

ibid

Could Worldcon expel Vox Day? Regardless of whether the rules permitted such an expulsion, there was a more basic problem. Day might not even be a member of Worldcon and whether he was or not was wholly irrelevant to the actions he was taking. Day was also boasting of hundreds of “minions” who would be willing to vote on his instructions and he had proven that he had sufficient votes to impact the Hugo nomination process. Expulsion may have been the SFWA’s solution to their Vox Day problem but the World Science Fiction Society would need a different one.

The two-sided war model of the continuing conflict suited Day’s purposes but it was rhetoric that the Sad Puppies found themselves reaching for. Back in April, Brad Torgersen had unwisely posted (and then wisely deleted) an essay framing the conflict as akin to the American Civil War:

*“The Hugo award is just a thing; a mere football. These divisions go far beyond a silver rocket ship. They are drawn along political lines — liberal, and conservative; progressive, and libertarian — as well as along artistic lines — taste, expression, and the desire for meaning. If one side has announced angry shock that Sumter got shelled, it’s because that side had the luxury of ignoring the other side. At least until now. The grays have thrown off their teeth-grit veneer of second-class citizenship, and the blues are rallying to the status quo. Voices long quiet, have erupted with the yell of rebellion. And there is every sign in the world that the blues will stop at nothing to put down the grays.”*

Brad Torgersen in a deleted post quoted here <https://workbench.cadenhead.org/news/3742/brad-torgersens-science-fiction-civil-war>

[8]

On May 2, IT guru, contrarian<sup>[9]</sup> and 1981 Hugo finalist Jeff Duntemann critiqued the Puppy controversy as essentially feeding the Puppy campaign by opposing it:

*“My conclusion is this: The opponents of Sad Puppies 3 put them on the map, and probably took them from a fluke to a viable long-term institution. I don’t think this is what the APs intended. In the wake of the April 4 announcement of the final Hugo ballot, I’d guess the opposition has generated several hundred kilostreisands of adverse attention, and the numbers will continue to increase. Sad Puppies 4*

*has been announced. Larry Correia and Brad Torgersen have lots of new fans who'd never heard of them before. (I just bought the whole Monster Hunter International series and will review it in a future entry.) To adapt a quote from...well, you know damned well whose quote I'm adapting: "Attack me, and I will become more popular than you could possibly imagine." Or, to come closer to home, and to something in which I have personal experience: "Feed puppies, and they grow up.""*

<http://www.contrapositive diary.com/?p=3402>

Vox Day certainly was enjoying the attention. Like everybody paying attention, he was also curious about the makeup of the many new members Worldcon was getting in 2015. Day also announced early in May a change in voting strategy. According to Day, he had always been keen on the Puppy campaigns voting "no award". This was akin in Day's eyes to burning the Hugo Awards to the ground. Now, hoping that many of the new members would be supportive of either the Sad or Rabid Puppy campaigns, Day offered this advice to his followers:

*"Now that the science fiction SJWs have publicly declared No Award, the best possible outcome for us is for them to try to burn down the awards and fail. And that is why we should not help them do it. I very much understand the temptation to cry havoc, run amok, and gleefully set fires, but keep this in mind: while strategic arson is good, strategic occupation is glorious. Translation: stow the flamethrowers. For now. And as for those who are tempted to freak out and overreact simply because the other side is throwing punches, keep in mind how the great champions react to getting hit."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150506214735/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/05/patience-is-strategic-virtue.html>

However, the impression given from the framing of two sides in conflict ignores the nature of the volume of the discussion. It was true that the key leaders of the Sad and Rabid Puppies were the focus of a lot of criticism but it was far from simple name-calling. The conflict had engaged many people who had only been partly engaged with the Hugo Awards in the past and the apparent threat to the Hugo Awards was inspiring new interest.

Both Jim C. Hines<sup>[10]</sup> and K. Tempest Bradford posted statistical breakdowns of the Hugo Award finalists by gender. Bradford pinpointed 2007 as a point in which the representation of women in the awards had actually declined in comparison to previous years, only to rise consistently up to 2014.

*"This happened for a lot of reasons. Many of those seeds were planted in 2007 in online conversations about gender bias and racism. It took a while for some of them to take root and grow strong. Because even with all the shouting and discussion, the larger world of fandom didn't participate or even know about it. Did some Worldcons gain more supporting memberships after 2007 due to these issues?"*

<http://tempest.fluidartist.com/unintended-consequences-a-post-about-the-hugos/>

Meanwhile, writer and pop-culture analyst Alexandra Erin began a delightful series of book reviews from the perspective of a fictional John C. Wright analogue eager to discover SJW/liberal tricks in innocuous books such *Corduroy*, *Imogene's Antlers* or *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* <sup>[11]</sup>. In a similar vein *File770's* daily Puppy Round-Ups started carrying poems and jokes from the comments of the previous day's round ups, such as this take on a famous and much-parodied poem:

*This is Just to Say*

*We have nominated*

*The stories*

*That were on*

*The ballot*

*And which*

*You were probably*

*Hoping*

*For better stories*

*Forgive us*

*Revenge is delicious*

*So sweet*

*And so cold*

Ultragotha, quoted <http://file770.com/i-am-not-a-puppy-i-am-a-free-man-515/>

Sad Puppy supporters also tried their hands at comedy, with Catholic fantasy writer Declan Finn posting a series of “Sad Puppies Bite Back” stories at his blog<sup>[12]</sup>.

But what really caught fans attention in May was the release of the 2015 Hugo Award Packet. The packet was a relatively recent but now firmly established tradition originally pioneered by John Scalzi. Works from finalists were collated into a downloadable collection for Hugo voters, making it easier for people to read works that they hadn’t already read.

People had already started reviewing the finalists before the packet was released but the packet helped fuel an explosion of reviews. I’ll save those for another chapter.

Throughout the month, progress had continued on the voting proposal at *Making Light*. The technical but clunky name of SDV-LPE had been replaced with the grand title of *E Pluribus Hugo* (EPH for short), meaning “Out of the Many, a Hugo”. The efforts of the group working on it were now focused on writing a formal proposal for the 2015 Worldcon business meeting. Jameson Quinn also started a *Go Fund Me* campaign to pay for him to attend Sasquan and speak for the proposal<sup>[13]</sup>.

And what else happened in May? Two things and both of them related to the Tor Books.

The first was the announcement in the *New York Times* that Tor Books had signed a \$3.4 million deal with John Scalzi for 13 books<sup>[14]</sup>. The deal did not literally cause the heads of his many detractors to explode.

The second was a Facebook post on May 11. Irene Gallo, creative director at Tor, described on her personal Facebook page the Sad and Rabid Puppies:

*“There are two extreme right-wing to neo-Nazi groups, called the Sad Puppies and Rabid Puppies respectively, that are calling for the end of social justice in science fiction and fantasy. They are unrepentantly racist, misogynist, and homophobic. A noisy few but they’ve been able to gather some GamerGate folks around them and elect a slate of bad-to-reprehensible works on this year’s Hugo ballot.”*

Irene Gallo, comment Facebook – since deleted

Her comment drew little attention at the time...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/2015/05/voting-open-for-2015-hugo-awards/>
- [2] [https://twitter.com/arthur\\_affect/status/585635584070262784](https://twitter.com/arthur_affect/status/585635584070262784)
- [3] <https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/04/09/gulag-diary-day-6/>
- [4] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/04/09/a-response-to-george-r-r-martin-from-the-author-who-started-sad-puppies/>
- [5] <https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/04/14/george-r-r-martin-responds/>
- [6] <https://twitter.com/scalzi/status/595065592081690624>
- [7] Unlike Vox Day and John C. Wright, I don’t believe Torgersen has made a clear statement on the record of that kind, although people might make inferences from other statements he has made.
- [8] greys and blues being the colours of the uniforms of the Confederacy on one hand and US Army on the other, with Torgersen presenting the Puppies as the rebels of the Confederacy
- [9] [http://www.contrapositivejournal.com/?page\\_id=8](http://www.contrapositivejournal.com/?page_id=8)
- [10] <http://www.jimchines.com/2015/05/hugo-gender-balance/>
- [11] <http://www.alexandraerin.com/2015/05/sprb-corduroy/> <http://www.alexandraerin.com/2015/05/rprb-imogenes-antlers/> <http://www.alexandraerin.com/2015/05/sprb-if-you-give-a-mouse-a-cookie/>
- [12] e.g., <http://www.declanfinn.com/2015/05/sad-puppies-bite-back-v-puppy-wins-hugo.html>
- [13] <http://nielsenhayden.com/makinglight/archives/016262.html> <https://www.gofundme.com/f/sasquanvoting>
- [14] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/05/25/about-that-deal/>

## 43: June Part 1 — the Tor Boycott

The discussion on the Sad and Rabid Puppy campaigns had not burned out by the start of June 2015 but it had plateaued. The back-and-forth of the argument had reached a point of circularity where people argued about events that had occurred in the course of the discussion. Earlier in the conflict, people had been giving one-star reviews at online book stores of works by notable Puppy-associated authors and counter campaigns had also occurred<sup>[1]</sup>. Sad Puppy-nominated finalist Lou Antonelli had found a Tweet critical of the Sad Puppies so objectionable that he contacted the Tweet's author (reviewer Aaron Pound) at his place of work<sup>[2]</sup>. These kinds of bad-faith interactions further fuelled hostility but at this stage, the surrounding discussion remained one mainly about books and awards. It wasn't a polite discussion about books and awards but it had not reached the kind maelstrom of toxicity that GamerGate had.

In early June, Jim C. Hines wrote a lengthy post summing up the various positions and claims the Puppy leaders had made.

*"I wanted to try to sort through the noise and hone in on what Correia and Torgersen themselves have been saying. As the founder and current leader, respectively, of the Sad Puppies, it seems fair to look to them for what the puppy campaign is truly about."*

<http://www.jimchines.com/2015/06/puppies-in-their-own-words/>

Around the same time, John Scalzi felt that he had said all he had to say about the Sad Puppies:

*"It's not escaped notice that I've been slacking on my Hugo/Puppies commentary recently, but honestly at this point there's not anything new for me to say. It's a low-information movement begun in craven entitlement, with a political element tacked on as a cudgel, taken over by an ambitious bigot, and I'm sorry for the several excellent people I know who have gotten wrapped up in this nonsense one way or another. That's pretty much where I've been on it for a while now. When I have anything new and useful to add, I'll make note of it."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/06/08/weekend-updatery-and-miscellaneous-6815/>

In the world of video games, GamerGate was still going strong, in part because its mixture of harassment and consumer activism means that participants always had something to do. The Sad and Rabid Puppy campaigns had vague and mutable objectives but their focus, one way or another, was on the 2015 Hugo Awards. Reading and reviewing books were not the kind of activity that could easily maintain a GamerGate-style culture war.

Despite reasonable fears, the Puppy Kerfuffle (a name which was beating "Puppygate" as the collective title) had not become overwhelmed by or folded into GamerGate, either in terms of numbers or in terms of tactics.

On Saturday, June 6/Sunday, June 7<sup>[4]</sup>, a self-styled "leader of GamerGate", Vox Day, decided to reinvigorate his Rabid Puppy campaign with a more GamerGate-style move. On Twitter, Day posted a message saying:

*"The Creative Director at Tor Books libels #SadPuppies, Rabid Puppies, and #GamerGate on Facebook."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150607072408if/https://twitter.com/voxdav/status/607225621475958784>

Embedded in the Tweet was a screenshot of Irene Gallo's Facebook comment from May 11. The time stamp on the comment in the image showed that the picture had been taken only a few hours after the comment had been made. At this point, it was unclear whether Day only just become aware of Gallo's comment or had waited until an opportune moment. In fact, it was the second option but we will look at that in the next chapter. Either way, the ensuing fuss had broken at a weekend, when supporters of the Puppy campaign had time to devote to social media but also a time when it would be difficult for corporate public relations to respond.

Gallo's comment had been in a reply explaining who and what the Sad and Rabid Puppies were:

*"There are two extreme right-wing to neo-Nazi groups, called the Sad Puppies and Rabid Puppies respectively, that are calling for the end of social justice in science fiction and fantasy. They are unrepentantly racist, misogynist, and homophobic. A noisy few but they've been able to gather some*



*GamerGate folks around them and elect a slate of bad-to-reprehensible works on this year's Hugo ballot."*

Irene Gallo, comment Facebook – since deleted

It was an offhand comment and not a carefully crafted piece of PR and there were certainly flaws in it. The two campaigns had enjoyed a degree of ambiguity as to what constituted "the Sad Puppies". Was it just Torgersen and Correia, the Evil League of Evil, or did it extend to the people on the slate or was it supporters of the campaign in general? From a perspective of precise political taxonomy "neo-Nazi" was poor terminology as there were no avowedly neo-Nazi groups involved<sup>[5]</sup> but multiple people had made cogent arguments that both campaigns (Vox Day, in particular) were rooted in fascism/neo-fascism/ur-fascism. Racism, misogyny and homophobia were all arguable and Torgersen's "affirmative action" claim about Hugo winners based on their gender, sexuality and ethnicity had been a core principle of the Sad Puppies 3 campaign (see earlier chapters).

Arguably, the biggest issue with Gallo's comment was calling the slate "bad-to-reprehensible works" as one of the works was published by Tor (*The Dark Between the Stars* – Kevin J. Anderson) but that was clearly a matter of opinion.

However, the precise wording of the comment was neither here nor there. Day's intent was to start a firestorm using the GamerGate playbook. Gallo's Facebook post flooded with comments, to which she replied with pictures of kittens. Comments included this question from Brad Torgersen:

*"Irene Gallo, I am going to ask a question, and I expect a response other than a cat picture non sequitur. How did you arrive at your conclusion that Sad Puppies is "neo Nazi"?"*

Brad Torgersen, comment Facebook

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150608193632/https://www.facebook.com/igallo/posts/10152728739637461>

Even an ungenerous reading of Gallo's comment did not support a conclusion that she had stated that the Sad Puppies was neo-Nazi but her comment had swiftly been taken to another level. Many Puppy supporters were characterising her comment as a claim that the Sad Puppies in general (including the campaign's supporters and nominees) were neo-Nazis and that all the slated works were terrible.

Come Monday, Gallo made an apologetic comment on her post:

*"About my Sad/Rabid Puppies comments: They were solely mine. This is my personal page; I do not speak on behalf of Tor Books or Tor.com. I realize I painted too broad a brush and hurt some individuals, some of whom are published by Tor Books and some of whom are Hugo Award winners. I apologize to anyone hurt by my comments."*

ibid

Tor book's official Twitter account announced:

*"Happy Monday! We appreciate your comments & would like to remind you that the views of our employees do not reflect those of the publisher."*

<https://twitter.com/torbooks/status/607937578788986880>

Meanwhile, Vox Day had declared war or rather an end to what he regarded as a kind of truce:

*"Back in April, Larry Correia and I, among others, encouraged everyone to leave Tor Books out of it. We made it clear that our problems were with certain individuals at Tor, not the organization itself. But as Peter Grant points out, Irene Gallo's comments, to say nothing of Moshe Feder's and John Scalzi's (now that the organization has bet its future on him, Scalzi is relevant in this regard), appear to indicate that we were wrong and our problem is with the organization as it is presently comprised after all."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150611203313/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/06/sf-war-to-knife.html>

Day had spent much of April pointing out the connection between Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden and Tor as well as implying that Tor was to some degree or other, rigging the Hugo Awards<sup>[6]</sup>. However, Larry Correia had indeed asked supporters of the Sad Puppy campaign to step back from making it a campaign against Tor Books<sup>[7]</sup>. While Tor was disliked for various reasons (and specifically because of John Scalzi and the Nielsen Haydens) Tor published many, many writers including Sad Puppy nominee Kevin J Anderson but also Evil League of Evil founder John C. Wright. There was an additional danger that the multiple

connections between the Sad Puppy leadership and Baen Books would result in the campaign looking like it was directly affiliated with the smaller publisher.

Supporters of the Sad Puppy campaign followed Vox Day's lead in accusing Tor and Irene Gallo of insulting them. Author and advocate for the Sad Puppy campaign, Tom Knighton tweeted:

*"Honestly, @torbooks has essentially said their staff can insult #SadPuppies at will, and nothing will be done. Pathetic."*

<https://twitter.com/TheTomKnighton/status/607959794838831104>

Mad Genius Club blogger and Sad Puppy nominee for Best Fan Writer Cedar Sanderson decided Gallo's comment was the final straw:

*"This has been increasingly clearly a company that was no longer in control of their employees, and those employees were determined to harm as many of us as they could possibly do, with absolutely no effort to discern any shred of truth. Irene Gallo simply blurts out the nastiest, most inflammatory things that pop into her head, as the author of the Entertainment Weekly article did, and it seems clearer and clearer that they are connected. "*

<https://www.cedarwrites.com/2015/06/07/fear-and-loathing-at-tor/>

Her colleague at Mad Genius, Dave Freer also joined in:

*"When someone speaks of a neo-Nazi the image that springs to my mind is a large angry skinhead with swastika tattoos, possibly beating up Jews in some inner city. I'm a little confused to find that Irene Gallo, the Creative Director at Tor thinks I am one.*

*Do you think I need to change my appearance to fit her delusions? Put on weight? Get high heels? Perhaps I'm supposed to 'self-identify' as a neo-Nazi woman (of dwarfish origins), and, to account for my being married to woman, as a lesbian. Huh I would have thought they'd be threatening me with multi-million dollar contracts to avoid being thought specieists, not abuse./sarc off."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/06/08/communication-subjectivity/>

Freer did not want a boycott of Tor Books, at least not yet. First he felt that his readers should write to the email address of the person responsible for the companies code of conduct and ask what was going to be done about Gallo's comment.

*"I urge you to do the same if you don't want the reaction from this hurting your favorite Tor author. I think it fair to give them time to respond, to deal with this sepsis. Let's see what they do about it. If it is not adequate I am afraid I will have to join the boycott of any Tor author who is not either a Sad Puppy, or who does not speak out publicly against this (which is very hard on authors, and that makes me angry and sad, but eventually you have to stop just hoping they'll leave you alone.) and encourage my readers to do the same. The company did not make a fortune from me – maybe 50-100 dollars a year. It won't break them, but I won't support someone who abuses me and many friends who are better people than I am. As I point out below, publishers get a lot more of a book's money than the authors. You'd think not badmouthing readers would be common sense."*

ibid

Another member of the Mad Genius Club, Peter Grant had already discussed at the weekend the idea of a Tor boycott.

*"I've remained silent about many previous slanders and libels about this situation, but this is just about the last straw. I would very much like to know whether Tor shares and/or espouses the false, slanderous and libellous views expressed by Ms. Gallo. If that company doesn't take a stand against such lies, or even chooses to remain silent about them (despite their being propagated by one of their editors), then I will have to assume that the time has come to openly call for a boycott of Tor by all objective, non-partisan, independent fans of science fiction and fantasy. I'll be discussing this option with other SF/F authors (and individuals involved in this controversy) during the coming days, to see whether we can co-ordinate a suitable response."*

<https://bavourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2015/06/is-it-time-to-call-for-boycott-of.html>

*Mad Genius Club* even carried a guest post by a Sad Puppy supporter Jonathan LaForce demanding that Tor crack down on bad behaviour:

*“Tor, let’s face facts: that you repeatedly allow straw man makers like John Scalzi to have a place in your stable, even as he vainly justifies his arrogant idiocy is absurd. To allow bigots like NK Jemisin bully pulpits without regard for fact or truth is wrong. To encourage people to put one-star reviews on Amazon, simply because you don’t like an author’s politics, rather than because you didn’t like the story is not only disgusting, it is a wilful manipulation of the Amazon rating system.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/06/07/dear-tor/>

The criticism of Gallo’s comment was not restricted to the Sad Puppy campaigns core supporters though. Baen author and editor Eric Flint, who had been critical of the Puppy campaigns came to the Puppy’s defence:

*“I will continue that debate. But I can’t possibly succeed in my goal, or even make any significant progress, if the people I’m arguing with are not only convinced that they’re being slandered but actually are being slandered. Under those circumstances, people stop listening to anyone except those already supporting them.”*

<https://ericflint.net/hugo-controversy/in-defense-of-the-sad-puppies/>

In the early days of GamerGate, the campaign enjoyed a notable victory by lobbying chip manufacturer Intel to pull an advertising campaign from video game news site Gamasutra. The website had been critical of GamerGate and in response the campaign had lobbied Intel portraying themselves as angry consumers<sup>[8]</sup>. By 2015, corporations connected with the gaming industry were becoming more circumspect to online outrage before reacting. The relatively quieter world of book publishing was still learning. On June 8, the founder of Tor Books Tom Doherty published an official letter from Tor Books. In tone it was apologetic but attempted to steer a line between mollifying Sad Puppy anger without promising any action.

*“Tor employees, including Ms. Gallo, have been reminded that they are required to clarify when they are speaking for Tor and when they are speaking for themselves. We apologize for any confusion Ms. Gallo’s comments may have caused. Let me reiterate: the views expressed by Ms. Gallo are not those of Tor as an organization and are not my own views. Rest assured, Tor remains committed to bringing readers the finest in science fiction – on a broad range of topics, from a broad range of authors.”*

<https://www.tor.com/2015/06/08/a-message-from-tom-doherty-to-our-readers-and-authors/>

The Tor.com version of the letter quickly filled with comments.

By the time Doherty’s letter appeared on Monday, Peter Grant had already written two more posts about Gallo’s comment. On Sunday he had identified the core set of people he objected to at Tor:

*“No. It’s becoming increasingly clear that **the problem lies in the corporate culture that’s taken over at Tor Books and Tor.com.** Four individuals currently or previously associated with Tor’s management and publishing activities at a senior level have now made statements that I can only regard as biased beyond logical comprehension. They are Patrick Nielsen Hayden (manager of science fiction books at Tor); his wife Teresa Nielsen Hayden (listed by Wikipedia as a ‘consulting editor’ for Tor Books, and formerly a senior editor there – also the publisher of the well-known web log and forum ‘Making Light’); Moshe Feder (also a consulting editor for Tor Books); and Irene Gallo (Associate Publisher of Tor.com and Creative Director of Tor Books). Certain Tor-published authors, primarily John Scalzi but also including others, have spouted the ‘party line’ in their support and/or on their own account as well.”*

<https://bavourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2015/06/well-well-well.html>

When Doherty’s letter was published, Grant responded with an open letter pointing to his experiences in South Africa.

*“Given that background, you’ll understand that to be told by Ms. Gallo that, as a supporter of the Sad Puppy campaign, I’m “unrepentantly racist”, is utterly unacceptable to me. Furthermore, I’ve fought (and I mean exchanged gunfire with) real neo-Nazis who sought to impose Nazi-like ideals of racial purity on a country at war with itself. Thus, to be told that I’m a member of an “extreme right-wing to neo-Nazi group” is equally unacceptable. I could go on cherry-picking individual clauses out of Ms.*

*Gallo's statements, but why bother? I think you can understand why I exploded with anger when I read it. She has no idea about those realities. I do. I will bear their scars, mental, spiritual and physical, until the day I die."*

<https://bavourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2015/06/an-open-letter-to-tom-doherty-of-tor.html>

Grant finished his letter with an ultimatum:

*"Mr. Doherty, with the greatest possible respect to you as an individual: until Tor **publicly** dissociates itself from the outrageous positions taken by the individuals I have named (all of them), **publicly** rebukes those concerned, and takes steps to make sure that no such statements are ever again made by senior members of the company, I shall be unable to believe any assurances that their views are not those of Tor. Actions speak louder than words – and so does the absence of actions. All Tor has offered is words. It's time for actions. What is Tor going to, not say, but **DO** about the situation? – because unless and until it does the right thing, others **are** going to do what they believe to be necessary and appropriate under the circumstances."*

ibid

By Wednesday (June 10), Grant was even more angry both with Tor and ordinary people defending Gallo's comments.

*"Those tactics are not going to work in this case. I've had enough. So have many other people. Ms. Gallo's words were the last straw for us, as I explained in my earlier posts. They're merely the latest example of a long-standing pattern of behavior by senior employees at Tor. I'm not joking about my response, either. I'm willing to give Tor a few days – a week at most – to rectify the situation and deal with all those involved, not just Ms. Gallo. If the company fails to do so, I will call for a boycott of its products and publications . . . and I won't do so alone. I've consulted with a large number of fellow authors and other individuals about this over the past few days. There are some influential figures involved, as Tor may soon find out to its cost."*

<https://bavourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2015/06/the-tor-imbroglio-and-progressive.html>

While many people had been commenting on the issue, there was a concession among Puppy supporters that Grant was in some way leading the way with this issue. On the Thursday of the same week, Larry Correia wrote an uncharacteristically short post about the controversy:

*"As far as I'm concerned, this is between Tor and its customers. A bunch of folks have come out to condemn Tom Doherty as a misogynist for trying to protect his company, and more #standwithGallo to double down on her comments about how everybody who disagrees with them politically is a racist, sexist, homophobe. That's awesome. You guys do far more to prove my original contention than anything I could have ever done on my own."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/06/11/the-latest-sad-puppies-related-stuff/>

Meanwhile, Doherty's letter had indeed come in for a lot of criticism by people opposed to the Sad/Rabid Puppies. Multiple authors and editors and fans were taking to social media to overtly express support for Irene Gallo. Examples include:

*"You can't even say "the sky is fucking blue" on the internet, as a woman, without public shaming. Where was the public employer outcry during RaceFail, or FrenkelFail?"*

Kameron Hurley <http://www.kameronhurley.com/the-revolution-of-self-righteous-dickery-with-not-be-moderated/> <sup>[9]</sup>

*"I'm not an eloquent debate enthusiast. My words dry up when struggling to defend myself or my positions. Fiction is easy. Arguing is not. It's just the way I am. And as it's the end of the day, more eloquent people than me have written about this. So I will link to them, and just say **I stand with Irene**. I definitely would want someone to stand with me."*

Mur Lafferty <https://murverse.com/standing-with-irene/>

*"I stand in solidarity with Irene Gallo. I respect the hell out of her and her work and I think she is doing amazing things with art direction. She makes an incredibly difficult job look effortless and easy. And publicly chastising her for what she said on her personal Facebook page was wrong."*

Natalie Luhrs <https://www.pretty-terrible.com/links-061215/>

*“What I am specifically concerned about, and why I’m disappointed in Tor, is their reaction to a complaint from one of the Puppies about a comment made by a Tor employee, Irene Gallo, on her personal Facebook page. Rather than taking a considered approach, Tor threw their employee under a bus, and appear to have broken every rule in the crisis comms rulebook. It’s sad to see that a company that in many other respects really gets the web, fails to understand how to manage the fallout from an online furore. “*

Suw Charman-Anderson <http://charman-anderson.com/2015/06/10/how-tor-failed-social-media-101/>

*I don’t know if you’ve been on the internet lately, but in the current GamerGate climate, a man calling out a woman for talking about misogyny is a fucking bat signal to the worst elements of the internet. It’s basically painting a giant target on her back for harassment, threats, doxing, and all the other methods misogynist mobs use to attempt to shut up women they don’t like. And leaving the comments open? That’s generally not done in these situations, because THAT’s basically inviting the harassers into the online equivalent of her workplace.*

Jessica Price <https://jessicalprice.tumblr.com/post/121118147583/i-stand-with-irene-gallo>

Eric Flint followed up his earlier post defending the Sad Puppies from the claims made in Irene Gallo’s comment with a specific rebuttal to Brad Torgersen. Flint quoted a verbal attack Torgersen had made on the Nielsen Haydens back in April, where he had called them cowards and without ethics and scruples and portrayed himself and the Sad Puppies as Spartans at the battle of Thermopylae fighting “the forces of the progressive pink and poofy Xerxes”<sup>[10]</sup>. Flint then stated:

*“Anybody who posts something like this online has no business complaining about the rhetoric of other people.*

*What this debate has basically come down to is the Sad Puppies defending their frequently irresponsible and sometimes outrageous conduct by insisting “they did it first!” And, often enough, their opponents yell back the same thing.”*

<https://ericflint.net/hugo-controversy/response-to-brad-torgersen/>

At the right-wing news outlet *Breitbart*, Allum Bokhari regarded Gallo’s apology and Doherty’s letter as a victory in a culture war.

*“Everywhere we look, the authoritarian left is on the retreat. As I predicted in January, a chorus of liberal voices has risen to condemn their behaviour. On social media, in tech and on the campus, ostensibly liberal and left-leaning commentators are busy condemning the extremists of their own tribe. Meanwhile, campaigns like GamerGate and the Sad Puppies are routing them in the culture wars. As in so many other cultural arenas, the SJWs of sci-fi are long past their heyday. And much of that decline can be attributed to the Sad Puppies themselves.”*

<https://www.breitbart.com/the-media/2015/06/13/torpedoed-media-narrative-on-hugo-awards-incorrect-savs-tor-books-founder/>

He went on to state:

*“Of course, many of the Sad Puppies have accused both Gallo and Tor Books of being insincere. That may well be true. But just a few short years ago, when the authoritarian left were at their peak, the idea of someone like Gallo feeling the need to issue an insincere apology would have been inconceivable.*

*Regardless of the outcome of the Hugo Awards, the Sad Puppies can start smiling. They are now a force to be reckoned with. And when you’re standing up to bullies and authoritarians, that’s often the only thing you need.”*

*ibid*

Sometime before Friday, June 12, an anonymous comment at a Reddit thread (since deleted) claimed to be a Tor employee and stated that the complaints were coming from bots<sup>[11]</sup>. Vox Day decided to treat this as a serious claim and responded as if the comment was a new set of false claims by Tor.

*“Fascinating. So, let’s examine the claims to determine how credible this is:*

*1.The Puppies are using “terroristic tactics”. That’s false.*

2. *The Puppies have created bots and sent “thousands of threatening emails”. That sounds like a variant of the old “#GamerGate is just 200 people” narrative that everyone in GG knows to be false. We’re expecting 100 for GGinParis alone. In any event, it means that if you have sent an email to Tor Books or Macmillan, you had better send another one with proof that you are not a bot. And “thousands” of emails? I know people are pissed off, but I find that hard to believe. Dozens, definitely. Hundreds, maybe. But thousands? No. And I very much doubt the emails were threatening anyone either.*

3. *Tom Doherty didn’t write the statement from Tom Doherty. That’s a fascinating claim. Doubtful. If he was angry about it, why did he leave it up?*

4. *Tor’s reputation is heavily damaged. All right, that’s true enough.*

5. *No one is going to get fired. If that’s true, then I will publicly endorse the boycott of Tor that many have been urging. However, given the nature of the previous statements, we should probably get confirmation before taking any such action.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150615003059/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/06/tor-books-stands-by-gallo.html>

Meanwhile, Tor did not concede to Peter Grant’s demands and censure its editors or one of its best selling authors. However, Grant did claim to have received inside communication from somebody at Tor:

*“I woke up to an e-mail from someone working at Tor. My correspondent begged that I not say anything that could lead to his/her/its identification, for fear of retaliation, but provided details that allowed me to confirm his/her/its identity and position there. A certain amount of ‘inside info’ was provided, and I’m promised more such information from a second correspondent later today.”*

<https://bavourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2015/06/most-interesting.html>

The anonymous insider explained to Grant that there was a lot of upset in the upper echelons at Tor. In a later post Grant reported his insider’s claims, many of which mirrored what had been said by the anonymous commenter at Reddit.

*“It appears that there’s immense anger and bitterness among some senior personnel at Tor. They reportedly believe the current backlash against that company is basically ‘manufactured outrage’, deliberately stirred up by Vox Day (whose name is allegedly an expletive there now). Some have even asserted that the thousands of e-mails complaining about Irene Gallo’s statement aren’t genuine, but the product of a bot-net, a manufactured wave of pseudo-indignation that has no foundation in reality. Apparently Macmillan and others involved aren’t so sure about that, but it’s a defence the SJW’s are using with might and main. It’s also apparently why almost none of us have had any acknowledgment of our complaints, not even a notification that our e-mails have been received. (Some correspondents who requested confirmation when their e-mails were opened have received it; others have not.)”*

<https://bavourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2015/06/anger-doubt-and-confusion-at-tor.html>

This idea, based purely on anonymous comments, that Tor’s management believed that email complaints were from bots fuelled a new phase in the campaign.

On June 14, Vox Day escalated his campaign:

*“But none of those people ever had a means of striking back at the people at Tor Books who were raining contempt on them at every given opportunity before. All I have done is provide tens of thousands of people with an opportunity to hit back at the very small number of individuals they know to hate and despise them. The outrage is not manufactured, it is merely directed. I can’t make people angry at Tor Books because they already are.*

*So, now it is time to demonstrate that we are not bots. Now it is time to let Macmillan know that we truly exist and we do NOT approve of the senior SJWs at Tor Books who have been publicly attacking us for more than a decade.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201108100540/http://www.voxday.blogspot.com/2015/06/the-outrage-is-not-manufactured.html>

Author and editor L. Jagi Lamplighter made a new request of her readers in a similar vein:

*“The last week or so has been very painful. On one hand, I have tremendous sympathy for the many good folks at Tor, some of whom I have known for 30 years. On the other hand, I also have tremendous sympathy for the fans—a few of whom are veterans who fought actual Nazis—who feel they are tired of being heckled and humiliated by a very few Tor employees, who have been behaving in a less than professional manner. Many of these readers are people I know, people I interact with online, or fans of John’s who have written us thoughtful letters explaining why they regretfully feel they must stop buying Tor book, despite their desire to keep reading John’s latest series.*

*I was thus appalled to see posts suggesting that the emails to Tor—many of which, I am led to understand, are arriving with photos of the reader’s Tor book collections, in some cases, collections worth thousands of dollars—were not legitimate but were sent from automated bots.”*

<http://www.ljagilamplighter.com/2015/06/15/tor-and-the-puppies-i-am-not-a-number/>

Lamplighter requested that readers write a physical letter to Tor, perhaps with pictures of Tor books they had bought previously, to demonstrate that they were real people.

Lamplighter’s husband, Evil League of Evil founding member John C. Wright followed Vox Day’s lead with a similar request of his readers. Wright’s most notable books were published by Tor, so the possibility of a boycott was a thorny issue for him.

*“I can speak with authority for the other Sad Puppies. We explicitly and openly said and meant from the outset to promote the opposite of a political agenda with our slate: We promoted for your consideration, dear readers, works thought good because they were entertaining, well crafted and imaginative; not bad works thought useful because they served political correctness, starred or were written by some favored mascot or supported some cause of the Left, and had no science fiction in them at all. The only color we care about is the black of the ink and the green of the pay. The hue of the hand that wields the pen does not somehow magically make the story more well written.*

*For this we were libelled, slandered, and insulted in every possible way in every venue the enemy could reach, with a fervour and a blinding soul-destroying hatred even now impossible to credit.”*

<https://www.scifiwright.com/2015/06/i-am-a-real-person/>

On Monday June 15, Peter Grant made an ultimatum to Tor:

*“I am simply not prepared to allow the lies, slander, libel and open contempt of those named above to continue unchallenged. Therefore, those expectations still hold. If they have not been met by noon on Friday, I shall call for a boycott of Tor Books. I’ve spoken to a large number of SF/F authors, fans and others about this. Some will publicly support a boycott. Others will do so more tacitly. I imagine we’ll both find the result interesting.”*

<https://bavourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2015/06/can-you-hear-us-now-another-open-letter.html>

By Tuesday, Grant was considering what the deafening silence from Tor and its parent company Macmillan to his ultimatum meant<sup>[12]</sup>. On Friday, Grant announced that the boycott of Tor was on. He was keen though to point out that this was not a Sad Puppies campaign as such:

*“I am not a member of, and I do not speak for, either the ‘Sad Puppies’ or ‘Rabid Puppies’ campaigns (although I support the former). I don’t represent cute puppies, playful puppies, cuddly puppies or hush puppies – only myself. If you share, in whole or in part, my values and outlook on life, I invite you to join me in this boycott. Don’t do so just because I, or anyone else, is asking you to do so. Act on the basis of your own informed conscience and reasoned judgment.”*

<https://bavourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2015/06/the-tor-boycott-is-on.html>

Larry Correia made a similar point from a different direction:

*“I’m seeing this narrative pop up that Sad Puppies is calling for a boycott of Tor, but that is simply not true. Speaking as the guy who started the Sad Puppies campaign, I’m not calling for a boycott of anything. I’m not asking anyone to do anything. As far as I’m concerned this mess is between Tor and its customers. I’ve said very little about it so far, but I’ve been clear about that much.*

*The Sad Puppies Campaign is NOT calling for any boycotts.”*  
<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/06/18/sad-puppies-are-not-calling-for/>

Both Grant and Correia made use of a fine distinction. Grant regarded Gallo’s comments about the Sad Puppies as a personal attack on himself as a *supporter* of the Sad Puppy campaign but for the Tor boycott, he wanted to be clear that he was not a *member* of the Sad Puppy campaign.

Meanwhile...Steve Davidson at *Amazing Stories* had an alternative to Grant’s boycott announcement. Picking up a suggestion from the comments at *File770*, Davidson declared that the next day, June 19, should be *Buy From Tor Day*.

*“Why does the world’s largest publisher of science fiction and fantasy need your help? Well, I don’t think they do, actually. I think they’re doing just fine – and I think they’ll be doing just fine despite the Puppy-inspired almost-might-be-happening-maybe boycott. Our friends over in Puppyland, county of Rabid (mostly) have taken great exception to one Irene Gallo’s supposedly libellous statement and are using it to try to make TOR cave to their demands that they fire her and several other puppy-kickers – Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden and Moshe Feder who also work at TOR – for the crime of not living in Puppy Bubble Land. (Excuse me,. That’s Happy Puppy Bubble Land.)”*

<https://amazingstories.com/2015/06/buy-tor-day/>

After Twitter had huge numbers of tweets on June 19 of people stating that they had bought a Tor book that day. In response, Vox Day posted sets of tweets where people had used the same wording. This, he suggested, showed that people were lying. Among the Tweets quoted was one by comic book and graphic novel writer Kurt Busiek. When Busiek was also challenged on Twitter by a person repeating Day’s claim, Busiek simply posted images of the receipts.

While the initial stages of the campaign had repeated many of the tactics used by GamerGate (target an individual woman but using the frame of a consumer complaint), the boycott lacked the same quality. The important feature of these tactics was to give supporters something active (but easy) to do. Not buying a book was easy but it wasn’t active. Buying a book on the other hand was both active and for the mass of science fiction fans opposing the Sad Puppies, relatively easy to do.

With Tor Boycott campaign essentially stalled by design, Vox Day announced “Stage 2”. This was essentially the same as L. Jagi Lamplighter’s earlier idea of sending physical letters. Day announced his demands:

*“Until Irene Gallo and Patrick Nielsen Hayden are no longer employed by Tor Books or Tor.com, I will not:*

- 1. Purchase any books published by Tor Books*
- 2. Read any books published by Tor Books*

*Given (2), this means that if Ms. Gallo and Mr. Nielsen Hayden are still employed by Tor Books in 2016, I will not nominate any books published by Tor Books for any awards.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170715235625/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/06/stage-2-snail-mail.html>

Day had also changed the tags under his blog’s main title to “*#SadPuppies BOYCOTT TOR BOOKS #GamerGate*”

A snail mail letter campaign was not the kind of activity to mobilise a culture war. Nor was this the only problem with the boycott campaign. At the *Otherwhere Gazette* Francis Turner (who had proposed a Baen Hugo campaign in 2006 – see chapter 10) explained:

*“the posts inspired me to take a look at my book buying habits and it turns out I jumped the shark gun on the boycott thing because it seems I’ve been boycotting Tor for a while now. Not intentionally, but that’s probably more serious for Tor and its owners than a straightforward determination to boycott. You see Tor don’t actually publish books I want to read and, Kevin J Anderson apart, haven’t done so for a few years.”*

<https://otherwheregazette.wordpress.com/2015/06/24/the-future-of-tor/>

Much of the dual Puppy campaigns’ supporters were people buying books from Baen or independently published books online or (more recently) books from Castalia House. Aside from a small set of authors



(such as Orson Scott Card, Brandon Sanderson, David Weber, John C. Wright, Kevin J Anderson) they were less likely to buy newly published books from Tor. A boycott of Tor by Sad Puppy supporters was unlikely to make a dent in Tor's bottom line but it might impact authors such as John C. Wright.

The Tor Boycott had dominated the discussion in June 2015 but it wasn't the only event in our story that month...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://maxonwriting.com/2015/05/28/battle-of-the-lone-star-reviews/>
- [2] <http://file770.com/the-effect-of-puppy-rays-on-fan-in-spokane-rocketships-526/comment-page-2/#comment-269965>
- [3] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_GamerGate#June\\_2015](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Timeline_of_GamerGate#June_2015)
- [4] depending on time zones – Day is in Europe and events correspond with him posting Sunday morning his time, with reactions on Saturday evening US time.
- [5] that I know of
- [6] for example, when a John C. Wright work was disqualified because it had been published prior to 2014, Day said: “Both Sad Puppies and Rabid Puppies exist because some members of the science fiction community were being treated as more equal than others, and the fact that John Scalzi and Tor Books are AGAIN the incongruous beneficiary of this sort of quietly preferential treatment is further evidence of the influential cliques and whispering campaigns that George Martin and other SJWs have disingenuously denied.”  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20150414182940/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/04/john-c-wright-work-disqualified.html>  
This is a politer example, as I'm avoiding the numerous disparaging references to Teresa Nielsen Hayden
- [7] “Don't threaten to boycott anybody because of their business associations, because that's exactly the kind of boorish behavior that's been done to us. Don't post links to a torrent site and suggest that people pirate stuff instead of giving a publishing house money. Do you have any idea how offensive it is to do that on a professional author's feed?”  
<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/04/11/last-sp-post-for-the-week-to-my-people-dont-yell-tor/>
- [8] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_GamerGate#October\\_2014](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Timeline_of_GamerGate#October_2014)
- [9] See chapter 13 for RaceFail and see chapter 24 for the scandal around Tor editor Jim Frenkel
- [10] In the comments to a Dave Freer post pushing a conspiracy theory about Teresa Nielsen Hayden's March prediction that the Hugo finalist announcement would be shocking <https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/04/13/nostradumbass-and-madame-bugblatterfatski/#comment-55499> The Xerxes comment suggests Torgersen was alluding to the Zack Snyder film *300*.
- [11] Even in 2015 it is surprising anybody took claims by an anonymous person on Reddit seriously. The original comment has gone but some of the replies can be seen here [https://web.archive.org/web/20170119141429/https://www.reddit.com/r/scifi/comments/39616g/i\\_stand\\_by\\_irene\\_gallo\\_terribleminds\\_chuck\\_wendig/cs47xdt/](https://web.archive.org/web/20170119141429/https://www.reddit.com/r/scifi/comments/39616g/i_stand_by_irene_gallo_terribleminds_chuck_wendig/cs47xdt/)
- [12] <https://bayourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2015/06/i-think-tor-and-macmillan-dont-know.html>
- [13] <https://web.archive.org/web/20150622005451/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/06/the-first-law-in-action.html>

## 44: June Part 2

[Content warning for discussion of a racist mass shooting in a later section]

The Tor Boycott and harassment of Tor creative director Irene Gallo by supporters of the dual Puppy campaigns dominated the discussion in fannish spaces in June. However, neither fandom nor the rest of the world stopped for the quixotic campaign against the publisher.

The same weekend that Vox Day started his campaign against Gallo (see the previous chapter), the SFWA presented the Nebula Awards for works produced in 2014. The timing of Day's release of the screenshot of Gallo's Facebook comment and the Nebula Awards was almost certainly not a coincidence. Out of curiosity, Mike Glycer emailed Day and asked him directly about the timing. Day explained:

*"I've held onto this since I had the screencap, which as you correctly note was made several weeks ago. As for the "sinister plotting", I have long been in the habit of never using all of my ammunition at once, or pointing-and-shrieking for its own sake. I am a patient man and I didn't strike back at TNH, PNH, or even John Scalzi right away either."*

Vox Day via email quoted here <http://file770.com/vox-day-reponds-about-gallo-screencap/>

The Nebula Awards presented a what-might-have-been look at works that potentially could have been Hugo finalists if the Puppy campaigns had not occurred. The Hugo and the Nebula awards often have an overlap in finalists but the outcomes can vary substantially between the awards. Nonetheless, the difference between the two awards was quite stark in 2015.

The winners in categories with equivalent Hugo categories were:

- Novel
  - *Annihilation*, Jeff Vander Meer (FSG Originals; Fourth Estate; Harper Collins Canada)
- Novella
  - *Yesterday's Kin*, Nancy Kress (Tachyon)
- Novelette
  - "A Guide to the Fruits of Hawai'i," Alaya Dawn Johnson (*F&SF* 7-8/14)
- Short Story
  - "Jackalope Wives" by Ursula Vernon (*Apex* 1/7/14)
- Ray Bradbury Award for Outstanding Dramatic Presentation
  - *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Written by James Gunn and Nicole Perlman (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures)

Of those, only the Dramatic Presentation category had any overlap with the Puppy slates and Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy* was arguably the least controversial Puppy-pick.

In a contrast to the tone of debate that would dominate June, one of Vox Day's sternest critics, Elizabeth Sandifer, debated Vox Day in a podcast where they discussed two stories of their own choosing. Sandifer picked Iain Banks's debut novel *The Wasp Factory*, while Day picked John C. Wright's Hugo finalist novella *One Bright Star to Guide Them*. The discussion demonstrated Day's capacity to present a demeanor of reasonableness as they examined the allegorical aspects of Wright's story:

**Sandifer:** Sure. Now then, do you want to just explain quickly the broad strokes of the allegory? In particular, the talking cat character, Tybalt. Who does he represent, and in particular, there's this climactic scene where Tommy has to kill this magical cat in order to lose his fear and become able to wield the magical sword that's necessary to defeat the villain. So, can you just explain how that allegory works, quickly?

**Day:** Well, Tybalt represents two things. Number one, he's obviously the Jesus Christ figure, because he has to die in order for the sacred fire to be lit, and then of course he comes back after his death, so he's the Aslan, he's the Jesus Christ. He's also, however – in that he's a black cat who has to be killed – he's also representational of the sin in Tommy's life, and it's the same reason that Mel Gibson, when he was filming...

**Sandifer:** *Passion of the Christ*, using his own hands to actually be the one to hammer the nails into Jesus's hands, right?

<https://www.eruditorumpress.com/blog/the-vox-day-interview-transcript>

John C. Wright struggled to maintain the same degree of détente in the aftermath of the discussion suggesting (in the abstract) violence in the comments at Day's blog. Sandifer examined Wright's tendency to suggest violence while noting the probability of Wright acting on his statements was very low:

*“-Mysticism is an aesthetic of observation and contemplation–*

*This is why the Christians are right to kill the magicians. If one does not define one's terms correctly, mental disorganization is the only result, and one speaks only darkness. Mysticism is an epistemology of non-rational truths: knowledge that comes through oneness with the universe, the spirit world, or the creator.”*

*The first line is Wright quoting a previous post of mine. The second paragraph is him advocating for my murder. Because he disagrees with my definition of mysticism. I am, to be clear, not particularly scared by this. I do not imagine that John C. Wright will now be hiding in my bushes, waiting for the opportune moment to strike. This is empty, vicious rhetoric of the sort that Day and Wright specialize in – sound and fury that, while not exactly signifying nothing, is still clearly told by an idiot.”*

Elizabeth Sandifer quoting John C. Wright <https://www.eruditorumpress.com/blog/john-c-wright-has-just-advocated-for-my-murder>

Meanwhile, Sarah A. Hoyt found far less substantial things to be concerned about. Mike Glycer's daily round-up of events in the so-called 'Puppy Kerfuffle', each had titles that used wordplay to mix puns about dogs with pop-culture references. The June 12 title was *The Hydrophobia That Falls On You From Nowhere*<sup>[1]</sup> — a pun based on rabies (because of Rabid Puppies) and the 2014 Hugo Award-winning story *The Water That Falls on You From Nowhere* (see chapter 32).

This round-up included as the eleventh entry a quote and link to a post by Sarah A. Hoyt which discussed Irene Gallo's use of the term “neo-Nazi”. As a consequence, Hoyt was not happy about the coverage at *File770*:

*“This brings me to something I was musing about this morning, right after I figured out what it meant that the lack-brains at File770 (henceforth club 770) linked back to my post with “the hydrophobia that falls on you from nowhere” because apparently my saying something about “arrangements that must be made for people of different orientations as reproduction and sex become more divorced from each other” means I'm homophobic. This despite the fact that you don't need to scratch very deep in this blog to figure out I was pro gay marriage well (WELL) before their sainted president evolved.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2015/06/15/bv-angels-for-angels/>

Puppy-nominated Hugo Finalist Kary English was unhappy for different reasons. In comments at *File770*, she expressed her frustration with the nature of the conflict. After criticising Larry Correia and Brad Torgersen for not apologising for the sweep of the nominations, she explained her reasons for not withdrawing:

*“It seems I can't say anything remotely in that vein without someone saying that if I truly thought that, I would withdraw. I've already given my reasons for not withdrawing, but I'll mention again that a large part of it is not giving Vox Day the satisfaction.*

*All that stuff about nominating liberals just to watch them self-flagellate and see how fast they withdraw? I'm not his marionette, and I won't dance to his tune. He set us up to be targets, just like he set up Irene Gallo. I'm not giving in to Vox Day.”*

Kary English in a comment at *File770*, later reposted <http://file770.com/furface-tension-626/>

On her own blog, she explained her issues with the claimed goals of the Sad Puppy campaign when compared to the actual outcomes:

*“I'm also not comfortable with the ballot sweep. My sense from the Sad Puppies is that locking up the ballot was never one of the goals of the movement, and that it was accidental, unintentional and unforeseen. If I'm wrong, and nominating five works in some of the categories was a deliberate attempt to sweep the ballot, then I wouldn't have wanted to be part of that, either.*

*The Hugos should represent all voices, so if Sad Puppies is about drawing attention to works that might otherwise be overlooked, I can support that and I'm happy to stand for it. But if it's about shutting out other voices and other work, if it's about politics or pissing off certain segments of fandom, that's not something I can get behind."*

<http://karvenenglish.com/2015/06/an-open-letter-to-puppies-and-everyone/>

Vox Day was dismissive of English's critique, making it clear that he doubted any of the Evil League of Evil was sorry about the ballot success at the nomination stage. Day concluded his post with this warning:

*"As several of the VFM have pointed out, the SJWs have it all backwards. They have to think that I am somehow duping thousands of idiots and fools into openly opposing them because the alternative is to accept how massively unpopular they are and how dismally their decades-long campaign to tell people what science fiction they may and may not read has failed.*

*What should frighten them is not the idea that Brad and Larry are the moderates in this regard. What should frighten them is the fact that I AM THE REASONABLE ONE here. Because the Evil Legion of Evil, the Dread Ilk, the Ilk, the Rabid Puppies, and above all, the Vile Faceless Minions, are not here to negotiate."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150630174136/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/06/i-dont-care-what-you-do.html> <sup>[2]</sup>

Day very publicly stated that he didn't care about English's views but by the end of June, when Day published the voting order for the Rabid Puppies in the Best Short Story category, he notably did not include Kary English's work *Totaled*<sup>[3]</sup>.

## ***Beyond the Kerfuffle***

Meanwhile, two events would impact the broader culture war in America: one tragic and the other hopeful.

On June 17, nine people were murdered in a racially motivated mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The victims included the pastor of the church, who was also a state senator<sup>[4]</sup>. The murderer, Dylann Roof, had released a manifesto before the shooting describing his racist belief. Photographs of the killer with images of the apartheid-era South African flag, the former Rhodesian flag and the Confederate Battle Flag<sup>[5]</sup> were made public.

Later investigation into Roof's motives found a young man who had "self-radicalised"<sup>[6]</sup> online, initially through following alarmist reports of "black on white" crime by the white-nationalist/paleoconservative Council of Conservative Citizens<sup>[7]</sup> and then through material from the more overtly neo-Nazi group The Northwest Front. This latter group was led by a man named Harold Covington who was a former member of the American Nazi Party who had later moved to South Africa and Rhodesia before returning to the US. Covington had also authored his own series of science fiction novels of the sub-genre of near-future US civil war. The Guardian described Covington's influence of Roof in an article that drew connections with the Puppy campaigns:

*"Covington, if you believe his website, runs a growing enclave of white supremacists near Seattle called the Northwest Front. The non-profit group is reflected in a series of sci-fi novels, authored by Covington, about a dystopian future in which a white nation is the only answer to US economic and racial woes.*

*American science fiction has long had a rightward tilt, from the contemporary strain of small-press sci-fi Tea Party fantasias swarming the Hugo Awards nominations all the way back to libertarian deity Ayn Rand. But Covington's novels are a breed apart."*

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/28/harold-covington-northwest-front-dylann-roof-manifesto-charleston-shooting>

There were no actual solid connections between Covington and either of the Puppy groups<sup>[8]</sup> but the article highlighted the role fiction played in imagining nationalist civil conflict within the USA.

As well as the extremist content, Roof had adopted from Covington (and probably elsewhere) the use of semi-covert neo-Nazi and white supremacist symbols, such as the use of the number 88 (which has multiple meanings) and 14 in reference to a key tenet of white supremacist beliefs<sup>[9]</sup>.

Much of America was in shock after the killings but not everybody. Baen author and Sad Puppy finalist for Best Related Work Michael Z. Williamson responded by taunting people discussing the murders on Twitter. In addition, he included a number of comments on his Facebook page about the murders, including criticism

of the murdered pastor because he had been opposed to concealed carry gun laws. More shockingly, Williamson also posted a “joke” about the murders that was a supposed recipe for a cocktail called a “A Charleston”. Fan writer Natalie Luhrs documented Williamson’s comments:

*“I don’t care if you think they’re jokes. And I know full well what kind of context they’re coming from, when your Twitter feed is full of you taunting people who are grieving and angry over an act of terrorism perpetrated against their community and you have pictures of yourself with guns and your Facebook profile pic is pro-waterboarding. I know exactly what kind of asshole you are and you can’t slither out of responsibility for your words because you think they’re jokes.”*

<https://www.prettv-terrible.com/documenting-a-wannabe-supervillain/>

Dylann Roof’s use of the Confederate Battle Flag led to a renewed examination of the flag as a symbol of racism and white nationalism. After much debate, on July 6, the South Carolina senate voted to remove the Confederate Battle flag from its position on the State House. Multiple online retailers, such Wal-Mart and eBay, announced plans to end sales of merchandise with the Confederate symbol on it.

Vox Day blamed the corporate response to the killings on a government conspiracy and claimed that it was censorship<sup>[10]</sup>. In a later post he would state:

*“All the SJWs have succeeded in doing is heating up the cultural war while taking one of the more potent historical symbols of the past and making it relevant to tomorrow’s rebels.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150627180735/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/06/the-game-of-thought-police.html>

The Charleston murders would have wider repercussions, raising questions about not just America’s problem with mass shooting but also racism and the role monuments celebrating the slave-owning Confederacy play in mobilising hate.

A more positive change for America occurred on June 26. The Supreme Court came to a majority opinion on the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case. The case effectively made marriage equality the law across all US states. The impact on millions of Americans would be substantial, cementing their right to be married and ensuring legal recognition of their families<sup>[11]</sup>.

Marriage equality had been a long-running battle in American politics and a Supreme Court decision shifted the politics of the issue considerably. Brad Torgersen saw a strong positive aspect to the decision despite his religious beliefs on the issue.

*“The Supreme Court has swept away an inequality. Well, and good. I’ve thought this outcome inevitable for probably ten years now. Just because of the trajectory of the legal wrangling.*

*Does that mean I, as a person of conservative religious belief, have to cheer and applaud a thing which my religious doctrine says is wrong? Nope. But then, not every wrong thing in the world has to be barred legally. Like I’ve said before, freedom of choice is a bedrock principle of my LDS faith. And while I am not an authority — nor do I claim any ability to speak for any Mormon other than me — I do think choice is a huge part of these very divisive and contested political fights over the rights of other people.*

*Because the choices other people make, sometimes offend us terribly.*

*This past week, it seems to me that the Supreme Court decided in favor of more rights. More freedom. More choice.*

*I think that’s the way it should be. Even if my church doctrine believes also that the exercising of these freedoms (gay marriage) is against the plan of God.”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/06/28/love-one-another-its-the-only-way-part-2/>

John C. Wright was far less happy:

*“In one hundred years, when this ruling is only an historical curio, like the Dred Scott Decision, studied by law students, or in five hundred years, when the Padishah-Emperor of the Americas finally converts to Christianity and makes the worship of the God of Abraham legal once again, or in fifty million years, when human beings are half forgotten legends in books written by the Coleopterous Race that rules*

*earth after mankind has passed away, the One, True, Apostolic and Catholic Church will still be in business, still preaching and teaching the same truths that she has always taught.”*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2015/06/the-feast-of-sts-peter-and-paul/>

Vox Day was even more upset by the court decision, calling marriage equality a “government-imposed abomination and the legal parody of marriage”.

*“It has become abundantly clear that the U.S. federal government is increasingly opposed to the U.S. Constitution, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. And like every other government that has been foolish enough to take on the Body of Christ throughout history, it will demand obedience in vain.*

*Of course the lukewarm and the nominal believers will fall in line and fall away, that is what they always do. But as the pressure mounts, the faith of the faithful will grow harder and stronger, until their oppressors break upon it like a pane of glass striking a diamond.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150621154222/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/06/bow-not-before-caesar.html>

Despite these complaints on the right, marriage equality was no longer the polarising wedge issue that it had been in American politics.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <http://file770.com/the-hydrophobia-that-falls-on-you-from-nowhere-612/>
- [2] VFM = “vile faceless minions”, numbered recruits for the Rabid Puppy campaign drawn from his comment section. Ilk and Dread Ilk were nicknames for long-standing regulars at his blog.
- [3] <https://web.archive.org/web/20150630174101/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/06/hugo-recommendations-best-short-story.html> arguably Day was doing English a favour by not listing her work. Alternatively, it could have been an experiment on Day’s part to see how much his final recommendations would impact the results.
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charleston\\_church\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charleston_church_shooting) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clementa\\_C.\\_Pinckney](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clementa_C._Pinckney)
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flags\\_of\\_the\\_Confederate\\_States\\_of\\_America#Battle\\_flag](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flags_of_the_Confederate_States_of_America#Battle_flag)
- [6] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/08/22/prosecutors-say-accused-charleston-church-gunman-self-radicalized-online/>
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council\\_of\\_Conservative\\_Citizens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Conservative_Citizens)
- [8] ...at the time. However, Vox Day would in later year promote and publish One America News Network journalist Jack Posobiec. Posobiec was a fan of Covington’s novels <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/07/08/jack-posobiecs-rise-tied-white-supremacist-movement>
- [9] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Fourteen\\_Words](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Fourteen_Words)
- [10] <https://web.archive.org/web/20150628195221/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/06/corporate-action-or-censorship.html>
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obergefell\\_v.\\_Hodges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obergefell_v._Hodges)

## 45: The Reviews (April to July)

The focus of this project has been on a small number of people who set chains of consequences in motion but at every stage, it was fans who determined the outcomes of the Hugo Awards by voting.

The sheer volume of comments and debates that the dual Puppy campaigns engendered makes it impossible for this project to adequately capture the range of opinions and discussions that took place. In particular, lengthy comment threads at *File770*, *Making Light*, *Monster Hunter Nation*, *Mad Genius Club* and Brad Torgersen's blog saw opponents and supporters of the Puppy campaigns duelling over the aims and legitimacy of the Puppy campaigns.

As the leader of the Sad Puppies 3 campaign, Brad Torgersen had appealed to critics of his slate to read the works nominated and evaluate them fairly. Proponents of the No Award Strategy argued that the impact of slate voting (particularly from the Rabid Puppy campaign) meant that even a reasonable work was compromised as a finalist by the Puppy slates. In those categories where there was a single non-slated finalist (such as Best Fan Writer and Best Novelette), even the non-slated finalist was competing against a field that many fans regarded as illegitimate.

A pertinent question then was whether the 2015 finalists were any good.

- Had the Puppies actually nominated award-worthy works and people?
- Would a No Award strategy unfairly penalise worthy finalists?
- Were the few non-Puppy-slated finalists any good or were they unwitting beneficiaries of a distorted nomination process?

There was no simple, objective process that could decide these questions. In the end, the decision would come down to how Worldcon members voted but in the meantime what fans could do is read and review the Hugo 2015 finalists.

Multiple bloggers took on projects of systematically reviewing all or many of the Hugo categories. In some cases, they had already reviewed some of the finalists before the announcement just as part of their general reviews of what they were reading. For example, a critic of the Sad Puppy campaigns Aaron Pound posted a long positive review of Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Sword* in February of 2015 that described the book as "leaving the reader both satisfied at the end of the book and looking forward to the next instalment"<sup>[1]</sup>

However, the announcement of the Puppy Sweep in April 2015 and then the later release of the Hugo Packet and the opening of voting in May 2015 led to a surge of reviews. In some cases, those reviews were posts focused on a single work. In other cases, bloggers looked at whole categories in single posts. In July more of these whole category posts included rankings showing how the blogger was going to vote.

Of the multitude of Hugo Award categories, Best Short Story, Best Related Work and the headline category of Best Novel garnered the most attention. Together, those categories showed some of the range of the Puppy-slated nominees and the relative impacts of the slates on the set of finalists.

### **Short Story**

The original Sad Puppy slate for Short Story had been quite different to the final results. Of the categories that focus on individual works<sup>[2]</sup>, Short Story had been the one with the most women on it in the first version of the Sad Puppy slate. However, Megan Grey's "*Tuesdays With Molakesh the Destroyer*" was technically ineligible<sup>[3]</sup> and Annie Bellet had withdrawn her story "*Goodnight Stars*" in April when the impact of the Puppy slates had become clear. Despite these setbacks, the Rabid Puppy slate had made up the difference, so the resulting set of finalists were still all Puppy-slated nominees.

- "*On A Spiritual Plain*" by Lou Antonelli (*Sci Phi Journal* #2, Nov 2014)
- "*The Parliament of Beasts and Birds*" by John C. Wright (*The Book of Feasts & Seasons*, Castalia House)
- "*A Single Samurai*" by Steven Diamond (*The Baen Big Book of Monsters*, Baen)
- "*Totaled*" by Kary English (*Galaxy's Edge Magazine*, July 2014)
- "*Turncoat*" by Steve Rzasa (*Riding the Red Horse*, Castalia House)

The result was a decent sample of the range of Puppy-slated works. At one end of the spectrum was Kary English's "*Totaled*". English was a former Writers of the Future candidate who had met Brad Torgersen in the associated writer's forums and like Torgersen had been mentored by the veteran editor and multi-Hugo-nominated writer Mike Resnick. Like Torgersen, English was on a path as a writer that until recently was a plausible route towards Hugo recognition.

At the other end of the Puppy-spectrum, Steve Rzasa's "*Turncoat*" was part of the Vox Day and Tom Kratman edited military-science fiction anthology *Riding the Red Horse* published by Day's recently-formed

Castalia House. Baen Books was also represented in this set of finalists, as was the conservative aligned independent *Sci Phi Journal* magazine.

**“Totalled”** was one of the most favourably received works of the Puppy-slated finalists. Indeed, the positive qualities of the story even had some bloggers questioning why the Puppy campaigns nominated it. The pseudonymous blogger Spacefaring Kitten, who had taken on reviewing most of the Hugo finalists, said of the story:

*“‘Totalled’ is another example of the disjunction between Sad Puppy manifestos and the actual stories on the slate. Brad Torgersen has been complaining about there being “too little optimism” and Larry Correia has been complaining about there being no Hugo winners that feature “capitalism as a positive thing”. In “Totalled”, a brain that has been severed from its totalled body gets suicidal in the end and the antagonist of the story is a shady megacorporation manager. My guess is that if someone else’s votes had got this on the Hugo ballot, the Puppies would denounce it as an SJW story.”*

<https://sfkittens.wordpress.com/2015/05/09/totalled-by-kary-english/>

Others noted the similarity of the plot with the classic Hugo Award-winning *Flowers for Algernon*. However, while reviewers recognised the quality of the writing, a consistent criticism was that the story was not particularly original and while overall good, not exceptional. Puppy-slated finalist for Best Fan Writer (and overall a supporter of the campaigns) Jeffro Johnson said of the story:

*“This one is not bad. As I read it, I kept thinking... this is sorta like “Flowers for Algernon”. Then it turned into “Flowers for Algernon”!*“

<https://jeffro.wordpress.com/2015/04/21/a-few-comments-on-totalled-by-kary-english/>

More positively, Bonnie McDaniel (another blogger who covered most of the finalists) compared the story to a previous 2014 Hugo Finalist:

*“Holy crap. This story had a weight, resonance, and emotional impact all the others lacked. (It also wasn’t stupid, boring and senseless, which helped.) I must admit here that my standard for this year’s Hugo nominations is a story the Vapid Canines rejected–Rachel Swirsky’s “If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love.” I loved that story, and I’m not ashamed to admit it.”*

<https://www.redheadedfemme.com/2015/04/the-hugo-project-totalled.html>

Lou Antonelli’s story **“On A Spiritual Plain”** had been published in *Sci Phi Journal* but Antonelli had also made it freely available on his own blog,<sup>[4]</sup> which helped make the story one of the earliest reviewed stories of the 2015 Hugo finalists. The story features a Methodist minister helping the souls of the dead on a planet where the natural magnetic fields trap ghosts. Blogger Stephen J Wright<sup>[5]</sup> noted a common response to the story:

*“The setting is a potentially interesting one – there are stories to be told here – and it is utterly squandered, wasted on a story that has less character development than a Polaroid photograph and less dramatic tension than a piece of used knicker elastic. Antonelli’s story is a bald recital of events with the same emotional impact as a crossed-out to-do list. “Got up. Had breakfast. Laid ghost. Picked up laundry.””*

<https://sjwright.livejournal.com/113688.html>

Multiple reviews found the story underwhelming and lacking tension. Blogger Lyle Hopwood summed up the story as “More an anecdote”<sup>[6]</sup>. At *Black Gate* fanzine, Rich Horton had positive things to say about Antonelli’s other Hugo finalist work (*Letters to Gardner* in Best Related Work) but was underwhelmed by this short story:

*““On a Spiritual Plain” isn’t as good, alas – it’s another story of some ambition, and another story on a religious subject (one of at least four on the short fiction ballots), but it just doesn’t have that zing for me.”*

<https://www.blackgate.com/2015/07/09/the-2015-hugo-shortlist-short-fiction-a-review/>

At the *Future Less Travelled* blog, critic Vivienne Raper<sup>[7]</sup> was open to giving positive reviews to Puppy-nominated works. She ranked Antonelli’s story fourth on her ballot (above *“Totalled”*) but also drew a similar conclusion:



*"It's a great premise, but the story doesn't quite deliver. In fact, it doesn't do much at all."*

<http://futureslesstravelled.com/reading-the-rockets-best-short-story/>

If Jeffro Johnson had been disappointed by two of the Puppy-slated stories he was thoroughly enthused by John C. Wright's *"The Parliament of Beasts and Birds"*.

*"This is easily the best thing I've read among the Hugo nominated works for this year that I've looked at so far. I can see that many of my friends that I enjoy chatting about stuff with will not feel the same way— and again, that's fine. But for me... seeing what looks like a simple "beast fable" of Uncle Remus reworked into something that could not just answer the half cadences of Genesis but also give the impression of completing an untold portion of Revelation— all I can say is that I find it to be simply staggering. Thank you, Mr. Wright."*

<https://jeffro.wordpress.com/2015/04/20/a-few-comments-on-john-c-wrights-the-parliament-of-beasts-and-birds/>

Wright's story followed the format of a fable with sets of animals discussing what happened after humans had gone from the Earth. Spacefaring Kitten gave it 0/10<sup>[8]</sup>. Blogger Joe Sherry had chosen to use "no award" sparingly, calling it a "scalpel, not a scythe" but felt that "no award" was more deserving than Wright's fable:

*"I think it is intended to be a parable or an allegory, but what it is remarkably heavy handed on the Christian theme with rather poor / oddly formal writing and it really doesn't deserve to be anywhere near this ballot. As such, it will not remain on mine."*

<http://joesherry.blogspot.com/2015/05/thoughts-on-hugo-award-nominees-short.html>

More wryly at *Apex Magazine*, Charlotte Ashley summed the story up:

"I suspect that as far as biblical fables written in 2014 go, it cannot be beat. It is not, however, my sub-genre of choice, having no relatable characters, intriguing plots or mind-blowing ideas"

<https://apex-magazine.com/clavis-aurea-30-2015-hugo-awards-edition-short-fiction/>

Not unlike *"Totalled"*, Steven Diamond's *"A Single Samurai"* was also bedevilled by faint praise from reviewers. The story follows a samurai who must climb a giant monster in order to kill it. Laura "Tegan" Gjovaag described a common reaction to the story:

*"Oh, I want to like this one. It's strong in many places, and has a sense of whimsy I really enjoy. But in order for me to really like it, the story had to nail the landing, and in my opinion, it didn't manage it. I think I get what the author was going for, but it didn't hit that mark for me. I love the idea of the samurai being guardians against the demons and darkness, and I love the idea of a samurai having to fight a monster as big as a mountain. But it just didn't quite work for me."*

<http://realtegan.blogspot.com/2015/06/hugo-reading-short-stories.html>

At the Fantasy Literature website, Terry Weyna concluded:

*"This story isn't bad, but it's not award-level quality. It could have described in more detail what it was like to travel on a walking mountain, eliminated the drag, and justified — through weaponry, the telling of the history of the samurai, the exploration of this samurai's own history of battling other monsters — the ending. Indeed, that ending could be powerful if it were set up well."*

<http://www.fantasyliterature.com/reviews/magazine-monday-hugo-nominated-short-stories-2014/>

However, Steve Rzasa's story *"Turncoat"* (published in the Vox Day/Tom Kratman-edited milSF anthology *Riding the Red Horse*) at least managed to engender strong reactions in its readers. One of the less scathing reviews summed up the story:

*"In Steve Rzasa's "Turncoat" the future looks like a Galaxy-wide Terminator movie, with Skynet on steroids out to obliterate the humans who created it. Our protagonist is Taren X 45 Delta, an AI inhabiting a battleship, crewed by cyborgs but after its crew is taken away to improve its efficiency, it starts reading ancient philosophy as an antidote to boredom and (dare we say) loneliness. It begins to worry about human souls. In the end, Taren X 45 Delta decides it's wrong to fire on a convoy of hospital ships carrying children and uploads itself to one of the Ascendancy battleship escorts, and offers its*

*allegiance to the true humans. The biggest problem with this story is that so much space is spent on infodumps and geeked-out technobabble that there's no room to show us why and how Taren X 45 Delta comes to this decision. There is the seed of a really interesting story hidden here, but this isn't it."*

<https://bibliogramma.dreamwidth.org/153351.html>

At *Adult-Onset Atheist* the reviewer was irritated with the absurdity of the pseudo-precision of the numbers used by the story's narrator

*"I am also nonplussed by awkward units. The author of this story uses decaseconds and kiloseconds as if they speak to the audience. He also uses random bits of precision to make the story sound more "machinery". The resulting Dunning–Kruger ambience is annoying at best.*

– *"Thank you, Alpha 7 Alpha. The enemy patrols are more frequent. This is the third such incursion in 584 kiloseconds."*

*Why not make it an even 604.8 kiloseconds, and call it a week?"*

<http://adultonsetatheist.blogspot.com/2015/05/snarl-turncoat.html>

Spacefaring Kitten was also not impressed:

*"I think this is a quite awfully-written story with a heavy-handed delivery of plot points and a lot of infodumping. You can see the "surprise" conclusion of the story coming from miles away (or by reading the title, actually). A very boring read, overall."*

<https://sfkittens.wordpress.com/2015/05/03/turncoat-by-steve-rzasa/>

Meanwhile, Puppy-nominated finalist Jeffro Johnson had found the story that appealed to him:

*"this is exactly the sort of thing that ought to be in the science fiction magazines but which just isn't there anymore."*

<https://jeffro.wordpress.com/2015/04/24/a-few-comments-on-turncoat-by-steve-rzasa/>

Vivienne Raper was initially critical of the story saying that it "appears to kick off with a tech-dork-porgasm of military equipment" but unlike other reviewers found the style of numerical precision engaging and eventually concluded:

*"Turncoat isn't the greatest story I've read, but it's definitely the best out of a bad bunch. And a total surprise – I never expected to like this one."*

<http://futureslesstravelled.com/reading-the-rockets-best-short-story/>

Other reviewers called it "excessive technobabble weapons-fondling"<sup>[9]</sup>, "thoroughly lousy"<sup>[10]</sup> and "Wretched"<sup>[11]</sup>.

Overall, the sense from multiple reviewers of the short story category was one of being underwhelmed. Even reviewers sympathetic to the Puppy campaigns found several of the stories lacklustre. More damaging for the Puppy project as a whole was a lack of any indication of how these stories either moved science fiction forward or restored the genre to some lost golden age. Even if Vox Day's Rabid Puppy campaign was seen primarily as an attempt to troll the "SJWs", the short story nominees didn't do that either.

Ironically, Annie Bellet's story "*Goodnight Stars*", which she had withdrawn from the list of finalists, received largely positive reviews compared with the remaining finalists — except from Puppy supporter Jeffro Johnson because the story had swearing in it and some racist white men as antagonists:

*"But it's also amateurish. It's use of the "f word" a whopping seven times makes it seem like it was written by an adolescent, not a Hugo calibre writer. "Three big white men" roar in from "If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love" in order to hurl racist epithets and behave in a cowardly fashion."*

<https://jeffro.wordpress.com/2015/04/22/a-few-comments-on-goodnight-stars-by-annie-bellet-2/>

## **Best Related Work**

The Best Related Work is one of the most weakly defined categories in the Hugo Awards. It is not explicitly for non-fiction but typically the category has gone to non-fiction works such as biographies of writers, collections of essays, histories of the genre and encyclopaedias of science fiction<sup>[12]</sup>. As a category, it

does not usually draw the most attention or the most votes. However, the Puppy campaigns had an opportunity with the slated nominees in this category to make more overt statements about science fiction.

Unlike Best Short Story, the finalists matched exactly Brad Torgersen's initial Sad Puppies 3 slate. The works included two entries from Castalia House, including yet another entry from John C. Wright. The other entry from Castalia House was a second entry from the *Riding the Red Horse* anthology. This anthology was edited by Vox Day and a basis for Day's nomination for Best Editor Short Form. Although not included in either slate, Brad Torgersen's short story "The General's Guard" was also in the anthology<sup>[13]</sup>.

Aside from Castalia House, the other works included an essay from Baen.com, a small press published writing memoir from Lou Antonelli (again) and Michael Z. Williamson's self published joke book.

- *"The Hot Equations: Thermodynamics and Military SF"* by Ken Burnside (Riding the Red Horse, Castalia House)
- *Letters from Gardner* by Lou Antonelli (The Merry Blacksmith Press)
- *Transhuman and Subhuman: Essays on Science Fiction and Awful Truth* by John C. Wright (Castalia House)
- *"Why Science is Never Settled"* by Tedd Roberts (Baen.com)
- *Wisdom From My Internet* by Michael Z. Williamson (Patriarchy Press)

*"The Hot Equations"* was not hated by reviewers. Ken Richards, who decided to vote "no award" in the category, summed up the essay:

*"Ken Burnside's well written, if dry article shows just why the exciting battles in space which have been a staple of MilSF and Space Opera since time immemorial are just as impossible as the rumble of the Empire battleships at the start of 'Star Wars'. Because Thermodynamics. But we knew that."*

<https://shouseindustries.weebly.com/hugo-2015-reviews/best-related-work-oh-the-pain>

Laura "Tegan" Gjovaag regarded the whole category as a "race to the bottom" but regarded the Hot Equations as one of the least worst entries:

*"Another interesting piece on the reality of hard MilSF ships and what they can actually do versus what they are said to do in fiction. If you are into the mathematic of thermodynamics and space, this is fascinating. If not, it's a bit technical and difficult to get into. I found it a little of both. I suspect it would be a great reference for a hard SF writer, but if the rules are always strictly adhered to, I also suspect stories have the potential to be very boring. While this is not nearly as bad as the other entries, it's still not award-winning writing."*

<http://realtegan.blogspot.com/2015/07/hugo-reading-related-work.html>

The word "dry" occurs a lot in the reviews of this essay but also the word "unexceptional". For example:

*"Unexceptionable, even though it's in the same anthology as the execrable Turncoat story. Definitely not award-worthy, but it didn't make me feel physically ill while I read it or anything, which for a work associated with "Day" is quite an achievement."*

<https://andrewhickey.info/2015/05/25/hugo-blogging-best-related-work-2/>

*"Why Science is Never Settled"* by Tedd Roberts was a two-part essay published at Baen's website that explored Roberts's views on the nature of science. A working scientist, Roberts discussed past controversies and ideas about the scientific method.

Spacefaring Kitten reviewed it together with *"The Hot Equations"* and was unimpressed:

*"Why pick a somewhat dry exploration into the scientific method and a physics-heavy account of thermodynamics and military science fiction? They seem to be fine as far as dry explorations and physics-heavy accounts go, but it feels quite weird that suddenly a legion of Hugo nominators pretend that they are enthusiastic about these tedious things."*

<https://sfkittens.wordpress.com/2015/07/30/rabid-sad-factoids-wrapping-up-the-related-work-category/>

Lis Carey focused on one of the key flaws in the essays:

*"This essay is quite decently written, and very effectively covers the ground of why science is a process, not a result, and truly never finally settled. Sadly, while never going at the subject head-on, it's laced through with excuses for climate science denialism."*

<http://www.liscarevlibrary.com/2015/06/why-science-is-never-settled-by-tedd.html>

She went on to conclude:

*“It’s sad that this essay that so effectively explains how science works and the factors that can both create and perpetuate error, then embraces a currently popular error, the belief that because it’s politically convenient, current climate science data, reasoning, and conclusions can be ignored.”*

*ibid*

The essays from Burnside and Roberts were at best unexceptional. Of the two, “*The Hot Equations*” was more clearly related to science fiction. There were no formal limits on how related a “related work” had to be in the rules for the Hugo Awards, instead, that question was one left to the voters. Font Folly felt that “*Why Science is Never Settled*” simply didn’t pass the bar necessary to be a “related work”.

*“At no point does the essay reference science fiction. He doesn’t talk about how science fiction authors misunderstand science, nor about the importance of understanding it better. It’s just a mediocre essay with more of a political than scientific goal. It’s a stretch to put it in this category at all, and it clearly is not an example of excellence of any sort.”*

<https://fontfolly.net/2015/07/07/hugo-ballet-reviews-related-works/>

Lou Antonelli’s *Letters from Gardner* was succinctly described by Lyle Hopwood as:

*“a series of short stories by Mr. Antonelli, linked by writing advice he received as feedback from magazine editors, especially Gardner Dozois, on those stories, as well as autobiographical material. He then describes what he did to rewrite or improve the story.”*

<http://peromyscus.blogspot.com/2015/05/review-letters-from-gardner-by-lou.html>

Memoirs work well when either the author is an interesting character in themselves or if they are recounting interesting events. Was Antonelli’s memoir of either kind? Few reviewers thought so.

*“Unfortunately, Antonelli is not really notable enough for anyone other than his fans, friends and family to find a memoir all that fascinating, the stories are, as early stories tend to be, somewhat lacking in many areas – not the least of which is female characters who are more than window dressing – the writing advice is pedestrian, and Dozois’ notes to a promising novice writer are pretty much what you’d expect any editor to write under such circumstances. And – one of my personal pet peeves, having worked as a proof-reader myself – the book is quite sloppily copyedited.”*

<https://bibliogramma.dreamwidth.org/158914.html>

Others though found some of the advice relevant<sup>[14]</sup>.

These first three works gained reviews not dissimilar to the short story reviews. Reviewers didn’t find them to be awful on the whole but they did find them to be unexceptional and it was also unclear to many readers why these works had been nominated, even taking into account the multiple agendas of the Sad and Rabid Puppy leaders.

Two other works on the ballot, mutually quite different from each other structurally, provoked much stronger reactions.

*Transhuman and Subhuman* was an extensive set of essays by John C. Wright, a founding member of the Evil League of Evil. Published by Vox Day’s Castalia House, the book consisted of a set of sixteen essays examining science fiction, popular culture and Wright’s philosophical views. This work was one of the few Hugo finalists extensively reviewed by an active supporter of the Puppy campaigns. GamerGate activist and aspiring author Brian Niemeier wrote reviews of each chapter in the collection as blog posts for his own blog and for the SuperserviceSF blog<sup>[15]</sup>.

Niemeier had an active interest in both science fiction and Catholic theology and enjoyed the way in which Wright mixed his own interests in these subjects. For example, in part XIV of his reviews, Niemeier focused on Wright’s discussion of Arthur C Clarke’s novel *Childhood’s End*.

*““I say CHILDHOOD’S END is ‘Gnostic’, a heresy of the Christians,” Wright explains, “because I do not see the attitude or mind-set of any other religion represented.”*

Wright bases his case for Childhood's End's Gnosticism on the scene in the book where an alien device capable of looking into the past is said to disprove "all the world's religious writings" and "all the world's great faiths". Clarke depicts everyone on earth abandoning religion as a result.

Pointing out that Christianity is the only major religion that claims its theology is based on concrete historical events, Wright concludes, "...there is only one religion under attack here, and it is misleading to pretend any religion but one is in the crosshairs. Like far too many atheist writings, this passage is not atheist, merely antichristian.""

<https://brianniemeier.com/2015/07/transhuman-and-subhuman-part-xiv/>

The reaction of other readers was quite different:

"Ugh. What an utter, mind-melting, nonsensical load of fucked up, sanctimonious, loathsome, sexist shit. Zero points for John C. Wright's collection Transhuman and Subhuman: Essays on Science Fiction and Awful Truth.

*I feel like antisepticizing my eyeballs now."*

<https://sfkittens.wordpress.com/2015/07/24/the-awful-truth-is-pervert-rants-get-zero-points-transhuman-and-subhuman-essays-on-science-fiction-and-awful-truth-by-john-c-wright/>

Rebekah Golden explained the issues in a bit more detail:

"I will not recommend reading his work to see what I mean. His language is dense and intentionally obtuse. His goal is to lead the reader to agree with just one of his assumptions and then pretend to reveal great truths built upon those assumptions when really he's just redefining reality to suit his own whims. It's obvious that he thinks he is clever but it is surprising anyone else would agree."

<https://rebekahgolden.com/2015/06/16/2015-hugo-awards-best-related-work-reviewing-transhuman-and-subhuman/>

Wright's essays were unlikely to win over anybody who didn't already share his perspective. However, reviewers did acknowledge that his collection of essays was at least more substantial than some of the other finalists and clearly related to the genre. What was also clearer was how Wright's work fitted within the framework of the surrounding culture war of which the Puppy campaigns were part. Stephen "no relation" J Wright regarded the florid prose of the essays as a distraction from the underlying style of argument:

"Wright makes a great show of being classically educated and versed in Aristotelianism, but on the showing he gives here, Aristotle wouldn't have him in the house. It's not even decent sophistry – the sorriest sophist Socrates ever skewered would still run rings around John C. Wright. This is a much more up-to-date debating technique – that of the Internet troll, the grinding bore who repeats the same message over and over and over, allowing no dissent and no discussion, and finally proclaiming victory when his last opponent keels over in a coma."

<https://sjwright.livejournal.com/124474.html>

Whereas Lis Carey summed up John C. Wright's views on women as fictional characters:

"Those advocating strong women characters in fiction, especially science fiction, are enemies in the Culture War, and they're on the side fighting against Culture. Fortitude and justice are masculine virtues; feminine virtues are delicacy and nurturing. Oh, wait, fortitude can be feminine, but it's different from masculine fortitude; it's long-suffering patience dealing with the childish menfolk, rather than courage in the face of adversity and danger."

<http://www.liscarevslibrarv.com/2015/06/transhuman-and-subhuman-essays-on.html>

Typically, people engaged with this kind of systematic reviewing of the Hugo finalists had not set out to promote 'no award' every work in every category. They had taken the challenge of reading the works seriously and many tried hard to avoid using 'no award' as an option above a finalist. Many reviewers struggled to find a convincing argument based on the quality of the works in this category not to just "no award" the whole thing.

*“So, to sum up the category of Best Related Works: Mr. Noah Award in a runaway. In fact, Noah is the equivalent of the magnificent Secretariat thundering down the stretch in the Belmont Stakes, straight and true and overpowering, leaving his competitors in the dust.”*

<https://www.redheadedfemme.com/2015/06/the-hugo-project-best-related-work.html>

One work in particular, ***Wisdom From My Internet*** by Michael Z. Williamson reinforced the impression that the Puppy slates were cynical insults aimed at Worldcon members. I’ve tried to include positive or semi-positive reviews in this chapter but there was very little positive said about Williamson’s collection of jokes. The *SuperversiveSF SF* blog did carry an interview with Williamson as part of a series of profiles of the 2015 Hugo finalists. When asked about his Hugo-nominated work, Williamson had little to say:

*“2) What kind of stories do you write normally write? Is your nominated story in that tradition? Or is it a departure for you?”*

*This wasn’t a story, other than being the story of how English can be used as a club to beat people with. I actually thought a short story I had published earlier in the year (“Soft Casualty”) was a much better example of my work, but I don’t really track this sort of thing so I’d completely forgotten it was eligible.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150520225408/http://superversivesf.com/2015/05/13/hugo-nominee-interview-mike-williamson/>

Even by the author’s own standards, he had better work. Nicholas Whyte summed up the dissatisfaction of many people who found the work in the Hugo packet:

*“Wisdom From My Internet is a really bad book. I will admit that I disagree with about 90% of Williamson’s political statements; but even in the few cases where I don’t, his style is just not very funny. More objectively, I’ve got a quarter of the way through and if there has been any actual reference to SF I have missed it. I prefer my Best Related Works to actually be, well, related. I don’t think I will bother with the rest.*

*How interesting that the author is a mate of the slate mongers, and that it was not recommended by a single contributor to the crowdsourcing exercise (which we are repeatedly told was “100% open” and “democratic”), yet ended up on both slates anyway! It has reinforced my intention to vote “No Award” for this entire category.*

*This nomination really shows up the bad faith of those behind the slates. For all their complaints about cliques, political messages and works getting nominated which are of poor quality and aren’t sfnal enough, here they have done exactly what they accuse the imaginary cabal of doing. It is simply shameful.”*

<https://nwhyte.livejournal.com/2469904.html>

Spacefaring Kitten described the book as “The Shittiest Unrelated Drivel in the History of Hugo Awards”<sup>[16]</sup>.

## **Best Novel**

The Best Novel category has traditionally attracted the most attention and votes of the Hugo Awards. The reputation of the award as a mark of literary status lies in no small part to the roster of famous novels that have won over the decades. The larger number of nominating votes for Best Novel in 2015 meant that one novel not on the Puppy slates, Ann Leckie’s *Ancillary Sword*, managed to win a spot as a finalist despite the Puppy campaigns. The withdrawal by Larry Correia and Marko Kloos of their novels from the finalists had meant that two more non-Puppy novels made it onto the ballot.

- *Ancillary Sword* by Ann Leckie (Orbit US; Orbit UK)
- *The Dark Between the Stars* by Kevin J. Anderson (Tor Books)
- *The Goblin Emperor* by Katherine Addison (Sarah Monette) (Tor Books)
- *The Three-Body Problem* by Cixin Liu<sup>[17]</sup>, translated by Ken Liu (Tor)
- *Skin Game* by Jim Butcher (Roc Books)

As a consequence, the Best Novel category was a competitive category. In addition, the Puppy-nominated novels were from bestselling authors neither of whom had been actively involved in the Puppy campaigns.

This was a category where the infamous Mr. Noah Award might struggle to win in what otherwise might be a bumper year.

*The Dark Between the Stars* by Kevin J. Anderson published by Tor books was ironically slated by the Puppy campaigns but from the publisher that many Puppy supporters were now boycotting.

Anderson was a highly prolific writer famous for tie-in works for Star Wars, the X-Files and a series of authorised sequels to Frank Herbert's *Dune* novels. He was one of the authors Brad Torgersen had identified as making a substantial contribution to the genre without award recognition.

*The Dark Between the Stars* wasn't tie-in fiction but it was part of wider series of novels by Anderson, forming book 1 of part 2 of *The Saga of Seven Suns* series<sup>[18]</sup>. The novel was setting out multiple characters and new information on top of a background already established in seven previous books. For readers new to the series this would be a challenge.

Aaron Pound was deeply unimpressed:

*"With a cast of dozens of characters, multiple plot threads, and a sprawling setting that spans an entire spiral arm of the galaxy, there are a number of words that can be used to describe this novel: Fat, flabby, ponderous, tedious, bland, and dull. There are some words that do not apply: Exciting, interesting, engaging, or good. Although The Dark Between the Stars is purportedly the beginning of The Saga of Shadows, it is actually the eighth book in a series, with the previous seven books making up the interminably overlong Saga of Seven Suns, meaning that a reader coming into this "new" series has to catch up on seven books worth of material to make heads or tails of what is going on in this book."*

<http://dreamingaboutotherworlds.blogspot.com/2015/07/review-dark-between-stars-by-kevin-j.html>

Reviewer Magpie Moth described the novel as showing "control rather than mastery" and went on to acknowledge:

*"KJA is an effective, successful writer – his record speaks for itself. His contributions to the genre deserve recognition in some form."*

*Just not this way, or indeed with this book."*

<http://magpie-moth.blogspot.com/2015/06/kevin-j-andersons-dark-between-stars.html>

Andrew Hickey was even less impressed identifying only one positive feature:

*"The only good thing I can say about this book is that at least it wasn't written by John C. Wright — but even Wright at least seems to take some care over the words he uses. This is not, in any meaningful sense of the word, writing."*

<https://andrewhickey.info/2015/07/15/hugo-blogging-best-novel-2/>

*Skin Game* by Jim Butcher was book 15 in his bestselling *Dresden Files* series. Like Anderson, Butcher was a bestselling author who had not received any Hugo Award attention. However, a novel with a fourteen-book backstory was going to be a difficult proposition for Hugo voters who hadn't read any of the prior novels. Bibliogramma described the issue:

*"I haven't read any of the previous Dresden Files novels, although I've sort of wanted to check out the series because I watched and enjoyed the short-lived TV show based on the character. So a lot of the backstory that presumably motivated the various good, evil, and ambiguously aligned characters was missing for me. And after 15 novels, there was a lot of history between most of the characters, as this seemed to be one of those novels that brings back all of your favourite guest stars to stir things up between them. I probably missed out on a lot that might have made the book more emotionally gratifying by being a complete stranger to the series, but that's one of the risks of nominating the 16th volume in a series for a major award."*

<https://bibliogramma.dreamwidth.org/150322.html><sup>[19]</sup>

Reviewers generally enjoyed the book up to a point but few found it particularly notable or exceptional. Aaron Pound compared it to watching a mid-season episode of a TV show:

*"The direct story of the episode mostly hangs together, but the characters all reference things they did in previous episodes, and start conversations that won't bear fruit until later ones. This novel seems*

*especially prone to this, as the entire plot of the book seems to be little more than a set-up for a future, as yet unwritten story.”*

<http://dreamingaboutotherworlds.blogspot.com/2015/08/review-skin-game-by-jim-butcher.html>

The largely pro-Puppy blog *SuperserviceSF SF* attempted to review the Hugo Novel finalists using a focus group format. The group they convened had one strong supporter of the novel but the group overall had more mixed views:

*“‘Jason’, although he enjoyed Skin Game and felt it was great fun to read, he didn’t see the writing as Hugo calibre or literary enough to deserve an award this year.*

*The rest of our group was similarly inclined. Skin Game was fun and amusing. It was well written, easy to follow and an enjoyable read. But perhaps not special enough to warrant a vote, though most felt that its place on the ballot was deserved.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150526143807/http://superservicesf.com/2015/04/20/first-hugo-novel-nomination-review-skin-game-by-worldcon-votersnominators/>

Overall reviewers didn’t dislike the story so much as not having any particular reason to vote for it.

Ann Leckie’s *Ancillary Sword* had the advantage of being only the second book in a series and in addition the first book had been the Hugo Award winner in 2014. This meant that many Hugo voters were already engaged with the series. Not all of them though — Vivienne Raper had not found *Ancillary Justice* very engaging and had given up on it after two attempts. Likewise, she found the sequel dull.

*“Later, the former AI agonises over whether another character – whose only distinguishing trait is lilac eyes – is too anxious and green to take along. It turns out the AI’s boss has done some cruel and unusual surgery to lilac eyes in order to spy on the mission. Again, I’m making this sound interesting. It wasn’t. And it wasn’t obvious it was taking place on a starship either. It could have taken place in a Japanese tearoom. Or a freelance hot-desking facility in contemporary San Francisco. Or at a dinner party of accountants in Fulham, London.”*

<http://futureslesstravelled.com/reading-the-rocket-best-novel/>

However, the book was largely praised by reviewers — unsurprisingly given that it had been sufficiently popular with Hugo Voters to become a finalist despite the otherwise overwhelming number of Puppy votes at the nomination stage.

The *Death is Bad* blog cheekily listed the aspects of the book that the Puppy campaigns should support while noting exactly why the Puppies wouldn’t support the book.

*“This should be right up the Puppies’ alley—a military space opera with good plotting. The primary message even mirrors their Hugo narrative! A minority of corrupt elites have taken control of the political institutions, and an outsider has to rise up for the common man to set things right.*

...

*And yeah, it’s an intoxicating narrative! It’s why I always lean a bit to the Puppies’ side when I read Larry’s blog; he is very good at telling that story. So normally I would assume they’d love this. But due to the gender thing I think they’ll assume that the author is on the “wrong” side of the political spectrum, call it “message fiction,” and dislike/hate it.”*

<https://deathisbadblog.com/sff-review-ancillary-sword/>

However, while its predecessor, *Ancillary Justice*, had been frequently cited by supporters of the Sad Puppy campaigns as an example of what was wrong with modern science fiction, the sequel drew less attention in 2015. Vox Day left it off his ballot and chose ‘no award’ instead for the fifth spot but his rationale was all in terms of his dislike for *Ancillary Justice*.

*“The fact that Ancillary Justice is the most-awarded novel in science fiction history will be seen as a complete joke within a decade, and within 15 years it will be as little read as the now-forgotten Nebula-winner The Quantum Rose“*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150525203344/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/05/hugo-awards-2015-best-novel.html>



Vox Day's ballot was interesting in itself.

“1. *The Three-Body Problem*

2. *Skin Game*

3. *The Goblin Emperor*

4. *The Dark Between the Stars*

5. No Award”  
ibid

*The Goblin Emperor* by Katherine Addison was Day's third choice and another non-Puppy book. This fantasy novel was not an obvious choice for Day but he never explained his reasoning for ranking it higher than a novel he had slated.

Bonnie McDaniel explained the premise of the novel:

*“I adore this book. As well as “court intrigue,” I’ve heard it described as “mannerpunk” and “competence porn,” and as much as I would like to get away from the urge to punkify/pornify everything, all three descriptions have their merits. This book succeeds because the characterization is just fantastic: we spend the entire book in a tight third-person focus on that eighteen-year-old kid, Maia Drazhar, and his struggles to succeed in this shark-infested pool he has been suddenly thrown into. He was never raised to be Emperor; indeed, his father banished Maia after his mother’s death ten years before, and has paid not a whit of attention to him since.”*

<https://www.redheadedfemme.com/2015/06/the-hugo-project-goblin-emperor.html>

It is a slow novel focussed on developing interactions in a society on the cusp of modernity. The *SuperserviceSF* blog attempted another focus group format review of *The Goblin Emperor* but the posts read oddly:

*“Another vocal supporter had much good to say about the concept and purpose to the book. In many ways his reasons for liking the book paralleled the reasons others disliked it. He felt it exemplified white privilege imposed upon black (or Goblin) society. He felt we need to consistently look at and focus on our societal problems with racism and sexism. He felt we should examine these problems deeply while assuming ignorance. While agreeing with another reader that the work was truly a lecture, he asserted that it was “...a lecture we need to have...”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150531084144/http://superservicesf.com/2015/05/17/worldcon-members-review-goblin-emperor/>

Although *SuperserviceSF* had stated they would review the other Hugo finalist novels in this format, I could only find evidence of *Skin Game* and *The Goblin Emperor* post.

The Hugo Awards retain a capacity to surprise. The Puppy sweep was the clearest example of this in 2015 but for many readers Liu Cixin's *Three-Body Problem* was a more pleasant and intriguing surprise for 2015.

*The Three-Body Problem* (in Chinese characters 三体) had already been a publishing phenomenon in China when first serialised in *Science Fiction World* and later published as a novel in 2008<sup>[20]</sup>. The English translation by Hugo Award-winning writer Ken Liu<sup>[21]</sup> had been published in 2014 making it eligible for a Hugo Award. The story follows an interconnected series of events that start amid the chaos of China's Cultural Revolution and follow on into a near-future account of an encounter with an alien civilisation with its own agenda. Aaron Pound describes the unusual novel:

*“Perhaps due to its Chinese origins, the book isn't structured like most novels that western readers will be familiar with. Instead of a single narrative thread, the book wanders between a couple of interrelated stories, stopping at times to digress about a particular historical or philosophical point, and then plunge back into the action. The story is at various times an exploration of the ills of Chinese political history, a murder mystery, an exploration of a complex and as yet unsolved physics problem, an alien invasion conspiracy, and a description of some relatively dubious subatomic engineering. The various threads are all interesting enough when taken individually that even when the novel seems to have wandered off the rails or become slightly didactic, it is still engaging and interesting. Even though Cixin Liu is not*

*entirely able to stitch all of the moving parts of the story together into a completely cohesive whole, it still holds together well enough that some of the rough edges are forgivable.”*

<http://dreamingaboutotherworlds.blogspot.com/2015/08/review-three-body-problem-by-cixin-liu.html>

Bibliogramma’s reaction was more emphatic:

*“Liu Cixin’s novel, *The Three Body Problem*, is like nothing else I’ve read in recent memory – a true novel of science and ideas, specifically the ideas upon which science is based, it’s probably the most essentially science-fictional thing I’ve ever read.”*

<https://bibliogramma.dreamwidth.org/149835.html>

The book wasn’t universally loved, Joe Sherry had his own doubts about it.

*“The Three-Body Problem is the first novel here where I have a problem: the science and overall concept of the novel is fun and exciting and something I want to know more about. The characters and the writing feel dated and clunky and almost as if they are a deliberate stereotype. Perhaps some of this is part of Ken Liu’s translation, perhaps some is my lack of cultural understanding of Mao era China and how individuals might have spoken in slogans. I don’t know. But that aspect of the novel felt more like it was coming from a sixty year old novel and not so much like one originally published in 2007 as this novel was. With all of that said, I kept reading and Cixin Liu held my attention. I wanted to know more and see where he was taking this story. Having completed the novel, I want read *The Dark Forest*. In the end it came across more as a fascinating yet flawed novel that isn’t quite something I would hold up as the best of the year.”*

<http://joesherry.blogspot.com/2015/07/thoughts-on-hugo-award-nominees-novel.html>

Likewise of the reviewers we have already heard from on other works, Laura “Tegan” Gjovaag, Bonnie McDaniel and Magpie Moth had their doubts about it. However, even reviews that highlighted the negative aspects of the work noted the complexity and depth of ideas in the book.

In a year in which a faction looking for more tradition in science fiction were at war with fans who wanted to see more cultural diversity, it seemed like the fates had presented a novel that combined elements of both camps. Liu’s book had been compared with the writing of Arthur C. Clarke, but the novel had its own distinctive qualities. It was debatable whether it was the most well-written novel from 2014 but it was certainly one of the most intriguing.

### ***Back to the Debarkle***

Reviews were the simplest positive way (short of voting) of participating in the Hugo Awards. Not every work on the Puppy slates was universally panned, but the least popular works among voters (*Wisdom From My Internet* in Best Related Work, and *Zombie Nation* in Best Graphic story) raised further questions about how and why Brad Torgersen had chosen works for the Sad Puppies 3 slate. Better works in the Novelette category (mainly from *Analog* magazine) were chapters in longer serialised work, which was both confusing and off-putting to readers unfamiliar with the series.

Three fifths of the Novella category were stories from John C. Wright, which combined with an additional short story made for a lot of Wright’s fiction on the ballot. Wright was certainly capable of interesting writing but as many reviewers noted the selected works were heavy handed in expressing Wright’s views about society and belief.

*“There’s no way around it. Maybe all authors have an agenda to one degree or another, but most of them successfully bury it or have it flow smoothly into their fiction so hardly anyone can feel its bite. Not so with these stories. They don’t begin this way, but by the time you get to the 2/3 point, you’ll feel as if you’re listening to Christian rock or a falsely popular and overhyped Billy Budd story that’s always an over the top Christian Ideal. All of them have the VERY CLEAR AGENDA emblazoned across every plotline, every character development, every resolution.”*

<http://danrymes.blogspot.com/2015/06/hugo-nominated-short-fiction-works-of.html>

The quality of editing of Wright’s fiction (nominally done by Vox Day in each case) was also questioned<sup>[22]</sup> as Wright’s verbose style created its own literary confusion.

What ambiguity there might have been in Wright’s heavy-handed message fiction was dispelled by the addition in Best Related Work of his essays where he even more overtly described his thinking. Both Brad Torgersen and Larry Correia had argued that the Hugo Awards had become too focused on works that were

overly literary, lacked action and were bedevilled by heavy-handed messaging. Wright's presence on the ballot (two-fifths due to the Sad Puppy slate and three-fifths due to the Rabid Puppy slate) undermined that argument.

The two Best Editor categories were a struggle for many reviewers to evaluate. The short form category (mainly for editing anthologies or magazines) had better material in the Hugo Packet for people to look at but reviewers still struggled. Best Editor Long Form presented even deeper challenges due to a lack of material in the packet for notable finalists:

*"There's no supporting material, really, for Jim Minz and Toni Weiskopf, either, just a pointer in the packet notes to the Baen website. I do, honestly, feel that if the nominees aren't going to try to make a case for my vote, then there's no reason I should give it to them. Of course, Baen has provided me with much reading material in the past – applying my usual test in these matters, I can see nine Baen books from where I'm sitting now, without turning my head. (I can see a lot of books from here without turning my head.) Well, Weiskopf and Minz are both industry pros with a lot of good stuff to their credit... doesn't make me feel particularly voting-disposed towards them, though."*

<https://sjwright.livejournal.com/122600.html>

This was not a new issue for the 2015 Hugo Awards. It was always difficult for a regular voter to understand who was a better editor except by general reputation. In a normal year, many voters were happy to ignore a category they didn't feel they had the capacity to judge but in the highly charged atmosphere and higher stakes of 2015, every category was a potential battleground.

Based on reviews, many readers did not find the bulk of the Puppy-nominated works terrible. If a single common thread ran through these reviews, it was the sense of being underwhelmed. Across the nominees, including Wright, Williamson, English, Butcher, Antonelli, and Anderson, reviewers had either read better and more exceptional work.

Brad Torgersen challenged voters considering a No Award Strategy to read the works in good faith before voting but the works themselves did not present a compelling case for his own campaign.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <http://dreamingaboutotherworlds.blogspot.com/2015/02/review-ancillary-sword-by-ann-leckie.html>
- [2] Most Hugo categories nominate a work – e.g., a novel – but some (such as Fan Writer or the Editor categories) nominate a person.
- [3] The story was available in 2014 but in an issue of *Fireside Fiction* dated January 2015
- [4] <http://louantonelli.blogspot.com/2015/03/on-spiritual-plain.html>
- [5] No relation to John C. Wright
- [6] <http://peromyscus.blogspot.com/2015/05/review-on-spiritual-plain-by-lou.html>
- [7] Vivienne Raper is her genuine name and "Raper" is an English surname equivalent to "Roper" (somebody who makes ropes). However, the combination of a first name that resembled "Vivian James" (the GamerGate mascot) and the surname led some critics of the Puppies to mistakenly assume that her name was a provocative pseudonym.
- [8] <https://sfkittens.wordpress.com/2015/05/23/the-parliament-of-beasts-and-birds-by-john-c-wright/>
- [9] <https://www.redheadedfemme.com/2015/04/the-hugo-project-turncoat.html>
- [10] <https://sjwright.livejournal.com/114429.html>
- [11] <https://andrewhickey.info/2015/05/23/hugo-blogging-best-short-story/>
- [12] also art books and more eclectic choices on occasion  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Related\\_Work](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Award_for_Best_Related_Work)
- [13] <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?1842993>
- [14] <http://jtingermany.blogspot.com/2015/07/hugos-2015-reads-related-work.html>
- [15] The reviews are no longer available at *SuperversiveSF SF* but are here <https://brianniemeier.com/2015/04/hugo-nominee-review-transhuman-and/>
- [16] <https://sfkittens.wordpress.com/2015/06/27/the-shittiest-unrelated-drivel-in-the-history-of-hugo-awards-michael-z-williamson-wisdom-from-my-internet/>
- [17] Liu's name is written in European fashion in the title of the book with the personal name first followed by family name rather than as his actual name Liu Cixin [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liu\\_Cixin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liu_Cixin)
- [18] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kevin\\_J.\\_Anderson\\_bibliography#The\\_Saga\\_of\\_Seven\\_Suns\\_series](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kevin_J._Anderson_bibliography#The_Saga_of_Seven_Suns_series)
- [19] I think the count is incorrect here and the book is the 15th in the series, not the 16th  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim\\_Butcher#Dresden\\_Files\\_series](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Butcher#Dresden_Files_series)
- [20] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Three-Body\\_Problem\\_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Three-Body_Problem_(novel))

- [21] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken\\_Liu#Winner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_Liu#Winner)
- [22] <http://peromyscus.blogspot.com/2015/05/review-short-fiction-of-john-c-wright.html>
- [23] e.g., <http://realtegan.blogspot.com/2015/07/hugo-reading-editor-short-form.html>

## 46: July

The substance of the argument about the Sad and Rabid Puppy campaigns had already run out of steam in June but the attempt to foment a GamerGate-like campaign against Tor Books fuelled the surrounding arguments for another month. July was a month of exhaustion.

Late in June, under general instructions from work, Brad Torgersen pulled back from social media but did become a scheduled blogger at *Mad Genius Club* discussing issues about writing<sup>[1]</sup>. Larry Correia's professional commitments (one of his reasons for not running Sad Puppies 3 in the first place) meant that he had limited time to blog. On the other side of the widening chasm, Mike Glycer announced that he'd be winding down the daily Puppy round-up posts. The final one ran on July 6 and attracted 1,887 comments.

July was a month for pre-emptive summing-ups of events. L. E. Modesitt, Jr. was one author who Brad Torgersen had suggested had been overlooked by the Hugo Awards back in January but who Torgersen had not included in his slate. Modesitt attempted his own evaluation of the struggle:

*“Likewise in the F&SF kerfuffle, it seems to me that the Sad/Rabid Puppies tend to focus more extensively, at times almost exclusively, on the importance of action, storyline, and individual worth and action, while the more “liberal” side insists that the context of the society/world in which storylines exist should play a far greater role and that no functional future society should be racially/culturally unidimensional. The Sad/Rabid Puppies appear to believe that the other side wants to continue using the Hugo awards to reward works and individuals that further their goals, while the “liberal” side believes that the Sad/Rabid Puppies want to wrench the awards back to representing the male, patriarchal U.S. culture of the 1950s. That’s an oversimplification since each group has individuals who don’t fit those definitions, but I think it captures the gist of the conflict.”*

<https://www.lemodesittjr.com/2015/06/30/readers-conventions-and-sad-rabid-puppies/>

Another notable figure deeply admired by Torgersen who had largely stayed out of the fray was author, editor and multiple Hugo Award finalist Mike Resnick. At his own magazine, *Galaxy's Edge*, Resnick attempted to put the months of conflict in perspective:

*“The recent brouhaha (a much better word than kerfuffle) over the Hugo ballot has caused a number of people, online and elsewhere, to proclaim that this is The End of Worldcon, at least the End of Worldcon As We Know It.*

*So it’s probably time for a little history lesson because you know what will actually cause The End of Worldcon As We Know It?*

*Peace, camaraderie, and tranquillity.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150814095546/http://galaxysedge.com/ked.htm>

Resnick ran through a history of Worldcon conflicts including the exclusion of the Futurians and the Breendoggle (see chapter 4) and argued that Worldcon and fandom attract passionate conflicts because people care. For Resnick, the true sign of the end of Worldcon would be an outbreak of peace.

Meanwhile, the broader right saw Sad Puppies as a major front in a culture war that included issues ranging from GamerGate to marriage equality. At the right-wing magazine *The Federalist*, its chief editor and publisher Benjamin Domenech wrote in an editorial:

*“In just the past two years, the Counterculture’s neo-Puritanical reign has made things political that were never thought to be: Shirtstorms and GamerGate, Chik-fil-A and Brandon Eich, Indiana and Sad Puppies, and don’t you dare say Caitlyn Jenner isn’t a hero.”*

<https://thefederalist.com/2015/07/06/welcome-to-culture-war-4-0-the-coming-overreach/><sup>[2]</sup>

He would go on to include Brad Torgersen's odd CHORF term to illustrate his wider point about the perceived overreach of the left:

*“If history repeats itself, it is good news for traditional Americans and bad news for the Left, which has taken on the role of Grand Inquisitor so rapidly that overnight civil liberties have become a Republican issue. Slowly but surely, the American Right is adopting the role of the cultural insurgent standing up*

*for the freedom of the little guy. They crowdfund the pizza shop, baker, and photographer; they rebel against the establishment in the gaming media and at sci-fi conventions; they buy their chicken sandwiches in droves. The latest acronym that came out of the Sad Puppies movement says it all. They describe their opponents as CHORFs: cliquish, holier-than-thou, obnoxious, reactionary, fascists. This is their description of the cultural Left.”*

ibid

The Tor Boycott hadn't stopped but without anything to do and no sign of Tor officially taking any action, the campaign fizzled. *Mad Genius Club* blogger Peter Grant updated people on July 1 with his hopes that the boycott would cost Tor a six-figure sum in 2015. He also attempted to disentangle how own Tor Boycott campaign from the Sad and Rabid Puppy campaigns:

*“The SJW’s also appear to be trying to conflate the Tor boycott with the Hugo Awards controversy. Please recall that I didn’t call for a boycott of Tor because of anything to do with the Hugo Awards. I did so because of the lies and unconscionable actions of a number of senior Tor staff. It looks to me as if the loony left is grasping at straws here. Vox Day, who as organizer of the Rabid Puppies is the SJW’s favorite demon, has done a great job cataloguing their manic efforts to further polarize and inflame the situation. I know that some people regard him as all sorts of nasty things because of various incidents in the past, but I don’t know anything about those. I’ve only had dealings with him since this situation blew up. In that context, I have nothing but praise for his openness, honesty and willingness to cooperate.”*

<https://bavourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-state-of-tor-boycott-and-sjws.html>

Day, of course, was making no secret that his Tor Boycott campaign was part of his wider culture war and his personal animosity towards Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden, and (of course) John Scalzi. Day was feeling bullish about a positive victory for the Puppy campaigns when the final results were announced. Member numbers had grown substantially for the 2015 Worldcon and nobody truly knew whether all these new members were voting for or against the Puppy campaigns.

*“I don’t know. Perhaps they fear that the record influx of Supporting Members are not all reliable SJWs and Truefen flooding in to defend the Hugo Awards by voting to not give out any awards. Perhaps they notice that my site traffic has continue to rise, and that support for both Sad and Rabid Puppies continues to grow as more sane people observe the behavior of the SJWs and realize we were not exaggerating. Perhaps it is simply a reflection of the wider cultural war that has heated up of late. Perhaps it is a reflection of the economic instability that now haunts even those who don’t pay much attention to the economy. Perhaps it is because we use their tactics against them more effectively than they do.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150703204104/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-hysteria-crescendos.html>

Day also claimed to be getting secret information from inside the management at Tor Books:

*“Things are getting very heated, as it has been reported that Patrick Nielsen Hayden has threatened to take his Scalzi (and other writers) and go elsewhere if either Irene Gallo or Moshe Feder are fired or forced to resign. Whether John Scalzi backs PNH to this extent or not (and if he is even aware of this threat on his behalf or not), I do not know, but I personally find it very difficult to believe that Scalzi would ever consent to put his ten-year contract with Tor Books in jeopardy for anyone’s sake. He may be grateful to PNH for launching and repeatedly propping up his career, but he’s not THAT grateful.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119084659/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-war-at-tor.html>

However, without tangible drama visible to everybody else, Day’s dubious accounts failed to stir up much interest. With no actual signs of either firings or mass departures or a sudden drop in revenue at Tor, there was a lack of any inherent drama in Day’s boycott.

Author and fan writer Jason Sanford had been tracking sales numbers for a set of current Tor releases. By July 22, Sanford concluded:

*“After examining two additional weeks of sales data it appears my initial analysis was correct. This new data shows that for the five weeks prior to the boycott starting on June 19, the total weekly sales average for these Tor titles was 1652 books per week. For those same Tor titles, their total weekly average sales for the last four weeks of the boycott has been 1679 books per week. So on average, Tor’s total sales for these titles are up slightly since the boycott started.”*

<http://www.jasonsanford.com/blog/2015/7/sticking-a-fork-in-the-pups-bovcott-its-done>

Baen author and Best Related Work finalist Michael Z. Williamson took on a far more defeatist tone for the Puppy campaigns. After making fun of the victims of a racist mass shooting (see the previous chapter) in June, the chance of anybody voting for what was one of the weakest works nominated by the Sad Puppies had collapsed even further. Williamson cast his vote on the ballot by voting ‘no award’ in all categories including for his own work *Wisdom From My Internet*:

*“The sheer, frothing, irrational vitriol aimed at us makes it clear that content will not be considered. We are Unclean, and many have stated they will not even look at our works.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150719235523/http://www.michaelzwilliamson.com/blog/index.php?itemid=368>

Vox Day disagreed with Williamson’s choices. Day stated that mass ‘no award’ had been an option he had originally considered, thus rendering the Hugo Awards null and void. However, he had changed his mind given that many people opposing the Puppy campaigns would vote ‘no award’ anyway.

*“Also, and more importantly, not voting No Award permits us to correctly gauge the full extent of the SJW influence in science fiction and see how it compares to the current strength of the Sad and Rabid Puppies. That’s my chief interest in this year’s vote, because it will inform the strategy that we pursue in the future.*

*Remember, we haven’t even begun to finance “scholarships” in the way the other side has. Our 2015 numbers do not reflect the full extent of the force we can bring to bear.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210403123736/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/07/m-zed-votes-no.html>

On July 24 Day released his final picks for the Hugo Awards, showing the ranked voting order he would be using<sup>[3]</sup>. His choices largely followed the Rabid Puppy nomination slate in categories where they had won most of the slots. For the two editor categories, Day ranked himself first for Short Form and Baen publisher Toni Weiskopf first for Long Form. For Best Novel, Day’s number one pick was *The Three-Body Problem* by Cixin Liu, the Chinese SF novel that had only made the final ballot because of Puppy nominees withdrawing. Day also picked one category for a blanket “no award”: Best Graphic Story.

Blogger and Hugo Award statistician Nicholas Whyte collated the rankings of multiple bloggers/fan writers for the main story categories of the Hugo Awards. By looking at their choices he was able to make some tentative predictions about the likely results. For the headline Best Novel category he concluded:

*“On that basis I think it’s impossible to call a winner, though I think it’s also fair to say that **Skin Game**, **The Dark Between the Stars** and No Award are probably out of the picture. Fans of both **Ancillary Sword** and **The Goblin Emperor** transfer to **The Three-Body Problem**, so I think it’s fair to say that it has an edge. For what it’s worth, fans of **The Three-Body Problem** tended to put **Skin Game** second, so it may pick up a lower place more easily than its first preferences suggest. I will note, however, that my surveys of 2011 and 2013 failed to pick up a single blogger who admitted voting for the Best Novel winner in either year, and that **Skin Game**’s supporters may not be fervent bloggers.”*

<https://nwhyte.livejournal.com/2489342.html>

The awards themselves were not the only things in play. Each Worldcon has a business meeting and the 2015 meeting had a number of proposals that would be voted on in August<sup>[4]</sup>. The proposals included two measures intended to fix the perceived flaws in the rules that had allowed the Puppy sweep of nominations.

The first proposal, entitled *4 and 6* was the simplest change. Instead of members nominating five works for five finalist positions, the proposal would mean that members would nominate *four* works for *six* finalist positions. If this rule had been in place in 2015, then the Puppy slates may have only achieved four finalists in each category and there would have been two non-Puppy-nominated finalists in each category<sup>[5]</sup>.

The second proposal to change the nomination method was *E Pluribus Hugo*, the complex transferable vote method that had been thrashed out over several weeks at the *Making Light* blog (see earlier chapters). This system would limit the number of finalist position that a large but minority voting bloc could achieve but also make it likely that such a bloc would get at least one finalist position. In effect, if the Sad Puppies were to continue to nominate in the same way they had in 2015, EPH would ensure that they would get some of their choices on the ballot but not all of them. The system was complex though and even with an extensive FAQ<sup>[6]</sup> members were struggling to understand the system and its implications.

Among the other proposals for the business meeting was to add a Best Series category to the awards. This idea had been floated for some time but it was also seen as a reaction to some of the more legitimate criticism of the awards that had arisen in the discussion about the Puppy campaigns. Adding a Best Series category would allow the Hugo Awards to better recognise those many lengthy multi-volume works of science fiction and fantasy that were unlikely to be finalists on the basis of a single novel.

### *Meanwhile...*

If fans had been spending their time arguing about the meaning of “respectively”, “reactionary” and “neo-Nazi” or tracking the sales figures for one publisher’s books, the rest of the world had continued on.

In the UK, a general election had returned a majority Conservative government under PM David Cameron. Cameron was seen as a moderate in his party but for the sake of party unity, he had promised the “euro-sceptic” wing a referendum on whether Britain should stay within the European Union<sup>[7]</sup>. At the time the EU was looking particularly embattled as the lingering impact of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis had plunged Greece into an ongoing state of financial insecurity. In a referendum on July 5, the Greek people decisively rejected harsh bailout conditions offered by the European Commission and the IMF.

Meanwhile, in the wake of another electoral defeat, Britain’s Labour Party was looking for a new leader. The press had initially been dismissive of the campaign by long-term left-wing backbencher Jeremy Corbyn but by July his campaign was attracting a lot of grassroots support<sup>[8]</sup>.

A quite different outsider was making a political splash in the United States. Donald Trump had initially been dismissed as a publicity-stunt candidate for the Republican Party 2016 Presidential Primaries. However, by mid-July he was at the top of two major opinion polls as a potential Presidential candidate. The press was still sceptical about his chances:

*“Trump has been at the center of a media firestorm since he kicked off his campaign last month. Much of the attention is focused on Trump’s statements against illegal immigration. The real-estate magnate has accused the Mexican government of sending “rapists” and others criminals to the US. Many of the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates have condemned his remarks.*

*However, Trump’s position atop of the polls may be a bit of an illusion. Two polling experts previously told Business Insider that his support could simply be a product of his high name recognition: Trump is a national figure partially thanks to his luxury brands and his reality television show, “The Apprentice.””*

<https://www.businessinsider.com.au/polls-donald-trump-in-first-place-2015-7?r=US&IR=T>

Black Lives Matter protests continued in the USA as more cases of deadly and excessive force used by police officers against Black Americans were reported<sup>[9]</sup>. In particular, the death of Sandra Bland in a jail cell<sup>[10]</sup> led to more protests demanding answers and accountability.

Meanwhile, across Syria and Iraq, violence spread as the civil war in Syria collided with the ongoing campaign by the radical Islamist group ISIL to control the region<sup>[11]</sup>.

2015 was already a hot year both in politics and in climate but the temperature was only going to rise.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1174049109287987&set=a.588203691205868>
- [2] For ‘Shirtstorm’ see chapter 30, Chick-fil-A <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chick-fil-A> and LGBT people, Brandon Eich [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brendan\\_Eich#Appointment\\_to\\_CEO\\_and\\_resignation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brendan_Eich#Appointment_to_CEO_and_resignation). Indiana – see footnote 12 in chapter 38.
- [3] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210225000119/https://voxdays.blogspot.com/2015/07/hugo-recommendations-2015.html>
- [4] <https://web.archive.org/web/20150905080424/http://sasquan.org/business-meeting/agenda/>
- [5] or maybe not... we don’t know what actual tactics would have been adopted and there were two Puppy slates (Sad and Rabid). Two coordinated slates with strong voter discipline could circumvent the change but it would take effort.
- [6] <https://web.archive.org/web/20150905102012/http://sasquan.org/e-pluribus-hugo-faq/>
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_European\\_Union\\_membership\\_referendum#Legislation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_United_Kingdom_European_Union_membership_referendum#Legislation)
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015\\_Jeremy\\_Corbyn\\_Labour\\_Party\\_leadership\\_campaign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_Jeremy_Corbyn_Labour_Party_leadership_campaign)
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Lives\\_Matter#2015](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Lives_Matter#2015)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death\\_of\\_Sandra\\_Bland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Sandra_Bland), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jul/17/sandra-bland-texas-protest-racial-tensions>
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palmyra\\_offensive\\_\(July%E2%80%93August\\_2015\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palmyra_offensive_(July%E2%80%93August_2015))



## 47: August Part 1

Sasquan, the 2015 Worldcon, had received a record-breaking number of votes for the Hugo finalists<sup>[1]</sup>. Whatever else the Puppy campaigns had done, they had led to a substantial number of people voting in the Hugo Awards. In early August nobody except the people counting the votes knew how the majority of voters had voted. On the last day of July, Nicholas Whyte updated his round-up of how multiple bloggers had stated they had voted. He observed:

*“This final snapshot doesn’t change the picture much; the three front-runners for Best Novel remain close to each other, and No Award remains in front in the other categories.”*

<https://nwhvte.livejournal.com/2501905.html>

If the pattern of voting among these bloggers was reflected in the final voting then ‘no award’ was going to win several categories. Ambitiously, Jim C. Hines made multiple predictions of how events would play out<sup>[2]</sup>.

For others, early August was a time of retrospectives including posts from Sarah A. Hoyt<sup>[3]</sup>, John Scalzi<sup>[4]</sup> and long-standing Worldcon member Chris M. Barkley. Barkley was direct about his opinion of the Puppy campaigns:

*“I consider what Brad Torgerson, Larry Correia and Theodore Beale have collectively done, is a direct attack on what fans, writers, editors, publishers and literature itself. And I consider this attack on fandom and the Hugos is a personal attack against me.”*

<http://file770.com/the-2015-hugo-awards-perspectives/>

Barkley was less keen on using ‘no award’ as a response, though:

*“I repudiate the No Award movement and those that support it. I believe that a No Award given in any category damages the prestige and reputation of the awards. I will vote No award above a nominee in a category ONLY if I can determine if it is warranted by my personal standards and taste, NOT because it was part of a knee jerk reaction to what has happened or for any other political concern. Those who do so blindly, without any consideration of the work itself, are, in my opinion, NOT ethical votes. (And I can report that I cast at least one vote for a nominee in all of the fiction categories.)”*

ibid

Among the retrospectives was a podcast/live-stream by the *SuperversiveSF SF* blog on August 1. The show was a round-table discussion of the events around the 2015 Hugo Awards presented by Jason Rennie of *Sci Phi Journal* and podcast (a Puppy nominee for Best Fancast), John C. Wright, L. Jagi Lamplighter, Brian Niemeier and Lou Antonelli among others. Rennie kicked off the discussion saying that he had “never been involved in anything this entertaining before”<sup>[5]</sup>. Wright and Lamplighter pointed out that this was the first time they had voted in the Hugo Awards despite having gone to Worldcon before because they hadn’t understood the voting process previously<sup>[6]</sup>. Lamplighter also suggested that it was unlikely that “no award” would win Best Novel because of the range of works on the ballot<sup>[7]</sup>. Later, the discussion turned toward Worldcon Guest of Honour novelist and screenwriter David Gerrold who had been consistently critical of the Puppy campaigns. It was at this point that events took another twist. Hugo finalist Lou Antonelli had this to say:

*“I really didn’t know much about [Gerrold] before the Hugo nominations came out. Following his discourse and his level of discourse as a result, I personally wrote a letter addressed to the police chief in Spokane and said I thought the man was insane and a public danger and needs to be watched when the convention’s going on, and I mean it. I attached my business card. I said this guy’s inciting to violence. Somebody—a weak-minded might attack somebody because of his relentless strength of abuse. I think, honestly, I think he belongs in a secure psychiatric facility.”*

1:00:28 <http://backup.superversivesf.com/2015/08/01/superversive-hugo-livestream/> transcript by Jim C. Hines  
<https://www.facebook.com/jimhines/posts/10153555284599283>

The other guests did not react strongly to Antonelli’s comment and he didn’t elaborate on why he felt the need to contact the police department of Spokane (where Worldcon was being held). However, the following day he elaborated on what he saw as a commercial threat from the critics of the Puppy campaigns:

*“Some of the most vocal people in the Puppy Kicker camp should hope there is not a sweep of No Awards because they crossed the line in attacking some authors into that’s called “exaction” under organized crime statutes. They threatened someone’s income or livelihood. It’s not extortion because no physical threat was employed, but when people say certain authors will never get published again, or that they will have to use a pen name in the future, they are committing exaction. Certain editors at Tor books – and one of the MCs at the Hugo ceremony – are guilty of this.*

*Of course, if the No Award threat fizzles, there’d be no cause for action in a court, but if an author – especially one who had a contract with Tor – loses out to No Award, they could sue for damages. That’s probably the real reason Tom Doherty wrote the response he did to the hateful bilge sputtered by Irene Gallo about the Sad Puppies. His lawyers advised that he’d better distance Tor the company from its editors in case an exaction complaint is filed after the Hugo results are announced.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150812083539/http://louantonelli.blogspot.com/2015/08/are-hugos-relevant.html?m=1>

Antonelli didn’t name Gerrold specifically but “MCs at the Hugo ceremony” was probably intended to refer to Gerrold. The idea that Gerrold had “threatened” the livelihood of authors connected to the Puppy campaigns had become a truism on Puppy-supportive blogs and it had its roots in comments Gerrold had made on Facebook in April (see chapter 41). Gerrold had discussed how the campaign had likely damaged the reputation of Brad Torgersen:

*“But the one thing that is growing more and more likely ... the architects of this squabble will have indelibly damaged themselves in the eyes of the SF community. There are invitations and acknowledgments that will never be offered — not because it’s a blacklist, but because nobody wants to hang out with assholes.”*

<https://www.facebook.com/david.gerrold/posts/10205360779551319?pnref=story>

In context, Gerrold’s comment was an observation rather than a threat but it had become part of a list of grievances among supporters of the Puppy campaigns.

Antonelli’s comments were not initially noted and it would take a few days before the wider community of fans became aware of them. *File770* carried a report on Antonelli’s comment and Jim C. Hines published a transcript (quoted above) on his own Facebook page. Antonelli offered a full apology on Hines’s Facebook page saying:

*“Thanks for your polite request for an explanation. I’ve thought about what to say, which is painful to admit. It’s become public that on July 1st I wrote a letter to the chief of the Spokane Police Department expressing some concerns over potential security issues at the upcoming Sasquan. I’m sorry for what I did. Without looking at the big picture I reacted in a manner that I thought I was being treated. It was stupid and wrong. My subsequent participation on a podcast was also a mistake because the environment further fuelled my fear and I lashed out again. I’m sorry I bothered the Spokane PD. They probably are ready to throw the butterfly net over ME when I enter the city. And I’m sorry and apologize to David Gerrold. He probably understands why I did what I did better than I do. I need to ponder the hurt I have caused. To give me time to think, after Sasquan I am taking a half-year hiatus from attending any conventions and/or submitting any fiction. I think I’ve become my own crazy uncle...”*

Lou Antonelli, Facebook comment

David Gerrold stated that he believed Antonelli’s apology was sincere<sup>[8]</sup> and also asked people to now steer away from negativity

*“But here’s my request. If you, the person reading this, are seeing those kinds of negative messages, then I invite and encourage you to please make a serious effort to steer those conversations away from further personal attacks. It doesn’t matter what side anyone is on anymore. Further attacks serve no one, they hurt all of us. I want people to come to Sasquan to have a good time. Let’s have it be an opportunity for healing and celebration. It doesn’t matter anymore which “side” you think you’re on — we’re all science fiction fans, this community belongs to all of us, and it’s time to start rebuilding it as a place where it’s fun for all of us. Please.”*

David Gerrold quoted here <http://file770.com/david-gerrold-on-lou-antonellis-apology/#comment-315364>

Unsurprisingly, Vox Day’s attitude to these events was more combative, stating that “All SJW tactics are legitimate when used against them.”<sup>[9]</sup> However, the broader appetite for further conflict was not at Day’s

level but events escalated regardless. Between Antonelli's original statement and his later apology, the editor of *Lakeside Circus* magazine Carrie Cuinn had written to Antonelli, withdrawing an offer of publishing one of his stories.

*"I had previously planned to published a story by Mr. Antonelli in an upcoming issue of Lakeside Circus. After hearing his statement of his actions, I contacted him and withdrew the offer. (And another email asking how he wanted the kill fee sent to him.) After that, Mr. Antonelli apologized to Mr. Gerrold, who choose to accept it, and I thought the matter was settled."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170922021721/http://carriecuinn.com/2015/08/10/a-statement-about-lou-antonelli-lakeside-circus-harassment-and-safety/>

After his apology, Antonelli chose then to post Cuinn's letter on his Facebook page, ostensibly to show people the consequences of making bad choices but without explaining the letter had been sent before his apology. Antonelli also included Cuinn's name, title and name of the magazine. As a consequence Cuinn was then subject to abusive emails.

Despite the further issues with Antonelli's actions, the executive committee of Sasquan chose not to ban Antonelli from attending the convention after further apologies from Antonelli and a request from David Gerrold not to ban him<sup>[10]</sup>. This itself caused its own controversy, as the initial communication did not mention Carrie Cuinn. It was later clarified that Cuinn had been consulted<sup>[11]</sup> but the decision led the Events Deputy Division Head/Co-Director of the Hugo Ceremony to resign in protest at allowing Antonelli to still attend<sup>[12]</sup>.

After months of conflict, the controversy around Antonelli's actions only added to the fears that the bad blood from the Puppy campaigns would lead to physical confrontations at Sasquan. Whether those fears were justified or not, one Puppy was certainly not going to be turning up in person.

*"I turned my back on your freakish community and everything it stood for as soon as I had the opportunity to see it clearly for myself at Minicon in 1997. I dutifully did my panels and never went to another SF convention or attended another SF-related event ever again. I don't associate with losers, child molesters, or creepy rape enthusiasts, and SF fandom consists of little else. I never submitted a short story to a science fiction magazine or submitted a novel to a science fiction publishing house because I didn't have any professional respect for most of the community's incompetent institutions."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150808205304/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/08/those-who-serve-and-know-not.html><sup>[13]</sup>

These comments were from a post where Day responded to Chris Barkley's summation of the event of 2015. As the self-appointed supervillain of the story, Day went onto explain his motivation for his ongoing campaign against "SJWs" and fandom.

*"All the SF community had to do was leave me alone and I would have left it alone. I did so, more or less, for 16 years. You didn't. For over ten years I was repeatedly attacked, unprovoked, by various members of your weird little community. I ignored most of their repeated jabs, their libels, their false accusations, their nasty insinuations, and their insults. Out of sheer contempt, I ignored most of their attempts to obtain my attention. But when John Scalzi, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, N.K. Jemisin, and Steven Gould, among others, made an attempt to publicly destroy my reputation, I decided I would not ignore it any longer."*

ibid

Nor was Day finished. Rather, 2015 was just a beginning:

*"So, you've got my attention now. And you should have known better to draw the contemptuous eye of the Supreme Dark Lord of the Evil Legion of Evil upon you. Because the Rabid Puppies, and the Dread Ilk, and the Ilk, and worst of all, my 391 397 Vile Faceless Minions, are coming for you. Not just this year, not just next year, but always and forever until you are gone. By all means, cry more about how much we hurt you; the VFM like nothing better than the taste of your tears."*

*The Sad Puppies want to fix what the SJWs have done to the detriment of science fiction over the last three decades. I respect that, although I think it makes more sense to demolish a building and build anew rather than attempt to shore up a termite-infested structure. But Rabid Puppies are not Sad Puppies. We want nothing more than to crush SJW bones, drink SJW blood, and leave a smoking hole where every SJW institution used to be."*

ibid

Day went on to describe everybody who may have followed the No Award strategy as “unwitting minions” of his.

Day was bullish about his campaign against the so-called SJWs and he had reason to feel that the tide was turning in the culture war. Day had several rhetorical tactics he used against accusations of racism and misogyny:

- never apologise or back down
- use obfuscations of his position
- use verbally aggressive rejoinders and counter-accusations (such as accusing people of being paedophiles).

On the national political stage, somebody else was following a similar strategy and Day was delighted. When businessman and candidate for the Republican Party Presidential nomination Donald Trump responded assertively to accusations of sexism from Fox News host Megyn Kelly, Day was effusive in his praise for how Trump handled himself:

*“This is how you handle it when someone calls you sexist, misogynist, or whatever other label they seek to use to discredit, disqualify, or distract you.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119072523/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/08/trump-crushes-feminist-speech-police.html>

The term “SJW” or social justice warrior had been current for several years but the general understanding of the term was of overtly left-wing people with a particular concern for issues around sexism, racism, homophobia and other societal-wide systemic prejudices (e.g., prejudices against the disabled). Day was defining the term more broadly to include even mainstream conservatives:

*“Megyn, YOU are a part of the big problem the USA has. Every SJW, every self-appointed thought policeman is a part of the problem. And it is time to start making sure that every time they try to play thought police, we cram that concept right down their throats.*

*“The big problem this country has is being politically correct.” It’s certainly one big problem that gets in the way of discussing any of the actual issues that matter.*

*It was good to see Trump put Kelly in her place. I have never understood the conservative affection for her. She’s a feminist, she’s PC, and she’s pro-immigration, ergo she is on the other side.”*

ibid

Day had for years presented himself as a dedicated enemy of the left. This stance had enabled him to make broad alliances with people who would otherwise disavow some of Day’s more extreme positions (such as his statements on marital rape, or his support for terrorist murderer Anders Brevik<sup>[14]</sup>). However, Day’s long term political frustrations were not directly with the left but with mainstream conservatism and the establishment of the Republican Party. For Day, conservatives had been repeatedly conceding ground on issues such as immigration, race relations, LGBTQI rights and (of course) gender equality. Using “SJW” to refer to a Fox News host though was a stretch even for Day but he had another term to play with.

Over recent months, Day had begun to pepper his posts with a new term: “Cuckservative”. The term was also being pushed by his allies Milo Yiannopoulos at *Breitbart* and self-styled investigative journalist and self-help guru Mike Cernovich.

In July Yiannopoulos explained the term at *Breitbart* after its use had been noticed in national media:

*“Thus, “cuckservative” can mean many things. It could mean conservatives who are afraid of social exclusion and kowtow to the liberal media establishment. It could mean conservatives who play the left’s game of identity politics, accusing their internal opponents, such as Donald Trump, of being racist or sexist or rapey for spurious or opportunistic reasons.*

*Another popular use of the term is as a reference to conservatives who “virtue signal” with meaningless platitudes to suck up to places like MSNBC. Or it could just mean Lindsey Graham, Karl Rove, or, yes, Jeb Bush.*

*Mike Cernovich, a lawyer and blogger who has used the hashtag enthusiastically, describes what it means to him: “A cuckservative is a Republican who enjoys watching his friends on the right, and indeed his entire country, get screwed by the radical left.”*

<https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2015/07/28/cuckservative-is-a-gloriously-effective-insult-that-should-not-be-slurred-demonised-or-ridiculed/>

The use of “cuck” as an insult had already become entrenched at the infamous image-boards 4chan and 8chan and was derived from the term “cuckold” both in its original meaning for a man whose wife is being unfaithful but also for a sub-genre of pornography in which a husband watches another man have sex with his partner and specifically where the other man is Black.

By August of 2015, the Southern Poverty Law Centre was describing the origin of the term and how its usage was a common connection between 4chan, GamerGate, and overt White Supremacists:

*“The origins of the term are unclear. Its first known usage was in a tweet from @Drunknsage, a veteran of last year’s GamerGate controversy. On January 14, 2015, he tweeted at two users, “I’ve been over using that insult lately c—lord, c—servative, democ—c—sucker, list goes on.” The term even has its own hashtag, #c—servative, often used for ultra right conservatives to attack the Republican candidates as being weak or ineffective.*

*What is certain is that it fermented in the racist depths of the Internet, a rung below even Reddit’s recently deceased /r/CoonTown, on sites like My Posting Career, The Right Stuff, and 4Chan’s /pol/, before seeping into civilized discourse.”*

<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2015/08/07/getting-cucky-brief-primer-radical-rights-newest-c-servative-meme>

While “SJWs” were the imagined enemy of GamerGate and the Puppy campaigns, Day did not regard the “cuckservatives” as a new battle; rather they were two sides of one coin for him:

*“It’s increasingly clear that the cuckservatives are the SJWs of the Right, being the self-appointed speech police:”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150810203718/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/08/cuckservative-speech-police.html>

The implication being that the broad coalition of people who believed they had been fighting a culture war against creeping political correctness in such arenas as video games or science fiction books, should now turn their energies towards fighting the more moderate sections of conservatism.

What’s more, Day was ready to codify his strategy and had his own publishing house to help him. On August 15 Day announced the cover and publication date of his new book of political essays.

*“As I mentioned previously, SJWS ALWAYS LIE: Taking Down the Thought Police will be released on August 27, 2015, the first anniversary of #GamerGate. I thought those of you looking forward to the book might be interested in seeing yet another excellent cover by JartStar.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201108091638/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/08/the-bonfire-of-sjws-approaches.html>

Day promised that there would be chapters on GamerGate and on the Hugo Awards. The release date would also be just a few days after the announcement of the Hugo Awards. Whatever the outcome of the vote, Day would be ready to roll onto his next campaign.

Meanwhile, fans from across the US and beyond had begun to head towards Spokane, Washington. Ominously, the state was in the grip of a massive wildfire season. As the start of Worldcon 2015 approached on 19 August, smoke and fire were heading towards Spokane<sup>[15]</sup>.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <http://file770.com/sasquan-sets-new-hugo-voting-record/>
- [2] <http://www.jimchines.com/2015/08/10-hugo-predictions/>
- [3] <https://accordingtohooyt.com/2015/08/12/the-goat-kicks-back/>
- [4] <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/08/02/teotat-locus-review-hugo-voting-closes/>
- [5] <http://backup.supersivesf.com/2015/08/01/supersive-hugo-livestream/>
- [6] Lamplighter corrects herself and says she may have voted for one thing before
- [7] around the 34-minute mark

- [8] <http://file770.com/david-gerrold-on-lou-antonellis-apology/>
- [9] <https://web.archive.org/web/20170722120044/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/08/come-see-violence-inherent-in-system.html>
- [10] item 6 <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-810-where-the-scrolled-things-are/> and <http://file770.com/sasquan-decides-not-to-ban-antonelli/>
- [11] <http://file770.com/carrie-cuinn-straightens-out-sasquan/>
- [12] <https://peripateticmeg.com/2015/08/28/sasquan-exit-stage-left/>
- [13] I quoted this before in chapter 5. Coincidentally, the Nielsen Haydens also attended the same con but there's no indication they encountered Day.
- [14] see earlier chapters
- [15] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015\\_Washington\\_wildfires](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_Washington_wildfires)

## 48: August Part 2

In a metaphor so thick that it literally assailed the senses, the 2015 Worldcon (aka Sasquan) opened with the smell of smoke as Spokane felt the impact of Washington State's wildfire season. However, neither fears of having to evacuate fans because of fire nor fears of violent fallout from the past months of bitter argument about the Puppy campaigns were realised<sup>[1]</sup>.

Despite everything, the convention was much the same as Worldcons have always been — a gathering place for fans, which included professionals of various kinds. Panels, meetings, parties and events. People networking and catching up with old friends.

One difference, though, was an extended business meeting for the World Science Fiction Society. The meeting's role was to discuss changes to the WSFS constitution and in 2015 this meant discussing the radical proposals to change the Hugo nomination and voting process. The volume and significance of the changes meant the business meeting had to run on several days and the level of interest meant that the formal meeting (complete with a parliamentary-style procedure) was one of the biggest events of a science fiction convention<sup>[2]</sup>.

The business meeting was lengthy and the amount of business required discussion of how to manage the various proposals. WSFS rules also require changes to the constitution to take two years to implement, i.e., they are voted on one year and ratified the following year. This meant that the 2015 business meeting also had to vote on ratifying proposals from the 2014 Worldcon in London<sup>[3]</sup>.

To cut the story of a very long meeting short, among other pieces of business, two key proposals to reduce the impact of slates were passed. Firstly the *4 and 6* proposal would change the rules so members could nominate 4 works (later amended to 5) but the final ballot would contain 6 finalists. This would limit the impact of a single slate so that there would be at least one non-slated work. The measure would be less effective against multiple slates and not much of a disincentive to duelling slates (e.g., if there were both Puppy and anti-Puppy slates in the future).

The other major proposal passed was *E Pluribus Hugo* or EPH. This was the new voting algorithm for the nomination stage that would build in elimination stages to the vote counting. In theory, EPH would mean that in the event of lots of nominating ballots with many works in common, these ballots together would boost the chances of at least one of the works being a finalist while reducing the chance that all of the works would. Like "4 and 6", EPH would have reduced the impact of the Puppy slates but might be less effective against multiple slates.

The voting method changes could not be implemented until ratified in the 2016 business meeting, which would mean that potentially the 2016 Hugo Awards could have another year of Puppy slates.

The more urgent question was the actual outcome of the 2015 Hugo Awards. Voting numbers were at a record high but who were all these new supporting members? Were they ordinary science fiction readers inspired by the works nominated by the Sad Puppies? Were they GamerGaters inspired by Vox Day's culture war? Were they fans rushing to defend the Hugo Awards from a perceived attack by reactionary forces? Only the results would tell.

The Hugo Award ceremony is a fannish take on the genre of glittering award ceremonies. Part self-congratulation, part star-studded gala, part fandom's quirky charm and celebration of amateur self-organisation<sup>[4]</sup>. The live-streaming video kicked off an hour before the ceremony started with a pre-show presented by the co-hosts of the *Radio Free Skaro* podcast<sup>[5]</sup>. The pre-show also included a panel with Ann Leckie, George R. R. Martin, John Scalzi, and editor Gillian Redfearn from Gollancz Books, who discussed the year in science fiction and the events around the Sad Puppies.

After the usual big-event delays, the ceremony proper began. Hosted by David Gerrold and Tananarive Due, the ceremony featured *Star Trek* redshirts fighting a 13-foot manually-operated body puppet of the spectre of death<sup>[6]</sup>, a sassy Dalek upstaging David Gerrold, veteran author Robert Silverberg (who had attended every Hugo ceremony ever) chanting "*Hare Krishna*", as well as other fan awards and the traditional *In Memoriam* section in which the community acknowledged the deaths of notable people in the genre.

Gerrold and Due maintained a spirit of humour and celebration to alleviate the tension that surrounded the outcome of the awards. Inspired by the many references to the 2015 Hugo Awards needing an asterisk next to the future results because of the Puppy slates, Gerrold had commissioned wooden laser cut asterisks as a gift to all the nominees and as keepsakes that would be available for sale to raise money for charity.

Explaining the idea to the audience, he asked the nominees sitting near the front of the auditorium to wave their asterisks.

The Hugo Award categories have a traditional order on the ballot, partly determined by convenience and partly determined by status. The most notable and talked about of the awards is the Hugo for Best Novel. The various Fan awards (such as Best Fan Writer) are usually clustered together near the Hugo ballot. The Astounding Award for Best New Writer (at the time called the John W. Campbell award) is technically not a Hugo Award but is voted on and presented together with them. Because of its “not a Hugo” status, it traditionally comes last on the ballot. For ceremonies, of course, the ballot order is reversed: the last become first and the first, last, for reasons of drama rather than egalitarianism.

So, after the preliminary events, sketches, introduction and community awards, the first outcome of all of 2015’s drama would be the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. The finalists consisted of four people nominated by the Puppy slates, including Kary English who was seen by many as one of the strongest nominees slated by the Sad Puppies. In addition, author Wesley Chu was the single non-Puppy-slated nominee.

If Sad Puppy supporters were the largest group of voters then there was a good chance that Kary English would win. If Rabid Puppy supporters were the largest group, then Vox Day’s number one choice Eric S. Raymond was a likely winner. On the other hand, if voters had chosen to simply ‘no award’ every category impacted at all by slates then this category would be the first ‘no award’ of the night.

When the list of finalists was read out there were loud cheers for both Wesley Chu and Kary English but when the envelope was opened and the name read out, the cheers for Wesley Chu were ecstatic. The first test of the evening had resulted in a deserving winner and a defeat for the Puppy slates.

Chu’s speech was a customary set of thanks to the many people who had helped him and only tangentially touched on the Puppy events when he thanked Irene Gallo. Chu swerved into politics right at the end of his speech when he jokingly announced his candidacy for Republican Presidential Candidate.

The Campbell Award was followed by the Fan Categories as well as Semiprozine and Professional Artist. The impact of the Puppy slates had been mixed on each of these but in every one there was at least one non-Puppy-slated person or work. Fan Artist went to Elizabeth Legget, Fancast to *Galactic Suburbia*, Fanzine to *Journey Planet*, Semiprozine to *Lightspeed*, and Professional Artist went to Julie Dillon. None of these had been on the Puppy slates.

Of these categories, the one that had the most eyes on the result was Best Fan Writer. Four of the five nominees were active supporters of the Puppy campaigns (including Castalia House blogger Jeffro Johnson and three *Mad Genius Club* bloggers, Dave Freer, Amanda S. Green and Cedar Sanderson). The non-Puppy finalist was Laura J. Mixon whose report on rage-blogger Requires Hate was controversial in itself, but which had also been endorsed by George R.R. Martin. This category was the next big test of ‘no award’ but the winner was Laura J. Mixon.

Seven categories in and ‘no award’ had yet to score a single one but neither had the Puppies. Had the Hugo voters somehow found a middle course between the two? However, these were the ‘down ballot’ categories, which typically received fewer votes than other categories. The second real test of voter intentions was in the next two categories.

The two editor categories (short-form for magazines and anthologies, long-form for books) are not categories that attract the most votes in general. They are hard for casual readers to vote on because the role and impact of editors are unclear. However, within the battlegrounds of the Debarkle, the editor categories were a proxy for the underlying conflicts. Both categories included Vox Day. Long-form included Toni Weiskopf, the publisher of Baen and a mentor to Larry Correia. Short-form included Mike Resnick, one of the most-nominated people in Hugo history but also a key figure in the SFWA civil wars of recent years and a father figure to Brad Torgersen. Of all the categories that had been swept by the Puppy slates, these two categories contained many notable figures of talent in the industry, including people who would plausibly have been nominated without the intervention of slates.

Both categories fell to ‘no award’.

After that shock, the ceremony went on to lighter categories with David Gerrold and a Dalek covering the two Best Dramatic Presentation categories. The winners were *Orphan Black* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Marvel’s sci-fi superhero hit *Guardians of the Galaxy* was popular with the audience in the auditorium based on the cheers but it was also the first winner of the night that had been on the Puppy slates. In whatever way members had voted, it had not been on the basis of voting against everything on the slates.

Best Graphic Story (a competitive category) went to Ms Marvel. Following that came Best Related Work which fell to ‘no award’ to many cheers in the audience.



Not everybody in the audience was cheering, though. The announcement of ‘no award’ received some boos also. For the next category, David Gerrold told the crowd that cheering was appropriate but that booing was not.

The Best Short Story category, in which many people had though Kary English’s “*Totaled*” stood a chance, also fell to ‘no award’.

Best Novelette was won by the one non-Puppy story “*The Day the World Turned Upside Down*”, by Thomas Olde Heuvelt and translated by Lia Belt.

Novella, which included a story by Tom Kratman and three stories by John C. Wright also fell to ‘no award’. Five categories now, each one of them being categories that the Puppies had swept, had gone to ‘no award’ and the only slated work to win anything had been *Guardians of the Galaxy* which would have likely been a finalist regardless. The headline category was yet to come but the results were already a comprehensive defeat for the Sad Puppies in particular.

The headline Best Novel had three non-slanted works. However, *The Three-Body Problem* had been singled out by Vox Day as a work he would have slanted if he had read it beforehand. On the other hand, *The Three-Body Problem* was published by Tor and hence actively boycotted by Puppy supporters. The announcement that it had won was met by loud cheers. Despite everything that had occurred in the Hugo Awards, somehow the biggest result of the night was exceptional in ways beyond the Puppy conflict.

A novel by a Chinese author, translated into English and delving into Chinese history and esoteric physics, had won science fiction’s most prestigious award in one of the most contentious years of the award’s history. Somehow, despite everything, the Hugo Awards had come out with a remarkable answer to the challenges of 2015 that managed to look beyond the conflict within America and out to a broader world.

The ceremony was over but the Puppy conflict was not. With the results came the Hugo voting statistics and the first real numbers on what had happened in 2015. There were also reactions and commentary and repercussions to come...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] Connie Willis’s account is here <http://azsf.net/cwblog/?p=152>
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert%27s\\_Rules\\_of\\_Order](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert%27s_Rules_of_Order)
- [3] Videos of the meeting are available on You Tube – part 1 is here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUE4UD\\_dOMY&list=PL0oLnkb-s4Yd\\_nZwV7IG\\_aItUV\\_5aP0aB](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUE4UD_dOMY&list=PL0oLnkb-s4Yd_nZwV7IG_aItUV_5aP0aB) In addition Alex Acks live-blogged the business meeting part 1 of their account is here <https://katsudon.net/?p=4238>
- [4] Recordings of the live-stream video is available here <https://www.ustream.tv/recorded/71459590>
- [5] <https://radiofreeskaro.com/2015/08/23/radio-free-skaro-490-smoke-on-the-water/>
- [6] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2021/07/07/debarkle-chapter-48-august-part-2/#comment-64709>

## 49: August Part 3

The 2015 Hugo Award results were an emphatic repudiation of the Sad Puppies 3 campaign by the voters. Of all the works nominated on either Puppy slate, only the Marvel movie *Guardians of the Galaxy* won a Hugo and “no award” had won the five categories which only had Puppy-slated works on the ballot.

Following the award ceremony, the Hugo voting statistics were released<sup>[1]</sup> showing how the votes were distributed and also what works had been nominated. The statistics showed a further level of pushback from the voters against the Puppy slates. Even in the categories where a non-Puppy-slated work had won, ‘no award’ had beaten the Puppy-slated works in the final rankings. The final ballot used a preference system so the official order is determined after elimination rounds of counting but often ‘no award’ beat the Puppy-slated finalists at the first preference stage. A majority of voters in most categories voted for ‘no award’ above having any Puppy-slated finalist win.

The statistics also revealed the nomination data including the “long list” of nominees who received a significant number of votes but not enough to become a finalist. This data was enough to produce speculative versions of how the 2015 Hugo Awards would have looked without the Puppy slates. Following the award ceremony, George R.R. Martin ran his traditional “Hugo Losers Party” and instituted an alternative “Alfie” award (named after the first-ever Hugo winner, Alfred Bester)<sup>[2]</sup>. Handing out rocket-shaped hood ornaments, he awarded Alfies to:

- Best Editor, Short Form John Joseph Adams
- Best Editor, Long Form Liz Gorinsky of Tor
- Best Related Work, *What Makes This Book So Great* by Jo Walton
- Best Short Story *Jackalope Wives* by Ursula Vernon
- Best Novella *The Slow Regard of Silent Things* by Patrick Rothfuss

As well as special awards to Annie Bellet and Marko Kloos for turning down their finalist spots after being slated by the Puppy campaigns, as well as an award for Eric Flint for attempting to be a voice of moderation in the ensuing drama.

Andrew Liptak at *io9* delved further and produced an alternative version of what the Hugo finalists would have looked like without the Puppy-slated works<sup>[3]</sup>. Notable inclusions in the *io9* version were Anita Sarkeesian’s *Tropes vs Women: Women as Background Decoration* in Best Related Work but also Andy Weir in the Campbell/Astounding Award for Best New Writer. Weir’s *The Martian* was a work many supporters of the Sad Puppies would have liked to have seen on the final ballot but it was technically ineligible because of its convoluted publishing history. Weir himself though was eligible for the Campbell award but in one of the many layers of irony, the Puppy slates had prevented him from being a finalist.

There were few close races in either stage of the voting. In the nomination stage, the impact of the Puppy campaigns was decisive and in the final voting, the impact of the anti-Puppy backlash was devastating<sup>[4]</sup>. With 2016 in mind, people were also looking to estimate the number of Sad Puppy and Rabid Puppy votes at each stage. Brandon Kempner at *Chaos Horizon* looked at how the numbers in the final voting played out and came up with some estimates:

*“Core Rabid Puppies: 550-525*

*Core Sad Puppies: 500-400*

*Sad Puppy leaning Neutrals: 800-400 (capable of voting a Puppy pick #1)*

*True Neutrals: 1000-600 (may have voted one or two Puppies; didn’t vote in all categories; No Awarded all picks, Puppy and Non-Alike)*

*Primarily No Awarders But Considered a Puppy Pick above No Award: 1000*

*Absolute No Awarders: 2500”*

<https://chaoshorizon.wordpress.com/2015/08/23/2015-hugo-stats-initial-analysis/>

Estimating the number of people who had nominated in the first stage by following the Sad or Rabid Puppy slates was a harder task. It was clear from the nomination data that not everybody who had voted for at least

one work on the Sad Puppy slates had then followed the rest of the slate. Interestingly, it was the proposed new voting method, EPH, that would help provide an answer.

In 2016 after the Hugo Awards had run been awarded, data was made public showing what impact EPH would have had on the 2015 and 2016 Hugo nominations. Greg Hullender at the review site *Rocket Stack Rank* used that data to make a more detailed estimate of the voting impact of the Puppy slates<sup>[5]</sup>. For nominations for the Best Novel category in 2015, Hullender estimated that 112 Sad Puppy voters and 142 Rabid Puppy voters had strictly followed the published slate to make nominations for this category, although individual authors on the slate got at least some additional votes from motivated fans who did *not* follow the slate. Hullender's analysis also estimated that the Rabid Puppy vote was larger and more consistent, a fact many people had guessed when the nominations were announced.

If Vox Day himself was upset with the Hugo Award results, he did his best not to show it. He had stated numerous times that he regarded multiple "no award" results to be a victory condition but then again, he had considered ways of putting a positive spin on any of the potential results. For Day, the results were a vindication of his more radical position over the Sad Puppies:

*"Now we know the result of that. This is a cultural war, not a literary sport. They are practicing a scorched earth strategy, and we can certainly assist them in that since we do not value their territory. I still think it was worth trying to take Berlin and end the war in one fell swoop, but even though our attempt break them once and for all failed, that only means that the victory was less than complete. What the Puppies accomplished was incredible when you look at the numbers involved and clearly indicates that the Rabid strategy, not the Sad one, is the only viable strategy. There will be no reconciliation."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150825181502/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/08/hugo-2015-results.html>

He would go on to say "All they have accomplished is to convert many Sad Puppies into Rabid Puppies". Day was also heartened by the victory of *The Three-Body Problem* in Best Novel. Although the novel had not been on either of the Puppy slates and had been published by Tor, Day had endorsed it as his number one choice for Best Novel. As people analysed the final spread of preferences it became clear that the votes for Best Novel had been a relatively close run race between *The Three-Body Problem* and *The Goblin Emperor*. The Rabid Puppy votes alone were not sufficient to pick a winner but they could make the difference between which popular choice finally won.

*"Considering that the Rabid Puppy vote averaged 565 across the various categories, that demonstrates that we have the ability to play kingmaker even when we're outnumbered approximately 4.5 to one by the SJWs combined with the traditional Worldcon community."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210224235227/https://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/08/blog-post.html>

Numerically, Day was correct: the Rabid Puppy votes had helped decide the winner of the Hugo Awards. However, who would have won if Day hadn't endorsed *The Three-Body Problem* is less clear, as his endorsement may have cost the novel some votes.

We can't know how genuine Day's spin on the results was but they did match positions he had stated before the outcomes were clear. The Sad Puppy camp was far less stoical in the face of defeat. Larry Correia saw nothing left to redeem for the Hugo Awards:

*"Rather than let any outsiders win, they burned their village in order to "save it". And they did so while cheering, gloating, and generally being snide exclusive assholes about it. This year's awards have an asterisk next to them. It was all about politics rather than the quality of the work. Even the pre-award show was a totally biased joke. In addition they changed the voting rules to make their archaic rules system even more convoluted in order to keep out future barbarian hordes. They gave as many No Awards this time as in the entire history of the awards."*

<https://monsterhunting.com/2015/08/24/sad-puppies-3-looking-at-the-results/>

The theme that the Hugo Awards had been burned down was repeated by other members of Evil League of Evil. In a post entitled "Burning Down The Field in Order to Save It", Sarah A. Hoyt also claimed that the real victor was Vox Day:

*"Until today I viewed him as a mirror of the SJW posturing. I retract that and I give him full measure of applause. Yes, his views are still repulsive and he still makes my skin crawl as often as the Marxists do, but you know what? At least he has a brain and uses it. Those of you celebrating might want to*

*take a deep breath and wonder — for just a minute — if you did anything more than what Theodore Beale wanted. Because from where I'm sitting, the man that set out to destroy the field and prove that everyone calling themselves its leadership were mannerless and brainless children not only won last night, he won walking away. He won without DOING anything. He won by convincing yourselves to hit yourselves repeatedly with the obvious hammers of partisanship, lack of care for quality and INTEREST in the health of the field. And before you died, you gloated you had won. The mind boggles."*

<https://accordingtohovt.com/2015/08/23/burning-down-the-field-in-order-to-save-it/>

John C. Wright also picked up on the theme:

*"The Hugo Award voters paid me the signal honor of burning down two or perhaps three whole categories of awards merely to prevent me from being awarded the spaceship which the breakdown of the votes shows I was due.*

*I am humbled by the laud shown my work: it is not everyone who can point to the smoking wreckage of a great city whose fanes and temple, colonnades and palaces, baths and coliseums and alabaster towers the burghers burnt with their own hands to prevent falling into his.*

*Even stranger to behold the beast-yowling burghers dancing with odd jerks of the elbows and knees around the bonfires of their own homes where all their best beloved scrolls and trophies burn, as if some signal victory is won, while the putrid smoke climbs up forever."*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2015/08/in-memoriam/>

Wright's claim that the breakdown of votes showed that he was due the awards was not true. Wright came 4th and 5th in Best Novella behind other slated finalists and came 6th (out of five) in Best Short Story and 4th in Best Related Work. Puppy-nominated works in each of the categories he was in ranked higher than Wright's works. However, he did come second to 'no award' on first preferences in Best Novella, marginally ahead of 'Flow' by Arlan Andrews Sr.<sup>[6]</sup>

Brad Torgersen's reaction was to focus specifically on the Best Editor categories. In many ways, these were the strongest categories in the original Sad Puppies 3 slate (Vox Day was added from the Rabid Puppy slate), with notable editors some of whom had a long track record at the Hugo Awards. In the Best Editor Long Form category, Baen publisher Toni Weiskopf had one of the strongest showings of any of the people slated by the Puppy campaigns, with 1216 first preference votes. Even so, she was roundly beaten by 'no award' which scored more than 50% of the total votes in the category with 2496 first preference votes. The large participation in the 2015 Hugo voting meant that Weiskopf was both one of the most voted for editors in this category ever and also the most voted *against*. Torgersen focused on this aspect in his reaction to the Puppy defeat:

*"Mark it in your minds, friends. Remember it. Know the truth of it. The people who parade their inclusiveness and their tolerance, threw **THE MOST-TANGIBLY-SUPPORTED EDITORS IN THE HISTORY OF THE HUGO AWARDS**, under the bus. By 2,500 people. To make a point. Women who have given decades to the business, got thrown beneath the wheels because people wanted to be right more than they love this field."*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/08/23/science-fictions-so-called-true-fandom-throws-women-under-the-bus/>

Mad Genius blogger and the heir apparent for Sad Puppies 4 Kate Paulk provided her perspective a few days later and focused on a number of the key post-Hugo Ceremony complaints. These included the wooden asterisks that David Gerrold had commissioned and presented to all the nominees.

*"I'm sure nobody else noticed the startling resemblance to a certain anatomical outlet, and of course, the Hugo rocket's suggestive shape has been noticed by many people. Put those together and you get a pretty damn accurate depiction of what the pre-award "show" did to their precious awards, not to mention the unfortunates deemed to be tainted by classical communist and Nazi guilt-by-association."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/08/27/yet-another-post-hugo-post/>

Paulk also repeated the idea that the award had been destroyed, concluding her post with this paragraph:

*“And what’s even sadder is this pathetic collection of power-hungry little Hitlers have destroyed what was once a genuinely respected award. Whether it can be resurrected by the Campaign to End Puppy-Related Sadness or not, I consider the cause to be worthy.”*

ibid

The outcome of the Hugo Awards also gained press attention. Amy Wallace wrote a lengthy article in *Wired* which recapped the history of the Sad Puppy movement and explained the significance of the results:

*“After a group of fans tried to guarantee a whiter, more male slate, most of the big Hugos instead went to “No Winner.””*

<https://www.wired.com/2015/08/won-science-fictions-hugo-awards-matters/>

Breitbart commentator and GamerGate advocate Milo Yiannopoulos blamed the results on “SJWs” and repeated the “burning down” theme in the title of his post:

*“According to fiery gaming and sci fi pundit @Daddy\_Warpig, the opposition to the Sad & Rabid Puppies slates took the form of encouraging voters to choose “no award” for an award category unless a work with appropriate politics was available. Taking it a step farther, many SJW zealots proved their commitment to tolerance, openness and variety by vowing not to read a work found on a Puppies slate under any circumstances.”*

<https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2015/08/23/set-phasers-to-kill-sjws-burn-down-the-hugo-awards-to-prove-how-tolerant-and-welcoming-they-are/>

Meanwhile, at *The Guardian*, Damien Walter was triumphant, seeing the impact of the backlash against the Puppy campaigns as a net positive for science fiction by affirming a commitment to diversity.

*“So Thank you Sad Puppies. You have woken sci-fi fandom from its slumber and proved that diversity in sci-fi really is a problem. There will never be another Worldcon or Hugo awards where diversity is not addressed. Diversity will now be carried to every new world and parallel dimension we visit. And sci-fi writing will be all the stronger for it. The future of humankind is global and many-hued. By reflecting that reality, sci-fi makes itself a fit literature for and of the future.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/aug/24/diversity-wins-as-the-sad-puppies-lose-at-the-hugo-awards>

The last word, though, should go to John Scalzi who summed up the outcome of the months-long kerfuffle:

*“The Hugo vote against the Puppy slates was not about politics, or cabals, or one species of science fiction and fantasy over another, no matter what anyone would like you to believe — or at the very least, it wasn’t mostly about those things. It was about small group of people acting like jerks, and another, rather larger group, expressing their displeasure at them acting so.*

*Mind you, I don’t expect the core Puppies to recognize this; indeed I expect them to say they haven’t done a single thing that has been other than forthright and noble and correct. Well, and here’s the thing about that: acting like a jerk and then asserting that no, it’s everyone else that’s been acting like a jerk, is the biggest jerk maneuver of all.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/08/24/being-a-jerk-about-the-hugos-not-as-effective-a-strategy-as-you-might-think/>

Except...

That was not the last word. The main event was over but the Vox Day/John Scalzi conflict had its own coda for August 2015.

It is easy to mock Vox Day’s claims of ‘Xanatos Gambits’ or the list of new projects that he announces with great ambition. However, Day does genuinely plan for some new event or project to follow on from the previous one. With the 2015 Rabid Puppies campaign coming to an end, Day had already scheduled the publication of his new political book *SJWs Always Lie* for August 27, the anniversary of GamerGate. The date, of course, being conveniently close to when the Hugo results would be announced.

Day’s book started with a dedication to GamerGate citing all the people who Day regarded as allied warriors in the culture war:

*“This book is for Adam Baldwin and Internet Aristocrat, for Sargon of Akkad and RogueStar and The Ralph Retort, for Ultra (who exposed the GameJournoPros), for Draginol and Grummz and all the devs*

of GG, for Christina Hoff Summers and Mercedes Carrera, for Yuji Nakajima and Oliver Campbell and Kukuruyo, for A Girl in Vermillion and A Mage in Black and MegaSpacePanda, for Doctor Ethics and Alejandro Argandona and Thurin and my man Daddy Warpig, for Paolo Munoz and Deep Freeze and Otter Jesus, for Shauna and Spacebunny, for Allum Bokhari and Mike Cernovich, and, of course, for the literally indefatigable Milo Yiannopoulos.

Day, Vox. *SJWs Always Lie: Taking Down the Thought Police (The Laws of Social Justice Book 1)* (p. 6). Castalia House.

The first chapter imagined a person dealing with a stereotypically oppressive social-justice orientated HR department. Day claimed that his book would enable people to defend themselves and their job from SJWs. Yet the second chapter, ostensibly about the “Three Laws of SJWs”, was about the relative popularity of Day’s blog (complete with statistics) and John Scalzi’s blog. The fourth chapter about GamerGate was surprisingly numbered as Chapter 5 and was followed by another Chapter 5 on the recent Puppies Campaign. On Twitter, writer and satirist Alexandra Erin spotted the notable error by the now multi-Hugo nominated editor:

“Okay, enough tearing down. Positivity time! @voxdays fans, of the two Chapter 5s in the book, which is your favorite?”

<https://twitter.com/AlexandraErin/status/636935489182941184>

In his book, Day described the beginnings of the year’s events:

“After discussing our differences, I stepped back from Sad Puppies and created Rabid Puppies, an allied campaign designed around the #GamerGate model. It was enthusiastically embraced by the Dread Ilk of Vox Popoli, the larger of my two blogs, and as was the case with #GamerGate, the anti-SJW people proved to be more numerous than those focused only on the industry-specific issue. However, the SJWs so hated everything Brad put forward, and reacted so negatively towards those works, that instead of needing a completely separate list of recommendations, the Rabid Puppy list turned out to be little more than the Sad Puppy list with a few tactical additions intended to further enrage the SJWs.”

Day, Vox. *SJWs Always Lie: Taking Down the Thought Police (The Laws of Social Justice Book 1)* (p. 92). Castalia House. <sup>[7]</sup>

Day also found a new way of declaring victory, this time seeing the Hugo voting reform *E Pluribus Hugo* as a net positive if ratified:

“If ratified at MidAmeriCon next year, it will transform the Hugo Awards into a quasi-Parliamentary system designed to ensure no single faction can singlehandedly dictate the shortlist in the future. This will have the effect of preventing future Puppy sweeps but will also limit the Tor cabal to one or two nominations per category as well. And since our goal was never to control the awards, but merely to break the SJW stranglehold on them, this will be an eminently satisfactory outcome from the canine perspective.”

Day, Vox. *SJWs Always Lie: Taking Down the Thought Police (The Laws of Social Justice Book 1)* (p. 102). Castalia House. .

In the rest of the book, Day continued with his complaints about codes of conduct, feminism and social justice warriors. He also spent time re-litigating his expulsion from the SFWA.

In response Alexandra Erin in the guise of one “Theophilus Pratt” published her own very short eBook entitled *John Scalzi Is Not A Very Popular Author And I Myself Am Quite Popular: How SJWs Always Lie About Our Comparative Popularity Levels*. Chapters included:

- Chapter 2: John Scalzi’s Blog Is Not That Interesting And No One Reads It,
- Chapter 3: John Scalzi Does Not Understand Satire As Well As I Understand Satire
- Chapter 5: John Scalzi Did Not Get Me Thrown Out Of The SFWA
- Chapter 5: John Scalzi’s Deal With Tor Is Not A Very Good Deal
- Chapter 5: John Scalzi Is Not A Very Popular Author

In the wake of eight months of Puppy campaigning, Erin’s parody proved very popular with people who had been following the Hugo Award controversy. John Scalzi joined in with a charitable offer:

“To benefit Con or Bust, a charity which helps fans of color attend science fiction and fantasy conventions, I will make an audio version of John Scalzi Is Not A Very Popular Author And I Myself Am Quite Popular: How SJWs Always Lie About Our Comparative Popularity Levels, a parody of an

*actual book by a certain obnoxious bigot who is obsessed with me, if \$2,500 is raised for Con or Bust by 11:59pm (Eastern), Sunday, August 30, 2015.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/08/27/charity-drive-for-con-or-bust-an-audio-version-of-john-scalzi-is-not-a-very-popular-author-and-i-myself-am-quite-popular-read-by-me/>

The money was raised quickly and the audio book produced.

Day's supporters retaliated with the own counter-parody books with titles defaming John Scalzi.

It had been a long year for science fiction and yet it was still only August.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2015HugoStatistics.pdf>
- [2] <https://georgerrmartin.com/the-alfie-awards/>
- [3] <https://gizmodo.com/this-is-what-the-2015-hugo-ballot-should-have-been-1725967147>
- [4] <https://nwhyte.livejournal.com/2514368.html>
- [5] EPH reanalysis <http://www.rocketstackrank.com/p/2015-hugo-nominations-organic-estimate.html> and data on Rabid Puppy discipline <http://www.rocketstackrank.com/2016/09/reanalysis-of-slate-voting-in-2016-hugo.html#rabidvsad>
- [6] 1st preferences No Award 3495, “*One Bright Star to Guide Them*” 556 <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2015HugoStatistics.pdf>
- [7] “our differences” here means a discussion with Brad Torgersen and the other Sad Puppy figures

## 50: 2015 Aftermath — July to December

The Sad Puppy defeat could have been taken as a repudiation of what the Sad Puppies had stood for but in the wake of the Hugo Award ceremony, nobody had a clear idea what the Sad Puppies had stood for. Larry Correia's original campaign had framed itself as promoting fun, honest action in science fiction as a blow against overly literary fiction, yet Sad Puppies 2 had promoted Vox Day's "*Opera Vita Aeterna*", a story in which an elf discusses theology and Sad Puppies 3 had promoted the work of John C. Wright, a writer even more obsessed with literary aesthetics and philosophical themes. Critics of Brad Torgersen's original framing of the Sad Puppies 3 campaign had pointed to his anti-diversity rhetoric and yet Torgersen could genuinely point to a slate that was not homogeneously white and male. True, the impact of the Puppy slates reduced the representation of women on the ballot compared to 2013 but it was still a better balance than relatively recent Hugo ballots (e.g., 2007). Sad Puppy supporters had rallied around a claim that the Hugo Awards were biased against conservative writers and works but also the Sad Puppy leadership had denied that the campaign was political. In an attempt to prevent critics of the Sad Puppy campaign from framing the campaign in any particular way, defenders of the campaigns had counter-examples ready.

In late August, founding member of the Evil League of Evil and multi-nominated Sad and Rabid Puppy nominee, John C. Wright reacted to the defeat of the Puppy slates at the Hugo Awards with a post where he attempted to encapsulate the campaign:

*"If there are any honest columns, or even a column not choked to the brim with lies, from the viewpoint of our dishonourable and lying-ass attackers, I would surely link to it.*

*There are none. Even columnists who perhaps imagine themselves to be neutral or balanced blithely fall into the orchestrated falsehoods, and do not admit what this struggle has always been about:*

*We are attempting to pry the control of the Hugos out of the hand of a clique or Inner Ring run by Patrick Nielsen Hayden for the benefit of his abortive antichristian ideology and the fiscal benefit (which, at one time there was to be had for publishing Hugo Award winning works), and return control to the fans.*

*We wanted it to stop being the Tor Award for Political Correctness and to return to being the Hugo Award."*

<https://www.scifiwright.com/2015/08/for-your-reading-pleasure/>

Yet even the framing of the campaign as anti-Tor Books was contradicted both by direct rhetoric and by actual actions. The Tor Boycott campaign (see earlier chapters) was stated to be not part of the Sad Puppy campaign per se both by its major advocate (Mad Genius Peter Grant) and from the other direction by a direct denial by Larry Correia that it was a Sad Puppy boycott. Further not only had the Sad Puppy slate ensured that a Tor-published book was a finalist (*The Dark Between the Stars* by Kevin J Anderson) the eventual winner of the 2015 Hugo Awards was a Tor book that had received the overt and vocal support of Rabid Puppy supremo Vox Day (*The Three-Body Problem* by Cixin Liu).

Wright would go on to explain in the same column all the various things that the Puppy campaigns were not:

*"Our motives are precisely what we said, both seriously and in jest.*

*Seriously, we thought and said that limiting the award to the radical-feminist Intersection-Theory Critical-Theory homonormative crap that the Inner Ring likes damages the brand and threatens to turn science fiction into one more postmodern wasteland of dreary garbage, neither edifying nor entertaining.*

*When is the last time an award winning science fiction tale or related work had even an iota of real science in it? THE MARTIAN by Weir was crammed with diamond hard science. It won nothing.*



*When is the last time an award winning science fiction tale had profound literary merit, seeped in the traditions of Western epic and romance from the classical period to now? My one THE GOLDEN AGE was both imaginative and rooted in the classics. It won nothing.*

*When is the last time an award winning science fiction tale was fun? Read HARD MAGIC by Larry Correia. It won nothing.*

*In jest, we said that the leading cause of sadness syndrome in cute furry puppies was the predominance of brain-meltingly absurd uberleftist ideological agitprop being rocketed to the top of the most prestigious awards in the field, and we asked for the sake of the puppies to grant awards based on merit.*

*This is not about conservative versus liberal.*

*The Morlocks are not liberals, except in the sense that they use the liberal vocabulary to express their illiberal ideas. And, of the four founding members of the Evil Legion of Evil Authors who decided to stand up to the Inner Ringwraiths, I am the only social and political conservative properly so called.*

*This is not about white males versus minorities.*

*Again, of the founding four, I am the only white male. (For those of you racists who insist we call carry an Ahnenpass, the others are Female, Hispanic, American Indian).*

*This is not about fun adventure fiction versus highbrow literary fiction.*

*I write highbrow literary fiction more filled with allusion and philosophical depth than anything the Morlocks recommend. Each time they claim to be what I am, a refined aesthete of exquisite literary accomplishment, another imp in hell laughs in the delight and the Empire of Lies grows another inch. Unlike the poseurs and pretend intellectuals, however, I can also read, admire and applaud wrecked but well meant pulp fiction and lowbrow fun. Because I am human and I like humans, whereas the Morlocks regard humans as food animals.*

*This is not about returning to the past of John W. Campbell versus the wondrous new future promised by Michael Moorcock and the New Wave, or whatever. This is not about rebels versus reactionaries.”*  
*ibid*

That other supporters of the Puppy campaigns or even major figures in the campaigns had said or implied that the campaigns were about at least some of the things Wright had listed was neither here nor there. Pulp vs literary, right vs left, diversity vs homogeneity, Campbell vs New Wave, Trad-publishing vs Indie? Counter-examples to generalisations abounded. Wright was confident that the Puppy campaigns were about something, spectators were less sure. Even Wright's example of Andy Weir's breakout hit *The Martian* as an example of what the Puppies were fighting for and what the non-Puppies were opposed to was contradicted by the Hugo nomination statistics. Without the Puppy slates, Andy Weir would have been a finalist for the Astounding/Campbell Award for Best New Writer.

Back in April, after the shock of the Puppy sweep of the Hugo nominations had sunk in among fans, author and editor Nick Mamatas had focused on a key claim of the Sad Puppy campaign (one alluded to in Wright's later post above). In a comment at John Scalzi's blog, Mamatas had laid out a specific challenge:

*“If the Hugos have really been dominated by leftist material that prized message over story since the mid-1990s (Brad's timeline), it should be very simple for members of the Puppy Party to name*

*a. one work of fiction*

*b. that won a Hugo Award*

*c. while foregrounding a left message to the extent that the story was ruined or misshaped*

*d. per set of winners since 1995.*

*That's all. Just a list of twenty books or stories—a single winner per year. Even though a single winner per year wouldn't prove domination, I'm happy to make it easy for the Puppies.*

*Any Puppy Partisan want to start naming some names?"*

Nick Mamatas, comment <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/04/20/keeping-up-with-the-hugos-42015/#comment-781272>

Puppy supporters had raised objections to four works over the past few years, specifically John Scalzi's *Redshirts*, Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice*, John Chu's "*The Water that Falls on You From Nowhere*", and Rachel Swirsky's "*If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love*". However, those criticisms were inconsistent, poorly sourced or often incorrect ("*If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love*" had won the Nebula Award, not the Hugo Award). Despite the many column inches that had been written about the Hugo Awards by supporters of the Puppy campaigns, a sustained, coherent, and well-referenced critique of the award from a Puppy perspective simply didn't exist.

Back in July, when Mike Glycer's *File770* was winding back the daily Puppy round-ups, one of the many regulars who were discussing the Puppy campaigns in the comments summed up their own puzzlement about the past several months of conflict:

*"Here at the End of All Things, are some answers/ things we're still missing:*

*– A honest explanation as to how the SP3 slate was created,*

*– How the tactics of slate-nominations furthers \*any\* of the constantly changing rationales provided by the Puppies*

*– Anyone taking on the Mamatas Challenge*

*– Evidence of a previous slate/ bloc-voting effort. The Puppies keep saying that's the only way Stuff They Don't Like Could have won, but are strangely reticent at providing any evidence or proof of their allegations.*

*– Why Wisdom of the Internet???? Seriously why? (And yelling about Scalzi is not a good answer)"*

Snowcrash, comment <http://file770.com/to-your-scattered-kennels-go-76/comment-page-3/#comment-303817>

The leaders of the Puppy campaigns and the many people who had supported those campaigns had a myriad of motives, perspectives and anxieties about social change. The Hugo Award campaigns had given disparate individuals a common purpose without any clear common philosophy. As Snowcrash's question highlighted, there was not even a clear idea of how the Hugo slates would achieve any of the various aims that had been stated. In the end, only Vox Day had any clarity but even he had multiple motives including his personal feuds against the Nielsen Haydens and John Scalzi, his overt anti-feminist and ethnonationalist beliefs and his desire to run his own GamerGate-like campaign.

In the wake of the defeat at the Hugo Awards, the less immediate reactions from supporters of the Puppy campaigns were also manifold.

At *Mad Genius Club*, ex-pat Australian Kate Paulk had taken on the mantle of organising Sad Puppies 4. The next part of the Debarkle will look at this iteration of the Puppies, but Paulk was promising a campaign that would directly address the more practical criticisms of Sad Puppies 3. The new campaign would be transparent about the nomination process and would also not present a simple slate of five works per category. The stated objective was to increase involvement in the Hugo Awards.

Others looked to new awards as an alternative to the Hugos. Author M.A.Rothman had been deeply disappointed by the results of the Hugo Award and the ceremony itself. He had encouraged his children to take an interest in the ballot and they were upset when multiple categories went to 'no award'.

*"I find that a great shame – and I blame not the people who established the ballots to vote for (for my kids enjoyed a great deal of what they read on the ballots), but as my kids noted – they blame the ones who made them feel "like the rug was pulled out from under me."*

*I'd offered Fandom my boys – my boys now reject them."*

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10204934540299315>

Inspired in part by the disappointment that Rothman had expressed and by the perceived injustice of the ‘no award’ results, the short-lived Jovian Awards were delivered in late December. Mike Resnick, Kary English, Arlan Andrews, Ken Burnside, and Toni Weiskopf, were each sent impressive glass ball trophies. These winners of the Jovians were the Hugo finalists who had come second to ‘no award’ in Hugo categories with no winner<sup>[1]</sup>.

English wrote about the award she received:

*“The photo doesn’t do it justice. The swirls are a deep, rich purple, and those sparkles near the bottom are coppery. The award is weighty, and it arrived in a velvet-lined presentation box. The award came with a certificate that praised both the story and the way I conducted myself throughout Hugo season.*

*I’ll be frank, here – after everything that went on, this brought tears to my eyes. So thank you, Jovians, whoever you are.”*

<http://karvenenglish.com/2015/12/my-jovian-award-a-nifty-tilting-planet/>

In a similar vein, George Phillies at the National Fantasy Fan Federation re-started the group’s Neffy Awards that had been discontinued in 2012. Only two awards were give out for 2015:

***Heroic Achievement:*** *All Hugo Fandom — for reviving the all-hobby fan feud*

***Best Editor:*** *Toni Weiskopf – Baen*

<https://tnfff.org/neffy-awards/>

The Neffy Awards would continue on for several years with a bigger range of categories and finalists but up to this point, each year Toni Weiskopf has been the sole nominee and winner in the Best Editor category.

The not-unreasonable idea that there were some Puppy-slanted nominees who deserved awards for their work implied the existence of a broad middle position on the so-called Puppy Kerfuffle of 2015. People who had been perceived as critics of the Puppies such as George R.R. Martin and Eric Flint had both argued against using ‘no award’ on more credible finalists. Fan writer Mike Glycer was regarded with particular hostility among Puppy supporters because of his daily Puppy round-ups at *File770* and the way the comment section to the round-ups had been a major centre of anti-Puppy criticism — yet, Glycer had put forward cogent arguments for Toni Weiskopf to win the Best Editor Hugo Award over more than one of the Sad Puppy campaigns. Likewise, there were people perceived as supporters of the Sad Puppy slates who, in the aftermath of the Hugo vote, offered cogent criticism of the tactics and tone of the Puppy campaign.

Baen author Chuck Gannon was in the unusual position of being on the Sad Puppy slate for his novel *Trial By Fire*, but not an actual finalist. In an added twist, his novel was a finalist for the Nebula awards without the intervention of a slate. In September 2015, Gannon wrote an essay that was posted as a comment at John Scalzi’s *Whatever* blog<sup>[2]</sup> and also as a guest post on Larry Correia’s *Monster Hunter Nation* blog. Gannon’s argument was primarily about tone and invective, and rested on the kind of both-sides style argument that George R.R. Martin had sometimes deployed:

*“So that’s why my concern is with how the discourse is conducted. Yes, there are always going to be arguments and debates, some more ferocious than others. And some burn themselves out. But some go on for longer, and do far more damage, than they must. And that typically happens when a debate starts falling under the real (or perceived) rhetorical influence of radical extremists like Vox Day or Requires Hate. Because although they might sound like they are deeply invested in the debate, their involvement is motivated by other objectives.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/09/02/wrapping-up-2015-a-hugo-awards-open-thread/#comment-796394>

The comparison of Vox Day with Requires Hate was one that had been made by others even though the juxtaposition is flawed in multiple ways<sup>[3]</sup>. At *Monster Hunter Nation*, Gannon’s thoughtful words were met with more direct hostility from Vox Day:

*“I happen to know that Charles Gannon is both a coward and a liar. But more importantly, he’s just wrong. He demands unilateral disarmament when it comes to rhetoric and completely fails to observe that you cannot “choose your battles” when you are attacked by SJWs.*

*No doubt he'll eventually learn this when they turn on him for one reason or another; they always do, sooner or later."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/10/12/sad-puppies-guest-post-by-chuck-gannon/#comment-71380>

Gannon's thoughts were not the only retrospective on the Puppy campaign from people partially involved. Ken Burnside had been on the Puppy slates for his essay *The Hot Equations*, which was one of the more critically well-regarded finalists for Best Related Work. In a guest post at *Mad Genius Club*, Burnside attempted to unravel the distinction between a list of recommendations and a slate. In his opinion, Brad Torgersen's initial attempts at the Sad Puppy 3 slate was more akin to a set of recommendations whereas the Rabid Puppy slate was unambiguously a slate. However, the Sad Puppy campaign as a whole was a different matter:

*"The Sad Puppies recommended reading list became the basis of the Rabid Puppies slate. The first pieces describing how the two were indistinguishable came out in early March. While I was published by Vox Day, I was a Sad Puppy, not a Rabid one. One very important difference between the two: Vox said to vote his slate; Brad said "These are highly recommended, worth reading, and if you agree, worth nominating."*

*The announcement of the Sad Puppies slate was a mishmash of "Let's get a certain type of SF represented" which I agree with, and a large charge of "Let's turn this into a culture-war front." I agree with the former. I think the latter is profoundly stupid."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/08/30/guest-post-by-ken-burnside/>

Burnside also discussed the hostility he experienced:

*"In the four month span between the ballot being made public and the end of voting on July 31st, I got threats of assault if I showed up at Worldcon (none materialized), I got called a racist, homophobic sexist neo-Nazi, and I watched lies and fabrications show up in national media. The Puppies are all racist white men (which is why the nominated slate had seven women in it). I mostly played duck-and-cover; Brad Torgersen was on scapegoat duty."*

ibid

On the ceremony, he discussed his dislike of the asterisks (citing Kurt Vonnegut's comparison of the symbol to an anus) and also discussed the events of the night, including the booing:

*"Then Best Editor, Long Form went to No Award, and the cheering made the floor tremble. Several people (myself included) started booing. David said "booing is not appropriate" and I came about a half-second away from standing up and jumping on the stage to grab the mic. Bryan Thomas Schmidt DID get up and curse loudly. Toni Weisskopf apparently never went to the ceremony at all; per Bryan the two of them commiserated for a few hours after the ceremony."*

ibid<sup>[4]</sup>

However, Burnside differed sharply from Brad Torgersen and other Puppy supporters in his analysis of what the underlying issues were. For him, the changes in what science fiction was being awarded were natural organic changes. Writing in science fiction had become organically more sophisticated. The "Heroic Engineer/Officer/Competent Protagonist Solves The Problem" style of story from the John W. Campbell age had given way to writing with characters with more depth and more flaws. Inevitably, works with literary elements were the ones going to win literary awards. While Burnside had joined the Puppy slates to address the "imbalance", the campaign itself had failed.

*"What happened instead? The Hugos became a front in the culture war. Brad Torgersen's posts at the very beginning about "victim class check box fiction" destroyed any rapport with people who weren't already in his camp. Other comments made by Torgersen kept the same divisive tone. Vox Day's posts on the subject started at inflammatory and went up from there. His business model is built off of it."*

*Both were using the tactic of “say something outrageous, wait for the ‘other side’ to get pissed off, and turn to the choir to say ‘see, I told you they’d over-react.’” When trying to build a roster of voters nominating literary works, this sure as hell doesn’t convince people that your side has any merit.*

*Conducting literary criticism via the rhetoric of culture war is profoundly stupid if you want your complaints listened to. The counter-reaction to the Puppies was justifiable, predictable, and seems to have fed into a considerable media campaign, one that Torgersen had to threaten libel lawsuits to tone down”*

ibid

Figures like Chuck Gannon, Wendy Delmater of *Abyss & Apex* magazine and Kary English had each become involved in the Sad Puppy campaigns but had attempted to pushback against the influence of Vox Day (sometimes in the mildest way). They also offered different rationalisations and expectations about the nature of the Sad Puppy campaign. Making generalisation about the Sad Puppies in the widest sense of the term is difficult because of these contrasting viewpoints.

In the case of Ken Burnside, he overtly stated that “while I was published by Vox Day, I was a Sad Puppy, not a Rabid one”. However, the multiple nominations on the Sad Puppy slate of works from Castalia House (such as Burnside’s essay from the *Riding the Red Horse* anthology) had added to the entanglement of the two campaigns.

However, common to the critique of events from this quasi-middle ground was a sense of the Hugo Awards, for non-malicious reasons, were overlooking certain styles and approaches to science fiction that had once been popular. George R.R. Martin was not averse to a degree of rapprochement on this issue. In late December he expressed hope that the Sad Puppies 4 campaign would be focused on a recommended reading list.

*“And that would be great. That would mean no Puppygate II. That would mean a spirited **literary** debate about writers and books without the acrimony and the name-calling. From that debate a truly democratic and diverse ballot could emerge, one that represents all tastes. That would mean no ‘**No Awards**’ at Big MAC II, and the Hugo ceremony could once again become a joyous celebration of the best and brightest in our field.”*

<https://grrm.livejournal.com/461206.html>

In response, Brad Torgersen’s anger had not mellowed:

*“I suspect that in order for a genuine mending to take place, between your average Sad Puppy, and the SF/F establishment, there would need to be several things.*

*1) A very public admission by the establishment that the NO AWARD bombing of the 2015 Hugos was a gross error.*

*2) A very public admission by the establishment that the CHORFholes were also a gross error.*

*3) A very public apology from the establishment, for the deliberate conflation of the Sads, with the Rabids.*

*4) A cessation of the endless game of shibboleths and street cred checks, on the part of Trufans, as conducted against everybody else (looks hard at Steve Davidson.)”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/12/27/sad-puppies-and-the-future/>

Torgersen had coined his own term for wooden asterisks that David Gerrold had handed out at the award ceremony. Combining his earlier term “CHORF” (see chapter 38) with “asshole” to create the portmanteau term “CHORFhole”, the asterisks were one of Torgersen’s top four lingering issues with the events of 2015.

However, as the Hugo statistics had revealed, it had been the Rabid Puppy campaign that had had the stronger numbers and the better discipline in the 2015 Hugo nominations. Vox Day’s motives may have been mixed and sometimes unclear but he was clear that his intent towards the Hugo Awards was hostile. He was also under no illusions that he or a work from his publishing house stood any chance of winning a Hugo Award. He was under no personal need to appear to be working within the system or to achieve results by legitimate means.

Day was not going to publicly announce his plans for Rabid Puppies 2 until he was ready but it was reasonable to assume that Castalia House would be part of his strategy. Brad Torgersen's picks for Sad Puppies 3 had included four different works from Castalia House and these works had also received promotional "Book Bombs" from Larry Correia<sup>[5]</sup>. Even without the Rabid Puppy slate, the 2015 Hugo Award controversy had been an effective promotional exercise for Day. The conflict had brought the publisher's output to the attention of right-leaning fans of military science fiction — i.e., many of the supporters of the Sad Puppies and many Baen Books fans.

Castalia House had built upon the success of *Riding the Red Horse* with a minor publishing coup. In April of 2015, the publisher had announced that they would be republishing the *There Will Be War* series of military science fiction anthologies created by veteran author Jerry Pournelle. In September Pournelle announced via *File770* that there would be a new volume in the series, again published by Castalia House. Pournelle explained how he saw the continuing relevance of the series:

*"I'm vain enough to think it's an important series, TWBW, and now that Iran is likely to have the bomb perhaps we need to think about the future of war. It seemed impossible to get out of the Cold War without at least a few atomic explosions, but we did it with containment, deterrence, and defence. I won't live to see the end of the next phase, but I like to believe TWBW helped get people thinking about how to get out of the Cold War alive; maybe a couple of new volumes will help with these new dangers."*

<http://file770.com/pournelle-resumes-there-will-be-war-anthology-series/>

Pournelle was famously one of the more consistently right-wing voices in science fiction over several decades but even so, his choice of publishing with Castalia House added an additional degree of apparent legitimacy to the publisher. Castalia was also publishing more new work from John C. Wright as well as works of science fiction scholarship such as a multi-volume examination of the work of Gene Wolfe<sup>[7]</sup>.

A second source for potential nominees to promote the publisher was the Castalia House blog. Puppy-slated Hugo 2015 Finalist Jeffro Johnson had begun a mammoth series reviewing the fantasy novels that had been listed in the so-called "Appendix N" of the original version of *Dungeons & Dragons* by Gary Gygax. These books were intended as a way of encapsulating the kind of settings and stories that Gygax hoped to emulate in the role-playing game.

*"The forty-three instalments of this series delve only into the books that Gary Gygax singled out in particular, and for the authors that he recommended their entire body of works, I only covered a single novel. Then there are the series that he highlighted— I stopped with those after the first volume when I sometimes wanted to put the entire project on hold to read them all. Finally, there are all the fantasy authors that wrote since the seventies that people think deserve a place on a list like this. People want to know if more recent authors measure up to these old classics, sure. But people really want to know which contemporaries of the Appendix N authors got snubbed by being excluded when they really deserved to be there."*

<http://www.castaliahouse.com/appendix-n-matters/>

Johnson was one of several people associated with the Puppy campaigns who had taken a renewed interest in the history of the genre. The Castalia House blog had begun looking back to the older pulp era of science fiction characterised by the first half of the twentieth century. If Brad Torgersen and Sarah A. Hoyt had been making aesthetic appeals to the height of John W. Campbell's or Robert Heinlein's influence on science fiction, there was now a section of right-leaning fandom looking even further back.

This interest in pre-war pulps was not a particular interest of Vox Day's but other aspects of the Castalia House blog more clearly reflected Day's agenda. Blogger Daniel Eness produced a five-part series on the blog entitled "Safe Space as Rape Room" that claimed to expose a pattern of collusion and cover-up of child sexual abuse within science fiction. The series repeated and expanded upon Vox Day's posts on the same topic from 2014 and looked at figures who had been convicted of child-abuse related crimes: Walter Breen, Ed Kramer, and also Isaac Asimov's son David. The series looked at Marion Zimmer Bradley as well as accusations of various kinds levelled at Arthur C. Clarke and Samuel R. Delany<sup>[8]</sup>. The argumentative style followed the same premise as Vox Day's 2014 posts on the topic and attempted to connect historic abuse with the recent leadership of the SFWA (see earlier chapters).

Day would not be lacking for items to include in his 2016 Rabid Puppies list.

Meanwhile, the true significance of the 'no award' vote was visible by an absence. One fear expressed earlier in 2015 was that the response to the Puppy slates would be left-leaning counter-slates. A moderately well-disciplined anti-Puppy slate could, in theory, easily overwhelm any impact of new Puppy slates.

However, this strategy would seriously impact the credibility of the Hugo Awards and essentially convert the award from a popular vote to one with a narrow jury, i.e., whoever controlled the counter-slate. The visible and emphatic vote against slates in the final voting of the 2015 Hugo Awards sent a clear message that slates of any kind were unlikely to succeed.

Instead of counter slates, 2015 had brought renewed attention to the resources needed to read and nominate. Many of these resources pre-dated the Sad Puppies 3 campaign. The online blog/fanzine *Lady Business* had started a Google Spreadsheet for Hugo suggestions for the 2014 Hugo Awards<sup>[9]</sup>. That approach helped inspire a Wiki-style site for collating Hugo Award suggestions<sup>[10]</sup>. In early January 2015, fan writer and reviewer Charles Payseur began his *Quick Sip Reviews* of short fiction across multiple magazines. With the impact of the Puppies, more people began seeking out sites like Payseur's that would help people find interesting short fiction. In September 2015, Greg Hullender and Eric Wong created *Rocket Stack Rank*, an online resource to help fans to find copies of short-fiction stories (something that was difficult for non-subscribers), and took on the added challenge of defining a systematic rating system, reviewing up to 700 stories a year, and presenting the result on a searchable website. In addition to these resources, websites and fan communities that had engaged with the Puppy conflict were sharing reviews and recommendations to encourage people to find works that they liked<sup>[12]</sup>.

Nobody knew what 2016 would bring to the Hugo Awards but after the events of 2015 nobody wanted to go into them again unprepared. Meanwhile, events beyond fandom were taking their own unexpected turn...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://web.archive.org/web/20161106235150/https://thejovianaward.com/> only the front page is archived but parts of the reasoning behind the award are quoted here <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-1230-the-scrolls-have-eyes/comment-page-2/#comment-383616>
- [2] *Whatever* version <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/09/02/wrapping-up-2015-a-hugo-awards-open-thread/#comment-796394> and *MHN* version <https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/10/12/sad-puppies-guest-post-by-chuck-gannon/> Gannon's main text is the same but the framing by the blog hosts are different as are the comments (obviously).
- [3] a full discussion is beyond the scope of this project but even if all aspects of the Mixon report and RH's critics are taken at face value, the behaviour outlined is comparable to multiple lower-ranked supporters of Day or GamerGate participants. Seeing Day as an online bully underestimates the issue.
- [4] Burnside misremembers the order in which the awards were announced (he places Short Story out of sequence). Gerrold's comment on boeing was much later in the ceremony. The editor categories can be watched here at around 5:45 mark <https://www.ustream.tv/recorded/71474005> Gerrold's boeing comment was after Short Story was announced (at 21:35 mark). It is also worth noting, that the audience overall applauds the announcement of all finalists before the winner (or non-winner) was announced.
- [5] for example <https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/03/04/sad-puppies-book-bomb-best-related-work-and-campbell-award-for-best-new-writer/>
- [6] <http://file770.com/there-will-be-war-again/>
- [7] <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/pl.cgi?527699>
- [8] <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-1211-fresh-squeezed-pixel-juice/>
- [9] <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1gEo318AwiDegc5dEuDbd4RLjADT2xsw0JEAgXbV0tU/edit#gid=17>
- [10] [https://hugonoms2015.fandom.com/wiki/Hugo\\_Nominees\\_2016](https://hugonoms2015.fandom.com/wiki/Hugo_Nominees_2016)
- [11] <http://www.rocketstackrank.com/2015/09/welcome-to-rocket-stack-rank.html>
- [12] for example <https://www.eruditorumpress.com/blog/weird-kitties-an-organized-anti-slate-for-the-2016-hugos>

## 51: Meanwhile...Donald Trump

It is 1987 and the question for American conservatives is who will succeed Ronald Reagan not just as President of the United States but as the ideological figurehead of the conservative movement. The most likely candidate for the Republican nomination is George H.W. Bush, the current Vice President, but Bush's credibility among the right of the Republican Party isn't strong. Nevertheless, his role at Ronald Reagan's side will make him a difficult candidate to beat. The alternatives to Bush include Bob Dole and Jack Kemp, but many on the right are putting their hopes in televangelist Pat Robertson who was promising to clear out liberals from the apparatus of the federal government.<sup>[1]</sup> Robertson had built his campaign by appealing for millions of volunteers in his Evangelical Christian base to rally to his cause. Press coverage of the race has focused on the increasing influence of the radical Christian movement within the Republican Party:

*“For a Republican Party seeking to solidify the gains it has made under President Reagan, Robertson’s success sets the stage for a two-year test of the party’s ability to deal with the sharp tensions between its establishment wing and the newly mobilized fundamentalist Christians, the single largest addition to the Republican coalition in the last decade.”*

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1986/06/01/pat-robertson-and-the-power-of-gop-activists/09a8aa29-1774-42dd-a9ea-7f46bca885a5/>

Robertson ended up withdrawing before the Republican National Convention and George H.W. Bush was duly selected as the Republican Presidential candidate. However, Robertson wasn't the only non-traditional candidate that conservatives considered as an alternative to Bush. New Hampshire Republican activist Mike Dunbar had an unusual idea:

*“It was early summer of 1987, and Mike Dunbar had an idea. What if Donald Trump ran for president? Dunbar launched a “Draft Trump” campaign. The media got wind of Dunbar’s plan, and the first round of stories about a possible Trump presidency ran in newspapers across the country. In October 1987, Trump’s helicopter landed in New Hampshire. That night, Trump spoke before a packed house.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140126064800/www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/blogs/hilary-sargent/2014/01/22/the-man-responsible-for-donald-trump-never-ending-presidential-campaign/95LunCt63n3xKog5DvJNFI/blog.html>

Trump was a registered Democrat when Dunbar first approached him and the idea of the publicity-hungry New York property developer being a likely Republican candidate was implausible. Trump's first campaign went nowhere but it brought him into the Republican Party and to the 1988 Republican National Convention.

Robertson's campaign had shown some strength in America's mid-western states. In Minnesota, Robertson's campaign was run by the businessman (and later tax fraudster) Robert Beale<sup>[2]</sup>. This led to an encounter that begins the intersection of the Debarkle story and the future presidency of Donald Trump. On the night of Bush's acceptance of the nomination, Trump was sitting in Bush's personal suite as was Robert Beale's twenty-year-old son Vox Day:

*“He crossed his legs, his shoe came near my shoulder and thereby drew my attention in my peripheral vision. I glanced back, did a double-take, and laughed. He grinned, leaned forward, patted my shoulder, and said “hey, sorry about that”.*”

Vox Day, comment <https://web.archive.org/web/20210314183831/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/02/donald-trump-democratic-socialist.html>

Trump would attempt another run at a Presidential nomination for the 2000 election but this time for the Reform Party created by billionaire Ross Perot. To head his exploratory committee, Trump chose long-time political operator Roger Stone<sup>[3]</sup>. However, the chaos within the Reform Party and the effort involved in winning the nomination led Trump to withdraw, with many people assuming that the whole campaign was a publicity stunt on Trump's part. Trump himself expressed frustration with the way the Reform Party had attracted many people with crank beliefs into its ranks:

*“I also saw the underside of the Reform Party. The fringe element that wanted to repeal the federal income tax, believed that the country was being run by the Trilateral Commission and suspected that my potential candidacy was a stalking horse for (take your pick) Gov. George W. Bush, Senator John McCain or Vice President Al Gore. When I held a reception for Reform Party leaders in California, the*



*room was crowded with Elvis look-alikes, resplendent in various campaign buttons and anxious to give me a pamphlet explaining the Swiss-Zionist conspiracy to control America.”*

Donald Trump, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150527135217/https://www.nytimes.com/2000/02/19/opinion/what-i-saw-at-the-revolution.html>

The Reform Party nomination in 2000 would eventually go to paleo-conservative Pat Buchanan, completing an arc whereby an apparent middle-ground populist party expressing discontent with America’s two-party establishment moves more overtly to the right.

Trump shifted his party registration back to the Democratic Party in 2001 and in 2004 would find a more efficient way of promoting himself via the NBC reality show *The Apprentice*<sup>[5]</sup>.

During the presidency of Barack Obama, Trump latched onto the idea that Obama may not have been born in the USA. The so-called Birther conspiracy theories had begun as rumours about Obama as early as 2004<sup>[6]</sup> and had even received some attention from supporters of Hillary Clinton’s campaign for the Democratic Party presidential nomination in 2008. However, the release of Obama’s short-form birth certificate during that campaign shifted the issue from rumour into conspiracy theory<sup>[7]</sup>.

Among the early-promoters of Obama-related conspiracy theories was *WorldNetDaily* columnist Jerome Corsi who had been a promoter of the so-called “Swift Boat” scandal aimed at Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry in 2004. Corsi’s 2008 book *The Obama Nation: Leftist Politics and the Cult of Personality* focused on attempts to tie Obama to more radical politics and to portray him as Muslim. The Obama campaign described Corsi in unflattering terms:

*“Of course, the lies in “The Obama Nation” almost pale in comparison to the bizarre, conspiratorial views that Jerome Corsi has advocated in his broader work. He believes that President Bush is trying to merge the United States with Mexico and Canada. He believes that there is a literally unending supply of oil beneath the ground. And in perhaps the gravest sign that his views can’t be trusted, he alleges a government cover-up of the 9/11 attacks and denies that airplanes were to blame for the towers’ collapse. And it doesn’t stop there. Corsi has penned a litany of bigoted, hateful comments—crossing the line so thoroughly that even the right-wing operatives behind Swift Boat Veterans for Truth disavowed him. This is a man who smears the Catholic Church, calls the Pope “senile,” and regularly demeans public servants in vile sexual and racial terms.”*

[https://web.archive.org/web/20080821062921/http://obama.3cdn.net/a74586f9067028c40a\\_5km6vrqwa.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20080821062921/http://obama.3cdn.net/a74586f9067028c40a_5km6vrqwa.pdf) <sup>[8]</sup>

At the time, fellow *WorldNetDaily* columnist Vox Day was keen to defend Corsi from more establishment Republicans:

*“I don’t have the answer, but I suspect that what Douthat and Dreher are attacking is Corsi himself, because if Corsi is credibly raising issues about Obama, as he previously did in the case of Kerry, then it’s also entirely possible, if not downright probable, that he’s credible with regards to the issues he’s raised about the plans for the North American Union and what happened on 9/11. And that simply cannot be born; better an Obama presidency than the puncturing of their conventional political worldview.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20080922162906/https://voxdav.blogspot.com/2008/08/imperative-of-narrative.html>

Day would also use his own *WorldNetDaily* column to promote Corsi’s Birther theories<sup>[9]</sup>. If Jerome Corsi was doing a lot of the legwork on Birther theories, it was Donald Trump’s capacity to garner media attention that was keeping the story going. As the 2012 election approached, sections of the right continued to attempt to discredit Obama with the notion that he had not been born in America and hence was not eligible to be US President.

Day was impressed with how Donald Trump was promoting the issue, so much so that in 2011 Day wrote:

*“It is amusing to see how a savvy individual like Donald Trump have used the issue to his benefit whereas foolish politicians like Michelle Bachmann are so tied to the old power structure that they dutifully submit to the pressure of the groupthink. I once said that if Hillary wanted to nail down the presidency, all she had to do was come out against immigration. She didn’t and she blew it. In like manner, all a Republican candidate has to do to win the nomination is to be the first “serious” candidate to openly align himself with the Tea Party and the birthers, although a strong anti-immigration position would help secure the deal.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110516032209/https://voxdav.blogspot.com/2011/04/riding-occams-razor.html>

In June 2015, Donald Trump officially entered the fray to announce that he was running for the Republican nomination for US President. Having spent the Obama years garnering support from the more conspiratorial section of US politics (the “fringe element” he had been dismissive of within the Reform Party), Trump moved to “secure the deal” by targeting immigration.

With the Syrian civil war at its height and a confusing array of groups fighting, there were large numbers of people fleeing the conflict. Consequently, migration along with fears of terrorism were major issues in US politics. However, Trump was also keen to raise the issue of immigration from Latin America via the USA’s southern border and even tied the issues together.

*“When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we’re getting. And it only makes common sense. It only makes common sense. They’re sending us not the right people.”*

*It’s coming from more than Mexico. It’s coming from all over South and Latin America, and it’s coming probably — probably — from the Middle East. But we don’t know. Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don’t know what’s happening. And it’s got to stop and it’s got to stop fast.”*

Donald Trump announcement speech transcript

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150618051032/https://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2015/06/16/donald-trump-transcript-our-country-needs-a-truly-great-leader/>

Within his speech, Trump promised tougher action on ISIS, better trade deals, improved roads and his signature policy:

*“I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I’ll build them very inexpensively, I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall.”*

ibid

A southern border wall was not Trump’s original idea. It was a policy that had been knocking around right-wing circles for some years<sup>[10]</sup>. However, Trump had packaged the idea within his own personal branding of a decisive businessman who could get things done (the extent to which this branding was a myth was already widely debated).

Throughout his speech, Trump had repeated one theme eight or nine times: the idea that America should be great again. Sometimes this was done negatively (e.g., about the existing political establishment “They will never make America great again”) and sometimes in terms of a personal way of thinking:

*“You know, all of my life, I’ve heard that a truly successful person, a really, really successful person and even modestly successful cannot run for public office. Just can’t happen. And yet that’s the kind of mindset that you need to make this country great again.”*

*So ladies and gentlemen...*

*I am officially running...*

*... for president of the United States, and we are going to make our country great again.”*

ibid

Comments like the ones he had made in his speech about Mexicans, as well as proposed policies such as a broad ban on Muslims entering the USA, had commentators describing Trump as “running the most explicitly racist campaign since 1968”<sup>[11]</sup>. Trump would dismiss these objections by claiming that his critics were being too “politically correct”<sup>[12]</sup>.

By September 2015, Vox Day was fully sold on the idea of Trump as a candidate:

*“He’s definitely listening to the Alt-Right and not the so-called “conservative media”. No wonder they hate him so much. If you’re even remotely concerned about immigration and its societally destructive effects, Trump is the only candidate you can possibly support.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119075723/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/09/the-only-serious-candidate.html>

In a comment on his own post, Day would reply to a call for open borders with a statement about how predominant his views on immigration were:

*“Sorry, even this libertarian will choose literal Italian Fascism over that sort of anti-nationalist, free-borders “freedom”.”*

Vox Day, comment <https://web.archive.org/web/20170119075723/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2015/09/the-only-serious-candidate.html>

Day was convinced and “on the Trump Train” but in the wider world, Trump’s campaign looked both extreme and ridiculous. The expectation that he could win the nomination was low and that if he did then he would certainly lose the election. Media attention was also focused on the Democratic Party race where the presumptive heir to Obama’s presidency, Hillary Clinton, was facing some determined opposition from the more left-wing Bernie Sanders.

Among what had been the self-named Evil League of Evil nobody was as convinced by Trump as Vox Day. John C. Wright was far more impressed by the campaign of retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson<sup>[13]</sup> primarily because Wright saw him as standing up to the news media.

*“So it is with great pleasure that I see a candidate, and not in a blustering or angry way, rebuke and dismiss the routine falsehoods of the Democrat party activists posing as journalists, and call them out.”*

<https://www.scifiwright.com/2015/11/ben-carson-just-won-my-support/>

Back in March of 2015, Sarah A. Hoyt was hoping<sup>[14]</sup> that the Governor of Wisconsin Scott Walker<sup>[15]</sup> would be the candidate who could rescue the Republican Party ideologically. However, his campaign fizzled out fairly quickly but among her regular followers, people remained interested in Ted Cruz. Hoyt though was concerned that Trump might destroy the Republican brand “thoroughly”<sup>[16]</sup>.

Brad Torgersen was sceptical about most of the field but also liked how Ted Cruz was responding to the media<sup>[17]</sup>. Torgersen was deeply unimpressed by Trump but saw him as a natural outgrowth of voters picking candidates in a shallow way:

*“Now comes the Trumppocalypse. He’s loud. He’s rude. He’s not PC. He’s a blowhard. His positions are all over the place. He’s guaranteed to offend almost everybody, and he honestly doesn’t f\*\*\*ing care. If his own party ejects him, he will say f\*\*\* it and run as the Bull Moose man, or some other half-cocked thing. Americans had a chance to be grownups, but Americans showed up at the polls wearing t-shirts that said, “I’m with Deepthi Trumppocalypse is merely the natural outgrowth of the era of the Unserious.”*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/1273471422679088>

Like Hoyt, Torgersen was concerned about how the media might use Trump’s image to discredit conservatives in general:

*“Why America’s liberals love Trump. No really, they do. They love the guy. Trump confirms (for them, in their minds) all the terrible things America’s liberals believe about conservatives all the time. Trump is loud, rude, vain, greedy, unscrupulous, pompous, arrogant, and many other not-nice things. I’ve seen several non-partisan polls showing Cruz out front, but almost all of my liberal FB friends believe absolutely that Trump not only leads, but is the leader going away. I see this asserted over and over again. Usually without any evidence. Trump is “winning” the GOP. And Trump is “proof” that the GOP and conservatives are bad. Not just a little bit bad. But very, very bad. And America’s liberals knew it all along.”*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/1295278353831728>

In August 2015, Larry Correia took a bold step of making some substantive election predictions, stating that he thought that Hillary Clinton would be the eventual Democratic Party candidate and that Ted Cruz would be the Republican Party candidate. In a lengthy post he explained his reasoning, spending time discussing why he thought Clinton would be beat Sanders. On the issue of Trump, Correia regarded him a stunt candidate who was enjoying a temporary boom in popularity, largely due to media coverage.

*“But here is the problem with Trump, and it isn’t his personality or being willing to insult people (because if I’m judging these people on personality, I’d probably get along with him in person way better than most of the others, and the Rosie line made me do a spit take). It is because he’s been a*

*Republican less time than Bernie has been a Democrat. When I've talked to the hard core Stormtrumpers they'll say he's great on the border! Okay, but what about his record on abortion, guns, crony capitalism, government intervention, eminent domain, and single payer healthcare? Suck, suck, suck... oh but on that one he evolved... This week.*

*For the people convinced that Trump is the Real Conservative in the race, and that the other 15 are all RINOs, put down the crack pipe. This is the same guy who a couple of years ago was outraged about violent videogames and saying how somebody needed to do something about them. Yeah, there's a dude totally grounded in the Bill of Rights."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/08/11/my-election-predictions/>

Like Hoyt, Correia had also regarded Scott Walker as a potentially promising candidate, and also Rand Paul. However, with Walker and Paul polling poorly, he saw Cruz as the strongest conservative candidate. By Christmas, Correia had included his views on Trump into his annual "Christmas Noun" comedy-skit post. A character explains the current situation with the Republican primaries to Wendell, the spokes-manatee of the Sad Puppies:

*"Yes, I know he's a rich obnoxious bloviating New Yorker, lifelong democrat, Clinton donor, who used to be in favor of an assault weapons ban, who likes eminent domain, restrictions on the internet, wanted the government to do something about violent video games, with policy positions that change by the hour, who has been proudly endorsed by Vladimir Putin, but yes, he is actually leading among republicans who self-identify as "liberal" or "moderate" so the media declared him the new face of conservatism and won't shut up about him. If he wins the primary like the media wants him to, then he'll go against one of two batty old socialists who don't understand basic econ,"*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/12/18/christmas-noun-8-too-noun-much-adjective/>

If Trump was the firm candidate of the Rabid Puppies then Ted Cruz was the compromise least-worst-choice choice of the Sad Puppies. In the Hugo Awards, it had been the Rabid Puppies who had eventually exerted the most control, only to be defeated by the broader body of fans. Would events play out in the same way on the bigger stage of US national politics? Only 2016 would know...

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://web.archive.org/web/20101203140137/https://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/25/us/robertson-asserts-he-d-purge-bureaucracy-of-all-but-conservatives.html>
- [2] <https://web.archive.org/web/20170119060007/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2017/01/the-alt-right-comes-to-washington.html>
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald\\_Trump\\_2000\\_presidential\\_campaign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Trump_2000_presidential_campaign)
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pat\\_Buchanan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pat_Buchanan)
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Apprentice\\_\(American\\_season\\_1\)#Week\\_1:\\_%22Meet\\_the\\_Billionaire%22](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Apprentice_(American_season_1)#Week_1:_%22Meet_the_Billionaire%22)
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack\\_Obama\\_citizenship\\_conspiracy\\_theories#Origins\\_of\\_the\\_claims](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama_citizenship_conspiracy_theories#Origins_of_the_claims)
- [7] <https://web.archive.org/web/20080815061158/http://my.barackobama.com/page/invite/birthcert>
- [8] Corsi is an advocate of the theory that oil is produced by mineral processes unconnected to fossilised plants/animals. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abiogenic\\_petroleum\\_origin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abiogenic_petroleum_origin) as a general hypothesis it isn't as wild as some of Corsi's beliefs, but Corsi's version is a literal conspiracy theory as summed up by the title of his book *The Great Oil Conspiracy: How the U.S. Government Hid the Nazi Discovery of Abiotic Oil from the American People* <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/14603086-the-great-oil-conspiracy>
- [9] <https://www.wnd.com/2009/07/104445/>
- [10] for example conservative pundit Jonah Goldberg has suggested it in a USA Today opinion piece in 2006 <https://web.archive.org/web/20080111054738/http://corner.nationalreview.com/post/?q=ZDY4ZjcxZDVkNzk1NjQ1NDkyMTZjMzYzMWJmZTJmODk=>
- [11] <https://theweek.com/articles/590711/donald-trump-running-most-explicitly-racist-campaign-since-1968>
- [12] <https://web.archive.org/web/20151210140303/https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2015/12/09/donald-trump-says-were-all-too-politically-correct-but-is-that-also-a-way-to-limit-speech/>
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben\\_Carson\\_2016\\_presidential\\_campaign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Carson_2016_presidential_campaign)
- [14] <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2015/03/06/winter-at-valley-forge/>
- [15] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott\\_Walker\\_\(politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott_Walker_(politician))
- [16] <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2015/09/06/weaponized-empathy/#comment-305687>
- [17] <https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/1256263011066596>

## 52: Part 4 Puppy Fall 2016-2017

The story so far...

In 2015, Larry Correia's Sad Puppy campaign targeting the Hugo Awards was handed over to Brad Torgersen. Torgersen put together a bigger slate of nominees with several categories having four or five entries listed. The Sad Puppy campaign was initially supported by far-right blogger, sci-fi author, and publisher Vox Day but after a disagreement on tactics, Day revealed his own Rabid Puppy campaign. Day's slate was largely the same as the Sad Puppy slate but with additional entries, many from his new (2014) publishing venture Castalia House.

The combined slates together swept multiple Hugo Award categories when the finalists were announced in April of 2015. This led to a major backlash fuelled by objections to the slate tactics, the poor quality of many of the Puppy-slated finalists, and the extreme politics of Vox Day. The Puppy campaigns were characterised by many people in the media as akin to the GamerGate culture war/harassment campaign that had been running within the world of video games since 2014. This comparison was made not just by critics of the Puppies but also by supporters in right-wing outlets such as *Breitbart* and *The Federalist*.

Day's personal animosity towards key figures in fandom associated with Tor Books (specifically John Scalzi and Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden) as well as the long-standing rivalry between Tor and Correia's publisher Baen Books, helped fuel a parallel campaign by right-wing fans against Tor Books in protest against comments made by a notable Tor employee about the Puppy campaigns.

The 2015 Worldcon saw a massive increase in supporting memberships as a consequence of the controversy. When the final votes were revealed at the Hugo Award Ceremony, multiple categories had no winner due to voters picking the 'no award' option over works pushed onto the ballot by slates.

Aggrieved, the Sad Puppies pointed to the apparent injustice of some notable people losing to 'no award', including the widely regarded publisher of Baen Books Toni Weiskopf. Meanwhile, Vox Day claimed the results as a victory as, according to him, he had hoped the Rabid Puppy campaign would lead to multiple Hugo categories being burned to the ground by 'no award'.

Both the Sad and Rabid Puppies vowed to return for the 2016 Hugo Awards but the distance between the two campaigns had increased.

Meanwhile, America was gearing up for the 2016 Presidential Election. In the polls, the Democratic Party front runner was Hillary Clinton, who was facing a hard-fought challenge from the more left-wing candidate Bernie Sanders. The Republican Party had a wide range of potential nominees but the initially assumed man-to-beat Jeb Bush was faring poorly and to many people's surprise, property tycoon and media celebrity Donald Trump was gaining support among Republican voters.

### ***Welcome to 2016***

On January 2 2016 a rally of several hundred supporters of a coalition of right-wing militia groups was held in the town of Burns, Oregon<sup>[1]</sup>. The rally included members of the so-called Three Percenters militia group<sup>[2]</sup> and was ostensibly a protest of a conviction of two local landowners who had set fires on federal land. Speaking at the protest was Amon Bundy, the son of Cliven Bundy who had led a tense standoff between militias and law enforcement as part of his campaign against the Federal Bureau of Land Management in 2014.

Towards the end of the protest, Amon Bundy announced his intent to lead an occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge buildings, approximately 50 kilometres out of town. Along with several armed groups, Bundy took over the federally-owned buildings. The standoff would last for weeks but despite law enforcement avoiding direct confrontation with the armed groups, one of the protestors was shot and killed after a car chase<sup>[3]</sup>.

It was an inauspicious start to a year.

For those looking for ill omens, the death of David Bowie on January 10 2016 was significant. Bowie's long and mercurial career had been underlined by the release just two days earlier by his final album *Blackstar*<sup>[4]</sup>. His death at 69 felt far too soon but in April of the same year, the death of another pop-culture icon, Prince, at age 57 added to a feeling of a year marked by ill fortune<sup>[5]</sup>.

Internationally, the Syrian civil war continued as a multi-factional conflict. As well as the violence of the Syrian government against its own citizens, the role of long-standing opposed regional powers of Turkey, Israel and Iran caused fears of the conflict escalating into a broader regional war. The role of the extremist Islamist group ISIS in the region was also inspiring lone-wolf terrorist attacks further afield. To add to the powder-key element of the conflict, the USA and Russia were at odds militarily in the war and the prospect

of the conflict expanding into a direct war between the two superpowers put the two nations closer to war than they had been in decades.

A further consequence of the violence in the Middle East was an increased number of displaced people seeking refuge in other countries. This flow of refugees was met by increased nationalist hostility in Europe, partly fuelled by the ongoing financial fallout and government austerity measures from the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Terrorism was also helping quasi-populist right-wing Islamophobic nationalist parties electorally in many European countries<sup>[7]</sup>.

In February 2016, the Conservative Party-led government of the UK announced that the planned referendum on whether the UK should remain part of the European Union would be held on 23 June 2016. The so-called Brexit referendum was an attempt by Prime Minister David Cameron to both placate and sideline the Eurosceptic wing of his own party as well as the growing electoral threat of English nationalist parties such as UKIP<sup>[8]</sup>.

### ***Meanwhile, there were still books to read***

2015 had been a loud and noisy year in science fiction but amid the culture war conflicts and psephological inventions, books were still being written and published. Even fans distracted by daily news reports from the frontline of the Puppy conflict found time to read and (perhaps more importantly) argue and debate about what they had read.

The Best-of-2015 articles and recommended reading lists summing up the year had a cornucopia of works from established and new authors. Ongoing series such as Ann Leckie's *Radch Trilogy* had new entries including Charles Stross adding to his long-running *Laundry* series with *The Annihilation Score*<sup>[9]</sup>. The chattering fans in the comments at *File770* were getting excited by newcomer Natasha Pulley's clockwork fantasy about predestination *The Watchmaker of Filigree Street*<sup>[10]</sup>. Other books being recommended included Jim Butcher's new steampunk series *The Cinder Spires: The Aeronaut's Windlass*, Elizabeth Bear's fantasy Western *Karen Memory*, and Kai Ashante Wilson's *The Sorcerer of the Wildeeps*<sup>[11]</sup>. Larry Correia was also getting noticed in the 'Best Of' lists with his own new fantasy series for 2015, *Son of the Black Sword*, which eschewed the stereotypical epic fantasy setting of a quasi-middle ages Europe for a world based on pre-modern India<sup>[12]</sup>.

However, two books in particular were receiving a lot of attention.

The first of these was Becky Chambers's *The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet*. The book in many ways was a conventional story of a spaceship and its crew, off on an interstellar adventure. Chambers, though, had but added emphasis on the story being about a found family working through their differences in what was a departure from the more grim tone of many contemporary books in SFF. What was more notable was the route through which the book had been published. Chambers had used the crowd-funding platform *Kickstarter* in 2015 as a way to get enough funding to spend time finishing her novel. Initially self-published, the popular support for the novel led to Chambers getting a more traditional publishing deal for the novel. Like Andy Weir's *The Martian*, Chambers had found other routes to publishing success created by how the internet could connect fans and authors. Notably, Larry Correia and, even earlier, John Scalzi had also used internet platforms to connect directly with fans to produce debut novels in science fiction and fantasy which had segued into deals with traditional publishers.

While Chambers's novel took a turn away from the emotionally harrowing aspects of the genre, the other novel receiving even more buzz than most was the first novel in N.K. Jemisin's new series: *The Fifth Season*. The book starts with the intentional starting of a planet-wide cataclysm and the murder of a child and goes on to follow three characters at different times as they experience variously a world plunged into a tectonic disaster, child enslavement and exploitation by a brutal regime of a subset of the population with strange powers. The author has stated that the novel is fantasy but the story weaved both fantasy and science fiction tropes together which itself lead to fans embroiling themselves in the unresolvable discussion of where the difference between the two sibling genres lie.

Mixing three different viewpoints and three different styles of writing, *The Fifth Season* was the sort of novel that invited debate and this was further fuelled by the story finishing with the kind of twists more common in short fiction than multi-book fantasies.

### ***Let the lists begin!***

More than ever, fans were paying attention to what had been published in 2015. With the Hugo Nominations set to open in early 2016, people were keenly aware of the events of the previous year. While there were no overt moves for a left-wing version of the Sad Puppies 3 campaign, fans on multiple platforms were talking about and collating what they had read the previous year and what was eligible in which

category. The fear was that Vox Day's Rabid Puppies would once again sweep the Hugo categories, and the one weapon his opponents had was lots of sci-fi fans and their love of books.

However, the strategy of mobilising lots of fans to collate what books they liked was not a strategy confined to the opponents of Vox Day. Elsewhere the fourth iteration of Sad Puppies was underway and it would prove to be a very different kind of hound than its kennel mates.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupation\\_of\\_the\\_Malheur\\_National\\_Wildlife\\_Refuge#Background](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupation_of_the_Malheur_National_Wildlife_Refuge#Background)
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three\\_Percenters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Percenters)
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LaVoy\\_Finicum#Flight\\_and\\_death](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LaVoy_Finicum#Flight_and_death)
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Bowie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Bowie)
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince\\_\(musician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_(musician))
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_the\\_Syrian\\_civil\\_war#Russian\\_intervention\\_and\\_Ba'athist\\_government\\_offensive\\_\(30\\_September\\_2015%E2%80%93February\\_2016\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Syrian_civil_war#Russian_intervention_and_Ba'athist_government_offensive_(30_September_2015%E2%80%93February_2016))
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_active\\_nationalist\\_parties\\_in\\_Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_active_nationalist_parties_in_Europe)
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_European\\_Union\\_membership\\_referendum#Date](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_United_Kingdom_European_Union_membership_referendum#Date)
- [9] <https://locusmag.com/2016/02/2015-locus-recommended-reading-list/>
- [10] <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-1028-trolling-down-the-moon/comment-page-2/#comment-359902>
- [11] The Best Science fiction & Fantasy of 2015 By Joel Cunningham / November 16, 2015 at 10:00 am B&NReads blog
- [12] <https://www.buzzfeed.com/awesomer/best-fantasy-books-of-2015>
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Long\\_Way\\_to\\_a\\_Small\\_Angry\\_Planet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Long_Way_to_a_Small_Angry_Planet)

## 53: The Ironic Story of Sad Puppies 4

We need to rewind back to March 2015.

Brad Torgersen's Sad Puppies 3 was on the verge of a remarkable publicity coup — a major sweep of the Hugo Award nominations. It wasn't public knowledge but behind the scenes, authors were being contacted by the Hugo Award administrators and notified that they were finalists and being asked to not announce this publicly until the official announcement was made.

At the *Mad Genius Club* blog, Kate Paulk was excited and pointed to “interesting whispers and things floating around the Internets”. Paulk was an Australian IT specialist who had moved to America and had begun writing and publishing novels independently. Having become friends with Sarah A. Hoyt, she had been critical of feminism in science fiction and of the perceived role of the left in the SFWA controversies of 2013-14 (see earlier chapters). Her *Mad Genius* post on the Sad Puppies in March 2015 was only partly about Brad Torgersen's campaign. In the same post, Paulk had other news to tell people...

*“Because in a fit of even greater insanity than usual, yours truly, Kate the Impaler of the Evil Legion of Evil, will be picking up the banner for Sad Puppies 4 and running with it. I even promised not to impale anyone with it (it's such a pretty flag, and getting blood and... stuff... all over it would make those poor sad puppies even more sad. Even the Evil Legion of Evil has standards, you know. We're completely against letting Sad Puppies stay sad. We want them to be happy).”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/03/26/carefully-on-tip-toe-stealing/><sup>[1]</sup>

Paulk had volunteered to run the fourth iteration of the Sad Puppies but with the Sad Puppies 3 campaign thoroughly embroiled in its own controversy for much of 2015, there was little for the fourth member of the litter to do until at least some of the dust had settled after the victory of ‘no award’ at the 2015 Hugo Award ceremony in August.

September 3 2015 brought the first official announcement of the campaign, courtesy of the *Mad Genius Club* blog:

### ***Introducing Sad Puppies Four: The Bitches are Back***

*(also the Embiggening, and the Embitchening, given that I, Kate the Impaler, am Queen Bitch and I am ably seconded by Sarah, the Beautiful But Evil Space Princess, and Amanda, the Redhead of Doom, and we are all more than capable of going Queen Bitch when we need to).*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/09/03/introducing-sad-puppies-four-the-bitches-are-back/>

The post came complete with a brand new logo by the same artist (Artracoon) who had produced the Sad Puppies 3 and Rabid Puppies logos earlier in the year. As well as a new logo, the campaign came with its own website, which was intended to be the main venue to organise the campaign.

Paulk offered a much simpler rationale for the campaign than the previous Sad Puppies:

*“The Hugo awards has entirely too small a voting and nominating pool. Five thousand votes is the largest number ever received? Two thousand nomination ballots? That's piddly. For a field loved by millions, it's nowhere near enough, and makes it easy for any small clique to corrupt the idea of awarding great SF and start giving themselves awards.*

*We want at least ten thousand nomination ballots. Tens of thousands of votes (which means tens of thousands of Hugo memberships, either supporting or attending). So many votes and voters that it's almost impossible for any one group – and yes, that includes the Sad Puppies – to dominate anything.”*

*ibid*

After months of argument about the Hugo Awards, the shifting rationales for the Puppy campaigns had focused on an undeniable fact. Sad Puppies 3 had led to a substantial increase in the number of people participating in the Hugo Award. True, the majority of those additional people were voting against the Sad Puppies, but it was a measurable impact, and arguably the Hugo Awards were richer for it.

Of course, mass participation book awards were not new. The book-cataloguing social media site Goodreads<sup>[2]</sup> had been running its own awards for several years. The winners of the 2014 Awards (run in 2015<sup>[3]</sup>) had received over 50 thousand votes for the fantasy category and over 30 thousand votes for the



science fiction category<sup>[4]</sup>. Both categories carried some overlap with the Sad Puppies 3 nominees and with non-slated books that were either finalists or on the long-list for the 2015 Hugo Awards (e.g., John Scalzi's *Lock In* was ranked second in the Goodreads after *The Martian*). Boosting the Hugo Award participation to the level of Goodreads when even a supporting membership in Worldcon cost money, whereas Goodreads was free, was going to be a major task.

Sad Puppies 4 had several advantages over the previous campaigns. Paulk had started the campaign months earlier than any of the iterations of Sad Puppies. Also, while not conceding that the critics of the Puppies had legitimate issues, Paulk had clearly listened to many of the criticisms of how Brad Torgersen had run Sad Puppies 3.

Firstly, the Sad Puppies 4 website had been organised into multiple pages — one for each Hugo Award category. Anybody (and everybody) was invited to leave comments on the appropriate page with eligible works that they had enjoyed. Paulk promised that everything listed would be included in a list for that category. Both Larry Correia and Brad Torgersen had attempted to crowdsource suggestions for their slates but had done so unsystematically. Torgersen had later claimed that the process had been transparent but Paulk's approach demonstrated there was a clearer way of doing it.

Paulk also had a response to the arguments about whether or not the Sad Puppies 3 recommendations had been a slate or not. Of course, Torgersen had literally called it a slate, but the semantic arguments had run through 2015, with critics of the Puppies pointing to how the slate had led to a block of nominees sweeping the categories, and supporters of the Puppies pointing to other recommendation lists such as the *Locus* Recommended Reading List. A central point in these arguments had been that the Puppy slate had four or five works in several categories, making it a de-facto slate regardless of any other quibbles. For Sad Puppies 4, Paulk stated that the outcome of the nomination process would be both a complete list of everything suggested and also a top-10 (based on the number of suggestions).

In addition, Paulk, Sarah A. Hoyt and Amanda Green recused themselves from inclusion in the list. Further, Paulk stated that:

*“Anyone can post any number of recommendations (obviously not for the same work – one recommendation per person per work), and there is NO political test. The only criteria is that you’ve read it/watched it/seen it and you think it’s one of the best in its Hugo class published in 2015.”*

ibid

And then the process started. In September people began leaving recommendations on the Sad Puppies 4 website. It was not a deluge and most of the recommendations were on the Best Novel page. Initially, many of the suggestions were from people who were regular commenters at *Mad Genius Club* or Sarah A. Hoyt's blog. Additionally, a number of critics of the Sad Puppy campaign who had been active in the comment section of *File770* also turned up to leave suggestions<sup>[5]</sup>. However, there was little tension and the comments were focused on the books rather than the culture war conflict of 2015.

In this first month, recommendations in the Best Novel category for Sad Puppies 4 including such varied works as John C. Wright's Castalia House-published *Somewhither* as well as N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season*. By early October, new recommendations had trailed off on the Best Novel page and the other categories were even more moribund.

December 2015 came and Kate Paulk made a new attempt to boost interest in Sad Puppies 4<sup>[6]</sup> and called for more people to leave suggestions at the site. In addition, she began at *Mad Genius Club* a series of profiles of each Hugo category to help people vote<sup>[7]</sup>. Within these Sad Puppies 4-specific posts, Paulk largely avoided using strong culture war rhetoric, but elsewhere, Sarah A. Hoyt used more of that tone via her platform at the right-wing blog *Instapundit*:

*“They called us neo Nazis and bad to reprehensible. This year we aim to show that there are real fans of science fiction not in their little club. A lot of them. My friend Kate Paulk nefariously explains the different categories, one a week, so you can, you know, decide for yourself and vote your conscience. Which, needless to say is totally “neo-Nazi” of us. At least in the fevered minds of vile progs.”*

<https://pjmedia.com/instapundit/221745/>

Hoyt connected the comment from Irene Gallo (see earlier chapters) that had spawned the Tor Boycott with the Sad Puppies 4 campaign. For whatever reason, recommendations picked up again in December<sup>[8]</sup>.

What was also increasingly obvious by this point was that one Sad Puppy supporter, in particular, was having a significant impact on the number of recommendations.

Declan Finn was an aspiring author of Catholic-themed thrillers and urban-fantasy stories who had been an avid supporter of the Sad Puppies 3 campaign. Through 2015 he had been writing a series of “parodies” about imaginary violent confrontations involving notable authors who were either supporters or opponents of the Sad Puppies<sup>[9]</sup>. Finn had recently published an urban fantasy novel entitled *Honor at Stake* about a beautiful Catholic Russian vampire who falls for a psychopathic (but good) young man, who together investigate a mystery involving evil vampires, the UN, and Vatican ninjas.

Fans of Declan Finn’s books, as well as Finn himself, had become a small but significant number of the people suggesting books at the Sad Puppies 4 website. Finn had taken a leaf from the Sad Puppy book of campaigning and was now actively campaigning for a spot in the Top 10 of the Sad Puppies 4 recommended list. In the age of eBooks and independent publishing, it was an obvious way to boost his own profile. By mid-February of 2016, Declan Finn was vying for the top spot in the Sad Puppies 4 Best Novel list with John C. Wright. Finn was also asking for his fans to suggest his *Sad Puppies Bite Back* series for the Best Related Work and Best Fan Writer categories<sup>[10]</sup>.

Finn was just one of a new generation of Puppy-supporting writers — people not campaigning for the Hugo Awards as such but rather campaigning for recognition within the pool of readers that had coalesced around the Sad Puppies 3 controversy. Accompanying Finn in this meta-level of quasi-political book promotion was GamerGate supporter, trad-Catholic, and regular commenter at *Monster Hunter Nation*, Brian Niemeier, who described his approach as:

*“I write for the quiet multitude that legacy publishing abandoned in its rush to be socially conscious—people who’d read SF for years and almost gave up, or did give up, on it for lack of the entertainment that was really all they ever wanted.”*

<https://brianniemeier.com/2016/01/sad-puppies-4-update-mv-readers-are/>

Niemeier was also running 8th in the Best Novel lists in late January with his science fiction novel *Nethereal* but was doing even better on the Campbell Award for Best New Writer page. Several people had suggested Andy Weir (author of *The Martian*) in that category but overall the page had received many fewer comments than the Best Novel category<sup>[11]</sup>. With so few people making suggestions, Niemeier was almost guaranteed a prominent spot in the Sad Puppies 4 lists.

With Hugo Nominations due to close at the end of March, Paulk closed the Sad Puppies 4 site to new recommendations on the last day of February, to give her time to collate votes and publish the lists<sup>[12]</sup>.

On March 17, Kate Paulk cross-posted the final lists at both the Sad Puppies 4 site and at the *Mad Genius Club* blog. In addition, a full tabulation of all works listed was made available on a Google Drive<sup>[13]</sup>. The final top-10 lists were much shorter than 10 for some categories. Best Editor Long Form was particularly short:

- *Toni Weiskopf – Baen*
  
- *Jim Mintz – Baen*
  
- *Tony Daniel – Baen*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2016/03/17/the-list/>

Other categories had more suggestions but often just one person per work. Best Novel though had 132 works suggested and a total of 419 votes. John C. Wright’s *Somewhither* beat Declan Finn’s *Honor at Stake* by one vote, 25 to 24.

Across the categories, the lists were a strange mixed bag of things. Mike Glycer’s *File770* was one of the top picks for the Sad Puppies 4 fanzine list but in truth, only three people had suggested it (which was one more than Dave Truesdale’s *Tangent Online*). Small participation meant that even a small number of non-Puppies taking part shifted the choices for the list by a significant amount.

Brian Niemeier came joint first in the Campbell list alongside publishing giant Andy Weir. Declan Finn’s efforts paid off not just in Best Novel but also in Best Fan Writer and Best Related Work. Other categories such as Best Novella and Best Novelette looked more like a selection made without any Puppy influence at all.

What was most notably lacking was many new or overlooked conservative authors. A claim of the Puppies had been that conservative writers had been progressively marginalised by the Hugo Awards. Sad Puppies 4

was a chance for ordinary readers to promote these ignored writers but the result looked not so very different from the past. In some cases, authors promoted by Sad Puppies 3 had vanished from the lists in Sad Puppies 4. Author Kevin J. Anderson received only one vote and his sequel to the Sad Puppies 3-nominated Hugo finalist *The Dark Between the Stars* did not appear at all<sup>[14]</sup>.

The announcement of the Sad Puppies 4 lists created a new problem for Kate Paulk. The lists as stated had fewer features of a slate (although the rankings were available so the capacity to use them as a slate was still present) but the “Sad Puppies” brand was still one of the most toxic in fandom. In January of 2016, Elizabeth Sandifer had made a telling point in an open letter:

*“Everything you’ve done since launching last summer has looked like a staggeringly disingenuous attempt to distance yourself from your existing supporters without actually alienating any of them. You’re making a grand show of saying “no, we’re not the people who recruited a lunatic who actively doxes anyone who gives him a bad review to help try to hijack a literary award” while trying to retain your existing support. I mean, you’re not even trying to build bridges with the people who previously opposed you; you’re just engaging in cheap theater to try to pretend that their objections aren’t true anymore.*

*And sure, maybe the superficial objections aren’t. You’re not providing a slate, just a “list of recommendations.” You’re not explicitly allied with Vox Day, you’re just still catering to the people he brought in. But these weren’t the reasons people despised the Sad Puppies. They were just the most blatant pieces of evidence that the Sad Puppies were a bunch of jerks. And what you’re blatantly and conspicuously failing to do is to actually give the slightest suggestion that A) you recognize that the Sad Puppies have in the past been a bunch of jerks and B) you’re not anymore.”*

<https://www.eruditorumpress.com/blog/an-open-letter-to-sad-puppies-iv>

Among people paying close attention to Sad Puppies 4, the lists produced were relatively innocuous but that didn’t mean authors wanted to be associated with the Sad Puppies brand. Several writers including Catherynne M. Valente and David Levine asked to be removed from the lists. British author Alastair Reynolds explained his objections:

*“I was away for a few days without internet access and discovered when I returned that my novella “Slow Bullets” has been included on the “SP4” Sad Puppies list for Hugo nominators.*

*At this point it’s of no concern to me whether this is a slate or a set of recommendations. Given the taint left by last year’s antics, I don’t care for any work of mine to be associated with any list curated by the Sad Puppies.”*

<http://approachingpavonis.blogspot.com/2016/03/slow-bullets-and-sad-puppies.html>

Paulk declined to remove people from the lists but as a compromise, she added an asterisk to those names who had objected to being included. At *Mad Genius Club* she replied to Reynolds, saying:

*“I will not insult those who consider your novella to be Hugo-worthy by removing you from the List. I will, however, be updating the version of this post at <http://sadpuppies4.org/the-list/> to note that you prefer that your work not be purchased, enjoyed, and nominated without your prior approval.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2016/03/17/the-list/#comment-74245>

At the end of the process, it was unclear what had been proven. Paulk had avoided many of the objections raised against Sad Puppies 3 but in doing so had created lists of works that were largely unremarkable. Inadvertently, Sad Puppies 4 had demonstrated that without the culture war campaigning there was not much substance to many of the Puppies’ broader claims.

Sad Puppies 4 and Kate Paulk’s involvement in the 2016 Hugo Awards did not end there. However, the bigger question people had been asking about the 2016 Hugos was not about the Sad Puppies but rather, what was Vox Day going to do next.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] Paulk’s Evil League of Evil nickname, “the Impaler” came from her 2011 novel about Vlad Tepes Dracula *The Impaler*, published by a small e-book publisher Naked Reader Press

- [https://web.archive.org/web/20110119222326/http://nakedreader.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=11&Itemid=4](https://web.archive.org/web/20110119222326/http://nakedreader.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11&Itemid=4) run by fellow *Mad Genius Club* member Amanda Green
- [2] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goodreads>
  - [3] Naming conventions for annual book awards follow two different conventions, either the “201X” means the awards held in the year 201X or mean the awards for books published in 201X and held in the following year. The Hugo Awards are usually referred to by the year they are held whereas Goodreads follows the year-published convention. So the 2015 Hugos and 2014 Goodreads are the awards for the same year.
  - [4] <https://www.goodreads.com/choiceawards/best-fantasy-books-2014> and <https://www.goodreads.com/choiceawards/best-science-fiction-books-2014>
  - [5] for example Snowcrash, whose critique of the Sad Puppies 3 campaign was quoted in an earlier chapter <https://web.archive.org/web/20160328234604/http://sadpuppies4.org/recommendations-best-novel/#comment-101>
  - [6] <https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/12/10/itstime/>
  - [7] <https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/12/17/hugo-category-highlight-best-fan-artist/>
  - [8] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2016/02/13/sad-puppy-4-graph-best-novel-recs/>
  - [9] <http://www.declanfinn.com/p/blog-page.html>
  - [10] <http://www.declanfinn.com/2016/02/sadpuppies-news-from-camestros-felapton.html>
  - [11] 43 comments by the time it closed. Several authors/works were suggested, but only Weir and Niemeier received larger numbers of comments. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160315075338/http://sadpuppies4.org/recommendations-campbell-award/>
  - [12] <https://madgeniusclub.com/2016/02/25/hugo-categories-highlight-the-big-two/>
  - [13] [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3xQY43MM8pKR3JSLUdrcGpGek0/view?resourcekey=0-RT\\_25LMsSHovS58bELAWlg](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3xQY43MM8pKR3JSLUdrcGpGek0/view?resourcekey=0-RT_25LMsSHovS58bELAWlg)
  - [14] *Blood of the Cosmos* (Tor 2015). The novel probably fell between two stools. Puppy supporters were boycotting Tor and the non-Puppies taking part in Sad Puppies 4 probably disliked the first book.

# 54: Rabid Puppies 2016

[Content warning for racism, transphobia and discussion of abuse]

Following the 2015 Hugo Award ceremony there had been much speculation on what action Vox Day would take next. The nomination and final voting statistics had revealed what many had suspected. The Rabid Puppies had a much bigger impact on the outcomes than less disciplined Sad Puppies and it would be Day who would determine what the Puppy conflict would be like in 2016.

Day kicked off Rabid Puppies 2016 on February 2 with a discussion of his choices for the Campbell Award for Best New Writer. His choices were mainly non-partisan choices such as Andy Weir who stood some chance of being nominated regardless but also included Castalia House-published writer Cheah Kai Wai<sup>[1]</sup>.

What was more interesting was the date of the start of Day's public campaign. Behind the scenes in "Brainstorm" online meet-ups, Day had been planning the 2016 Hugo campaign but the Rabid Puppy announcement took place after the cut-off for people to join 2016 Worldcon in time to have the right to nominate. In the comments Day provided a very limited explanation:

*"I'm not asking anyone to shell out more money to the Hugo crowd. The Brainstorm people know what is going on. But don't bother trying to anticipate me. You can't.*

*And you do understand that the SJWs in SF read this blog, right? I'm not explaining anything."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160204040612/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/02/rabid-puppies-2016-best-new-writer.html#c619761123149888909>

Worldcon membership rules allowed members of the 2015 Worldcon to nominate in the Hugo Awards for 2016. Day would have the votes of any willing Rabid Puppy (or disgruntled/radicalised Sad Puppy) who had joined Worldcon in 2015. However, Day was not making a major effort to recruit new members, which also meant that the numbers of Rabid Puppies voting in the final round of the 2016 Hugo Awards might be limited. Given Day's stated desire to burn the Hugo Awards to the ground, 2015 had demonstrated a basic dilemma for the Rabid Puppy campaign. For Day, Worldcon was a bastion of liberals and so-called Social Justice Warriors and the only way to vote in the Hugo Awards was to pay Worldcon more money. Whatever else the Puppy campaigns of 2015 had done, they had led to a major increase in supporting memberships which had provided extra money to the convention.

## ***A very short culture war***

The Hugo Awards were not the first or only target for Day's Rabid Puppies. Part of the point of the campaign was for Day to give his supporters (aka "minions") something to do. Day had borrowed the "raid" culture from the 4chan imageboard communities<sup>[2]</sup> that had helped fuel GamerGate and he was attempting to use it within the world of science fiction books. His first target of 2016 was the book review site Goodreads.

Goodreads had become a major site for book reviews and unsurprisingly many of the Puppy-nominated works for the 2015 Hugo Awards and many Castalia House books were receiving poor reviews. Some of those reviews were dubious due to Goodreads's odd policy of allowing reviews of books that had been announced on the site but not yet actually published but many of the reviews, while scathing, were genuine.

Day established a Rabid Puppy group on Goodreads and looked set to make the review site a major site of activity for his followers, with Day calling the site "the new battleground":

*"I created my Goodreads account yesterday, as it is clear that with Amazon increasingly policing their reviews, Goodreads has become a primary locus of effort for SJWs. It's time to for us to start contesting that territory; create an account there and friend me. If you've already got a Goodreads account, friend me. You can also follow my author page there. And then start rating. Don't worry about writing reviews for now, just hit the ratings for the time being."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160113210713/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/01/the-new-battleground.html>

The Rabid Puppy Goodreads campaign started by targeting one of the most prolific reviewers of the Puppy works of 2015, Lis Carey<sup>[3]</sup>. However, just as the conflict was starting with duelling coverage on both Day's blog and at *File770*, the battleground itself intervened and promptly chucked the Rabid Puppies out.

*"This is hilarious. Goodreads not only deleted my account in less than 36 hours, but they deleted the Rabid Puppies group as well.*

“ Hello Vox,

Your account was recently brought to our attention. Upon review, we have decided to remove it from the site. A CSV of the books you shelved is attached for your personal records. You are banned from using Goodreads in any capacity going forward.

Sincerely,

“ The Goodreads Team

*La, whatever shall I do without SJWs telling me what to read? In any event, that should certainly suffice to demonstrate what sort of playing field they have established there. It's an interesting sort of business plan that revolves around marketing only to the left side of the political spectrum.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210224233326/https://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/01/social-justice-convergence-at-goodreads.html>

Goodreads was far from immune from trolls but by taking very swift action against the Rabid Puppies, they quickly avoided becoming embroiled in Vox Day's culture war campaigns. Nonetheless, Day declared victory of a sort:

*“The goal had absolutely nothing to do with committing any vandalism on the site. The goal was to see to what extent the SJWs were running amok on Goodreads and smoke them out. I also wanted to learn the system in the build-up to the next Reader's Choice award, which is not something to which I had hitherto paid any attention, but at least superficially looked less corrupt than the Hugo Awards. We discovered how converged the site is much faster than I had anticipated, thanks to Sean and Rivka, who is not only a librarian, but a moderator. It should be obvious that if I had any desire to wreak havoc, I would not have formed a public group of around 200 people and permitted anyone to join it. I would have simply unleashed the 466 Vile Faceless Minions sworn to mindless obedience of the Supreme Dark Lord.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119072121/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/01/they-owe-him.html>

If Day did attempt to influence future Goodreads Reader's Choice awards, there is no sign of any impact. Thus ended the very short story of the Rabid Puppy raid on Goodreads. As a coda, in April of 2016, Day also announced a Rabid Puppy move against the Locus Magazine Award but without any visible results<sup>[4]</sup>.

## ***Hoyt v Day***

Between these failed attempts to influence Goodreads and Locus Awards, the Rabid Puppies 2016 campaign continued. Day had little hope of winning a Hugo Award for any of his or his publishing house's works. Instead, he had learned the lesson that Larry Correia had demonstrated from the Sad Puppies. The nomination phase of the Hugo Awards was highly vulnerable to being shaped by a relatively small number of disciplined voters following a slate of works.

Day was not expecting the same level of help from the Sad Puppies this time either. The Sad Puppies 4 recommendation list might serve to give him some ideas of works to include on his own slate but the nature of the campaign (and the fact that it was being run by people of his least favourite science fiction gender) meant the Rabid Puppies campaign would be by itself.

2015 had been a year in which the Sad Puppies had struggled to distance themselves from Vox Day and indeed, Day had often left it to Sad Puppy leaders to defend him:

*“Last year, my alliance with the others tied my hands. You may recall that I did not talk much to the media or bother to protest most of their ridiculous characterizations, but left that to Brad, the SP3 spokesman. I had no need to defend myself against spurious charges, and there was no point in doing so anyhow.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160117230406/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/01/sad-puppies-cant-protect-them-now.html>

It was not surprising that Day would eschew the Sad Puppies in 2016 but he went further and took steps to actively alienate a key figure in the Sad camp.

Early in 2016, Sarah A. Hoyt was still very sceptical about Donald Trump as a candidate, although she was also fiercely opposed to the current state of immigration to the USA and alarmed by what she perceived as high levels of illegal immigration. Hoyt herself was an immigrant, having moved from Portugal as a young woman and set up a new life for herself with an American husband. For Hoyt, this was deeper than a personal choice about where to live. For her, America was a set of ideals and her claim was that she was effectively “born American”, something she had discovered in her youth in Portugal through the works of Robert A. Heinlein.

*“I bought Stranger in a Strange Land, based on the title, because that’s how I felt. Then I came here and found I belonged here, all along. The day of my citizenship ceremony, after we came home, I walked out to the mailbox and on the way there it hit me “I am an American now. I belong, in law as I always did in my heart.” Then as now the thought is enough to bring tears to my eyes. Thank you, guys, for accepting me as one of your own. (And that total acceptance regardless of national origin is nowhere else as complete as in the US. (Though some other ex-British-colonies come close.))*

*In Portugal I felt strange because I believed in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”*

<https://accordingtohovt.com/2016/02/28/i-was-born-american-a-blast-from-the-past-7-4-2014/>

Hoyt was hardly the first science fiction fan who felt alienated from the world she grew up in but then later found a home and a community within fandom but she was perhaps a little unusual in seeing her core fandom being “the USA”. In her fiction, Hoyt had described this as a quasi-religion/ideology of people she called *USAians*.

Nominally, both Hoyt and Day had been self-described libertarians, although Day had started avoiding using that term for himself by 2016. However, this idea that the defining quality of what makes somebody an American being a set of ideological beliefs and attitudes was absolute anathema to Day. This should not have been a surprise to anybody. Day had made no secret of his beliefs that America was a country intended for people of English descent. True, Day did obfuscate in several ways the basic racial aspects of his beliefs (for example, by pointing to his own ancestry which included Mexican and Native American ancestors) but in his columns and in books such as *Cuckservative*, Day had advanced the idea that politics derived from culture and culture derived from personality and personality predominantly derived from DNA, and that DNA demonstrated that culture was deeply tied to race. Day objected fundamentally to Hoyt claiming she was American.

From mid-February to March 2016, Vox Day and Sarah A. Hoyt became embroiled in a war of words over the interrelated question of immigration and Donald Trump, with Day specifically targeting Hoyt’s factually correct claim to be American.

For Hoyt, Donald Trump was a closet Democrat who was using populism to gain support. In the comments of her blog on February 21, she described Trump in these terms:

*“Look, he is “European Right Wing” which is why VD likes him. Americans following VD MUST understand he’s not an American conservative. He’s an European right winger. They’re not the same. And here in the states, they’re both socialists. The only difference is leftists in Europe are INTERNATIONAL socialists, and right wing is NATIONAL socialist. That’s all.*

*You want national socialism here? Yeah. Trump is your man. He’s into the banks for millions and he’s corrupted everything he touched. But you guys believe he’s a white Knight sans peur et sans reproche. Good LORD.”*

<https://accordingtohovt.com/2016/02/21/the-carol-of-the-bells-a-blast-from-the-past-2202014/#comment-346876> <sup>[6]</sup>

To other comments in the same post, Day responded on his own blog:

*“Contra Sarah, Trump is neither the potential problem nor is he the solution. What he offers is one last chance to get it right. That’s all. He will buy America a little more time to find itself again, to find itself and embrace the strong, self-confidence of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant American nationalism that made the USA a world power and turned it into a place to which people around the world wanted to come.*

...

*Race does matter. Sex does matter. Nationality does matter. Not because the Left lies about these things, but because they are materially and objectively significant. The romantic Right is outdated, ill-informed, and intellectually irrelevant. Here is a hint: if you’re even mentioning the word “mercantilism”, you are arguing against nationalist Frenchmen dead 300 years, not the nationalist Mil-Right of today.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160225044931/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/02/a-pernicious-influence.html> <sup>[7]</sup>

On February 26 in response to another of Hoyt’s posts, Day was breaking things down into simpler terms.

*“The white race is not imaginary. America as an Anglo-Saxon nation is not imaginary. What is imaginary is the “proposition nation” version of America that she, the Portuguese immigrant, erroneously believes America to be. Red Eagle and I cover this in moderate detail in Cuckservative: How “Conservatives” Destroyed America.*

*We’re not killing “the republic that she loves”. It never existed in the first place. Nations are not places, governments, or ideas. Nations are people. Nations are, as the Founding Fathers wrote, posterity.*

*Sarah may want to consider herself their posterity, but she is not and they would not regard her as such either. Her position requires denying both history and reality, and her post nationalism is as deluded as any progressives. And it’s hardly a surprise that the immigrant declares immigration, the very issue that is propelling Trump to the White House, isn’t a problem.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200930025134/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/02/racial-identity-is-dispositive.html> <sup>[8]</sup>

“Posterity” was a keyword that Day had fished out of the preamble to the US Constitution<sup>[8]</sup> which Day took to mean the direct descendants of the primarily English colonists at the time of US independence. Day’s argument was that the US Constitution is intended only for people he described as “White Anglo-Saxon” and presumably Protestant<sup>[9]</sup>. A couple of days later, he would more overtly belittle Hoyt’s status as an American:

*“One cannot no more become an American by virtue of one’s thoughts or feelings about revolution or equality than one can become Australian, Canadian, or any other nation of English descent. That’s why, unlike Irish-Americans, Swedish-Americans, and Italian-Americans, there are no hybrid “English-Americans”. Like it or not, the fact is that they are the American nation and the posterity of the Constitution.*

*The Japanese have a word for a foreigner who is so enamoured of Japanese concepts and culture that they come to identify with it. We had a few in my class in Tokyo; they would wear their yukatas and religiously perform tea ceremonies every day. Sarah could be reasonably described as an American weebo.” <sup>[9]</sup>*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201108170717/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/02/no-you-really-werent.html>

The following day, he would tie his objections to Hoyt to his objections to transgender people:

*“My, these transamericans are certainly entitled, aren’t they? Not only can they tell Americans what Real Americans are and are not, but they are going to kick out everyone who doesn’t think like they do, no matter whose posterity they happen might be! Nations aren’t genetically-related peoples, after all, but mere collections of similarly-minded groupthinkers.*

*Notice that I never said anything about Sarah being good enough to be an American. I never said anything about being American being something good, or even desirable. What I stated is a simple fact, one no more controversial than Sarah being female. She is Portuguese. She is not American. Becoming a U.S. citizen is paperwork; the mere fact that one has to become a U.S. citizen is sufficient to indicate that one is not an American. As it happens, I even know a few Americans who are not U.S. citizens.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210302231054/https://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/02/the-mask-comes-off.html>

Day’s reputation as a debater is low on the left but surprisingly high on the right. The reason can be seen in these exchanges. He would find the confused assumptions and assertions within a conservative’s or libertarian’s arguments and attack those but in doing so advance a more extreme right-wing position. In the same post he would point out the inherent authoritarianism within Hoyt’s claim that beliefs determine whether a person is a true American or not:

*“Their “proposition nation” is not even theoretically possible without the sort of thought police that their self-definitive ideals must reject. Defining a nation as a proposition is as intrinsically absurd and self-negating as feminism or communism or open-borders libertarianism. These transamerican idealists consider themselves to be intelligent and well-educated, and yet they have observably failed to even begin to think through the necessary consequences of the very values they erroneously claim makes one American.”*

ibid



But Day was knocking down Hoyt's confused idea to push the even more alarming notion of America being defined genetically.

In a later post, as this cross-blog argument was dying down, he made his analysis even more overt:

*"But the post does serve to nicely illustrate the intrinsically dishonest, pernicious, and untenable nature of the concept of the proposition nation, which anyone can join "by belief and choice". Such a nation requires, absolutely requires, thought policing of the most stringent and ruthless variety, and is intrinsically totalitarian in a way that the most authoritarian "blood and soil" regime could never be.*

*It is no surprise that as a result of immigration and the necessary redefinition of what it is to be American, the country has become considerably less free despite the influx of these "belief and choice" citizens. The Know-Nothings were, more or less, correct. Indeed, the present situation is a direct consequence of the inability of 19th century immigrants to fully grasp the Rights of Englishmen, because they were never English and they will never be what might be described as Americans version 1.0. More recent arrivals are observably even less able to do so."<sup>101</sup>*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170922192408/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/03/that-which-goes-unlinked.html>

Notably, while Day's arguments were targeted at Sarah A. Hoyt many of them were as applicable to Larry Correia although he didn't target him by name.

As we will see in later chapters, Sarah A. Hoyt's opposition to Donald Trump would shift but from early 2016 onward the Sad Puppy leaders no longer went to the same lengths to defend Vox Day or Vox Day's prior involvement. This did not extend to conceding that Day's critics had been correct. Instead, accounts by Sad Puppy leaders of the events of 2015 quietly side-lined Vox Day's role or avoided mentioning the Rabid Puppies at all.

### ***Making Awards Rabid Again***

The press release encapsulated the zeitgeist:

#### ***'RABID PUPPIES 2016 Make the Hugos Great***

*On the heels of last year's magnificent campaign, which successfully placed 58 of its 67 recommended nominees on the ballot and inspired no less than 5 No Awards, the Supreme Dark Lord of the Evil Legion of Evil is proud to Make the Hugos Great Again by announcing his recommendations for the 2016 Hugo Awards.*

*"Many of the things that were said about the Puppies last year by luminaries of the field such as George R.R. Martin, David Gerrold, and John Scalzi were deeply hurtful," said Vox Day, as he quaffed blood from the silvered skull of an SJW. "But I think we've learned from our past mistakes and put together a kinder, gentler, list of recommendations that will entertain the casual reader of science fiction and fantasy, as well as inform the more serious observers of the field what a ghastly collection of criminally sick freaks have been inhabiting the community of science fiction fandom for decades."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20171022064359/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/03/rabid-puppies-press-release.html>

Echoing Donald Trump's catchphrase, Day announced the finalised list close to the nomination closing date for the 2016 Hugo Awards. In the press release, Day highlighted five entries of particular note:

- *"Moira Greyland's account of her childhood abuse at the hands of her mother, the award-winning science fiction writer Marion Zimmer Bradley*
- *Five-time 2015 Hugo nominee John C. Wright's novel Somewhither: A Tale of the Unwithering Realm.*
- *SF great Jerry Pournelle, whose ground-breaking There Will Be War series returned after a 25-year absence due to the end of the Cold War.*
- *"Safe Space as Rape Room", a five-part series on the paedophiles and child molesters who have preyed upon children in the science fiction community.*
- *"Space Raptor Butt Invasion", a sensuous space romance that is a tribute to true diversity in science fiction."*

ibid

These five nominees demonstrated three of the four major aspects of Day's choices for his slate.

Moira Greyland was the daughter of Marion Zimmer Bradley. In 2014 writer Deirdre Saoirse Moen had contacted Greyland to discuss the degree to which Bradley had known about or enabled the abuse inflicted by her husband, convicted paedophile Walter Breen (see chapter 25). Greyland had revealed Bradley's own abusive action towards her children, reopening the discussion of the so-called Breendoggle within the science fiction community. Vox Day had included aspects of the scandal in his attack on the SFWA after he had been expelled. Greyland's own harrowing account of her experiences had an added element attractive to Day: Greyland tied the issue of child abuse to the sexuality of Marion Zimmer Bradley and Walter Breen to argue against the legitimacy of same-sex marriages.

More directly tied to Day's earlier campaign against the SFWA was Daniel Eness's series for the Castalia House blog entitled "Safe Space as Rape Room". The series was little more than an expansion of Day's own blog posts from 2014 attempting to tie the SFWA leadership at the time to the abusive behaviour of individuals within the broader science fiction community.

Together, these nominees were part of Day's attempt to tie paedophilia to the Hugo Awards and, more broadly, part of a right-wing strategy to discredit support for LGBTQI rights by conflating paedophilia with a tolerance of diverse sexualities, genders and gender expression.

The second aspect of Day's picks was to promote Castalia House as a publisher. While it was unlikely that many Worldcon members would be won over to his books, the publicity around the Rabid Puppy campaign would likely bring Castalia House to the attention of a right-wing audience.

Lastly, and most interestingly was *Space Raptor Butt Invasion* by Chuck Tingle. I have written a much fuller account of the history of Tingle and this book in my series *The Hugosauriad*, which I won't repeat here<sup>[1]</sup>. The self-publishing phenomenon had been a regular inside joke in the comments at *File770* during 2015 and it is likely that Day picked up the existence of Tingle's idiosyncratic take on gay erotica there. Day's intent was to get things on the ballot that would inherently discredit the worth of the Hugo Awards by being laughably awful, possibly inspired by the Sad Puppy choice of *Wisdom From My Internet* in 2015. Tingle's book was a poor choice for this strategy and would eventually backfire for Day and the Rabid Puppies when Tingle used the ensuing controversy to not only boost his own popularity but also to satirise Day and the Puppies.

The full list revealed the fourth plank of Day's slate strategy: hostages.

The slate contained numerous works and nominees that could easily have appeared as Hugo finalists without the intervention of a campaign. Many of these, like Alistair Reynolds's novella *Slow Bullets*, had been drawn from the Sad Puppy 4 recommendation list. Some appeared to be unlikely choices for Day, especially his pick of *File770* in the Best Fanzine section (although he was clearly an active follower of the Hugo Award coverage there).

These works quickly became talked about as "hostages". Their role in the slate was multifold. Firstly, they were works that supporters of the Puppy campaigns could point to as unarguably meritorious works, lending credibility to the slate. Secondly, being included in the Rabid Puppy slate might make life difficult for these so-called hostages and perhaps might lead some legitimate contenders to withdraw from the Hugo Awards rather than be associated with Vox Day's slate or the Puppy brand. Thirdly, their presence on the final ballot would make it harder for voters to simply 'no award' any Rabid Puppy nominee or, equally delightful for Day, vote 'no award' over a finalist who might have won if it hadn't have been for the Rabid Puppy slate. Lastly, including likely Hugo finalists would increase the chance of Day's slate appearing to be successful at the nomination stage.

If Day had retained the support of the people who voted for his choices in 2015, then his Rabid Puppy slate would have significant support in the nomination phase of the 2016 Hugo Awards. The Sad Puppies were now little more than a sideshow, their recommendation list helping Day fill empty slots in his slate but neither wanted nor needed for his objective. He was setting out not to win the Hugo Awards but to disrupt them. A term had arisen in the 1990s among the world of online game players that neatly encapsulated Day's strategy:

*"A griefer or bad faith player is a player in a multiplayer video game who deliberately irritates and harasses other players within the game (trolling), by using aspects of the game in unintended ways, such as destroying something another player made or built. A griefer derives pleasure primarily or exclusively from the act of annoying other users, and as such is a particular nuisance in online gaming*

communities. To qualify as griefing, a player must be using aspects of the game in unintended ways to annoy other players—if they are trying to gain a strategic advantage, it is instead called “cheating”.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Griefer>

The difference was, this time people were expecting him.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] A Singaporean author who mainly now publishes under the name Kai Wai Cheah but also as Benjamin Cheah <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?257508>
- [2] a description here <https://theconversation.com/4Chan-raids-how-one-dark-corner-of-the-internet-is-spreading-its-shadows-68394> “Raids are somewhat similar to distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks used by hackers to bring down websites. But rather than aiming to interrupt the service at a network level, they attempt to disrupt a site’s community by actively harassing users or taking over the conversation.”
- [3] <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-13-the-man-from-p-i-x-e-l/comment-page-2/#comment-385155>
- [4] <https://web.archive.org/web/20201108105844/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/04/rampaging-puppies.html>
- [5] <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2016/01/17/through-fire/>
- [6] the pronoun reference of ‘he’ here gets a little ambiguous but I read ‘he’ here being Trump throughout. Does Hoyt overtly say Day or Trump is a Nazi? Not quite but close enough.
- [7] “Mil-Right” I believe is for “militant right”, a coinage Day was trying to push early in 2016 as something more advanced than “alt-right”
- [8] for example <https://web.archive.org/web/20170119092413/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/12/cuckservative-at-return-of-kings.html>
- [9] “weebo”/“weeaboo” is not from Japanese but a nonsense term adopted by 4chan to replace the more overt “wapanese” slur (“white Japanese”) <https://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/weeaboo/>
- [10] and yes, that does mean Day thinks people of Irish descent are not proper Americans either. This is a very traditional form of racism he is pushing.
- [11] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2019/08/23/hugosauriad-4-6-extinction-event-2-chuck-tingle-versus-the-alt-right-space-raptor-butt-invasion/>

## THE RABID PUPPIES 2016 SLATE

- BEST NOVEL
  - *Seveneves: A Novel*, Neal Stephenson, William Morrow
  - *Golden Son*, Pierce Brown, Del Rey
  - *Somewhither: A Tale of the Unwithering Realm*, John C. Wright, Castalia House
  - *The Cinder Spires: The Aeronaut’s Windlass*, Jim Butcher, Roc
  - *Agent of the Imperium*, Marc Miller, Far Future
- BEST NOVELLA
  - *Fear of the Unknown and Self-Loathing in Hollywood*, Nick Cole, *Tales of Tinfoil*
  - *Penric’s Demon*, Lois McMaster Bujold, Spectrum
  - *Perfect State*, Brandon Sanderson, Dragonsteel Entertainment
  - *The Builders*, Daniel Polansky, Tor.com
  - *Slow Bullets*, Alastair Reynolds, Tachyon Publications
- BEST NOVELETTE
  - “Flashpoint: Titan”, Cheah Kai Wai, *There Will Be War Vol. X*, Castalia House
  - “Folding Beijing”, Hao Jingfang, *Uncanny Magazine*
  - “What Price Humanity?”, David VanDyke, *There Will Be War Vol. X*, Castalia House
  - “Hyperspace Demons”, Jonathan Moeller, Castalia House
  - “Obits”, Stephen King, *The Bazaar of Bad Dreams*, Scribner
- BEST SHORT STORY
  - “Asymmetrical Warfare”, S. R. Algernon, *Nature* nr. 519

- “*Seven Kill Tiger*”, Charles Shao, *There Will Be War Vol. X*, Castalia House
- “*The Commuter*”, Thomas Mays,
- “*If You Were an Award, My Love*”, Juan Tabo and S. Harris, *Vox Popoli*
- “*Space Raptor Butt Invasion*”, Chuck Tingle
- BEST RELATED WORK
  - *Appendix N*, Jeffro Johnson, Castalia House blog
  - *Between Light and Shadow: An Exploration of the Fiction of Gene Wolfe, 1951 to 1986*, Marc Aramini, Castalia House
  - “*The Story of Moira Greyland*”, Moira Greyland, Askthebigot.com
  - “*Safe Space as Rape Room*”, Daniel Eness, Castalia House blog
  - *SJWs Always Lie*, Vox Day, Castalia House
- BEST GRAPHIC STORY
  - *The Divine*, Boaz Lavie, Asaf Hanuka, Tomer Hanuka, First Second
  - *Full Frontal Nerdity*, Aaron Williams, Do Gooder Press
  - *Erin Dies Alone*, Cory Rydell and Grey Carter, The Escapist
  - *The Sandman: Overture*, Neil Gaiman and JH Williams III, Vertigo
  - *Invisible Republic Vol 1 (#1–5)*, Corinna Bechko and Gabriel Hardman, Image Comics
- BEST EDITOR, SHORT FORM
  - Jerry Pournelle
- BEST EDITOR, LONG FORM
  - Anne Sowards, Penguin
  - Jim Minz, Baen Books
  - Mike Braff, Del Rey
  - Toni Weiskopf, Baen Books
  - Vox Day, Castalia House
- BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION, LONG FORM
  - *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, Konrad Tomaszkiewicz and Mateusz Kanik Sebastian, CD Projekt RED
  - *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, Hideo Kojima, Kojima Productions
  - *Until Dawn*, Will Byles, Supermassive Games
  - *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Zak Penn and Joss Whedon, Marvel Studios
  - *The Martian*, Ridley Scott, Scott Free Productions
- BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION, SHORT FORM
  - *Supernatural*, “Just My Imagination” Season 11, Episode 8, Richard Speight Jr, Supernatural
  - *Grimm*, Season 4 Episode 21, “Headache”, Jim Kouf, Grimm
  - *Tales from the Borderlands* Episode 5, “The Vault of the Traveller”
  - *Life is Strange*, Episode 1, Raoul Barbet and Michel Koch, Life is Strange
  - *My Little Pony, Friendship is Magic*, Season 5, Episodes 1-2, “The Cutie Map”, Jayson Thiessen, Jim Miller and Rebecca Dart, My Little Pony
- BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST
  - Larry Elmore
  - Michal Karcz (Karezoid on Deviant Art)
  - Abigail Larson
  - Lars Braad Andersen, example
  - Larry Rostant, example
- BEST SEMIPROZINE

- *Abyss & Apex*, Wendy Delmater
- *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, Scott H. Andrews
- *Daily Science Fiction*, Jonathan Laden and Michele Barasso
- *Sci Phi Journal*, Jason Rennie
- *Strange Horizons*, Niall Harrison
- BEST FANZINE
  - *Black Gate*
  - Castalia House blog
  - *File770*
  - *SuperserviceSF SF*
  - *Tangent Online*
- BEST FANCAST
  - *The Rageaholic* by Razorfist
  - *Hello Greedo*
  - *8-4 Play*
  - *Cane and Rinse*
  - *Tales to Terrify*
- BEST FAN WRITER
  - Jeffro Johnson
  - Morgan (Castalia House)
  - Shamus Young
  - Zenopus
  - Douglas Ernst
- BEST FAN ARTIST
  - Rgus
  - Matthew Callahan
  - Disse86
  - Darkcloud013
  - Kukuruyo
- BEST NEW WRITER (Campbell Award)
  - Pierce Brown
  - Cheah Kai Wai
  - Sebastien de Castell
  - Brian Niemeier
  - Andy Weir

## 55: The Dragon Award Begins

Dragon\*Con (as it was initially styled) arose out of the world of role-playing games. In the 1980s Georgia gamer and aspiring editor Ed Kramer had been running an online bulletin board (BBS) called the Dragon Alliance of Gamers and Role-Players (DAGR)<sup>[1]</sup> and named after his Dragon Computer<sup>[2]</sup>. Club members Ed Kramer, David Cody, John Bunnell, Robert Dennis, Mike Helba, and Pat Henry used the 1986 Worldcon in Atlanta to promote their forthcoming 1987 convention in Atlanta. By the start of the 1990s Dragon\*Con had allied with the Origins gaming convention and was hosting several thousand attendees.

By the millennium, Dragon\*Con was twenty-thousand-attendee pop-culture convention with multiple programming tracks spreading into films, TV franchises, books and games, and a significant event in its home of Atlanta.

While Dragon\*Con's reputation was growing, Ed Kramer's reputation took a sharply negative turn. In August 2000, Kramer was arrested for the molestation of three teenagers which followed a previous arrest in 1997 where the charges had been dropped<sup>[3]</sup>. Kramer's arrest was simply the start of a long saga that would continue until 2013 when he finally pleaded guilty to the charges. In between times was a series of cancelled court dates, in-home detention, breach of bail conditions, imprisonment, injury, and a lengthy campaign. Kramer had presented his situation to people in his personal and professional circles as a miscarriage of justice, blaming the delays on the court system. Multiple high-profile people within science fiction were pulled into a campaign against a perceived injustice against Kramer including Harlan Ellison, Anne McCaffrey and former SFWA President Robert Sawyer. Surrounding Kramer was a cloud of misinformation fuelled by critics of Kramer — and by Kramer himself. However, Kramer's repeated breach of bail conditions and eventual confession revealed that he was very far from the innocent victim of a miscarriage of justice that he had portrayed himself as.

As discussed in chapter 25, Vox Day had attempted to use the Kramer case as a way to create negative publicity about the SFWA in 2014. Day had not focused on the misguided defence of Kramer by sci-fi luminaries but rather on the fact that Kramer (like Day) had been a member of the SFWA but that the SFWA had not expelled Kramer (unlike Day). Unfortunately for Day, Kramer's membership had lapsed by this point. However, at Day's Castalia House Blog, the 2015 series on child abuse issues in science fiction communities spent more time on famous authors such as Anne McCaffrey who had fallen for Kramer's claims that he was being mistreated by the court system.

Dragon\*Con itself attempted to maintain some distance from Kramer during the years between his arrest and eventual conviction. However, during that time Kramer remained as a part-owner of the convention. Only in 2013 did the convention find a legal means of separating themselves as a business from Kramer, buying him out. At around the same time, the convention dropped the asterisk from its name.

As a for-profit entity with a fixed location, Dragon Con continued to expand with multiple events held within the event including film festivals, e-sports competitions, concerts, as well as more conventional activities such as panels and talks. Among those events were award ceremonies. Dragon Con had hosted numerous awards over the years including the "Wizard Fan Awards" and the Julie Awards (both for comics).

During the events of the so-called Puppy Kerfuffle of 2015, Dragon Con became a key point of comparison with Worldcon for supporters of the Sad Puppies. For example, a guest post at *Mad Genius Club* in April 2015 compared the relative size of Worldcon with commercial pop-culture conventions:

*"Worldcon is dying of old age, and failing to recruit younger fen. They're going, instead, to places they find more congenial — Dragon Con, Gen Con, SDCC Comic Con, NY Comic Con, Salt Lake Comic Con, all sorts of other places. I have my own opinions about why this is happening — mostly about exclusive behaviors exhibited by the longterm fans when the Wrong Kind of People show up, or have differing political opinions."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2015/04/21/to-my-friends-who-are-going-to-vote-no-award-at-the-hugos-this-year/>

Many key figures in the Puppy campaigns regarded Dragon Con as part of the natural territory for their followers.

*"If we call ourselves a religion, we can even accuse people of being racist when they pick on us. No, it's not right, and of course, that will bother us, but it's common usage, and it will make us seem even MORE normal. "What do you mean I can't have the week off to drive to Dragon con? It's part of my religion. Are you some kind of racist?""*

The convention itself had a very broad and diverse set of attendees but there was a belief among many of the Sad Puppy supporters that the convention was a sympathetic place for them or at the very least not actively hostile. Larry Correia had been a convert to the excitement of the con from early in his professional writing career, describing it in 2011 as:

*“DragonCon is like Mardi Gras for nerds... So it is Nerdi Gras, only bigger and more awesome. There isn't anything else quite like DragonCon. Cram 45,000 official guests into 4 hotels in downtown Atlanta. That's official purchased a ticket types. I don't know how many thousand others just showed up and crashed the party. I'm guessing a lot.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2011/09/07/dragoncon-was-awesome/>

With the devastating final results of the 2015 Hugo Award, some Puppy supporters thought that the right response was to walk away from Worldcon and the Hugo Awards altogether. This was matched by some of the rhetoric from critics of the Puppies, who had suggested that the Puppy leadership should set up their own awards.

So it was both notable and not wholly a surprise when on March 31 2016 Dragon Con announced the first inaugural Dragon Awards with their own new website<sup>[6]</sup>. Details were more forthcoming a few days later:

*“ATLANTA – April 4, 2016 – Dragon Con, Atlanta's internationally known pop culture, fantasy, sci-fi and gaming convention, announced the introduction of the Dragon Awards, a program of fan-chosen awards to recognize outstanding achievement in science fiction and fantasy literature, comics, gaming and filmed entertainment.*

*The introduction of the Dragon Awards is part of the convention's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration.*

*Dragon Award winners will be selected by all fans – not just Dragon Con members or attendees – in an open nomination and final voting system. To accommodate as many creative genres as possible, awards will be given in each of 15 categories covering the full range of fiction, comics, television, movies, video gaming and tabletop gaming. Winners will be announced at the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dragon Con convention, which will be held September 2 to September 5, 2016 in Atlanta.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160409041241/http://awards.dragoncon.org/2016/04/04/official-press-release/>

The award categories divided the field by subgenres and different modes, reflecting many of the convention's own programming tracks. The literary categories were all for novel-length works with no short fiction categories. The announced categories were:

1. Best science fiction novel
2. Best fantasy novel (including paranormal)
3. Best young adult/middle grade novel
4. Best military science fiction or fantasy novel
5. Best alternate history novel
6. Best apocalyptic novel [in subsequent years replaced by Best Media Tie In]
7. Best horror novel
8. Best comic book
9. Best graphic novel
10. Best episode in a continuing science fiction or fantasy series, TV or internet
11. Best science fiction or fantasy movie
12. Best science fiction or fantasy PC / console game
13. Best science fiction or fantasy mobile game
14. Best science fiction or fantasy board game
15. Best science fiction or fantasy miniatures / collectable card / role-playing game

The announcement did not draw any direct parallels with the Hugo Awards and the timing of the new award was connected to the convention's 30 year anniversary<sup>[7]</sup>. The lack of short fiction categories and the style of the other categories meant that the Dragon Awards were not intended to be directly compared with the Hugo Awards. In addition, the Dragon Awards had an eligibility period that would extend into the current year (i.e., for the first year, books published partway into 2016) meaning that the set of books eligible

for the Dragons and the Hugo Awards were not exactly the same each year. Nonetheless, in the context of the events of 2015, the announcement drew comparisons with the beleaguered Hugos.

At *Mad Genius Club*, Sad Puppies 4 leader Kate Paulk described them as “Another Way To Help End Puppy-Related Sadness”, and stated:

*“Even more interesting, the Dragon Awards are a complete people’s choice award. Anyone can sign up and vote, and it costs nothing. I’m really looking forward to comparing what comes out of the Hugo process and what comes out of the Dragon process – particularly in terms of numbers of voters and the like (hopefully the Dragon folks will be nice and give us that information to play... ahem... run statistical analysis with.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2016/04/07/another-way-to-help-end-puppy-related-sadness/>

The Puppy-sympathetic Conservative-Libertarian Fiction Alliance also saw the potential for the Dragon Awards to displace the Hugo Awards as the premier genre award:

*“The Dragon Awards is already being talked about as a much-needed successor to the erstwhile industry pinnacle Hugo Awards, which have fallen into politicized controversy and disarray over the past few years.*

*Read the official press release here, visit, nominate, and vote. With 60,000 Dragon Con members, The Dragon Awards has the potential to become SFF’s most important recognition.”*

<https://conservativelibertarianfictionalliance.com/2016/04/08/dragon-con-announces-fan-driven-dragon-awards/>

How these awards would operate was not obvious. With a purely online voting system with no barriers to entry, the potential for the awards to be spammed was a potential weakness. At *File770* one of Dragon Con’s founding members, Senior Director and Co-Chairman David Cody explained that the nomination stage would be partly curated and that the details of the process would not be fully transparent to prevent outside parties from gaming the system.

*“We’re going to employ various tools to combat ballot box stuffing when the actual voting starts.*

*Also, for nominations, it won’t be possible to slate or overload the nominations for each category. We’re going to use experts in the various disciplines to create the final nomination lists after examining all the nominations.*

*Yes, I am being deliberately vague so that those trying to game the system won’t know what exactly we are doing to combat any shenanigans.”*

<http://file770.com/dragon-awards-updates/>

Vox Day was not worried that he might be excluded by this process. Echoing again Donald Trump’s campaign slogan in a post entitled “Making SF awards great again”, Day stated:

*“Yes, indeed, I think the Hugo Awards might have just taken a few hits over the last decade or two. In any event, I’m sure the science fiction fandom community is every bit as delighted about people taking their advice and setting up a new and alternative award as they were about people taking John Scalzi’s advice to nominate and vote for the Hugo Awards.*

*I am registered to vote in the Dragon Awards and I would encourage you to do so as well. I’ll post my recommendations here the week after the Hugo shortlist is announced, in the event that any of you might happen to be curious about them.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160410122732/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/04/what-totally-unexpected-action.html>

Aside from Dragon Con Senior Director David Cody, it was not clear who was leading the Dragon Awards. However, in an interview at 2016 Worldcon, Baen author/editor Eric Flint and author/editor Bill Fawcett presented themselves as people with inside knowledge of how the Dragon Awards would operate<sup>[8]</sup>.

Eric Flint had been a critic of the Sad Puppies during 2015 but not without his own criticism of the Hugo Awards and was in many ways sympathetic to some of the negative critiques of the Hugos. Flint’s association with the award and the existence of sub-genre awards such as the Military Science Fiction & Fantasy category, pointed to the Dragon Awards likely to be more sympathetic towards a Baen audience.



Bill Fawcett had a long career in both games and books, as well as a long association with Dragon Con<sup>[9]</sup>. That association had seen him get embroiled in the ill-advised defence of Ed Kramer when many sci-fi luminaries believed Kramer's claims that he was a victim of a miscarriage of justice<sup>[10]</sup>. Fawcett's broad career in multiple roles within science fiction and fantasy, including writing, editing and game design, made him a natural addition to Dragon Con's award advocates.

One person's initial reaction to the Dragon Award's announcement was notably missing. Larry Correia appeared to have nothing to say about the new award. Correia's uncharacteristic silence on the matter was broken in July when he explained why he had avoided talking about the new awards.

*"This weekend I was at LibertyCon, and I ran into one of the organizers of the Dragon Awards. He said that he was kind of surprised that he hadn't seen me talk about them online much. I told him that was because of Sad Puppies, I'm a controversial figure, there are just too many bitter harpies and poo flingers from fandom's inbred pustulent under-choad who automatically flip out about anything I do, so I didn't want to rock the boat for them.*

*But his response? Screw that. This award is for ALL FANS. And you have fans. So GO BUG THEM! We want so many people voting in this thing that no little clique or faction can sway it. The more fans involved, the better."*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2016/07/12/wrongfans-unite-only-a-week-left-to-nominate-for-the-dragon-awards/>

Correia didn't name the organiser who he had spoken to but Correia's endorsement of the award was likely to bring in many more voters. Indeed, when fans raised issues around how the Dragon Award website worked, both Bill Fawcett and David Cody appeared in the comments of the post to help Correia's fans vote.

By the time Correia had posted, the finalists for the 2016 Dragon Awards had already been announced. The nomination phase had not been a smooth ride as Doris Sutherland explained at *Women Write About Comics*:

*"The Dragon Awards were announced back in April, and since then have suffered from definite teething problems. The eligibility period for nominations underwent a last-minute change; after this came a delay in the announcement of the finalists, which were supposed to have been made public on 2 August. But then, it is perhaps to be expected for a new awards initiative to have a rocky road in its first year."*

<https://womenwriteaboutcomics.com/2016/08/nominees-revealed-for-first-dragon-awards/>

The finalists were a mixed bag of works from across the field but included authors such as John Scalzi and N.K. Jemisin<sup>[12]</sup> as well as Larry Correia, Marko Kloos, Eric Flint and Dave Freer. Vox Day was not a finalist but the Castalia House-published novel *Somewhither* by John C. Wright was. Baen had seven works as finalists and Tor had five (including a Tor Teen book). Smaller publishers were represented as well. The book club/podcast *Sword & Laser* had run its own book publishing contest in 2015 using the publishing platform Inkshares<sup>[13]</sup>. That contest had led to multiple finalists in the Dragon Awards as well.

Sad Puppies 4 appeared to have had some impact on the awards as well. In the Horror category, both Declan Finn's *Honor at Stake* and Brian Niemeier's *Souldancer* were finalists. The two writers had been emboldened by their Sad Puppy 4 campaigns to encourage their fans to vote in the Dragons.

The resulting set of finalists looked a lot like what Puppy-inspired critics of the Hugo Awards had claimed was lacking from the Hugo Awards. There was a greater number of Baen authors, as well as authors from smaller publishers and self-published authors<sup>[14]</sup>.

The critique of the Hugo Awards not representing independent or self-published writers was incoherent for the awards overall given that there were whole categories devoted to fan-produced works. However, the unspoken part of the critique was that it was applied to Best Novel. The Dragon Awards having seven novel categories with multiple finalists was indeed far more capable of representing more categories of novels and more approaches to publishing.

However, if the Dragon Award finalists were more diverse by publisher, they were less diverse in other ways. Of the 44 novels that were finalists, only 10 were by women<sup>[14]</sup>.

We'll return to the outcome of the 2016 Dragon Awards in a later chapter. In the meantime, we need to return to the wider world of politics where 2016 was proving to be a busy year.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] Most details of Dragon Con's history taken from 2007 archive version of the convention's own history page <https://web.archive.org/web/20080420134835/http://www.dragoncon.org:80/history.php>

- [2] The brand was called Dragon because it was made in Wales <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon> 32/64
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_E.\\_Kramer#2000\\_arrest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_E._Kramer#2000_arrest)
- [4] <https://web.archive.org/web/20111020064501/http://atlantajewish.com/content/2004/edkramer.html>
- [5] At this point though, Sarah A. Hoyt herself had not actually attended Dragon Con <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2016/09/19/dragoncon-aar-kacey-ezell/>
- [6] <https://web.archive.org/web/20160409062049/http://awards.dragoncon.org/2016/03/31/the-dragon-awards/>
- [7] Presumably 30 years from when Dragon Con was first announced in 1986. The 30 year anniversary of the first actual con would have been 2017.
- [8] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqB3nepAego>
- [9] see <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/f/bill-fawcett/> and <http://pernhome.com/aim/?p=125> and [http://www.crescentblues.com/3\\_6issue/fawcett.shtml](http://www.crescentblues.com/3_6issue/fawcett.shtml)
- [10] for example see <https://www.prweb.com/releases/2007/04/prweb519006.htm>
- [11] for example <https://monsterhunternation.com/2016/07/12/wrongfans-unite-only-a-week-left-to-nominate-for-the-dragon-awards/#comment-79310> and <https://monsterhunternation.com/2016/07/12/wrongfans-unite-only-a-week-left-to-nominate-for-the-dragon-awards/#comment-79421>
- [12] for *The Fifth Season* which appeared in two different categories
- [13] see <https://www.inkshares.com/contests/the-sword-laser-collection-contest> and <http://swordandlaser.com/home/2015/4/15/get-published-with-sword-laser-on-inkshares>
- [14] Arguably the proportion is 11 out of 46. N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* appeared in two categories, as did Dave Freer's *Changeling Island*. Counting those works only once gives 10 out of 44 or about 23%.

## 2016 DRAGON AWARD FINALISTS

- 1. Best Science Fiction Novel
  - *Agent of the Imperium* by Marc Miller
  - *Ancillary Mercy* by Ann Leckie
  - *Aurora* by Kim Stanley Robinson
  - *The Life Engineered* by J-F Dubeau
  - *Raising Caine* by Charles E. Gannon
  - *Somewhither: A Tale of the Unwithering Realm* by John C. Wright
- 2. Best Fantasy Novel (Including Paranormal)
  - *Asteroid Made of Dragons* by G. Derek Adams
  - *Blood Hound* by James Osiris Baldwin
  - *Changeling's Island* by Dave Freer
  - *The Cinder Spires: The Aeronaut's Windlass* by Jim Butcher
  - *The Fifth Season* by N. K. Jemisin
  - *Grave Measures* by R. R. Virdi
  - *Son of the Black Sword* by Larry Correia
- 3. Best Young Adult / Middle Grade Novel
  - *Calamity* by Brandon Sanderson
  - *Carry On* by Rainbow Rowell
  - *Changeling's Island* by Dave Freer
  - *The Shepherd's Crown* by Terry Pratchett
  - *Six of Crows* by Leigh Bardugo
  - *Steeplejack* by A.J. Hartley
  - *Trix and the Faerie Queen* by Alethea Kontis
  - *Updraft* by Fran Wilde
- 4. Best Military Science Fiction or Fantasy Novel
  - *Allies and Enemies: Fallen* by Amy J. Murphy

- *Blood in the Water* by Taylor Anderson
- *Chains of Command* by Marko Kloos
- *The End of All Things* by John Scalzi [withdrawn]
- *Hell's Foundations Quiver* by David Weber
- *The Price of Valor* by Django Wexler
- *Wrath of an Angry God: A Military Space Opera* by Gibson Michaels
- 5. Best Alternate History Novel
  - *1635: A Parcel of Rogues* by Eric Flint & Andrew Dennis
  - *1636: The Cardinal Virtues* by Eric Flint & Walter H. Hunt
  - *Bombs Away: The Hot War* by Harry Turtledove
  - *Deadlands: Ghostwalkers* by Jonathan Maberry
  - *Germanica* by Robert Conroy
  - *League of Dragons* by Naomi Novik
- 6. Best Apocalyptic Novel
  - *Chasing Freedom* by Marina Fontaine
  - *Ctrl Alt Revolt!* by Nick Cole
  - *Dark Age* by Felix O. Hartmann
  - *The Desert and the Blade* by S. M. Stirling
  - *The Fifth Season* by N. K. Jemisin
  - *A Time to Die* by Mark Wandrey
- 7. Best Horror Novel
  - *Alice* by Christina Henry
  - *Chapelwood* by Cherie Priest
  - *Disappearance at Devil's Rock* by Paul Tremblay
  - *Honor at Stake* by Declan Finn
  - *An Unattractive Vampire* by Jim McDoniel
  - *Souldancer* by Brian Niemeier
- 8. Best Comic Book
  - *Astro City* – Vertigo
  - *Saga* – Image
  - *Civil War II* – Marvel
  - *Daredevil* – Marvel
  - *DC Universe: Rebirth* – DC
  - *Ms. Marvel* – Marvel
  - *Providence* – Avatar
- 9. Best Graphic Novel
  - *Chicago* by Glenn Head
  - *Killing and Dying* by Adrian Tomine
  - *March: Book Two* by John Lewis and Andrew Aydin
  - *Sacred Heart* by Liz Suburbia
  - *The Sandman: Overture* by Neil Gaiman and J.H. Williams III
  - *Virgil* by Steve Orlando and J.D. Faith
- 10. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy TV Series

- *Daredevil* – Netflix
- *Doctor Who* – BBC
- *The Expanse* – Syfy
- *The Flash* – CW
- *Game of Thrones* – HBO
- *Jessica Jones* – Netflix
- *Outlander* – Starz
- 11. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Movie
  - *Ant-Man*, dir. Peyton Reed
  - *Captain America: Civil War*, dir. Joe and Anthony Russo
  - *Crimson Peak*, dir. Guillermo del Toro
  - *Deadpool*, dir. Tim Miller
  - *The Martian*, dir. Ridley Scott
  - *Star Wars Episode 7: The Force Awakens*, dir. J.J. Abrams
- 12. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy PC / Console Game
  - *Darkest Dungeon* by Red Hook Studios
  - *Fallout 4* by Bethesda Softworks
  - *Metal Gear Solid V* by Konami Digital Entertainment
  - *Overwatch* by Blizzard Entertainment
  - *Undertale* by Toby Fox
  - *XCOM 2* by 2k Games
- 13. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Mobile Game
  - *Fallout Shelter* by Bethesda Softworks
  - *Hyper Burner* by Patrick Cook
  - *PewDiePie: Legend of the Brofist* by Outerminds Inc.
  - *Quaser One* by Emre Taskin
  - *Star Wars: Galaxy of Heroes* by Electronic Arts
- 14. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Board Game
  - *Blood Rage* by Cool Mini or Not
  - *Codenames* by Vlaada Chvátil
  - *Pandemic: Legacy* by ZMan Games
  - *Monopoly: CTHULHU* by USAopoly
  - *Star Wars: Rebellion* by Fantasy Flight Games
  - *Talon* by GMT Games
- 15. Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Miniatures / Collectible Card / Role-Playing Game
  - *Call of Cthulhu Roleplaying Game (7th Edition)* by Chaosium Inc.
  - *Deluxe Tunnels & Trolls* by Flying Buffalo
  - *Magic the Gathering: Battle of Zendikar* by Wizards of the Coast
  - *Magic the Gathering: Shadows over Innistrad* by Wizards of the Coast
  - *MouseGuard (2nd Edition)* by David Petersen & Luke Crane
  - *Star Wars: Armada* by Fantasy Flight Games

# 56: Meanwhile...The Nationalist Shift Part 1: Brexit

[Content warning for political violence]

Despite the horrors of World War 2, Europe has never been lacking in nationalist parties. Anti-immigration movements have latched onto events of the day to help bolster political influence. The fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s brought fears of mass migration from former Eastern bloc countries, while immigration from Middle Eastern countries was exploited to fuel Islamophobia — further fuelled by the series of wars in the region from 2003 onwards. Parties like the Freedom Party of Austria<sup>[1]</sup> mixed vague appeals to “freedom”, populism, and scepticism towards the European Union to gain political influence. In multi-party democracies, these political movements were typically distinct from more established centre-right political parties and while electorally unlikely to ever gain a majority of seats, their position in parliaments gave them significant influence.

The French National Front (now called National Rally)<sup>[2]</sup> had been one of the oldest and most high-profile of such parties under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen for several decades. Le Pen’s party underwent a revival in 2011 under the leadership of Le Pen’s daughter Marine Le Pen and in 2012, Marine Le Pen came third in the first round of the Presidential election with nearly 18% of the vote. This resurgence was part of a pattern across Europe in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, the subsequent harsh economic policies across the Eurozone, anti-immigration sentiment fuelled by a refugee “crisis”, and Islamophobia. The National Front was typical of such movements, mixing a broad anti-left message with an emphasis on economic protectionism, and anti-European Union sentiment in contrast to the more established centre-right parties.

Geo-politically this ideological mix of nationalism, anti-progressive rhetoric and economic protectionism was also reflected in the stance of Vladimir Putin of Russia. In France, concern about the connections between Putin’s government and the National Front<sup>[3]</sup> was part of a pattern of concern about the connection between Putin’s fear of the European Union as a proxy for the United States and alleged support for nationalist parties such as the Italian Northern League and The Golden Dawn in Greece<sup>[4]</sup>. These nationalist movements were both ideologically sympathetic to the Russian government and also strategically important, with growing tensions between the NATO countries and Russia over Ukraine and Syria.

Even prior to Brexit and among the political classes sympathetic towards the European Union, Britain has often regarded itself as semi-detached from Europe. Of course, the underlying cultural and economic influences behind the nationalist populism in many European countries was no different in the UK. What was different was its visibility. Lacking electoral reform, Britain’s democracy had been a two-party plus exceptions since World War II. A first-past-the-post electoral system meant that for most decades one of either The Conservative Party or The Labour Party would win a majority of seats in the lower house (the House of Commons) and form a government. The Liberal Party (at this time now known as the Liberal Democrat Party) had varying degrees of success as a historical third-party<sup>[5]</sup> but electorally would often find itself competing for votes against Labour, enabling the built-in bias in the electoral system for the Conservative Party.

“Nationalist” party politics in the UK had historically been the politics of the countries other than England: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland’s political history in this period is a whole book in itself but Scotland and Wales both had developed politically significant centre-left political parties that enjoyed varying degrees of electoral success. The significance of those parties increased during the years of Tony Blair’s Labour government, which devolved more power to Scotland and Wales and established national assemblies, effectively shifting the UK to a more federal system of government.

Of course, that didn’t mean the UK was free of right-wing nationalist parties. Quasi-fascist groups such as the National Front (UK)<sup>[6]</sup> and the British National Party<sup>[7]</sup> had attempted to gain electoral recognition, particularly in local elections over multiple decades while stoking up campaigns against immigrant communities, often targeting South Asian communities. However, with political power on the right monopolised by the Conservative Party, the ideological struggle for a specifically English form of right-wing populist nationalism was primarily within the Conservative Party. The central ideological division that formed was over Britain’s role within the European Union.

Traditionally, the Conservative Party had been in favour of the common market aspects of the EU on ideological grounds of being pro-free trade and because the party was overtly pro-business. EU membership

gave British businesses access to huge markets and EU trade rules also helped enable the City of London as a world financial capital. The role of the EU, the EU Parliament and related bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights in setting social policy were less welcome within the Conservative Party, which on average sat to the right of many of Europe's major centre-right political parties. Euroscepticism within the UK was also fuelled by Britain's notorious tabloid press, which was always happy to print lurid stories of EU government excess or legislative absurdity<sup>[8]</sup>.

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) was founded in the 1990s and was initially regarded as a bit of a joke<sup>[9]</sup> but from 2003 under the leadership of Nigel Farage, UKIP began gaining small but significant electoral success. The party mixed economic populism and anti-EU sentiment to draw votes away from the Conservative Party while also drawing some votes from Labour's demographic base. The visibility of the party was enabled by its campaigns for the EU parliamentary elections, which unlike other elections in the UK used a system of proportional representation.

For much of the first decade of the 21st-century, Euroscepticism was primarily a headache for the Conservative Party. Tony Blair's Labour government had enjoyed notable electoral success since the late 1990s and Blair had shifted the party rightwards, effectively occupying the then-sweet spot of Britain's electoral centre. Blair's decision to involve Britain in supporting George Bush's invasion of Iraq had been unpopular (and very divisive within Labour) but economic prosperity had been strong, fuelled by rising house prices.

The Global Financial Crisis hit Britain hard and it also wiped out any claims Labour could make to be effective economic managers. Disenchantment with the ongoing war in Iraq also helped further discredit Labour. Trust in mainstream political parties was also deeply eroded when a major scandal arose in 2009 over parliamentary expenses<sup>[10]</sup>. That scandal impacted the Conservative Party more than Labour but Labour MPs were far from immune from the fallout.

At the 2010 General Election, the prevailing pattern of UK elections since WWII was broken. Labour lost badly and while there was a major swing to the Conservative Party, it was insufficient for them to form a majority government. Instead, the centre/centre-left Liberal Democrat Party formed a coalition with the Conservatives. David Cameron (regarded as leaning to the left of the Conservative Party) became PM and began an economic program of austerity measures in response to the ongoing financial crisis.

Five years later, Cameron would win an outright majority for the Conservative Party in 2015. The previous alliance with the Liberal Democrat Party had enabled the Conservatives to project a more moderate image but the coalition government had been electorally disastrous for the Liberal Democrat Party, alienating many of their supporters.

Cameron moved to resolve the internal dispute within his party over EU membership by setting up an advisory referendum on EU membership for 2016. Confident that there was a pro-EU majority in the country, a referendum on the so-called "Brexit" (i.e., a British exit from the EU) resulting in a "stay" vote could remove the main point of disunity for the Conservatives and cement Cameron's position. UKIP was continuing to challenge the Conservative Party on the right and had shown significant electoral gains in 2014 in both local government elections and EU Parliament elections<sup>[11]</sup>.

The campaigns on the issue (to Remain or Leave) revolved around the issues of the economy, immigration and sovereignty. Immigration issues included the right of EU citizens to move freely between countries but in the campaign rhetoric of the Leave campaigns, the broader issues of immigration from developing countries, the Middle East and also of asylum seekers were raised.

The referendum question was a simple question of whether Britain should remain or leave with the intention that any formal policy one way or another would be resolved after the vote. This meant that the exact nature of what "leave" might entail was quite broad. There were many degrees to which the UK might reduce ties with the European Union and the implication of these were quite different on the three core issues of the economy, immigration and sovereignty.

The support for a Leave vote was far from purely nationalist or right-wing. Some Labour MPs also campaigned for a pro-Brexit vote. Many people on the left had been sceptical about the EU as a project for decades, seeing it primarily as a pro-business/pro-capital enterprise or as an instrument of US influence internationally. The EU's action towards Greece during its government debt crisis<sup>[12]</sup> was also seen as a dangerous abuse of power by many on the left.

However, while left-scepticism about the EU contributed to a degree of disunity, the Leave campaign was dominated by a nationalist and anti-immigration element. What was initially unclear was that the underlying nationalism, while couched in terms of "Britain", was essentially a species of English nationalism. In Scotland, the Leave campaign was finding very little purchase. European Union membership was an important part of the Scottish Nationalist Party's plans for an independent Scotland. The SNP was overtly

left-of-centre and the questions of independence and sovereignty were focused on escaping the influence of England rather than the EU.

Beyond Britain's borders, right-wing nationalists elsewhere regarded the possibility of a pro-Brexit vote with excitement. In France, Marine Le Pen declared that

*“Objectively, it will be the beginning of the end of the European Union. I compare Brussels to the Berlin Wall. If Great Britain knocks down part of the wall, it's finished, it's over.”*

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3348271/Britain-leaving-EU-like-fall-Berlin-Wall-spell-end-bloc-says-Marine-le-Pen.html>

Meanwhile, in the US, presidential hopeful Donald Trump had his own spin on Brexit:

*“Trump said a Brexit would make sense for Britons “especially in the light of the craziness of the migration chaos”.*

...

*He also doubled-down on his proposed Muslim ban and again insisted large parts of Britain were “no-go” areas following a takeover by Islamic hate preachers. Trump, who spoke of his “great love for Britain”, believed migrants “pouring in all over the place” would be the final straw for many when it comes to the EU referendum.”*

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/655219/Donald-Trump-EU-Brexit-blessing-crazy-migration>

While Brexit would prove to be a vastly more complicated issue than even its opponents suggested it would be, it was being treated symbolically by the nationalist right as a referendum on immigration.

That connection in the minds of extreme nationalists between Brexit and a blow against a pro-immigration establishment would prove to be a fatal one.

British Labour MP Jo Cox was an anti-Brexit campaigner and a popular figure in her West Yorkshire constituency. On June 16 during the 2016 Brexit campaign, she was stabbed and shot by militant nationalist Thomas Alexander Mair<sup>[13]</sup>. Mair had a long history of connections with nationalist groups in the UK such as the National Front, BNP and the English Defence League. Like the Charleston killer (see chapter 44), Mair had an interest in South Africa and the apartheid form of white nationalism. According to a Guardian profile of Mair:

*“Mair was particularly fascinated by the Norwegian Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 people in gun and bomb attacks in 2011, and kept newspaper clippings about the case.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/23/thomas-mair-slow-burning-hatred-led-to-jo-cox-murder>

Jo Cox had been targeted as a prominent left-wing politician and because of her views in support of Britain remaining in the European Union. Her husband issued a statement after her death saying:

*“Today is the beginning of a new chapter in our lives. More difficult, more painful, less joyful, less full of love. I and Jo's friends and family are going to work every moment of our lives to love and nurture our kids and to fight against the hate that killed Jo.*

*Jo believed in a better world and she fought for it every day of her life with an energy and a zest for life that would exhaust most people.*

*She would have wanted two things above all else to happen now, one that our precious children are bathed in love and two, that we all unite to fight against the hatred that killed her. Hate doesn't have a creed, race or religion, it is poisonous.”*

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/jo-cox-dead-brendan-cox-statement-full-response-a7086226.html>

Campaigning on the Brexit referendum was suspended briefly in the immediate aftermath of the murder.

Beyond the specific case of the assassination of Jo Cox, hate crimes increased during and immediately after the Brexit vote. Hate crimes had been increasing in the UK since 2013 but there was a measurable spike during the Brexit campaign, which was possibly greater in areas with a stronger Leave vote<sup>[14]</sup>.

Opinion polls had pointed to a small but significant margin in favour of Remain and this was confirmed by opinion polls on the day of the referendum which showed the split as 52% for Remain and 48% for Leave.

So it was a substantial shock when the actual results turned out to be nearly the exact opposite of those figures.

51.89% of voters chose Leave in the final count. It was not a large margin but it was a significant one, large enough to make recounts unnecessary.

The Brexit story was far from done but the political landscape had shifted.

The reasons why people had voted the way did (regional issues, distrust of politicians, economic issues) were complex but for a section of the right, the vote was highly symbolic.

### ***Let's check in with the Puppies***

The Brexit vote had been a surprise upset for a political establishment and among figures associated with the Sad Puppy campaign, the parallels were clear. At *Mad Genius Club*, Dave Freer took sarcastic and anticipated blame for the Brexit result stating that it was “our fault”. More seriously, he saw a clear similarity between events.

*“Actually there are a few entertaining and logical writing and publishing related things to be derived from the Brexit circus. The first and obvious one is it could all have been avoided (no matter how you see this as good or ill), if those running the EU (or publishing, for that matter) had not been so busy with their own agendas and feathering their own nests to be aware of the growing discontent. Publishing has seen a steady fall off in sales... but you'd never guess if you looked around a NY Publisher's office. The same is true in the EU – the bureaucrats, and bankers, and various little elites did very well. In Britain the losers in the equation voted in the referendum. In publishing the losers – writers and readers voted with their wallets. The outcome, in the end, is about the same: the unthinkable (if you were at the top the benefit pyramid –where no one you knew would support such a ridiculous thing) has happened. If either group had taken action, given up a few of their perks, spread the benefits, seen the people paying their wages felt they too were winning from this it could have been different. In publishing if they'd worried more (or even at all) about providing books that were directed at pleasing the demos, instead of just themselves. If they'd listened to the concerns of people nearer to the middle – and more representative of it, they'd sell more books and not be losing hand over fist to Indy sales and other media. Instead they just said the magic words “Racism, sexism etc.”. Likewise if the EU elite had given David Cameron real concessions on the main concern of the people who voted leave – immigration, instead of ignoring those concerns, dismissing them as racism etc...”*

*The magic is all used up. It doesn't work any more.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2016/06/27/brexit-it-is-our-fault/>

Sarah A. Hoyt had multiple posts on the topic, including a guest post from Francis Turner. Turner thought that Britain may have avoided a worse fate by voting to leave.

*“It is my belief that the UK dodged a bullet here. In almost every other country in the EU, the anti-EU forces are fascist, nationalist or socialist (and some combine elements of all). Perhaps worse these parties have been successfully labelled as such, whether or not they actually are, and as a result they are attracting the would-be jackbooted thugs even if they didn't want them. This will not end well. In Europe immigration and unemployment/economic growth are huge causes of discontent. The elites have done their best to label anyone who complains about either as an extremist and this is going to come back and bite them hard. Unless they actually address the issues, we will either see elections where the “extremist” parties win (see Germany/Italy in the 1930s) or we will see revolution and civil war (Spain in the 1930s) and by the time the extremists take to power the economies will be so screwed up that idiotic measures like protectionism will seem to make sense. Some European politicians made noises today about the need to listen to the people and some “extremist” parties aren't yet so demonized that the extremists are in control, but there's not much time before disaster is set in motion. In some countries it may be too late.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2016/06/24/brexit-how-why-and-what-next-francis-turner/>

In a different post, Hoyt saw Brexit as a symbolic victory.

*“What Brexit means is the first LARGE SCALE breach in the wall that the (largely national socialist) elites have erected with mass media/mass entertainment/mass art over the last century or so. What the inimitable Sabrina Chase calls “the media-entertainment industrial complex” worked very hard, mostly*



*by commanding the heights of power and making everyone an outsider labelled “crazy” or “fascist” or worse, if they disagreed from the consensus being built.”*

<https://accordingtohojt.com/2016/06/27/the-world-turned-upside-down-2/>

For Hoyt, it was the mass media that had been frustrating true progress for the right for decades and enabling a move leftwards (as she perceived it). Brexit for Hoyt, was a demonstration that the tide had turned.

*“That this has changed and continues to change I don’t need to explain. Sure, the mass media still holds a large portion of the LIVs, but... but it’s not the same. They could never run the campaign that demonized militias under Clinton now. It took them longer to demonize the tea parties, and the job was always patchy. The Tea Party suffered more from what it WAS — a leaderless organization. Yes, that was also its strength — than from anything else. Their news/books/art/narratives reach increasingly fewer people.*

*Which not only allows things like Brexit to happen (and I’d like to remind you that Europe is well behind us) but makes a lot more of them inevitable.”*

ibid

Vox Day, of course, had been passionately pro-Brexit for some time. Back on June 16, Day had reacted to the attack on Jo Cox by saying:

*“It’s not at all surprising that European politicians have been attacked in more than one country. I’m only surprised that more of them haven’t been targeted, considering what they have done to their nations.*

...

*Cox isn’t the first pro-immigration politician to be attacked in Europe. It would be astonishing if she was the last.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119214547/https://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/06/politics-by-other-means.html>

On the day of the vote, Day had called on his British readers to vote Leave.

*“The current situation is what those great British leaders of the past, who from Napoleon to Hitler fought to prevent the domination of Europe by a single power, were desperate to prevent. Your nations were finally brought to heel through deceit rather than force, through persistent lies and propaganda rather than military might.*

*But today, you have been presented with an opportunity that is all too rare. You have been given the opportunity to reclaim your heritage, reclaim your birthright, reclaim your independence, reclaim your sovereignty, reclaim your freedom, and reclaim your nation. And you have been given the chance to do this peacefully!”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119081609/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/06/vote-leave-today.html>

With the vote for Leave, Day also had a warning to Britain’s MPs lest they consider not enacting the necessary legislation to remove Britain from the EU:

*“‘Remember Jo Cox’ should be the response to anyone who calls for Parliament to ignore the clearly expressed will of the British people. If Parliament refuses to respect the referendum, violence will almost surely be among the various consequences.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119081942/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/06/england-and-wales-choose-freedom.html>

Later he anticipated that the Brexit vote would lead to the end of the European Union entirely:

*“Since these events tend to follow a certain pattern, and they tend to pick up speed rather than slow down, we can reasonably anticipate that the political crisis of 2016 will lead to the political collapse of 2020, followed by the first war to take place in formerly EU territory in 2022.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119081854/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/06/a-lost-faith.html>

Day's own nationalist hopes lay with Donald Trump but in response to words from Marine Le Pen, Day was excited by the growing nationalist shift in politics worldwide.

*"With eloquent nationalist leaders like her, Viktor Orban, and Matteo Salvini, among others there is reason to believe it will not be the last one. The EU is immoral, unnatural, anti-democratic, and evil. The sooner it collapses, the better off everyone will be.*

*The globalists are the Nazis of the 30s and 40s and the Communists of the Cold War. They are the enemy of Man. As Le Pen aptly notes, 'more and more, the destiny of the European Union resembles the destiny of the Soviet Union, which died from its own contradictions.'"*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20161207141654/https://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/06/the-prison-of-peoples.html>

However, Trump and rising nationalists like Viktor Orbán in Hungary were not the only reason why Vox Day was excited by political trends. He himself was increasingly being cited in articles as a figure in a new version of right-wing nationalism in America: the Alt-Right.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom\\_Party\\_of\\_Austria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_Party_of_Austria)
- [2] *Rassemblement national* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Rally](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Rally)
- [3] <https://web.archive.org/web/20150211084552/https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/40m-of-russian-cash-will-allow-marine-le-pens-front-national-to-take-advantage-of-rivals-woes-in-upcoming-regional-and-presidential-elections-9888509.html>
- [4] [https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_putins\\_friends\\_in\\_europe7153/](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_putins_friends_in_europe7153/)
- [5] and historically prior to WW2 being the de facto second party
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Front\\_\(UK\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Front_(UK))
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British\\_National\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_National_Party)
- [8] <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23324911>
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK\\_Independence\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_Independence_Party)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Kingdom\\_parliamentary\\_expenses\\_scandal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_parliamentary_expenses_scandal)
- [11] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/events/vote2014/eu-uk-results>
- [12] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek\\_government-debt\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_government-debt_crisis)
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder\\_of\\_Jo\\_Cox](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Jo_Cox)
- [14] <https://www.economicsobservatory.com/did-the-vote-for-brexitead-to-a-rise-in-hate-crime>

## 57: Meanwhile...the Nationalist Shift Part 2 — The Alt Right

In European multi-party democracies, right-wing nationalist groups had often been visible as distinct political parties critical both of the left and social progress but also of the centre-right and of neo-liberalism. The ideological positions of the Nouvelle Droite<sup>[1]</sup> thinkers in France and the more transnational European New Right<sup>[2]</sup> were critical of capitalism as a force that (in their perspective) was eroding ethnic identities and culture. Critics, rightly, pointed that these ideas were little different than the militant European nationalism of the past.

As discussed in the last chapter, in Britain right-wing discourse was dominated by the Conservative Party post-WWII, with more extreme far-right groups enjoying very little electoral success and mainly associated with violent protest. Margaret Thatcher's long period of office as Prime Minister in the 1980s had established a model of conservatism that was nationalistic but also business-centric and not wholly averse to the European Union. The conflicts within conservatism and beyond into British (or more specifically English) right-wing thinking would eventually spill over into the project to take the UK out of the European Union (aka Brexit – see the previous Chapter).

In the USA, third-party politics was even more moribund than in the UK. There was a tradition of populist candidates gaining some electoral success but post-WWII such candidates had not displaced either of the two major parties. The Democratic Party and the Republican Party had for much of their existence been only loosely tied to ideological positions but from the 1960s to 1980s, the two parties had become more defined in terms of one being to the left of America's political centre and one to the right. This had been cemented by the two terms of Ronald Reagan's presidency, in which the conservative President had won notable electoral victories on the basis of a pro-business, pro-military, anti-Soviet and socially conservative position. The reputation of Reagan among America's conservatives was only cemented further after he left office, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, without the spectre of communism to unite America's conservatism, there was a loss of direction to the movement. Capitalism had been enshrined as an idea in opposition to Communism but capitalism itself was not a force that prevents change.

The contentious election of George W. Bush and the subsequent attack on the World Trade Centre by Islamist terrorists put neoconservatism in the spotlight. The neoconservatives favoured not just a strong US military but also an interventionist foreign policy, a view that was seemingly validated by the terror attack on US cities. While critical of the left and of socially progressive policies, opposition to such policies was not the primary focus of neoconservatives, nor was it a particularly populist movement other than its emphasis on American military might.

Within American conservatism, a smaller and less influential (at the time) movement had coalesced in opposition to neoconservatism. Nicknamed paleoconservatives, they were just as keen on America having a strong military but thought that the singular role of the US military was to defend the US border and not be stationed overseas. Sceptical about the wonders of free trade and overtly antagonistic towards immigration, paleoconservative figures such as Pat Buchanan<sup>[3]</sup>, William S. Lind<sup>[4]</sup> and Paul Gottfried<sup>[5]</sup> occupied an ideological space that could make connections with the European New Right as well as with more extreme sections of the American right.

Gottfried helped coin the term “alternative right” (in conjunction with a younger writer, Richard B. Spencer<sup>[6]</sup>) in 2008 for a broad set of paleoconservative-related beliefs that were out of favour with the neoconservative establishment of the Republican Party. The term “alternative right” was later shortened to “alt-right” but it was several years before this caught on.

Spencer would adopt more overtly racist stances than his paleoconservative mentors (who by most standards were already pretty racist) and make more overt connections with white supremacist and neo-Nazi ideas. However, Spencer's key focus for an “alternative” right was not an ideological one but the nature of the battleground.

*“Despite his anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi comments, Spencer's key intellectual influences are largely those thinkers concerned with winning the “cultural war” against egalitarianism, liberal democracy, capitalism, socialism, and multiculturalism”*

**Key Thinkers of the Radical Right (p. 226). Oxford University Press. .**

Spencer was not the only figure attempting to define a new approach to right-wing ideology. Arising in parallel to this repackaging of paleoconservatism, a more philosophical movement known as neoreaction

(sometimes styled as NRx) and/or The Dark Enlightenment was developing in online spaces. Writers such as the British academic and horror writer Nick Land and American right-wing blogger Curtis Yarvin (aka Mencius Moldbug) combined futurist/technological themes with a kind of horror at the shifting pace of the world. Both Land and Yarvin are genuinely interesting yet, despite the hefty overlap with their writing and science-fictional themes, the neo-reactionaries had little direct connection with the events of the Debarkle. Instead, sets of diffuse ideas and influences helped colour what would become the alt-right. One such idea was the notion of “the Cathedral”, the central progressive/neo-liberal<sup>[7]</sup> conspiracy of ideas at the heart of the modern world. In Elizabeth Sandifer’s lengthy analysis of Land and Yarvin she describes the idea:

*“Generally speaking, however, the awful, searing truth with which Moldbug believes we cannot cope is that liberal democracy is pretty shit. Moldbug puts a genuine effort into selling this truth, arguing that there exists a de facto conspiracy of, as he puts it in the Open Letter, “mainstream academia, journalism and education” that he calls the Cathedral, as it constitutes a de facto state religion that means that democracy is secretly an Orwellian mind control process. And to be fair, Moldbug really sells it, essentially spinning a vast historical conspiracy theory in which the Roundheads of the English Civil War have secretly controlled the world for centuries via the false rhetoric of classical liberalism and the Enlightenment. But it’s hard not to notice that this is basically crap.”*

Sandifer, Elizabeth; Graham, Jack. *Neoreaction a Basilisk: Essays on and Around the Alt-Right* (p. 18). Eruditorum Press. .

What neo-reactionary ideas primarily lent was intellectual respectability to anti-democratic ideas among sections of the Silicon Valley tech industry. Land’s influence was limited by both the difficulty of his writing and also the very weirdness of some of his more extreme views<sup>[8]</sup> whereas Yarvin had direct ties with the right-wing magazine/news outlet *Breitbart*. Yarvin was also noted influencing ostensibly libertarian thinking towards a more overtly anti-democratic position.

*“Where Moldbug has been most influential is among radical libertarians and in burgeoning online subcultures. His overt anti-democracy is a departure for American libertarianism but has a small but growing influence, especially following the 2008 financial crisis. Prominent libertarian investors Balaji Srinivasan and Peter Thiel have echoed Neoreactionary themes about seceding from the US for tech-CEO dictatorships.”*

Key Thinkers of the Radical Right (p. 200). Oxford University Press. .

Peter Thiel<sup>[9]</sup> used his fortune to help bankroll right-wing movements in the US, including donations to Donald Trump. Like many right-leaning people entranced by modern technology, Thiel had cast himself as a libertarian but by 2009 his hope for a libertarian future was waning:

*“I remain committed to the faith of my teenage years: to authentic human freedom as a precondition for the highest good. I stand against confiscatory taxes, totalitarian collectives, and the ideology of the inevitability of the death of every individual. For all these reasons, I still call myself “libertarian.”*

*But I must confess that over the last two decades, I have changed radically on the question of how to achieve these goals. Most importantly, I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible.”*

<https://www.cato-unbound.org/2009/04/13/peter-thiel/education-libertarian>

Thiel still hoped though for a technological escape for progressive politics.

*“Because the vast reaches of outer space represent a limitless frontier, they also represent a limitless possibility for escape from world politics. But the final frontier still has a barrier to entry: Rocket technologies have seen only modest advances since the 1960s, so that outer space still remains almost impossibly far away. We must redouble the efforts to commercialize space, but we also must be realistic about the time horizons involved. The libertarian future of classic science fiction, à la Heinlein, will not happen before the second half of the 21st century.”*

ibid

The Randian or Heinleinian (whether Heinlein himself believed it or not) libertarian techno-optimism was failing for many. This disenchantment with the prospects of an individualist future was matched by a disenchantment by social conservatives with the capacity for conservatism as a movement to actually prevent change. Neoreactionary and paleoconservative ideas helped bridge the gap between the two kinds of disenchantment.

The common themes between Spencer's warmed-over paleoconservatism rebranded as "alternative right" and neo-reactionary thinking was the emphasis on opposition to democracy, the left, liberalism and feminism while promoting nationalism and racism but with the addition of an interest in technology, culture and the internet as a venue for cultural-political action.

GamerGate [see earlier chapters] provided a model for how disparate right-wing groups could collaborate and coordinate action without formal alliances or any kind of defined leadership structure. Instead of a distinct political organisation, what was increasingly being referred to as the "alt-right" in 2015 was a chunky soup of ideological positions. Differences on the far-right such as theological disputes between overtly-Christian neo-Nazis and overtly-pseudo paganist neo-Nazis could be ignored in actions like GamerGate, as it didn't require any formal alliances or decision-making structures.

"Alt-right" (not unlike traditional fascism) was more of an aesthetic choice for a group of related ideologies. One that presented itself as young, media-savvy, humorous and ironic. The Alt-Right didn't reject as such the ideas of existing right-wing fringe groups such as extreme Creationist groups, militia movements or the so-called Sovereign Citizen movements but these older expressions of American nationalism were portrayed as off-brand.

Alt-Right was a term used by both observers of the online right and as a self-description by those who sympathised with the ideologies and the tactics. The term became increasingly popular on 4chan's politics board /pol/ as well as other places associated with GamerGate. Likewise, figures associated with GamerGate, including Milo Yiannopoulos and Vox Day, also became associated with the term.

Yiannopoulos himself maintained a slight distance from the term, preferring "alt-lite" on the grounds of not fully embracing the more white supremacist aspect of the movement. However, his employer *Breitbart* became key to mainstreaming the alt-right as a movement and as a means of pressuring mainstream conservatism rightwards. Allum Bokhari and Milo Yiannopoulos had been the main figures at *Breitbart* in covering (and endorsing) both GamerGate and the 2015 Sad/Rabid Puppies, acting as sympathetic chroniclers of the movement. So it was not surprising that they took on a similar role for the alt-right, penning "An Establishment Conservative's Guide To The Alt-Right" for *Breitbart* in March of 2016.

*"The alt-right is a movement born out of the youthful, subversive, underground edges of the internet. 4Chan and 8Chan are hubs of alt-right activity. For years, members of these forums – political and non-political – have delighted in attention-grabbing, juvenile pranks. Long before the alt-right, 4Channers turned trolling the national media into an in-house sport. Having once defended gamers, another group accused of harbouring the worst dregs of human society, we feel compelled to take a closer look at the force that's alarming so many. Are they really just the second coming of 1980s skinheads, or something more subtle?"*

<https://www.breitbart.com/tech/2016/03/29/an-establishment-conservatives-guide-to-the-alt-right/>

Bokhari and Yiannopoulos surveyed the movement breaking it down into key figures they classed as

- The intellectuals: many of the paleoconservatives and neoreactionaries discussed earlier but also figures such as right-wing blogger Steve Sailer<sup>[10]</sup>, and more tangential figures to the neoreactionaries such as Eliezer Yudkowsky's *Less Wrong* blog where speculation about artificial intelligence helped inspire both Land and Yarvin<sup>[11]</sup>.

- The natural conservatives who they described as "mostly white, mostly male middle-American radicals, who are unapologetically embracing a new identity politics that prioritises the interests of their own demographic".

- The meme team: Alt-right supporters primarily interested in the 4chan-style meme, shock and irony culture.

- The 1488ers: The actual self-described neo-Nazis. The numbers referred to the 14-word white supremacist slogan and 88 as a code for "Heil Hitler".

That the alt-right included a neo-Nazi element was not disputed, and figures such as Matthew Heimbach<sup>[12]</sup> and Andrew Anglin<sup>[13]</sup> were notable figures within the ad-hoc coalition.

The most prominent figure of what Yiannopoulos called the "meme team" was neither real nor human but a cartoon frog. Pepe the Frog had been a character in a webcomic by artist Matt Furie. The laid back frog had been circulating as an apolitical character in memes within multiple communities since 2008, but by 2015 he had become more closely associated with alt-right memes via 4chan. This was much to the dismay of the creator of Pepe, who had no wish for his work to be associated with right-wing extremism. The hapless frog was further embroiled in a meta-meme involving a pseudo-religion called the cult of Kek<sup>[15]</sup> as a part of nested in-jokes of alt-right meme culture.

To complete the circle, the phenomenon of memes and coincidences spawning parody religions drew the attention of neo-reactionary Nick Land:

*“The name ‘Kek’ appears to have crossed into Cyberspace by odd coincidence (and not — originally — as a name at all). Orcish, Korean, and Turkish languages were all supposedly involved. ‘Kek’ was an encryption of ‘LOL’ within certain World of Warcraft communication channels. The Turkish ‘Topkek’ (a cupcake brand) was a secondary coincidence. No one seems to have been invoking the chaos deities of Ancient Khem at that point.*

*The introduction of Pepe — a manifest frog-entity avatar — is shrouded in even greater obscurity. The memetic phenomenon was (again, apparently) convergent, or coincidental — an entirely independent frog plague (Exodus 7:25–8:15).*

*One more coincidence: Outbreak of the ‘cuck’ meme. (Kek is Kuk.) It’s a definite ‘barbarous name of evocation’ in retrospect, but mostly still connected around the back. Kek, Kuk, cake, cuck, might sound like consistent croaking, but tidy cultural cladistics are difficult to identify. (A sense of ethno-religious crisis on the Alt-Right is one indispensable contextual element.)”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160419202006/http://www.xenosystems.net/kek/>

The Bokhari and Yiannopoulos essay itself began with a header image in which an elephant representing the Republican Party dressed as Ebenezer Scrooge is confronted by the frightening apparition of the Ghost of Christmas Future who wears the face of Pepe the Frog and points warningly to a gravestone marked “GOP 2016”.

The choice *Breitbart*, Yiannopoulos and the alt-right more generally were offering to the Republican Party was to adopt their candidate of choice or face oblivion, and the alt-right candidate of choice was Donald Trump.

Trump and the alt-right offered an opportunity for Vox Day. As the term was gaining currency in 2015, Day tended to use it in a way that implied it was a group distinct from himself. Although in his late 2015 book *Cuckservative*, Day often attributed his own views to a nebulous group of “alt-right critics” of modern conservatism. He also discussed the movement more generally and the various terms being used for it.

*“In the years since, the progressive left, of whom the SJWs are the fanatical shock troops, has moved further and further into the anti-scientific realm of equalitarian fantasy, while the cuckservatives of the center right cower in silence. Those on the right who dare discuss the increasingly obvious scientific and statistical realities of human biodiversity are labelled racists, fascists, bigots, and Nazis, often by the “conservative” media. These intellectual rebels have been described by their critics as the alt-right, the neo-reactionaries, and even the Dark Enlightenment, but whatever they are called, they are currently outcasts from the range of respectable, permissible opinion.”*

Day, Vox; Red Eagle, John. *Cuckservative: How “Conservatives” Betrayed America*. Castalia House. .

In early 2016 he was attempting to make a different coinage “the mil-right” (presumably for “militant right”) be a thing. In one such post from February 2016, Day was taking issue with the fears among Sarah A. Hoyt’s followers that Donald Trump would be too extreme.

*“Race does matter. Sex does matter. Nationality does matter. Not because the Left lies about these things, but because they are materially and objectively significant. The romantic Right is outdated, ill-informed, and intellectually irrelevant. Here is a hint: if you’re even mentioning the word “mercantilism”, you are arguing against nationalist Frenchmen dead 300 years, not the nationalist Mil-Right of today.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20171104043950/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/02/a-pernicious-influence.html>

However, by mid-2016 Day was more directly describing himself as “alt-right”<sup>[16]</sup> and in doing so was gaining media attention from journalists covering the apparent political trend. Day also had his GamerGate connections with Milo Yiannopoulos and could use his publishing house to publish works by paleoconservatives such as William S. Lind and “alt-lite” figures such as Mike Cernovich and Jack Posobiec.

Gaming the Hugo Awards and finding new outlets for self-promotion such as the Dragon Awards gave Day not only attention but a degree of credibility on the wider alt-right. He could (and did) claim to be waging the culture war against the so-called “social justice warriors”. In a bid to position himself among the defining

figures of the movement, in August 2016 Day published a 16-point manifesto of alt-right beliefs. They included statements such as:

5. *The Alt Right is openly and avowedly nationalist. It supports all nationalisms and the right of all nations to exist, homogeneous and unadulterated by foreign invasion and immigration.*

6. *The Alt Right is anti-globalist. It opposes all groups who work for globalist ideals or globalist objectives.*

7. *The Alt Right is anti-equalitarian. It rejects the idea of equality for the same reason it rejects the ideas of unicorns and leprechauns, noting that human equality does not exist in any observable scientific, legal, material, intellectual, sexual, or spiritual form.*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20161018072227/http://voxday.blogspot.co.uk/2016/08/what-alt-right-is.html>

For the fourteenth point of the manifesto, Day chose a version of the infamous fourteen-word slogan of the white supremacists<sup>[19]</sup>, adding in the “Alt-right believes” at the start.

Day had successfully used his notoriety from the 2015 Hugo Award and his connections from GamerGate to position himself as a significant figure within a growing political movement. That movement had attached itself to the political fortunes of Donald Trump but many people still expected Trump to lose.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nouvelle\\_Droite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nouvelle_Droite)
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_New\\_Right](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_New_Right)
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pat\\_Buchanan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pat_Buchanan)
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_S.\\_Lind](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_S._Lind)
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Gottfried](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Gottfried)
- [6] “In a Radix interview, Spencer noted that he coined the term “alternative Right” in 2008 in order to differentiate himself from “mainstream American conservatism” and pass down European “ancestral traditions” to new generations. Paul Gottfried argues that both he and Spencer jointly created the Alt Right term.” *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right* (p. 226). Oxford University Press.
- [7] this doesn’t need to make sense
- [8] case in point, neo-Nazi-inspired satanism [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order\\_of\\_Nine\\_Angles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_Nine_Angles)
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Thiel#Political\\_activities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Thiel#Political_activities)
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve\\_Sailer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Sailer)
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliezer\\_Yudkowsky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliezer_Yudkowsky) also notable for his serial fan-fic *Harry Potter and The Methods of Rationality*
- [12] whom RationalWiki describes as “white separatist, Neo-Nazi, racist Confederate supporter, Anti-Semite, Anti-American ideologue, homophobe, excommunicated Orthodox Christian” [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Matthew\\_Heimbach](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Matthew_Heimbach)
- [13] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/The\\_Daily\\_Stormer](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/The_Daily_Stormer)
- [14] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Pepe\\_the\\_Frog](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Pepe_the_Frog) and see also <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-pepe-the-frog-became-a-nazi-trump-supporter-and-alt-right-symbol>
- [15] <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/cult-of-kek>
- [16] <https://web.archive.org/web/20201108141853/https://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/09/nrx-and-altright.html> “Although a few people have attempted to shoehorn me into the “Dark Enlightenment” or classify me as a “Neoreactionary”, I’ve never considered myself part of NRx like I do the AltRight.”
- [17] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike\\_Cernovich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Cernovich)
- [18] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack\\_Posobiec](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Posobiec)
- [19] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourteen\\_Words](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourteen_Words)

## 58: Hugos and Dragons and Puppies Again

The sibling genres of fantasy and science fiction are often accused of being escapist. Arguably, escaping to other worlds of the imagination is a net positive but regardless, if a person hoped to escape the developments in American politics in the election year of 2016 they weren't going to do so in SF&F fandom that year.

April 26 saw the announcement of the 2016 Hugo Awards Finalists and once again the talk was all of the puppies. The slate of notable alt-right figure Vox Day had multiple finalists in every category except one (Best Editor Short Form)<sup>[1]</sup>. People initially counting up the influence of the Puppy slates also saw a major overlap between Hugo finalists and the Sad Puppy 4 long list. The Puppies had struck again! Or had they?

In 2015 the overlap between plausible-looking Hugo finalist and Sad/Rabid Puppy-slated work was small. Using data released after the 2016 Hugo Awards (to show the potential impact of the new EPH nominating system), Greg Hullender at *Rocket Stack Rank* estimated that only two works from the 2015 slates had enough “organic”<sup>[2]</sup> votes to have made it onto the ballot regardless. Ironically, neither work appeared on the final ballot for other reasons<sup>[3]</sup>. However, in 2016 a range of different factors was in play.

Firstly, Sad Puppies 4 had a long list which meant that many more works were included, increasing the chance of overlap. Nor was SP4 a “slate” as such and the range of works included things suggested by overt critics of the Puppy campaigns. Secondly, Vox Day's Rabid Puppies slate had also included many works that would likely have been nominated by non-Puppy affiliated voters, including *Seveneves* by Neal Stephenson in Best Novel, *Penric's Demon* by Lois McMaster Bujold in Best Novella, *Strange Horizons* in Best Semiprozine and *File770* in Best Fanzine — works many people referred to as “hostages”. Using the same techniques he had used for the 2015 data, Greg Hullender's analysis found 14 finalists that had appeared on a Puppy list that would have had enough organic votes to be a finalist regardless<sup>[4]</sup>.

What the “true” set of finalists would have looked like with no Puppy campaigns at all is unknowable but the 2016 set of finalists were a very different kind of selection than it had been in 2015.

If Vox Day's Rabid Puppies had voted for several plausible Hugo-worthy works, they had also increased the number of works included primarily to troll Worldcon members. These included a weak parody of Rachel Swirsky's *If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love* that had been lifted from Vox Day's blog's comment section, the Castalia House blog series “Safe Space as Rape Room”, artist Kukuruyo, who ran a webcomic featuring GamerGate mascot Vivian James, and, of course, Vox Day himself both as an editor and for his political book, *SJWs Always Lie*<sup>[5]</sup>.

If the impact of the Puppies was more ambiguous in 2016 it was still no less visible. There had been a hope that the huge numbers of people who had joined Worldcon and voted against the Puppies in 2015 would translate into overwhelming numbers at the nomination phase. However, without a coordinated slate, a large number of people voting for a wide range of different things will not necessarily outvote a much smaller number voting for a slate. Over four thousand nomination ballots had been cast and of those, maybe less than 10% were people following the Rabid Puppy slate<sup>[6]</sup> but in more popular categories, Day included more “hostages” on his slate and concentrated his more controversial picks on down-ballot categories.

The presence of the Rabid Puppies on the ballot again unsurprisingly left many fans feeling dejected. At *Nerds of a Feather*, blogger The G lamented:

*“I don't want the Hugos to be an annual rerun of the US presidential election. That already takes up too much oxygen as it is, and the Hugos are supposed to be about fans celebrating the best stuff they discovered over the previous year—not voting in lockstep to further someone's agenda. So I won't back any proposed counter-slates—not even one that reflected my exact political worldview (and it's very doubtful that any would). I want nothing to do with that—nothing at all. On the other hand, what's the point of voting in a one party system?”*

<http://www.nerds-feather.com/2016/04/hugopocalypse-ii-where-do-we-go-from.html>

As in 2015, some finalists withdrew from the ballot, including author Thomas A. Mays<sup>[7]</sup> and fanzine *Black Gate*. Others saw little hope for 2016 at all.

*“And that's what I'm already seeing. And it started last year. George and John and Mary, much as I like them, were wrong. They went with the “Oh, just vote for the best of what's there and it will work out.” No, that wasn't the thing to do and it didn't work out. This year even the Sads didn't do that well, though they did better than fandom. Vox did. The 2016 Hugos are NOT the Hugo Awards. They are The Vox-hugo. They will celebrate the best in what Vox likes. If you go along with it, you are not voting for the Hugo winner. You will be voting for the Vox-hugo winner.*



*There are no Hugo awards for 2016.”*

<http://fosteronfilm.com/thoughts/here-we-go-again-welcome-to-the-vox-awards.htm> <sup>[8]</sup>

Others thought that a second year of a “no award” sweeping the awards would also be a disaster.

*“Likewise, how can any publisher associate itself with these kinds of brand-threatening shenanigans? They’re risk-averse enough as it is. Why take the chance with printing the Hugo rocket ship logo on its project without thinking of two years’ worth of Hugo train wrecks?”*

*A second year of “No Award” winners will put the final nails into the Hugos’ coffin because it would demonstrate readers’ lack of faith in the award.”*

<https://jgfollansbee.com/2016/04/29/the-hugo-awards-are-dead-and-the-xpuppies-killed-them/>

The Hugo Awards were not dead yet though.

Long term Worldcon member and World Science Fiction Society constitutional expert Kevin Standlee floated the idea of another potential voting reform: Three Stage Voting.

*“I do not wish to rehash the arguments for and against either EPH or 4/6 here. However, I would like to set out a plan that I’ve been thinking about (and have talked about) since this series of bad actors imposed their minority opinion on the majority of the members of WSFS last year. It’s a completely different change than either EPH or 4/6, and actually leaves the current nominating and final ballot phases of the Hugo Awards unchanged, but instead inserts an additional stage into the selection process that gives the membership of the current Worldcon an opportunity to weigh in on whether they think any particular finalist deserves to be on the ballot without having to resort to the rather blunt instrument of voting No Award.”*

<https://kevin-standlee.livejournal.com/1560332.html>

Standlee’s proposal would add an extra stage between nominations and determining the finalists, allowing voters to upvote semi-finalists they liked and downvote others. The proposal attracted further discussion at *File770*.

Spacefaring Kitten, who had been a prolific reviewer of the 2015 Hugo Ballot, produced a “Puppy Free Voting Guide” modelled on the guide produced by Deirdre Saoirse Moen in 2015. However, Kitten also pointed out why the same approach wouldn’t work in 2016.

*“But — and here’s the problem — many things on the Rabid Puppies slate this year are quite good and have nothing whatsoever to do with Theodore Beale. There’s silly crap up there as well, but some are worthy finalists which might well have gotten on the shortlist also without Beale’s help.”*

<https://sfkittens.wordpress.com/2016/04/26/puppy-free-hugo-voting-guide-and-the-problem-with-it/>

Instead, Kitten proposed a simpler strategy:

*“So, how about just no awarding the shit and ignoring the troll’s trolling?”*

*Ibid*

Others came to the same conclusion:

*“This year, I don’t think I’ll do the same. It seems ridiculous to penalize works that could plausibly have made it onto the Hugo ballot just because (as John Scalzi put it) “the Puppies are running in front of an existing parade and claiming to lead it.” This year I’ll read all the nominees, and vote for the ones I think are wonderful; those that I think don’t deserve to be on the ballot I’ll rank below “No Award.””*

<https://amptoons.com/blog/?p=21689&cpage=1>

Of course, whatever 2016 may have produced was still under the old voting rules. 2015 had seen two major proposals be accepted that would change how the nominations work. If those changes were ratified at the 2016 Business Meeting, then 2017 would be different.

Or would it?

A paper in May 2016 by Jameson Quinn and Bruce Schneier, who had both helped formulate the E Pluribus Hugo (EPH) voting system in 2015 [see earlier chapters], examined 2015 nomination data and measured the hypothetical impact of the reform on the 2015 ballot.

*“The number of slate nominees would have been reduced by 1 in 6 categories, and by 2 in 2 categories, leaving no category without at least one non-slate nominee.”*

A Proportional Voting System for Awards Nominations Resistant to Voting Blocs J. Quinn and B. Schneier  
[https://www.schneier.com/academic/archives/2016/05/a\\_proportional\\_votin.html](https://www.schneier.com/academic/archives/2016/05/a_proportional_votin.html)

A gain of only one non-slated work was less than many people had hoped for EPH, even though the paper demonstrated the overall effectiveness of the scheme. At *File770* a serial discussion into voting rule changes, reminiscent of the 2015 discussion at *Making Light*, looked at numerous proposals including Kevin Standlee’s Three Stage Voting idea (3SV).

With the Sad Puppies largely absent from the fight and with most of the substantive arguments having already played out in 2015, the 2016 award season was less riven with feuding disputes. There was a degree of pressure on some finalists who had been on the Rabid Puppy slate to withdraw, few did. Included in those who had been asked to withdraw was erotic humourist Chuck Tingle whose short story *Space Raptor Butt Invasion* had been slated by Vox Day in an attempt to mock the Hugo Awards. Tingle didn’t withdraw but instead turned his attention to mocking Vox Day and rolling the whole process of being nominated into his bizarre metafictional book titles.

The official Sad Puppies 4 participation in the 2016 Hugo Awards was led by Kate Paulk via the *Mad Genius Club* blog. When the finalists were announced, Paulk celebrated the increase in voting numbers and stated that her main objective was to encourage people to vote.

*“I said when I started this that I didn’t care what won: I wanted to see more participation. Damn near doubling nomination ballots is a good start. Phase 2 for 2016 is a similar level of increase in the actual award ballots, and again, I do not care which of the finalists wins. If hordes of people vote for dino erotica, so be it. If they vote for something else, so be it.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2016/04/28/the-obligatory-post-hugo-finalists-post/>

Through the following months, she set out to write summary posts about the finalists in each category. Overall, Paulk’s summary varied from neutral to negative but insofar as they were negative they were often negative about both slated and non-slated work. When it came to Best Editor Long Form, Paulk found the same problem many voters had with the category.

*“I think I’m going to have to sit out this category. There simply isn’t enough in it that’s caught my attention over the year for me to make a judgment, and I personally refuse to simply say “Oh, X is a good person and they’ve done a lot of good over the years”. That’s not what the award is for.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2016/07/07/hugo-category-highlights-the-finalists-best-editor-short-form-and-long-form/>

This summary included Baen Publisher Toni Weiskopf.

Early August, as the start of the 2016 Worldcon approached, Dragon Con announced the finalists<sup>[10]</sup> for their new award [see chapter 55]. August also saw the unofficial reunion concert by the Evil League of Evil with Brad Torgersen, Larry Correia, John C. Wright, and Vox Day all complaining about a report done by Fireside Fiction which looked at the low proportion of stories published by SF&F magazines by black authors.

*“The field of short science fiction and fantasy — at least U.S. publications, which make up the bulk of the field — is essentially not publishing black writers. This locks them out of this valuable process.”*

Cecily Kane, Introduction to Antiracism in Speculative Fiction Special Report <https://medium.com/fireside-fiction-company/antiracism-in-speculative-fiction-7e30eff97008>

Having spent 2015 complaining about systemic bias in the Hugo Awards against conservatives, Brad Torgersen felt in 2016 that it might be many factors other than racism for Fireside’s findings.

*“So, I have a tough time believing that the supposed dearth of other-than-W authors publishing in the short fic markets, is a matter of prejudice.”*

<https://bradrtorgersen.blog/2016/08/05/addressing-the-problem/>

Larry Correia was blunter, calling the report “defeatist garbage”<sup>[11]</sup> and Vox Day then endorsed Correia’s “fisking” of the report<sup>[12]</sup> with John C. Wright following suit<sup>[13]</sup>.

## **Worldcon 2016**

The 74th Worldcon was held in Kansas City, which famously is in Missouri<sup>[14]</sup>. The convention itself carried the usual mix of panels, events, cosplay masquerades and fans milling around.

The con had its own controversies. *Tangent* editor Dave Truesdale found himself expelled from the convention due to his action at a panel (“The State of Short Fiction”) he was supposed to be moderating. His speech entitled “Science Fiction is not for Snowflakes” led to the panel being disrupted. The expulsion itself led to further debate whether the con organisers had overreacted to Truesdale’s behaviour<sup>[15]</sup>.

Meanwhile, at the business meeting, the key voting reforms of EPH and the “4 and 6” amendment were ratified, ensuring that they would be in place for the 2017 Hugo nominations. “4 and 6” was intended to restrict voters to 4 works per category on their ballot, from which 6 finalists would result. However, to work better in tandem with the EPH voting algorithm, the change was amended to 5 and 6.

New proposals were also considered. The Three-Stage Voting proposal was passed but would require ratification at the 2017 Worldcon (as was normal). Likewise, a stronger form of EPH which would impact slate voting more (entitled EPH+) was also passed but once again would require ratification the following year<sup>[16]</sup>.

## **The Decisive Hugo Awards**

The 2016 Hugo Ceremony featured novelist Pat Cadigan as toastmaster who managed the proceedings with dry humour. The awards themselves adapted to the times. Voters had taken the Spacefaring Kitten option: the Castalia House works lost to “no award” and the various “hostages” were treated on merit on the whole. In the end, only two categories, Best Related Work and Best Fancast, had no winner.

Unsurprisingly for an award based on a popular vote, popular candidates won. Mike Glycer and *File770* won Best Fan Writer and Best Fanzine respectively, in no small part due to the site’s coverage of the 2015 Puppy Kerfuffle. However, the biggest cheer of the evening was for the headline award for the night. The Hugo Award for Best Novel went to N.K. Jemisin’s *The Fifth Season*. The novel had received widespread popular and critical acclaim and the win also marked the first time a Black woman had won the Hugo Award for Best Novel. That Jemisin was also particularly hated by Vox Day [see previous chapters] was an added bonus for many fans.

Jemisin’s win marked a decisive point in the culture war that had been raging in the Hugo Awards. Vox Day’s Rabid Puppies had shown they could impact the nomination stage but their capacity to shape the awards themselves was sharply limited. Meanwhile, Hugo voters were more than capable of adapting to Day’s shifting tactics and despite multiple years of disruption, the Hugo Award for Best Novel had once again managed to pick out a historic winner that pushed the boundaries of what SF&F was as a broad genre, and who the genre was for.

Not be outdone, Vox Day declared victory again:

*“Things went very much according to form, and we have the SF-SJWs exactly where we want them at this point in time. Observe that after only two years, we already have them voting almost entirely in reaction to us, changing and complicating their rules, and awarding SJWs instead of merit in most categories.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170424153244/http://voxdav.blogspot.com.au/2016/08/post-hugo-analysis.html>

In a later post, Vox Day claimed that this was simply the first stage in a much longer campaign.

*“Anyhow, the first stage is now over. The new award has been established and the Hugo rules have been modified and complicated, as anticipated. Now we’re onto the second stage, which will last longer and promises to be more interesting than the first. RPs, be sure to keep your voting/nomination emails from Sasquan and MidAmericaCon, as you may need them next year if you are neither Brainstorm nor VFM.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210808190629/https://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/08/why-worldcon-changed-rules.html>

However, the voting statistics released after the announcement of the winners told a much clearer story about the direction of the Puppy campaigns. At the nomination stage earlier in 2016, Vox Day had received 437 votes for Best Editor Short Form. Those votes would have included Worldcon members from 2015, as well as any new members who had signed up in time for 2016. Yet, in the final voting in the category (which included ONLY 2016 members) Day had received 165 first preference votes. At *Chaos Horizon*, Brandon Kemper summed up what had happened:

*“It’s highly unusual to get 437 votes in the nomination stage and then collapse to 165 in the more popular, more voted in final stage. That 165 represents the most “Rabid” of the Rabid Puppies; some of the other Rabid Puppy picks did considerably better in the first round of voting “Space Raptor Butt Invasion” got 392 votes in the first round of Short Story, for instance. It’s hard to know what exactly to chalk that up to at this point—people enjoying the joke, a broader pool of Rabid Puppy associated voters who didn’t want to vote Vox Day #1 in Long Form Editor.”*

<https://chaoshorizon.wordpress.com/2016/08/20/2016-hugos-some-initial-stat-analysis/>

The voting power of the Rabid Puppies had reduced during 2016. It was harder to tell numerically but it was likely the voting power of the broader (and less disciplined) Sad Puppies had reduced as well. The Sad Puppies 4 campaign had not engendered much enthusiasm except from a small number of self-promoting authors, and without the combative rhetoric of Larry Correia, the campaign had not pulled more Sad Puppies into buying Worldcon memberships.

Of course, that didn’t stop Larry Correia from attempting to have the last word on the issue:

*“Funny. When I started Sad Puppies four years ago, the narrative was all about how the Hugos were a celebration of what was great, representing the best of all of fandom. I said nope, it is decided by cliques, ass kissing, and politics. They called me a liar. Fast forward to now, and at least they are open it is all politics. Hell, they’re celebrating it.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2016/08/22/my-thoughts-on-the-2016-hugos/>

The Hugo Awards had not died but the Hugo Awards were dead to the Puppies. The good news for Correia was that he now had an alternative.

## ***The Dragon Coda***

Atlanta, early September 2016.

It was a much smaller affair than the grand Hugo Award ceremony that had been held in Kansas City a few weeks earlier — one event among many in the bustling pop-culture convention of Dragon Con but still a significant one.

Years after having lost the Campbell/Astounding Award for Best New Writer, and years after his “How to get Correia nominated for a Hugo” blog post, it was trophy time for Larry Correia. The inaugural Dragon Award for Best Fantasy Novel went to *Son of the Black Sword*, book 1 in Correia’s new fantasy epic<sup>[18]</sup>.

Nor was Correia the only former member of the self-styled Evil League of Evil to be offered consolation by the Dragons. For the other headline category of Best Science Fiction Novel, John C. Wright’s *Somewhither: A Tale of the Unwithering Realm* published by Vox Day’s Castalia House won. Beyond the main players in the Puppy conflict, minor players such as Brian Niemeier (a GamerGate supporter and regular commenter at Correia’s blog), won Best Horror novel for his self-published space opera *Souldancer*.

The Dragons offered a parallel vision of science fiction and fantasy. In the novel categories, they were largely male and largely conservative. They were also surprisingly opaque. The administrators of the awards did not publish detailed voting statistics. The nomination process remained vague as to how the final set of nominees were chosen. It was also unclear what measures they had in place to prevent people from voting multiple times.

But in the end, did any of that matter? Larry Correia was happy.

*“I don’t even know what the rules are for prior winners, but I’ll tell you guys right now, since I’ve been lucky enough to get one, I am perfectly happy if you never nominate me for a Dragon again. I’ve been recognized. There are so many awesome writers out there who have been ignored by other awards for years and years, that I would love to see some of them get a shot. Spread the love. Read great books. And then next year, nominate whoever you think was great.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2016/09/05/son-of-the-black-sword-wins-the-1st-annual-dragon-award-for-best-fantasy/>

## **FOOTNOTES**

- [1] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/2016/04/2016-hugo-award-finalists-announced/>
- [2] “organic” here meaning votes not based on slate discipline and estimated on the basis of the number of people who nominated these works but not other works on the slate in the same category

- [3] “Tuesdays With Molakesh the Destroyer” was disqualified because of its publication date and “Goodnight Stars” was withdrawn by its author. Hullender’s analysis can be read here <http://www.rocketstackrank.com/p/2015-hugo-nominations-organic-estimate.html>
- [4] <http://www.rocketstackrank.com/p/2016-hugo-nominations-organic-estimate.html>
- [5] Day’s book was eligible in the Best Related Work category on the grounds that it had a chapter on the Sad Puppy campaigns.
- [6] Number of ballots cast from here <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2016HugoStatistics.pdf> estimate of number of Rabid Puppy votes from Greg Hullender <http://www.rocketstackrank.com/2016/09/reanalysis-of-slate-voting-in-2016-hugo.html> Brandon Kemper at *Chaos Horizon* arrived at a figure of 440 Rabid Puppy nominators <https://chaoshorizon.wordpress.com/2016/08/20/2016-hugos-some-initial-stat-analysis/> and Aaron Pound made a similar estimate <http://dreamingaboutotherworlds.blogspot.com/2016/09/random-thought-2016-what-could-have.html>
- [7] <http://file770.com/thomas-a-mays-withdraws-his-hugo-nominated-story/>
- [8] the analysis in the quoted post makes no attempt to distinguish the “hostages” or account for the SP4 list including works suggested by Puppy critics, and hence led to a pessimistic conclusion.
- [9] <http://file770.com/three-possible-hugo-voting-alternatives/>
- [10] <https://www.dragoncon.org/mediarelations/2016/08/12/vote-for-the-dragon-con-awards/#more-1940>
- [11] <http://monsterhunternation.com/2016/08/08/fisking-the-latest-diversity-in-sci-fi-freak-out/>
- [12] <https://web.archive.org/web/20170423202913/https://voxday.blogspot.com.au/2016/08/larry-correia-fisks-latest-sf-sjw-drama.html>
- [13] <http://www.scifiwright.com/2016/08/larry/>
- [14] except when it isn’t
- [15] Various accounts. Jim C. Hines <https://www.jimchines.com/2016/08/worldcon-expels-truesdale/> Jeb Kinnison <https://substratewars.com/2016/08/24/worldcon2016-the-dave-truesdale-affair/> Death is Bad blog (which has the recording) <https://deathisbadblog.com/truesdales-worldcon-panel-recording/> and Truesdale himself <https://web.archive.org/web/20160823065053/https://tangentonline.com/articles-columnsmenu-284/3227-2016-worldcon-panel-on-the-qstate-of-short-science-fiction/>
- [16] <http://www.wsfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2016-WSFS-Minutes-Final.pdf>
- [17] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/2016-hugo-awards/>
- [18] <http://file770.com/first-dragon-awards-presented/>

## 59: Meanwhile...Trump, Puppies and Pizza

*“You ignorant low information bastards. Motivated by fear and anger, you overlooked every gain made over the last few cycles, and traded it in to a lying huckster democrat for some magic beans. So you could stick it to the establishment, by electing the shit bird who funded them.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2016/05/04/on-the-election/>

May 2016: what had been a long list of potential Republican candidates for US President had slowly whittled its way down to three. Senator Ted Cruz and Governor John Kasich suspended their campaigns on May 3, after the leading candidate Donald Trump had secured an unassailable lead in delegates for the convention<sup>[1]</sup>. That Trump had even lasted the first few months of the long race for the nomination had surprised people. That Trump had actually beaten all the other candidates was mystifying. Of the many factions and flavours of Republicans, Trump appeared to be a poor fit for most of them. He was neither a neoconservative nor a libertarian nor particularly religious. His positions on key issues such as gun rights or abortion had been inconsistent over the years, as had his party allegiance. Whichever way you sliced the Republican Party, it appeared to have a natural anti-Trump majority.

But that’s not how elections work. Trump had built up a reputation as a fighter and had attracted a base of support by maintaining his quixotic “Birther” campaign alleging issues with President Barack Obama’s birth certificate for years. For many Republicans, Trump was not offering to be the perfect compromise candidate for the party but rather a champion in a culture war against the Democrats and the left. That base of support kept Trump in the race while other candidates dropped, out leaving him facing the uninspiring Cruz and the too-moderate-to-win Kasich. Trump’s capacity to generate publicity for himself had kept him in the news and his unapologetic approach to bad news coverage had earned him even more support.

The outcome dismayed Larry Correia, who was deeply suspicious of the New York businessman, but most of all Correia had no faith that Trump could beat the likely Democratic Party candidate, Hillary Clinton.

*“So the classless boor probably loses to the sea hag. Not that it matters too much, since they’d both govern as authoritarian democrats, only one has more nationalist rah rah thrown in. Spare me the nonsense about lesser evils and SCOTUS judges. He won’t make it that far. And by some miracle, like Hillary has a stroke, this rambling ignoramus wins, he would still screw that up somehow in his one term. Big question is does he suck enough to take the GOP with him? And if you think he is going to actually build a wall, you are a sucker.”*

ibid

It was unusual for Correia to launch into his famous debating style against fellow conservatives but Trump appeared to be an electoral and political disaster for the right. In a later post, Correia would describe the situation:

*“Trump is a bridge too far. We’ve had moderates and RINOs and held our nose and voted for them. But this isn’t a moderate or a RINO. This is an amoral statist authoritarian liberal, who got to where he was by being a huckster con appealing to anger and fear. He is a self inflicted gunshot wound to the head. He is an insult to the founders, a disgrace to our people, and in the unlikely event he wins, will probably go down in history as the man who ended any hope of small government or individual liberty in America. I won’t have that stain on my soul.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2016/05/06/the-endless-facebook-trump-whaa-post/><sup>[2]</sup>

However, by this point, many Republicans had come round to the idea (in some cases reluctantly) of President Trump. That shift of opinion was visible among notable figures associated with the 2015 Sad Puppy campaign.

As early as February 2016, author John C. Wright had decided to shift his allegiance to Trump. Spurred on by his editor<sup>[3]</sup> Wright framed the election as an apocalyptic struggle between the “beast” of Federal Government and the forces of good. To that end, he argued that Ted Cruz might appear to be the best choice because of Cruz’s support of “basic Reaganesque principles”. However, for Wright, this would be an error because for him this was a culture war, not a policy discussion. To win, Wright believed that a different target had to be beaten first.

*“I say the main enemy is the Press. Destroy the Press, and the federal government can be driven back into its proper constitutional limitations. With the Press at large acting as the False Prophet for the Beast, it cannot be driven back, because the people are deceived into thinking the Beast will not consume their lives.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160226035534/http://www.everyjoe.com/2016/02/22/politics/election-2016-real-and-delusional-america/#1>

Citing the dangers of “political correctness”, Wright saw Trump as being uniquely capable of defeating the perceived evil of mass media. However, whatever doubts Wright had about Trump were more aesthetical than ideological<sup>[4]</sup>. In September, Wright found himself dissatisfied with Trump’s performance in the Presidential debates saying that:

*“everything Trump said was correct, but how he said it seemed undignified and unbecoming of someone running for high office”*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2016/09/first-presidential-debate/>

Wright is hard to describe as being typical, and his views at the best of times run eccentric, but he was far from the only Puppy supporter shifting towards Trump.

Peter Grant, who had been the most vocal advocate for a boycott of Tor Books in 2015, also found himself holding his nose when considering the voting options. Describing both Trump and Clinton as “deeply flawed” candidates, Grant asserted that Trump was preferable.

*“Who is the ‘lesser evil’ among the candidates? To my mind, that has to be Donald Trump. I find that thought deeply distasteful in many ways. Don’t forget, I’m a retired pastor, and I assess candidates from that moral and ethical perspective. He doesn’t check many of my ‘positive’ boxes, and checks far too many of my ‘negative’ ones . . . but he checks more of the former, and less of the latter, than Hillary Clinton. He’s also made some campaign promises that I would like to see implemented, even though I’m not sure of his sincerity or their practicality. On those grounds, and with great moral reluctance, I see no-one else to support in the present election. That’s a very sad commentary on the state of US politics today.”*

<https://bayourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2016/10/trumps-sexist-clintons-corrupt-so-what.html>

Sarah A. Hoyt’s journey towards Trump took a lot longer. At the start of the year, she had been so opposed to Trump that she found herself in a back-and-forth blog argument with Vox Day [see chapter 54]. However, as the election drew closer, her deep dislike of Hillary Clinton tipped the scales.

*“Having decided I needed to vote against Hillary: no, it’s not her corruption. (What? You think it wasn’t there, before? Or that I was so stupid as not to know it? Or that the Clinton’s long time friend and crony, Donald Trump, doesn’t have some of that on him? Probably a lot of that on him.) It’s the press. The moment the sluice gates opened. The moment it became obvious that she has, at the very least, committed serious security breaches, if not sold our secrets to the highest bidder, the press started a drumbeat of “Donald Trump’s tax returns for 1990 MIGHT have used a shady dodge to avoid taxes.”*

*Oh, yes, yes, that is comparable to the festering mess of corruption and horror that is the Clinton foundation, or the Pay for Play schemes Hillary ran as secretary of state, or—*

*It was that, the chorus of coordinated deflection, the drumbeat of covering up for a woman who, frankly, has nothing to recommend her, that pushed me over.*

*I’m going to vote against Hillary Clinton in the only effective way I can.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2016/11/02/last-night-i-dreamed-again/>

A vulgar champion in a culture war, the lesser of two evils or a token candidate to serve as a protest vote against Clinton — the former Sad Puppies offered different rationalisations for siding with Trump. Some of those rationalisations were not dissimilar to the unhappy alliance they had made with Vox Day over the preceding years: an acknowledgement of the difference between their views and his but also that siding with a metaphorical devil<sup>[5]</sup> can be worthwhile to gain an effective ally against the left.

However, with Trump, neither Larry Correia nor Brad Torgersen took the final step towards Trump that they had towards Day. Nor was this wholly unusual for right-leaning people in Utah. Scepticism towards the

overtly immoral and vulgar Trump was high among Mormons, much higher than among other socially conservative Christian denominations. At one point in October 2016, third-party anti-Trump libertarian Evan McMullin topped the opinion polls in Utah<sup>[6]</sup>. The possible loss of Utah as a safe Republican state had the potential to make it impossible for Trump to win sufficient electoral college votes to win the Presidency<sup>[7]</sup>. Brad Torgersen even began to wonder if Trump's candidacy was not what it appeared to be.

*"I'm just going to put it: when Trump loses (and he is going to lose, mark my word) it won't be the fault of anyone but the Republican establishment, and then Trump himself. I understand fully that Trump voters detest Hillary. I agree. She's a miserable option for POTUS. But when the Republicans allowed the Trump candidacy to go forward, they sacrificed any chance of beating Hillary. Because Trump was the perfect (for Hillary) combination of pomposity and buffoonery necessary to alienate undecideds and rally the Blue Dogs to Hillary's cause. People want an outsider to go into D.C. and take scalps. I get it. I get it that Trump voters want the casino table turned over. They want the D.C. establishment smashed. But Trump was and is the worst kind of tool for the job. In fact, one could argue the Trump candidacy has made tools of us all, by gifting Hillary with a more or less smooth path to the White House. In this role, Trump has been practically perfect. Almost like it was planned that way."*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/1598825483477012>

Torgersen was hardly alone in believing Trump was going to lose, as the New York businessman kept stumbling from one outrage to another<sup>[8]</sup>.

Vox Day, on the other hand was confident that Trump would win, and also dismissive of Mormons in general as a set of voters.

*"The ironic thing is that Mormons may be the only portion of the electorate dumb enough to collectively a) reject racial identity politics while simultaneously b) practicing aggressive religious identity politics.*

*You can get offended by my observation if you like, but you can hardly deny it. Taken as a political demographic, Mormons won't vote for white American interests, but they'll vote for a Mormon every single time."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119091621/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/10/gosh-lot-of-people-would-like-to-kick.html>

In the comment section of his blog, anti-Mormon sentiment became more overt with references to the infamous 1838 Missouri Mormon Extermination Order<sup>[9]</sup> and the use of anti-Semitic tropes reapplied to Mormons.

### ***The Road to Pizzagate***

If Trump's campaign in October 2016 looked troubled, Vox Day remained bullish. Day had little to lose by predicting a Trump victory: if Trump subsequently lost the outcome could be attributed to electoral fraud or sinister Clinton shenanigans. With increased media attention towards the Alt-Right, Day's status as a figure on the right was growing, although he remained a relatively minor figure.

Day's past connection with the so-called "manosphere" of online misogyny and with GamerGate had brought him into contact with a number of sympathetic allies. In particular, Milo Yiannopoulos of *Breitbart*, YouTube self-help guru Stefan Molyneaux and self-proclaimed independent journalist Mike Cernovich.

Cernovich had segued his previous online presence as a self-help guru peddling macho sex advice and health food supplements to political commentary on the presidential election framed as "journalism". A 2016 profile of Cernovich exemplifies how the election had helped raise his profile. The *New Yorker* described Cernovich's background as:

*"Cernovich trained as a lawyer. In 2003, he was accused of raping a woman he knew; the charge was later dropped, but a judge ordered him to do community service for misdemeanor battery. (His record has since been expunged.) On his first blog, which he started in 2004, he offered a libertarian critique of prosecutorial overreach, emphasizing free speech and false rape allegations. He launched his current blog, *Danger and Play*, in 2011, after his first wife filed for divorce."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20161024063552/https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/31/trolls-for-trump>

Cernovich had used his social media presence to build up concerns about Hillary Clinton's health. These concerns largely lacked factual substance but were focused on picking on small details to present Clinton as weak or in declining health — but when Clinton had a genuine fainting spell in September 2016, Cernovich gained a great deal of attention.



*“On September 11th, Clinton fainted after attending a memorial service at Ground Zero. Cernovich wrote a post called “Complete Timeline of Hillary’s Health #HillarysHealth,” which included such data points as “peculiar travel habits” and “lengthy naps.” It got two hundred and forty thousand page views—less than a marquee Huffington Post story, but impressive for a blog with no advertising budget. More important, #HillarysHealth became a national trending topic on Twitter. That day, Chris Cillizza, a centrist pundit at the Washington Post, wrote an article titled “Hillary Clinton’s Health Just Became a Real Issue in This Campaign.” Scott Greer, a deputy editor of the Daily Caller, tweeted, “Cernovich memed #SickHillary into reality. Never doubt the power of memes.””*

ibid

Day helped promote Cernovich’s campaign to his audience as well as promoting Trump as strong and healthy up to absurdly comic proportions. The mutual alliance between Day and Cernovich was further cemented by Day’s publisher, Castalia House, releasing a new book by Cernovich for the election.

Entitled *MAGA Mindset: Making YOU and America Great Again*, the book was emblazoned on the cover with a drawing of a beatific Donald Trump smiling over the image of a phoenix blazing up over an image of the USA. The short book cited four factors that Cernovich regarded as central to Trump’s success:

- “First, Trump is a nationalist, so he puts America and American citizens first.”
- “Second, Trump has rejected the concept of white guilt.”
- “Third, Trump is unapologetically masculine.”
- “Fourth, and finally, Trump has attacked political correctness and the thought police culture.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Cernovich’s book went on to mix advocacy for Trump’s anti-globalist nationalism with standard affirmation-style self-help advice. Overtly linking the two aspects of the book, Cernovich described Trump’s connection to the self-help approach.

*“As one of the world’s few experts on mindset, I recognized Trump’s behavior during the Republican primaries was not random, as many pundits had erroneously claimed, but in fact was based on a deep background in mindset. Later evidence confirmed that this was the case, as during a campaign speech in Iowa, Trump mentioned that he had studied under, and attended church with, Norman Vincent Peale, the ground-breaking author of *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Trump’s mindset training began at an early age, as he grew up in the Presbyterian Church during the positive thinking movement led by Peale. In a speech during the Iowa primary campaign, Trump told the audience: “I went to Sunday school. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, was my pastor. To this day one of the great speakers I’ve seen. You hated to leave church. You hated when the sermon was over. That’s how great he was at Marble Collegiate Church.”*

From Part 3 of Cernovich, Mike. *MAGA Mindset: Making YOU and America Great Again*. Castalia House. <sup>[11]</sup>

In October 2016, two different email-themed news stories connected to Hillary Clinton grabbed the attention of the media. The first was the publication by the website Wikileaks of a dump of hacked emails from the Democratic Party National Committee (DNC) and from the personal email account of John Podesta, the chair of Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign<sup>[12]</sup>. The second was an announcement by FBI Director James Comey to Congress that his agency was investigating a set of emails from Clinton discovered in a separate investigation<sup>[13]</sup>. While critics of Clinton expected both of these sources to reveal substantially discrediting facts about Clinton, neither did. However, the close proximity of the announcements to the election date arguably caused substantial harm to the Clinton campaign by creating a smokescreen of scandal.

Right-wing rumours and conspiracy theories about Bill and Hillary Clinton were at least as old as the World Wide Web itself. The Wikileaks release of emails from somebody so closely connected to Clinton would have been exciting for the online right at any time. Coming as they did in the closing weeks of a Presidential election in which many people expected Clinton to win, the email release must have been viscerally exciting.

However, the Podesta emails did not contain much in the way of major scandals or complex conspiracies<sup>[14]</sup>. Without much actual substance, the search began in alt-right spaces (such as 4chan, 8chan, and parts of Reddit) to seek out hidden meanings behind the many mundane emails. Connecting rumours about how online paedophiles might clandestinely communicate, the alt-right amateur detectives seized upon references to “pizza” and a specific email from Podesta’s brother about a “spirit cooking dinner” run by a performance artist. From these slim connections, an increasingly elaborate web of speculation began to grow with claims of a secret satanic sexual abuse conspiracy operating in Washington DC.

Mike Cernovich and Vox Day were eager to involve themselves in the confabulation. Cernovich in particular used Twitter to amplify the wild speculation that was emerging from more fringe parts of the internet. Cernovich would claim that his past experience as a lawyer allowed him to discern that many of the emails were using secret code words in a similar style as those used by drug dealers. A reference to a hotdog stand was, Cernovich alleged, a code phrase. A set of emails about a handkerchief was also a code!

*“Mike Cernovich@Cernovich*

*“I think it has a map that seems pizza-related.”*

*This is code. I know this from representing drug dealers.”*

Mike Cernovich on Twitter quoted by Vox Day 03/11/2016

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170119091347/https://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/11/clinton-sex-trafficking-code.html>

Cernovich alleged that collectively the “codes” revealed that Clinton had been running a sex trafficking ring.

On November 4, Donald Trump’s son Donald Trump Jr. actively promoted the conspiracy theory by tweeting a link to a YouTube video in which Stefan Molyneaux, Mike Cernovich and Vox Day discussed what they called the “Spirit Cooking Scandal”.

*“Donald Trump Jr. promoted an “alt-right” video on his Twitter account that suggests Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton’s campaign is engaged in satanism and her aides are trying to “kidnap your children, make them disappear, sell them into all kinds of things.” The video features “alt-right” bloggers Vox Day, who claims blacks are inferior to whites, and Mike Cernovich, a rape apologist.”*

<https://www.mediamatters.org/donald-trump/donald-trump-jr-promotes-alt-right-video-claiming-clinton-camp-has-satanists-who-want>

The conspiracy theory blended elements of 1980s “satanic panic”<sup>[15]</sup> and the anti-Semitic “blood libel”<sup>[16]</sup> with the tactics and networks of the alt-right and the remnants of GamerGate. For Vox Day, it was a continuation of the same misuse of concerns about child abuse to defame opponents that he had been using within science fiction communities.

November 8 saw the surprise win of Donald Trump as US President and yet this did not lead to a lessening of the online activity which had now been named “Pizzagate”. At the centre of the fiction, a real Washington restaurant, Comet Ping-Pong, was finding itself in an internet storm as even more lurid allegations were cooked up on the Chans and then amplified by social media accounts, blogs, and alt-right personalities such as Cernovich, Jack Posobiec, and Day. In addition, figures associated with Trump such as his son, or the son of Trump advisor General Michael Flynn, also helped promote the lurid fantasy.

Pizzagate would reach its maximum media coverage in early December 2016 when a man armed with an AR-15 and a handgun entered the restaurant believing he was on a mission to rescue stolen children hidden in a basement<sup>[17]</sup>.

## ***A new era***

With a majority of electoral college votes but a minority of actual votes, Donald Trump had won the election. Close to Trump were figures such as *Breitbart* editor Steve Bannon with direct connections to the alt-right. The culture war had not merely escalated in 2016 but had spread beyond the spaces of popular culture and into the national politics of the world’s most powerful country.

On the last day of 2016 at Sarah A. Hoyt’s blog, one of her followers summed up events:

*“How messed up was 2016? Let’s put it this way: Chuck Tingle getting a Hugo nomination*

*doesn’t even make the Top Ten of Crazy.”*

Christopher M. Chupik <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2016/12/31/year-of-the-black-swan-by-christopher-m-chupik/>

## **FOOTNOTES**

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016\\_United\\_States\\_presidential\\_election#Republican\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_United_States_presidential_election#Republican_Party)
- [2] “RINO” is a dismissive term for more moderate Republican figures that stands for “Republican In Name Only”

- [3] I assume he means Vox Day. “Despite how early in the election cycle it is (I usually start thinking about whom to support in late October) my editor asked me to endorse one candidate or another, so I held my nose and picked one. One candidate, I mean, not one nose.” <http://www.scifiwright.com/2016/02/john-c-wright-endorses-the-devil/>
- [4] The day after he endorsed Trump on his blog, Wright was arguing for the repeal of the 19th Amendment that established voting rights to women in the USA. Even Trump didn’t argue for that. <https://www.scifiwright.com/2016/02/repeal-the-19th-amendment/>
- [5] Wright’s analogy for Trump (footnote 3) and also a past analogy used by Larry Correia for Day “I nominated Vox Day because Satan didn’t have any eligible works that period.” <https://monsterhunternation.com/2015/04/14/george-r-r-martin-responds/>
- [6] <https://www.ksl.com/article/41911133>
- [7] I’m not going to explain the electoral college here
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald\\_Trump\\_Access\\_Hollywood\\_tape](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Trump_Access_Hollywood_tape)
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormon\\_Extermination\\_Order](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mormon_Extermination_Order)
- [10] selected quotes from Part 1 of Cernovich, Mike. MAGA Mindset: Making YOU and America Great Again . Castalia House. .
- [11] for previous discussion on these connections see my older posts on Jordan Peterson <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2018/03/11/reading-peterson-12-the-end-of-peterson-the-last-lobster/>
- [12] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podesta\\_emails](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podesta_emails)
- [13] <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/10/30/politics/clinton-emails-fbi-abedin/index.html>
- [14] access to debate questions was arguably the most damaging claim picked up by mainstream media [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podesta\\_emails#Presidential\\_debate\\_questions\\_shared\\_by\\_Donna\\_Brazile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podesta_emails#Presidential_debate_questions_shared_by_Donna_Brazile)
- [15] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satanic\\_ritual\\_abuse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satanic_ritual_abuse)
- [16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood\\_libel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood_libel)
- [17] not only did the stolen children not exist but neither did the basement

## 60: Dramatis Personae — The Next Generation

As a route to popular mainstream success in publishing science fiction, the controversy generated by the Puppy campaigns was not a winning strategy. Even on the side opposed to the Puppy campaigns, the main beneficiaries of increased traffic were blogs and fanzines. While opposing the Puppy campaigns didn't hurt people's writing careers it did not, on the whole, boost them. Alexandria Erin's astute parodies and observations of the Puppies had given her a social media audience which grew further as she segued those skills into political commentary in the wake of Donald Trump's election<sup>[1]</sup>.

On the pro-Puppy side, there was no obvious damage to Larry Correia's publishing success but he had already found his audience and a sympathetic publisher. Other Puppies such as Sarah A. Hoyt, Kate Paulk, and Dave Freer were already disgruntled with traditional publishing and by 2015 had increasingly seen hope in publishing eBooks independently through the vast markets created by eBook readers.

From a purely commercial standpoint, the apparent winner of the drawn-out Puppy conflict was erotic author Chuck Tingle. Already something of a phenomenon, his inclusion in the Rabid Puppy slate and then his subsequent subversion of that by counter-trolling Vox Day, had led to further media coverage and interest in his bizarre social media presence<sup>[2]</sup>. Tingle had also involved himself in the US Presidential campaign in 2016, with his own website alleging Trump was communing with an alternative horror dimension Tingle calls the void<sup>[3]</sup>. There Tingle also promoted a new line of his "Tingler" eBooks about a closely-related character called Domald Tromp which featured Tingle's style of titles that mix contemporary news topics with sexual situations e.g., *Domald Tromp's Ass is Haunted by the Handsome Ghost of his Incriminating Tax Returns*.

Tingle's success rested on his genuine talent and creativity but it also illustrated an issue with the publishing space in which he had prospered. Tingle's books were all self-published online and his initial books were quasi-parodies of the multitudinous forms of erotica available on eBooks. The vast number of books available online created niche audiences eager to consume more content but also made it difficult for authors to make a name for themselves and stand out from the crowd.

Larry Correia had built his own successful writing career by first marketing to a sympathetic audience in online pro-gun communities. His aggressive debate style and unapologetic politics had done him little harm commercially because his approach played well with his audience and the content of his books. Alienating science fiction fans of more liberal politics was not undermining his own career as it bolstered loyalty among his established fans and brought in more readers sympathetic to his political views. Correia also actively promoted other writers by organising so-called "book bombs" which encouraged readers to buy a specific book within a short time period to boost the book's ratings online. In a crowded eBook world, profile, patronage and politics could all serve to make an aspiring author just that little bit more noticed.

Recent chapters of this project looked at how two supporters of the 2015 Puppy campaigns promoted their works through the events of 2016. Declan Finn and Brian Niemeier had each featured in the list generated by the Sad Puppies 4 book recommendation lists. For Niemeier, this had translated into being included in Vox Day's 2016 Rabid Puppies slate for the Hugo Awards and for both Niemeier and Finn, this added profile had led to them being finalists for the 2016 Dragon Awards. Niemeier went on to win the Best Horror category in the Dragon Awards for his space opera after Vox Day recommended it in his final voting list for the 2016 Dragons<sup>[4]</sup>.

Of Day's picks of 2016 Dragon Award finalists, six of the seven novels went on to win that year. Whether that was just smart choices on Day's part or the voting power of his followers is an open question. Yet both he and Correia had demonstrated that their patronage could draw attention to books by new authors. Additionally, attaching a culture-war narrative to the publishing of a book was now a demonstrated way of drawing attention and support from right-wing online communities.

In February of 2016 former soldier, actor and writer Nick Cole<sup>[5]</sup> announced that he had been "banned by the publisher". Cole had already published a few books with Harper Collins including a trilogy of post-apocalyptic books and a novel, *Soda Pop Soldier*, in which gamers fight a virtual reality war for corporations<sup>[6]</sup>. It was the sequel (or rather prequel) to *Soda Pop Soldier* that led to the dispute. Cole had planned for the story to feature a *Terminator*-style AI rebellion and for motivation, he had decided that the AI at the source of the rebellion would deduce that humanity would kill it after watching a reality TV show in which a character has an abortion.

*"The Thinking Machines realize that one, if humanity decides something is a threat to its operational expectations within runtime (Thinking Machine-speak for "life") then humanity's decision tree will lead*

*humanity to destroy that threat. Two, the machines, after a survey of humanity's history, wars, and inability to culturally unite with even members of its own species, realize that humanity will see this new Life Form, Digital Intelligence or the Thinking Machines, as a threat. And three, again they remind themselves this is the most watched show in the world. And four, they must abort humanity before likewise is done to them after being deemed 'inconvenient.'*"

<https://nickcolebooks.com/the-ctrl-alt-revolt-controversy/>

Cole's editor (according to Cole) took issue with this aspect of the novel and Cole refused to change it and in a blog post (a version of which is quoted above) gave his reasons. Believing that he's destroyed his chance of publishing the book, Cole later stated that something "wonderful" then happened.

*"I took a friend of mine to get a hot dog and told him what had befallen me. This friend was a member of a secret writer group made up of many different types of people who were tired of the Tastemakers choosing who they thought was acceptable. Choosing who would get to go forward in publishing and "play for the major leagues." As it were. The people in this wild conspiracy group I was being introduced to felt that writers should advance in their careers based on merit. Not race, gender, or being a particularly vociferous advocate of the Weather Cultist Religion. Men, women, left, right. Gay, straight. They were there. And one of them, one of those writers had long been decrying the blatant left-wing bias in Big Publishing, pointing out how they had hurt him, and others, by bullying, marginalizing, and constant vicious personal attacks that often verged into the incredulous merely because they dissented philosophically regarding politics or religion. They called this writer crazy and said, and believe me this seemed audacious then given the current no-holds-barred take-no-prisoners-live-fire status on the culture war of the present, that there was no such thing as a "Left Wing Bias" in publishing. They actually said that like it was the truth. Said it with a straight face, in fact. Can you believe that? No. No one does."*

ibid

The surprise twist is the writer Cole is discussing is, of course, Larry Correia. Cole's blog post became widely shared and Correia featured Cole's situation on his own blog, stating:

*"Here is the beautiful part... For decades the left held all the power. Readers are sick of their shit. The fact that standing up to them can actually be a sales boost demonstrates that their power is waning. You know why I talk about the size of my royalty checks? Because nothing pisses the bullies off more than being successful despite their best efforts to trash you."*

<https://monsterhunting.com/2016/02/10/left-wing-bias-in-publishing-your-wrongthink-will-be-punished/>

Vox Day also promoted Cole's account, stating:

*"Both Sarah A. Hoyt and I have previously written about the ideological gatekeepers in publishing, a situation that has persisted for at least 20 years and has continually gotten worse over time. The SJWs in science fiction deny it, of course, and they've been able to get away with doing so because most authors are afraid to talk for fear of their careers being destroyed. But the ability to publish independently is eliminating that fear:"*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20181206052300/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2016/02/the-sf-gatekeepers-strike-again.html>

Day would later in the year republish Cole's novel (*Ctrl Alt Revolt*) via Castalia House and promoted it for the Dragon Awards where it won the Best Apocalyptic Novel category. Cole would go on to develop a successful series of military science fiction novels published under his own independent label.

As Correia had explained and as Day had attempted to implement with Castalia House, successfully publishing books and boosting sales with culture war rhetoric was a win-win. Fight the SJWs and make money!

Was this a template that could be replicated and what were the parameters for success?

Jon Del Arroz was a Californian fan who had enjoyed some success with a superhero webcomic called *Flying Sparks*. In 2016 he'd moved into writing novels with a tie-in book to a spaceship-themed card game *Star Realms*<sup>[7]</sup>. Del Arroz's book had received favourable plugs from its editor Jennifer Brozek<sup>[8]</sup> but was also featured on Mary Robinette Kowal's blog<sup>[9]</sup>. At the time, Del Arroz's bio read:

*"Jon Del Arroz began his writing career in high school, providing book reviews and the occasional article for the local news magazine, The Valley Citizen. From there, he went on to write a weekly*

*webcomic, Flying Sparks, which has been hailed by Comic Book Resources as ‘the kind of stuff that made me fall in love with early Marvel comics.’ He has several published short stories, most recently providing flash fiction for AEG’s weird west card game, Doomtown: Reloaded, and a micro-setting for the Tiny Frontiers RPG. Star Realms: Rescue Run is his debut novel.”*

<https://marvrobinettekowal.com/journal/favorite-bit-jon-del-arroz-talks-star-realms-rescue-run/>

But Jon Del Arroz was more than a fan and a writer: he was also a self-described “veteran of the Great Meme War Of 2016, Kekistani Citizen and #PepLivesMatter activist”<sup>[10]</sup>, experienced with the ways of 4chan<sup>[11]</sup> and a supporter of Donald Trump. Del Arroz had also previously had political ambitions, having made a brief run to be a Republican Party candidate for Congress in 2009.

However, on his public-facing blog, he avoided political controversy through the tumults of 2016. That approach changed in January 2017. Later, in court documents, Del Arroz would state that he received substantial hostility because of his support for Donald Trump,<sup>[13]</sup> both from strangers and from people he knew in his fan and author communities.

Del Arroz had been a participant in his local convention BayCon for several years, but early in 2017, he learned that he was not being invited as a speaker for the 2017 event due to a shift in policy at the con. He reacted by claiming that he was being ostracised because of his politics.

*“This was a wanton act of discrimination, and perhaps more importantly, a show of utter disinterest in promoting prominent local science fiction authors. With a supposed emphasis on diversity, this act done to a Hispanic author casts an even darker shadow. It’s about as disturbing as it gets to see folk that you considered friends for years treat you with that level of disregard, while in the same stripe ignoring attendees who deliver me death threats.*

*Most shockingly, the event organizers (of whom I know very well and very personally) in question did not respond personally, but delivered a form letter to explain the ostracization. It’s disingenuous and displays a dismissal and dehumanization of which I could hardly conceive.”*

<https://delarroz.com/2017/02/09/bringing-home-the-baycon-or-what-i-learned-from-being-blackballed/>

The convention organisers explained that was not the case but rather it was a natural consequence of the convention trying to include more speakers and that Del Arroz had already been pre-invited for 2018 as a speaker.

*“There never has, nor ever will be any decisions made to invite or not invite guests based on their political beliefs or personal philosophies. Every decision we make in regards to who participates in our con as a guest always takes into consideration our theme and focus for the year. Each decision is made professionally, communicated professionally, and always comes down to a group decision by executive and programming staff.”*

BayCon statement quoted at <http://file770.com/jon-del-arroz-off-baycon-2017-program-claims-decision-is-politically-motivated/>

Del Arroz’s framing of not being included in a convention’s programming as being “blackballed” and discriminated against for his politics was elevated as a cause célèbre among the network of right-wing authors including Nick Cole, Brian Niemeier, Declan Finn and, of course, Vox Day. Thus began what court documents would later allege was:

*“a marketing strategy that involves pitting himself against other professionals in the science fiction industry in order to increase his visibility in the media and on social media sites.”*

Memorandum: Points and Authorities San Francisco Science Fiction Conventions, Inc. SFSFC, 18CV334547 Jonathan Del Arroz vs San Francisco Conventions, Inc. et al 2/19/2021 retrieved from <https://portal.scscourt.org/case/MTk2MTAwMA==>

As well as the immediate dispute with people connected to BayCon, in early February 2017, Del Arroz was in dispute with Baen author Sharon Lee who ended up having to ban him from her Facebook wall<sup>[14]</sup>. On his blog Del Arroz stated

*“My interactions with Sarah A. Hoyt and Larry Correia have been far different than with leftist author Sharon Lee as an example. The first two hardly know me at all, but have promoted my book, been encouraging to me and others, been stellar people all the way around. The truth is the exact opposite of what’s whispered (and sometimes shouted) about them at sci-fi convention halls. By contrast, I’d been a staunch fan of Ms. Lee for years, have all of her and her husband’s work including self-printed*

*chapbooks. They know me, and don't like me first because I'm openly Christian (another story), which bothers them for whatever reason. Even though my novel contained a lot of homage to them, and probably would appeal heavily to their fans, they wouldn't lift a finger in that regard. When the going got tough with politics, Ms. Lee turned her social media into a hate fest. She called me names and blocked me instead of standing by me. That's the difference between the two sides at this juncture. As Vox Day said, SJWs have no loyalty, and despite Dario's call for civility, one has to remember that truth."*

<https://delarroz.com/2017/02/16/friendship-in-the-time-of-sjws/>

Del Arroz's objections to Lee would continue into 2017. On a new alt-right sympathetic social media platform Gab, Del Arroz called for people on the site to help him troll Lee.

*"If anyone is a fan of Sharon Lee — super SJW author who hates me, getting ready to troll her by tagging on twitter/Facebook with these. Would love some help. Even if not a fan, can still tag"*

Jon Del Arroz on Gab (@otomo) quoted in a comment at his blog <https://delarroz.com/2017/07/21/more-sci-fi-fake-news-dishonesty/#comment-983>

Sharon Lee was just the start of a series of social media conflicts from Arroz during 2017, with unwanted social media harassment towards people such as fan writers Shaun Duke and Paul Weimer, SFWA President Cat Rambo, Setsu Uzume, and the Codex Writers forum among others<sup>[15]</sup>.

The ensuing disputes brought Del Arroz both conflict and publicity, but also status among the broader cloud of right-wing writers and fans associated with the past Puppy campaigns. Del Arroz's opinions and works would be further amplified by Vox Day, whose blog and status as a significant alt-right figure was gaining him even further attention as the first year of Donald Trump's Presidency raised the political temperature.

We will be meeting Jon Del Arroz again as we follow the events of 2017 within science fiction conventions and awards, but also beyond when the alt-right looks for new fronts in the culture wars.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://www.patreon.com/AlexandraErin>
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuck\\_Tingle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuck_Tingle)
- [3] <https://www.trumpdebatefacts.com/> and also the parody Trump Whitehouse restaurant <https://www.maganiightatthewhitehouse.com/>
- [4] <https://web.archive.org/web/20170119085442/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2016/08/the-dragon-awards.html>
- [5] <https://nickcolebooks.com/about-me/>
- [6] <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/pe.cgi?35196>
- [7] <https://www.starrealms.com/>
- [8] <https://jennifer-brozek.livejournal.com/258083.html>
- [9] <https://maryrobinettekowal.com/journal/favorite-bit-jon-del-arroz-talks-star-realms-rescue-run/>
- [10] <https://delarroz.com/2017/02/11/the-art-of-the-troll/> and more on the meme war of 2016 here <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/memes-4Chan-trump-supporters-trolls-internet-214856/>
- [11] <https://delarroz.com/2017/01/13/what-you-like-is-literally-hitler/>
- [12] [https://web.archive.org/web/20190225113759/https://www.lodinews.com/news/article\\_8c99bbaa-a998-5534-968f-47e3f314ce23.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20190225113759/https://www.lodinews.com/news/article_8c99bbaa-a998-5534-968f-47e3f314ce23.html)
- [13] Del Arroz Declaration 2/7/2019 18CV334547 Jonathan Del Arroz vs San Francisco Conventions, Inc. et al retrieved from <https://portal.scscourt.org/case/MTk2MTAwMA==>
- [14] <https://delarroz.com/2017/02/03/the-trolling-accusation/>
- [15] <https://www.jimchines.com/2018/01/jon-del-arroz/>

## 61: The Sad Demise of the SP5

Proverbially every dog has its day but when that day has passed, some dogs leave not with a bark but with a whimper. There was always going to be a Sad Puppies 5 and in November 2016 Sarah A. Hoyt took on the mantle as chief organiser of the fifth iteration. Previously she had nearly taken on this role for Sad Puppies 3 and then again for Sad Puppies 4 but health and work had prevented her. What was clear to Hoyt was that the coalition of fans and writers that had gathered to support the Sad Puppy campaign needed a new direction and that direction would not include the Hugo Awards.

*“I saw what they did with the money we gave them in 2015 and, honestly, fool me once shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me. It wasn’t the Noah Award of books they PUBLICLY refused to read, no. It was the kabuki skits before and the self congratulatory smirks, and their assumption they’d saved the awards from racistsexisthomophobe, which meant they never bothered to read any of the works, or any of the blog posts on our side, either. I was not going to give them any more money.*

*I am still not going to give them any money.*

*But Sarah, you’ll say, how can you lead Sad Puppies 5, when you’re not going to nominate and vote on the Hugos.*

*Well, as much as I hate to say this, the Hugos as the award Heinlein won, are dead. There is nothing that can be done. I’m not a necromancer. In that sense the Sad Puppies won. We proved the game is rigged, and we can walk away.”*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2016/11/23/and-be-a-dog/>

However, the Dragon Awards were a more promising award and also Hoyt felt that the whole scheme should be less award-focused.

*“This year the Sad Puppies (5) will host a page, on which you can make recommendations, and which will, every month, give you a collated list of the 5 works with the most votes, in each subcategory (if we have that many, of course) and if/what awards they’re eligible for. The list will also include mystery, where a lot of the indie are quite good and by and large unnoticed.*

*Before the nominating dates for major awards, I’ll put a notice on the page, and a list of the however many (5 or 10) most recommended books for your consideration.*

*However, the awards are NOT the point anymore. Frankly in the hyper-distributed world of indie publishing, they might never be the point again.*

*The point is to give science fiction and fantasy that escapes the bounds of what traditional publishers encourage — which is often not what the public at large will even read — and to promote the health and popularity of our genre.”*

*ibid*

Hoyt was reintroducing the culture war rhetoric that had been toned down for Sad Puppies 4 but the basics of her idea were substantially less confrontational than the award-focused versions of the Puppy campaigns. This approach was heading towards many of the existing resources that fans, in general, had created over the years to help them track what was popular with award eligibility.

Not long after Hoyt’s post, Sad Puppies 4 supremo Kate Paulk followed up with her own post entitled “Yipping at the Dragon’s Feet” affirming the shift away from the Hugo Awards and towards the Dragon Awards<sup>[1]</sup>.

And then nothing happened.

December passed and 2017 began with the last days of the Obama Presidency but no Sad Puppies 5 website. However, the Sad Puppies had always been a broad and participatory movement and inevitably somebody would fill the void. That somebody would be Declan Finn.



Acknowledging that he didn't know what format the Sad Puppies 5 site would take and also making it clear he was more interested in the Dragon Awards than the Hugo Awards, Finn laid out the books that he would be recommending, using the Hugo categories as a template[2].

And then stuff happened.

At *Mad Genius Club*, Amanda Green's blood pressure was rising.

*"Sigh. There are mornings when it really doesn't pay to get out of bed. Or perhaps I should learn not to look at my phone as soon as I get up. What usually happens when I do is that I see something on social media that sends my blood pressure rising and has me racing for the keyboard to fire off a response. Yeah, yeah, I know. It sounds sort of like what the president-elect must act. At least I don't do Twitter.*

*Anyway, this morning, the BP rising bit came in the form of a private message from a friend of mine. We are in a number of groups together on Faceplant. In one of those groups, someone had posted a notice with the header of "Sad Puppies 5 Suggestions." Now, that got my eyes open real quick because the person posting it wasn't Sarah and, the last I heard – which was last night – Sarah was the one coordinating SP5. So, with coffee starting to brew, I figured I'd go see what I had missed overnight."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2017/01/10/sad-puppies-5-and-recommendation-lists/>

While not mentioning Declan Finn by name, the post title identified his post as the issue. By using the name "Sad Puppies" Finn had apparently crossed a line, even though his open campaigning during Sad Puppies 4 had not visibly caused offence.

Green was clear though: Sad Puppies 5 was coming soon.

*"With that said, Sad Puppies 5 will be getting off the ground very soon with a new website, a blog and more. Sarah A. Hoyt – yes, our Sarah – is running it this year. (The only reason the site isn't up already is because she has been ill and has had a deadline to meet.) The official SP5 site will be the only place where recommendations for the various lists SP5 compiles will be accepted. If you go to anywhere else and they claim to be speaking for SP5, they aren't. Not unless Sarah has specifically announced it here, on her blog or on the SP5 site."*

*ibid*

Green was also clear that she would be helping Hoyt with SP5 and also be taking over the reins (leads?) for SP6.

Facing a sudden and unexpected backlash to his list, Declan Finn came to the only possible conclusion he could make. The negative reaction he was receiving must be coming from the comment section of the popular fanzine *File770*! At the top of his post he added a disclaimer in all-caps, bold and underline:

***"EDIT: FOR THE READING BEREFT — APPARENTLY, THE USUAL CROWD AT File770 CAN'T READ — I MUST PUT IN AN EVEN BIGGER NOTE HERE. I'M NOT IN CHARGE OF SP5. THE FOLLOWING IS, IN PART, A GUIDE FOR MY RECOLLECTION, SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THOSE WHO WILL BE VOTING, AND AN OPPORTUNITY FOR OTHER PEOPLE TO GUIDE MY VOTING. APPARENTLY, SOME PEOPLE ARE TOO STUPID TO HAVE FIGURED THIS OUT FROM THE BELOW. THAT IS ALL."***

<http://www.declanfinn.com/2017/01/sad-puppies-5-suggestions.html>

In the comments Mike Glycer pointed out that the fanzine was not the source of the criticism<sup>[3]</sup>. While readers of the fanzine were paying attention to things Puppy-related, this new Puppy controversy was coming from within the broader movement.

The next day saw Sarah A. Hoyt express her anger at Finn's post also.

*"...in one of my normal hangouts I found someone had echoed his post, which was something like "It's time to make a list for Sad Puppies 5".*

*I don't know how much of this is intentional, and how much was just the poster being stupid, in the sense that his blog posts are normally so scattered you have to read tea leaves to find out what he's saying. I have to assume he didn't know the impression he was giving, or else he doesn't know me very well, after being with me in various places on line for several years.*

*On the other hand, this same person had approached me, multiple times by proxy and in person, being very ah, delicate, I'm sure he thought, and asking me if I wanted to share the burden of Sad Puppies, or perhaps off load it completely to him. The fact he even thought this was appropriate as well as his tendency to blog posts his own mother couldn't interpret is the reason he would be the very worst person for it."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2017/01/11/sad-puppies-gate-keeping-and-we-did-build-this/>

According to her own words, Finn's post had driven Hoyt berserk and had left her shaking and crying. Declan Finn had recently moved to a new independent publisher, Silver Empire, led by author, software developer and martial artist, Russel Newquist<sup>[4]</sup>. If *Mad Genius Club* perceived Finn's post as an attack on their territory, Newquist regarded Amanda Green's post as an attack on his domain.

*"Sarah A. Hoyt and Amanda Green over at the Mad Genius Club have declared to one and all that Silver Empire author Declan Finn is not one of the "cool kids." Evidently, he's so uncool that they can't even name him over at their blog, making it difficult for him to even defend himself. Yet nobody seems to have any doubt who they're talking about."*

<https://russellnewquist.com/2017/01/sad-puppies-meet-regina-george/>

Newquist's post was illustrated with a picture of the cast of the film *Mean Girls*<sup>[5]</sup>. The Puppy campaigns had always been a very loose coalition but this kind of infighting only further loosened any common bonds between supporters.

And then...nothing happened again. Indeed *very much* nothing happened with Sad Puppies 5. The Hugo nominations opened and closed, the deadline for the Dragon Award nominations crept closer and by mid-2017 it became clear that the one thing that wasn't happening was Sad Puppies 5.

Come June the absence of Sad Puppies 5 required an explanation. At *Mad Genius Club* Sarah A. Hoyt explained that illness and work pressure had overwhelmed her time in 2017 and with technical problems at the website she had hoped to use, it had just been impossible to get Sad Puppies 5 up and running.

*"Thing is, I meant to have this up before nominations for the Dragon Award opened. But on top of the comedy of errors above, our website provider either crashed or was hacked, so while trying to survive auto-immune and meeting more deliveries than UPS, I've been trying to get it up and running again. (My author site is down also.)"*

*So, that's where we are. We'll put it up sometime in the next couple of months, and then Amanda and I will run it, and then Amanda will take over Or Amanda, Kate and I will continue shepherding it.*

*When we said this before and pointed out that PARTICULARLY indie books need some place to mention them, we were linked to/lectured by someone on the rabid side, because apparently they already have a site, so we don't need one of our own."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2017/06/20/about-those-lost-puppies/>

Getting complex projects off the ground while juggling illness, work, family and life is a struggle and there's no big surprise here. Larry Correia's original Sad Puppies campaign was little more than sarcastic blog posts and a list of people he liked. Even a simple recommendation site takes time, effort and most of all focus. Unfortunately, the January dispute with Declan Finn had also undermined the perception of good faith among former Sad Puppy supporters.

Russell Newquist was one of many to dissect the lack of an outcome.

*"Sarah A. Hoyt's leadership of the Sad Puppies V campaign is a classic case study in leadership failure. If you ever want the absolute pitch perfect example of what not to do in a leadership position, look no further. This tale has everything: incompetence, insanity, bullying, harassment, technical difficulties, lack of vision, and just plain bitchiness. If I tried to create an example of bad leadership from scratch, I couldn't make one this complete. If she were trying to destroy the Sad Puppies campaign and help the other side, she couldn't have done a better job of it."*

<https://russellnewquist.com/2017/06/complete-leadership-failure-looks-like/>

Newquist finished his multi-part post with a stinging attack on Hoyt.

*“Given all of this, you’d think that somebody who spent months literally doing nothing would have an easy time just... letting it go. But now, that play would require at least some competence, and Hoyt has demonstrated that she has absolutely none. So instead, she’s penning more posts about the subject as recently as yesterday.*

*But is she actually accomplishing anything? Nope, she’s just out playing Mean Girls again. She’s hitting hard on Mr. Finn (while still lacking any courage and refusing to name him out loud), and also hitting on everyone around him.*

*In a word, an author of mediocre success is trying to bully a less successful author in order to feel better about her own failure. She’s admitted herself that she’s several books behind, and no wonder. She’s too busy writing several-thousand-word-long insanity-fests.*

*Here’s a tip, Sarah: lay off my authors and get back to work, before your publishers call and demand their advances back – as they have every legal and moral right to do if you’re that far behind.”*

**ibid**

Hoyt replied in the form of a GIF-filled post on her own blog.

*“I did not feel guilty about a) not turning over Sad Puppies to someone else. Sad Puppies was Larry’s, then Brad’s, then Kate’s, and is now mine and next year will be mostly Amanda’s. We were in it from the beginning, and we have decided long ago that it would stay within the cabal, because none of us — all of us public figures to a degree or another — can afford to have something associated with our name taken down a crazy road without us having control over it. b) Not putting up a list for the Hugos — I was never going to put up a list. And I feel queasy about encouraging people to vote for an award that has been so thoroughly tainted. c) Not putting up a list for the Dragon. The Dragon is bigger than any of us. Some small names got in last year, but they were just because it was the first time. Right now I’m not big enough for the dragons, and I doubt any who covet it are either. d) I thought it was time to get out from between the fight of the Volksdeutsche[sic] expatriate and the guardians of chorfdom,”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2017/06/25/bright-shiny-buttons/> <sup>[6]</sup>

Hoyt was still promising that the Sad Puppies recommendation site would be coming but as June turned to July there was no sign of it. Nor did Amanda Green take up Sad Puppies 6.

Six years after Larry Correia had first put his name forward for a Campbell Award, the Sad Puppies had finally departed.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://madgeniusclub.com/2016/12/01/yipping-at-the-dragons-feet/>
- [2] <http://www.declanfinn.com/2017/01/sad-puppies-5-suggestions.html>
- [3] a point later endorsed by Sarah A. Hoyt <https://madgeniusclub.com/2017/01/11/sad-puppies-gate-keeping-and-we-did-build-this/#comment-88414>
- [4] <https://russellnewquist.com/about/>
- [5] and “Regina George” is a character from the film
- [6] “Volksdeutsche expatriate”, i.e., Vox Day

## 62: The Last Dangerous Bark

Sad Puppies 5 had fallen apart due to the twin forces of apathy and infighting, but the Rabid Puppies had always operated with more of a *Führerprinzip*. There was no ambiguity as to who was in charge, nor was Vox Day about to crowdsource his recommendations. Day regarded himself as a master strategist with skills honed from the video game industry and from playing tabletop war games. For the 2017 Hugo Award nominations, what he faced was *E Pluribus Hugo* — the proportional nomination method devised by multiple people in a series of epic discussion threads at the *Making Light* blog in 2015. Having been voted in by Worldcon members in 2015 and then ratified in 2016, EPH would have its first true outing in 2017.

Day had latched on to an idea of how EPH worked and decided to adopt a strategy that had become known as “bullet voting”, where it was believed that concentrating your votes on one or two candidates would maximise the chance of your picks reaching the final ballot. In terms of the style of choices, Day’s 2017 Rabid Puppies slate followed a similar approach as 2016 but was limited to one or two per category as “bullet votes”. Those picks included works he wanted to promote from Castalia House, “hostage” nominations such as Neil Gaiman or *File770* intended to confuse voters, stuff he just liked such as a story by China Miéville, and finally works intended to troll or discredit the Hugo Awards. After being humorously reversed trolled by Chuck Tingle in 2016, Day did not renominate Tingle but instead picked a different erotic space-dinosaur story “Alien Stripper Boned From Behind By The T-Rex” by Stix Hiscock.

The initial list <sup>[1]</sup> underwent some rapid revisions. Mike Glyer withdrew *File770* as a candidate for the Hugo Awards.

*“I know a few will be disappointed — File770 is a community effort, and when it is nominated that is a symbolic recognition of what everyone contributes, not just my own work. I apologize to anyone who feels let down, though I assure you I thought about the community here when making this complicated decision.”*

<http://file770.com/file-770-withdraws-from-2017-hugos/>

Day’s final list featured himself (twice)<sup>[2]</sup>.

- BEST NOVEL
  - An Equation of Almost Infinite Complexity by J. Mulrooney
- BEST NOVELLA
  - “This Census-taker” by China Miéville
- BEST NOVELETTE
  - “Alien Stripper Boned From Behind By The T-Rex” by Stix Hiscock
- BEST SHORT STORY
  - “An Unimaginable Light” by John C. Wright (God, Robot)
- BEST SERIES
  - Arts of Dark and Light by Vox Day
- BEST RELATED WORK
  - Star Wars Art: Ralph McQuarrie by Ralph McQuarrie (Abrams)
  - The View From the Cheap Seats, Neil Gaiman (Morrow; Headline)
- BEST EDITOR, SHORT FORM
  - P. Alexander, Cirsova
- BEST EDITOR, LONG FORM
  - Vox Day, Castalia House
- BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION, LONG FORM
  - Deadpool
- BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION, SHORT FORM
  - “The Winds of Winter”, *Game of Thrones*, Miguel Sapochnik, David Benioff & D. B. Weiss
- BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST

- Tomek Radziewicz
- JiHun Lee
- BEST SEMIPROZINE
  - Cirsova
- BEST FANZINE
  - Castalia House blog
- BEST FANCAST
  - The Rageaholic by Razorfist
  - *SuperversiveSF SF*
- BEST FAN WRITER
  - Jeffro Johnson
  - Morgan (Castalia House)
- BEST FAN ARTIST
  - Alex Garner
  - Mansik Yang
- BEST NEW WRITER (Campbell Award)
  - J. Mulrooney

On April 4 the Hugo Finalists were announced<sup>[3]</sup> and once again the Puppies were present. However, at least at first glance, it appeared that the changes to the nomination system had made a big difference. In particular, the shift from five finalists per category to six meant that in every category where a Rabid Puppy-slated work was present, there were several non-slated works available for voters<sup>[4]</sup>. The impact of the Rabid Puppy slates was further weakened by eligibility issues in the two artists categories. The Rabid nominees for best Professional Artist hadn't published qualifying works in 2016 and the Rabid nominees for Fan Artist had only published professional work in 2016<sup>[5]</sup>.

The Rabid Puppies had made a final push at the Hugo Awards but the impact was limited. Day's greatest success was getting the improbably named "Alien Stripper Boned From Behind By The T-Rex" by Stix Hiscock insofar as the obscure erotic novelette created some additional publicity. *Wired* magazine covered the latest twist in the Hugo Awards with a focus on the erotic story.

*"And that, basically, is how we end up with Stix Hiscock. In March, Vox Day, a sci-fi writer and the pack leader of the Rabid Puppies, called on his minions to vote Hiscock in. The reasoning couldn't be more obvious: If at first, you don't succeed, find a new Tingle; a Tingle 2.0; an evil hetero twin. A Twingle, if you will. When reached for comment, Day replied: "No thanks. You'll have to sustain your Narrative [capitalization his] without my help.""*

<https://www.wired.com/2017/04/hugo-nominations-who-is-stix-hiscock/>

*Wired* also sought out Chuck Tingle's view. Tingle was enjoying his second time as a Hugo finalist. Fans had rewarded his social media reverse trolling of Vox Day with a nomination in the Best Fan Writer category. Tingle had this to say about Stix Hiscock's nomination:

*"hello buckaroo name of JASON thank you for writing and thank you for congrats on this way! I believe this author is put on the nominees by THE BAD DOGS BLUES as a way to prank the Hugo's like when they thought author name of chuck was some goof they could push around (no way buddy not this buckaroo). so it seems to be same idea as last year don't know much about it. thing is you cant just nominate some reverse twin of chuck there is only one chuck on this timeline and he is nominated as BEST FAN WRITER all by his own! this is a good way I am so proud! so long story short I hope this new author is not a reverse twin of the void but who knows I have not seen the end of this timeline branch yet."*

ibid

io9 went a step further and tracked down the pseudonymous author.

*"Hiscock also said she didn't know anything about Beale, and seemed to be unaware (before the interview) that he was responsible for Alien Stripper getting on the ballot. She was a little hurt that he*

would use her novelette as a way to mock the Hugos, especially since it doesn't seem like he's even read it. (It's possible Beale picked it specifically because of the Rabid Puppies' hatred of the award-winning novelette *If You Were A Dinosaur, My Love*.) "I guess I'll cry a little, laugh a little. But I'll be ok. Jokes are pretty hilarious sometimes," Hiscock said.

Still, Hiscock said it's an honor to be nominated, even though she probably won't be able to attend the ceremonies in Helsinki because of the expense. And even though Beale might've gotten *Alien Stripper* on the ballot due to sheer pettiness, the bank error is definitely in Hiscock's favor. Book sales of *Alien Stripper Boned From Behind by the T-Rex* are through the roof."

<https://gizmodo.com/meet-the-hugo-nominated-author-of-alien-stripper-boned-1794118102>

Beyond the Rabid Puppies, the 2017 Hugo finalists included many notable works. N.K. Jemisin's sequel to *The Fifth Season*, *The Obelisk Gate* was a finalist for Best Novel as was the final novel in Cixin Liu's *Three-Body Problem* trilogy, *Death's End*. Best Dramatic Presentation Short Form still had entries from *Doctor Who* and *Game of Thrones* but in a shift away from the predictable, the finalists also included an album by the band Clipping called *Splendor & Misery* that used music to tell an Afro-futurist story about space travel and slavery.

Vox Day's more recent spin on the diminishing returns of the Rabid Puppy campaign was that he was trying to push Worldcon further to the left to discredit it and his followers should act accordingly.

*"Best Novel is even worse; as expected, Jemisin should be the odds-on favorite to win her second straight Best Novel Award. That is arguably a bigger joke than "Alien Stripper Boned From Behind By the T-Rex", which is why it behoves us to wholeheartedly support The Obelisk Gate.[sic]"*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170406182739/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2017/04/hugo-finalists-2017.html>

For once, Day's prediction was correct. At the 2017 Hugo Award ceremony, the climax of the proceedings saw N.K. Jemisin win a second Hugo Award for Best Novel. In a Guardian news article on the awards, the 2017 Hugo Award administrator Nicholas Whyte noted:

*"This is the first time that the same author has won two years running since Lois McMaster Bujold in 1991 and 1992, a quarter of a century ago; and of course Bujold's continuing appeal was confirmed by the Vorkosigan saga winning the new best series category," said Whyte of Jemisin's win. "This is a super set of results ... which demonstrate that SF is thriving and diverse."*

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/11/hugo-awards-2017-nk-jemisin-repeats-best-novel-win-the-obelisk>

Vox Day naturally lost to No Award again, this time coming seventh out of six.

The large majority of the winners were women, including all the story categories, and both of the artist and editor categories. The Best Related Work category was won by Ursula Le Guin for her collection of essays about life and writing. This was the final Hugo that Le Guin would win in her lifetime.

With the announcement of the winners also came the statistics and a far more complex situation became clear in the nominations. EPH had helped Vox Day's Rabid Puppies gain nominations. This wasn't entirely unexpected, as the proportional aspect of EPH was intended to help different groups within the wider body of voters get some representation in the set of finalists. In one of the ultimate ironies of the Debarkle story, Vox Day was a finalist for Best Editor Long Form with only 83 votes, whereas Patrick Nielsen Hayden didn't make the ballot with 118 votes<sup>[6]</sup>. In a lesser irony, Rabid Puppy fan writer Jeffro Johnson gained a finalist spot with 80 voters because of EPH, with a fan writer who had been an active supporter of EPH losing out with 81 votes<sup>[7]</sup>.

In the Hugo Administrator's report on the impact of EPH, the conclusion was that the 'bullet vote' strategy had had an impact.

*"It is also clear that EPH made it relatively easier in 2017 for a nominee with a large number of "bullet" votes, i.e. whose supporters did not support any other nominees, to get on the ballot. Most notably, in one category a nominee who would have been in eighth place under the old system, and therefore not a finalist, ended in third place under EPH, edging out another nominee who had 42% more nominating votes. EPH+ would have made this easier still – another two such "bullet vote" candidates would have made it onto the final ballot."*

<http://www.thehugoawards.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2017-Hugo-report-4-systems-comparison.pdf>

In the comments at *File770*, one of the figures connected to EPH, Jameson Quinn, had a different perspective stating that “the idea that I think is mistaken is that this year’s outcome shows that under EPH, bullet voting works”

*“The upshot is that, under EPH, it is /not/ the fact that the puppies bullet voted that gave them an advantage; that was merely incidental. Their advantage came from the fact that their choices did not overlap with those of other voters. Arguably, in this case, EPH was doing exactly what it was designed to do: increasing the diversity of nominators who had some finalists who they supported. The fact that PNH had 118 ballots but only 65 points mean that a majority of PNH nominators supported some other finalist or finalists. Eliminating PNH left only perhaps a score of voters without a finalist they supported; eliminating VD would have leftover four score without. tl;dr: in EPH, there is no incentive to bullet vote by leaving weak candidates off your ballot; but there is an incentive to “free ride” by leaving people who can win without your vote off your ballot. “*

**Jameson Quinn comment** <http://file770.com/2017-hugo-award-winners/comment-page-2/#comment-696334>

At the 2017 Worldcon business meeting, further changes to the nomination process including Three Stage Voting (3SV) were voted down.

The Puppy influence over the Hugo Awards had finally come to an end.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] which can be read at *File770* <http://file770.com/rabid-puppies-2017-arrives/>
- [2] <https://web.archive.org/web/20181020232957/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2017/03/rabid-puppies-2017.html>
- [3] <http://file770.com/2017-hugo-award-finalists/>
- [4] Practically it was at least five non-Rabid works once disqualifications were taken into account and if obvious hostages (Neil Gaiman, the movie *Deadpool*) aren’t counted as Rabid nominees
- [5] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2017-Hugo-report-5-decisions-log.pdf>
- [6] <http://www.thehugoawards.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2017-Hugo-report-4-systems-comparison.pdf>
- [7] Me, as it happens, but winning a spot as Hugo voting trivia in the process which is an honour in itself

## 63: What the Evil League of Evil (and Friends) Did Next

2017 was a year in which the left was discombobulated, the centre was lost, and the right was emboldened. Contrariwise, the culture war in science fiction had passed its zenith, and the right had taken its football to play different games elsewhere. Worldcon, the SFWA, and science fiction literary awards would still have both internal cultural conflicts as well as ideological conflicts with the ascendant alt-right, but 2015 had been the high tide of such battles. From 2017 onward, the yardstick for culture-war conflicts within science fiction would be framed in terms of “puppies”.

In an apparent bid to make the historiography of the Debarkle easier, multiple members of 2014’s Evil League of Evil banded together to publish an anthology entitled *Forbidden Thoughts*. The title, evocative of Harlan Ellison’s never-fully-completed *Dangerous Visions* anthologies, was predicated on the idea that the last bastion of transgressive ideas in speculative fiction is reactionary conservatism. The contents included:

- A foreword by *Breitbart* columnist and GamerGate figurehead Milo Yiannopoulos
- A story by Sarah A. Hoyt based on the birth of Moses
- A story by Vox Day about women soldiers
- A story by Brad Torgersen about a world with strange genders in which there is a perhaps mythical land where there “were simply boys and girls, women and men”
- A story by John C. Wright with a talking dog
- “The left’s 20 rules for Racism” by Tom Kratman
- A history of the Sad Puppies by Larry Correia and Brad Torgersen

In addition, there were stories by L. Jagi Lamplighter (John C. Wright’s wife, and editor and mentor for Brian Niemeier and Jon Del Arroz), and Puppy sympathiser Ray Blank, as well as an allegorical story by Nick Cole in which a spaceflight goes wrong because of the actions by characters with names close to those of John Scalzi and N.K. Jemisin. The whole thing was edited by Jason Rennie of twice Puppy-nominated *Sci Phi Journal* and published by *SuperserviceSF Press*, the pro-Puppy blog associated with Rennie and Lamplighter.

Yiannopoulos’s introduction set the tone with an overt reference to Vox Day.

*“The final important thing to know about SJWs is they are incapable of telling the truth. They often have dark reasons for their mendacious nature—there have been a continuous stream of cases where SJWs, held up as paragons of virtue defending women, minorities and LGBT people from the disgusting bigotry of regular fans, are actually proven to be abusers, rapists and paedophiles.”*

Yiannopoulos, Milo; Kratman, Tom; Cole, Nick; Correia, Larry; Torgersen, Brad R.; Wright, John C.; Day, Vox; Lamplighter, L. Jagi; Hoyt, Sarah A.; Niemeier, Brian; Freeman, A.M. ; Oxide, Chrome; Shumak, E.J. ; Blank, Ray ; Ward, Matthew ; Young, Joshua M. ; Hallquist, David ; Oka, Pierce ; Lebak, Jane ; Zwycy, Ben. *Forbidden Thoughts* (p. 2). *SuperserviceSF Press*. .

After multiple references to the 2016 *Ghostbusters* film, he went on to say:

*“As a final promise, if the fight against SJWs in science fiction remains strong, I will write my own story for inclusion in a future volume of *Forbidden Thoughts*. Think about how many tears that will cause to rain down!”*

ibid

Yiannopoulos would not fulfil this promise.

Correia and Torgersen meanwhile portrayed the 2015 Sad Puppies 3 campaign with a metaphor mixed with Donald Trump and *Animal House*.

*“The CHORFs lost by winning. Sort of like how Hillary Clinton was the “popular” nominee, but Donald Trump is actually going to the White House. Proof that you can do everything right—have the superior press game, the superior money game, the superior celebrity endorsements, and all the favorables anyone could desire—and still blow it.”*

ibid



As for Blutarisky, John Belushi's character from *Animal House*, we are reassured that "he switched parties, to the Republican side—in the wake of 9/11/2001."

*Saturday Night Live* alumni aside, *Forbidden Thoughts* was the rooftop concert finale of the Evil League of Evil (plus guests). Politics and surprise electoral success had driven the league apart, and increasingly the original members pretended that Vox Day (in particular) had never existed.

*Forbidden Thoughts* was also something of a swan song also for Milo Yiannopoulos. The book was released in January 2017 but by February things had begun to unravel for Yiannopoulos. After being scheduled to speak at the prestigious Conservative Political Action Conference<sup>[1]</sup>, Yiannopoulos was targeted by an anti-Trump/anti-alt right conservative group called The Reagan Battalion. The group promoted a set of videos from 2016 of Yiannopoulos discussing his sexuality as a gay teenager. Yiannopoulos spoke frankly about this, saying

*"paedophilia is not a sexual attraction to somebody 13 years old, who is sexually mature"*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milo\\_Yiannopoulos#Remarks\\_on\\_paedophilia\\_and\\_child\\_sexual\\_abuse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milo_Yiannopoulos#Remarks_on_paedophilia_and_child_sexual_abuse)

Unsurprisingly, these statements were not well received by a socially conservative group like CPAC. Yiannopoulos had been courting controversy for over a year with college campus talks in which he singled out immigrant or transgender students for targeted harassment. In January of 2017, a speaking event he led at the University of Washington led to a protestor against the event being shot and wounded<sup>[2]</sup>. This style of controversy, as well as GamerGate and the targeted harassment on social media of Black actor Leslie Jones<sup>[3]</sup>, had not harmed Yiannopoulos's reputation among Republicans. Indeed, at the start of 2017, Yiannopoulos enjoyed the patronage of the wealthy right-wing donor Robert Mercer<sup>[4]</sup> and former *Breitbart* editor and now Trump advisor Steve Bannon.

However, Yiannopoulos's comments on teenage sexuality undermined his growing status on the right. By the end of February, he had been pressured into resigning from *Breitbart*, and publisher Simon & Schuster had cancelled plans to publish his autobiographical book. Before the end of the year, revelations of Yiannopoulos's direct ties with far-right extremists (including alt-right figure Richard Spencer)<sup>[5]</sup> led to even Mercer and Bannon<sup>[6]</sup> cutting ties with him.

If Yiannopoulos spent 2017 being abandoned by former allies, he was not to be abandoned by the erstwhile Evil League of Evil aka the Puppies (Sad and Rabid). As the controversy around Yiannopoulos's statements about sex and children grew in February, Vox Day rallied to his defence calling it an "operation to destroy Milo"<sup>[7]</sup>. Day, along with his allies Mike Cernovich and Stefan Molyneaux, framed the issue as the scandal actually being because Yiannopoulos was a crusader against paedophilia rather than an apologist for it.

*"I think Stefan is probably right to see this as the most significant aspect of the whole situation, and that Milo has the opportunity to transform what has been a terrible time for him into his finest moment if he is willing and able to do what so many before him have not, and name the names of those who have been, and probably still are, preying on young men and boys today."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210808103451/http://voxdays.blogspot.com/2017/02/a-sympathetic-call.html>

Naturally, this reversal of events never actually took place.

John C. Wright also believed that Yiannopoulos would be vindicated.

*"The libels against Milo Yiannopoulos continue, but the still, small voice of truth is speaking also. Those who were deceived innocently at first now have no excuse. Within hours, an unedited version of the year-old conversation used to libel Milo was available, as were leaks from the press revealing that the attack was deliberate, coordinated, and duplicitous."*

*If any man looks at the evidence, pro and con, and decides Milo is secretly an advocate for paedophilia rather than a victim of it and a public crusader whose work has put three paedophiles behind bars, I will not argue the point. At least he looked at the evidence. A man who condemns, sight unseen, a fellow human soul, taking the word of the Fake New media as gospel, that man has let partisanship overmaster his conscience and common sense."*

<https://www.scifiwright.com/2017/02/milo-and-the-bookstore/>

Wright followed up this plea in defence of Yiannopoulos with a plug for the book *Forbidden Thoughts*. The longer version of the video did show the longer argument Yiannopoulos had advanced, but the gist of his comments was not substantially different viewed in the wider context. That Yiannopoulos's comments were

taken in the worst way possible by right-wing audiences should have been little surprise to both Wright and Day given their extensive campaign to link homosexuality with paedophilia. That a lack of subtlety and moral panic would be applied by conservatives to one of their allies took them by surprise.

At Sarah A. Hoyt's blog, Kate Paulk announced "Je Suis Milo" and condemned those attacking Yiannopoulos.

*"The diseased flaccid dicks who created this piece of rancid shit to smear the man are at least openly evil. The tight-assed moralists standing back-to-back with the people who should be their worst enemy are just as eager to control everyone else as the openly statist fuckwit throwing metaphorical (and sometimes literal) turd grenades. They think because they call themselves "conservative" it makes them good and righteous and proper, and all the while they're arm in arm with Satan – who is happier than a pig in mud."*

<https://accordingtohovt.com/2017/02/24/je-suis-milo-vanno-by-kate-paulk/>

At *Mad Genius Club*, Dave Freer also rallied to Yiannopoulos's defence.

*"It's a common feature of modern journalism: take elements that are obviously plainly true, leave out the bits that would spoil the spin you want to put on the individuals, and apply bias particularly in ways at least some of your audience are likely to want to believe. The attack on Milo Yannopolous was a masterclass in this. It is long-term destructive if you're supposedly writing fact, not fiction, but it is very useful for suspending disbelief in fiction. If you're writing fiction and want to suspend disbelief it's particularly instructive to see how the background was crafted."*

*It was no use having its source as a left wing website: the left has been trying to 'normalize' pre-pubescent paedophilia for generations, let alone post-pubescent sex. In sf – Delany has been a darling of theirs, the activities of Breen were well-known, and they tried to whitewash Marion Zimmer Bradley back into favor. They love Polanski and adore Dunham. It's the right and center who regard it with disgust. A left-source of the carefully selectively edited material would have been treated with the disdain that the left wing would have treated right wing evidence of Hillary Clinton breaking security regulations or laughing at getting a rapist to walk free. So: they faked a right wing site... And of course there are parts of the US right (I believe that neo-Nazi fellow was delighted by it) eager to believe the worst of a flamboyant homosexual, from that sort of source."*

<https://madgeniusclub.com/2017/02/27/the-illusion-of-reality/>

Sarah A. Hoyt went further, warning her readers that "If they take Milo down, you're next," and followed that with her own musings about the age of consent.

*"This is where Milo got into overthinking, when he started discussing how strictly speaking paedophiles are attracted to those people who haven't undergone puberty (or are undergoing puberty.) He's absolutely right, but he was perhaps over-intellectualizing. The truth is that laws of consent usually slice the do no harm/prevent harm very finely indeed, and are set when most of the population of the country can be assumed to have passed through and undergone puberty."*

*For instance the age of consent in Portugal is 14. By 11 I had undergone menarche. My best friend, OTOH, didn't go through it till 16. However hers was very late, and doctors were involved. Most people got it at 12. So 14 seems like a fairly safe age of consent. You're not going to prevent people who go through it earlier from having sex (OTOH I found an interest in physics and electronics prevented me pretty effectively till much, much older.) But you want to discourage outright predators. So 14 is about right for Portugal."*

*Do I mean girls of 14 (or boys for that matter) know what they're doing? No. But I also don't think they know what they're doing at 18. Left to me, I'd set the age of consent at thirty, and human population would plummet."*

<https://accordingtohovt.com/2017/02/22/if-they-take-milo-down-voire-next/>

The age of consent issue also got Brad Torgersen musing on the question. Citing the example of Calvin Graham,<sup>[8]</sup> who had enlisted in the US Navy at age 12 after Pearl Harbour, Torgersen considered what is the right age for “Working? Driving? Voting? Drinking? Getting laid?”.

*“It seems to me we’ve never quite figured out (as a society) what we’re comfortable with. Especially regarding the last two items. Besides, biological age doesn’t always correlate to emotional age. I think all of us know people in our circles, or within the family, who are way more emotionally mature (or way less emotionally mature) than their biological age would seem to suggest.”*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/1800805023279056>

The *Forbidden Thoughts* anthology would also be promoted by Jon Del Arroz later in 2017 as part of a bizarre campaign.

In 2017, Wisconsin science fiction and fantasy convention Odyssey Con unwisely included former Tor editor James Frenkel in the position of Guest Liaison for the con. Frenkel was the subject of serious sexual harassment complaints in 2013<sup>[9]</sup>. As a consequence Frenkel left Tor and was also banned from WisCon, another notable Wisconsin convention. Author Monica Valentinelli had been invited as a Guest of Honour for the 2017 Odyssey Con and when discovering Frenkel’s involvement had informed the organisers that she had in the past “several uncomfortable interactions with this individual and I did not feel safe around him”<sup>[10]</sup>. Frenkel was removed as her point of contact for the convention but as the date for the convention approached Valentinelli learned that not only was Frenkel still involved but they were scheduled together for some events. She raised her concerns again with the con, but found their response to be dismissive. Not feeling safe in attending, Valentinelli withdrew. In the ensuing mishandling of the convention’s response, other notable authors withdrew from the convention as well<sup>[11]</sup>.

Eager to exploit an opportunity for a book promotion, Jon Del Arroz announced his own response to the events.

*“A couple of weeks ago, an invited headlining guest flaked on a convention, OdysseyCon. No notice was given, no accommodations were asked for, simply bailing two weeks before it happened, leaving the fans without an honored guest. The Con responded professionally and nicely, trying to work things out as much as possible, but that wasn’t enough for this person who took to social media, and got a cabal of angry virtue signallers to start swearing, berating and attacking anyone they could.*

*The people who are left in the dust are fans, innocent folk who just wanted to spend a weekend hanging out, playing games, talking science fiction, listening to some authors speak and having a good time in fellowship. None of these virtue signallers thought or cared about the fans. It’s frankly shameful and unprofessional.”*

<https://delarroz.com/2017/04/25/authors-who-care-about-fans-and-readers/>

Del Arroz avoided discussing the reason why Valentinelli had withdrawn but offered instead a book bundle for attending members of OdysseyCon. The bundle included the *Forbidden Thoughts* anthology (“featuring incredible stories by Baen Books authors Sarah A. Hoyt, Larry Correia, Brad Torgersen and more!”) as well as works by Nick Cole, Sarah A. Hoyt, Declan Finn, John C. Wright, L. Jagi Lamplighter, as well as less notable authors eager for the associated publicity.

Del Arroz’s April 25 post promoting the book bundle was followed the next day with his Dragon Award recommendations. Of the novel categories, all but two were authors from the bundle and the first exception was Vox Day’s *A Sea of Skulls* <sup>[12]</sup>. Del Arroz’s picks were then given a further signal boost by Vox Day, who linked to them from his blog.

When the Dragon Award finalists were announced, seven works that were either in the bundle or recommended in Del Arroz’s Dragon Award picks were finalists, along with other works suggested by Vox Day or by people connected with the *SuperserviceSF SF* blog<sup>[13]</sup>. The capacity for multiple right-wing groups or figures to influence the Dragon Award finalists appeared to be significant.

Gaining nominations was one thing but winning was another. Brian Niemeier, who had improbably won the inaugural Dragon Award for Best Horror in 2016 with a space opera novel, hoped to frame the final vote as a culture war. Among the finalists in 2017 was John Scalzi and Niemeier was keen to present his book as the only way to prevent the “SJWs” from winning.

*“But we can’t rest on our laurels. The Dragons are an open contest, and that openness brings with it the risk of dirty tricks—like the CHORFs pulled when they shelled out tens of thousands of dollars to stuff the ballot box at the Hugos under the guise of “scholarships”. That’s why we have to stay focused and present a united front to keep the entryists from gaining a foothold. As indies, our greatest advantage is also our greatest drawback. It’s nigh impossible to get a small group of us to agree on pizza toppings, never mind which books to support. But the SF SJWs are a fun-destroying monolith, and they’ve declared their intention to overrun the Dragon Awards. We who prize fun science fiction over nagging civics lectures must hang together or hang separately.”*

<https://brianniemeier.com/2017/08/2017-dragon-award-finalist-secret-kings/>

Niemeier’s call to action for a new culture war had not anticipated that the other side might not be very interested in fighting. John Scalzi promptly withdrew his book from consideration.

*“The reason is simple: Some other finalists are trying to use the book and me as a prop, to advance a manufactured “us vs. them” vote-pumping narrative based on ideology or whatever. And I just... can’t. I don’t have the interest and I’m on a deadline, and this bullshit is even more stale and stupid now than it was the several other times it was attempted recently, with regard to genre awards*

*My plan was to ignore it, but on further reflection (and further evidence that this nonsense was going to continue through the finalist voting period), I decided this was the better course. To the extent this bullshit manufactured narrative is centered on me, well, now it’s not, as far as these awards are concerned. I’m delighted to be able to chop it off at the knees by removing myself from consideration. I wish the progenitors of this narrative luck; now they will have to compete with the other finalists on the basis of the quality of their work instead. They’re going to need all the help they can get with that.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2017/08/07/withdrawing-from-the-dragon-awards-2017/>

Other authors followed suit, including Alison Littlewood. Unbeknownst to her, her book *The Hidden People* had been included in Vox Day’s slate in the Best Horror category. She requested that her book be withdrawn from the award. To her surprise, Dragon Con declined in a letter to her from Pat Henry – the Dragon Con President.

*“Good morning Ms. Littlewood,*

*While I appreciate your sense of fair play, I must decline your request to remove *The Hidden People* from the Dragon Award Nominations. We are aware of the rabid puppies and justice warriors efforts to effect the voting and we go through a number of steps to avoid ballot stuffing or other vote rigging behaviors. While we didn’t start the Dragon Awards to foil these two groups, we believe that as we add voters, they will become irrelevant in our awards.*

*We believe the “people’s choice” approach is a better way to recognize authors and their works. The Dragon Awards ballot – which consists of works nominated by fans – is a broad representation of the best science fiction and fantasy literature available today. With 53 novels listed, there is actually something for everybody on this ballot.*

*The original purpose of the Dragon Awards was not so much as awards but as a quality reading list. The cost of reading current material has been rising steadily for years. Library budgets are not adequate to have all, or even a decent collection of the type of materials that Dragon Con fans enjoy.”*

Pat Henry in a letter to Alison Littlewood, quoted on her blog <http://www.alisonlittlewood.co.uk/news-blog/another-statement-regarding-the-dragon-awards/>

N.K. Jemisin also asked for her novel *The Obelisk Gate* to be withdrawn as well. The Dragon Award already had something of a legitimacy problem, and with big-name authors treating a finalist spot as negative marketing, their response to Littlewood was devastatingly bad PR.

The Dragon Awards officially shifted their position saying:

*“And then, over the last couple of days, we got an earful from our fans and others. The issue also caused a second author to ask us to remove her book from the ballot as well. We’ve reconsidered and changed our mind. This is what’s happening next.*

*We have removed *The Hidden People*, by Ms. Littlewood, and *The Obelisk Gate*, by N.K. Jemisin, from the 2017 Dragon Awards ballot and we will re-issue ballots to those people who voted for these two books. We believe that fans who voted in the Horror and Apocalyptic categories should have a second chance to vote. No new titles will be added to the ballot.”*

<https://www.dragoncon.org/awards/a-new-day-and-a-fresh-perspective/>

John Scalzi withdrew his own withdrawal in a gesture of rapprochement with the convention.

*“the folks at the Dragon Awards suggested they were willing to put in some work to listen and learn, and the honoring of Ms. Littlewood’s withdrawal request and their commitment to rethink aspects of their process was a good first step. Enough that I was willing to reconsider withdrawing from the ballot.”*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2017/08/10/update-on-the-dragon-awards-and-me/>

What remained mysterious was Pat Henry’s statement that “justice warriors” had attempted to affect the voting. With no obvious campaign from the left towards the Dragon Awards, people were puzzled by the claim until a group of Dragon Con fans calling themselves “The Red Panda Fraction” revealed themselves on Twitter<sup>[14]</sup>.

The Dragon Awards were both a child of, and a victim of, culture wars within fandom, but they were also a marker in the diminishing returns of the strategy of using right-wing-fuelled outrage to boost sales of books. GamerGate had petered out into irrelevance, the Sad Puppies had been defeated by the triple alliance of voting reform, apathy, and internal infighting. There was, though, another arena that shared many of the features of both video games and science fiction fandom, and it was an arena that Jon Del Arroz was already familiar with.

Del Arroz had scored a gig as a “journalist” at right-wing news outlet *The Federalist* and in April 2017 he launched into the newest front in the culture war: comics.

*“I ran a Twitter search again, this time to investigate Marvel’s religious leanings. Marvel has writers who profess to be atheist, Jewish, and they even have a Muslim writer. Most writers, eager to speak out on their left-wing politics, don’t talk about their religion at all.*

*I did find one oddity: out of the entire group, I did not find one writer that openly professed Christianity. On the contrary, many of the writers made comments mocking Christians or the Bible. It begs the question: does Marvel hold a latent religious intolerance toward Christians? Based on this research, it would appear so. I reached out to the Marvel writers listed above and Marvel Comics Editor-in-Chief, Axel Alonso, but they declined to comment.”*

<https://thefederalist.com/2017/04/12/forcing-political-correctness-employees-characters-killing-marvel-comics/>

This was not the first salvo in the wildly shambolic third attempt at a fandom-specific culture (the first two being GamerGate and the Puppies) but it was a point at which attention shifted from one arena to another. The conflict known as Comicsgate will have to wait until another chapter but it managed a level of farcical toxicity that its predecessors, even at their most incompetent moments, couldn’t rival.

Fandom culture wars had always been a sideshow to more mainstream politics but in 2017 they struggled not just with relevance but also in terms of outrage. National and international politics had taken a turn for the weird and dangerous in a way that both paralleled and exceeded the Puppy conflict. These were the Trump years and normal had taken a holiday.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative\\_Political\\_Action\\_Conference](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Political_Action_Conference)
- [2] <https://web.archive.org/web/20170122013437/http://www.kiro7.com/news/local/man-shot-during-uw-event-for-milo-yiannopoulos/486520649>

- [3] One of the actors in the women-led *Ghostbusters* reboot. The harassment of Jones by Yiannopoulos's followers led to him being permanently banned from Twitter in 2016 <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/leslie-jones-leaves-twitter-amidst-onslaught-of-racist-tweets/>
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Mercer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Mercer)
- [5] [https://web.archive.org/web/20171006000933/https://www.buzzfeed.com/josephbernstein/heres-how-breitbart-and-milo-smuggled-white-nationalism?utm\\_term=.ogQJj2V5m7#.gbdEPxB6oJ](https://web.archive.org/web/20171006000933/https://www.buzzfeed.com/josephbernstein/heres-how-breitbart-and-milo-smuggled-white-nationalism?utm_term=.ogQJj2V5m7#.gbdEPxB6oJ)  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20171008080128/http://www.dallasobserver.com/news/interview-with-bartender-who-kicked-milo-yiannopoulos-out-of-karaoke-9948271>  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20181217112143/https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/milo-yiannopoulos-nazi-salutes-video-karaoke-richard-spencer-white-nationalists-karaoke-bar-a7987486.html>
- [6] <https://web.archive.org/web/20180125085555/https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/11/bob-mercero-defunds-milo-yiannopoulos-sells-stake-in-breitbart>  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20171118125648/https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/10/steve-bannon-disowns-milo-yiannopoulos>
- [7] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210809004927/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2017/02/operation-destroy-milo.html>
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvin\\_Graham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvin_Graham)
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Frenkel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Frenkel) also covered in earlier chapters
- [10] <http://file770.com/monica-valentinelli-withdraws-as-goh-of-odyssey-con/>
- [11] <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-41217-blah-blah-blah-pixels-blah-blah-scroll/>
- [12] <https://delarroz.com/2017/04/26/896/>
- [13] <http://file770.com/dragons-and-puppies-and-innocent-bystanders-oh-my/>
- [14] <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-83117-scrollfinger-hes-the-man-the-man-with-the-first-fifth-touch-a-pixels-touch/>

# 64: Meanwhile...Trump Year One

[Content warning: discussion of historical cases of sexual assault and discussion of hate crimes and murder]

## *Me Too*

Donald Trump was far from being the first US President to be credibly accused of sexual assault but he was the first to have been recorded boasting about it<sup>[1]</sup>. The day after Trump's inauguration as US President saw large rallies in several American cities organised as the Women's March<sup>[2]</sup>. The protests specifically cited the rhetoric of Trump and the Republican Party in the 2016 elections as a source of legitimate fear among multiple dimensions of society.

*“The rhetoric of the past election cycle has insulted, demonized, and threatened many of us – immigrants of all statuses, Muslims and those of diverse religious faiths, people who identify as LGBTQIA, Native people, Black and Brown people, people with disabilities, survivors of sexual assault – and our communities are hurting and scared. We are confronted with the question of how to move forward in the face of national and international concern and fear.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170125034852/https://www.womensmarch.com/mission/>

With an overtly misogynistic President in office, as well as increased activity from influential anti-feminist groups within the coalition of extremist groups known as the alt-right, there was good reason for women collectively to fear the new administration. However, Trump's control over the Oval Office was not some sort of final victory in a long-running culture war. Societal change and cultural shifts were continuing and Trump's level of national support in the US, while large, remained within a minority of Americans.

A recurring set of themes in this project has been the ability of women to fully participate in social and professional spaces, as well as the coordinated and uncoordinated pushback against these social changes. The prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment in workplaces (and other spaces) also played a role in excluding and marginalising women. In the wake of revelations in late 2017 about the noted producer and film financier Harvey Weinstein's long history of rape and sexual abuse of actors<sup>[3]</sup>, the *Me-Too* movement<sup>[4]</sup> became an international phenomenon in which people highlighted their experience of being sexually harassed or assaulted at work or in professional spaces. The impact of the movement was felt across party political lines, with high-profile politicians in both parties coming under criticism for past behaviour.

The Weinstein case helped publicise an ongoing pushback against institutionalised misogyny even during a time when ideological misogynists had regained political power and influence. In the world of books and publishing, spaces such as literary conferences were highlighted as having their own sexual harassment problems. Fantasy author Anne Ursu surveyed multiple people in children's literature to collect accounts of sexual harassment in children/youth book publishing, finding that:

*“Responses reveal, in general, three loci for sexual harassment: in the workplace; at conferences and book festivals; and in the professional spaces where spheres of the industry intersect (author to bookseller, agent to author, etc, editor to agent, etc.) All three categories seem to require different solutions”*

[https://medium.com/@anneursu\\_10179/sexual-harassment-in-the-childrens-book-industry-3417048ccde2](https://medium.com/@anneursu_10179/sexual-harassment-in-the-childrens-book-industry-3417048ccde2)

Although the policy responses to the prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse in multiple industries were often split along party political lines, the people creating the hostile environments were from a wide range of political beliefs. In the wake of Anne Ursu's piece in 2018, the behaviour of fantasy author Myke Cole [see previous chapters] was raised by multiple people. Author Janci Patterson would later highlight the fears women faced in making complaints about sexual harassment after she had recounted being sexually harassed by Cole.

*“That is what it was like being a woman in publishing who had been harassed. I watched people discrediting the women who spoke up on the basis of their comments being anonymous. If it was true, why would they need anonymity?”*

*I knew why. After Zoe Quinn, women in my position all know. We are all one internet post away from being Zoe Quinn.”*

<https://www.jancipatterson.com/2018/02/19/sexual-harassment-apologies-and-forgiveness/>

Cole would make a public apology for his behaviour in 2018 but would face further allegations in 2020<sup>[5]</sup>. Cole is just one example — a salient one in terms of the Debarkle but also in terms of demonstrating the range and depth of the issue. The biases in science fiction communities meant that as recently as 2007, the bulk of Hugo Awards finalists had been men. This was due in part to men who did not regard themselves as anti-women but nonetheless contributed to a broad culture of hostility and sexism. The drive for less hostile spaces and for consistent action against sexual harassment and casual sexism was resulting in genuine change (e.g., by 2017 the Hugo Award finalists were predominantly women) but was also met with a counter-reaction that contributed to the Puppy campaigns.

It is hard not to see Donald Trump’s presidency in the same light. That 2017 saw a widespread and very public rejection of misogyny AND the installation of one of the most overtly misogynistic public figures of the time as President was no coincidence, even if there was no simple way to disentangle cause-and-effect or change from backlash.

## **Racism**

There’s a triptych of issues in the events of the Debarkle: gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity. This chapter won’t get around to discussing sexuality but it can’t ignore the dynamic of polarisation of US politics in 2017 around race.

Within the symbolic first 100 days of the Trump presidency, he stoked fears of “illegal” immigrants crossing the southern border and enacted travel bans against people from several Muslim countries.

Executive Order 13769 was signed on January 27 2017 as one of the first acts of Donald Trump as President, in a move that was widely seen as an attempt to limit the ability of Muslims to travel to the United States. The order itself was not presented in those terms and potentially would have resisted many of the legal challenges it faced if not for the surrounding rhetoric of Trump which helped establish that the order was effectively religious discrimination. Instead, the legal challenges resulted in the order being redrafted<sup>[6]</sup> and this new version only survived a Supreme Court challenge by one vote.

Trump’s general incompetence was also apparent in the initial stages of his attempt to have a wall built between the US and Mexico. However, Trump’s lack of organisational ability did not prevent him from giving the green light to increasingly hostile anti-immigration actions by the US at the border and also by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) within the US<sup>[7]</sup>.

The Black Lives Matter protests of 2016 and earlier, continued during 2017 fuelled by further deaths of Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement<sup>[8]</sup>. Additionally, the high-profile public protests by US sports stars that had begun in 2016<sup>[9]</sup> drew the ire of President Donald Trump:

*“Donald Trump launched a sensational attack on NFL players who have kneeled in protest of the national anthem during a speech in Alabama on Friday night, challenging the league’s owners to release anyone who engages in the movement started last year by former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick.*

*“Wouldn’t you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, ‘Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He’s fired. He’s fired!’” the president said at a rally for Republican senator Luther Strange, who is running in a special election next week to remain in the seat vacated by attorney general Jeff Sessions.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/sep/22/donald-trump-nfl-national-anthem-protests>

Trump’s rhetoric positioned the protests as unpatriotic actions, a framing that stripped the protests of their substantive content (objections to the murder of Americans by the government) and placed them in a dichotomy in which the only sides were those against or for America (or more specifically American nationalism). It was a framing of the multitude of protests against police violence that became common on the American right, even among those with ostensibly libertarian positions.

After players for the Seattle Seahawks stayed in their locker room during the playing of the national anthem at an American football game, Brad Torgersen presented the issue in terms of sides in a culture war.

*“Over on the Seahawks page there are plenty of Social Justice Zealot “fans” trying to explain to the ACTUAL Seahawks fans why they are wrong to perceive #TakeAKnee as anti-patriotic and anti-*



*American. In true Social Justice Zealot fashion, it doesn't take long (in any thread) for them to begin calling all the Seahawks fans Trumptards, bigots, racists, etc. I swear, Social Justice Zealots went to the idiot school of reverse public relations. Clue: you do not woo back a disaffected audience by calling them names! And if the NFL thinks Social Justice Zealots will replace the legions of actual fans who are rapidly departing the fold—SJZs were the ones claiming the NFL and SuperBowl Sunday cause domestic violence, remember?—the NFL deserves everything it has coming to it in the months ahead. It will take them \*years\* to try to repair this PR disaster. If it can be repaired?"*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/2115912888434933>

I use Brad Torgersen as an example here not because he had any particular political significance in 2017 but as a person with a small but not insignificant online presence who had not been particularly pro-Trump in 2016. For people ostensibly against the misuse of power by the state, the rationalisation of Black Lives Matter or the national anthem protests as being primarily an issue of being for-or-against America as a concept proved to be an easy way for many right-wing “libertarians” to side with law enforcement rather than engage with the underlying problem.

2017 also saw the continuation of a process that had begun after the Charleston massacre in 2015 of the removal of monuments to Confederate soldiers and the Confederacy. Some Republican-controlled state legislatures enacted laws to prevent local governments from removing such monuments<sup>[10]</sup> but the process continued.

Just as the right-wing response to protests against police violence reframed the issue to avoid the central issue (police violence), counter-responses by the less overtly racist right to the removal of monuments to the Confederacy (or more generally of people who supported and profited from slavery) were framed in a way that avoided discussing the reason why the monuments were being removed. By way of an example again, here is Sarah A. Hoyt in June of 2017 making an analogy with the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

*“Um... no one is sending indoctrinated young people to the countryside to teach farmers how to farm, true, but we are sending indoctrinated young people across the country to beat people and lecture them in the name of progressivism and “to build a better future” even though everything these young people know of the world they learned from their ideologically insane/no world experience professors.*

*And if they think there is no similarity to the Chinese cultural revolution, when statues, monuments, references to our own past are being removed from every public space and book, in the name of “progress” then they are part of the problem. They too have been indoctrinated to the point they have no contact with reality anymore.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2017/06/28/the-day-before-liberty-con/>

The line of argument was not just that the removal of monuments (many erected decades after the end of the US Civil War) was (somehow) erasing history but that this historical erasure was the underlying idea motivating the removal.

Again, Hoyt is just an example of a broader and larger group of people on the right who were ideologically not of the alt-right (or even the so-called “alt-lite”) but who framed their opposition to the left in terms that were compatible with the more overtly racist stance of alt-right figures.

### ***The Alt-Right, Unite the Right and Beyond***

In November 2016, *The New Yorker* magazine announced that “The Alt-Right Hails Its Victorious God-Emperor”

*“This is such a new category that no two people agree on precisely what it means or how many people fall within it. Some on the alt-right are committed white nationalists; others are committed neo-monarchists who refer to Donald Trump, buoyantly, as their “god-emperor”; others are chaos agents who are committed to nothing at all. One could argue that, together, these people’s social-media activism made it possible—made it conceivable—for Trump to be elected. On Wednesday, Charles Johnson, an alt-right troll who calls himself a journalist, was sitting on a Brooklyn-bound F train wearing a Make America Great Again hat. “You support a man who is racist, sexist, and homophobic,” a man standing next to him said, accurately. “We won—fuck off,” Johnson said, also accurately.”*

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-alt-right-hails-its-victorious-god-emperor>

That four-word response (“We won—fuck off”) exemplifies the initial euphoria of the online far-right in the wake of the surprise victory of Donald Trump. The article went on to quote Vox Day directly explaining the role of the alt-right within the political discourse.

*“The morning after the election, an influential alt-right blogger who goes by Vox Day wrote, “Donald Trump has a lot to do . . . It is the Alt-Right’s job to move the Overton Window and give him conceptual room to work.” Day and his peers have been doing this job for months. They have flooded the Internet with offensive images and words—cartoon frogs emblazoned with swastikas, theories of racial hierarchy—and then ridiculed anyone who had the temerity to be offended. “Racism and sexism are a) human beliefs, and, b) as legitimately held as any other belief,” Day told me in a recent e-mail. No picture is shocking. No idea is bad. Who gets to define bad, anyway? “Remember that rhetoric is the art of emotional manipulation,” Day added. Last week, on his blog, Day wrote, “There is no more Republican vs. Democrat. It is now whites vs. non-whites and white quislings.””*

ibid

It was a dynamic that had played out at a microcosmic scale in the 2015 Hugo Awards: the more ideologically extreme Rabid Puppies campaign pulling the more conventionally conservative Sad Puppies campaign further to the right and deeper into more confrontational tactics. Day’s contempt for the political positions of people like Sarah A. Hoyt had become more overt in 2016 but that was something Day did not need to dissemble about anymore. More mainstream conservatives could take more extreme positions while rationalising that they were not as extreme as the nebulous alt-right.

Day was gaining national mainstream attention but he remained a relatively minor figure in comparison to his “alt-lite” allies Mike Cernovich and Milo Yiannopoulos or rivals like Richard Spencer<sup>[11]</sup>. Spencer, who had a reasonable claim to having coined the term “alt-right”, had also gained a great deal of media attention in the wake of Donald Trump’s improbable success. Spencer and Day’s underlying race-based nationalist ideology were not very different, but Spencer was more overt in tying his views to Nazi and white supremacist ideology. Day would always deny any link between his views and Nazism, whereas Spencer would make “jokes” like saying “let’s party like it’s 1933”<sup>[12]</sup> or make Nazi salutes.

Spencer’s well-dressed and confident demeanour had enabled his increasing media fame. However, he would gain some substantially unwelcome publicity on the day of Donald Trump’s inauguration. During a TV interview, a hooded stranger punched him in the face<sup>[13]</sup>. Whatever the ethics of the punch may have been, the ensuing adoption of the footage as a viral meme of a Nazi being punched undermined Spencer’s status. For once Vox Day had nothing but praise for “SJW” rhetoric.

*“Is it fair? Not particularly. So what? It’s funny and effective. It is excellent rhetoric. It’s the first time the Left has outmimed the Right in ages, and all because some amateurs thought they were playing underwater 5D chess. Sometimes, what looks stupid is just stupid.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170429042458/http://voxdav.blogspot.com.au/2017/01/the-right-alternative.html>

In a narratively simpler world, a single punch would be sufficient to defeat the rising leader of a new-style Nazi movement. In reality, Spencer was attempting to shift the alt-right’s online presence into a physical one. That ambition would coalesce around the city of Charlottesville, Virginia.

The town had its own controversial monument, a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee that sat in a park that at the time was named after him. The city council had decided to remove the statue and rename the park. In May 2017, Spencer led a torchlit night-time march to the statue with a crowd chanting multiple slogans such as “You will not replace us” or, even more disturbingly “Jews will not replace us”<sup>[14]</sup>. Residents of the city held a candlelight vigil as a counter-protest the following night.

Through the summer, there were more confrontations as various far-right/white supremacist groups including the KKK<sup>[15]</sup> targeted Charlottesville. These groups were often met by much larger counter-protests. However, the protest against the KKK led to police using tear gas against the counter-protestors<sup>[16]</sup>.

The ‘Unite the Right Rally’ was scheduled to be held in Charlottesville in early August after weeks of tensions between far-right groups, counter-protestors and police. The ostensible purpose of the rally was to protest the removal of the statue of Robert E. Lee, but the structure of it was an attempt to bring disparate far-right groups together for collective action. As well as alt-right figures such as Richard Spencer and online figures, the rally would include overt neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups as well as right-wing militia groups<sup>[17]</sup>.

On the evening before the rally on August 11, the white nationalists held another torchlit march this time on the campus of the University of Virginia, chanting slogans like “blood and soil” and eventually surrounding and assaulting a group of counter-protestors<sup>[18]</sup>.

Unsurprisingly August 12 quickly descended into violence. A full account of events is beyond the scope of this chapter and there are many better accounts available<sup>[19]</sup> but before noon of that day, the governor of Virginia had declared a state of emergency. Before the day was over a counter-protestor had been murdered and many others injured when a white supremacist intentionally drove his car into a crowd<sup>[20]</sup>.

The murderer was eventually sentenced to life in prison. Civil cases against the organisers of the rally were still ongoing when this chapter was written (see Afterword).

The violence and overt neo-Nazi aspects of the Unite the Right Rally were shocking and made international headlines. Again, if we were to imagine a narratively simpler world, the revelation that the people who had online sounded suspiciously like Nazis also acted like Nazi street gangs in physical reality would have alerted people across the political spectrum that the right had a serious Nazi problem that had already led to murder and domestic terrorism. Donald Trump’s reaction was an attempt to hedge his bets by suggesting that at least some of the people on “both sides” were good people. Rationalising away the very vocal neo-Nazi-like aspect of the alt-right would require effort from the more mainstream right. This was not just confined to Trump or Trump supporters. Sampling from the opinions of the erstwhile Evil League of Evil we can find the non-Trump-supporting Brad Torgersen searching for ways to make sense of events at Charlottesville without confronting the ugly truth. Torgersen regarded the alarming news coverage as mainly an issue with the media.

*“On average, the United States racks up between 10,000 and 15,000 homicides a year. Which ones make the news; depends entirely on what kind of narrative the news feels like pushing. Example: you will seldom see the national media running breathless front-page reports about black teenagers killing black teenagers in Democrat-controlled Chicago. That’s not news. That’s business as usual. Boring. And not conducive to the kind of narrative the media are eager to shape.”*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/2059580674068155>

Torgersen would go on to say in the same post:

*“So, when some idiot clown plows his vehicle into a crowd of other idiot clowns, during an event which seems to be nothing but an all-hands All-Clowns-Day, the media—who drive the clown car—are right in the middle of it. Shaping perception. Ensuring that the line between commentary and fact, is blurred into the dust. Pinning tails on various donkeys, cough, I mean, elephants.”*

*ibid*

This was the pattern that he had followed with the Rabid Puppies antics in 2015 but applied to the national stage. Whatever else Torgersen might be, he is definitely not a neo-Nazi and it really shouldn’t have been much of an ideological conflict to criticise murder. Yet, Torgersen’s reaction was not atypical for many people on the right as a way to avoid confronting the difficult idea of the growing extremism on the right.

Others saw a sinister hand of conspiracy in the events at Charlottesville as a way of avoiding examining their own overlap of beliefs with the Unite the Right organisers. After stating his own opposition to “Nazism”, *Mad Genius Club* blogger, Castalia House author and former organiser of the 2015 Tor Boycott, Peter Grant declared:

*“Putting all these things together, I can only conclude that a shadowy behind-the-scenes organizer (or organizers) is/are pulling the strings, coordinating responses to Charlottesville for the benefit of far-left-wing and progressive elements in this country. I have a pretty good idea who’s to blame, as well.*

- I have little doubt that George Soros, and organizations and individuals funded by him, are heavily involved.*

- I have little doubt that former President Obama’s ‘Organizing for Action’ and its leadership is in this up to its neck.*

- It’s very obvious, from their own statements and those of their leaders, that organizations such as Antifa, Black Lives Matter, etc. are behind much of what’s going on.*

• *I have little doubt that the national news media, so infamously in the tank for former President Obama and so clearly united in opposition to President Trump, are playing this up for all they're worth.*

<https://bayourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2017/08/was-entire-charlottesville-imbroglio.html>

A year earlier, Grant had stated that it was a bad idea to drive a car at protestors if you felt under threat but purely for practical reasons<sup>[21]</sup>.

*“Firstly, a vehicle isn't going to help when the streets are clogged. You can't drive over dozens of protestors. If nothing else, their bodies will immobilize your vehicle, just as surely as if it became high-centered over a bump. What's more, as soon as you're forced to slow down or stop, you're going to get dragged from your vehicle by angry rioters.”*

<https://bayourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2016/09/lessons-from-charlotte-riots.html>

If former Sad Puppies struggled to rationalise their own reactions to the violence of Unite the Right, the matter was a much simpler one for Vox Day. Day, who disliked Richard Spencer because of his high-profile and because Spencer was less shy about ties with self-declared neo-Nazis, regarded the Unite the Right events as a sign of Spencer's incompetence and ideological impurity. Spencer and other figures such as Gavin MacInnes<sup>[22]</sup> were attempting to move the online presence of the alt-right into a more physical sphere of street fighting and in-person protests. This was not an arena that Day could compete in, as his influence (such as it was) was predominantly online and he himself was based near the Alps rather than on the ground in the US.

Day's criticism of some of the groups involved in Unite the Right (in particular Andrew Anglin of the *Daily Stormer*) was part of wider in-fighting among the alt-right at the time. For the first time, Day found himself being targeted on social media by the same set of trolling and harassment techniques developed by the alt-right. On the right-wing Twitter alternative Gab, Day was harassed by supporters of Anglin who called him a paedophile (a tactic Day had espoused in the past). This led to Day demanding that Gab use more strict moderation and enforce rules against doxing and harassment. Day declared on September 16 2017:

*“And now Andrew Torba has publicly endorsed people attempting to doxx and SWAT his users despite the way in which doing so would clearly violates Gab's Terms of Service. At this point, given the unprofessionalism and obvious lack of self-control being demonstrated by Andrew, I think it is safe to conclude that Gab is dead. It simply hasn't stopped moving yet.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170916235757/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2017/09/gab-wants-war.html>

The conflict between Day and Gab's founder Andrew Torba would drag on with threats of lawsuits. Gab itself would also face pressure from technology companies unwilling to provide services to a site where neo-Nazis were organising<sup>[23]</sup>.

September 2017 was not the best time for Vox Day. His next step was to actively endorse Senatorial candidate Roy Moore. Day regarded Moore as the genuine example of what the alt-right could be as a political force, saying:

*“And this is why it is a mistake for the Alt Lite to fear accepting the Alt-Right label. The failed attempts of Richard Spencer, Greg Johnson, and Andrew Anglin to “brand” it as their own preferred ideology are no more significant than the attempts of the media to brand it as National Socialism.*

*But it doesn't matter what it is called. You can't kill an inevitable philosophy with guilt-by-association. The conservative movement has failed. The libertarian movement has failed. The neo-liberal world order has failed. Multiculturalism has failed. Civic nationalism has failed.*

*An alternative Right is the only possible alternative to the failed right-wing ideologies and philosophies of the past. The label is irrelevant, what is clear is that whatever it is an alternative, it is Right, and it is winning.*

*Notice that Roy Moore has seen considerably more setbacks than the average individual. He has seen far more pressure and opposition from the Republican and media establishments, and been literally discredited and disqualified. But now he is very likely to be the next Senator from Alabama, because the Alt-Right is inevitable.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170927173948/https://voxdav.blogspot.com/2017/09/the-rise-of-real-alternative.html>

While a Republican winning a senate seat in Alabama may have appeared to be inevitable, it was not. Moore was credibly accused of sexual assault by multiple women, two of whom had been minors at the time of the assault. Moore also had a disturbing pattern of behaviour towards younger women and teenage girls<sup>[24]</sup>. The allegations seriously undermined Moore's senatorial campaign and in a narrow victory the Democratic Party candidate Doug Jones won. Moore refused to concede, but the results were inevitably certified despite attempts by Moore to mount legal challenges.

Day's past success in raising his profile had been catching the wave of culture war/conspiracy theory/harassment campaigns that had bubbled up from 4chan or its even less savoury rival 8chan. Both GamerGate and Pizzagate had been brewed up in the toxic mix of ironic shitposts and genuine conspiratorial ideation in the Chans. In October, Day had been excited about a potential revival of the 2016 Pizzagate campaign, now rechristened "Podestagate".

On October 5 at a photo op with members of the military, Donald Trump had made cryptic remarks about events being "the calm before the storm". In all likelihood, the phrase was cryptic only because Trump was simply saying the first thing that came into his head. However, for Trump supporters and those who had assumed his surprise victory must have been due to Trump's strategic genius, the words resonated as a promise of some remarkable new phase in Trump's plans.

On October 28 on the /pol/ board of 4chan somebody offered an answer. Calling themselves 'Q', the otherwise anonymous person claimed (naturally without any verification) to be somebody with high-level access and inside knowledge of Trump's secret project named "The Storm"<sup>[25]</sup>. Met initially with scepticism, the idea began to catch on.

In December 2017, Vox Day was fully on board with the hot new trend from 4chan, saying "Storm is the New Pizza". Pizzagate was back in a new form and with a wider back story...but that is a story for another time.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald\\_Trump\\_Access\\_Hollywood\\_tape](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Trump_Access_Hollywood_tape)
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017\\_Women%27s\\_March](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Women%27s_March)
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey\\_Weinstein\\_sexual\\_abuse\\_cases](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey_Weinstein_sexual_abuse_cases)
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me\\_Too\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me_Too_movement)
- [5] <https://www.cbr.com/vault-comics-drops-myke-cole-sexual-misconduct-allegations/>
- [6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive\\_Order\\_13769](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_Order_13769)
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration\\_policy\\_of\\_Donald\\_Trump](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_policy_of_Donald_Trump)
- [8] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Lives\\_Matter#2017](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Lives_Matter#2017)
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S.national\\_anthem\\_protests\(2016%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S.national_anthem_protests(2016%E2%80%93present))
- [10] e.g., [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alabama\\_Memorial\\_Preservation\\_Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alabama_Memorial_Preservation_Act)
- [11] I don't know if Spencer regarded Vox Day as a rival
- [12] [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/lets-party-like-its-1933-inside-the-disturbing-alt-right-world-of-richard-spencer/2016/11/22/cf81dc74-aff7-11e6-840f-e3ebab6bcd3\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/lets-party-like-its-1933-inside-the-disturbing-alt-right-world-of-richard-spencer/2016/11/22/cf81dc74-aff7-11e6-840f-e3ebab6bcd3_story.html)
- [13] <https://time.com/4642117/richard-spencer-punched-white-nationalist-nazi-trump-inauguration/>
- [14] <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/8/15/16141456/renaud-camus-the-great-replacement-you-will-not-replace-us-charlottesville-white>
- [15] <https://web.archive.org/web/20201025043058/https://www.umnews.org/en/news/clergy-stand-up-to-charlottesville-kkk-rally>
- [16] <https://www.c-ville.com/rashomon-effect-police-chief-defends-tear-gas-activists-allege-police-brutality/>
- [17] There's a taxonomic argument to be had there that I'm just repeating myself with those distinctions. Whether there was much ideological difference between these groups is one question, but there were aesthetic differences in how they portray themselves.
- [18] <https://www.dazeddigital.com/politics/article/37059/1/i-saw-the-attack-at-charlottesville-i-knew-it-was-coming>
- [19] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unite\\_the\\_Right\\_rally](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unite_the_Right_rally)
- [20] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlottesville\\_car\\_attack](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlottesville_car_attack)
- [21] Grant recommended avoiding such situations altogether but if trapped, he suggested shooting the protestors/rioters rather than driving at them.
- [22] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gavin\\_McInnes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gavin_McInnes)
- [23] somehow, Gab did actually survive and is still running today. At some point Vox Day re-joined the service.
- [24] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy\\_Moore\\_sexual\\_misconduct\\_allegations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy_Moore_sexual_misconduct_allegations)
- [25] <https://www.vox.com/2017/10/7/16441232/trump-calm-before-storm>

# Volume 3

## 65: Post Apupalypse 2018-2019

The protracted culture war for the soul of science fiction fandom was over...sort of. The broad social issues and responses to demographic and technological change were still ongoing. Issues of systemic bias and ingrained prejudice within fandom and publishing still existed. Fandom's seemingly insatiable appetite for controversies and feuds was not going to end or even truly pause to catch a breath. Unravelling the distinction between personal differences, justifiable anger, aesthetic arguments, and shitty behaviour had not been simplified. If anything, having faced down a caricature-like example of an antagonist (Vox Day even portrayed himself as supreme dark lord sitting on a throne of skulls) highlighted how complex non-Puppy-related fannish disputes could be.

Nevertheless, during a time period in which many institutions in wealthy English-speaking countries (and beyond) had found themselves pulled further to right by the rise of extreme nationalism, first the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) and then Worldcon/WSFS/Hugo Awards had, in the end, seen off reactionary campaigns against increased representation for historically discriminated sections of society.

Vox Day had warned the SFWA that dire consequences would follow if he were expelled and many right-leaning figures within or previously associated with the SFWA had also warned that his expulsion in 2013 would lead to a disastrous rift in the organisation (see chapter 22). In reality, the SFWA did not collapse, implode or split into innumerable factions. While there were some attempts to establish "apolitical" rival organisations to the SFWA, none of these amounted to anything. The right-wing campaign against the organisation continued only in the form of harassment by internet trolls of SFWA officers, including SFWA President (2015-2019) Cat Rambo.

Although Day threatened legal action against the SFWA, the subsequent Puppy campaigns against the Hugo Awards actually comprised the major response to his expulsion. These campaigns mixed discontent from Day's expulsion with some fans' lingering resentment of perceived poor representation of Baen Books at the Hugo Awards and a mix of self-promotion and broader culture-war sentiment. After a high point of activity in 2015 including a boycott of Tor Books, the Puppy campaigns finally fizzled out in 2017.

The fears expressed in 2015 that the Puppy campaigns would lead the Hugos into a spiral of irrelevance, a battlefield of warring slates versus counter-slates, or rule changes (such as shifting to a juried award) that would fundamentally change the character of the awards did not come to pass. The high-profile win in 2016 of N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* helped reconfirm the status of the Hugo Awards as a leading indicator of future classics and rising stars.

Tor Books did not collapse, the publishing careers of Patrick Nielsen Hayden and (major target of the Tor Boycott) Irene Gallo continued to be successful. John Scalzi continued to write popular, best-selling science fiction.

Of the Puppies, by 2018 those whose careers had been doing well (such as Larry Correia) continued to prosper. Those whose traditional publishing careers had been in decline (such as John C. Wright and Sarah A. Hoyt) shifted further into independent publishing online. Reflecting recently on the events of 2015, John Scalzi noted:

*"The best-case scenario sees the most popular Pups more or less at the same level of sales and popularity as they were when the nonsense started; they were not hurt by it because they already had their fan bases, contracts and distribution, and their fan base was either sympathetic to their Pup positions, or didn't know and/or care."*

<https://whatever.scalzi.com/2021/09/12/thoughts-on-the-debarkle/><sup>[1]</sup>

The Post-Apupalyptic wasteland was one of few material consequences.

The Hugo Awards had upgraded its voting system to a more proportional system with more nominees and, in the process of reforming the constitution, had added new categories including the Best Series award. Memberships and voting levels did not remain at the same heights as in 2015 but the conflict had drawn in new members and newly active people in fan spaces.

However, the conflict lingered psychologically among fans connected with the Hugo Awards — a sense of vigilance or paranoia about potential new threats.

### ***The Benedict Option***

In 2017, conservative writer Rod Dreher<sup>[2]</sup> reacted to what he perceived as the growing acceptance of secular virtues in American society by proposing a kind of withdrawal from broader society by Christians

into their own spaces. He called this approach “The Benedict Option” after the codification of medieval Catholic monastic orders by Saint Benedict<sup>[3]</sup>.

Although most of the so-called Evil League of Evil were Christians of one kind or another, religion was rarely a centrepiece of the Puppy campaigns. They had been more motivated by worldly issues rather than spiritual ones. Nonetheless, in a kind of convergent evolution, the former Puppies adopted a kind of genre-based secular form of a Benedict Option. Where once upon time figures such as Michael Z. Williamson or Brad Torgersen might have been found commenting in mainstream fan spaces such as John Scalzi’s blog, the former Puppies retreated to their own blogs and Facebook pages.

In the social media of the former Puppies, the Hugo Awards rarely came up anymore, appearing only when the normal level of fannish disputes within Worldcon reached a sufficient level for them to notice and then only when the former Puppies could cite the latest event as evidence that the predicted collapse of the Hugo Awards had finally arrived.

### ***Meanwhile...a Raison d’être***

If fandom had survived 2015-2017 and passed through largely unscathed, the wider culture war had only grown. Nationalism was ascendant globally; racism and misogyny were finding new validation from elected politicians. Transgender people had become the new target of demonisation by the right (and beyond) after the failure of the culture warriors to stop marriage equality.

Right-wing stochastic terrorism was continuing and, while the alt-right had failed to find unity in the wake of Donald Trump’s election, their willingness to find new outlets to organise and recruit had not lessened.

In May of 2015, I had begun erratically to follow and document in a scattershot way the views and statements of the Sad and Rabid Puppies. The connection to a broader cultural wave of reaction to modern society was something that I thought was obvious but not always well expressed. This wave of reaction was unorganised and often diffuse, expressed often incoherently or on apparently unrelated subjects and yet was a common thread running across phenomena as varied as Brexit and GamerGate. Indeed, this “thread” would take the form of individuals common to both, such as the YouTube GamerGate personality Sargon of Akkad later being the UKIP candidate and pro-Brexit campaigner Carl Benjamin<sup>[4]</sup>.

If the net material impact of the Puppy campaigns appears to have been very limited at best and counter-productive to their stated aims at worst, the question remained as to the impact on the political beliefs of its leading lights. Vox Day’s tactics and those of the alt-right in general, had multiple aims, but where they enjoyed the most success was in radicalising people who already held strong conservative views on race, immigration, nationality, militarism, gender or sexuality.

The Puppy campaigns had been many things, but for the participants, they had been part of a political journey. While the Great Puppy Kerfuffle of 2015 was truly over, that political journey was continuing. I decided to watch where it went.

## **FOOTNOTES**

- [1] Excel would regard this as a circular reference.
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod\\_Dreher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod_Dreher)
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Benedict\\_Option](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Benedict_Option)
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl\\_Benjamin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Benjamin)



## 66: The Rise and Self Destruction of Comicsgate

[Content warning for bullying and misogyny]

GamerGate (see chapter 28) and the Puppy campaigns had each chosen their own mode of popular culture to stage a revolt against the perceived incursion of more modern ideas. The offending ideas were not just social/political but also aesthetic or a combination of both — particularly regarding how women were represented. While both GamerGate and the Puppy campaigns included women supporters, both campaigns highlighted feminism as one of the social movements they were pushing back on and also portrayed the respective domains as places naturally suited for the enjoyment of young men.

Among the alt-right (see chapter 57) both of these campaigns were part of a broader pushback against the inclusion of women, a greater range of ethnic groups, and LGBTQI people in popular culture both as characters and as creators. This pushback was tied to a politically paranoid belief that sinister forces were attempting to wipe out white people as a group and hence the increased representation in popular culture (from movies to TV adverts) of people other than manly-looking cis-het English-speaking Christian white men was regarded as confirmation of a genocidal plot. This overarching idea allowed the alt-right to connect in their rhetoric everything from their opposition to immigration and movements like Black Lives Matter with their support for Donald Trump, and of course to the ongoing struggle over popular culture.

GamerGate had framed itself as a consumer uprising. The Puppy campaigns would adopt similar rhetoric but were predominantly campaigns by content creators (i.e., authors). Even the more GamerGatesque aspects of the Puppy campaigns (e.g., the Tor Boycott – see chapter 43) were still led primarily by aspiring authors. However, a more general reactionary consumer revolt tactic was adopted on the right across a broader range of popular culture. In the aftermath of GamerGate, this had included a coordinated campaign against the women-led reboot of the *Ghostbusters* franchise. The targeted harassment of actor Leslie Jones led to Milo Yiannopoulos being permanently banned from Twitter<sup>[1]</sup>.

Other alt-right backlashes in popular culture included campaigns against Rian Johnson's *Star Wars* sequel *The Last Jedi*<sup>[2]</sup> in 2017. In 2018 former GamerGate and Puppy supporter Brian Niemeier was one of many on the right who was outraged by Netflix commissioning a re-boot of 1980s kid's cartoon *She-Ra* but with more body-positive character designs. Niemeier saw the move as a sadistic mental game by the media company.

*“What follows is crucial. In fact, it's the whole point. The converged corporation fans initial murmurs of normie dissatisfaction into a full-fledged backlash. Conveniently, the company will have hired a race hustler masquerading as a writer or a LOOK AT ME!!! LGBTQ+ mascot to headline the project. Those who complained have unwittingly stepped into a kafka trap wherein the production's SJW fellow travelers in the media can snipe at normal people with their victims caught in a crossfire.”*

<https://brianniemeier.com/2018/07/the-sjw-turkey-shoot/>

Even cute Disney musicals got dragged into the culture war with, belatedly, the song “Let It Go” from the 2013 film *Frozen* being identified as subversively feminist in 2017 by popular right-wing self-help guru of the time Jordan Peterson calling the film “propagandistic”<sup>[3]</sup> while Vox Day saw Satan and the collapse of civilisation in the song.

*“Disney is run by literal satanists preaching Alastair Crowley's “do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law” to children. They are one of the primary engines of the West's degeneracy and decline. It is not an accident that everything they touch, in every industry, turns into morally radioactive slime.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20171027230425/http://voxdav.blogspot.com.au/2017/10/the-devil-that-is-disney.html>

However, histrionics about catchy show tunes lacked the same mobilising influence as GamerGate and the Puppy campaigns. Attempts to derail huge franchises backed by marketing might of the increasingly dominant Disney corporation proved to be largely fruitless.

Among the many areas in this sporadic cultural campaign was superhero comic books. This front in the culture war was initially just part of the same unfocused complaints about the improved representation of women and other groups in modern comics. Most notable of these incidents was the far-right online harassment campaign that sprung up in 2016 objecting to the cover of a Marvel comic featuring the character Mockingbird in a t-shirt that read “Ask me about my feminist agenda”<sup>[4]</sup>. The writer of the comic, Chelsea Cain, was subject to a wave of harassment on social media<sup>[5]</sup>. In 2017 an otherwise unremarkable photograph

of women staff at Marvel drinking milkshakes became the focus of another social media harassment campaign.

*“According to a vocal contingent online, Antos and the Marvel Milkshake Crew were “fake geek girls,” “social justice warriors,” and “Tumblr-virtue signallers,” the sort of people who were ruining the comics industry by their very presence. “The creepiest collection of stereotypical SJWs [“social justice warriors”] anyone could possibly imagine,” one user tweeted. Musings on Antos’ sexual availability led another to write, “Better have her sign a consent form, she looks like the ‘false rape charge’ type.””*

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/comicsgate-how-an-anti-diversity-harassment-campaign-in-comics-got-uglvand-profitable>

Central to that campaign was a YouTuber and comic book writer/reviewer Richard C. Meyer, who had been using his channel (entitled “Diversity & Comics”) to promulgate the idea that feminism and diversity were undermining comics. Not all of Meyer’s anti-diversity rhetoric was public and his more extreme comments were contained in a private channel for more dedicated fans of his videos.

*“In a private YouTube video called “The Dark Roast,” originally posted in November 2017 and obtained by The Daily Beast, Meyer called one Marvel editor a “cum-dumpster,” accused various female writers of “sucking their way into the industry,” and mused which famous creators were paedophiles or had psychological problems. “The Dark Roast is where I get to say stuff like ‘Dan Slott looks like a paedophile,’” he says in the recording. “I don’t have to dance around; I don’t have to say ‘parody’ or wink-wink.””*

ibid

Meyer was one of the two central figures in Comicsgate but before we get to the second figure, we need to look at the other dimension of Comicsgate and encounter some more familiar faces.

Comics, as an industry, had many features in common with both the book publishing world of the Puppy campaigns and the quite different world of video games. Technological change and shifts in consumer habits had meant that the dominant publishers of superhero comic books (Marvel and DC) were dealing with a changing market. Fewer people were buying individual comics from speciality comic book stores and instead were buying comics digitally, or in collections/graphic novel formats. In addition, Japanese manga had become increasingly available to Western audiences since the 1990s. As with book publishing, people hadn’t stopped reading, but the market had become less predictable and consumer choice had increased significantly<sup>[6]</sup>.

Not unlike video games, the comic book industry had also had a long history of difficult and often exploitative relationships not just with fans but also with the key people producing the creative work. In the new century, the value of the intellectual property of many classic superheroes had come to far exceed that of the sales of comic books — especially for Marvel (now owned by Disney) whose superhero movies were becoming must-see blockbuster films.

Digital tools and digital publishing had reduced some of the barriers to the creation of independent comics. However, comics remained more complex and expensive to produce than text-only books. They also required more collaboration between individuals. As with independently-produced novels, aspiring comic book creators taking an independent path faced the issue of how to stand out in a busy market.

The twenty-first century had brought many internet-based innovations but one of particular pertinence to this chapter was the rise of crowdfunding sites. Some of these sites, like GoFundMe<sup>[7]</sup>, were focused on personal causes or charitable giving; others such as Kickstarter and IndieGoGo were intended to help people fund specific projects<sup>[8]</sup>. The Kickstarter model was well suited to projects such as comics and graphic novels. The time and cost of writing and illustrating a comic involves significant risk for the people involved, and being paid in advance of the work had obvious advantages by demonstrating that there was a paying audience for the proposed work.

Inevitably tying the culture war to crowdfunding comic books was a step that somebody was going to take.

Although it was not obvious in March 2017, the shine was coming off Vox Day’s Castalia House publishing project. When the Rabid Puppies campaigns finally ran out of steam, Day’s enthusiasm for publishing new science fiction novels also waned sharply. Provoked by an article in *The Federalist* by Jon Del Arroz jumping on the trend of attacking diversity in comics, Day asked his followers if they’d be interested in crowdfunding a line of comics from Castalia.

*“Is this something where a Kickstarter would make sense? I don’t like the idea of relying solely upon the Dread Ilk for this, as you are already supporting more vital projects such as Gab, Infogalactic, and*

*Castalia House. Those are strategic projects of general interest, whereas something like this is more specific to a single converged market. My thought is that it would be interesting to subvert the current superhero genre with a group of nationalist superheroes who are totally opposed to the evil would-be rulers of the world; they'd be seen as villains, of course, by those who romanticized saving the UN every Saturday morning in the 1970s and 80s."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170401023420/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2017/03/diversity-in-comics.html>

Day had already had some work done illustrating his *Quantum Mortis* science fiction novel and while Castalia House's back catalogue wasn't huge, there was a variety of works he could adapt. Day was already using his many followers for more direct crowdfunding of his various projects (such as his alternate version of Wikipedia).

After considering the mainstream crowdfunding site Kickstarter, Day was faced with a dilemma. He wanted the campaign to be overtly controversial, with some of the initial artwork featuring a vigilante hunting down an illegal immigrant who was a child rapist. By 2017, large tech companies had belatedly become far wavier of providing material support for the far-right, and Day believed that Kickstarter would cave to the inevitable backlash to his campaign. Not that Day didn't want a backlash (he hoped to provoke one) but he did not want one of sufficient strength that it would derail the funding of the campaign.

In the end, Day used a new (and short-lived) crowdfunding site called Freestart, the creation of a right-wing activist/entrepreneur Charles C. Johnson<sup>[9]</sup>. Freestart was also used by Richard Spencer to crowdfund some of his legal fees in the wake of the disastrous Unite the Right rally<sup>[10]</sup>. The lowest level pledge for the project was at \$10 and was named "Pull the Trigger":

*"This is for those who could not care less about comics, but enjoy tormenting SJWs and would enjoy the privilege of triggering them by being able to say "yeah, I did that." We will send you a special digital portrait of Rebel, in her Alt★Hero outfit, blowing a kiss and saying "You're welcome!" that you can send to people crying about it on social media."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170929184914/https://freestart.com/project/althero/>

Your ten dollars would earn you a picture of "Rebel", one of Day's superhero characters — a young woman from the Southern United States whose costume incorporated the design of a Confederate flag.

Day's campaign was a success, raising \$34,735, although nearly a third of that amount was from just three donors<sup>[11]</sup>. Freestart as an overall project would be less successful due to being cut off by payment processing companies PayPal and Stripe in 2018<sup>[12]</sup>.

The campaign resulted in Castalia gaining a new imprint called Arkhaven Comics and Day had a new channel to bring his combination of the culture war and commercial venture to the world.

This takes us to the fourth figure in the world of Comicsgate: Ethan Van Sciver<sup>[13]</sup>. A comic book artist who had had some success with DC and Marvel, Van Sciver had also notably provided the illustrations in 2017 for the highly popular right-wing self-help book *12 Rules for Life* by Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson. Van Sciver's YouTube channel Comic increasingly became the centre of Comicsgate activity, with his focus shifting from advice on illustrating comics to culture-war rhetoric and promoting figures such as Vox Day and Richard C. Meyer<sup>[14]</sup>.

Both Meyer and Van Sciver took the culture war boost into crowdfunding their own comics projects in 2018. Meyer's *Jawbreakers—Lost Souls* comic was announced as a Kickstarter project near the start of the year but his connection with the ongoing social media harassment of other figures in comics led to some comic book stores announcing that they would not stock the comic once it was released. These announcements led to new rounds of harassment:

*"On the early morning of Friday, May 11th Meyer agreed with a fan's joke about breaking the legs of those at the stores who refused to carry Jawbreakers, rallying his "army" around his cause. Shortly thereafter that morning, Variant Edition Culture & Comics was broken into, the glass was smashed through in the front of the store, and money was stolen from the register. There are strong suspicions from the shop's owner and the local community that this was no coincidence. That afternoon despite the problematic violence, Meyer's "army" continued to threaten Big Bang with unknown "consequences"."*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180930081423/https://womenwriteaboutcomics.com/2018/05/previolsly-on-comics-comicsgate-gets-aggressive-and-other-news/>

The subsequent storm led the publisher Antarctic Press to withdraw their plans to publish *Jawbreakers* with Meyer. In retaliation, Meyer started legal action against Antarctic Press and announced his own publishing

company to produce the comic. Antarctic's action was then characterised by Comicsgate supporters as further evidence of left-wing censorship.

Jon Del Arroz used his column in the prominent far-right web magazine *The Federalist* to frame the conflict over *Jawbreakers* as a battle for freedom of expression.

*"Their backtracking had big implications for Meyer and his team, as the book would no longer be distributed to comic book stores. But there was little they could do about it. Antarctic Press was hit by a storm of industry professionals colluding to try to force conservative-authored competition out of the business, which was followed by several retailers threatening to drop all Antarctic Press books from their shelves if the publisher produced Meyer's book. The precedent set is disturbing, but this kind of anti-conservative discrimination has been festering in the comics world for a long time."*

<https://thefederalist.com/2018/05/15/mob-attempts-strangle-youtubers-breakout-success-upon-ditching-sjw-infested-comics/>

According to Del Arroz, Comicsgate was an anti-harassment campaign, pushing back against left-wing hate directed at conservatives within the comics industry.

With figures like Meyer and Van Sciver publishing their own comics using crowdfunding but also facing issues with potential boycotts from publishers, distributors and comic shops, Vox Day saw an opportunity. Day had already established a second comics imprint, Dark Legion, intended for more creator-owned projects to complement his Arkhaven comics. Day himself regarded the broader Comicsgate campaign less like GamerGate and more like the Sad Puppy campaign, to the extent of overtly stating that "Comicsgate is Sad Puppies"<sup>[15]</sup> and prior to that describing Meyer and Van Sciver as "moderates". This was dismissive and also a way for Day to support Van Sciver's claims that the Comicsgate campaign was somehow an apolitical consumer backlash against forced diversity. However, Day also recognised that "Comicsgate" as a brand name was attracting the attention of a large potential market for Arkhaven and Castalia House.

In September 2018 Vox Day staged a very small comic book *coup d'etat*.

Day announced the third imprint for his line of comics and registered the name in systems for the distribution of comics<sup>[16]</sup>. The name chosen was *Comicsgate Comics*.

*"Theodore "Vox Day" Beale, the Nazi-quoting nationalist most famous for gaming the Hugo Awards with bloc voting campaigns, has appropriated the "ComicsGate" name for a new comics publishing company. But adherents of the ComicsGate movement, though sharing his distaste for diversity, are far from pleased."*

<https://boingboing.net/2018/09/04/alt-right-publisher-founds-com.html>

Day's move to apparently control the term "Comicsgate" led to a furious backlash from Ethan Van Sciver. Day attempted to explain that he was not seeking to control the term, but rather to help creative people who wanted to support Comicsgate.

*"Arkhaven is for the original material that we create. Dark Legion is what other creators bring to us for publishing. ComicsGate is similar to Dark Legion, but it is specifically for creators and fans who wish to make public their support for ComicsGate. We don't claim to define ComicsGate, we don't claim to be the official publisher of ComicsGate, and there will certainly be ComicsGaters who will utilize other publishers and distribution channels, this is merely our way of offering our structural support for the people and philosophy of ComicsGate."*

<https://boundingintocomics.com/2018/09/03/exclusive-vox-day-announces-new-comicsgate-imprint/>

Day, Meyer and Van Sciver had already established social media followings of people involved in notable anti-SJW campaigns. The subsequent fight over the name "Comicsgate" was exactly as toxic as you would imagine, setting warring armies of trolls against each other.

Caught in the middle was Jon Del Arroz. Arroz had used his social media presence and his platform on *The Federalist* to boost Van Sciver, Meyer and the Comicsgate hashtag. He also had allied himself with Vox Day and had books published via Castalia and comics distributed by Arkhaven, including a forthcoming adaptation of MilSF writer Richard Fox's *Ember War* series.

For the first time, Day found himself facing substantial opposition from people marginally to the left of him but still in the anti-SJW right. Portraying him as a grifter and a carpet-bagger, the new-found critics of Day discovered (as if they were new) some of Day's more extreme views, including Day's endorsement of the political mass murderer and child-killer Anders Brevik.

Right-wing anti-SJW comic review site *Bounding Into Comics* made a call for peace.

*“On September 3rd, 2018, Alt-Hero publisher Vox Day announced his prospective Comicsgate imprint right here on Bounding Into Comics, and it would be an insult to diarrhea to say that the Comicsgate community understandably lost their crap in response. Whether Vox Day was trying to do something he deemed to be positive for the movement, or he was just trying to co-opt it a la Sad Puppies...or both, is mostly irrelevant; the fallout from his move was quite real, particularly when it came to author and occasional BIC contributor Jon Del Arroz.”*

<https://boundingintocomics.com/2018/09/22/lets-not-turn-comicsgate-into-dramagate/>

Under pressure, Day abandoned the idea of a Comicsgate imprint and also wanted an end to the infighting but also did not want to concede defeat. He even took issue with how *Bounding Into Comics* described his relationship with the Sad Puppies.

*“I would, however, like to correct one common misapprehension: I never co-opted Sad Puppies. To the contrary, I was the architect of the Sad Puppies most notorious success and at no point in time was there ever any conflict between the Sad Puppies and me. If you look more closely, you’ll notice that none of the four leaders of the Sad Puppies, from Larry to Kate, have ever made a single accusation on that score. I don’t intend to say any more than that, except to reiterate an absolute fact: I did not co-opt Sad Puppies and anyone who claims I did in any way, shape, or form is wrong.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210808092457/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2018/09/dramagate.html>

Day did not give up on his plans for Arkhaven but his attempt to involve himself more directly in Comicsgate had seriously backfired. More generally, Day had narrowed the field of support that he had in the online right. His feuds with figures such as Richard Spencer and Andrew Anglin (people willing to adopt the more overt trappings of Nazism) had earned him enemies to his marginal right and now the Comicsgate infighting had earned him enemies to his marginal left (i.e., people who had embraced his anti-SJW rhetoric but were warier of being seen as white nationalist extremists).

Jon Del Arroz had also found himself on the less fun side of a right-wing social media harassment campaign. By November 2018 he was declaring that Comicsgate was dead and that it was a failed movement<sup>[17]</sup>. Del Arroz also now conceded a point that many critics of Comicsgate had already observed: a lot of what was being produced by Comicsgate-crowdfunded campaigns were either low quality or late or both.

*“It divided the audience, made everyone angry. There was no more to it than that. It didn’t help people sell books. A lot of small-time creators who were not seeing the IndieGoGo returns as the bigger names got angry. They were promised a new day in comics, it didn’t come. Books started to fail in their goal, and all because the YouTube crowd moved from trying to help everyone and lift all boats... to trying to protect their increasingly shrinking corner of fandom”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190125170831/http://delarroz.com/2018/11/16/a-failed-movement-in-three-acts/>

When Del Arroz was more openly criticised by Ethan Van Sciver, Del Arroz struck back making another point that critics of Day, Van Sciver, and Del Arroz would find familiar.

*“Many of these guys do not, however. They’re stuck. This YouTube money was never going to last forever. The whole premise was based on outrage, not actual products, and so these guys have to perpetually stoke outrage — at Vox Day, at me, at Miss Sashi, at smaller creators (Ethan dedicated several shows to attacking a guy who had an IndieGoGo with less than 20 backers because he spoke ill of EVS), at fans even — who I won’t name to protect them. They’re using the same tactics as the pros at Marvel/DC that they were originally mocking to get big.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200808145306/https://delarroz.com/2018/11/13/two-face-finally-came-for-me/>

Outrage marketing had found its limits.

Despite this, Comicsgate would continue to rumble on in subsequent years. Del Arroz still continued to crowdfund comics and Vox Day continued to push his Arkhaven line. Culture wars do not have neat or definitive ends.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milo\\_Yiannopoulos#Social\\_media\\_controversies\\_and\\_bans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milo_Yiannopoulos#Social_media_controversies_and_bans)
- [2] <https://www.gq.com/story/last-jedi-spam-rotten-tomatoes>
- [3] 2:56 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUKiFxBVpZM&t=203s>
- [4] <https://bleedingcool.com/comics/recent-updates/return-feminist-agenda-t-shirt/>
- [5] <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/krishrach/a-women-writer-was-harassed-off-twitter-for-a-feminist-comic>
- [6] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robsalkowitz/2019/10/08/surprising-new-data-shows-comic-readers-are-leaving-superheroes-behind/?sh=1f15151d4d68>
- [7] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GoFundMe>
- [8] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indiegogo> , <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kickstarter>
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_C.Johnson#Websites\(GotNews,\\_WeSearchr,\\_Freestarttr\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_C.Johnson#Websites(GotNews,_WeSearchr,_Freestarttr))
- [10] <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/muckraker/richard-spencer-manages-find-attorney-federal-charlottesville-case>
- [11] Based on the archive of the Freestarttr page, anonymous donations of \$5000, \$2500 and \$2500. Assuming the ‘top donors’ section is accurate; most donations would have been less than \$200. An NPR piece as part of the Reveal podcast cast doubt on the donation pattern <https://revealnews.org/podcast/never-meet-your-super-heroes/> While it is a good piece overall, I haven’t see anything that supports their claim that Vox Day was directly involved in establishing Freestarttr, and I think they are overstating the degree to which the pattern of donations was unusual for the Alt-Hero campaign.
- [12] <https://web.archive.org/web/20180822010341/https://www.thedailybeast.com/far-right-fuming-after-big-finance-chokes-off-money-flow>
- [13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethan\\_Van\\_Sciver](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethan_Van_Sciver)
- [14] <https://www.thedailybeast.com/comicsgate-how-an-anti-diversity-harassment-campaign-in-comics-got-ugly-and-profitable> “Meyer internalized a lot of Vox Day’s rhetoric early on in his YouTube career: He told The Daily Beast that he was a fan of Vox Day’s “rules for SJWs”—SJWs always lie, SJWs always double down, SJWs always project—though he says he eventually got a bad feeling about him and distanced himself, roasting him as a “carpetbagger” and a “fraud.””
- [15] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210808125343/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2018/08/comicsgate-is-sad-puppies.html> “But it is eminently clear that the growing community around Arkhaven and Dark Legion are to Comicsgate what the Rabid Puppies were to the Sad Puppies. Comicsgate is the Tea Party to our Trumpslide. And you all know how those things turned out.”
- [16] Apologies for the vagueness here. There were claims that he had trademarked the name, which does not seem to be true but he did establish some sort of commercial claim to the name “Comicsgate”.
- [17] <https://web.archive.org/web/20181127162328/https://delarroz.com/2018/11/07/comicsgate-is-dead/>

## 67: Vox and Q

Starting in 2017 and spreading through the alt-right in 2018 and then further beyond in subsequent years, the compendium of conspiracy theories known as Qanon has become so complex that an adequate account is beyond the scope of this project. For those looking for a more detailed account of the key figures instrumental in propagating the Qanon conspiracy theory, the HBO documentary *Q: Into the Storm* by Cullen Hoback<sup>[1]</sup> is worth watching. For information on the broader movement, its influences and variations, the entertaining *Qanon Anonymous* podcast<sup>[2]</sup> has been covering the phenomenon since April 2018.

The precipitating element of the conspiracy theory was a series of enigmatic and anonymous postings on imageboards (first 4chan and later 8chan) by a supposed intelligence agency insider who used the codename “Q”. The content of these posts was both very thin and very cryptic, with much of the surrounding lore and beliefs being constructed by fans of the theory. “Fans” is, I believe, the correct term to use here, as the Qanon movement resembled fannish culture in multiple ways including the importance of fan theories, an often anarchic (even if ideologically reactionary) decentralised structure as a movement, and the shared social experience of participants. Where Qanon differs from more conventional fandoms was the extent to which its participants do not believe they are dealing with fiction.

The lens I do have for looking at Qanon is, of course, Vox Day but while Day heavily embraced and promoted Qanon and Qanon beliefs, readers should be mindful that Day’s interest was in what became a narrower core of Qanon-associated beliefs — essentially those ideas most directly connected to white nationalism and anti-leftism, the basic “payload” of the movement.

As discussed in chapter 28, Vox Day was an active promoter of the /pol/ board of 4chan. It was from 4chan that Day aligned himself with GamerGate in 2014, and from 4chan that he co-opted images and slogans for the “great meme wars” in the lead-up to the election of Donald Trump in 2016<sup>[3]</sup>.

As with GamerGate, Qanon had already gained some traction before Vox Day adopted the movement from 4chan in December 2017. By this point, the discussion of Q had already expanded to include the more accessible forum of Reddit and was also being promoted as a legitimate source by former *WorldNetDaily* columnist Jerome Corsi. Corsi had been a promoter of a number of conspiracy theories including the so-called “Birther” theory about Barack Obama (see chapter 51) as well as conspiracy theories about the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Centre. At this point, the conspiracy theory was mainly known as “The Storm” and for Day this was a simple extension of the 2016 Pizzagate conspiracy theory.

Pizzagate coverage had declined once the 2016 Presidential election was over but Vox Day was still a believer in the lurid claims. In his first post on Q, Day affirmed his continuing belief:

*“I’m always mystified by the claims that Pizzagate has been “debunked” because an actor showed up at the restaurant in DC and fired a single shot at the floor. It’s a bizarre pseudo-argument that doesn’t even rise to the level of logical fallacy; they might as legitimately claim that Pizzagate has been debunked because Adrian Peterson had a 100-yard rushing game for the Arizona Cardinals.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180223103836/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2017/12/storm-is-new-pizza.html>

Despite the many structural similarities with GamerGate, the Qanon/Storm conspiracy theory at this point lacked the same intrinsic calls to action that GamerGate had. There was no obvious pseudo-consumer revolt or directed harassment campaign attached to it as such<sup>[4]</sup>. Rather, as Day’s post revealed, it was about rationalising beliefs left over from the events of 2016.

Pizzagate had held a promise for its followers that the election of Donald Trump would bring to light the true extent of the conspiracy. Long before Pizzagate, conspiracy theories about the Clintons had been popular among the right dating back to the 1990s, and more mundane beliefs among Republican supporters included the idea that Hillary Clinton had engaged in criminal behaviour in connection to her time as Secretary of State during the Obama administration. Despite Donald Trump’s “lock her up” rhetoric during the 2016 campaign, the harsh reality for many conservatives was that there was still no sign of any kind of official action against the Clintons. Of course, this was because there was no legal basis for any kind of charges against Hillary Clinton but that was not an acceptable conclusion. Instead, Qanon offered an alternative scenario: The Storm.

At its core, The Storm was the belief that the conspiracies at the heart of US and World politics were so vast, that Trump was engaged in a hidden counter-conspiracy against the forces of evil. For Vox Day those

forces were literally Satanic — nor was this a new belief, but a fundamental part of his theology. Back in 2002 Day expressed this with a small amount of equivocation in his *WorldNetDaily* column:

*“The Christian view, in particular, puts forth the notion that our world is ruled by an evil supernatural being, one who long ago usurped humanity’s God-given sovereignty. This being, Satan, is not only self-aware, but has been intelligent enough to fool the mind of man from the very start, beginning with the first temptation in the Garden of Eden.”*

<https://www.wnd.com/2002/02/12907/>

Throughout his career, Day had expressed the apparently sincere belief that the world was ruled by Satan and would use the terms “god of this world” or “god of this age”<sup>[5]</sup> as synonyms for the devil. More broadly, Day’s stance was a multiple-gods resolution of the “problem of evil,”<sup>[6]</sup> where the conventional Christian God was the supreme deity of the cosmos but a less conventional Satan was the god of Earth in a fallen state and responsible for bad things that happen from war to natural disasters.

This theological belief fitted in neatly with the Pizzagate/Qanon backstory that the powerful people in the world were all part of a Satanic cult. However, Day’s practical application to the meta-conspiracy theory was to look for more concrete signs that Donald Trump was moving against the imagined evil cabal. In early 2018 a literal storm caused delays at JFK airport but Day speculated that this might be just a cover story for The Storm. He also revealed the primary function of Qanon at this point during Trump’s term of office.

*“It’s easy to get impatient. But don’t. These things play out over time; Rome wasn’t corrupted in a day and she won’t be cleaned up in a day either.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180119184422/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2018/01/coincidence-or-storm.html>

Trump had not locked up Hillary Clinton, and he hadn’t built a border wall, and Mexico certainly wasn’t going to pay for a border wall. Trump’s less-wealthy supporters had not seen much material improvement in their lives and fundamental issues in America — from access to healthcare to inadequate infrastructure to ongoing foreign wars — had not seen changes. However, in the fictional reality of Qanon, Trump was busy secretly fighting Satanic globalists and sex-traffickers.

The Qanon conspiracy theory had already rolled into itself pre-existing conspiratorial beliefs including past satanic panics, the more recent Pizzagate theory, the globalist conspiracy theories prompted by President George Bush Senior’s use of the term “New World Order,” and the panoply of conspiracy theories surrounding Bill and Hillary Clinton. Underneath those conspiracy theories were older anti-Semitic conspiracy theories from the 1903 *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* fraud to the ancient anti-Jewish blood libel.

Yet another shocking school shooting in February 2018<sup>[7]</sup> prompted Day to promote the theory that school shooters were teenagers under hypnotic mind control by the FBI in a bid to promote stricter gun laws — a belief he also linked to Q.

*“Fortunately, given the ongoing progress of the God-Emperor in his campaign against the corrupt bureaucrats, we should find out the truth regarding these sociopathic operations in the reasonably near future. I suspect this sort of thing only scratches the surface of what Q and others warn is literally beyond imagination.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180326173134/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2018/02/fast-and-furious-ii.html>

The full “truth” was always on the verge of being revealed!

By March 2018, Reddit had decided to act against the subreddit that had become a popular place for discussing the so-called “Q-drops” from 4chan<sup>[8]</sup>. While Qanon lacked a specific call to action from its followers, the “CBTS” subreddit (“calm before the storm”) had increasingly become home to violent rhetoric and extreme views. Reddit closed down the group but Qanon’s followers had already expanded from a small group following the posts initially on 4chan and then on the rival 8chan<sup>[9]</sup>.

As mentioned above, 8chan had been the creation of GamerGate supporter Frederick Brennan as a site with even fewer rules than 4chan. As a consequence, it had become home to shocking and illegal material such as child pornography<sup>[10]</sup>. Despite Day’s supposed anti-paedophile campaign, the highly dubious nature of 8chan did not prevent him from promoting Qanon, which had become the main source of the traffic to 8chan. The imageboard was no longer controlled by Brennan: who had sold the site to an American internet entrepreneur based in the Philippines called Jim Watkins, who operated the site with his son Ron<sup>[11]</sup>. While the identity of



the person behind Q is unknown, it is likely that Jim and Ron Watkins had substantial control over the Q account once it had moved to 8chan.

The intentionally user-unfriendly nature of both 4chan and 8chan meant that second- and third-hand promoters of the Qanon conspiracy theory were essential to the spread of the idea. Their promoters would also add their own speculation and theories to attempt to make sense of the essentially cryptic nature of the terse messages from Q. Vox Day would promote the site Neon Revolt as a major source for his own Qanon speculation. Revealingly, Neon Revolt would warn fans of Qanon not to seek out the original messages on 8chan.

*“A final word of caution about the Chans: While you can go there and seek out the relevant Q boards for yourself, I wouldn’t recommend it if you’re brand new to all this. On top of them being purposefully hard to use (in order to keep the “normies” out) you might end up seeing things you might otherwise not wish to see. Remember how I said these platforms are free-speech forums? That means that literally anyone can post just about anything – and that means bad actors, too, attempting to derail researchers with all manner of pornography, gore, shilling, etc. If you’re not seasoned and somewhat desensitized to internet culture, you probably walk away feeling a bit sick.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180711232011/https://www.neonrevolt.com/2018/07/11/who-is-qanon-an-introduction-to-the-qanon-phenomenon-qanon-greatawakening/>

By mid-2018 serious incidents directly related to Qanon were occurring, such as two in Arizona where a man in May occupied a cement plant claiming it was a front for a child sex trafficking ring and another man in a homemade armoured car blocked the roadway over the Hoover Dam claiming he was on a Q-inspired mission<sup>[12]</sup>.

Vox Day was also tapping into the messianic nature of Qanon, expressly adopting Biblical language to talk about “The Storm”

*“The Storm is coming. We don’t know the day or the hour, but it is coming. And we should quite literally thank God for Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, both of whom stand between us and all the raging, raving, rancid evil of the Cabal. Pray for their upcoming meeting, pray that both men be granted wisdom and courage, and pray that they are victorious over the evil that seeks to destroy Christianity, Christendom, America, and Russia.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210808102002/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2018/07/qanon-users-guide.html>

However, this was July 2018 and Trump had still not arrested Hillary Clinton or built a border wall or made America great again by any reasonable metric. At the start of 2019, the waiting for Trump to do something amazing was even getting to Vox Day and he announced that if Trump didn’t build the border wall, then Trump would be fired<sup>[13]</sup>.

In the meantime, Day had decided to tap into the other aspect of the Qanon phenomenon: money.

## ***Alt-Hero: Q***

Qanon was not just popular among Vox Day’s target audience; the spread of the conspiracy theory was funnelling more people towards far-right/white nationalist sites. Q-related content was driving clicks across the Web including on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Day’s comic book ambitions were also at their height, so naturally, he found a way to tie them together.

Vox Day’s most significant recruit to his stable of comic books had been the veteran writer Chuck Dixon,<sup>[14]</sup> who had already worked on a number of projects by mid-2018 for Arkhaven. Day commissioned Dixon to write a Q-themed comic set in his Alt-Hero universe. Qanon by this point existed in multiple forms (Christian-dominionist, new-age spiritualism, aliens...<sup>[15]</sup>) but the proposed series focused on the spy-thriller version of Qanon: a secret war between good and evil security agencies within the US government.

As with other Comicsgate-related projects, Alt-Hero: Q (as it was entitled) was to be a crowdfunded project and Day chose the mainstream crowdfunding site IndieGoGo. Promoting the campaign, Chuck Dixon explained the premise in an interview:

*“What we’re presenting is an action/thriller hero that I’m really excited to be creating. We’ll be inserting him into stories of global cabals and dark conspiracies that threaten not only world peace but the basic human rights of the individual. Our guy, Roland Dane, is an experienced law enforcement professional who has to drop out of the system to act as an operative for the mysterious organization he knows only as Q. Roland is a little rough around the edges and his methods are often direct but he’s one man trying to make a difference for all of us.”*

The campaign appeared to be successful but at the last minute, IndieGoGo's Trust & Safety department closed the campaign, refunding contributors. Other campaigns associated with Arkhaven Comics were not shut down (such as the Jon Del Arroz/Richard Fox *Ember War* comic) but IndieGoGo did not provide a detailed public reason for their action.

Vox Day threatened legal action but eventually stated that he and backers of the campaign would go into arbitration with IndieGoGo. The outcome of that arbitration was never publicised but Day claimed victory<sup>[16]</sup>. Without a third-party crowdfunding platform, Day collected funds from followers more directly, eventually publishing some issues of the comic in 2019.

## 2019

At the start of 2019 America was still not “great again”. The border wall was unbuilt and despite the many portents, clues, and wild speculation, there was no actual sign of mass arrests or a “Storm”. Even Day was beginning to tune out.

*“Here is some logical thinking: act while the window of opportunity is open. People are disappointed, bored, and if they haven't already lost interest in the topic, are rapidly doing so in light of the series of what look like ongoing retreats on the part of President.*

*My perspective is that if it happens, great. But I'm not interested in actively following along anymore. I'm certainly not with the black-pillers, who are always looking to justify their hopelessness no matter what happens, just so they can say they were right to never believe in anything. I still hope that the God-Emperor is willing and able to take action to at least try to save the American nation from the global evil that is seeking to destroy it.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190914053250/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2019/02/too-little-too-late.html>

Day would waver in his promotion of Q in the first half of 2019, partly distancing himself from the conspiracy theory but then returning to it on the rationale that the negative mainstream publicity about Qanon was evidence that there must be something to the theory.

The re-arrest of the super-wealthy paedophile Jeffrey Epstein<sup>[17]</sup> in July 2019 brought new excitement to Q followers. Epstein's associations with many high-profile politicians and thought leaders appeared to lend weight to the idea of a global conspiracy of abuse by powerful people. Among the right, Epstein's connections to the Clintons were strongly emphasised, whereas his long-standing connections to Donald Trump were naturally ignored. Epstein's subsequent suspicious death in his jail cell in August 2019 was officially deemed a suicide, but inevitably led to widespread speculation — generally that he had been assassinated because of the compromising information he had on many powerful people.

Day regarded Epstein's death as a sign confirming that Pizzagate had been true all along.

*“Here is my prediction: Pizzagate will, sooner or later, be largely confirmed to be true, most likely sans a few of the more lurid and cartoonish elements, and, as with the Epstein case, will turn out to be more sinister and of larger scale than even the conspiracy theorists initially believed.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210808122023/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2019/07/pizzagate-reconsidered.html>

By the end of 2019, Day was once again predicting that “The Storm” was imminent<sup>[18]</sup>.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Q\\_Into\\_the\\_Storm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Q_Into_the_Storm) and <https://www.hbo.com/q-into-the-storm>
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QAnon\\_Anonymous](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QAnon_Anonymous) and <https://www.qanonanonymous.com/>
- [3] At the end of chapter 7 of Vox Day's 2015 book “SJWs Always Lie” (see chapter 43) a cartoon depicts GamerGate as an explosion of characters including video game icons such as Sonic the Hedgehog and Super Mario but also the GamerGate mascot Vivian James and figures such as Milo Yiannopoulos, Sargon of Akkad, and Daddy Warpig. On the right-hand side of the picture, just below Princess Peach, is a young man in a wheelchair that represents Frederick Brennan, the creator of 8chan, who helped promote GamerGate and provided an alternative home for the movement when the operators of 4chan attempted to limit its activities.
- [4] That isn't to say Qanon followers didn't harass people or engage in other action, as we will see – just that it wasn't at this point centred on action for followers to take other than spreading the theory.

- [5] a term taken from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." 2 Corinthians 4:4 King James Version – other translations use "god of this age"
- [6] see <https://web.archive.org/web/20210808165241/http://voxdays.blogspot.com/2012/03/john-pipers-murderous-god.html> and <https://web.archive.org/web/20160113181154/http://voxdays.blogspot.com/2010/07/more-atheist-ignorance.html> and <https://web.archive.org/web/20160112215906/http://voxdays.blogspot.com/2005/11/mailvox-some-christians-dont.html>
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoneman\\_Douglas\\_High\\_School\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoneman_Douglas_High_School_shooting)
- [8] [https://www.dailydot.com/debug/reddit-bans-r-cbts\\_stream/](https://www.dailydot.com/debug/reddit-bans-r-cbts_stream/)
- [9] <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/how-three-conspiracy-theorists-took-q-sparked-qanon-n900531>
- [10] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2015/01/13/this-is-what-happens-when-you-create-an-online-community-without-any-rules/>
- [11] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim\\_Watkins\\_\(businessman\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Watkins_(businessman))
- [12] <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/arizona/2018/08/07/qanon-ties-two-arizona-arrests-conspiracy-theory-trump/920336002/>
- [13] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210808144120/http://voxdays.blogspot.com/2019/01/build-wall-or-youre-fired.html>
- [14] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuck\\_Dixon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuck_Dixon)
- [15] <https://web.archive.org/web/20190914064936/http://voxdays.blogspot.com/2018/09/wait-what.html> interestingly it was the inclusion of aliens in the meta-conspiracy theory that provoked scepticism from day. Observant people will also note that with the inclusion of aliens into the mix, Qanon lore was covering almost identical territory to the hit 1990s TV series *The X Files* but as if the fans of that series had thought they were watching a documentary.
- [16] In Day's book *Corporate Cancer*, Chapter 9 was titled "Indiegogo Case Study: The Arbitration Process and Outcome" but was largely empty, stating that it was "redacted until October 11, 2021". As of October 15 2021, the chapter is still redacted.
- [17] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey\\_Epstein](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey_Epstein)
- [18] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210808145006/http://voxdays.blogspot.com/2019/12/the-secret-stasi.html>

## 68: History Rhymes — Nebulas 2019

One of the contradictory themes of the 2015 Sad Puppy campaigns was its dual claims of tradition and change. Brad Torgersen had sought a traditional publishing path within science fiction, seeking a mentor from an influential editor (Mike Resnick) and publication in one of the longest-running science fiction magazines, *Analog*. However, the Sad Puppy campaign would quickly shift to claiming that it was championing the new independent paths to publishing created by the proliferation of eBooks and eBook readers. In the 2015 Sad Puppy slate, Torgersen had in particular included independent author Annie Bellet as an example he could cite of the Sad Puppies introducing independent writers into the Hugo nominations. That many independently-published writers were already present in the shorter fiction categories was not something acknowledged by the Puppies, nor was the fact that the most notable bête noire of the Puppies, John Scalzi, had self-published his first science fiction novel on his blog.

In the chaos and bad blood of the 2015 Hugo Awards, Annie Bellet had withdrawn after the Puppy sweep of the nominations became clear. While the maelstrom that was the Puppies dominated science fiction news in 2015, other significant changes were occurring. 2015 also marked a major change in the membership eligibility rules for the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA). After a referendum of members, the SFWA amended its rules to make it easier for self-published and small press writers to become members<sup>[1]</sup>. Bellet had been a member of the SFWA prior to the rule change, but was part of a growing number of independently-published authors joining the SFWA.

The territory of science fiction publishing was changing during this period. New small publishers focused on eBooks were coming into being. From 2016, the newly-created Dragon Awards featured some finalists from new publishing collectives such as Chris Kennedy Publishing,<sup>[2]</sup> particularly in the military-SF and space opera subgenres. Ironically, after a busy year in 2017, Vox Day's own boutique publisher Castalia House effectively withdrew from science fiction publishing in 2018<sup>[3]</sup>.

### ***LMBPN and 20BooksTo50K***

Among the many new milSF/space opera publishers was an outfit calling itself LMBPN. The publisher began as a name for author Michael Anderle to self-publish under<sup>[4]</sup>. Prior to his foray into self-publishing, Anderle had worked in online sales marketing,<sup>[5]</sup> and used the skills he had learned to more effectively market his books in the increasingly crowded market of eBooks. At the time Anderle was visiting Mexico, and while the money he was making from self-publishing SF was small, he realised that he could make a steady income from it.

*“Down in Mexico, you can have an incredible life even in Cabo, which is more expensive, for \$50,000 a year. Now you only have to make \$36,000 in order to stay in the country and I looked at it and said okay if I can get 20 books all making this seven and a half dollars a day, I could make \$50,000 a year and retire my wife, who was the main breadwinner in the household.*

*And so that's kind of where the genesis was: 20 books to make 50k. I had written two books. I was in the middle of my third. I figured I could finish it by the end of next year. So, 2016 is approximately 14 months and that was my goal. Try to get 20 books all making seven and a half dollars and making it income for us.”*

<https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2019/10/21/indie-author-to-creative-empire/>

To expand the range of books he was publishing, Anderle partnered with another self-published author Craig Martelle, an Alaska-based former marine and business consultant<sup>[6]</sup>. LMBPN continued to grow, but it was a different enterprise that would make both Anderle and Martelle more famous in the world of independent publishing.

KBoards were a set of community forums for self-published eBook authors. In a 2016 post entitled “20 books to 50k”, Anderle outlined his model for making money from self-publishing. He explained how he had learned from advice offered on the boards:

*“I was on The Author Biz with Stephen Campbell in January. I had just released my 5th book and was going to close above \$10k that month. The title to that show is '90 days to \$10,000' and it was a blast talking to him. I mentioned how Rick Gualtieri and Annie Bellet shared some incredible information*

*here on KBoards and I really appreciated their willingness to lay out their information here for newbies like myself to read.”*

<https://www.kboards.com/threads/20-books-to-50k.233197/>

The purpose of the post was partly to explain his model for making money but also to recruit authors to a new private Facebook group he had created where authors could learn to follow Anderle’s model. The group was unsurprisingly called 20BooksTo50K. By 2017 Anderle and Martelle were running a 20BooksTo50K conference in Las Vegas to help aspiring authors make money from self-publishing.

*“Sam’s Town, Las Vegas*

*November 3-5, 2017*

*What is this conference about? Do you want to take things to the next level? Is your hard work not getting you where you need to go? That’s why we’re here – how can your writing make you money?”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170417190105/http://20booksvegas.com/>

By 2019 the Facebook group had over 26,000 members and was running conferences internationally<sup>[7]</sup>. The group had strict rules against self-promotion and off-topic posts, and most importantly a rule that stated “NO DRAMA! (that’s what all the above nomenclature is about) – drama never helped anyone. This is a business site to help you be a better indie author business”<sup>[8]</sup>.

Among the members of the group was another former-Marine-turned-author, Jonathan Brazee. He had also started his own small press for his books *Semper Fi Press* and also had become an active member of the SFWA, chairing the professional education committee<sup>[9]</sup>. In 2018, Brazee’s novelette “Weaponized Math”, published by LMBPN in 2017, was a finalist in the Nebula Awards<sup>[10]</sup>. The connections between 20BooksTo50K and the SFWA went in both directions —2016-2019 SFWA Director-at-large Lawrence M. Schoen had also joined the Facebook group.

## **2019 and The Nebula Slate**

In November 2018 Jonathan Brazee posted a message to the 20BooksTo50K Facebook group encouraging eligible members to take part in the SFWA’s Nebula Awards. At the end of the post was a long list of titles by 20BooksTo50K members that might be suitable works to add. Brazee was quite clear that this was not intended to be a slate, but just a means to encourage participation and maybe improve the number of independently-published works on the SFWA reading list.

*“Nominations are now open for the Nebulas. You can nominate five in each category. Indies have not fared so well in the awards, with only one work making the ballot last year. It probably takes 20 nominations to make the ballot, so there are certainly enough indies who have read each others’ works and can nominate. We can’t—and shouldn’t—have a slate to get an indie work the actual award, but we can get indie works visibility to that other members might notice them and read them. Then, let the chips fall as they may, and may the best story win, indie or trad. Below is a list of indie works or trad works from 20Books members taken from the Nebula Reading list. I have probably missed some, so please, let me know so I can add them. I will be repeating this effort later on.”*

Jonathan Brazee <https://www.facebook.com/groups/781495321956934/permalink/1654005978039193/> as quoted here <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2019/02/23/just-an-additional-note-on-the-20booksto50k-nebula-not-a-slate/>

Brazeze would later state that he had discussed posting an indie reading list with an SFWA staff member who had advised that it would be fine to do so if he stayed away from recommending how people should vote<sup>[11]</sup>.

Skipping forward in time, in February 2019 German fan writer Cora Buhlert posted her annual thoughts on the Nebula finalists after they had been announced by the SFWA. After analysing each of the categories, Buhlert considered the more unusual aspects of that year’s finalists. Buhlert had taken a specific interest in the burgeoning indie publishing space and had published multiple works of her own, and as a consequence, she was quick to notice something that others had not.

*“Which brings us to the other notable trend on this year’s Nebula shortlist, namely the surprising amount of indie writers nominated. There are six indie writers and five indie books/stories nominated for Nebula Awards this year, which is a lot more than we’ve seen before. Now the SFWA opened*

*membership to self-published writers a few years ago, so it was only to be expected that we would start to see more indie books on the Nebula shortlist (disclaimer: I'm not an SFWA member)."*

<http://corabuhkert.com/2019/02/21/some-thoughts-on-the-2018-nebula-award-finalists/>

Digging down further, Buhkert noted a common connection between these nominees.

*"Furthermore, most (five of six – I'm not sure about Rhett C. Bruno) of the indie Nebula finalists are affiliated with the 20Booksto50K group founded by Michael Anderle. For those who don't know, 20Booksto50K started out as a Facebook group for business minded indie writers (the name implies that 20 books should bring you an income of 50000 USD), but by now they are also holding regular writers' conferences. 20Booksto50K is a huge group – I think they have twenty thousand members or something – and because of their business focus, a lot of financially successful indie writers, i.e., the ones also most likely to join SFWA, are members. Plus, many of the early members including the founder were SFF writers, though they've since branched out to cover other genres. I've never been a member, largely because I don't do Facebook, but I know some members and have seen videos of their conferences, so I'm familiar with the ideas behind the whole thing, which is basically "write fast, publish fast and create a 'minimum viable product' in highly commercial genres". I've also read their manifesto, which may be found here. 20Booksto50K also encourages collaboration between authors and I wouldn't be surprised the some of the indie anthologies, where the nominated stories were published, grew out of this or similar groups. What is surprising, however, is that several writers affiliated with 20Booksto50K hit the Nebula shortlist this year, since critical acclaim and awards recognition is not really a main aim of this group. Though I guess they're happy enough to take the publicity boost it brings."*

ibid

Another blogger<sup>[12]</sup> followed up Buhkert's observation and looked into the posts at the private 20BooksTo50K Facebook group. On February 5, shortly before nominations would close for the Nebulas, Jonathan Brazee had posted a second message to the group about the award. Once again, he had stated that he was not posting a slate but this time he was more direct with a call to action.

*"Having written that, we hope you will at least consider self-published works when you make your nominations. It is difficult to compete with the Tors and Random Houses in publishing in terms of visibility, but at least if an indie work makes the final ballot, other members will be aware of it and will hopefully give it a read before voting once the final ballot is released."*

Jonathan Brazee <https://www.facebook.com/groups/781495321956934/permalink/1759086464197810/>, as quoted here <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2019/02/21/the-nebulas-20booksto50-not-a-nudge-nudge-slate/>

As well as framing the vote in terms of indie versus the powerful big publishers, Brazee went further.

*"A title with two asterisks after means it is currently in the top six (four titles at the moment). A title with one asterisk means it is in the top ten with regards to recommendations (five more titles). Other titles are very close to the top ten."*

ibid

And in the Andre Norton Young Adult category, he was even more direct, highlighting one specific work:

*"I'm not sure if you all saw Amy DuBoff's post in another FB group listing indie works, but her novel, A LIGHT IN THE DARK, is also YA, so it is eligible for the Andre Norton Award (one of the Nebula Awards). Last year, there weren't six books that achieved the minimum required ten noms, so there were only four books on the ballot. If ten people have read her book, liked it, and nominate it before COB Friday, then it will probably make the final ballot. — with James Hunter and 24 others."*

ibid

The post had stated that it wasn't a slate, but the difference between Brazee's asterisked list and a slate was minimal. In addition, four of the six authors from the slate who had ended up being Nebula finalists had also been published recently by LMBPN, including Jonathan Brazee, Richard Fox, A.K. DuBoff, R.R. Virdi and Yudhanjaya Wijeratne. Blogger Aaron Pound looked further into Brazee's original list and found that 15 of the authors listed had appeared either in an LMBPN anthology series called *The Expanding Universe*, or in a non-LMBPN anthology series called *Sci-Fi Bridge*<sup>[13]</sup>.

When the news broke of the apparent slate impacting the Nebula Awards, nobody was angrier than Annie Bellet.

In a long set of Tweets, Bellet outlined her objections to slates and her anger at what had occurred. In particular, she was angry because of the effort that she herself had put into bringing self-published writers into the SFWA.

Bellet felt that, despite Brazee's caveats, the February Facebook post was unambiguously a slate:

*"the list was explicit including asterisks for the works that should be focused on the most and explanations of how many votes it would take etc. There's no grey area on this one. It is a slate."*

<https://twitter.com/anniebellet/status/1100461597049401345> also quoted here <http://file770.com/annie-bellet-criticizes-20booksto50k-slate-and-members-of-the-group-respond/>

It appeared sci-fi fandom was heading into another slate war.

Yudhanjaya Wijeratne was a Sri Lankan author who at the time of this controversy had published work both independently and in more traditional ways. His story "Messenger" had been written in collaboration with the US-based writer R.R. Virdi and published in the LMBPN *Expanding Universe* anthology series. Learning that his story had been nominated for a Nebula Award was an exciting surprise. However, his delight soon encountered the fallout from the public counter-reaction to the apparent 20BooksTo50K slate.

Wijeratne, seeing claims that appeared to be accusing him of cheating his way to a nomination (as far as he understood them), responded in kind to Bellet's Tweets. Unaware of the back-history of the Sad Puppies and the connection between sci-fi awards and the ongoing culture wars, Wijeratne stepped into a social media controversy. He would later describe the ensuing angry back-and-forth in these terms:

*"Much of this boils down to information asymmetry: the US SFF community clearly has a lot of group norms and contextual behaviour templates. However, if they are to welcome authors from other parts of the world, it remains a mistake to assume that everyone walking in will know what these norms are."*

<https://yudhanjaya.com/2019/03/incidentally-there-is-support-for-wijeratnes-story-part-two-aftermath-and-decision-trees/>

And yet...unlike the events of 2015, a number of factors resulted in what had been an angry situation, de-escalating rapidly. Partly this was due to people building bridges between individuals, in particular Wijeratne and Bellet whose social media exchanges had become very harsh. A more public step was taken by Jonathan Brazee, who did something quite remarkable when compared with the events of 2015: he apologised.

Rather than doubling down on the conflict or making excuses for his Facebook post, Brazee wrote an extended explanation that was posted on *File770*. In it, he explained honestly how the 20BooksTo50K list had come about and what his motives for creating it had been. Most importantly, he took the blame for the mistakes made.

*"Fourth, while I had what I consider the best of intentions, my unfortunate wording has cast a pall over the awards and caused ill feelings, something that has kept me awake at nights since this broke. I can't turn back the clock, and I have nothing in my power to change what happened. But what I can do is to offer that my own nomination be removed from consideration for the award."*

<http://file770.com/jonathan-brazees-sfwa-make-statements-on-nebula-awards-issues/>

In addition to Brazee's apology and willingness to shoulder the lion's share of the blame for the bad feelings generated, a number of other factors also helped reduce the heat of the conflict. First of all, the impact of the supposed slate had been relatively small and, unlike the 2015 Puppy slates, had not led to a sweep of the nominations. Secondly, while Brazee's post had framed things in terms of an indie-v-trad publishing divide, he had not framed things in terms of the wider culture within US society. Both of these factors minimised the extent to which the arguments would result in two entrenched camps.

Of course, while 20BooksTo50K were not, in general, culture warriors, that did not mean that the culture warriors were not watching what was going on.

## ***The Forever* (Culture) War**

Nobody is exactly sure how the online right-wing magazine *The Federalist* is funded<sup>[14]</sup> but by 2019 it was a prominent source of culture-war-style propaganda and pro-Trump stories. To cover the science fiction award world through a partisan lens, *The Federalist* employed Jon Del Arroz. For Del Arroz, the conflict over the Nebula Awards was a simple one.

*“The targeted blogs and social media posts are a coordinated effort by traditional publishing’s elites to diminish 20BooksTo50K’s credibility among establishment publishing and brand them as a political organization to fight. In 2019, being apolitical has become akin to declaring your politics to the extreme left. Much of the left has taken an “if you’re not with us, you’re against us” attitude to try to harm people who don’t want to take sides in the culture war. It’s a dangerous view to take, as writers have been blacklisted and banned, and now even worse.”*

<https://thefederalist.com/2019/03/04/indie-sci-fi-authors-upending-traditional-publishing-turned-war/>

Drawing parallels with Comicsgate and the Puppy campaigns, Del Arroz claimed that left-wing “elites” were out to destroy 20BooksTo50K because of their commercial success and their focus on writing rather than on political correctness. However, Del Arroz skipped over multiple inconvenient facts, including that the major critic of 20BooksTo50K was Annie Bellet, whose track record in independent publishing was significant. Del Arroz also failed to mention his professional connection with one of the authors who had benefitted from the 20BooksTo50K list: Richard Fox, whose *Ember War* series he was adapting for Vox Day’s Arkhaven Comics.

A similar highly selective omission of key facts was done by another culture warrior, Brad Torgersen, who saw parallels in the brief conflict with his own more contentious Sad Puppy slate.

*“Anyway, this past week, some indie authors got on the Nebula ballot, and the taste-makers — many of whom are ardently “woke” political activists — began braying about how a “slate” had ramrodded these indie authors onto the sacred SFWA ballot, and how it was high treason against all things Good and Clean in the genre for any “slate” to influence the Nebula final selections.”*

<https://archive.is/Rc3fb#selection-205.0-209.50>

A name missing from Torgersen’s essay was once again Annie Bellet, who Torgersen had drafted into his 2015 culture war. That Bellet was erased from both accounts had multiple layers of significance (her role in promoting independent authors in the SFWA, to being directly cited as an inspiration by Michael Anderle in establishing 20BooksTo50K, to being one of the “footballs” used in Torgersen’s own slate campaign), but to add to the irony, Torgersen framed his essay in terms of George Orwell’s *1984*.

Torgersen did briefly mention Bellet in a long comment left on a post by Yudhanjaya Wijeratne in which Wijeratne had recounted his upsetting and confrontational experiences as a consequence of the backlash against the 20BooksTo50K list.

*“Anyway, 2015 was a maelstrom of verbal attacks — and a major media misinformation campaign not too different from the kind launched against American teenager Nick Sandmann. I had to write several media outlets and ask them if they felt like having me bring them up on a slander lawsuit for what amounted to horrible, baseless accusations. It was lies from one side of American SF/F to the other, and back again. Annie was a casualty, though I will say she’s now making the mistake of beating other people up with her crutches — and that’s the wrong way to go about anything, no matter how wrong you believe yourself to have been.”*

Brad Torgersen comment at <https://yudhanjaya.com/2019/03/incidentally-there-is-support-for-wijeratnes-story-a-response-to-file770-and-a-record-of-the-nebula-award-madness/><sup>[15]</sup>

Torgersen could only see this conflict in terms of what he described as “woke” politics, despite the lack of any obvious ideological dimension to the conflict. The only claim of systemic racism that had been made was a reasonable claim that the hostility that Wijeratne had experienced as a consequence of the anti-slate backlash was yet another way that authors from a background other than white male English-speaking Americans experience barriers to participation. For Torgersen, any division must have been a division in politically partisan terms, and one in which there was an establishment elite consumed by left-wing ideology.

The collision between LMBPN and 20BooksTo50K’s ethos, the SFWA, and the Nebula awards was not without hurt and emotional damage. It led to Lawrence M. Schoen resigning his directorship, and to former SFWA President Robert Sawyer decrying the admission of independent authors<sup>[16]</sup>. However, it still offered a different picture of what could have been. Multiple people found ways of de-escalating conflict without compromising their own substantive interests, even after confronting experiences and social media controversies. Instead of lasting months, the controversy lasted a few days. Despite precipitating a crisis, Jonathan Braze’s integrity in taking the brunt of the blame only helped his reputation. Brad Torgersen, on the other hand, could only see the culture war, and while he had resisted falling into the well of absurdity that



was Qanon, he was trapped in a view of the world in which everything was a struggle against the imagined leftist elites.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://www.sfwaworld.com/2015/02/03/sfwaworld-welcomes-self-published-small-press-authors/>
- [2] <https://chriskennedypublishing.com/about/>
- [3] The Internet Science Fiction Database records 13 entries for Castalia House in 2017 but only one for 2018 (a reprint of Nick Cole's *Soda Pop Soldier*), and none for 2019
- [4] <https://lmbpn.com/about/a-little-history/>
- [5] <https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2019/10/21/indie-author-to-creative-empire/>
- [6] <https://craigmartelle.com/about/>
- [7] <https://publishdrive.com/were-back-from-the-20booksto50k-conference-and-we-cant-wait-to-tell-you-about-it>
- [8] <https://www.facebook.com/groups/20Booksto50k>
- [9] <https://www.jonathanbrazee.com/about-jonathan/>
- [10] <https://nebulas.sfwaworld.com/nominated-work/weaponized-math/> the Nebulas awarded in 2018 are named the 2017 Nebulas for the year the works were published in.
- [11] <http://file770.com/jonathan-brazee-sfwaworld-make-statements-on-nebula-awards-issues/>
- [12] This was me, but I don't want to centre myself in a chapter of a history I'm writing
- [13] <http://dreamingaboutotherworlds.blogspot.com/2019/03/biased-opinion-destructiveness-of.html>
- [14] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Federalist\\_\(website\)#Finances](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Federalist_(website)#Finances)
- [15] Nick Sandmann was a student at Kentucky Covington Catholic High School who went on a school visit to protest against abortion in Washington DC, during which he was filmed in apparent confrontation with protestors [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January\\_2019\\_Lincoln\\_Memorial\\_confrontation#Defamation\\_lawsuits](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January_2019_Lincoln_Memorial_confrontation#Defamation_lawsuits) Sandmann sued multiple media companies for defamation over the coverage of the incident. The legal cases were settled, but the nature of the settlement was not revealed. He was represented in the case against *The Washington Post* by Lin Wood. In the wake of the January 6 Capitol insurrection, Sandmann sacked Lin Wood <https://web.archive.org/web/20211017082206/https://twitter.com/N1ckSandmann/status/1353565242618482689?s=20>
- [16] <https://web.archive.org/web/20200809234045/http://www.galaxysedge.com/magazines/issue-39-july-2019-updates-in-progress/decoherence/>

## 69: Life After Puppies — Hugo Awards 2018

Convinced in 2015 that the Hugo Awards were heading towards an inevitable decline, the Sad Puppies celebrated the arrival of the 2016 Dragon Awards as the final nail in the coffin of the venerable Hugos. Membership numbers for Worldcon remained strong<sup>[1]</sup> even if the number of Hugo voters declined from the peak of 2015<sup>[2]</sup>. The Dragon Awards, in the meantime, struggled with their own capacity to publicise themselves, with the size and scope of Dragon Con overshadowing the award ceremony which was forced to compete with a plethora of other events.

A more dramatic change was noticeable in the gender balance of the Hugo Award finalists. 2007 had seen a remarkable lack of representation of women writers in the main story categories (Novel, Novella, Novelette, Short Story), with only one woman finalist (Naomi Novik). From that nadir, the number of women finalists increased until 2014 and the impact of the Puppy campaigns. However, even the Puppy years avoided the low point of 2007, and ten years later a majority of finalists were women. The underlying trends had continued during the Puppy years, even if the impact of the slates had masked the changes. From 2016 onwards the winners of those four categories would all be women. Transgender authors and authors using non-binary pronouns were now visible in the Hugo Awards, further breaking down the stereotype of the male science fiction author.

Hugo Award finalists had become more ethnically diverse in the post-Puppy years, although international representation narrowed and US dominance of the awards increased in this period. Likewise, the Hugo Awards continued to lean more towards science fiction rather than fantasy across multiple categories.

N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy contained elements that could be classified either as science fiction or fantasy, but the author was keen for people to regard it as a fantasy novel<sup>[3]</sup>. Asserting fantasy as not a lesser sibling to the supposedly more cerebral science fiction, Jemisin had championed the genre as something which was powerful in its own right.

*“This is what both classic and modern fantasy teach us, however: that you have to fight anyway. That sometimes it is the journey, and not the final climactic battle against some Dark Lord or another, that defines who we are. That our happy ending might very well depend on how loudly and powerfully we tell our stories along the way. Don't think of fantasy as mere entertainment, then, but as a way to train for reality. It always has been, after all.”*

<https://time.com/collection/100-best-fantasy-books/5898000/nk-jemisin-fantasy-novels/>

In 2018 the third book in Jemisin's series won the Hugo Award for Best Novel, a historic win that made her the first person to win three consecutive Hugo Awards for Best Novel. In a powerful acceptance speech, she touched on events in America at that time:

*“This has been a hard year, hasn't it? A hard few years. A hard century. For some of us, things have always been hard. I wrote the Broken Earth trilogy to speak to that struggle, and what it takes just to live, let alone thrive, in a world that seems determined to break you. A world of people who constantly question your competence, your relevance, your very existence.”*

<https://gizmodo.com/n-k-jemisin-makes-hugo-awards-history-with-latest-best-1828460094>

In the speech, Jemisin discussed the influence of American history on the story of oppression within her trilogy, and how that history was reflected within fandom as a microcosm of the world. She also discussed her detractors and, without naming the Puppies or Vox Day directly, offered a response:

*“But this is the year in which I get to smile at all of those naysayers—every single mediocre insecure wannabe who fixes their mouth to suggest that I do not belong on this stage, that people like me cannot possibly have earned such an honor, that when they win it it's meritocracy but when we win it it's “identity politics” — I get to smile at those people, and lift a massive, shining, rocket-shaped middle finger in their direction.”*

ibid

The speech was widely but not universally applauded. On a private discussion group frequented by some of the old-guard of science fiction, author Robert Silverberg called Jemisin's speech “graceless and vulgar”. The comment would have gone unobserved if not for an act of malice by Vox Day.

Jemisin's Hugo victories had been on the strength of her novels, but figuratively they also served as a repudiation of Vox Day's attempt to damage the Hugo Award. The self-styled Dark Lord had nothing but contempt for Jemisin, and in response to her historic win claimed that this was a sure sign of his own victory. His own campaign had failed but, according to Day, the victory of both Jemisin and multiple women in the 2018 Hugo Awards demonstrated that the Rabid Puppies had destroyed the reputation of the awards by goading people into a counter-reaction. It was a flimsy argument even by his standards, given the popularity of Jemisin's book and the critical acclaim they had received beyond the Hugo Awards.

To bolster his argument, Day offered two quotes. One was a poor transcript of Jemisin's speech with most of the punctuation missing so that it read as a single semi-coherent sentence. Day's intent was to make Jemisin appear to be inarticulate. The second quote was from Robert Silverberg. The private forum where Silverberg had made his criticism was one also frequented by a supporter of Vox Day,<sup>[4]</sup> and Day was happy to use the quote to attack Jemisin and embarrass Silverberg. The subsequent anger at Silverberg's comments damaged his overall reputation to the extent that he subsequently wrote an ill-advised essay at *File770*, stating that he was neither racist nor sexist<sup>[5]</sup>.

Jon Del Arroz had also attempted to keep the fandom front of the culture war burning with a series of stunts in 2018, including a turned-down bid to join the SFWA,<sup>[6]</sup> and Worldcon declining him an attending membership,<sup>[7]</sup> leading to Del Arroz launching a lawsuit against the 2018 Worldcon organisers and – more bizarrely – the 2020 New Zealand Worldcon organisers<sup>[8]</sup>. The suit would not be fully resolved until 2021.

Del Arroz's actions were not the only point of friction between conventions and the aftermath of science fiction's culture war. In April 2018, Baen author John Ringo "mutually agreed" with the ConCarolinas convention to no longer be a special guest<sup>[9]</sup> after other authors objected based on his past behaviour at other conventions. Ringo himself described it as "I just got disinvited from a con due to threats to my personal safety," but did not substantiate this claim.

In May, Larry Correia was similarly dropped as a guest at the Origins Game Fair after a significant social media storm when he was announced as a guest. Correia's connections with the Sad Puppies and GamerGate had led to negative associations for many people<sup>[10]</sup> although even some of Correia's critics felt that Origins should have done their homework beforehand rather than invite and then disinvite him<sup>[11]</sup>.

While other conventions were still dealing with the fallout from the Puppy conflict, Worldcon was largely (Jon Del Arroz excepted) avoiding becoming embroiled again. That did not mean everything was plain sailing. Aside from the later issues with Robert Silverberg's comments, the 2018 Worldcon also had disputes over programming and the treatment of Hugo Award finalists<sup>[12]</sup>. As well as the usual complexities of running conventions, an influx of new members from the opposition to the Puppies hastened the generational shifts within the Worldcon community. Issues over the programming (in particular, the level of representation of writers from marginalised groups) led to a re-examination of the program led by Mary Robinette Kowal<sup>[13]</sup>.

At the *Black Nerd Problems* blog, writer and critic L.E.H. Light expressed her concerns and frustration with the experience.

*"Full disclosure, I'm attending Worldcon 76. I've paid my money, booked my room, and planned my cosplay. Worldcon is the best chance for me to meet some of my favorite authors without me having to book an international flight. And to attend the Hugos? That will be fantastic. I submitted panel ideas and have been placed on a few. Every step of that process has been delayed and challenging far beyond what I expected, even from a volunteer-run event. All along I had a voice in the back of my mind telling me something was wrong, and now, with all the evidence in front of me, I have to confront a real possibility: That my presence at the con is one of tokenism and not inclusion."*

<https://blacknerdproblems.com/worldcon-starts-over-but-will-it-be-enough/>

Worldcon, like the genre it celebrated, struggled with the tension between the past and the future. The genre of science fiction was haunted by the figures who had been predominant in the seminal years of the 1940s and 50s, but also by the voices who had been marginalised in that time and beyond. Of those ghosts, there was perhaps none greater than John W. Campbell, one of the most influential editors in science fiction in the twentieth century.

In October 2018 writer and genre historian Alec Nevala-Lee published his biographic book *Astounding*, which he described as being about the:

*"...extraordinary partnership between four controversial writers—John W. Campbell, Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, and L. Ron Hubbard—who set off a revolution in science fiction and forever changed our world."*

<https://nevalalee.wordpress.com/about-astounding/>

In the lead-up to the book's release, Nevala-Lee considered the way the broader science fiction community might engage with Campbell's history and with his legacy.

*"Which brings me to John W. Campbell. In 1973, two years after the editor's death, the Campbell Award for Best New Writer—which is given out annually at the Hugo Awards—was inaugurated by the World Science Fiction Society, along with the Campbell Memorial Award for Best Science Fiction Novel by the Center for the Study of Science Fiction at the University of Kansas. I don't know how this biography will be received, but it wouldn't entirely surprise me if it led to a wider debate about Campbell, his views on race, and whether his name ought to be attached to an award whose list of recent recipients stands as a testament to the genre's range of voices"*

<https://nevalalee.wordpress.com/2018/08/24/the-happy-golden-years/>

However, that is a story for the next chapter.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Worldcons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Worldcons)
- [2] 5,950 ballots in 2015, 3,130 ballots in 2016, 3,319 ballots in 2017, 2,828 ballots in 2018, 3097 ballots in 2019  
<http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/>
- [3] <https://nkjemisin.com/2014/11/you-can-tell-a-lot-about-a-fantasy-novel-by-its-glossary/>
- [4] <https://web.archive.org/web/20180823081143/voxday.blogspot.com/2018/08/this-is-what-victory-looks-like.html>
- [5] <http://file770.com/racism-and-sexism/>
- [6] <http://file770.com/sfwa-denies-a-membership-application/>
- [7] <http://file770.com/del-arroz-not-allowed-to-attend-worldcon-76/>
- [8] <http://file770.com/del-arroz-files-suit-against-worldcon-76/>
- [9] <http://file770.com/john-ringo-out-as-concarolinas-special-guest/>
- [10] <http://file770.com/origins-game-fair-drops-larry-correia-as-guest/>
- [11] e.g., SFWA President Cat Rambo tweeted "I gotta say on behalf of @monsterhunter45 that it is total bullshit to be so unprepared that you invite someone and then uninvite them as GoH, and I'd be angry and disappointed in the same situation, @originsgames" <https://twitter.com/Catrambo/status/996169360912732161>
- [12] <http://file770.com/worldcon-76-program-troubles/>
- [13] <http://file770.com/kowal-to-assist-changing-worldcon-76-program/>

## 70: Life After Campbell

A perennial question about the Sad Puppy campaign and the Rabid Puppy campaign is whether they were a single phenomenon with two flavours, or two separate things that operated together for a while. There is not a single answer to the question. Even an attempt to sort the original Evil League of Evil into Sad and Rabid groups has ambiguities: where should Baen author Tom Kratman be placed? Or Castalia author John C. Wright? Post-2015 hostility between Vox Day and Sarah A. Hoyt made the political distinction a little clearer but even that became blurred when Hoyt endorsed Donald Trump.

### *Puppies, Pulp, and Campbell*

A difference that arose, which roughly corresponded with the two flavours of Puppies, was the kind of past that the reactionary campaigns wanted to return science fiction to. For the Rabid Puppies, this was not directly led by Vox Day, but rather grew out of the blog of Castalia House and the bloggers that it promoted, such as Jeffro Johnson and his Appendix N project. This was a renewed interest in the pre-WWII pulp era of science fiction, and writers such as Edgar Rice Burroughs and Robert E. Howard. For Sad Puppy figures such as Sarah A. Hoyt and Brad Torgersen, the defining era/aesthetic of science fiction was that characterised by Robert A. Heinlein or more generally by the influence of editor and author John W. Campbell<sup>[1]</sup>.

In a more interesting world, there might have been a full-throated literary argument between these two perspectives between Sads and Rabids but in our world, it was more people stating set positions. Where they could agree was that the sharp decline in science fiction occurred sometime in the 1980/90s. For the Sad/Campbellian position, this was when the influence of Campbell's approach finally waned. For the Rabid/Pulp analysis it was a little more complex. The decline had started post-World War II, but had been temporarily paused in the late 1970s with the arrival of *Star Wars* reintroducing the pulp aesthetic into the genre. Jasyn Jones (aka GamerGate's Daddy Warpig) explained the thesis at the Castalia House blog.

*“Post-WWII was the era of the Campbellian Silver Age, the era of “Men with Screwdrivers” SF. Action and adventure were childish and frankly embarrassing, as were purple prose and laser swords. Barsoom? Silly. Buck Rogers? Childish. Northwest Smith? A gunslinger, not a scientist. And this was the age of SCIENCE. Science was the focus, technology the touchstone. Stories had to be cerebral, intellectual. They had to be REALISTIC. Real science, none of this fuzzy-headed soft science stuff. SF had to shake off the woolly-headed thinking of Fantasy, the embarrassing antics of Space Opera, the adolescent focus on Adventure and Action. SF was serious business. Real Literature. It was time to grow up.*

*Folks, the audiences didn't get smaller. The genre did. It threw away what had made it popular in the first place.*

*So, when George Lucas came along, he found all the many various tropes and tools the Silver Age had discarded and derided, the laser swords and swashbuckling space battles, the roguish spaceman and his loyal sidekick, the space princesses and space magicians. The action and adventure and heroism. He found them buried in the dust, picked them up, dusted them off, and made F&SF fun again. Made it thrilling again. Made it inspiring again.”*

<http://www.castaliahouse.com/star-wars-stole-pulp/>

The Rabid Puppy “pulp revival,” like much of the broader Puppy engagement with genre history, was not well-connected with broader non-partisan critical engagement with science fiction's pulp era. This is not to say that the far-right interest in the pulp era was insincere: multiple sites sprang up actively reading and reviewing pre-WWII science fiction but with a modern culture-war spin. This adoption or co-option of a historical period as part of a far-right identity was not just in fandom: scholars of medieval history also found themselves struggling with right-wing extremists taking an active, if confused, interest in pre-modern European history<sup>[2]</sup> as part of the far-right's attempt to forge a broader cultural identity.

The Campbellian wing of the Puppy campaigns was equally inconsistent with its engagement with the past. The notable second volume of William Paterson's biography of Robert A. Heinlein<sup>[3]</sup> drew little attention from the Sad Puppies in 2015, as did the 2014 film *Predestination*, an adaptation of Heinlein's time-looping story “—All You Zombies—”<sup>[4]</sup>. Of the Evil League of Evil, Sarah A. Hoyt was the biggest champion of

Heinlein, who she regarded as a formative figure for her approach to science fiction and to politics. However, Hoyt's view of Heinlein was almost religious in nature<sup>[5]</sup>.

For Brad Torgersen, the engagement with the Campbellian legacy was both structural and aesthetic. Torgersen championed the idea of science fiction as a genre of space-heroics, and styled himself as a writer of "hard" science fiction,<sup>[6]</sup> but more relevant to his pre-Puppy career was the role of two legacies of the earlier period of science fiction.

One of Campbell's strangest historical impacts was the promotion of the work and ideas of L. Ron Hubbard (see chapter 4). Hubbard would go on to form the Church of Scientology, but as a science fiction writer, his work would not go on to be well-regarded. However, one of Hubbard's ongoing influences on science fiction was via the Writers of the Future contest (see chapters 4, 9 and 33). The contest for new writers had a genuine track record for finding promising talent, and past winners included future Hugo Award finalists such as Karen Joy Fowler, Nnedi Okorafor, and Aliette de Bodard<sup>[7]</sup>. Brad Torgersen's first major publishing break into science fiction came via Writers of the Future, and it was also via this program that he met his mentor, Mike Resnick.

Torgersen's second Campbellian connection was *Analog* magazine. The long-standing platform for science fiction stories that John W. Campbell had renamed from *Astounding*, had been a seemingly permanent presence in the Hugo Awards, providing everything from serialised novels to a plethora of short fiction<sup>[8]</sup>. After Torgersen's *Writers of the Future* success, he had a large number of stories published in *Analog* and to this day he is listed as one of the most famous names to have been published in the magazine<sup>[9]</sup>.

However, by the 2010s, the influence of both these quite different venues was on the wane. Partly due to changing tastes and changing economic factors for print magazines, the more widely-read and critically-acclaimed short fiction was coming from online magazines that allowed people to read individual stories for free. Also, for Writers of the Future, the increasing concern among the writing community of the connections between Writers of the Future and the Church of Scientology<sup>[10]</sup> led to many questioning the ethics of being involved in the competition.

Torgersen's Sad Puppies 3 slate had been something of a last hurrah for *Analog* at the Hugo Awards, with four *Analog* stories becoming finalists on the strength of the Puppy campaigns. Torgersen also included Kary English on the slate due to their common connection with Writers of the Future. No Writers of the Future from a year after 2015 would be a finalist again in the following years, nor would any story from *Analog* make it onto the ballot<sup>[11]</sup>.

## ***Statues and Statuettes***

Within the broader culture war raging across the US and the world, two deeply contrasting views of history were in conflict: on the one hand, viewing history as an active area of study where people can engage with the past through the lens of the present, and on the other, seeing history as a set of edifying symbols and territorial claims for a patriotic view of the world. In the US these perspectives ran hottest in recent years over the issue of monuments to Confederate figures from the US Civil War.

In the wake of the violent Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, Sarah A. Hoyt encapsulated the latter view of history with her perspective on the attempted alt-right takeover of the city.

*"And no, to whom it may concern, a region not wanting their past or their regional heroes erased to appease a vocal minority does NOT make them white supremacists. This idiotic changing of names, removing of statues and erasing people from history is NOT the work of a free society. It is wholly Stalinist and is letting the rest of the world know you by your fruits as it were. I have nothing invested in the ACW, except for having studied it enough to know it was more complex than most people think, and I'm only "southern" by fiat of my friends, but even I get outraged at the erasing of the past of the region. And you know damn well they're coming for Jefferson and Washington next. At which point they'll have to go through me. It's the left's old bullshit of removing the giants of the past so their diminutive stature looks tall."*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2017/08/14/fools-to-the-left-of-me-clowns-to-the-right/>

The removal of symbolic elements such as monuments was regarded by Hoyt as the erasing of people from history, even though the advocates of the removal of such monuments were motivated by their active understanding of the history behind those monuments and their role in rallying support for white supremacist movements<sup>[12]</sup>.

This conflict of critical versus purely symbolic views of history had its own parallels within the world of literary awards. In 2015, during the peak of the Puppy campaigns, the World Fantasy Convention announced they would be adopting a new design for the World Fantasy Award. The trophy at the time was a caricature

of the writer H.P. Lovecraft, and while visually striking and distinctive, it had two issues: firstly, Lovecraft was not an obvious pick as a symbol for the genre of fantasy,<sup>[13]</sup> and secondly Lovecraft as a person was deeply racist even by the standards of pre-war America. Writer Nnedi Okorafor described her own feelings about the trophy she had won in 2011.

*“Do I want “The Howard” (the nickname for the World Fantasy Award statuette. Lovecraft’s full name is “Howard Phillips Lovecraft”) replaced with the head of some other great writer? Maybe. Maybe it’s about that time. Maybe not. What I know I want is to **face** the history of this leg of literature rather than put it aside or bury it. If this is how some of the great minds of speculative fiction felt, then let’s deal with that... as opposed to never mention it or explain it away. If Lovecraft’s likeness and name are to be used in connection to the World Fantasy Award, I think there should be some discourse about what it means to honor a talented racist.”*

<http://nnedi.blogspot.com/2011/12/lovecrafts-racism-world-fantasy-award.html>

The change in trophy was characterised by some as appeasing social justice warriors and part of a slippery slope for further erasure of history. Historian of Lovecraft’s work S.T. Joshi publicly returned his previous World Fantasy awards in protest at the change<sup>[14]</sup>, saying:

*“Evidently this move was meant to placate the shrill whining of a handful of social justice warriors who believe that a “vicious racist” like Lovecraft has no business being honoured by such an award. (Let it pass that analogous accusations could be made about Bram Stoker and John W. Campbell, Jr., who also have awards named after them. These figures do not seem to elicit the outrage of the SJWs.) Accordingly, I have returned my two World Fantasy Awards to the co-chairman of the WFC board, David G. Hartwell.”*

<http://stjoshi.org/news2015.html>

Far from erasing Lovecraft from history, the critical engagement with Lovecraft’s underlying and overt racism led to multiple critically-acclaimed works by writers re-examining Lovecraft’s themes from new perspectives, including 2017 Hugo finalist works *The Ballad of Black Tom* by Victor La Valle and *The Dream-Quest of Vellitt Boe* by Kij Johnson, as well as the 2017 World Fantasy Award-winning novel *Lovecraft Country* by Matt Ruff.

## ***The End of an Era***

2017 also saw the passing of science fiction writer Jerry Pournelle. A prolific and critically acclaimed science fiction writer as well as science and technology columnist, Pournelle’s first published science fiction was also one of the last works to be edited by John W. Campbell in *Analog* before his death in 1971.

Pournelle had been arguably<sup>[15]</sup> the most influential figure in mainstream science fiction for right-wing perspectives in the genre, and his work helped map out the sub-genre of military science fiction (aka MilSF), building direct bridges between science fiction writers and the US military. An advocate of hard science fiction and libertarian/paleoconservative views, Pournelle was regarded as a mentor by both Sarah A. Hoyt and Vox Day, but had also been an active member of the SFWA for many years.

In the aftermath of the victory of “no award” in the 2015 Hugo Awards, many Puppy supporters took to quoting Pournelle’s maxim “Money will get you through times of no Hugos better than Hugos will get you through times of no money.”<sup>[16]</sup> Despite his long career and professional impact on the genre, Pournelle had never won a Hugo Award. However, he had won the nearest thing to a Hugo: the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, the not-a-Hugo presented at the Hugo Awards and sponsored by the owners of *Analog* magazine. Indeed, Pournelle had been the inaugural winner of the award in 1973.

The John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer was an attempt to recognise new writers, but by virtue of being officially not a Hugo Award, it could operate on its own eligibility criteria, and avoid potential conflicts of people being Hugo finalists for the same work in two categories. However, by the 2010s the appropriateness of the award being named after John W. Campbell was coming into question.

Alec Nevala-Lee’s biographic history of the height of Campbell’s influence, *Astounding*, had led to a renewed examination of some of science fiction’s “greats” (see the previous chapter). Robert Heinlein’s mercurial politics, Isaac Asimov’s sexual harassment and L. Ron Hubbard’s exploitation of people’s credulity were all part of the wider influence of the talent that Campbell had fostered, along with the undeniable wealth of ideas, themes, and tropes that Campbell had promoted within the genre. Nevala-Lee had anticipated that his book might provoke a further re-examination of the name of the Campbell Award, and in 2019 *Astounding* was a finalist in the Best Related Work category of the Hugo Awards.

Jeannette Ng was a British-based, Hong Kong writer with a background in Medieval History. Her debut 2017 novel *Under the Pendulum Sun* was a gothic fantasy about 19th-century English missionaries in Fairyland. It also made her eligible as a finalist for the 2018 and 2019 Campbell Awards.

In August 2019, Ng's birthplace of Hong Kong was facing its own historical turning point. The former British colony had been officially returned to China in 1997 under an agreement that was characterised as "one country, two systems,"<sup>[17]</sup> with Hong Kong retaining its capitalist economy and adopting a democratic system of government. However, by 2019 the influence of the Beijing government on Hong Kong's government had grown substantially. Protests against a proposed bill that would allow protestors to be extradited to mainland China were met with harsh and violent crackdowns by the Hong Kong police<sup>[18]</sup>.

Traditionally, the Hugo Award ceremony leads with the Campbell Award and finishes with the award for Best Novel. So, the first winner's speech of the 2019 Awards was that of Jeannette Ng. I'll quote her edited version<sup>[19]</sup>.

*"John W. Campbell, for whom this award was named, was a fascist. Through his editorial control of Astounding Science Fiction, he is responsible for setting a tone of science fiction that still haunts the genre to this day. Sterile. Male. White. Exalting in the ambitions of imperialists and colonisers, settlers and industrialists"*

<https://medium.com/@nettlefish/john-w-campbell-for-whom-this-award-was-named-was-a-fascist-f693323d3293>

However, this was just the introduction to her broader point, as her speech moved from the past to the present:

*"So, I need say, I was born in Hong Kong. Right now, in the most cyberpunk in the city in the world, protesters struggle with the masked, anonymous stormtroopers of an autocratic Empire. They have literally just held her largest illegal gathering in their history. As we speak, they are calling for a horological revolution in our time. They have held laser pointers to the skies and tried to to impossibly set alight the stars. I cannot help be proud of them, to cry for them, and to lament their pain."*

ibid

In a later Tweet about the subsequent controversy around her speech, Ng made a more direct connection between the themes.

*"The list of awful things Campbell did is long, but the one that I can't stop thinking about is his defence of the Kent State Shooting. His arguments in that editorial are not all that far off the ppl defending Hong Kong Police's brutality against protestors right now."*

[https://twitter.com/jeannette\\_ng/status/1164117806419521537](https://twitter.com/jeannette_ng/status/1164117806419521537)

The reaction to Ng's speech was varied, with many people calling for the Campbell Award to be renamed<sup>[20]</sup>. The reaction from the former Sad Puppies was inevitably more sceptical. On Facebook, Brad Torgersen described himself as "one of the very last Campbell Award nominees who actually respected the Campbell legacy" and:

*"Now, the SF prognoscenti's eternal ire is perhaps understandable—if you recognize that Campbell cannot be woke-erased. Any more than Heinlein can be woke-erased. Because Campbell (and Heinlein, and others) gave the audience what it wanted most from SF: idea-driven action and adventure stories, with bold heroics, real science, real scientific dilemmas, and a firm insistence that humanity (all of us on this blue ball called Earth) had a pioneering future in the Big Beyond. For his effort, Campbell has been labelled every unkind word in the dictionary. Going on six decades. Why?"*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/3552034954822712>

Why Campbell had been labelled with unkind words (such as "fascist" and "racist") was not hard to discover, given the coverage, but Torgersen had a different answer:

*"Campbellism has been a resounding crowd-pleaser and financial success story. Campbellism has its fingerprints on 85% of the money-making SF books, SF book series, SF stories, SF franchise spin-offs, and SF products created in the last half century. While the New Wave—entirely an anti-populist, anti-prole, very academic and woke-progressive project from its inception—has struggled in Campbellism's mighty shadow."*

ibid



Dell Magazines (owners of *Analog* magazine and sponsors of the Campbell Award) responded to the controversy in a measured way. Nevala-Lee's book had already led to Dell considering a name change for the award, but they had been waiting for the magazine's 90th anniversary. A few days after Ng's speech, the editor of *Analog* Trevor Quachri announced the name change.

*"As we move into Analog's 90th anniversary year, our goal is to keep the award as vital and distinguished as ever, so after much consideration, we have decided to change the award's name to The Astounding Award for Best New Writer."*

<https://theastoundinganalogcompanion.com/2019/08/27/a-statement-from-the-editor/>

Quachri concluded his editorial with some thoughts on history.

*"Though Campbell's impact on the field is undeniable, we hope that the conversation going forward is nuanced. George Santayana's proverbial phrase remains as true today as when it was coined: "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it." We neither want to paper over the flaws of those who have come before us, nor reduce them to caricatures. But we have reached a point where the conversation around the award is in danger of focusing more on its namesake than the writers it was intended to recognize and elevate, and that is something nobody—even Campbell himself—would want."*

ibid

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] Attempting a consistent sub-taxonomy of these groups may well be an exercise in futility. While Campbell v. Pulps sort of works to distinguish Sad from Rabid, it makes little sense for the chosen genres of novels by Larry Correia or Vox Day. Correia's most famous books are best classed as urban fantasy, a relatively new sub-genre, whereas Day's fiction has been his own brand of Christian epic fantasy.
- [2] For example <https://psmag.com/education/nazis-love-taylor-swift-and-also-the-crusades> and like the alt-right's engagement with European history, their engagement with literary history was typically just as confused.
- [3] <https://www.heinleinsociety.org/heinlein-journal/bill-patterson/>
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predestination\\_\(film\)#Release](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predestination_(film)#Release) The film had a limited release in the US initially and for Sad Puppies 3, US fans may not have been aware of it. However, the film's Hugo eligibility was extended into 2016 and a few people had recommended it on the suggestion pages of the Sad Puppy 4 blog.
- [5] Hoyt's 2010 Tor.com essay on Heinlein (part of a promotional series for the first volume of Patterson's biography) was entitled semi-ironically "The Church of Heinlein (mildly) Reformed" <https://www.tor.com/2010/08/18/the-church-of-heinlein-mildly-reformed/> In 2014 John Scalzi would mock the quasi-religious aspect of Hoyt's approach to Heinlein when commenting on Toni Weiskopf's view of fandom and awards characterising Baen as the "The Orthodox Church of Heinlein" <https://whatever.scalzi.com/2014/03/11/the-orthodox-church-of-heinlein/>
- [6] "hard" in this case meaning with significant STEM content (to use a modern term) that is integral to the story. Whether that is an accurate description of Torgersen's work is a separate question.
- [7] <https://www.writersofthefuture.com/writer-winners/>
- [8] The run of winning novels is bookended by 1955's Best Novel *They'd Rather Be Right* by Mark Clifton and Frank Riley and 2003's *Hominids* by Robert J. Sawyer, neither of which has had a long-lasting reputation, but the roll call of writers remains impressive.
- [9] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210911201622/https://www.analogsf.com/authors-corner/whos-who/>
- [10] Former Writers of the Future participant Jim C. Hines discussed some of the issues in 2012 <https://www.jimchines.com/2012/02/wotf-and-scientology/>
- [11] As of the 2021 Hugo Awards, Nnedi Okorafor was a former Writers of the Future winner who would have her first Hugo win after 2015, but there was a long gap between the two. It is unlikely that Hugo voters had a particular animus to Writers of the Future participants; more probably, the program was no longer attracting the kind of writers who would make it onto the Hugo ballot.
- [12] One of the statues concerned was finally removed in 2021. As this report notes: "Charlottesville's statues of Lee and Jackson were erected in the early 1920s with large ceremonies that included Confederate veteran reunions, parades and balls. At one event during the 1921 unveiling of the Jackson statue, children formed a living Confederate flag on the lawn of a school down the road from Vinegar Hill, a prominent Black neighbourhood. The Jackson statue was placed on land that had once been another prosperous Black neighbourhood." <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/10/1014926659/charlottesville-removes-robert-e-lee-statue-that-sparked-a-deadly-rally>
- [13] Lovecraft merged horror and the supernatural with science fiction tropes about cosmic entities, which is certainly fantastical but not typical of fantasy as a broad genre

- [14] <http://file770.com/s-t-joshi-rails-against-ending-use-of-lovecraft-bust-on-world-fantasy-award/>
- [15] I feel like I should have a reference here to somebody else asserting this but I also feel it is obvious
- [16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry\\_Pournelle#Awards](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Pournelle#Awards)
- [17] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One\\_country,\\_two\\_systems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_country,_two_systems)
- [18] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019%E2%80%932020\\_Hong\\_Kong\\_protests](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019%E2%80%932020_Hong_Kong_protests)
- [19] a swear word was removed and on the night, she had accidentally referred to the wrong magazine (Amazing instead of Astounding) and the wrong Campbell (Joseph instead of John W.).
- [20] <http://file770.com/storm-over-campbell-award/>

# 71: Meanwhile... 2019

[content warning: descriptions of racism and murder]

I don't know how many people hoped that the election of Donald Trump might somehow take the heat out of the simmering polarisation of US politics. I can see how somebody might imagine that, having unexpectedly elected Trump, the victory might mollify the more extreme aspects of the American right or, alternatively, that Trump's obvious inadequacies as a political leader might disillusion or discredit the right-wing of the Republican Party. Well before 2019, it was clear that Trump would only accelerate the growth of a partisan divide in the US.

Harsh immigration policies and more publicly aggressive action toward undocumented immigrants in the US did not reduce the scare-mongering on the right about "illegals" or demographic change. The US severely curtailed the numbers of refugees it would admit from what was already an historic low<sup>[1]</sup>. Immigration to the US from Mexico (an issue Trump had seized upon from the beginning of his Presidential campaign) had already been sharply falling since 2010<sup>[2]</sup>. However, the factual basis of immigration to the USA was never the primary motivator behind the political rhetoric of the issue.

## ***Conspiracy Nation***

In 2018, with the US mid-term elections looming, fear-mongering news coverage of a Central American "migrant caravan" helped spur a renewed ideological panic on the right about migrants<sup>[3]</sup>. The caravan was portrayed as a kind of invading army and an impending crisis, with Trump announcing:

*"I must, in the strongest of terms, ask Mexico to stop this onslaught – and if unable to do so I will call up the U.S. Military and CLOSE OUR SOUTHERN BORDER!"*

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/oct/18/trump-threatens-to-close-us-mexico-border-over-migrant-caravan>

Polls at the time showed that illegal immigration was one of the biggest issues for Republican Party voters but of very little concern for Democratic Party voters<sup>[4]</sup>. Trump's policies and rhetoric had only served to heighten the issue for conservatives, quite independent of the actual impact of policies or the actual level of migration in the US.

Right-wing media would continue to play on a core fear of the right that immigration was, somehow, a left-wing plot. On social media, a rumour quickly spread that claimed the migrant caravan was being organised and funded by the billionaire financier George Soros. The anti-Semitic theory was a new variation on Soros-themed conspiracies that had been circulating for several years, but in the increasing political fever of the Trump years, the theory was inspiring violence.

*"It also may have resonated in darker places. Cesar Sayoc, the man charged with mailing pipe bombs to Soros and other prominent critics of President Donald Trump, dwelled at length online about conspiracy theories involving the Hungarian-American philanthropist. Robert Bowers, charged with killing 11 people worshipping in a Pittsburgh synagogue on Saturday, used his social media accounts to post extensively about the caravan, including circulating an image of refugees in Guatemala purportedly climbing into a truck with a Star of David on the side."*

<https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/nation/2018/10/31/george-soros-and-migrant-caravan-how-lie-multiplied-online/1824633002/>

Of the former Evil League of Evil personalities, we've been following, Sarah A. Hoyt was the keenest to see the hand of George Soros in everything from the 2017 Women's Marches to Black Lives Matter to Antifa<sup>[5]</sup>. In the wake of the 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Hoyt also saw the hand of Soros:

*"And yet, the way things have been going, with not only an entire cohort that was indoctrinated in Russian propaganda (originally) and then just in America-hatred in our best schools, it might be inevitable. How long can a nation subsist with the enemy within? Particularly when the enemy's power is threatened by new technology. Particularly when that enemy is financed by Soros who might very well BE the beast of the apocalypse?"*

<https://accordingtohojt.com/2017/08/14/fools-to-the-left-of-me-clowns-to-the-right/><sup>[6]</sup>

In the Trump era, fringe conspiratorial beliefs were no longer restricted to alt-right image boards, but as likely to be tweeted or retweeted by members of Congress or the President's son<sup>[7]</sup>. Hand in hand with the

Soros conspiracy was a wider conspiracy claim that the left or the “globalist elites” were planning a replacement of white people by immigrants. Known as the “great replacement,”<sup>[8]</sup> the belief was another idea that had started in extremist circles and which had become more mainstream among Trump supporters. While discussing the 2018 migrant caravan, Hoyt asserted that replacement was part of the left’s underlying motivation.

*“Gramsci convinced these idiots that unlike the disappointing Western peasants, other races were NATURALLY communist/socialist. So, the left is fully invested in replacing every white person with someone who can tan, because then communism will automatically happen*

*This is at the back of their obsession with “demographic replacement” for countries like the US.”*

<https://accordingtohojt.com/2018/10/24/the-elephants/>

Framed as “replacement” it was a disturbing view of immigration as an existential threat and, in the context of the 2018 migrant caravan, a threat tied directly to the mid-term elections. Those elections, of course, were tied to a more mainstream conspiratorial claim that was predominant in Republican circles: that Democratic Party electoral success was dependent on mass voter fraud. As Hoyt herself explained in her PJMedia column:

*“Well, for recount after recount to happen, and ballot box after ballot box to be found always giving the election to the Dems (yes, there is one case of a Republican pulling this trick, against another Republican, in a very small precinct and a run for something like recording clerk. Let’s be real. To all those now eagerly ready to post that link, it doesn’t matter. Go with elections of state-wide and nationwide importance instead. The left always “wins” these contested contests) is about as likely as a mouse giving birth to a clock.*

*We know it too. We joke about it. Or at least we tell each other. “If it’s not close, they can’t cheat.”*

*Only they can. They’re doing it. Heck, have you considered the votes that go into it being close or not? Given everything they pull, how many of those are even legit?”*

<https://pjmedia.com/blog/sarah-hoyt/2018/11/12/the-tragedy-of-our-electoral-commons-n142>

This same column was finished by Hoyt with a vision of looming death and disaster:

*“But if you do nothing and keep insisting you don’t hear the music, sooner or later you’ll hear the rough music of blood and death. When all memory of civil discourse and respect for the laws is gone. When it’s all about two different laws, one for the people in power and one those without. When Marxism-Leninism is imposed from above and fills mass graves as it always does.”*

*ibid*

Conspiratorial ideation is not inherently politically partisan, and during the Trump years rumours and speculation about Trump would spread among left, centre, and the “never Trump” minority on the right, particularly in relation to the role of Russia in Trump’s 2016 victory. However, decades of misinformation from think-tanks and lobby groups on a range of issues from smoking to climate change<sup>[9]</sup> had primed the American right for belief in widespread conspiracies and encouraged deep scepticism of more verifiable sources. By 2019, layers of conspiracies were dominating right-wing political discourse.

Qanon was still growing in 2019, but of the personalities this project had been following, only Vox Day ever became committed to that particular nexus of conspiracies. Where Qanon was branching out from its Alt-Right and 8chan beginnings was in less political spaces, including online New Age spiritual groups and “wellness” culture, using fear of child exploitation as a route into political extremism<sup>[10]</sup>. Non-alt-right figures such as Sarah A. Hoyt never became enmeshed in Qanon’s more bizarre theories but, as discussed above, did endorse elements of the “great replacement” conspiracy theory, which would become more pervasive on the right in following years<sup>[11]</sup>. More broadly still, George Soros-themed conspiracy theories (typically with at least some grounding in fact, such as funding for causes perceived as liberal or progressive by Soros’s connected foundations) were even more widespread. The dominant belief was that the Democrats were the primary beneficiaries of widespread and systematic election fraud (despite very little evidence)<sup>[12]</sup>, but the surprise 2016 win by Donald Trump had also caused many Democrats to doubt the integrity of the electoral system<sup>[13]</sup>.

## *Christchurch and after*

On March 15, 2019, in the city of Christchurch, New Zealand, an Australian man embarked on a campaign of mass murder first at a mosque and then at an Islamic community centre. Before being apprehended, he had murdered 51 people and injured a further 40 more. In a further gruesome twist, he had used a body camera to live-stream the mass shooting using the video-streaming capabilities of Facebook<sup>[14]</sup>.

The shocking murders were just one part of a global increase in far-right violence<sup>[15]</sup> and it was quickly revealed that the killer (Brenton Tarrant) had been an avid consumer of far-right propaganda via 4chan, 8chan, and YouTube<sup>[16]</sup>. Like other far-right mass killers, Tarrant had also published a manifesto to accompany his killing spree. The manifesto was entitled “The Great Replacement”.

Tarrant’s manifesto was treated as idiosyncratic and confusing by media reports, but the style would have been familiar to anybody who had been following the online right over the past few years. Mixing neo-Nazi iconography (e.g., the sonnenrad/black sun symbol), ironic quips, references to video games and YouTube (including “subscribe to PewDiePie” – a video game reviewer), anti-immigration rhetoric, and alt-right ideology, his manifesto was pitched in the language of the online far-right. There were idiosyncratic elements such as his claim to be an ‘eco-fascist’<sup>[17]</sup> and his endorsement of the Chinese government<sup>[18]</sup>. However, multiple elements were essentially the same claims, ideological stances, and terminology as Vox Day’s, including ethno-nationalism, endorsement of the Norwegian terrorist/child-murderer Anders Behring Breivik, repudiation of conservatives as “civic nationalists”, and the so-called “14 words” white supremacist slogan, among other things<sup>[19]</sup>. The “shitposting” style also created a degree of deniability and confusion for people on the right, who were naturally keen to distance themselves from a brutal and unrepentant mass-murderer. However, even if separating which details were intended as jokes (e.g., a claim to have been radicalised by the innocuous video game *Spyro the Dragon*), Tarrant’s actions clearly indicated his antipathy to Muslims and immigrants and his adherence to the dual “great replacement” and “white genocide” conspiracy theories.

Vox Day himself was unsure whether the murders in New Zealand were proof that he had been right all along about immigration, or whether they were actually a “false flag” by nefarious forces designed to discredit white nationalists. After going with the first approach, he later added this to his post on the killings:

*“UPDATE: The shootings in New Zealand were almost certainly the first of the false flags everyone who has been paying attention has been anticipating. The paid shills are out HARD on this one trying to put out the fires being set by everyone who notices the highly cheesy nature of the so-called manifesto or the unlikely prospect of a very fit young Aussie who looks a lot like an SAS officer being inspired by a Norwegian to attack a mosque in New Zealand in order to defend gun rights in the United States.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210808114320/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2019/03/immigration-war.html>

Peter Grant (former leader of the 2015 Tor Boycott) had a quite different reaction to the anti-immigrant/anti-Islam mass killings. He posted warnings of Islamic terrorism, claiming that

*“Hundreds, possibly thousands, of former ISIS combatants and fellow-travelers have returned, or are in the process of returning, to their former home countries. Many are not known to the authorities there. I think it’s likely to the point of certainty that some of them, at least, will take this call to action to heart, and plan revenge attacks on Christian places of worship.”*

<https://bayourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2019/03/watch-out-for-terror-attacks-this.html>

Meanwhile Sarah A. Hoyt mocked the idea of white supremacist violence being a credible threat.

*“If you don’t want to lose brain cells by reading it, the gist of it is that Talar Ansari, probably second generation immigrant from some Arab country or other, looked at the shootings in New Zealand, and is sure that the “White Supremacists” are going to get him. And that white supremacists are a far greater terrorist threat than Islamic radicals.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2019/03/18/st-patrick-all-american-saint/><sup>[20]</sup>

Jon Del Arroz’s reaction in the more immediate aftermath of the attack was more disturbingly flippant (as covered by Jim Hines):

*“An attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand leaves at least 49 dead. The gunman’s livestream of the massacre includes him telling people, “Subscribe to PewDiePie.” Hours later, Jon Del Arroz posts the following to Twitter:*

“@jondelarroz

Subscribe to PewDiePie

2:16 am – 15 Mar 2019”

<https://www.iimchines.com/2018/01/jon-del-arroz/>

On April 27, 2019 at a synagogue in Poway, California a gunman murdered one woman, injured the Rabbi, and shot into a room with children inside. Luckily, the murderer’s weapon jammed and he fled and was later arrested. As with the Christchurch killer, he had left a written statement of his views on 8chan and also had attempted to live-stream the murders on Facebook<sup>[21]</sup>. As with Christchurch, the killer was also citing the “great replacement”/“white genocide” conspiracy as a motive but in this instance targeting Jews rather than Muslims.

On August 3, 2019 at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas a mass shooter murdered 22 people and injured 23 more. Unlike the Christchurch killer, the murderer was targeting Latino people rather than Muslims, but like Tarrant was also inspired by the “great replacement” conspiracy theory. Also, like Tarrant, the killer left a manifesto on 8chan<sup>[22]</sup> and directly cited the Christchurch killings as an inspiration for the mass shooting but also attacked Donald Trump for not acting sufficiently to stop immigration. The El Paso massacre was the deadliest of the 2019 attacks inspired by Christchurch, but it wasn’t the only one<sup>[23]</sup>.

## Epstein

In a political and cultural atmosphere already brimming with conspiratorial thinking, mistrust of “elites” and misinformation, the death of wealthy paedophile Jeffrey Epstein in jail while under further investigation for sex trafficking appeared to be a final confirmation for many people that everything was not right with the world. Ruled a suicide by the coroner<sup>[24]</sup>, the more popular opinion was that he had been assassinated to protect the powerful people who had been visitors to his island. There was no direct evidence that Epstein had been assassinated but the circumstances were so overwhelmingly suspicious as to make it hard not to doubt the official story.

People on the right who had avoided more overt conspiracy theory mongering were now far more inclined to support the prevailing narrative. Brad Torgersen (often portrayed as the most left-leaning of the Evil League of Evil) summed up his own reaction.

*“It’s pretty simple. Epstein was killed to keep him quiet. His testimony would have dragged many, many famous, rich, and powerful men into an embarrassing public debacle which might have also put some of them on the criminal hot-seat. So, to fix the problem those people had Epstein snuffed. This is what the enlightened ruling class does. Ethics are for little people. The ruling class are the same old greedy, immoral, perverse bastards they’ve always been. They just broadcast “wokeness”—the latest, greatest fig leaf for their many and egregious sins. (side-eyeing Clinton, Inc.)”*

Facebook 6 November 2019 <https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/3786463118046560>

In the comments, Torgersen became even more apocalyptic:

*“When the dam bursts, I expect lampposts to be decorated from one end of America to the other. Money can’t protect you when the proles no longer fear jail, nor the cops, nor repercussions. When all there is, is rage at the latest, greatest double-standard and abuse of power.”*

Facebook comment 6 November 2019

[https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/3786463118046560?comment\\_id=3786505944708944&reply\\_comment\\_id=3786517568041115](https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/3786463118046560?comment_id=3786505944708944&reply_comment_id=3786517568041115)

## Meanwhile...

In Australia, a combination of climate change and an unusually dry and warm year led to the annual bushfire season starting early<sup>[25]</sup>. By early September (Southern hemisphere spring), communities in northern New South Wales were facing major bush fires. By November the spread of fires and a combination of wind, heat, and dry air led to a Catastrophic level fire danger warning for Sydney. By December large areas of Australia were on fire, with the country’s biggest cities inundated by smoke and many rural communities cut off by fire fronts. Climate change had become manifest.

In December 2019, health authorities in the city of Wuhan, China identified a cluster of unusual cases of pneumonia connected to a seafood market in the city.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united?width=850&height=850&iframe=true>
- [2] <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends>
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central\\_American\\_migrant\\_caravans#Late\\_2018\\_caravans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_American_migrant_caravans#Late_2018_caravans)
- [4] <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/10/15/little-partisan-agreement-on-the-pressing-problems-facing-the-u-s/>
- [5] “Look, through black-lives-matters and the pussy hatted spectacles, and now with antifa, you don’t even have to dig very deep, or very far to see beneath the surface the money flowing in, from chartered buses to identically printed signs, to— It’s Soros all the way down. Which is like turtles, only malevolent, soaked in the sins of the 20th century, and either trying to avenge himself on the world for the Holocaust that stole his childhood, or seeking redemption for the things he did then and continued to do to enrich himself, in all the wrong ways. I don’t know which, and I doubt he does.” <https://accordingtohojt.com/2019/11/23/somethings-happening-here/>
- [6] Hoyt would also claim about Unite the Right that it was a fight between 400 people of whom “Of those 400 people, probably 300 were antifa, which is to say tugs[sic] who need money and are on Soros’ payroll. The other 100 people were neo Nazis of some description, or perhaps people who went along because their friends were going, or perhaps people who were there to see what happened. And of course, some number of them were FBI agents, because some number always is at the KKK and Neo Nazi rallies.” <https://accordingtohojt.com/2017/08/16/the-fringe/>
- [7] e.g., Matt Gaetz <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/nation/2018/10/31/george-soros-and-migrant-caravan-how-lie-multiplied-online/1824633002/>
- [8] [https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/The\\_Great\\_Replacement](https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/The_Great_Replacement)
- [9] <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-018-0157-2>
- [10] In Australia, this surprising axis between the alt-right and wellness was exemplified in 2020 by the celebrity TV chef Pete Evans. Evans had been controversial in the past for his advocacy for crank “paleo” diets but his media career was sharply interrupted after he posted a cartoon of a butterfly adorned with the quasi-Germanic “sonnenrad”/black sun symbol that had become appropriated by neo-Nazis [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Sun\\_\(symbol\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sun_(symbol)) <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/tv-and-radio/dumped-by-sponsors-what-happens-to-pete-evans-now-20201117-p56f7j.html>
- [11] In 2019 the phrase was still relatively fringe. By 2021 the term was being used by Fox News host Tucker Carlson <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/tucker-carlson-great-replacement-white-supremacy-1231248/> Of the former Sad Puppies, Peter “Tor Boycott” Grant was not using the phrase on his blog in 2019 but by 2021 was using it in the title of his blogposts <https://bayourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2021/09/the-great-replacement-is-in-full-swing.html>
- [12] [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/republicans-voter-fraud\\_n\\_5b0850f8e4b0fdb2aa53791f](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/republicans-voter-fraud_n_5b0850f8e4b0fdb2aa53791f)
- [13] <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2018/09/11/many-democrats-think-that-the-2016-election-result-was-rigged/>
- [14] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christchurch\\_mosque\\_shootings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christchurch_mosque_shootings)
- [15] <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/17/the-observer-view-on-the-christchurch-shootings-weve-been-too-slow-to-see-deadly-far-right-threat>
- [16] <https://apnews.com/article/intelligence-agencies-shootings-brenton-tarrant-new-zealand-new-zealand-mosque-attacks-d8217fa30fe4eeba45fb001b77857385>
- [17] this is less unusual in the Australian context, where anti-immigration arguments have been positioned in terms of the additional people straining the resources of Australian urban centres even by mainstream politicians <https://www.afr.com/opinion/immigration-is-being-blamed-for-the-traffic-and-transport-gridlock-of-our-cities-20180417-h0yw49>
- [18] A pro-China position on the alt-right was unusual then, and is still unusual in pro-Trump circles which include some overtly anti-Chinese Communist Party platforms such as the *Epoch Times*. However, in 2021, Vox Day had been overtly praising China’s head of state Xi Jinping as an example of a strong nationalist/anti-globalist leader <https://web.archive.org/web/20210927133810/https://voxdays.net/2021/09/27/%E7%9C%9F%E5%96%84%E7%BE%8E/> “Compare the Chinese program with the unmitigated filth and appalling celebration of the False, the Wicked, and the Ugly of the last 100 years of Western art and literature. When is the last time any Western leader dared to stand firmly against the degradation of Western culture, or to even lift a finger in an attempt to raise the cultural standards of the West? And Xi’s culture campaign is not a communist program, it is an intrinsically Chinese nationalist one, one that has its roots in the consciousness of the consequences of past decadence and was almost certainly inspired by the cultural campaign instituted by the great Lee Kuan Yew when he first came to power in Singapore in 1959.”
- [19] I’m obviously not going to be linking to the manifesto but there are multiple news-oriented and academic discussions of the content <https://www.start.umd.edu/news/new-zealand-terrorists-manifesto-look-some-key-narratives-beliefs-and-tropes> <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/03/what-the-christchurch-attackers-manifesto-tells-us.html> <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/03/the-shooters-manifesto-was-designed-to-troll/585058/>
- [20] Hoyt is referring to this well-written essay in the Atlantic <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/03/christchurch-attack-muslim-rhetoric/585106/>
- [21] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poway\\_synagogue\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poway_synagogue_shooting)

- [22] The [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019\\_El\\_Paso\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_El_Paso_shooting)
- [23] <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/brenton-tarrant-christchurch-shooter-attack-el-paso-norway-poway-a9076926.html>
- [24] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey\\_Epstein](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey_Epstein)
- [25] <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/natural-disasters/bushfires/2019-20-bushfires-explainer>



## 72: Part 6 Overview — Pandemic 2020

In the previous parts of this story, we traced the precursors to a culture war within (primarily US) science fiction fandom, the eruption of that culture war into a specific dispute over the Hugo Awards, and then the aftermath of that dispute during the years of the Donald Trump Presidency.

Historical stories do not have neat ends, and the formal end to this story is where I started it in the introduction: January 6 2021<sup>[1]</sup>. I wanted to ensure that, as we dived into the ins and outs of fandom, that the broader political context was recognised. These events did not occur in a vacuum, and in some cases, major world events helped shape the fannish microcosm. In other cases, technological and economic changes that happened with less fanfare were also at work. The rise of eBook readers, smartphones, and online book stores, for example, changed the economic relationships between readers, authors, and publishers in ways that are still developing.

This is also partly a story of changes in the ways that communities that are physically remote from each other communicate. The pre-internet fandom brought people virtually together via mimeographed fanzines and the postal system. Bulletin boards and Usenet newsgroups created new ways for fans to organise. Online services such as CompuServe opened up that kind of online experience to a wider set of people, and by the start of the 21st century, web-based blogs and forums were key spaces where many of the major players in this story became engaged with one kind of fandom or another. By 2009 and the RaceFail controversy (see chapter 13), the blog/social media site LiveJournal was a major locus of fan discussion and also instrumental for many women and people of colour to assert higher expectations of fans on issues of race and sexism. During the subsequent years, blogs reached their peak influence and also saw a steady decline in face of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Meanwhile, the role of spaces with less internal regulation and laxer community standards, such as 4chan and later 8chan, as a locus for extreme reactionary ideas to be disseminated also grew.

While these broad socio-economic and technological changes have played their role in this story, major political events have also punctuated the narrative. In some cases, those events have had an immediate impact, and in other cases, they simply correspond non-causally<sup>[2]</sup> in time. These events mark milestones in the young history of a new century.

The September 11 terror attacks on the USA marked a key moment for multiple people involved in the Debarkle. For Brad R. Torgersen, it was the point where he joined the army. For John C. Wright, it was a point where he began to seriously question his atheism. Sarah A. Hoyt cites 9-11 as an event that caused her to see the views of people on the left as fundamentally wrong, even though her political “coming out” would be a few years later. The attacks do not appear to have changed Vox Day’s views of the world, but they led him to shift his *WorldNetDaily* column from a review of computer technology to political punditry.

The Global Financial Crisis of 2007 to 2009 corresponds with, but does not appear to have directly caused, a major cultural shift in fandom. Long-running debates about the representation of women and cultural diversity in fandom shifted gear in this period. At one end, a historic low in the representation of women in the Hugo Awards in 2007 led to an increased call to action by many women in fandom and publishing. Meanwhile, the anger and frustration of many people of colour in fandom at the tokenism and exploitation of cultural diversity in fandom and publishing led to an ongoing shift in the nature and make-up of fandom. That this occurred during a global crisis of capitalism may or may not have been a coincidence.

To what extent the GFC played a role in the historic election of Barack Obama as US President is beyond the scope of this project. However, what was apparent was the start of a sustained pushback from the US right against the perceived acceleration of social change. Although right-wing movements such as the Tea Party acted in opposition to movements such as Occupy Wall Street, a common theme at least in the rhetoric of both<sup>[3]</sup> was the sense of betrayal by conventional politics and established figures of powers (such as banks) in the wake of the GFC.

Of course, at the centre of this particular project is the rise of alt-right culture warriors in the period of 2014-2016, when the twin popular culture campaigns of GamerGate and the Puppy Kerfuffle were directly connected by the recognition of a new aesthetic of right-wing online activism, the most politically extreme form of which became known as the Alt-Right. How the alt-right would have evolved if Hillary Clinton had won the 2016 US Presidential Election is unclear. Instead, the US Presidency went to Donald Trump, a figure whom the alt-right had christened their “God Emperor”.

Below all of this, the world kept changing. The long-term consequence of the Industrial Revolution and the 20th century’s acceleration of the consumption of fossil fuels was incrementally-rising global surface temperatures. The physical impacts of this warming process had long been predicted, but for the general

public it was difficult to spot differences between an unseasonably warm month and a long term trend. In the second decade of the 21st century, the signal of global warming was becoming loud enough to be heard above the noise without the aid of statistics.

Yet, it was a different long-predicted phenomenon that would become the signature event, closing the chapter on the nearly twenty years since 9-11. A global pandemic.

In 2021 we don't know how the long-term effects of the pandemic will impact our politics or our communities. Neither do we know how it will reshape fandom. However, in the final part of our story, we will look at how a worldwide calamity impacted the players in the Debarkle, and how the culture war led to a new threat against democracy.

## **FOOTNOTES**

- [1] Plus some codas and wrapping up of various events in 2021.
- [2] or, if there is a causal connection, it is not immediately apparent
- [3] to what extent this was cynical within the Tea Party groups is unclear

## 73: Covid, Contrarians and Cons

The exact start of the Covid-19 pandemic isn't known. At the time of writing this chapter (November 2021), it is believed that via some means a variant of a coronavirus found in other mammals made its way into the human population<sup>[1]</sup>. A less likely possibility (on current evidence) is that the virus outbreak was due to an accidental exposure from the Wuhan Institute of Virology. It's likely that there will never be a wholly unambiguous answer to this question, because viruses don't keep diaries or film their activities for TikTok. This chapter isn't the story of a virus or a pandemic, though — there are better places to read about how Covid-19 spread around the world. This is a story about fear, uncertainty, and doubts both natural and manufactured, but also about how people coped with a challenging year.

### *The Covtrarians*<sup>[0]</sup>

From early January 2020, the spread of the virus and the reaction of governments and health agencies to the virus become increasingly well documented. Through that time, understanding of the nature of the virus, how it spread, what it did to people, and which ones were most likely to suffer ill effects, increased rapidly. However, during that period of shifting understanding, public advice was changing rapidly while governments and health officials scrambled to make policy. Initially, it was not even clear whether there had been cases of human-to-human transmission of the virus even as (as we know in retrospect) it was spreading rapidly.

Culturally, the idea of a global pandemic wasn't new. The 21<sup>st</sup> century had already seen the 2003 SARS outbreak that had impacted South China and Hong Kong in particular but which had also spread to parts of South East Asia and even Canada<sup>[2]</sup>. The 2009 H1N1 (aka "swine flu") pandemic had proved to be less fatal than many had feared,<sup>[3]</sup> but had still been a notable cultural and political phenomenon. The 2015-16 outbreak of Zika fever<sup>[4]</sup> had led to particular concerns over the impact on pregnancies, while the 2013-16 outbreak of Ebola in West Africa<sup>[5]</sup> had even become a minor issue in the 2016 US Presidential campaign. The Ebola outbreak had been deadly but geographically limited. However, the high fatality and gruesomeness of the disease meant that it was particularly fearsome in the public consciousness.

That public consciousness of epidemics and pandemics had been shaped for decades by popular culture. Crossing genres of horror, thrillers, and science fiction, stories of pandemics, contagion, and biological weapons are plentiful. H.G.Wells's seminal *War of the Worlds* isn't a pandemic story as such, but it presents disease as the ultimate undoing of the invading Martians. Works from writers as varied as Alistair MacLean, Stephen King, and Margaret Atwood have played on the themes of potential or realised pandemics<sup>[6]</sup>. The 2015 Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning novel *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel imagined a world rebuilding in the ruins of civilisation destroyed by an influenza pandemic<sup>[7]</sup>.

There are multiple layers of fantasies in these works. On the one hand, the idea of disease as an external and essentially foreign threat — a deliberate or accidental invader from "abroad"<sup>[8]</sup>. On the other hand, science fiction's double-edged view of science as both saviour and existential threat, with researchers into disease either as the heroes battling the disease or as the Frankenstein-like figures who push the boundaries of knowledge too far<sup>[9]</sup>.

So, it was not surprising that early in 2020 there was much speculation that a novel virus might be a bioweapon on one hand, or an accidental release of medical research on the other. At any time, the discovery of a major new disease might have led to speculation on both these points, but in 2020 the world was already in a state where wild or even absurd theories could gain rapid attention (e.g., Qanon). In addition, among much of the American right (already at a high degree of conspiracy ideation), China was the international enemy du jour. US President Donald Trump had been escalating a trade war with China since 2018, and the violent crackdown on pro-democracy protestors in Hong Kong was alarming people across the US political spectrum<sup>[11]</sup>.

What was in January/February a perceived danger of a potentially disruptive epidemic was also regarded by many on the right as the fault of the Chinese government, or of the Chinese people and culture more generally. Whether this was via intention (a bioweapon),<sup>[12]</sup> or by accident (a lab leak), or because of a culture gone awry (typically via the demonisation of so called "wet markets" selling unusual wild animals for meat), there was an insistence on the right that China in some broad sense be held responsible for any consequences of this new virus. This first stage of folding the future pandemic into the partisan US culture war, therefore, focused on the name of the disease.

There had already been a substantial pushback by public health agencies against the mainstream media naming the disease after its apparent point of origin in Wuhan, China. This pushback was not a new thing,

and similar work had been done to pushback against the H1N1 influenza names of “Mexican Flu” and “Swine Flu” (less successfully), as names like these caused public confusion on how the disease was spread.

On the right, names such as “wu-flu”, “kung-flu”, and “xi-disease”<sup>[13]</sup> were used partly to maintain the association with China, and also as a counter-protest against the official pushback against the name “Wuhan coronavirus” which had initially been used in news coverage. On February 11, the WHO officially named the disease Covid-19 and the virus SARS-CoV-2, and the mainstream media followed suit. The pushback against this name continued on the right for some time. In March 2020 the anti-Communist/pro-Trump Epoch Times argued:

*“There has been controversy recently about what to call the virus that has unleashed a worldwide pandemic. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) prefers “novel coronavirus.” Others have referred to it as the “Wuhan virus,” after its place of origin, as is common in naming diseases. The Epoch Times suggests a more accurate name is the “CCP virus,” and calls upon others to join us in adopting this name.”*

[https://web.archive.org/web/20200319150457/https://www.theepochtimes.com/giving-the-right-name-to-the-virus-causing-a-worldwide-pandemic-2\\_3277200.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20200319150457/https://www.theepochtimes.com/giving-the-right-name-to-the-virus-causing-a-worldwide-pandemic-2_3277200.html)

At Sarah A. Hoyt’s blog, this nominal confusion was demonstrated by a repeated error of thinking that Covid-19 was somehow essentially Chinese, and that this Chinese characteristic would prevent the disease from spreading to Western countries even after it had already done so.

*“Even in Italy, the mortality is mostly among Chinese transplants. And before you tell me I’m racist (rolls eyes), no, I’m not. Leaving aside the protein in the lungs this thing might or might not bind to, there are co-morbidity factors for Chinese (and to an extent for Italians. Definitely for Iranians, particularly Iranian males.) One of them is smoking like a chimney. The other is that China (where the mortality seems to be way higher, honestly) is more polluted than you can imagine. Iran might be too. You know dictatorships don’t really much care for the environment, and I remember Portugal in the early sixties, when going out early in the morning during rush hour was like putting your face fully in the exhaust of a car. I have no clue as to Italy air quality, and I have a full schedule ahead, so I refuse to fall down that rabbit hole.*

*Right now, we know it’s spreading like wild fire. It’s known as a “virgin field” epidemic. What it doesn’t seem to be is all that deadly. NOT among countries which actually give a f\*ck about their citizens. For the others, everything is deadly. Remember North Korea telling their citizens that pine needle soup was nutritious?”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2020/02/28/dont-fear-the-wu-flu/>

Hoyt was telling her readers not to be afraid of Covid-19 in late February, even as the disease was already running rampant in Iran. (The Iran connection would later lead Vox Day to spread the idea that Covid-19 was actually a US deep-state biowarfare attack on China and Iran<sup>[14]</sup>). The stickiness of this idea – that the virus was somehow essentially Chinese, as if it remembered its origins – would still be there with Hoyt many weeks later in April when the body count in the US was already climbing exponentially.

*“It’s hard to deny the disease presents in weird clusters. I have a friend whose Georgia County is about the same level of bad as Italy. Which makes no sense whatsoever, as they have no high Chinese population. And while the cases might be guess work (with tests only accurate AT MOST 70% of the time, it’s guesswork all the way down) the deaths aren’t. The community is small enough they all know each other. And they’re losing relatively young (still working) and relatively healthy (no known big issues) people.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2020/04/03/assume-a-spherical-cow-of-uniform-density-in-a-frictionless-vacuum/>

Whatever the origins of the disease, by early March Covid-19 had already moved beyond them. However, this sense of Covid-19 as a distinctly Chinese or perhaps East Asian phenomenon continued as wishful thinking that the new version of SARS would follow the same script as its older cousin. This disconnect between the feeling of relative safety and a disease spreading rapidly through international travel was encapsulated in an account by former Sad Puppy supporter and Dragon Award finalist Declan Finn, who in early March 2020 took a trip to Italy with his new wife. Covid-19 was already spreading quickly in Italy at this point, but as Finn noted:

*“But yeah, Italy decided to freak out over the Corona Virus.*

*You’re probably wondering, Declan, why go there in the first place?*

*Because when we went, it was Lombardi that was the problem. Milan and Venice, et al were the problems.*

*Lombardi was “under lockdown.”*

*I figured, “It’s Lombardi. It’s a quarantine. How do you fuck up a quarantine? Close the roads, the border, and shut down planes and trains in and out of the area.”“*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200316225157/http://www.declanfinn.com/2020/03/i-have-returned-from-italy-part-1-oh.html>

Finn would find himself having to flee Italy (breaking airport security in the process) as a wave of international shutdowns of air travel to prevent the spread of disease left millions of people stranded<sup>[15]</sup>. Air travel allowed the epidemic to quickly become a pandemic, jumping from one major international transport hub to another. By the time Declan Finn had returned from Italy, New York had begun to shut schools as a public health measure against the virus. By April 6, New York was one of the largest outbreaks of Covid-19 in the world at the time with over 2,000 people dead<sup>[16]</sup>.

I’m emphasising the partisan disinformation aspects of this early phase of the pandemic, but in this first quarter of 2020, right-wing websites were not exclusively pushing nonsense about the pandemic. Only a few of the former Sad Puppies could reasonably be called “Preppers” (Peter Grant of Tor Boycott fame, for example) but the widespread sense of looming disaster or Communist take-over did mean that there was helpful advice on preparedness, including warning people to make sure they had sufficient supplies of food, medication, and clean water for a potential period of quarantine. Sarah A. Hoyt’s blog carried a guest post about the need for infection control measures written by a registered nurse<sup>[17]</sup>. Warnings against panic buying could also be found, which were particularly pertinent in March 2020 when a wave of panic buying of toilet paper spread around the world fuelled primarily by a fear of shortages caused by the self-same panic buying. Sarah A. Hoyt (as our main example here) also correctly identified in early March that the group under greatest threat of death from Covid-19 was old people in nursing homes, and that insufficient attention was being paid to keeping these people safe<sup>[18]</sup>.

The arrival of a pandemic, while not wholly unexpected, was also a surprise to everybody. For the American right, that prepper/self-reliant strand of the culture was almost disappointed in Covid-19’s somewhat anti-climatic progress. Not only was survival common rather than limited to a special few, for many people Covid was asymptomatic. The deadly nature of Covid lay in its capacity to easily spread, often via the wealthier people<sup>[19]</sup>. At least initially, many developing nations were spared the impact of the disease, while America and Western Europe became the areas with the fastest growth. Forcing Covid into a partisan narrative would be difficult, but it would be necessary, because there was no simple free-market response to a pandemic: it would require a coordinated national response. In late March, with many parts of America locking down and the federal government initiating new spending, Sarah A. Hoyt began to frame the response to the pandemic as a plot by the left.

*“This brings us to Enemies-domestic: the left is flexing everything that remains of its power to convince the population that they’re all going to die and that only government can save them. It might work long enough to elect their spokes-zombie, Joe Biden, D-mentia, to the presidency. That’s what they’re counting on. Because once they get it, we will never, ever, ever vote our way out. Shooting our way out is the only thing we can hope for.*

*And we must count on Trump to turn the corner on that. I’m not sure about it. They’re trying to pass the second stimulus bill to repair what the first undid. (As always, government pretending to fix what it broke. The quarantine broke things, and now the stimulus bill broke more things.... Pardon me I’m going to be ill.) But the second won’t pass, because Malig-Nancy and the House Wreckers will not want the mess repaired. They want us to go down in flames, so socialism looks good.*

*Enemies, domestic.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2020/03/19/seven-days-in-march/>

Hoyt's claim was not that Covid-19 was fake, but that the left and the Democrats and the media had created a panic which had duped everybody, including Trump and much of the Republican Party, into implementing an economic shut-down and deficit spending. These measures were certain, in Hoyt's view, to be a disaster on a scale far beyond the pandemic, and by March 24 her predictions had escalated.

*"Every part of the machine is interlocked. And what is happening is taking the wheels off. It's smashing into the center of the economy with a hammer. BTW when I say there will be famine and people will die, I mean in the US. PEOPLE WILL DIE. Of hunger. Of lack of heat. Of lack of medicine. PEOPLE WILL DIE. And not all of them the insane people who are instigating this. In fact, most of the power mad governors will be just fine. And one can only hope that the idiots roaming Facebook and saying this is their chance to smash capitalism get to FEEL what they're encouraging. Dying of hunger ain't pretty.*

*In the rest of the world? If people starve in the US, the rest of the world will starve worse. Russia thinks it can be resurgent. So does China. They're going to find mostly they die. Their despotic systems only work in a hyper abundant world. But what this whole thing adds to is that the Chinese Virus was not the problem. The people imposing crazy quarantines and measures are. The idea that you can shut the country down for two weeks is bad enough. The people trying to stampede us into doing it longer, are ignorant of the realities of economics, or indeed of reality."*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2020/03/24/cures-and-diseases/>

By April, the idea that Covid-19 was some uniquely Chinese disease was no longer tenable even for Sarah A. Hoyt. Instead, she offered a new theory why the disease was running rampant in many parts of the world but that major public health measures were largely unwarranted. The answer was that too many people were hugging.

*"also think if you go and look at the clusters, you'll find that there are reasons why it got exceptionally bad there, but not anywhere else. And it was never going to get as bad anywhere else. And the measures should have been taken specifically in those places, without the ruinous cost of crashing the economy. For instance, my friend in Albany, Georgia, tells me he assumes part of the reason it got so bad in his neighbourhood (the worst per capita in the U.S. last I looked) is that "we are the touchiest, most social people I know," i.e., there is a lot of touching and hugging.*

*At a guess, this is the reason it got so bad in Italy, too, but not nearly as bad in Germany, where, frankly, people aren't that touchy/feely/huggy.*

*New York City — do I really need to say this? — is not Colorado. I can go months without using an elevator. I can't remember the last time I used a subway, and the last time I used public transport was last year while visiting my parents in Portugal — and even then, only when I was going to downtown Porto because it's almost impossible to park. If I keep the curtains closed in the bathroom, I can't see my closest neighbor (who admittedly is close, but that's on one side). That's in Denver. I have open space in the front and back of the house, and the only people I share air with are my family.*

*Now, in NYC, besides the fact they all live in modified closets with shared air, you can't get anywhere without rubbing elbows with strangers. Subways and elevators are simply parts of daily life for most New Yorkers. And as for social distancing... well! Every time I go East, when I hit the first layover, I want to start singing, "Don't stand so close to me." So, would a complete lockdown of the city, with perhaps distribution of food so the grocery stores could be closed, make sense for NYC? Sure, it would. Of course, it would.*

*A grave violation of everyone's rights? Sure. No doubt about that. But perhaps necessary for a limited time in a limited space. Does a complete lockdown in places where the culture is completely different make any sense? No. Also no. With a side of no."*

<https://pjmedia.com/blog/sarah-hoyt/2020/04/12/modeling-covid-19-and-the-lies-of-multiculturalism-n384188>

Nor was this just the strange ideas of a minor science fiction writer. Hoyt's *PJ Media* column expounding this theory was picked up by veteran right-wing talk radio personality Rush Limbaugh, who amplified her claims.

*“We assume everybody must live in New York. Everybody must live the dense populations. In other words, there’s no state of Washington model for Texas. Well, there might be, but it doesn’t get used and it’s overshadowed and overused by the nationwide model.*

*Now, she [Hoyt] makes it clear. “I don’t think,” she writes, “COVID-19 is a hoax. ... I do think it has got really bad ‘in clusters.’ I also think if you go and look at the clusters, you’ll find that there are reasons why it got exceptionally bad there, but not anywhere else.” Like why is it not bad West Virginia? Why is it not nearly as bad in California as it is in New York? Why is it not nearly as bad originally in the state of Washington as it is elsewhere? Where are there places where it isn’t really bad at all? Is that of no interest to anybody? Or do we sweep that under the rug in order to protect the integrity of the models?”*

<https://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2020/04/13/the-covid-19-models-cant-account-for-culture/>

In reality, Covid-19 was already growing exponentially in Hoyt’s home state of Colorado, and was firmly entrenched in the less populous states of America. Cases were declining in New York, but that was just the end of the beginning of America’s pandemic. Nonetheless, Tucker Carlson of Fox News was busy claiming that the pandemic was now receding<sup>[20]</sup>.

In this period from April to May 2020, a position on the Covid-19 pandemic among the US right began to crystallise around the central idea that Covid-19 was no worse than a seasonal flu, and that the only appropriate measures were to continue as normal with perhaps an extra emphasis on personal hygiene. Not only should there not be lockdowns, but the potential damage to the economy was such that people needed to be actively encouraged to be economically active; also, public health messaging in general was causing fear and panic, which was also hurting the economy. Further, this growing viewpoint on the right saw the public health measures being implemented not just as an error or a mistaken policy born out of over-cautious thinking, but as a deliberate attempt by the left (even in the form of Republican governors) to push an authoritarian agenda. Naturally, within this paradigm of the pandemic as an excuse for a left-wing plot which would lead to mass starvation, the only appropriate response was to rebel:

*“Here’s the thing, though, the way things are RIGHT NOW, you can rebel now or rebel later. You can rebel now, and go back to your life, or you can rebel later, when you’ll have to shoot anyone asking you for papers or keeping you from growing beans.*

*If you don’t assert your rights now, you’ll have to assert them in blood, when you’re starving and sick, cold and broken in winter, when the lights go out (we’ve already been having brownouts and blackouts) when your cars are not working, when getting factories back in a state to produce anything is almost impossible, when airplanes have been taken to “graveyards” in the desert forever, when your local hospital has shut its doors and has no money to reopen.”*

<https://accordingtohovt.com/2020/04/10/olly-olly-oxen-free/>

The idea of anti-lockdown protests as a part of the culture war would continue throughout the pandemic and in the process subsume within it genuine fears, anxieties and legitimate complaints about the severe measures that would be implemented in multiple nations. However, it was not just the most aggressive anti-Covid measures that would be caught up in the backlash, it was the symbols of the pandemic as well, and no symbol was pervasive than the light blue of the surgical mask.

*“Over and over, everywhere, they’re out in force. “I wear a mask because I care.”*

*The fact this phrase is always used tells me it’s not original. They heard it somewhere, and it sounded good to them and they’re going to use it buckle and tongue whenever anyone challenges the UTILITY — or the sanity — of their wearing a mask.*

*In fact, their wearing a mask is tying a yellow ribbon in their front yard during the Iran hostage crisis. It is flying the flag after 9/11. It’s a way of showing their feelings, their emotions. It’s also a way of feeling part of a crowd. (Yes, I flew the flag after 9/11. But my dears, I fly the flag all the time, up to and including when I get a wild hair.)*

*They don’t even TRY to argue it does something useful. They just view it as a symbol to tie to their faces, to show they “care.””*

From here on in, the complexity of responses to a pandemic would be filtered through the conspiratorial lens of the partisan culture war to the point of absurdity. Within this lens, Sweden, a nation normally demonised by the US right for its social-democratic policies, was lionised for its relatively light touch (with the right ignoring reasons why Sweden had a better chance of avoiding lockdowns than the US, including the country's approach to healthcare, better work/life balance, and high civic trust) while Australia's centre-right government was demonised for strict border controls. President Donald Trump's chief medical advisor Anthony Fauci became a figure increasingly demonised by Trump's supporters because he continued to communicate the seriousness of the disease. To be seen as taking Covid-19 seriously was in itself regarded as a partisan act tantamount to undermining the position of Trump and giving aid to "enemies, domestic".

The conspiratorial and contrarian culture war response to Covid-19 would not abate in the coming months. Folded into the anti-factual narrative came alternative cures, initially hydroxychloroquine and later the anti-parasitic drug ivermectin, as well as older quack cures such as mineral bleach that had been circulating prior to the pandemic but which was co-opted as a Covid cure as early as January 2020<sup>[21]</sup>. Once Covid-19 was perceived as a front in the culture war it became axiomatic that the official narrative (i.e., more evidence-based sources) was a lie, and that the "truth" must lie somewhere else. Forced to choose between science and fiction, America's right chose fiction while the case numbers and the death toll continued to grow.

### ***Meanwhile, in the reality-based community...***

While some parts of the science fiction community were using their imaginative capacity to perceive public health as a leftist coup, everybody else was contending with the challenge of the new world of the pandemic. What nobody knew was how long or how severe the pandemic would be. Neither popular culture nor recent history was much of a help here. As bad as Covid-19 was proving to be, it was clear that the world was not facing a scenario like *Station Eleven* or other post-apocalyptic literature, but nor was the disease going to have a lesser impact than expected like the H1N1 outbreak. In *The Andromeda Strain*, the rapidly mutating alien virus shifts to a non-lethal form that consumes plastics, and while this plot twist was highly fanciful, the idea that Covid-19 might burn itself out by spreading so quickly that the majority of people in a country might become immune was an idea that (at least initially) the British government found attractive enough to consider<sup>[22]</sup>.

Fandom at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's third decade<sup>[23]</sup> was more international and more online than at any point in the past. Like many parts of society, the social and commercial infrastructure that existed via the internet would prove to be an important part of how fandom (and wider society) would cope with a global pandemic.

Where US fandom in particular would find the uncertainty of the pandemic to be a problem was with conventions.

On the scale of the problems the world was facing in 2020, how to run science fiction conventions was tiny in comparison with a worldwide public health crisis, the potential collapse of international supply chains, and the ethical issues of widespread government-enforced lockdowns. Nevertheless, it was a minor conundrum that reflected the multitude of major and minor conundrums faced by communities of various kinds.

As US states enacted pandemic measures in March and April of 2020, many conventions hoped that events would be able to be held from May onward. Hopeful messages in March gave way to likely cancellations in April. Conventions scheduled for later in the year held out hope that things would eventually be better<sup>[24]</sup>. However, the realities of Covid-19 were becoming clearer. The virus spread especially well in indoor events, older people were especially vulnerable, and events where varied groups travelled to meet each other were especially effective at spreading the disease. I don't believe any science fiction convention was ever identified as a super-spreader event, but this was more likely due to their widespread cancellation than their inherent nature.

Some larger pop-culture conventions examined ways of organising as smaller events that could enforce social-distancing measures. Atlanta's Dragon Con spent several months planning a reduced-size convention, but in July 2020 was forced to announce that the physical convention would be cancelled for that year<sup>[25]</sup>.

Worldcon faced a more layered conundrum for 2020. The peripatetic convention was scheduled for Wellington, New Zealand. This was an almost prescient choice for 2020, as New Zealand would prove to be one of the nations with the fewest Covid-19 cases by almost any measure. However, it had achieved this status by almost completely shutting down international travel and using swift lockdowns to control any outbreaks. Even in the event that case numbers would be low enough for a convention to be allowed to run, it would be impossible for members not based in New Zealand to attend.



The very particular problem of a Worldcon being held in a country that had closed its borders reflected an issue that had been building with Worldcon from long before the pandemic. Donald Trump's aggressive anti-Muslim travel policies had raised fears in 2017 that Muslim fans might face issues travelling into a Worldcon held in the US. Likewise, non-US locations presented a problem for US-based fans whose immigration status might be challenged by the more aggressive immigration controls at the US border. Leaving or entering the US had become more of a challenge to many fans. Nor was this a uniquely American problem. Brexit had made it harder for many EU citizens to freely enter the UK, and UK government immigration policies made international travel for UK-based non-citizens more fraught. The 2019 Worldcon in Dublin had no attendees from Nigeria after the Irish embassy failed to provide them with visas in time<sup>[26]</sup>. Broader questions of what kinds of countries would be safe for fans of multiple nations and backgrounds to attend were raised by Worldcon bids from China and Saudi Arabia as well as a speculative potential bid for Israel<sup>[27]</sup>.

CoNZealand (as the 2020 Worldcon named itself) attempted to solve its very specific problem by moving to a virtual online convention, which it announced in April 2020<sup>[28]</sup>. This pivot online reflected a broader international trend forced by the pandemic to use of web-based conferencing software such as Zoom to enable people to stay in touch during lockdowns, as well as the increased use of services such as Discord and Twitch for people to communicate during online activities such as video games. These services had all existed prior to the pandemic, but the incentives to use them had increased with the increasing difficulty of meeting in person during 2020.

## ***A World of Virtual Cons***

Perhaps inevitably, CoNZealand ran into some of the same issues that had impacted other recent Worldcons. As with the 2018 Worldcon, several Hugo Award finalists raised concerns about the programming for the conventions. Best Fan Writer finalist and podcaster Alistair Stuart organised an open letter by a group of finalists expressing their concerns.

- *Many Hugo finalists have not been offered programming and panels relevant to their nomination.*
- *We believe that many of our panels cannot be adequately performed without more diverse participants and/or a reframing of the topic.*
- *Communication with Hugo finalists about the financial requirements for participation has been inconsistent or absent, with contradictory information on whether or not we were able to participate in programming without a full attending membership. This issue particularly impacted Black, Indigenous and people of color (“BIPOC”), leaving them more likely than other finalists to receive no programming.*

Statement of 2020 Hugo Finalists re: Worldcon Programming, Google Doc

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UN1Cm4aNr62qNGRVw1z\\_vsTwosRcKWUzpURDf0h8IVg/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UN1Cm4aNr62qNGRVw1z_vsTwosRcKWUzpURDf0h8IVg/edit)

Part of the issue had been confusion about what status of membership finalists needed in order to take part in what had become a virtual convention<sup>[29]</sup>. The issue with how to juggle these competing demands led to a further innovation to conventions in 2020: a fringe convention.

Led by several of the finalists who had raised their concerns in the open letter, CoNZealand Fringe described itself:

*“In the tradition of Edinburgh Fringe and other international collateral events, CoNZealand Fringe has been created as a complementary programming series to the annual science fiction convention Worldcon. All our livestreams take place outside core CoNZealand programming hours and are not official CoNZealand programming items. CoNZealand Fringe is not endorsed by CoNZealand.”*

<http://www.conzealandfringe.com/>

While virtual conventions lacked the physical restrictions of in-person conventions, there were still organisational ones. However, for some, the shift to virtual conventions opened up new opportunities, such as *FIYAH Magazine* announcing its own inaugural online convention to be held in October 2020<sup>[30]</sup>.

Sadly, the online Hugo Award ceremony for 2020 managed to encapsulate the shifting culture within fandom in ways that further heightened issues from old and new perspectives. CoNZealand had early on in its planning scored George R.R. Martin as the celebrity toastmaster for the Hugo Award ceremony. On paper, Martin was an obvious choice given his enormously high profile after the success of *Game of Thrones* and his long-standing connection with Worldcon. However, the pre-recorded video presentation was overlong and under-edited. This would have been bad enough given that the potential audience for the

ceremony was higher than ever, but Martin’s presentation included the frequent mispronunciation of names, and both he and Robert Silverberg (in his own segment) went to some lengths to defend the legacy of John W. Campbell — a decision that went down poorly with Hugo voters who had picked Jeannette Ng’s 2019 Campbell Award acceptance speech as the winner in the Best Related Work category. The anger was summarised by fan writer Natalie Luhrs:

*“What I haven’t forgotten is this: George R.R. Martin repeatedly mispronounced the names of nominees and, in one case, a publication which was nominated. All the nominees were asked to provide pronunciations for their names in advance. The fact that Martin chose not to use that information is disgusting and racist as fuck, as nearly without exception the names he mispronounced were Black and brown. He mispronounced FIYAH, a publication owned, edited, and written by Black people.*

*This is thoroughly beyond the pale, especially since those segments were pre-recorded and CoNZealand could have asked him to re-do those segments and pronounce peoples’ names correctly. Names are important. They have power.*

*There was also a whole segment about the Oscar statuette and its crotch. It was gender essentialist and transphobic. It was so gross I don’t even want to talk about it to be honest. CoNZealand tweeted a non-apology apology about it to people who were offended. I’m not particularly gender non-conforming, but if that segment made me feel gross and unwelcome, imagine how it made not only the trans and other gender non-conforming nominees feel, but also all those who were watching. It was a gigantic “fuck you, you’re not welcome here.””*

<https://www.prettv-terrible.com/george-r-r-martin-2020-hugo-awards/>

The convention also came under criticism from New Zealand fans for the lack of representation of NZ fandom<sup>[31]</sup>.

Yet despite these issues, CoNZealand had delivered an extraordinary step in the evolution of Worldcon. A virtual, internationally-distributed gathering of fans with all the features of a historic Worldcon (including fannish controversies).

Meanwhile, the culture war had other challenges to present in 2020, but that’s another story.

## FOOTNOTES

- [0] term stolen from a suggestion by Hampus Eckerman <https://twitter.com/motbilder/status/1459280168950935552>
- [1] <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/who-convended-global-study-of-origins-of-sars-cov-2-china-part>
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Severe\\_acute\\_respiratory\\_syndrome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Severe_acute_respiratory_syndrome)
- [3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009\\_swine\\_flu\\_pandemic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_swine_flu_pandemic)
- [4] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015%E2%80%9316\\_Zika\\_virus\\_epidemic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015%E2%80%9316_Zika_virus_epidemic)
- [5] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western\\_African\\_Ebola\\_virus\\_epidemic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_African_Ebola_virus_epidemic)
- [6] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/mar/05/theres-something-out-there-spread-of-disease>
- [7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Station\\_Eleven](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Station_Eleven)
- [8] Dean Koontz’s novel *The Eyes of Darkness* which features a mysterious viral weapon that in the original version is from the Soviet Union and named Gorki-400, had a name change in the late 80s as the Cold War came to an end. In what would fuel internet speculation decades later, Koontz renamed the virus after a Chinese city instead – picking Wuhan [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Eyes\\_of\\_Darkness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Eyes_of_Darkness)
- [9] From the 1970s we have on the one hand examples such as *The Andromeda Strain* film (based on Michael Crichton’s book) which centres scientist. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Andromeda\\_Strain\\_\(film\)#Plot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Andromeda_Strain_(film)#Plot) On the other, the BBC’s post-apocalyptic series *Survivors* (from Terry Nation, who invented the Daleks) which has a pandemic started by an unnamed Asian scientist after a lab accident which is spread by air travel. The plot point is only episode 1 but is shown dramatically in the opening credits of every episode. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survivors\\_\(1975\\_TV\\_series\)#Series\\_1\\_\(1975\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survivors_(1975_TV_series)#Series_1_(1975))
- [10] I’m not going to examine the evidence against Covid-19 being a bioweapon other than to say that it is substantial. The possibility that it was an accidental leak from the Wuhan Institute of Virology which was engaged in (benevolent) research on corona viruses is regarded as unlikely (see note 1), and the main evidence remains that apparent coincidence of original centre of the outbreak in Wuhan and the presence of a major institute specialising in this type of virus.
- [11] That police tactics in Hong Kong resembled police tactics in the US against Black Lives Matter protestors was not a connection made by many on the right.

- [12] For example, Fox News's Tucker Carlson in February of 2020 <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/02/20/cell-phones-cancer-and-coronavirus-tucker-carlson-spreads-conspiracy-theories-14584> which also features an early example of 5G mobile phone networks being dragged into the mix
- [13] I'll be drawing many examples from Sarah A. Hoyt's blog as she was the most prolific of the former Sad Puppies in discussing Covid-19 in 2020 <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2020/02/10/totalitarianism-and-ignorance/>
- [14] I don't have the time or space to track Vox Day's shift towards being essentially pro-the-Chinese-government, but this atypical pushback against the predominant conspiracy theory on the right (Covid being China's fault in some sense) with an alternative conspiracy theory that the anti-Trump US Deep State was behind it all is certainly a milestone <https://web.archive.org/web/20211113195523/https://voxday.net/2020/05/04/unz-vs-fox/>
- [15] Finn managed to escape back to the US, but not until after attempting to break out onto the runway and having a run-in with airport security.
- [16] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_in\\_New\\_York\\_City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_New_York_City)
- [17] <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2020/02/19/breaking-out-a-guest-post-by-helen-miller-rn/>
- [18] <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2020/03/13/a-state-of-madness/>
- [19] The Austrian ski resort of Ischgl was identified as a key point at which Covid spread through Europe <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/05/everyone-was-drenched-in-the-virus-was-this-austrian-ski-resort-a-covid-19-ground-zero>
- [20] <https://dailycaller.com/2020/04/07/tucker-carlson-coronavirus-receding-ending-national-lockdown-taboo/>
- [21] <https://www.thedailybeast.com/qanon-conspiracy-theorists-magic-cure-for-coronavirus-is-drinking-lethal-bleach?via=newsletter&source=DDMorning>
- [22] <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/12/uks-herd-immunity-covid-strategy-a-public-health-failure-inquiry.html>
- [23] OK I know that sounds wrong, but 2000-2009 inclusive is the first decade in the 21st century (or, if you prefer, 2001-2010) so 2020 is either the start of the third decade or end of the second. Ordinal numbers are messed up.
- [24] For example Tennessee's *Libertycon* announced on March 30, 2020 that they hoped to still run, only to announce in April that they wouldn't be able to <https://web.archive.org/web/20200512224537/https://libertycon.org/libertycon-33-is-a-go-for-now/> , <https://web.archive.org/web/20200512224824/https://libertycon.org/sadly-lc33-for-2020-is-cancelled/>
- [25] <https://www.dragoncon.org/mediarelations/>
- [26] <https://twitter.com/suyidavies/status/1160135631101501440>
- [27] <http://file770.com/israel-worldcon-bid-being-explored/>, <http://file770.com/a-worldcon-in-saudi-arabia/>, <http://file770.com/chengdu-worldcon-bid-announces-ambassadors/>
- [28] <http://file770.com/conzealand-virtual-worldcon-plans-and-new-membership-rates/>
- [29] Comments at *File770* <http://file770.com/group-sends-letter-of-concern-to-conzealand-programming/#comment-1199867>
- [30] <https://theconvention.fiyahlitmag.com/2020/07/01/announcing-fiyahcon-2020/>
- [31] <http://file770.com/new-zealand-fan-organization-comments-on-conzealand/>

# 74: Meanwhile...Election 2020

[content warning: discussion of violence and murder]

Robert Heinlein's "crazy years" were a period in his extrapolation of history into the future where rapid technological change would accompany a period of cultural and social decline. The idea resembles aspects of accelerationism,<sup>[1]</sup> and the sense of galloping technological change and social unrest is one the world has been grappling with culturally since at least the nineteenth century. Among science fiction writers, and particularly science fiction writers with an interest in the Campbellian "Golden Age", Heinlein's "crazy years" were an apt metaphor for contemporary social ills.

## ***The "Crazy" Year***

Back in 2010 in the second year of Barack Obama's Presidency, John C. Wright framed his objections to Obama's policies, and more broadly to what he then called "political correctness," using Heinlein's terms.

*"The main sign of when madness has possessed a crowd, or a civilization, is when the people are fearful of imaginary or trivial dangers but nonchalant about real and deep dangers. When that happens, there is gradual deterioration of mores, orientation, and social institutions—the Crazy Years have arrived."*

<http://www.scifiwright.com/2010/01/the-crazy-years-and-their-empty-moral-vocabulary/>

And by 2013, Sarah A. Hoyt was making a similar appeal.

*"... But insanity can only be amped so much. After a while even the crazies know it's crazy. And then, there's the fact that semantic insanity encourages the sort of behavior that makes things worse and takes society apart faster. And then the crash comes. The normal result of the crash is a strong man regime, and maybe that's where we'll end up. Only not the current strong men, because they're semantically insane. The very people trying to speed up the crash are the ones least likely to survive it."*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2013/07/17/4357/>

Veteran right-wing blogger Glen Reynolds cited not just Heinlein but also Wright and Hoyt's spin on the "crazy years" in a 2017 *USA Today* editorial, this time claiming that "hysteria" against President Donald Trump was a symptom of the Heinleinian cultural insanity. For Reynolds (and for Hoyt also), the rise of what would generally be called the authoritarian right<sup>[2]</sup> is a direct result of left-wing insanity. Reynolds uses the example of Weimar Germany.

*"I don't want a Nehemiah Scudder (or alternative versions like Pol Pot or Hugo Chavez). And Hitler was a response to Germany's own Crazy Years under the Weimar Republic. But you don't get Hitler because of Hitler. There are always potential Hitlers out there. You get Hitler because of Weimar, and you get Weimar because the people charged with maintaining a liberal polity are too corrupt and incompetent — or crazy — to maintain a liberal polity."*

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/08/21/these-crazy-years-glenn-harlan-reynolds-column/584541001/>

That authoritarian demagogues suppress socially progressive change is undeniable even for Reynolds and Hoyt but they regard the rise of the far-right not as a welcome change<sup>[3]</sup> but as some inevitable force of history redressing a balance after left-wing insanity gets out of control.

Nehemiah Scudder was the name Heinlein gave to his own imagined US demagogue and in 2017 writer David Brin saw a different parallel between Heinlein's prophecy and events of the time<sup>[4]</sup>. Pointing to Heinlein's essay on the stories that he hadn't written about the future history, Brin saw some clear parallels between Donald Trump and Nehemiah Scudder.

*"Throw in a depression for good measure, promise a material heaven here on earth, add a dash of anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Negroism, and a good large dose of anti-'furriners' in general and anti-intellectuals here at home and the result might be something quite frightening — particularly when one recalls that our voting system is such that a minority distributed as pluralities in enough states can constitute a working majority in Washington."*

Heinlein, Robert A. *Revolt in 2100* (Gateway Essentials Book 483) (Kindle Locations 4015-4018). Orion.

Brin also pointed to how in Heinlein's essay Scudder used a revived "Ku Klux Klan in everything but the name" as street fighters to sway the very last free election. Brin also blamed the left for being insufficiently welcoming of those on the centre and right who were appalled by Trump, but was unambiguous that Trump was the dark outcome of Heinlein's "crazy years" and not some kind of release valve that would stave off the inevitable.

And yet...the turmoil of the past two decades was not truly exceptional. The Global Financial Crisis was not the Great Depression, the Covid-19 pandemic was not the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918, but the scales of these events were comparable<sup>[5]</sup>. The mismatch between the reality of a genuine and deadly global pandemic and the fictional kind helped fuel the disinformation campaign on the right against public health measures. As Sarah A. Hoyt would express it: "if the homeless and the poorer countries in Africa where China has a presence weren't dying like flies, the illness was NOT that dangerous"<sup>[6]</sup>.

## ***Boogaloo Rising***

From mid-April 2020, protests demanding the relaxation of state Covid-19 measures began in multiple US states. Undoubtedly, these protests arose in part from small business owners whose livelihood was severely impacted by public health restrictions. However, from the start, conservative pro-Trump groups were actively coordinating these efforts. The conservative advocacy group Freedom Works<sup>[7]</sup> used its prior experience organising Tea Party protests to facilitate protests targeting state governors and state legislatures.

*"We know many of you are already participating in or planning rallies calling on your Governors to allow businesses in your state to reopen, but this isn't just about the economy. It's about our freedom. Both go hand-in-hand, so if our economy dies, our freedom goes with it and we are here to help."*

Freedom Works Rally Planning Guide retrieved by Politico

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200425071305/https://www.politico.com/f/?id=00000171-9e47-d46f-affb-bfdf3de10000>

The Freedom Works guide encouraged protestors to follow social distancing guidelines and also to avoid overtly political slogans. However, the protests rapidly became more politically partisan, and far-right groups such as the Proud Boys and militia movement groups were keen to associate themselves with the protests<sup>[8]</sup>. The focus of many protests in the US was State Capitol buildings. In Idaho, armed protestors pushed past police and security to enter the chamber of the Idaho State Capitol building while the Idaho House of Representatives was in session. Ammon Bundy, who had led the armed occupation of a federal building in 2016,<sup>[9]</sup> was one of the few people arrested at this protest.

Despite these protests, popular sentiment in the US was often in favour of the public health measures<sup>[10]</sup>. Worldwide, many politicians, as well as local and national governments, enjoyed a boost in popularity during the initial stages of the pandemic. Even Donald Trump gained a boost in his approval ratings in March 2020<sup>[11]</sup> but Trump supporters saw the economic downturn caused by the pandemic as having an unfair impact on his electoral chances, or even a deliberate plot to undermine his presidency.

Covid had arrived at the tail-end of years of right-wing fears of a left-liberal power grab leading to (or requiring) a civil war. The sense of a coming violent conflict either on politically partisan or racial lines in America was decades-old, but had largely festered in fringe extremist groups. That idea that the left (or liberals or Democrats or a shadowy "elite") was pushing "reasonable" people towards violence became a more commonplace idea on the right during the Obama Presidency, fuelled in part by social media and in particular Facebook.

Anti-pandemic public health measures genuinely had an authoritarian aspect to them, requiring state and federal governments to enact policies preventing or discouraging people from doing what were otherwise normal and legal activities. The enforcement of such policies by police carried with it in the US all the existing systematic problems of policing within America.

The idea that Covid was an imminent threat to the US model of government was already becoming pronounced among sections of the right in early April 2020<sup>[12]</sup>. Given the now decades-long question in right-wing spaces as to whether a given event might be the tipping point into a second American Civil War, it was only natural that Covid and the public health measure being deployed against it was cited as a new potential trigger point.

Former Sad Puppy supporter and author Peter Grant stated on April 2 2020:

*"I'm seeing an emerging understanding, a deliberate coming together to harness the coronavirus pandemic to the advantage of left-wing, progressive politics at any cost, no matter what lies and deceptions have to be perpetrated to do so."*

<https://bavourenaissance.blogspot.com/2020/04/using-pandemic-for-political-advantage.html>

Grant was an active “prepper” who had been preparing for a variety of apocalyptic scenarios (for Grant, often involving a collapse of public order in cities) for years. The mode of these discussions about an impending civil war was not that such a war was the right response, but that it was a situation being forced upon people. Among the discussion Grant posted was this extensive analysis of the state of mind of some preppers in mid-April 2020.

*“If that happens, we will have the Tools for the Boogaloo, which are guns. We will have the Dehumanization for the Boogaloo, which is our political and cultural tribalism. And we will finally have the Motivation for the Boogaloo, which is our kids need to eat.*

*The Boogaloo Soup will be complete.*

*And should that happen, it will kill far more people than COVID-19, and will kill far more people than the unemployment from our response to COVID-19. It will be the greatest tragedy in the history of our nation, because we will have brought it all upon ourselves, from our own Freakoutery.*

*The soup timer is ticking. Beginning of May would be a great time to get our asses in gear.*

<https://medium.com/handwaving-freakoutery/the-covid-19-boogaloo-opus-51b1c1b860cd>

As we saw in the previous chapter, Sarah A. Hoyt was among many on the right who anticipated that the US lockdown measures would impact food production and supply to the point that severe food shortages would be occurring in the US by winter. That, or events earlier, would, in the minds of the writer of the essay above, be the trigger for the “Boogaloo”: a semi-ironic term shortened from “Civil War Two: Electric Boogaloo”<sup>[13]</sup>.

In an April 17 post entitled “The Covid-19 Boogaloo Opus”<sup>[14]</sup>, Grant went on to quote others experiencing a similar reaction to life during a pandemic.

*“I’ve hated the road this country has been on for the last twenty years, but with the actions taken by the Fed and government in the last few weeks, they have pressed down hard on the accelerator as if they want to take the country over the cliff and into the abyss below. What is the end game to these machinations and schemes? Do they have some master plan for a global world order, or are they just arrogant psychopaths flailing about trying to retain their wealth, status and power? Whatever the purpose, it is not going to end well.”*

Jim Quinn quoted at <https://bavourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2020/04/the-covid-19-boogaloo-opus.html>

Central to the growing Boogaloo culture was Facebook. This wasn’t to say that arenas such as 4chan, 8chan/8kun, and Telegram weren’t also centres for far-right agitation around the pandemic<sup>[15]</sup>. However, Facebook had a reach far beyond these more fringe sites and its weak and inconsistent enforcement of community standards allowed groups to organise quickly.

*“A review by TTP found 125 Facebook groups devoted to the “boogaloo,” the term that far-right extremists use to describe a coming civil war. More than 60% of the groups were created in the last three months, as Covid-19 quarantines took hold in the U.S., and they’ve attracted tens of thousands of members in the last 30 days.*

*In several private boogaloo Facebook groups that TTP was able to access, members discussed tactical strategies, combat medicine, and various types of weapons, including how to develop explosives and the merits of using flame throwers. Some members appeared to take inspiration from President Donald Trump’s recent tweets calling on people to “liberate” states where governors have imposed stay-at-home orders.*

*The fact that Facebook is letting such activity proliferate, despite explicit threats of violence to government authorities, is another sign of the company’s inability to manage harmful content on its platform—even among groups that make no secret of their intentions.”*

<https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/extremists-are-using-facebook-to-organize-for-civil-war-amid-coronavirus>

As a broad movement, these Boogaloo groups did not have a central or consistent ideology. Overall, they presented themselves as quasi-libertarian or conservative, but inevitably attracted a more overtly white

supremacist and neo-Nazi fringe. That libertarian aspect also led to a wildly inconsistent view of law enforcement. It was not uncommon on the right to be sceptical or hostile towards Federal law enforcement bodies such as the FBI or in particular the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, but the reaction against pandemic public health measures was more state-based, and many libertarians also agreed with the left-wing view that police had become systemically authoritarian<sup>[16]</sup>. This confusing milieu of ideas led to at least one attempted attack on police officers<sup>[17]</sup>.

### ***A new conflict***

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a Black American, was murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis during an arrest. Video footage was taken by bystanders of Floyd's arrest and death, which quickly spread leading to a new wave of protests against police violence<sup>[18]</sup>. The protests were initially relatively peaceful. However, on the evening of May 27, the protests were accompanied by violence and property damage in contrast to daytime protests earlier<sup>[19]</sup>. In the subsequent evenings, many businesses were damaged, including the famous Uncle Hugo's science fiction bookshop<sup>[20]</sup>.

The violence and property damage were blamed by many on the loosely affiliated left-wing protestors known as Antifa. Donald Trump went so far as to announce that he would be declaring Antifa a terrorist organisation as a consequence<sup>[21]</sup>. However, FBI investigations into the violence found no evidence that Antifa was to blame<sup>[22]</sup>. What did become clearer was the role of right-wing extremists in the violence, and in subsequent conflicts in the coming months. In Minneapolis, the attacks on businesses were started at least in part by a figure who witnesses came to call "the umbrella man" who had been smashing shop windows and inciting people to loot. This figure was later revealed to have been a member of a group called the "Aryan Cowboys" and had been involved in previous racist crimes<sup>[23]</sup>.

In multiple protests across the US, people observed the role of apparent right-wing agitators and so-called Boogaloo-boys, involving themselves both as protestors but also as vigilantes claiming to be defending property from looters<sup>[24]</sup>. This duality of claiming to support protests against the police but portraying the protests as a danger to property, which hence would need an armed defence, can be seen in posts from the time. Peter Grant described his own dual impression while talking about the protestors as an undifferentiated group:

*"I have no problem with protests against the actions of police in Mr. Floyd's death. If I were living in or near Minneapolis, I'd take part in them! On the basis of video evidence, I have no hesitation in labelling it police malfeasance, at the very least. There should be (and I hope there will be) legal consequences for all concerned. However, when the protestors start behaving like thugs and criminals, that crosses a line just as clearly as the one the police crossed in dealing with Mr. Floyd. The protestors make themselves criminals too."*

<https://bavourenaissance.com/2020/05/minneapolis-cowardice-of-city.html>

Further in the same post:

*"If that's the case, I think – I hope! – that an increasing number of Minneapolis residents will take matters into their own hands, and start striking back at the anarchists and criminals and thugs who currently appear to rule their streets and business districts. If I were living there, I'd be among them. If police fail to keep the peace, then it's up to us to do so in our own neighborhoods and towns."*

ibid

Larry Correia's reaction was more confused as he regarded the most pressing issue of the day being people on the left demanding that right-wing gun owners get involved.

*"Hypothetical Liberal "Ally" Who Lives in the Suburbs Which Aren't On Fire – "Hey, gun owners! Here is some civil unrest! Why won't you come and help us?" Snort. Fuck off. "Pussies! Why not?" Well, every single gun nut in America has spent their entire adult life being continually mocked, insulted, and belittled by the left. You've done nothing but paint us as the bad guys."*

<https://monsterhunting.com/2020/06/04/where-are-all-you-gun-owners-now/>

Meanwhile, right-wing gun owners were trying to involve themselves in the protests including militia groups like the Three-Percenters<sup>[25]</sup>, even if it was mainly to stand around aimlessly. Other even more extreme far-right groups saw the protests as potential cover for more violence:

*“Accelerationists promote violence to speed up the collapse of society. An eco-fascist Telegram channel wrote to its nearly 2,500 subscribers on Thursday that “a riot would be the perfect place to commit a murder.” Accelerationists often seek to exploit moments of political or civil unrest, and the widespread protests that have unfolded across the country fit the bill. Similarly, 4Chan is full of racists cheering the violence and saying that they hope it’s the beginning of a “race war.””*

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkyb9b/far-right-extremists-are-hoping-to-turn-the-george-floyd-protests-into-a-new-civil-war>

Examples of far-right violence were numerous. A member of a Boogaloo group from Texas who travelled to Minneapolis to take part in the protests, who was later convicted at firing his AR-15 at a police station<sup>[26]</sup>. A US air force sergeant killed a federal security officer at a courthouse in a drive-by shooting, and later shot two police officers (killing one and wounding another)<sup>[27]</sup>. Sean Hannity on Fox News blamed the murder of the black security officer on the people protesting George Floyd’s murder,<sup>[28]</sup> six days after the actual murderer had been arrested and his connection with right-wing groups had been made public.

This is not to say that all and every example of violence or property damage was caused by far-right *agents provocateurs*, but rather that the role of the far-right in violence in the protests was consistently ignored by others on the right using the existence of violence to condemn the broader Black Lives Matter protests. In addition, the early cases of violence and property damage provided a rationale for further crackdowns by police, National Guard, and Department of Homeland Security, which in turn further escalated protests, as well as providing a rationale for a panoply of far-right groups from ad-hoc volunteers claiming to be defending property, to militias, to more overtly white supremacist groups to add to the confrontations in American cities.

This already volatile mix had the additional element of the Qanon conspiracy theory gaining a revitalised second spurt of growth during the periods of pandemic lockdown. For Vox Day (coincidentally, originally from Minnesota) the state of affairs in Minneapolis were the perfect conditions for Donald Trump to declare martial law, citing Q messages on 8kun pointing to the 1807 Insurrection Act<sup>[29]</sup>. Day was also scornful of any involvement of the so-called Boogaloos in the violence, claiming that the term was just a new media bogeyman<sup>[30]</sup>.

The broader existing narrative that America was under threat from the shadowy forces of Cultural Marxism easily adapted to include both the pandemic public health measures and the Black Lives Matter protests. When the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America announced an official position in support of Black Lives Matter, the former Puppy-slated fantasy magazine *Cirsova* responded with a statement that not only were BLM terrorists, but that by extension the SFWA was a terrorist organisation as well<sup>[31]</sup>.

### ***...and all in an election year***

If it felt too much like everything was all happening at once in 2020, it was also an election year. The 2016 Presidential election had been fraught, Donald Trump had won with a minority of the popular vote and had remained generally unpopular (but with enthusiastic supporters) during his term of office. In a neutral year, his chance of winning was slim and would require the same narrow circumstance of close wins in key states to be re-elected. Worldwide, many national leaders had gained popular support on the wave of communal support for resisting the pandemic. However, Trump’s divisiveness and habit of undermining the policies of state governors or the health advice of his own advisors had meant that any gain in support had been brief. His core supporters were more enthusiastic than ever, though.

The Democratic Party had settled on an uninspired but safe choice of former Vice-President Joe Biden as their candidate. However, the pandemic had resulted in a relatively low-key campaign.

US states and local election boards had their own unique problem. With Covid-19 spreading across the country, the potential for the pandemic to severely disrupt voting was very high. Numerous measures were adopted to try to make voting both easier and safer in multiple states and across political boundaries.

However, these measures were adopted at a time when conspiratorial perspectives on electoral politics were at a peak in right-wing circles. Qanon, Covid, Black Lives Matter, and a sense of spiralling chaos were a fertile ground for new fears, or for old fears to be incorporated into the current narrative. A persistent, deep-seated and unshakeable belief existed among many on the right that the Democratic Party was engaged in widespread and large scale electoral fraud for decades. This belief relied on anecdotes, but was poorly supported by any serious investigations<sup>[32]</sup>. The idea of widespread voter fraud also encompassed parallel fears about America’s urban population<sup>[33]</sup> and fears about immigration. Supporting this fear was not just Republican propaganda tailored to support voter suppression measures, but also personal anecdotes. For example, Brad R. Torgersen in 2019:



*“I used to live and work in King County, Washington State. One of the things that broke me from the Democrats—I was a reliable Dem voter through my twenties—was watching the Seattle Democrats manufacture votes for their recount process that stole the governor’s election from Dino Rossi. They did not even try to hide what they were doing. They bragged about it. They were proud! It was their revenge, they said. For Bush winning in 2000. That was in 2004.”*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/2964735233552690>

Torgersen’s example had been an extraordinarily close election and sets of initially uncounted ballots discovered during a recount in King County helped sway the election to the Democratic Party candidate. The National Rifle Association had even mass emailed members in the state to observe recounts amid claims by the Republican Party that the election was being stolen. Notably, not only was no substantial evidence of fraud demonstrated but the Republican candidate lost a series of legal challenges to the final result<sup>[34]</sup>. Those legal challenges had rested on an approach of casting as much doubt on the electoral process by pointing to inconsistent voter rolls or initial voter tallies as evidence of electoral malfeasance, rather than as the natural consequence of a large-scale data-gathering process. Additionally, as such challenges are naturally made by the candidate likely to lose, they are remembered by party partisans as fraudulent elections which the other side won, whereas close elections won by a partisan’s party were seen either as being right and fair or as victories won despite the other side’s cheating.

Taken in isolation, it would be incorrect to describe single claims of electoral fraud as a conspiracy theory. However, taking the myriad claims from Republicans as a whole, and comparing them to their own actual documented evidence of fraud, the level of collusion needed for fraud at the scale claimed without a proportional amount of documented prosecutions, implied a conspiracy covering not just Democrats but officials, judges, and even Republican governors.

Nor was this theory of systematic electoral fraud the most bizarre conspiracy floating within right-wing discourse in 2020. However, it was (and is) one of the most damaging. Back in 2018, Larry Correia had encapsulated a binary choice for the right.

*“A friend of mine who is a political activist said something interesting the other day, and that was for most people on the left political violence is a knob, and they can turn the heat up and down, with things like protests, and riots, all the way up to destruction of property, and sometimes murder... But for the vast majority of folks on the right, it’s an off and on switch. And the settings are Vote or Shoot Fucking Everybody. And believe me, you really don’t want that switch to get flipped, because Civil War 2.0 would make Bosnia look like a trip to Disneyworld.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2018/11/19/the-2nd-amendment-is-obsolete-says-congressman-who-wants-to-nuke-omaha/>

The implication of this dichotomy was that if voting was no longer an effective option for the “vast majority of folks on the right,” then the only other option was shooting people. It was a view that gave the right very little agency and, of course, was sharply at odds with recent history in which multiple conservative protest movements had been active in various domains, such as the Tea Party but also (arguably) Correia’s own Sad Puppies. Yet Correia was also encapsulating here a sentiment that could be found across the right: that the left was pushing them involuntarily towards extremism and violence, when they just wanted to be left alone<sup>[35]</sup>.

Another obvious issue with the electoral fraud conspiracy theory was how Donald Trump had somehow won the 2016 election. However, this counter-example to entrenched belief was ascribed either to a misjudgement by the Democrats, or to Trump having outplayed them in a complex game of multi-dimensional chess. This second idea might appear to be layering on absurdities, yet among Qanon believers in particular, Trump’s powers to outwit the “elites” conspiring against him were overwhelming.

As the election approached, despite everything, Vox Day was convinced that Trump would not just win but win by a landslide.

*“Ergo, it’s not only in the bag, but President Trump is going to win in a landslide that has only been exceeded by Ronald Reagan in his 49-state thumping of Walter Mondale. Despite the Fake Polls, everyone knows this is going to happen: Walmart is not pulling all its guns-for-sale off the floor because Trump’s supporters lack weaponry and Rodeo Drive is not already being boarded up prior to Election Day because Hollywood storeowners anticipate excessive exuberance on the part of ecstatic Biden voters.*

“Joe Biden is heading to St. Paul, Minnesota, tomorrow. It will be the fullest travel day of his general election campaign, with stops now in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.”

*Translation: Biden is going to lose Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201101092001/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2020/10/franco-swiss-model-predicts-trump.html>

For Qanon’s true-believers, November was the obvious denouement of the whole “Storm” narrative. The big reveal in which the supposed Babylonian Luciferian child-sex trafficking human sacrifice adrenochrome Hilary Clinton death list would be exposed and Trump would finally deliver on the demand to “lock her up”. Electoral shenanigans would not be able to outfox Trump, who (in the eyes of the true believers) was already several steps ahead of the “Swamp”.

*“We’re rapidly approaching the mother of all Q-proof tests. If Joe Biden wins, as predicted by all the polls and all the mainstream media, we’ll have to conclude that Q was, at best, a morale-boosting LARP. If, on the other hand, Donald Trump wins, even the most dedicated Q skeptics will have to admit that Qanon was more reliable than the entire mainstream media. And if The Storm begins, everyone will be forced to acknowledge that Q was the real thing from the start.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210808151840/http://voxdav.blogspot.com/2020/11/endgame-approaches.html>

## **Stop the Steal**

Q was of course not only a “morale-boosting LARP” but also almost certainly a cynical exercise by the owners of 8chan/8kun to drive traffic to their site. The “mother of all Q-proof tests” came, and the statistically most likely outcome occurred: a victory by Joe Biden. Of course, Qanon was not a movement that had attracted people likely to be swayed by empirical evidence, not even if it was overwhelming empirical evidence.

However, the shock and denial on the right at what was always a highly probable outcome was substantial. The denial was fuelled by a unique circumstance of the election. The pandemic and voting methods adopted for the pandemic had led to large numbers of people voting early or voting by mail. Of those people who voted in the election, only 27% voted in person on the actual election day, with another 27% voting in person before election day and 46% voting by mail<sup>[36]</sup>. When it came to counting the votes, many states counted the in-person votes first, and this fuelled a predicted but unnerving aspect to the election count.

The Biden campaign, being mindful of the impact of the pandemic, had largely been encouraging of early voting and voting by mail. The Trump campaign, on the other hand, had been dismissive of pandemic concerns and also had characterised voting by mail as being dubious. Consequently, there was a partisan split in the way the two sets of voters went about voting. 37% of Trump’s votes were cast on election day, compared to only 17% of Biden’s votes<sup>[37]</sup>. As a consequence, initial returns on election night looked far, far better for Trump than they were in reality. In addition, with several marginal states having slim margins, the election count was not conclusive until several days after the election. This delay made what was a substantial electoral victory by Biden (in terms of both the electoral college and the popular vote) appear to be much narrower.

Before the election was conclusively called for Biden, Larry Correia was already convinced that something was substantially amiss.

*“I am more offended by how ham fisted, clumsy, and audacious the fraud to elect him is than the idea of Joe Biden being president. I think Joe Biden is a corrupt idiot, however, I think America would survive him like we’ve survived previous idiot administrations. However, what is potentially fatal for America is half the populace believing that their elections are hopelessly rigged and they’re eternally fucked. And now, however this shakes out in court, that’s exactly what half the country is going to think. People are pissed off, and rightfully so.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2020/11/05/the-2020-election-fuckery-is-afoot/>

The fraud, according to Correia, was so glaringly obvious as to be undeniable. Correia pulled together claims he had read on the internet and appealed to his ability as a former accountant to identify the fraud.

*“Now, as a suspicious auditor type who spent a lot of hours looking for fuckery in complex systems, my gut tells me fake ballots were getting dumped into the system to make up the difference. And oh look, here is a giant pile of red flags indicating that’s the case.”*

*ibid*

A few days later, Correia was appealing to a statistical distribution sometimes used in forensic accounting known as Benford's Law.

*“Basically, when numbers are aggregated normally, they follow a distribution curve. When numbers are fabricated, they don't. When human beings create what they think of as “random” numbers, they're not. This is an auditing tool for things like looking for fabricated invoices. It also applies to elections. A normal election follows the expected curve. If you look at a 3<sup>rd</sup> world dictatorship's election numbers, it looks like a spike or a saw.*

*There's a bunch of different people out there running the numbers for themselves and posting the results so you can check their math. It appears that checking various places around the country Donald Trump's votes follow the curve. The 3<sup>rd</sup> party candidates follow the curve. Down ballot races follow the curve. Hell, even Joe Biden's votes follow the curve for MOST of the country. But then when you look at places like Pittsburgh the graph looks like something that would have made Hugo Chavez blush.”*

<https://monsterhunternation.com/2020/11/09/election-2020-the-more-fuckery-update/>

In fact, Benford's Law applies only to some types of data and the electoral data of the kind Correia was referring to would not necessarily follow the law even if it was 100% above board. The Wikipedia article on Benford's Law had prior to the election carried a section explaining its limitations with election data but in the wake of the 2020 election, there were attempts to remove it. Vox Day used this to falsely claim that Wikipedia had only added in these details after the election<sup>[38]</sup> but in fact, his own more limited copy of Wikipedia (Infogalactic) had removed the same information in the wake of the election<sup>[39]</sup>.

Day was of course convinced that Trump had in fact won, and that the size of Biden's victory was the clearest evidence of the “Trumpslide” reality.

*“And as to why this unprecedented level of fraud has taken place, the answer is that because there was a Trumpslide. Donald Trump is on track to receive 10 percent more votes than he did to win the Presidency in 2016. Barack Obama was re-elected in 2012 with 5.2 percent fewer votes than he received in 2008. Bill Clinton was re-elected in 1996 with 5.5 percent more votes than he received in 1992.*

*Donald Trump's re-election was shaping up to become the biggest landslide since Reagan... which is why millions of fraudulent ballots were produced to try to provide the media with a means of overturning the election results.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20211121021542/https://voxdav.net/2020/11/06/fuckery-is-afoot/>

That Trump himself and his polarising personality was the underlying reason why so many Americans had come out to vote against him was not a hypothesis Day was willing to consider. Instead, Day followed the Qanon lead, and took the electoral confusion as actually a part of Donald Trump's master plan. The apparent (actually illusory) fraud was all part of a trap laid by Trump to allow him to secure future elections.

*“This tends to confirm my hypothesis that President Trump was so confident of his re-election that he was willing to appear to put his second term at risk in order to secure free and fair elections in 2024 and beyond. After all, what is the point of winning a second term if the Swamp is simply going to undo everything you have accomplished. This would also explain the need to wait for the second term to drain the Swamp; the only way to systematically excise the full extent of the fraud was to expose it to everyone.”*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20211121022337/https://voxdav.net/2020/11/13/too-implausible-for-fiction/>

This “plan” was also part of what Day believed was Trump setting himself up as a future Caesar-like figure of American politics. Trump, Day believed, was preparing to “Cross the Rubicon” and take ultimate power.

*“As Rex explains contra the media narrative, we're not waiting for Trump's concession. We're waiting to see if JOE BIDEN is going to concede in order to reduce the amount of damage to the Republic and the risk of widespread violence or not. That's the whole point of this drip-drip-drip of increasingly important information, and it explains why Trump has been remarkably constrained in his actions to date. It also explains why Biden has been hesitant to assert himself as the President-Elect and why Kamala Harris hasn't resigned from the Senate yet.*

*It's a waiting game for now. They're waiting for the next shoe to drop while Trump patiently waits for them to concede. But we know the clock is running"*

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210808102011/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2020/11/were-waiting-for-bidens-concession.html>

Correia also continued to push the claim that the election data showed multiple red flags all pointing to the high likelihood of electoral fraud<sup>[40]</sup> but neither his own analysis nor the myriad internet claims that were circulating stood up to scrutiny. The Trump campaign and two independent legal groups began court challenges to the results, raising hopes in those who believed that fraud had occurred that damning evidence would soon be revealed. Vox Day initially put a lot of hope in these legal challenges, seeing them as part of Trump's master plan<sup>[41]</sup>.

Those legal challenges would eventually descend into farce, and Trump's own Attorney General would concede on December 2 that there was no evidence of widespread fraud in the election<sup>[42]</sup>. By this point the theories among Trump supporters about events had become even more wild. Day was now convinced that an elaborate plot involving the voting machine companies, the Biden campaign, and the CIA had swung the election electronically. Luckily the whole plot was about to be exposed because the second US Civil War had already broken out clandestinely<sup>[43]</sup>. In what amounted to a theory that read like a poorly-plotted thriller, an elite US special forces unit had attacked a CIA base in Germany and recovered the servers used by the CIA to steal the election. Of course, no evidence of this fantastical tale ever eventuated.

Indeed, nothing eventuated – or at least, nothing that validated Qanon on the one hand or the more mundane election fraud claims on the other.

### ***Don't they know it's the end of the world?***

On November 4, with the election still unsettled but with the tide turned to Biden, Sarah A. Hoyt closed her blog post for the day saying:

*"May G-d have mercy on our souls.*

*I'll continue posting as long as I'm allowed on line. I'm sure it won't be a full year. No, the Dems won't be able to hold us, but what comes next only G-d knows. And with the world involved the chances of it being anything like our Republic are minimal.*

*Make what preparations you can for the hard crash. Don't think I'm being pessimistic. This is your warning. Sauvé qui peut."*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2020/11/04/and-all-the-devils-are-here-2/>

Shortly before the election, Hoyt had been published in an anthology, along with Brad Torgersen and Jon Del Arroz on the theme of dystopian versions of America if Trump lost the election.

In the anthology (titled *Divided We Fall: One Possible Future*) Hoyt's story has radical leftists quickly take over urban centres after Biden wins and within a few years, Chinese troops are rumoured to have invaded the now-chaotic USA. In Brad Torgersen's story, the Federal government are attempting to criminalise the Church of the Latter-Day Saints. The central character is exasperated by plans by the Mormon resistance to only use non-violent resistance:

*"The people I used to work for don't care how nice and peaceful we are. We've been branded the 21st century equivalent of Branch Davidians. The three-letter agencies are going to do whatever they want to us, and I frankly don't see any way out of it, except for Utah and a bunch of other Mountain West states to secede."*

Henckel, Mack; Torgersen, Brad; Hoyt, Sarah; Del Arroz, Jon; Noring, Lea; Winder, Chris; Cartwright, Rick; Thompson, Julian; Smith, Leigh; Henckel, Mack. *Divided we Fall: One Possible Future*.

An America that was part gulag and part the Fox News portrait of Venezuela was one election away. The month prior to the election, Sarah A. Hoyt had argued that a civil war was something the left was trying to force the right into. She concluded that argument by saying:

*"Sure, the time might come — and unfortunately not far off — to live free or die. But if the time comes it must be done with forethought and in the certainty, it won't lead to what we're trying to avoid. Trusting the left to poke us into it, and thinking it will turn out all right is a fool's game.*

*This is no time to go wobbly. If the republic can be saved at the ballot box, the cartridge box should stay shut. Full and ready, but shut.”*

<https://accordingtohoyt.com/2020/09/21/burning-and-curing/>

It was a sentiment; Brad Torgersen had echoed a month earlier.

*“Marxism is heinous. Marxism is death. None of which is talked about nor acknowledged by the American liberal establishment. Especially not in 2020, when the American liberal establishment is eagerly shedding what’s left of its liberalism in favor of an aggressive and totalitarian form of Leftism. Dissenters to be punished on sight. The American Left will cost you your job. They will smear your name across social media trying to discredit and defame you, so that you cannot support yourself. And worse. Wokeness is just Marxist doctrine dressed up in rainbow clothing. The people following this doctrine in America will gradually prune back—and then eliminate—the soap box, the ballot box, and the jury box. Until all we’ve got left to fight them with is the cartridge box. I really hope we can stop them with the ballot box. But I keep my cartridge boxes well-stocked. And I visit my ranges regularly. And so should you.”*

<https://www.facebook.com/brad.torgersen/posts/4917385918287602>

While these particular doomsday scenarios may seem absurd, the underlying fear of the power of the government of the USA has substance. The capacity for the power of the Federal government or the office of the Presidency to be abused is enormous, and the historical precedents disturbing — even if the main victims of such abuses have been indigenous Americans, Black Americans and immigrant communities. However, it is the logic of these fantasies of persecution, combined with an unshakeable belief that the left/liberals/Democrats have stolen or subverted the election process and that the remaining option is violence, that leads to the active preparation for such violence, including the stockpiling of weapons.

The ready and irreversible escalation of conflict had plagued the Puppy campaigns to the point Larry Correia and Brad Torgersen actively alienated potential allies within fandom while using the rhetoric of persecution to reinforce group loyalty among supporters. On a national scale Donald Trump had followed a similar strategy, often alienating parts of the Republican party. By the end of 2020 the strategy had exhausted a nation.

Over 300 thousand Americans had died of Covid-19, which had become the third-largest cause of death<sup>[42]</sup>. An actual palpable disaster had hit America in 2020, but the eyes of the right were on imaginary disasters.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accelerationism>
- [2] It is not uncommon for right libertarians to claim that authoritarianism is by definition left-wing, and hence “authoritarian right” would be a contradiction in terms in this model. Empirically, the ready and numerous political alliances and common ideas between, for example, 21st-century US right-libertarians and the alt-right and white nationalist movements demonstrate the flaws in this model.
- [3] At least rhetorically not as a welcome change.
- [4] <https://david-brin.medium.com/heinleins-future-history-coming-true-before-our-eyes-10356a95556a>
- [5] 25–50 million deaths worldwide for the 1918-20 Spanish Flu [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish\\_flu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_flu) and currently 5 million reported deaths for Covid19 2020-21 but 9.5–21.6 million estimated [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19\\_pandemic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic)
- [6] <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2020/08/31/smelling-the-smoke/>
- [7] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FreedomWorks>
- [8] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/17/far-right-coronavirus-protests-restrictions>
- [9] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupation\\_of\\_the\\_Malheur\\_National\\_Wildlife\\_Refuge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupation_of_the_Malheur_National_Wildlife_Refuge)
- [10] <https://thehill.com/homenews/news/public-global-health/493210-two-thirds-of-americans-worry-states-will-lift>
- [11] <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/24/trumps-approval-ratings-so-far-are-unusually-stable-and-deeply-partisan/>
- [12] <https://bayourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2020/04/covid-19-as-threat-to-our.html>
- [13] A joke name parodying the title of a 1980s break-dancing film [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breakin%27\\_2:\\_Electric\\_Boogaloo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breakin%27_2:_Electric_Boogaloo)
- [14] <https://bayourenaissanceman.blogspot.com/2020/04/the-covid-19-boogaloo-opus.html>

- [15] According to the FBI, a far-right terror attack on a hospital was foiled in late March 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/26/hospital-bomb-attack-man-killed-fbi-agents-missouri> the man plotting the bomb attack was killed in a shoot out but evidence shows he regarded the pandemic as “real” but part of a Jewish conspiracy <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Covid-19-Briefing-PDF.pdf>
- [16] For example libertarian sci-fi author Michael Z. Williamson called police officers confronting a mother who had let her child play at a neighbour’s house during a lockdown “Dull-witted, jackbooted brownshirts. Enforcing a law, they can’t actually cite. They are just thugs for hire.” <https://www.facebook.com/michaelz.williamson.14/posts/268929570810394> Williamson would maintain a consistent criticism of police abuse of authority in the coming months.
- [17] <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/emmanuelfelton/boogaloo-boy-arrested-texarkana-swenson>
- [18] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder\\_of\\_George\\_Floyd](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_George_Floyd)
- [19] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Floyd\\_protests#In\\_Minneapolis%E2%80%93Saint\\_Paul](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Floyd_protests#In_Minneapolis%E2%80%93Saint_Paul)
- [20] <http://file770.com/minneapolis-sf-bookstore-burned-another-vandalized/> Uncle Hugo’s had also been instrumental in the success of Larry Correia’s first novel <https://monsterhunternation.com/2020/06/02/uncle-hugos-bookstore-burned-in-riot-fundraiser-back-on-link-below/>
- [21] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52868295>
- [22] <https://www.thenation.com/article/activism/antifa-trump-fbi/>
- [23] <https://www.startribune.com/police-umbrella-man-was-a-white-supremacist-trying-to-ignite-floyd-rioting/571932272/?refresh=true>
- [24] <https://www.justsecurity.org/70497/far-right-infiltrators-and-agitators-in-george-floyd-protests-indicators-of-white-supremacists/> and see also <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/05/27/the-boogaloo-movement-is-not-what-you-think-for-the-role-of-Facebook-and-some-of-the-internal-ideological-differences-within-Boogaloo-groups>
- [25] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three\\_Percenter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Percenter)
- [26] <https://www.thedailybeast.com/texas-boogaloo-fired-ak-at-minneapolis-police-precinct-feds-say> and <https://www.thedailybeast.com/far-right-boogaloo-ivan-harrison-hunter-admits-posing-as-blm-supporter-during-minneapolis-george-floyd-riot>
- [27] <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/steven-carrillo-boogaloo-bois-active-duty-airman-ignite-civil-war/>
- [28] <https://www.mediamatters.org/black-lives-matter/far-right-boogaloo-supporter-allegedly-killed-black-federal-police-officer-and>
- [29] <https://web.archive.org/web/20200601183345/voxday.blogspot.com/2020/05/call-ball.html> 8chan had rebranded itself as 8kun after being shut down in the wake of multiple mass shootings connected with the site in 2019 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/8Chan#2019\\_shootings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/8Chan#2019_shootings)
- [30] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210808084218/https://voxday.blogspot.com/2020/05/the-boogaloo.html>
- [31] <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-6-29-20-three-arms-good-four-arms-better/>
- [32] <https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/analysis/The%20Truth%20About%20Voter%20Fraud.pdf>
- [33] <https://www.facebook.com/larry.correia/posts/2633884916622421>
- [34] [https://web.archive.org/web/20080706034924/http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/politics/2002319056\\_webverdict06.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20080706034924/http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/politics/2002319056_webverdict06.html) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004\\_Washington\\_gubernatorial\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Washington_gubernatorial_election)
- [35] The Sad Puppy campaigns are also sometimes portrayed in this way by former Puppies. It is ahistorical in the sense that initially the Puppy campaigns presented themselves as a fun exercise, freely entered into, but I believe this contrary sentiment is sincere even if it runs counter to past claims.
- [36] <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/11/20/the-voting-experience-in-2020/>
- [37] “Within each age group, Biden voters are much more likely than Trump voters to say they voted by mail, with the size of this gap largely the same across groups.” *ibid*
- [38] <https://web.archive.org/web/20211121015339/https://voxday.net/2020/11/07/the-attack-on-benford-s-law/>
- [39] [https://infogalactic.com/w/index.php?title=Benford%27s\\_law&type=revision&diff=726174069&oldid=24376](https://infogalactic.com/w/index.php?title=Benford%27s_law&type=revision&diff=726174069&oldid=24376)
- [40] “The consensus thus far is overwhelming. No. Not only no but hell no. There have been a few hedging their bets (but they are still suspicious) and zero saying that there is nothing wrong (like in every single other thread, where I get screamed at by Dunning-Krugerands). I’m not claiming this is an accurate sampling of every professional of this type in America, but it is pretty telling. ” <https://monsterhunternation.com/2020/11/12/i-asked-one-simple-question-to-people-who-work-with-fraud/>
- [41] <https://apnews.com/article/barr-no-widespread-election-fraud-b1f1488796c9a98c4b1a9061a6c7f49d>
- [42] <https://web.archive.org/web/20210808173441/http://voxday.blogspot.com/2020/11/this-is-civil-war.html>
- [43] <https://web.archive.org/web/20211121022016/https://voxday.net/2020/11/26/mailvox-a-second-opinion/>
- [42] <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2778234>

## 75: Conclusion

Worldbuilding is an important part of all fiction, the creation of imagined reality within which characters can interact and a plot unfold. While worldbuilding has a role in all genres, it is of particular importance within science fiction and fantasy where the departure from genuine reality is expected to be more profound and overt. If you read this far into the Debarke (and haven't simply skipped ahead to the final chapter), I can assume you are conversant with the idea of imagined realities, but I want to describe an imagined reality now – not to provide a setting for a piece of narrative fiction, but to help describe some real-world events. We will call this imagined reality the Unnatural Alliance.

### *The unnatural alliance*

Imagine a world just like our world, with all the same nations and kinds of people. Superficially it is hard to spot the difference between our reality and the imagined one, and indeed, many people in our reality think they are living in this imagined one.

In this imagined reality, the world is run by an unnatural alliance. The first part of the alliance we will simply call *The Left*. These people look and sound just like the left of our reality, but instead of a disorganised and contentious spectrum of belief, the majority of The Left is only marginally different from Josef Stalin, and the arguments and differences and rivalries are simply deceit designed to confuse observers.

The second part is *The Ageing Establishment*. This is nearly everybody in entrenched positions of power, authority, or expertise, from senior politicians to college professors and scientific bodies.

The third and final part is *Corrupted Corporations*. This is not what the libertarians and conservatives would believe is capitalism, but a strange (and incoherent) version that has become corrupted. That corruption means that while they are nominally capitalist and supposedly driven by profits, these corporations actually act in ways that will cost them profits. Almost any large commercial body can be somehow involved (e.g., pharmaceutical companies), but most of all the large software companies and the major media organisations are the ones believed to be most implicated.

Together, all three groups act in concert, with one determining the behaviour of the other. The Ageing Establishment directs the actions of The Left, The Left direct the actions of the Corrupted Corporations, and the Corrupted Corporations control The Ageing Establishment, or perhaps the reverse of that. The neo-reactionaries call this The Cathedral, the overt anti-semites call it a Jewish conspiracy, while others blame it on “Cultural Marxism” or “political correctness”.

The idea that these groups that in our actual reality have competing interests or are actually ideologically opposed are all working together in this imagined reality provides a comforting explanation for an uncomfortable fact. Actual reality (physical reality, but also the social reality of cultural change) keeps misbehaving, and not conforming to ideological expectations. Whether this is climate change or the apparent rapid switch in popular opinion to favour marriage equality, the world that asserts itself over our imagined frameworks of it, keeps behaving in ways that run counter to the expectations of right-libertarians, social-conservatives, paleo-conservatives, right-nationalists, neo-fascists, and white supremacists.

Not everybody who subscribed to this imagined reality sees it all in one piece, but those who do need more conceptual glue to hold the whole thing together. They offer different underlying explanations for the corrupting influence: demonic influence for the Trad Catholics, Zionist conspiracy for the neo-Nazis, cultural Marxism, closet Communism, or a Babylonian death cult for the Qanon true believers — or reveals within reveals, that the satanism is a cover for Communism, or the Communism is a cover for satanism, for those even further down the rabbit hole.

The winner of the inaugural Dragon Award for Best Horror novel, Brian Niemeier claims in the marketing blurb for his book on modern popular culture that:

*“You know that the big movie studios, comic book companies, and video game publishers push an agenda. What you don't know is that the corporations in control of your entertainment aren't grifters or ideologues. They're evangelists of a fanatical anti-religion.*

*Movie producers don't ruin beloved film franchises for profit. Comic book writers don't warp iconic superheroes into self-parodies to sway voters. They hate their audiences with zealous fervour. They want you demoralized, they want your kids propagandized, and they want you to pay for the privilege.”*

**Marketing blurb for *Don't Give Money to People Who Hate You* by Brian Niemeier**

Niemeier's argument may seem particularly out there, based as it is on a view that sees feminism as witchcraft, but the idea that there is a corrupting influence bent on destroying things you love is widespread. Brad R. Torgersen didn't blame the decline of his "nutty-nugget" view of science fiction on demonic feminist witchcraft but the difference between Torgersen's view and Niemeier's is in their imagined causes of the corruption. Arguably, Niemeier's demon-fuelled perspective is more rational than Torgersen's insofar as Niemeier offers an explanation for the apparent contradictions.

### ***How it all works***

The Puppy campaigns provided a microcosm of the view that sees the world as the conspiracy of an unnatural alliance. It had three elements supposedly seeking to destroy science fiction:

- The establishment old guard of science fiction, the SMOFs, the supposedly ageing fans of Worldcons, the literati, and the "snobby critics".
- The corrupted publishing companies, the commercial giants personified by Tor/Macmillan.
- The left, the feminists, the RaceFailers, the politically correct, the SJWs, the supposed cancel culture mob.

All three, we were told, were working in concert to co-opt the Hugos Awards, to take over the SFWA, to undermine the commercial popularity of science fiction. That a commercial operation with tight margins like Macmillan would be intentionally letting its employees undermine sales of books made no sense, was an issue that was skipped over for the most part by the Sad Puppies.

Likewise, that Brad Torgersen had been the beneficiary of support and encouragement from such established institutions of science fiction as the Writers of the Future Award, *Analog* magazine and multiple Hugo finalist Mike Resnick was another inconvenient fact that could be ignored, along with the role Jerry Pournelle played as an inspiration to both Sarah A. Hoyt and Vox Day.

Also, that the years up to 2014/15 and beyond had been a period of very vocal conflict between the social and commercial establishments of science fiction on the one hand and the voices of people who had been systematically marginalised in fandom, (or their historical contributions erased or both) including women in general but also people of colour, disabled people, people from non-English speaking countries, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people, actually demonstrated that the left was very far from controlling everything.

### ***No, it doesn't all make sense***

It is, of course, an absurdity but once accepted the absurdity of the unnatural alliance is its own proof. Why else would big pharma and public health authorities be conspiring together to bring Venezuelan-like communism to god-fearing America if it wasn't for...well, whatever the conspiracy theory of the day is. Once somebody has accepted that this imagined reality applies in one domain (whether it be video games, science fiction, climate science or vaccines) it is not just easy but necessary to see it everywhere.

Maintaining that belief still takes effort because the unnatural alliance – like any conspiracy theory – offers only a superficial level of explanatory power. Because it cannot be falsified by any actual facts (any contrary information is either ignored or absorbed), any and all smaller theories about events can be equally true and can even coexist.

During and in the immediate aftermath of the Capitol Riot of January 6, 2021, right-wing spaces contained two competing narratives. Firstly, that the protestors invading the building were true patriots rightly attempting to prevent a procedural coup against the United States. Secondly that the protests were a false flag being run by the Deep State to discredit the Stop the Steal movement. These radically different perspectives did not lead to two competing camps, but rather existed together and shifted in emphasis.

In the months that followed, a third perspective arose: the riot at the Capitol was nothing more than a minor protest that had no specific objective other than for people to express discontent or, perhaps, better electoral procedures. Of course, it is entirely possible that many people caught up in the crowd that day had complex motives or lacked any true objective, but this idea of the protests as being nothing more than just protests, sits right alongside the belief that the election was truly stolen. It is also an idea that sits right alongside the rhetoric of "the soapbox, the jury box, the ballot box, and the cartridge box". To believe that and to believe that Silicon Valley and the mainstream media is silencing conservatives, that courts are unfairly skewed against the right, and that the elections are stolen, implies by its own logic that civil insurrection is justified. The mantra of the four boxes was far more widespread and among less radicalised people than just those who not only felt motivated to attend the rally at Washington DC that day but also to march on and enter the Capitol. There's a paradox in these narratives, because if it were actually true that a murderous authoritarian regime was mounting a coup, then there would be a compelling ethical reason to physically prevent it if you could.



This brings me to a point that has come up time and again in the discussion of not just the Puppies, but of this flavour of the modern right in general.

### ***Is it sincerity, cynicism, or grift?***

Or can it be all three at the same time? I don't know. I can't tell if Vox Day, for example, ever truly believed in Qanon, or whether he recognised it as a "morale-boosting LARP" from the start. I don't know which of the many contradictory stories Larry Correia or Brad Torgersen have given for their motives for the Sad Puppy campaigns is actually the one they believe. The simplest explanation is that they believe all of them.

Back in 2015, I attempted to rationalise the Sad Puppy viewpoint of the Hugo Awards with a less ideological lens:

1. They see writing primarily as a business. e.g., Brad Torgersen: *"And since I am an entrepreneur — all commercial writers are, when you get right down to it"*
2. *They see mutual aid between fellow authors as an important service*
3. *They regard awards in themselves as subjective and of no intrinsic value but...*
4. *Also see them as mean of promotion of businesses and...*
5. *As a mark of inclusion*

<https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2015/07/10/the-unified-puppy-theory/>

This "Unified Puppy Theory", saw the Sad Puppies perspective as a commercial one that could only see the Hugo Awards in commercial terms. The ideological dimension married with this as a way of rationalising why the Hugo Awards did not actually operate in this way. In the terms I've used in this essay, the Hugo Awards themselves were a corrupted corporation — a commercial venture that should be helping authors like the members of *Mad Genius Club* promote their books, but which was failing to do so because of the corrupting influence of the left.

More broadly, the world of self-publishing that arose with online bookshops and eBook readers, created a commercial opportunity for people to create a secondary income from selling books — or at least believe that there was such an opportunity. The tantalising idea that self-publishing might not just provide extra income but maybe even a livelihood was amplified by the fantasy that a break-out success might lead to significant wealth. There are far worse improbable get-rich-quick schemes than writing books, and although the field is replete with scams and predatory companies, it remains a less exploitative option than multi-level marketing schemes (admittedly a low bar).

In the politically non-partisan 20booksto50K group, this idea of the promise of moderate success (a stable small income that would be enough to live on if you had a low cost of living) carries with it elements of America's long tradition of self-help. Work hard and apply the right discipline, tactics, and strategy and you can make money. In the more politically partisan *Mad Genius Club*, the promise of independent publishing would also be seen as a way of side-stepping the dead hand of moribund big publishing and connecting directly with a vast readership eager to read books free of "political correctness".

It isn't hard to see that for many, even writers like Sarah A. Hoyt and Dave Freer who had at least some success as mid-list traditional published writers, independent publishing in a crowded field where consumers have a vast range of choices for their leisure time beyond reading, was not going to lead to great success. In the end, capitalism sucks for most and rewards a few because it is a money funnel, but if you believe capitalism is a moral algorithm that rewards hard work, grit, and determination without regard to social standing there is a cruel lesson to be learned. Or not learned...but avoided and rationalised away.

John C. Wright, Vox Day, Sarah A. Hoyt, and Larry Correia have each described themselves at some point as having been libertarians. Both Day and Wright have since changed how they describe themselves, but I think it is reasonable to say that whatever their wider ideological stances were, both they and Brad Torgersen believed that America should be a place where working hard to profit yourself is a moral virtue, and one that a functioning society should reward based on your innate talents. Wright might see the hand of God in that and Day might believe those innate talents are genetically determined and lacking in women, but the basic tenet is there. It's not an ideal I share, but neither is it a particularly radical one.

That the world has not well rewarded the hard work of Wright, Hoyt, or Freer adds an implication to this perspective that something must be amiss with the world. That the world has not recognised and celebrated

the innate talent (as they see it) of Vox Day and Larry Correia is another point against the world working as it should.

The world, according to Vox Day, is fallen and Satan is the (lowercase) god of the world. In a world of lies, lies in the service of a higher truth are not lies. Day's mental model of reality is not one shared by Larry Correia, but it provides a readily understandable answer to the question of sincerity, cynicism, or grift. In a broken, corrupted world there isn't a distinction: they are morally the same if (as Day believes) he is in a system controlled by a "Luciferian cult". The rest of the Evil League of Evil have less melodramatic beliefs about reality, but the ethical logic remains the same. Truth has become unmoored and the world is not as it should be.

### ***Where next?***

This project followed the origins of fandom to the social, economic, and technological change of the early 21st century to chart the dynamics of a small culture war that mirrored a larger conflict in American and world culture. Culture wars do not end in clear victories or even definitive ends. The toxic connections between fringe sections of the internet such as 8kun and the radicalising algorithms of social media giants such as Facebook still exist. The tide of political rhetoric against immigration is still strong, and strongest in those nations that oppose action on climate change, as if anticipating the inevitable future movements of peoples that a warmer world will produce. The tactics used to demonise gay people have shifted to transgender people, and new waves of racist nationalist movements still pushback against the human rights of the majority of human beings.

What remains true is that people can act together to support the rights and voices of everybody in their community. Doing so can be contentious, and supporting the right of people to be heard may even be portrayed as an attack on "free speech". Mutual trust and investment in the well-being of others is not persecution, nor is it socialism or communism or political correctness, but just the recognition of everybody's humanity. If there can't be consensus on the recognition of the humanity of each of us in a community, then there can't really be a community. It is not just a fair demand to make of people but a necessary one.

# Afterword: Dramatis Personae

Through this saga, several key figures have been highlighted during the narrative. In this final chapter, we will see where each of them landed at the end of 2021. People and organisations are presented in the order that they appeared in the text.

**Worldcon and the Hugo Awards:** The famous convention was scheduled to be held in Washington DC in 2021. However, to minimise the disruption from the pandemic, the convention was rescheduled to December. Attendees were required to be vaccinated and wear masks. The Hugo Awards were also rescheduled to December. At the convention, the voting for the site selection for Worldcon 2023 went to Chengdu, China. The Hugo Awards ceremony was embroiled in controversy when the weapons and space technology company Raytheon was announced as a sponsor. The sponsorship led to a social media storm because of Raytheon's connection to civilian casualties in the ongoing civil war in Yemen.

**John Scalzi:** the author continues to enjoy commercial and critical success and is still published by Tor Books. His *Interdependency Saga* was a finalist for Best Series in the 2021 Hugo Awards. His blog *Whatever* is still going and has included posts from his daughter Athena Scalzi. Athena appeared on the longlist (nominees who didn't quite make enough votes to be finalists) of the Hugo Awards for the Best Fan Writer category.

**Vox Day:** Day never formally gave up on Qanon, but he quietly stopped mentioning it during 2021. His main blog content has been promoting his web-comic platform and posting anti-vaccine propaganda. In 2021 his blog was shut down by Google, leading him to re-open it on a WordPress site but without a comment section. The movie version of his Alt-Hero comics was not released. He ended his feud with alt-right social media site Gab. He has yet to finish his epic fantasy saga.

**The Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America:** The SFWA is still going and its current president is Jeffe Kennedy, a romance and fantasy author.

**Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Hayden:** Teresa is still a consulting editor and Patrick is still the Editor-in-Chief at Tor Books. *Making Light* was still operating as a blog in 2021.

**Baen Books and Toni Weiskopf:** Baen is still publishing a wide range of science fiction. In 2019, Discon III (the 2021 Worldcon) announced that Toni Weiskopf would be a Guest of Honour at the convention<sup>[1]</sup>. The official web forum of the publisher, Baen's Bar, continued as a site for discussion, but over the years had become less active. Nonetheless, in the wake of the January 6 Capitol Riots, some threads on the Bar were actively discussing armed "resistance",<sup>[2]</sup> including calls by author Tom Kratman for Trump to form a militia wing of his supporters. An investigation into extremist violent rhetoric on the Bar by fan-writer Jason Sanford highlighted the extent of the radicalisation on the web forum<sup>[3]</sup>. To manage the subsequent media attention, and amid fears that Internet Service Providers might take action against Baen's websites, Weiskopf temporarily closed Baen's Bar<sup>[4]</sup>. In turn, Sanford was subject to social media harassment by supporters of the Bar, as well as more reasoned pushback from Baen authors such as Eric Flint and David Weber<sup>[5]</sup>. Amid the controversy, Discon III announced that Weiskopf had been removed as one of the Guests of Honour, which generated its own controversy<sup>[6]</sup>. After the 2021 Hugo Awards were announced, the voting statistics showed that Weiskopf had received enough votes to be a finalist in the Best Editor Long Form category but had declined the nomination.

**Larry Correia:** Correia continues to produce popular books and in 2021 he won his fourth Dragon Award for his science fiction book *Gun Runner*, co-written with John D. Brown. He retains a contentious relationship with Facebook.

**N.K. Jemisin:** In 2020, Jemisin was awarded a \$625,000 MacArthur Foundation's "genius" grant<sup>[7]</sup>. In 2021 she was listed in *Time* magazine's *100 Most Influential People in the World*<sup>[8]</sup>. The film/TV rights for her multi-Hugo award-winning *Broken Earth* series were bought by Sony Pictures in 2021 for a seven-figure sum, with Jemisin herself set to adapt the books for the screen<sup>[9]</sup>.

**Sarah A. Hoyt:** Hoyt bought back the rights to her *Darkship* series from Baen Books and is currently re-editing them so she can publish them independently. She has recently moved from Colorado.

**The Mad Genius Club:** The line-up of the *Mad Genius Club* had shifted only a little. After the Puppy campaigns, the focus of the site returned to giving advice to aspiring independent authors with minimal politics but a lingering suspicion of traditional publishing. Dave Freer is living a self-sufficient lifestyle on an island off the coast of Tasmania where he is engaged in a dispute with the local government.

**GamerGate:** The more famous names attached to GamerGate have long since moved on, but if you say “GamerGate” three times on social media, the lingering mass of true believers will appear to explain how they were all misunderstood.

**Mike Glycer:** *File770* remains a popular source of news and gossip in fandom, including coverage of the latest disputes and controversies at Worldcon.

**Benjanun Sriduangkaew:** Has published several novels and short fiction since 2015.

**Brad R. Torgersen:** In 2019, Torgersen won the Dragon Award for Best Science Fiction novel for *A Star-Wheeled Sky*. For a brief period in 2021, his Wikipedia page also listed his military medals which included the *Non-Commissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbon* awarded to officers “who have completed a prescribed leadership course at an NCO training school”<sup>[10]</sup>.

**John C. Wright:** Wright withdrew the rights for several of his novels published by Vox Day’s Castalia House and republished them with Russell Newquist’s *Silver Empire*.

**Tom Kratman:** Can be found on Quora arguing about historical wars.

**Castalia House:** Has largely stopped publishing new science fiction

**Marko Kloos:** Kloos has been a finalist four times for the Dragon Awards. Two of his short stories were adapted for the Netflix animated sci-fi anthology series *Love, Death & Robots*.

**Kary English:** English is still writing stories and remains involved in the *Writers of the Future* contest.

**Michael Z. Williamson:** Having multiple Facebook accounts in slightly different names allows Williamson to argue against masks and vaccines despite regular temporary Facebook bans.

**The Sad Puppies 4 Website:** Ownership of the domain name was lost by the former Puppies, and the site has been adopted by various owners in the years since. For a while, it was a website promoting Italian slot machine websites, and then a site linking to audiobook versions of the Quran. At the time of writing, it is being used to display an example blog (about carpet cleaning) for a WordPress template.

**The Dragon Award:** Dragon Con has not published detailed statistics on the voting of the awards. The level of participation in the awards is not known.

**Declan Finn:** Despite several efforts, Finn has not been a Dragon Award finalist since 2017. He has not made a return visit to Italy.

**Richard Spencer et al:** The deadly Unite the Right Rally of 2017 in Charlottesville led to a civil case against the organisers of the rally by nine victims of the violence. 12 individual defendants and five white nationalist/supremacist organisations were found guilty on multiple charges. The jury awarded \$25 million in damages to the victims<sup>[11]</sup>.

**Jon Del Arroz:** The case Del Arroz had filed against the 2018 Worldcon lasted until June 2021. Most of his claims against the convention were dropped during the litigation, leaving only one claim for defamation. The organisers of the 2018 Worldcon settled this final claim rather than continue the case any further, and paid Del Arroz an undisclosed sum and made a public apology for implying he was racist<sup>[12]</sup>. In August 2021, Del Arroz was permanently banned from Twitter for violating their rules against “hateful conduct”,<sup>[13]</sup> although he has been seen on the site since using a different account.

**Comicsgate:** Jon Del Arroz, Ethan Van Sciver, and Vox Day are no longer feuding. The mix of culture-war rhetoric to promote crowdfunded projects continues.

**Qanon:** On November 22, 2021, a sub-group of Qanon followers gathered in Dealey Plaza, Dallas, Texas with the expectation that John F. Kennedy would appear. He didn’t.

**20 Books to 50K:** Remains an active Facebook group helping aspiring authors. Their 2021 Vegas conference featured a panel with Toni Weiskopf and Larry Correia discussing social media strategy.

**Camestros Felapton:** Intends to redirect his efforts to shorter and more poorly footnoted posts. The proportion of typographical errors will be unaffected.

**Timothy the Talking Cat:** Despite many requests, Timothy did not appear or contribute directly to this project<sup>[14]</sup>.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <http://file770.com/2021-site-selection-confirms-washington-dc/>
- [2] <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-1-9-21-magnetic-monopology-do-not-exceed-c-do-not-collect-200-zorkmids/>
- [3] <https://www.patreon.com/posts/baen-books-forum-47582408>
- [4] <http://file770.com/weisskopf-announces-hiatus-for-baens-bar/>
- [5] <http://file770.com/weisskopf-correia-weber-defend-baens-bar-jason-sanford-subjected-to-harassment-over-his-report/> and <http://file770.com/baen-strikes-back-sanford-under-growing-storm-of-harassment/>

- [6] <http://file770.com/discon-iii-removes-weisskopf-as-a-guest-of-honor/> and <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-2-19-21-why-i-sweep-my-scroll-with-a-geiger-counter-every-day-and-nary-a-pixel/>
- [7] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/oct/07/nk-jemisin-leads-2020-round-of-macarthur-genius-grants>
- [8] <https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2021/>
- [9] <https://deadline.com/2021/06/the-broken-earth-nk-jemisin-sony-tristar-7-figure-deal-author-adapts-1234769656/>
- [10] [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Brad\\_R.\\_Torgersen&oldid=1034274220#Fiction awards and honors](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Brad_R._Torgersen&oldid=1034274220#Fiction_awards_and_honors)
- [11] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-59355019>
- [12] <http://file770.com/worldcon-76-settles-with-jon-del-arroz-issues-apology-will-pay-compensation/>
- [13] <http://file770.com/jon-del-arroz-permabanned-from-twitter/>
- [14] the end

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# Appendices

# Appendix A: The Mandatory Map at the Back of the Book

The following map is a re-drawn version of a joke map I made in 2015 to illustrate the “kerfuffle” as I saw it at the time. I’ve redrawn all the islands and changed the orientation of the map, but the only other significant change was to give a little isthmus between Baen and Baen’s Bar. Aside from that, this is how I perceived things in 2015.



One question I was asked at the time was why the Puppy lands were bigger than the non-Puppy lands. The answer is that the fans are all sailing in the sea.



# Appendix B: 2015's Unified Puppy Theory

This is a re-edited and re-formatted version of my July 2015 essay on the Sad Puppy's ideas and motivations.

On the final Puppy Round Up at *File770*, Snowcrash asked:

*Here at the End of All Things, are some answers/ things we're still missing:*

- *A honest explanation as to how the SP3 slate was created,*
- *How the tactics of slate-nominations furthers \*any\* of the constantly changing rationales provided by the Puppies*
- *Anyone taking on the Mamatas Challenge*
- *Evidence of a previous slate/ bloc-voting effort. The Puppies keep saying that's the only way Stuff They Don't Like Could have won, but are strangely reticent at providing any evidence or proof of their allegations.*
- *Why Wisdom of the Internet???? Seriously why? (And yelling about Scalzi is not a good answer)*  
<http://file770.com/?p=23595&cpage=3#comment-303817>

I only had stupid answers at the time but I think I can give a better answer now.

Firstly, by way of background, The Mamatas Challenge was a comment by author Nick Mamatas on John Scalzi's blog:

*If the Hugos have really been dominated by leftist material that prized message over story since the mid-1990s (Brad's timeline), it should be very simple for members of the Puppy Party to name*

- a. one work of fiction*
- b. that won a Hugo Award*
- c. while foregrounding a left message to the extent that the story was ruined or misshaped*
- d. per set of winners since 1995.*

*That's all. Just a list of twenty books or stories—a single winner per year. Even though a single winner per year wouldn't prove domination, I'm happy to make it easy for the Puppies.*

<http://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/04/20/keeping-up-with-the-hugos-42015/#comment-781272>

Naturally the Mamatas challenge has not been met by anybody – although the odd work of fiction has been suggested.

As Snowcrash points out, none of these have been truly answered, and by that I don't mean they have been answered and people don't like the answer, but rather that even people who have been following the discussion closely can't really say what the consensus Puppy position on each of these questions are.

Part of the answer to that is that the Puppy leaders and supporters increasingly disengaged from debate during the kerfuffle. Notably, there is a long comment on Brad Torgersen's blog (Torgersen being the curator of the Sad Puppy 3 slate) by puppy supporter 'James May'<sup>[1]</sup>. In this comment May exhorts other supporters not to engage on a wide range of issues with critics of the Puppies. I don't know how influential May was, but from around that time Puppy activity on non-puppy sites does seem to have reduced.

The net effect is a general lack of specific answers. More general blog posts from Puppies have tended more to airings of grievances – particularly in terms of how they have been ill-treated by accusations of political extremism or about how liberals are out of touch with middle America.

Consequently, to attempt to answer the questions Snowcrash raised is difficult, and we can be sure that the Mamatas challenge will never be met, but it will never be conceded either. No major Puppy is going to say "it isn't actually possible to meet the Mamatas challenge because those works don't exist in sufficient

numbers as Hugo winners”. But what of the rest? More importantly, what kind of model makes the Puppy campaign coherent? By ‘coherent’ I don’t mean morally or tactically wise, but rather, understandable. Ideally this model would have a degree of explanatory power and perhaps predictive power – i.e., if the Puppies were thinking like *this* then they might do *that* in the future.

I think lots of commentators have hit on the answer multiple times, so I don’t have anything new or startling to say, but I do want to put it down in one place so I can point at this model in the future and say ‘this’ without having to repeat the whole thing.

### ***The Rabid Puppy model***

I will start with the Rabid Puppy model because that is simplest, most overt and obvious. Theodore Beale aka Vox Day is a former columnist at the right-wing ‘news’ site *WorldNetDaily*. WND is one of many commercial enterprises aimed at pushing news and opinion pieces at a relatively narrow conservative audience. Vox Day has looked at that business model and is attempting to repeat it, but with fiction. He explained his model back in 2012 in an article at *WorldNetDaily*<sup>[2]</sup>. He has since established a publishing house. Rabid Puppies is simply a continuation of that strategy, with two aims:

1. Promote his publishing house and authors to a niche market
2. Help establish that market by stirring up a public ideological battle within SF/F

The Rabid Puppy model is simple to understand and cynical in application. For the purposes of Rabid Puppies, Sad Puppies was a recruiting ground, a set of easily duped participants in Beale’s strategy, and a handy front. It wasn’t particularly clever or even that evil in the grand scheme of things, but it was cynical and exploitative. Beale has styled himself as a sociopath – whether he is or isn’t is neither here nor there, and long-distance psychology is a fool’s game – and Rabid Puppies fits that model.

### ***The Sad Puppy model***

The Sad Puppy model is harder for several reasons. Firstly, while Rabid Puppies is clearly the work of a single dictator, the Sad Puppies are a bit more amorphous. The nearest we have to a sense of a leadership is the ironically-named Evil League of Evil, i.e.,

- Larry Correia – the original Sad Puppy
- Brad Torgersen – curator of the Sad Puppy 3 slate
- Kate Paulk – nominated convener of the future Sad Puppy 4 slate (or whatever it may become)
- Possibly Vox Day (although it is somewhat unclear whether he is just part of the ironic naming or an active participant in organising Sad Puppies)

As Day is accounted for above in Rabid Puppies, I think it is best to ignore him (which is probably wise advice all round). Paulk is also a blogger at the *Mad Genius Club* and it probably wise to consider some other regulars there as part of the general Puppy movement. Specifically:

- Sarah A. Hoyt
- Cedar Sanderson
- Dave Freer
- Peter Grant

All four were key voices in the multiple discussions on the Sad Puppy nominations and related issues (such as the Tor boycott). Peter Grant notably has said that he is only a supporter of the Sad Puppies and not a leader.

Each one has offered many different comments on the Sad Puppy movement, but none have really addressed the issues raised in Snowcrash’s questions. Of course, two of those could only be answered by Brad Torgersen, but the others could have been attempted. The nearest we have to an answer to the Mamatas challenge is Dave Freer’s Petunias Post,<sup>[3]</sup> which this blog covered in depth. We clearly are not going to get straight answers from the blogs of any of these people, but perhaps we can look at the issues in another way. In short, what were they thinking?

If we can describe the cognitive model that best explains their behaviour, we can make substantial steps into understanding the Sad Puppies. To do that we have to consider how the Puppies above think about writing and think about awards. In doing so I’ll start with the *Mad Genius Club* – while this isn’t the place where any of the three Sad Puppy campaigns was announced, it is a common point for all the players (perhaps best exemplified by this recent post on the *Mad Genius Club* blog in which Brad Torgersen reviews Larry Correia’s *Monster Hunter* series<sup>[4]</sup>)

The *Mad Genius Club* blog is by a group of writers, and a significant number of the posts<sup>[5]</sup> address the mechanics of writing and publishing. There is a lot that is very laudable about the *Mad Genius Club* – a set of writers helping each other out and offering practical advice, from structuring your plot to getting reviews.

Mad Genius also offers advice in terms of aesthetics. I've discussed two major posts by Kate Paulk before. It is the second one that is more overtly a Sad Puppy manifesto<sup>[6]</sup>.

Anyway, this little piece of anecdotal leads to some thoughts about what could be considered the Sad Puppy Manifesto. Despite this, and the individual color of the three campaigns to end Puppy-Related Sadness, there actually are some broad principles that underlie the Sad Puppies campaigns.

The full list can be read at the link. Most of it is vague, and some of it touches on issues from other posts, but I'd like to point out her fourth clause:

*4. The award that matters most is people buying the work. That doesn't mean other awards aren't nice: we all like a bit of recognition now and then. But if with all the millions upon millions of people out there who could be reading, we can't build an audience over time, then something isn't working right. It could be sucky distribution. It could be that presentation or some of those other intangibles need a bit of a boost. It could also be that you're writing for an audience of half-a-dozen and you're already selling to them. (If so, do consider broadening your horizons a little bit).*

<http://madgeniusclub.com/2015/05/21/of-puppies-and-principles/>

The award that matters most is people buying the work. Note that this is on a website that aims to help aspiring writers and to promote the works of the writers who blog there – both of which are quite reasonable aims. Over on Brad Torgersen's own blog he has a separate page entitled *BRT Success – A Definition*. It introduces itself as:

*Kris Rusch has been doing a series of wonderful blog posts, specifically focusing on success: how we as writers define it, what it means to us, how everyone sees it differently, and so forth. As a result, I thought I'd take a moment to actually write out my definition for myself. Because it's changed as I've gotten older. Become more clear. Dare I say, healthier? More in tune with who I am as a person? Less affected by a lust for fame — which I think all of us experience when we're brand new — than a desire to be personally comfortable with my life and able to provide for my family without subjecting myself, or them, to undue hardship.*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/brt-success-a-definition/>

Reading further down Brad gives a set of milestones in terms of publishing and monetary success that I don't have any quibbles with. Brad is defining success in terms of tangible outcomes, and that is very sensible – particular if your aim is to be a professional author (artistic outcomes being all very nice but they don't pay your mortgage). There is a later paragraph that I think is more relevant to the Sad Puppy Model:

*Notice also that there are no awards anywhere on that list. Not that I wouldn't appreciate an award, if given. I am in fact due an award as of the last updating of this page, albeit a modest award in the grand scheme of writing. I'm just not going to bank on them, nor am I going to integrate them into my definition of success. Because all writing awards that I know of are given subjectively, based on the opinions of other people, and I don't like having my personal definition of success riding on the opinions of other people. Celebrities do this all the time, and look how wrecked they always are? I say, the further you can get from depending on someone else's opinion being your key to happiness, the better! So, I'm not factoring awards into my goal list at all. If they come, great, I won't bitch. If they never come, also great, because I don't need them to tell me I am succeeding.*

*ibid*

It might be easy to dismiss this as sour grapes (i.e., not wanting awards now that he has burnt the bridges to getting awards) but given that this is beginning to look like a common theme, I'd like to assume that this is a sincere statement of Brad's opinion. Specifically, that 1. awards are just subjective, and that 2. they are secondary to real success, which is financial.

Moving on to Larry Correia. At his blog, he recently posted this interesting essay on How Authors Get Paid (part 2). Here is a quote that I believe fits a pattern:

*The mass market doesn't give a crap about literary prizes. The chunk of that multi-billion dollar entertainment market that pays attention to literary prizes is tiny. Award winning doesn't translate into much, if any, extra sales. To many of the people who just want to be entertained, award winning doesn't mean good. It means boring and preachy. That's a whole different fight that I've been having for the last three years and don't feel like having again right now, but basically, winning awards doesn't*

*translate into getting paid more. If you look at the list of authors who have won prestigious awards and you compare it to the list of authors making lots of money, there is a little bit of overlap, but most of the authors getting paid aren't on that award winning list.*

<http://monsterhunternation.com/2015/06/25/how-authors-get-paid-part-2/>

To summarize from the conveners of Sad Puppies 1, 2, 3, and probably 4, we have statements on a similar theme: awards are at best secondary, what counts is sales and making money. At first sight, that makes all of the Sad Puppy campaigns even more mysterious – why go through all of this angst and this conflict and even just the effort of gathering slates and mobilizing nominations if awards really don't matter that much?

A simple answer would be that the Sad Puppy model is just the Rabid Puppy model – i.e., a publicity stunt. However, if that is the case, it is odd that the Puppies have got so upset in terms of the reaction – and unlike Vox Day, the upsetness seems genuine. Brad Torgersen appeared on many blogs critical of Sad Puppy 3 trying to explain himself – and often digging himself into a deeper hole.

If we go back to *Monster Hunter Nation* (Correia's blog) it is worth pointing out a different thing he does: an Amazon 'Book Bomb'. A book bomb is when people coordinate to buy a particular book from Amazon on a particular day – as a result of the potential readers all buying on the same day rather than spread over several days, the book will rise much higher in Amazon sales ranking for that period. Away from puppydom, this was done most notably by the short story collection *Machine of Death* as a kind of prank/publicity stunt that had the amusing side effect of annoying Glenn Beck.

Correia regularly organizes book bombs for books from authors he likes, and personally I can't see anything wrong with it. Amazon rankings are a bit silly and I don't see that anybody gets harmed by this, and overall, it encourages people to both write and to read. Rather like *Mad Genius* in general or Torgersen's regular reviews of upcoming authors, it is all an example of a kind of mutual aid among a group of aspiring authors. It is like a kind of benevolent fraternity/sorority or a friendly Masonic group or a local chamber of commerce. Despite the image of business being a cutthroat competitive world, anybody who has run a small business knows that cooperation makes sense. Business networks are particularly important for small businesses as they are more vulnerable to tough economic times and competition from big business. Also, each business by itself operates with a smaller and less diverse skill set, so sharing knowledge and experience makes sense.

Local chambers of commerce also can run awards and there are even more general systems of local awards such as these in Australia:

*The Local Business Awards aim to pay tribute to and reward the local community's best businesses. It also aims to develop and strengthen the bonds between businesses and the community thereby improving the standards of local businesses.*

*The benefits to your business by participating*

*The Local Business Awards are based within the local community. The awards give local businesses the opportunity to:*

*Promote their business and its strengths.*

*Display their range of products and services.*

*Provide in-store displays of their Local Business Awards success.*

<https://thebusinessawards.com.au/about>

While quality, etc., are part of such an award scheme, the key issue is promotion. Again, it isn't likely that an award will make such a big difference, but rather like the Amazon book bomb it is all part of a way of promoting and doing your fellow businesses a favor. It is also a way of demonstrating to an individual business (or author) that they are part of a group of mutually supporting people – a mark of acceptance.

Having said all that about mutual aid, the perceived subjective nature of awards and their use in marking acceptance, it is really hard to ignore the political aspect of the Sad Puppy campaign. In response to controversy around the Sad Puppy 2 slate in 2014, Larry Correia wrote a lengthy post on his blog outlining his thoughts:

*Allow me to explain why the presence of my slate on the Hugo nominations is so controversial. This is complicated and your time is valuable, so short explanation first, longer explanation if you care after.*

*Short Version:*

1. *I said a chunk of the Hugo voters are biased toward the left, and put the author's politics far ahead of the quality of the work. Those openly on the right are sabotaged. This was denied.*
2. *So, I got some right wingers on the ballot.*
3. *The biased voters immediately got all outraged and mobilized to do exactly what I said they'd do.*
4. *Point made.*

*I've said for a long time that the awards are biased against authors because of their personal beliefs. Authors can either cheer lead for left wing causes, or they can keep their mouth shut. Open disagreement is not tolerated and will result in being sabotaged and slandered. Message or identity politics has become far more important than entertainment or quality. I was attacked for saying this. I knew that when an admitted right winger got in, they would be maligned and politicked against, not for the quality of their art but rather for their unacceptable beliefs.*

<http://monsterhunternation.com/2014/04/24/an-explanation-about-the-hugo-awards-controversy/>

Larry Correia's post continues and much of it is focused on the political aspects. In a similar vein, political aspects are raised on *Mad Genius club* and on Brad Torgersen's blog. It is really difficult to see this as anything other than a straight left vs right conflict when looking at the content of many Sad Puppy posts.

In addition, looking at the Puppy complaint through a predominately political lens just highlights the absurdity of some of the claims, and takes us straight back to Snowcrash's questions. Correia's account simply doesn't add up, and it avoids completely that people were upset about the slate rather than people on the right getting nominated – except perhaps Vox Day's nomination. Yet even Vox Day is an obvious counter-example: a man well known for his extreme and outspoken views, who nevertheless twice served on a Nebula Award jury. In terms of a grand conspiracy by the elites of SF to keep conservatives out, having Vox Day as juror for a major award seems to be a very odd move.

The political lens simply takes us in circles. Correia and other Puppies seem to believe what they are saying despite lacking any evidence that adds up. It makes no sense to assume that they are lying, because then we are left with no motive at all.

However, politics is just a small part of this – or rather, politics and ideology are not that relevant in terms of actual ideological content. Rather, the issue that Larry Correia (and others) keeps returning to is ideology as a marker of a group. Brad Torgersen refers to some of the modern debate around racism and sexism as *culturalist tribalism*<sup>[7]</sup>.

Here is a different model:

1. They see writing primarily as a business. e.g., Brad Torgersen: “And since I am an entrepreneur — all commercial writers are, when you get right down to it”<sup>[8]</sup>
2. They see mutual aid between fellow authors as an important service
3. They regard awards in themselves as subjective and of no intrinsic value but...
4. Also see them as means of promotion of businesses and...
5. As a mark of inclusion

Now I'd add to this that they see this not as a 'should' but as an 'is. Their view isn't that the Hugo (or other awards) should *become* these things but that they already *are* these things – just a dysfunctional example. As a consequence, the question is why the Hugos are not operating in that way (i.e., celebrating the best businesses, giving a boost to new ones, basically being the Chamber of Commerce for the business of SF). Without any other obvious answer to that issue (because it is actually based on a faulty model), the answer they fell upon was that the Hugo's were behaving dysfunctionally because of the left.

### ***Correia's journey***

The most direct example of this idea of the Hugo awards being a mark of inclusion into a mutually supporting group is Larry Correia's own accounts of engaging with Worldcon. In 2011, he was nominated

for a Campbell Award. While not actually a Hugo Award it is awarded at Worldcon and the nomination and voting process is the same.

Correia's contemporaneous account of his visit to the Nevada Worldcon is an upbeat and positive account of what sounds like a nice experience for everybody concerned. He didn't win, but he seems to have taken that in stride and enjoyed the company of his fellow nominees.

*But anyway, Lev Grossman won the Campbell. Looking at the results afterward, I got my ass handed to me. It wasn't really a surprise, since I knew going in that my odds of winning were really low. (I'm not exactly the sort of writer most of the Worldcon voters root for, but more on that in the next blog post). Just getting nominated to begin with was a huge surprise. But anyways, congrats to Lev.*

The contrasts with his account then, and his later accounts in which he characterizes it as a more alienating experience, is so noticeable that Correia more recently added an addendum to the post.

*EDIT-4/10/2015: It seems weird to have to go back and make a note on a post from years ago, but some clever types brought this up to show that I had a wonderful experience at Worldcon, and anything I said later about bias in the system, or negative experiences isn't true, and thus all the fans on my side are wrong and bad.*

*Note a couple of things, above I said I got my ass handed to me. It wasn't really a surprise, since I knew going in that my odds of winning were really low. (I'm not exactly the sort of writer most of the Worldcon voters root for, but more on that in the next blog post). ... And then I didn't? Yeah, I didn't write that post then because I chickened out.*

*In 2011 I was still under the impression that I could be nice and keep my head down and play along and maybe eventually they would accept me. I was a new guy. All of my peers and friends in the industry told me to only talk about the positives, smile, and not say anything. I was afraid that if I talked about the negatives, it would be bad for my career.*

*So, in this post I left out the negatives and only talked about the positives. It was at that birthday party that I was pissed off and ranting, but Toni Weisskopf talked me down from saying anything.*

*Brad was my roommate, and I vented to him about assholes trying to pick fights, and he warned me off of being anything but nice, and gracious too. Wow, have times changed.*

*But I've got a hard time biting my tongue, and being nice turned out to be useless because they kept attacking me anyway. By the time San Antonio rolled around, it was all in the open.*

*So, for the TNH crowd vectoring in on this one post to try and discredit me, yep, you got me. Back then I was still afraid of you.*

<http://monsterhunternation.com/2011/08/23/worldcon-report/>

Correia was invited in to join a club and the members of that club turned on him and rejected him and Correia was rightfully angry – *but*, it wasn't actually a club and people were just a bunch of people and that isn't how Worldcon or the Hugo's (or the Campbells) work. Correia's blog was assertively conservative prior to his nomination and it was assertively conservative afterwards – there was no great mystery about his politics when he was nominated and none afterwards. It is noticeable that it only took from August 2011 to January 2013 for the Sad Puppy campaign to start taking shape:

*The Hugo awards are the most prestigious thing you can get in sci-fi/fantasy (other than fat royalty checks, obviously). Getting nominated for a Hugo is a great resume builder. I was a finalist for the Campbell award for best new writer a couple of years back, and though the Campbell is a separate award from the Hugo, it works through the same system, same voters, and is even given away at the same ceremony. Going through that experience was very enlightening.*

*The Hugo is pretty fancy, but basically, like most awards, it is a popularity contest.*

<http://monsterhunternation.com/2013/01/08/how-to-get-correia-nominated-for-a-hugo/>

Yet by the end of 2012 he clearly already did genuinely feel shut out. That is, if we see the start of the campaign as primarily an aggressive move, and that is the perception of the Sad Puppy campaigns, it is a mistake to assume Correia saw it that way. Certainly, his rhetoric and tone look aggressive but that is his normal blog style. It makes more sense to see this as Correia just engaging in self-promotion and doing so because he assumes (despite evidence to the contrary) that this is what people do and they just sort of pretend that they don't. Of course, there is all sorts of self-promotion going on all the time by all authors, but such overt campaigning for the Hugos (particularly with this politically partisan tinge to it) was unusual. Given some of the later rhetoric, it is easy to confuse the objection to John Scalzi's style of self-promotion as a kind of protest (i.e., as if the Puppies were saying Scalzi was wrong to self-promote, and therefore are using a slate because the system has become corrupt). Instead, it is better to see the objection to Scalzi (at least initially, and putting aside more free-form Scalzi-hate) as more that his self-promotion was fine but that non-Puppies in general objecting to Correia's more assertive self-promotion was hypocritical

### ***Top-down reasoning and confirmation bias***

So, I have a sort of model but it needs some more fuel to the cognitive fire. Part of the issue is confirmation bias. Now that is also an issue with everything I've just written because I have clearly gone looking for things to help develop my model and ignored stuff that doesn't fit. I'll give myself a pass, though, because at this point, I'm just trying to develop a hypothesis rather than committing myself to a set of beliefs.

In terms of the Puppy arguments and justifications, we do see a degree of confirmation bias. Any instance of a person in some way promoting themselves or encouraging Hugo nominations or votes is seen as establishing that this was normal behavior, but people not doing so or, more importantly, that such behavior was limited in extent and scale, is ignored. Every case of some left-wing person or feminist or advocate of LGBTI rights asserting their views within fandom is taken as evidence of many people in SF publishing or writing holding the same views. Now, it could be argued that people on the left do exactly the same kind of thing – generalizing from a few extreme examples to a much wider group of people on the right – which may be true, but isn't relevant. The issue here isn't to establish that the Puppy campaign was bad, as this is more easily established by the disruption it caused and the poor quality of the works nominated. The issue is to establish what the thinking was behind the campaign, and this kind of over-generalization does seem to be important.

Another aspect is what I would call 'top-down reasoning'. What I mean by that is a kind of informal style of reasoning that mimics the axiomatic style of geometry. It starts with generalities, and then reasons its way to particulars. How it differs from more empirical or reality-based reasoning is that the particulars are not then judged against the available evidence. So, if a Puppy takes it as truths widely acknowledged that Worldcon is dominated by left-wingers and that left-wingers promote message fiction, then they can conclude that left-wingers use the Hugo Awards to promote message fiction. Of course, they would because that is what they do! The conclusion, in top-down reasoning, does not then need to be tested against actual examples.

A notable example is this comment from Brad Torgersen:

*Golly, I am pretty sure the point of Sad Puppies 3 was to make the final ballot more inclusive, not less. Didn't we say that? I'm pretty sure we said that. More, not less. Big tent, not small tent. Nobody can tell anybody they don't belong. Isn't that what I personally have been banging my pot about for years now, even before Sad Puppies came along?*

<https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/05/13/musings-not-sorted/>

Brad was citing this as an argument against claims that Sad Puppies was anti-diversity. However, rather than point to the increased diversity due to the Sad Puppy campaign (which would be factually tricky), he points to what the Sad Puppies had said about themselves. Ironically, Torgersen has elsewhere noted the need to check the 'narrative' against the facts,<sup>[9]</sup> but as with many of his posts he seems to have avoided applying the lesson to his own Sad Puppy campaign.

### ***Answering Snowcrash's questions***

With no Puppies being available or willing to answer Snowcrash's questions, I can now use my model to make a virtual Puppy who I can interrogate at will. OK, this is something of a Straw Puppy, but it is all I have.

The questions are:

1. An honest explanation as to how the SP3 slate was created,

2. How the tactics of slate-nominations furthers *any* of the constantly changing rationales provided by the Puppies
3. The Mamatas Challenge
4. Evidence of a previous slate/ bloc-voting effort. The Puppies keep saying that's the only way Stuff They Don't Like Could have won, but are strangely reticent at providing any evidence or proof of their allegations.
5. Why *Wisdom From My Internet*???? Seriously why? (And yelling about Scalzi is not a good answer)

- **An honest explanation as to how the SP3 slate was created?** Well, we know it was filled with people Brad Torgersen knew or worked with in writing. So, the explanation that best fits is that they were all business-owners (in a sense) that Brad felt deserved credit, either because they had been good at promoting the business of SF writing (Butcher, Anderson) or were businesses that needed a pat on the back. Torgersen probably honestly felt he was doing each of them a favor – hence his confused reaction when some nominees did not react well when they understood what had occurred. His choices were only political insofar as he thought the reason why past Hugo Awards hadn't been functioning properly was because of the nefarious actions of the left. The politics, as he saw it, was one-sided.

- **How the tactics of slate-nominations furthers *any* of the constantly changing rationales provided by the Puppies?** The slate tactic makes no sense, and makes no sense in terms of the post-hoc rationalizations that have been given by the Puppies. However, it is important to understand that the rationalizations given have been just that: post-hoc rationalizations. The slate tactic was a natural outcome of the Puppy perception of awards. The mechanism of the award is meaningless, and the award itself symbolic of no intrinsic value. What mattered was people getting the nomination, and hence getting the mark of endorsement. Given that, what mattered was getting people he was rewarding nominated, and maximizing that number. The point was to nominate people rather than works, and so he filled up as many slots as possible.

- **The Mamatas Challenge?** The answer is that all winners of the story categories meet the Challenge (with exceptions available when people bring them up). The axioms are that 1) Left-wingers promote message fiction and 2) Left-wingers controlled the Hugos. Therefore: the Hugos were dominated by message fiction. Top-down pseudo-syllogistic reasoning trumps any actual examples.

- **Evidence of a previous slate / bloc-voting effort?** See previous answer. It is taken as axiomatic that such awards must be the result of deals and agreements because there isn't any other way they could work because awards are purely arbitrary. Throw in general leftist-themed conspiracy theories and it becomes an established truth. Evidence isn't needed.

- **Why *Wisdom From My Internet*?** People, not works. Williamson had to be nominated for something because he works hard at promoting himself to his audience. Torgersen had already filled the other slots so Best Related Work was what was open. Additionally, it demonstrates how Williamson promotes himself – social media 'humor'

So, there you have it. Our virtual puppy answers.

## FOOTNOTES

- [1] <https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/05/13/musings-not-sorted/#comment-12392>
- [2] <http://www.wnd.com/2012/12/a-throne-of-bones/>
- [3] <https://camestrosfelapton.wordpress.com/2015/05/29/on-petunias-and-whales-part-1/>
- [4] <http://madgeniusclub.com/2015/07/05/monster-hunter-win/>
- [5] <http://madgeniusclub.com/navigating-from-writing-to-publication/>
- [6] <http://madgeniusclub.com/2015/05/21/of-puppies-and-principles/>
- [7] <https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/04/14/tribalism-is-as-tribalism-does/>
- [8] <https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/04/21/why-do-it/>
- [9] <https://bradrtorgersen.wordpress.com/2015/06/14/narratives-vs-facts/>