

WISCON CHRONICLES 2

The WisCon Chronicles

VOLUME 2

Provocative essays on feminism,
race, revolution, and the future

Edited by
**L. Timmel Duchamp &
Eileen Gunn**



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The WisCon Chronicles, Volume 2

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WisCon: bigger on the inside than it is on the outside

EILEEN GUNN AND L. TIMMEL DUCHAMP

Feminists come in all sizes and colors and genders. They have a variety of belief systems: they don't all fit tidily together in a box. And, as you may know, some of them are a tad opinionated.

WisCon, a literary festival for feminists interested in science fiction and fantasy, has, for over three decades, attracted people with diverse and strongly held opinions. It hasn't always suffered them gladly, and it doesn't necessarily mediate the arguments that ensue, but WisCon does not homogenize their points of view, and it provides an on-going opportunity for feminists of all stripes to get together and laugh, talk, and enrich one another.

WisCon 31 was the WisCon of Kelly Link and Laurie J. Marks, the remarkable writers who were its guests of honor. Attendees wore delightful coronets of pearls and rocket ships and flowers, hand-made for them at the Carl Brandon Society party; they talked all day and, still talking, partied all night. Everyone who came, it's safe to say, experienced a different convention, because there was so much going on — over two hundred programming items: panels, academic presentations, readings by more than fifty writers, workshops, parties, reunions, gatherings. Friendships formed, romance bloomed and faded, conversation flowed non-stop.

The WisCon Chronicles series is a response to activist Liz Henry's hortatory "Document, document, document!" at WisCon 30. However, documenting WisCon is a Sisyphean task: the convention is much bigger than it looks from the outside, and it is both more diverse than it used to be and more parochial than it wants to be.

This volume explores some of the issues of interest at WisCon 2007: gender, race, culture, revolution, and the future of thinking about those matters. We offer a selection of scholarly essays, comments, argu-

ments, emotive yelps, appeals to reason, scathing replies, and fears and hopes for the future collected from participants – writers, academics, bloggers, activists, and fans, some of them WisCon veterans and some attending for the first time. This is a small fraction of the topics that were considered at WisCon 31: a slice of WisCon, cut across the political discussions and the examinations of human imagination and potential.

What you will find in this book:

Kelly Link and Laure J. Marks, in the first essay, interview one another and discuss the books that made them the writers they are. In the final essay, a transcription of their guest of honor speech, they wear asbestos pants and spin a fantasy from email and postcards. In performance, they launched a barrage of wit and a fair number of objects at the audience: they are the first WisCon guests of honor to require both a trebuchet master and a pair of giant eagles.

Mark Rich records his impressions of WisCon 31 in an account that is both journal and prose poem.

Nisi Shawl offers crowns to honor our inner royalty, and explains how honoring royalty can be an egalitarian act.

Tom La Farge meditates on animal minds and the human mind, beginning with pack and school behavior, traversing group identity, individualism, and fabulation, and ending with an aria by lovely Pooch, from Carol Emshwiller's *Carmen Dog*.

Susan Simensky Bietila, the surrealist political artist, contributes two of her dramatic images of women *in extremis*, and some thoughts about the interrelationship of fiction, illustration, and the imagination.

Naamen Gobert Tilahun offers a witty and hortatory exploration of his experience on his first WisCon panel and maps out areas of interest for a more thorough examination of the profound effects of colonialism on both the content and the writers of science fiction.

L. Timmel Duchamp explores the theory that some writers may create a persona or a second self in order to write and compares the process of doing this to the performance aspects of creating a gender role.

Survivors of the notorious “Romance of the Revolution” panel, a discussion that grew larger on the Web after WisCon was over, delineate their disagreements in four articles:

Laura Quilter’s partial transcript of the event,
 K. Joyce Tsai’s report from the trenches,
 Chris Nakashima Brown’s essay both debunking and
 romancing the power of revolutionary thought, and
 L. Timmel Duchamp’s analysis of how the panelists’ different
 styles of communicating reflect radically different, gender-
 based, ways of thinking.

Wendy Walker writes of the lives of the originators of the English gothic novel — William Beckford, “Monk” Lewis, Horace Walpole, and Ann Radcliffe — and their complex relationships with colonialism, empire, slavery, and sexuality.

Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu discusses a still prevalent assumption: that the characters in a book — even a book about Africa — are white by default.

Catherynne M. Valente follows the journeys of three modern female heroes to hell and back, in *Alice in Wonderland*, the *Wizard of Oz*, and the *Nutcracker*.

Rachel Swirsky writes resonantly of her own experiences with racism and sexism in writers workshops, and has collected and edited a substantial and practical set of essays from sixteen other writers and teachers on how to deal with such situations. Contributors include Nora Khan, Ericka Crouse, Anna Schwind, Julia Glassman, Maria Deira, Jenny Zhang, Stephanie Denise Brown, Nisi Shawl, K. Tempest Bradford, Richard Jeffrey Newman, Sue Lange, Alaya Dawn Johnson, Eugie Foster, Alyx Dellamonica, Ross Wagner, and Katherine Sparrow.

In addition, interspersed among the longer essays are a number of shorter pieces. Two WisCon first-timers — Rosalyn Berne and Jacqueline A. Gross — relate their experiences and examine their reactions, and seven WisCon regulars look ahead to possible WisCon issues of 2018: Elizabeth Bear, Nicola Griffith, Joan Haran, M.J. Hardman, Nora Jemison, Kate Schaefer, and Lawrence Schimel reflect on their personal interests and their hopefulness (or lack of same) about humanity’s near future.

Ideas start at WisCon — WisCon begat the Tiptree awards, the Carl Brandon Society, the Sense of Gender Awards in Japan. The Tiptree motherboard has made grants that increase the variety of attendees at WisCon, and the WisCon dialog, originally about feminist issues, has

expanded to encompass issues of race and class and a broader exploration of gender issues. But WisCon is not all politics: one of its hallmarks from the beginning has been its sense of fun. We hope we've made it clear in this volume that at WisCon, you can both dance and be part of the revolution.

WISCON CHRONICLES 2

Logic and Loving Books

Kelly Link and Laurie J. Marks in conversation at WisCon 31

TRANSCRIBED BY NIALL HARRISON

Laurie J. Marks: Would you care to tell people how it happened that you ended up being the editor of my book, when a year ago we hardly knew one another?

Kelly Link: Sure. I knew Laurie's Elemental Logic series as a reader. I'd really loved the first two books, and we had talked to Laurie at some point about how much we loved the books. We knew there had been a holdup in bringing the third book out and wanted her to realize that we would love to publish the books, but we may have said it in such a way that it sounded as if we were merely being polite. Although, publishers are never polite about that: when they offer to buy a book, they mean it. But there came a point where Laurie got back in touch with Gavin, and we realized the book might end up published without us being as involved as we wanted to be, so we reiterated our keen interest in publishing the book. And we published it. As the editor of the book, I would like to hear a bit more about the process of writing a series and also how you feel that this series is different from the kind of novel you were writing before. What sort of progression is it?

Laurie: First of all I didn't want to write a series. I think that's because I did write a series before, and I discovered by the second book that the world that was perfectly adequate for one story was not adequate for two. And I didn't want to be like everybody else, writing a series. So I set out to write *Fire Logic* to stand all by itself.

Kelly: Which it does.

Laurie: Sort of. And that's because, even when I had a publisher for it, I still wasn't planning on writing a series. But as I worked on *Fire Logic* for what seemed like forever — it was only five years, but that's a long time to work on one thing — I gradually figured out what elemental logic was, and it did start to seem pre-ordained that in fact there would be four books. As soon as I thought I was finished with *Fire Logic*, *Earth*

Logic popped up in my head, inadvertently. There it was! And the same thing happened when I was finished with *Earth Logic*, which I also intended to be The End. There had to be four.

Kelly: Maybe I can describe the series a bit, and then you can re-describe it since you probably know it better than I do. But one of the great things about editing books is that you are still reading as a reader, but you also are reading much more closely. As you go through a book a second or third time, you are thinking about coherence and connections that the writer is making. You're in this privileged position that I'm sure most readers would love to be in — not only do you get to see the book before anyone else does, but you get to ask questions of the writer. So: the series. It's fantasy, but it has extremely complicated community dynamics of a kind you don't always see in fantasy narratives. It's not a quest story, although there are elements of a quest. But the novels are really about people having to work together to solve problems — and when I say that, it sounds as though these books might not have the large-scale exciting things that people want when they read for pleasure, and yet they're incredibly pleasurable books in those ways as well. Part of that fact comes from the way the characters are involved in conversations. One of the things you don't see often enough in genre fiction, I think, are the sort of pleasurable conversations where people are helping each other solve problems, and moving the narrative forward by talking as well as by doing. Kim Stanley Robinson does it, you do it, Laurie, a few others, and it's a very satisfying kind of read. In the novels, as you can gather from the titles, there are different kinds of "logic," and there are characters who possess certain powers associated with each kind of logic — which again sounds like it's a familiar trope, but it also involves ways of thinking as well as ways of doing. I'd like to hear you describe the books, Laurie, and see how your description varies from mine.

Laurie: I've been asked to do this a few times, and I truly can't. It must be the dilemma of being the person who's really on the inside of the series, that with every attempt I make to explain what happens or what it is, I immediately start floundering in uncertainty. Whatever I say can't possibly be true, because there's so many things I'm not saying. I also feel that, in order to talk about one of my books, I really have to tell the whole book, and I've already written it.... So, really, you should all just read it. Is the series defiant of summary? Maybe on one level. People

rescue each other from all kinds of things — there's a summary.

Kelly: Over the course of the series, events in the real world have started to mirror some of the events in the books. At least that's how it seems to me, as a reader. When you've read a book that matters to you a great deal, you interpret the things that are going on in the real world in ways that begin to make connections with what you've read. For example — I will mangle the pronunciation — the Sainnites are people who have come into a country that is not their own — they have been forced out of their own country — and they take over the place they arrive in. They kill many of the people, they make demands, they build garrisons. And the people being taken over begin to fight back. You can see the parallels.

Laurie: It has certain appearances of being good-versus-evil, and then somewhere in the middle it stops being that. I think the distinctions start to become...indistinct. And that's one of the big enlightenments that came to me.... The way these things usually happen is the characters figure it out, and then I catch on. So when one of the characters was looking around at the good guys and wondering, "What's the difference between us and the bad guys?" and not being able to find any difference, I was like, okay! Yes!

Kelly: You've said that one of the places the book came from was looking at countries where the invaded people begin to resist and assimilate, and come to terms, or not, with being invaded and with living with another culture.

Laurie: And I think I was writing against my own romance of resistance movements, and how fantastic they are, because they're full of heroes who are fighting for the just cause, of course! And of course I imagine myself as one of those people — or, I did imagine myself like that in college — but as I acquired more information about the world I started to think, "Well..." Historically speaking, the biggest acts done for the best of reasons have still had extremely bad unintended consequences. My other choice in writing these books was to examine a sense of paralysis: anything we do is going to make the world worse, so we should all go and live on an island. But then of course we'd probably blow each other up. In a lot of ways these books are working through the problem of human violence, and even more important, our human tendency to believe that we're right. Whether or not you're right, that can be a dangerous belief.

Kelly: And yet your books also provide the things that the best genre fantasy provides for me as a reader and an editor. In the last decade or so, I've grown tired of a lot of other traditional fantasies, because they do not seem to me to represent the complexities of the real world, and yet I still really want those narratives, the kinds of interactions and stories that you get in a fantasy novel. And that's why I love your books so much.

Laurie: Can we talk about you now, please?

Kelly: Oh, for a little while.

Laurie: I've noticed about Kelly that she doesn't like talking about herself — you'd rather talk about books, right?

Kelly: Yes.

Laurie: But if it's your books, is that OK?

Kelly: Well, we can try...

Laurie: I heard a rumor that maybe you have another collection coming out...?

Kelly: Yes, I have a collection coming out next year. Sharyn November's the editor, so it'll be under the Penguin family of books, and it will be a collection of young adult stories. There will be two stories from *Magic for Beginners*, and one from *Stranger Things Happen*, and the others will be stories that have come out in the last couple of years, mostly in YA anthologies. And I will write one new story.

Laurie: When I was injured and ended up having to spend many tedious weeks first in the acute ward of the hospital and then in a rehab hospital — which I almost immediately started calling “prison” — people sent me things that were often incredibly insightful. One of the things you sent me was a box of young adult books, which turned out to be the only thing I could read. What is it about YA? For one thing, I don't think of your stories as being young adult stories, because I read them exactly the same as any other stories I read. So what is it about that particular group of readers that you like?

Kelly: There are a couple of ways I should approach that. One thing is that a YA story is just a story that a young adult will read and like. Or — and I'm cribbing from Sharyn November here — YA is a story in which the protagonist is either in their teens and experiencing things for the first time, or sometimes, and especially in fantasy novels, is an older person who is again experiencing something brand-new to them. It might be a secret power they discover, or a responsibility...they're

usually stories about people who are moving from one sphere into another sphere. I find that a pretty useful description. And then, fairly recently, I saw a panel which had a number of young adult writers and editors on it, and someone asked, “What isn’t YA? What can’t you do?” They looked at each other and eventually said, “You can’t be boring, and no bestiality.” So YA is a very broad category.

Laurie: I’m writing YA!

Kelly: I do think that if I’d read your books as a teenager I would have loved them, because there are characters who are moving from one sphere to another, and who have to solve problems that are new to them. The other way of approaching this whole question is that, as well as reading Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, which were read to me by my parents when I was old enough to read for myself, the books that I was really drawn towards were young adult anthologies — things like E. Nesbit’s ghost stories. When I went back and looked at the children’s section of the bookstore in my twenties, I started thinking about that again, and it seemed to me that the model I want for myself — I don’t write like her, but the career model I aspire towards — is Joan Aiken’s. She moved back and forth between categories, short work to long work, adult to picture book to young adult.

Laurie: I’m thinking about your stories. Those that do remain very vivid to me are those that have young people who are floundering around. I think I must find that particularly appealing because I feel that’s what I’m doing — the floundering — but the experience of reading your stories, the disorientation, the struggle to make it make sense, which is sometimes both pleasant and a little frustrating, is forcing me into this mindset of a teenager. It doesn’t make sense. Random things happen.

Kelly: Maybe, again, this is partly because of these things I read and loved as a child — I didn’t understand all of it. I would digest the parts that were accessible to me at one point, and then I would mull over the stuff that I didn’t understand. Or if it didn’t seem interesting I’d dismiss it, but keep what I enjoyed from the work.

Laurie: So would someone have said you were reading things that were too old for you? “You can’t read that book!”

Kelly: When you first begin to read, unless you are a very different kind of reader than I think most people here probably are, you read books in which you don’t know all the vocabulary. So you begin to learn

words because of the cluster in which they appear: you discover concepts you don't understand, but as you continue to read, you pick them up.

Laurie: Lots of examples.... This is the new thing I've learned about teaching this year – give kids lots of examples, and they'll figure it out. And you and I have very similar parents. My parents also read to me, for instance. In fact, for my parents it was a requirement: you had to sit there and listen to what was being read, and it almost always was a fantasy story. I don't know why – I'd have to ask my mother, and she's not here, although your mother is, and I'm very jealous. My father loved science fiction. As I recall, the first science fiction writer I read was Edgar Rice Burroughs. But I also read *The Three Musketeers*. There are three volumes about the Musketeers, by the way, and I have read all of them, including all the sex that they take out of the popularized versions of the story. And this was when I had no idea what sex was, and I had no idea what the characters were so worked up about....

Kelly: Talking about parents: my mom is here, but I should say my dad and my stepmom are also here, so possibly they know more about this period in my life than I do. But one of the things I do remember is when the miniseries of *Roots* was going to be on the television, my mom said that if I wanted to watch it I should read the book first. Or, she at least gave me the book, so that I would appreciate it more. That was a great thing to do.

Laurie: I'm sure your mother had learned by that point that if she gave you a book you would read it.

Kelly: We would go see friends, and I would pick through their libraries when I ran out of things to read. I don't know about you, but it didn't matter to me whether books were good or bad. I had other criteria. When I've gone back and read some of the books I really loved as a kid, some of them suck, and some of them are terrific, and there are the really interesting ones where I assumed they would suck, but in actual fact they have a certain amount of vigor and life to them still.

Laurie: I read *Jane Eyre* when I was nine, maybe, and loved it, and I still love it to this day – but for totally different reasons. Whereas the *Chronicles of Narnia* were also really important to me, and now I find them sort of tiresome. I keep wanting different things from the world. Some books are so large and complicated that they can continue to give you new things, and some books just aren't.

Kelly: I need to go back. I love Narnia. I've read those books over and over again. I taught last Spring, and it was a very basic low-level English course, writing and reading, and I could make up the syllabus, and the first book that I put on the syllabus was *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. One of the things I still love about it is how much space he leaves for the reader. It's a very spare book in some ways — the thing that he spends the most time describing is meals. He will say that there's a battle, but there's not a lot of description of it. He lays out certain really beautiful scenes that stick with me. Howard Waldrop has an exercise where he asks writers to write down the scene that sticks with them from childhood, the essential thing they remember. What I wrote down a couple of years ago, and still think about once in a while, is the snow queen's sleigh, and the sound of the bells, and that landscape.

Laurie: As you talk about it, the entire image is coming into my head, and I know that's an image that's very old indeed. And certainly those books have a great power. The back of the wardrobe as an entrance to some surprising unexpected place... I've always loved the backs of closets. I didn't know what a wardrobe was, I'd never seen one — although I'd figured out that you hung clothes in it — but the backs of closets and me....

Kelly: And the sight of a row of heavy coats, you feel you could put your hand through them and feel your way into a forest.

Laurie: We love the same books, Kelly.

Kelly: One of the other things that we've talked about recently is working methods. I'm a short story writer — I like to read novels, but I don't write them. And one of the things you say about your working method is one of the things that horrifies me most about the idea of writing a novel — which is that you say that you write in order to throw things away.

Laurie: It's all about getting to the second draft.

Kelly: Could you talk about that a little? In such a way that I will feel more comfortable with it and less horrified?

Laurie: What is horrifying about it — other than that on the surface it looks like wasted effort? Or is that it?

Kelly: I find writing difficult enough to start with. The idea that you are writing with the knowledge that none of that, or almost none of that, will be in what you end up with is worrying. It seems to me that it

would take ten years to write a novel, and you know, in ten years I can write ten short stories.

Laurie: Surely more than ten.

Kelly: In some decades.

Laurie: Well, if you would give up all that other stuff you're doing, like running a business and teaching courses and travelling all over the world — all of which I wish I could do. But what I can do is throw things away. I used to be *very* good at it, but now I'm only good at it with my writing. I think I'm able to do it because that's the habit I formed when I started writing. I was young, I didn't know what was worth keeping — I wasn't even thinking in that way — so I would write something and think, "Oh, that's kind of cool, but if I do something else I could make it even cooler." And the doing something else would change things so much that I'd have to totally redo the whole story. And that, actually, is a definition of the difference between revising and editing that really makes sense to me. When you're editing, it only affects the particular piece you're working on, but when you're revising, if you change something it changes everything. I know there are some people in the world who can begin a project with the whole thing in their head, but my head won't hold those kind of things. So I write things down, and when they're written down it makes them real to me, and I can see what I could do next. When I say I write things and throw them away, that's really a shorthand — I write things so that I can see what it is I want to do. And then I can do it. With that knowledge in mind, and knowing that I'm writing 500-page manuscripts, it's clear that I would never finish anything if I wrote slowly and threw it all away, so I write really fast. I'm that way because I don't have to worry about it — why would I worry about something I'm going to throw away? It's very freeing, and since a first draft is really hard, why make it harder by adding worry?

Kelly: That sounds much more attractive, writing in order to get to where you want. I have that problem, and I solve it by not writing until I force myself to think for a while.

Laurie: I know a lot of writers, students, professionals, who find writing so hard that they don't do it or can't make themselves do it, and I think it's mostly because they're trying to go from nothing to a finished product in one magical moment. Like going from a clean kitchen to a baked cake in one move. That metaphor falls apart fairly quickly because you don't throw away the ingredients to get to the cake, but

still. You don't want to waste your effort, but if your choice is to not write at all or write in a wasteful way, the wasteful way starts looking not totally insane. Here's another metaphor: walking on rocks across a river. Once you've stepped on the rock and have left it behind, that doesn't make that rock irrelevant. You couldn't have reached the next rock without it. I try to think of my manuscript drafts in that way — not trash, but the thing I step on to get to the next thing. And I don't actually throw them away, they just sit there. These are not small piles: I'm talking feet.

Kelly: How many feet, for a novel like *Water Logic*? Five feet? Eight?

Laurie: It depends on the novel. For *Water Logic*, since I had to suddenly finish it, it didn't have the time to acquire quite as much paper. So the *Water Logic* pile is probably only about three feet tall. It used to be that I was printing copies of all my manuscripts for people in my writer's group, and then I would get them back with comments — it's amazing how quickly that makes your pile grow.

Kelly: Let's talk a bit about workshops. I think both of us are quite dependent on community, on reading other writers and having other writers read our work.

Laurie: So tell me about your group.

Kelly: This has been a bad year for writing, although a great year for other things. But in a good year I meet up with a writer named Holly Black, we sit in a cafe for as many hours as we can, she works on something and I work on something at the same time, we sit across from each other.

Laurie: That is one of the coolest things I've ever heard. Why do you do it?

Kelly: Well, it works. I used to do it in Brooklyn with Shelley Jackson. I think the first time I tried it I was in California, and Karen Joy Fowler and Stan Robinson had been doing this for a while, meeting to work in the same space. I was surprised, because I thought that writers were supposed to isolate themselves. Part of it is just the feeling that someone else is working really hard, and you will look bad if you're not working hard as well. But it's also very companionable. Even the mildly competitive feeling is companionable. And then, when I get stuck in something, I can talk about it — again, there's this myth that you don't talk about something before it's finished. But Holly and I, although we're interested in the same kinds of things, we don't write much like each

other, and we don't necessarily think the same way. So if I describe the thing I can't quite articulate sometimes she can put her finger on it, and say it back to me in a way that's different enough that I can see how to tackle it, and I hope I do the same thing for her. And I think workshoping does that, but with a larger number of people — when I can I also workshop with Delia Sherman and Ellen Kushner.

Laurie: Your cafe-writing sounds similar to what happens in my writer's group, which has four people in it.

Kelly: And I've been to John Kessel's workshop, Sycamore Hill. And in some ways it helps me feel that this is what I'm working towards, because these are some of the writers I love to read the most. I want to hear what it is that I'm not doing, I want to hear what they have to say. And I want a chance to talk about other peoples' work, too.

Laurie: I'm monogamous with my writer's group. But we've been together for eleven years, which is kind of amazing. I have felt as though I couldn't possibly have learned to write without them. Even though I had published several books before I met them, I feel like I didn't really start learning to write until then. It wasn't just me throwing things away any more, it was me showing these things to these people and then throwing away. They could tell me what I was doing, right away, and help me to imagine what I could be doing. As you said, diversity helps, that we are different people and writing very different things.

Kelly: It's that thing people say about science fiction, which is a small enough field that for many decades now it has been in some ways a conversation between writers. Writers respond to others' work with their own work. Before I realized that you were in the same group, I had read Rosemary Kirstein's books and loved them — and you're different writers, but when I read your books I saw certain similarities in the way you thought and approached some things.

Laurie: This is the measure of an incredibly good reader, that you can pick that up. What was it? I'm curious.

Kelly: I think that it was the approach towards problem-solving, and the attention to language. You're both writing novels that are in some ways very deeply immersed in traditional genre forms, but you're doing new things in those genres.

Laurie: I can see that. Rosemary is one of my favorite writers, and has become more so because I understand her work much more deeply

because I read it repeatedly. Every time I read it I have to say something about it – I suppose this is the editor’s experience, reading to respond. You seem to like that.

Kelly: One of the wonderful things about editing books is that I’m fairly sure my work changes depending on the work that I’ve been editing. So I haven’t been writing, but when I begin to write there will be trace elements of the things that stuck out towards me in other work, things I got stuck on. They will change the way that I write.

Laurie: I’m thinking about my relationship with Rosemary more, and I think it has been a very fertile relationship for me, because in some ways she and I are both analytical writers. Even though she is writing science fiction and I am not, I began loving science partly because of my experience of reading her books about people who love science. So I think her work has changed the way I’m living, and of course the way you live feeds into the way you write.

Kelly: I think of it as certain kinds of work you read change the way you see for a while. Gavin always talks about the effect of reading Stan Robinson’s work, and how you begin to see the world differently for a while, the way Stan’s characters see it. I think perhaps writers are especially susceptible to this, and that it comes out when you work as well. Anyway...you have a novel that you’re thinking about writing, am I right? Called *The Cunning Man*? Which I would love to read.

Laurie: I would love to read it too! I’m working on *Air Logic*, and also on *The Cunning Man*, and on a textbook, and I’m teaching a lot, and the problem I have with my life is obvious: there’s not enough life for the stuff. How about you? I suspect you have the same problem.

Kelly: Yes. I haven’t had a lot of time for writing in about a year and a half now, but I feel that I hit a point, maybe two years ago, where it seemed to me the kinds of stories I write and the kinds of models for stories that I started out with, which were not terribly conventional models, started to feel too much like a safety net. I think the danger, especially working in unconventional forms, is that the lack of variation becomes more apparent the more you write. And this is a thing I don’t think people hear when they start to write, which is the better you get at doing certain kinds of things, the faster you have to give things up, or the work begins to lose energy. You start reaching for things because you know how to do them rather than because they’re essential. So what I decided was that I would try to learn how to use more conven-

tional tools to figure out the stuff I had skipped the first time around — because I couldn't figure it out first time around. Like worldbuilding. If I'd known that I was meant to be worldbuilding... Holly Black said that she learned everything she needed to know about writing from playing D&D, but I never played D&D. So I thought that by going backwards for a bit I would find new things to do.

Kelly Link and Laurie J. Marks were the guests of honor at WisCon 31.

Kelly Link is the author of many award-winning short stories, collected in *Stranger Things Happen* (2001) and *Magic For Beginners* (2005). With her partner, Gavin J. Grant, she is cofounder of Small Beer Press and publisher of the twice-yearly literary zine *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*. Grant and Link also edit the fantasy portion of *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* (St. Martin's Press).

Laurie J. Marks is the author of eight fantasy novels to date, including *Dancing Jack*, *The Watcher's Mask*, the Children of the Triad series, and the award-winning Elemental Logic series: *Fire Logic*, *Earth Logic*, and *Water Logic*. Her essays and book reviews have appeared in the *SF Revu* and other journals, and she teaches composition, creative writing, and science fiction at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She lives in Boston with her partner, Deb Mensinger. *Water Logic* was published by Small Beer Press in 2007, and she is currently at work on *Air Logic*.

Niall Harrison edits reviews for *Strange Horizons* and features for *Vector*. He also writes reviews for a whole bunch of places, and blogs at vectoreditors.wordpress.com. WisCon 31 was his first WisCon, and he'd like to go to more.

WisCon, 2018

M. J. HARDMAN

What do you think the cutting-edge political issues at WisCon will be in ten years?

Ah — “think” — and I wonder if I shall be among those who in 2018 shall see how accurate we were! A most interesting notion — like a verbal time-capsule. So, “think” — hope, expect, predict, *inter alia*. All quite different.

Extrapolating from the “progress” we’ve made since the ’60s, I would *expect* that there would be a continuing round of minor modifications, still attempting to encompass women as full people into a structure where that is not the assumption; so, panels on combining family and writing, modifications of religious practice to include women, modifications of legal stuff — and how to enforce it when recognized, and how sf can help in all this, and which works of fiction this year did a good job of it, is what I would *expect*.

What I would *hope* is quite different. I would *hope* that there would be a sea change, that the full humanity of women would come to be so accepted that it no longer needs arguing or defending, that women’s work would be judged on a human scale, one not linked to white men’s accomplishments but to that of all humanity. In that case, I would *hope* to see the political issues being the details of how, in language, we continue (obliviously or ignorantly) to recreate that which we have now rejected, or ways in which we do not create that which we have now accepted. I would *hope* that my work with linguistics postulates *inter alia*, together with that of others within WisCon already present, would be tools of making fully real in every day language this sea change, where the old arguments of PC are forgotten and we actually take seriously the power of language. I *hope* that the major political issue would be holding our politicians and public officials accountable for the effects of their language in detailed ways. I would *hope* that the political issue would be the withdrawal of deniability as a privilege of power — and that such would have become a regular trope within SF.

However, as a *prediction* there is one overwhelming political issue, already raising its head:

Water.

I rather *expect* that it will become a trope within sf, the way the collapse of cities has become. I *predict* that whatever else one is talking about, one will have to take into account “water.” I *predict* that the issues that today circle around race and sex will be circling around water, and who does and doesn’t get it, and at what cost. I expect the usual suspects will be on the thirsty list, and that the major political issue will be how to get water for those not in power. It is likely still to be variants of race and sex, of course, but now focused on water.

M. J. Hardman is an anthropological linguist, Professor of Linguistics and Anthropology at the University of Florida. Her field work has been primarily in the Andes Mountains with the Jaqi languages, for which she has written grammars, teaching materials, and cultural studies, and she is currently involved in making that legacy available on the Internet. She also teaches courses dealing with perception, language, gender, and violence. Part of her research work in language and gender has included the exploration of metaphors and the patterning of worldsense in language and science fiction.

Reflections on WisCon 31, 2007

MARK RICH

Lovely mundane moments...something to ground the shimmering of unreality over events where all too many friends stayed up too late the night before. Really, a hotel full of some of the sharpest people in the world who are not at their sharpest. Sometimes. Yet things roll along, and brightness intrudes...as I heard in the words (uttered behind me and above my line of vision: for I was fixed upon making sure the cooler in the Con Suite was draining just into the bucket, not onto the carpet) of some morning creature who had just set her eyes upon nearly unutterably joy-producing visions of the just-waking hours, after finding hot water and tea bags: "Oh! There's real sugar... wow. And a plastic spoon! Hooray!" I quote that as nearly exactly as I can, knowing the element at WisCon with a penchant for academic precision. Someone here at the convention was made happy by this shimmery vision. Real sugar, plastic spoon. All the water drained off the ice into the bucket, without spilling: another vision of happiness. I had made myself useful. Martha and I were expressing how grateful we were for the great many hotdogs consumed at WisCon 30, when we were just buying a house and had appallingly few pennies to spend, on food or anything else; we were expressing it by helping out in the Con Suite on what one of our supervisors called the Least Healthy Breakfast of the Con, which meal arrived upon the table in wide, shallow cardboard boxes. Chocolate, coconut, peanut, cinnamon-sugar...ring doughnuts and dough swirls and sweetness-filled dough disks, to be arranged alongside the peanut butter, apples, bananas, and snipped-apart bunches of grapes. These Con Suite people were doing their job well, for people were arriving and finding quick sustenance and then disappearing toward programming items, eager to feed another, less-tangibly-to-be-satisfied hunger for insights and ideas. Some reappeared in a room where four panelists were warming lustily to the notion of speaking knowledgeably and perhaps feelingly about vampire romance. The moderator smiled benignly upon the crammed-tight sardines of her audience, thinking she would soon engage them

all in a thoughtful exploration of the phenomenon of recent times, in which vampires have become romanticized. Isn't it curious? These monsters? Sexy? Interesting, isn't it? Dreamily so, apparently: for the romancers, pushed along by the force of million-copy bestsellers, won the hour over from the curious-about-society moderator, while the audience swooned. I am making all this up, although Timmi said something of the sort happened. She was the moderator — and survivor, we saw when we ran into her later: not drained from the experience; not pale. She would return to conquer eventually, I supposed. Since she was wearing something black with wide collar I asked if she had turned it up, to evoke your standard vampire's extravagant cape. Had not thought of it: next time, maybe. It might have worked for that audience. Might have let her turn the conversation her way, by means of a silly Signifier. I am with her, in thinking it more interesting to look at what it means to be part of a culture in which the charnel monster smells of Chanel...although there is something to be said for the sweetly gooeey, as when a breakfast is Least Healthy, or as when culinary transformation renders Lovecraftian horror into marshmallow Cthulhu Peeps, a transformation to be seen and tasted at the Diversicon party on the last night of the convention. The sweetness reveals the essential silliness. Something of the opposite happened to Rick Bowes, walking onto a panel thinking he would be engaging in polite discussion on the dilute topic of policemen characters in fiction, only to discover, to his delight, that the panel faced an enlightened and enlightening room full of real law-enforcement. Audience contributions grounded and made real an engaged discussion. I suppose such reversals are par for the course: no one knows where a panel will go. Not moderator, not panelist, not audience. Certainly not those who are not even present. Martha and I certainly had zero idea where any of the panels went, our convention having turned into one in which we gave our time over to volunteering far more than we expected — and also to hanging out supportively with a small-press publisher facing a tough passage in his life. All making for a fine weekend, of course, community being what it was all about. I can only imagine what was going through the mind of guest-of-honor Kelly Link, in terms of where-things-go. She stood behind the Small Beer table when we arrived at WisCon — and again the moment we left, days later. Guest of honor? It must mean being feted and pampered and appreciated: and here she was alongside Gavin as

part of an editing and publishing enterprise...and this meant she was hard at work, apparently the whole time. Standing before us all, yes, indeed – applauded, lifted, put at ease, toasted...when perhaps the unshimmery reality is that she, by providing a focus of attention, was the one Atlas-like holding the rest of us up by her mere presence. She took part in seven programming items, according to the WisCon Program Pocket Book index – a number equaled by that cheerful character, Duchamp, and exceeded only by the astonishing eleven for Laurie J. Marks (the other GOH). In reality there were eight and twelve items for the GOH duo, respectively, since their GOH speeches were not indexed. What strength in those GOH arms, raising aloft the rest of us! Both of them were involved in a Saturday night party, to add to their nonstop labors. “Really being worked hard this convention,” or words to that effect, fell upon our ears as a figure appeared and then disappeared near us, who gave the impression of being Link. Such disappearances mark these WisCons: think of all the faces in the halls: you see that expression of someone looking for someone else who is puzzlingly not there...the face of Carol Emshwiller, who looked tiny in an oversize chair in the lobby while the hordes around her went trooping off to supper, and while she awaited the appearance of that cheerful (here she is again) Aqueductian. Looking, wondering: that vague worry. Disappearing, recurrently: like a certain small-press publisher who thought the convention ran Thursday to Saturday instead of Friday to Monday, and whose table we ended up watching. Yet reappearing, at odd moments. Sunday night in the Diversicon party I was sitting with a Pan and a Patrick; and it must have been past midnight when Link appeared in a chair beside us, her hands reaching for the cooler. In her expressive face was a look of what truly seemed apology as she said to me, “This is my first beer all day.” She must have felt badly for not having been still working: you get into these grinds, don’t you know, and you cannot believe it when things cease grinding. Or maybe her expression was just of sad and weary realization: first drink, so late. Then she sat with us, not so much engaging in conversation as recovering from a tough con, alternating sips of beer with bites of the Cthulhu Peeps bunched in her other hand.

Mark Rich is an artist, musician, and writer of poetry and prose.
His stories have appeared in *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*,

Electric Velocipede, Talebones, Analog, SF Age, and other major magazines. Some have been collected in a chapbook from Small Beer Press (2003) and a collection from Wordcraft of Oregon (1991). We do not understand why Wikipedia insists he is an international commodities trader, and we think someone should rectify this situation immediately.

WisCon, 2018

NICOLA GRIFFITH

What do you think the cutting-edge issues will be at WisCon in ten years?

Access.

Politics has always been about access: to power, to money, to decision-makers and decision-making, to information, to basic needs. How access works is changing.

For example, digital distribution — the direct access of content creators to their audience — is changing the entertainment and education world. Writers have the opportunity to seize their own distribution and retail. At least for a little while. Will we be brave enough and quick enough?

Political debate, the access of voters to their candidates' thought process, is less controllable in the digital age — without YouTube we might have had Howard Dean as President. But can we make that access two-way? Will we find a way to have input on decision-making?

Assuming we're lucky enough to live a long, long time, we are only temporarily able-bodied. We are an aging population. Soon those of us who have always been fit and strong will start encountering what those of us who are physically compromised already experience: the 'accessible' bathrooms with doors that are impossible to open unless one is strong; 'no barrier' conferences with panelists sitting on a raised stage; acquaintances who say, 'Sure, the whole house is level entry, once you've, y'know, climbed the stairs to the front door.'

Access, like feminism itself, is relative. We all have to stay open to the challenge: ask for more from those who have it, help those who have less.

Nicola Griffith is a British science fiction author, editor, and essayist. Griffith is a 1988 alum of the Michigan State University Clarion science fiction writing workshop and has won a Nebula Award, the James Tiptree Jr. Award, the World Fantasy Award,

and five Lambda Literary Awards. She is the author of five novels, and of a multi-media autobiography, *Now We Are Going to Have a Party*. She lives in Seattle, Washington.

“Because we are all so royal”: the Carl Brandon Society party at WisCon 31

NISI SHAWL

Around two wide tables, hands of every human color busied themselves with glittering stars, garlands of flowers, and small silhouettes of rocket ships punched from brightly colored foam. It was Friday night at the Madison Concourse Hotel, and WisCon guests were engaged in one of my favorite pastimes: creating our own crowns.

I facilitated with wire-cutters, offering here a faux stuffed bird, there a dangling strand of beads. Some people wanted me to design their entire crowns; others wanted only a consultant.

The party’s hosting organization, the Carl Brandon Society, also offered refreshments and blank membership/donation forms. There was an iPod mix contest, too, with books by non-white authors as prizes (a logical choice, since the CBS advocates for increased racial representation in the genre). But crowns were the evening’s focal point. They made engaging with incomers much easier. Rather than asking for money, we offered them something tangible: a physical representation of their highest selves.

Dimas Bautista, a CBS member for whom English is a third language, sparkled with joy and conviviality as he became more and more engrossed in this creative, non-verbal means of communication.

At one point CBS co-founder MJ Hardman introduced me to an African American woman I’d never met before, Rosalyn Berne. I grew excited as she explained the setting and premise of her novel-in-progress. Weaving a wreath of pink roses, we pieced together our literary connection: I was familiar with Rosalyn’s unpublished book, though her name was new to me, because I had served as a reader for a women’s writing residency where she applied. We finished our work and Rosalyn asked, “Why crowns?”

The answer came out easily: “Because we are all so royal.”

Rosalyn seemed satisfied. What I had said felt true. It was true. It still is. But reflecting on the party, the crowns, and the question, has made me want to expand on my response.

Crowns and me go way back. In 1977, I asked an admirer to make a crown for me. He braided together three half-rounds of sterling silver, bent the result into a circle, and soldered the ends to a flat piece that always caught in my hair. It was too large, anyway. I didn't wear it much.

In 1993, I was working at the first Borders Book Store in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Store One's General Manager told his Assistant Managers they probably ought to promote me — "if we can just get her to stop wearing a tiara." The tiara in question was a wire circlet twined with pearls and sprays of gauzy white flowers. It fit much better than the silver one. I wore it every day for months. Why not? White goes with everything.... In the end, I got my promotion despite my unusual headgear.

I had been given this particular crown by an elder, a female priest of Ifa, the African religious tradition I follow. Crowns resonate deeply in this tradition, and it's from Ifa that I derive much of my understanding of why making crowns is so important to me, and so emblematic of my memories of WisCon 31.

Ifa is a West African-based religious philosophy, the root of New World practices such as Santeria and Vodun. In Ifa cosmology, one's spiritual health is tied to being in balance, in alignment with, and clearly connected to, one's highest self. This connection is maintained via one's "ori" — literally one's head, connotatively one's consciousness. Thus, what one places on one's physical head can heighten or diminish the ori's efficacy as a conduit to one's highest self, one's meta-consciousness. When I wear a crown I emphasize and support my own divine nature.

The word I used in answering Rosalyn's question was "royal," not divine. But these two concepts are closely related in West African thought (and in non-Christian European mythologies concerning "sacred kingships" also). Contemporary Nigerian "obas," or chiefs, serve a religious function as well as a political one.

Within the house in which I practice Ifa, royalty is also viewed as the state of being sovereign over one's own self. This is a highly desirable state, especially given that many of us are African Americans and

descendants of those whose legal right to claim self-sovereignty was won relatively recently.

These are some of my reasons for wearing crowns. Why give them to others, though? Why help others create them for themselves?

The answers to these questions have to do with a particular concept of intersubjectivity, and with a certain established rule for practicing magic.

As a linguistic term, intersubjectivity means only that independent agents are able to agree upon what they are communicating to one another. In philosophy, however, it can refer to the “co-creation of loci of subjectivity;”† in other words, the idea that we make ourselves who we are through relating to one another as subjects rather than as objects.

The magical rule I mentioned above is sometimes known as “The Law of Three.” It basically posits that whatever intentions one directs outward will return to the sender *threefold*. It sets up a very special sort of reactivity between those acting as magical agents and the cosmos within which they act. A ritual designed to increase financial abundance, for instance, will often include the celebrant giving someone else money. In this way she or he provides the powers being petitioned with a model for the desired results.

In keeping with these modes of thought, then, I invoke my royal self by recognizing it in others.

Some leftists tell me they are put off by my affinity for the concept of royalty. They associate the word with hierarchy and dominance. But if all are equally royal, there is no hierarchy. If royalty is acquired through granting it to others, there is no dominance.

WisCon hosts the James Tiptree Jr. Literary Award every other year. Winners wear a tiara, and that forms a connection between crowns and the convention for most people. This is the exact opposite of a problem. Rather than undermining the royal status of Tiptree Award recipients by denying them exclusivity, those of us who in 2007 created and displayed our own royal accoutrements validated and supported the winners’ existence as our fellow sovereigns.

The CBS party was followed by two-and-a-half more days of WisCon 31. I was touched and pleased to see that many partygoers continued to wear their crowns throughout the long weekend. I carried my own crown, a spangly, galaxy-like rainbow swirl, through several airport

security checkpoints, and can do it as I reminisce about WisCon 31, my meeting with Rosalyn Berne, and the smiling faces of those celebrating with me our innate and irreducible royalty.

† Christian de Quincy, “Intersubjectivity,” www.deepspirit.com/systempl/intersubjectivity/

Nisi Shawl, co-author of *Writing the Other: A Practical Approach*, has published short stories in venues including *Asimov’s Science Fiction* and *So Long, Been Dreaming* and has a collection of short fiction, *Filter House*, from Aqueduct Press.