

Worlds Of Imagination NEWSLETTER

Speculative Fiction Writers Association

SPRING 2024 EDITION

Greetings from the Speculative Fiction Writers Association. We hope your 2024 is off to a good start. Our group focuses on all things speculative fiction, from the latest fantasy books on the shelves, to science fiction epics on the big screen, to interesting and long-awaited adaptations coming to TV. We hope you enjoy this edition of Worlds of Imagination, our quarterly newsletter.

In This Newsletter...

- Meet our Member: Bruce Schindler
- Rebecca Yarros' *Fourth Wing* Reviewed by JK Washer
- Editorial, Hugo Awards Bow to Chinese Censorship by Matthew Cushing
- Latest Member News, including two stories published and a cover reveal
- Sci-Fi Lingo, *Dune*
- On Our Website, *The Importance of Sensitivity Readers* by Naomi Jacobs

MEET OUR MEMBER

Bruce Schindler



What inspired you to start writing?

In high school, a short humorous story of mine was read aloud in class and received a positive reaction. I started writing poetry and science fiction stories, even while deployed to Vietnam in the Army, though none were published. I was also a photographer/editor in the public affairs detachment of the Wyoming Army National Guard. After my wife died, I remarried a horse lady and moved to Nebraska. She saw my efforts to train a filly and suggested my body would better tolerate writing. To get me into writing mode, she signed me up for NaNoWriMo, which committed me to write at least 50,000 words in November.

She did this on October 28. I had no clue about anything to write. Despite that and the holiday, I won the challenge. This ultra-rough draft became the basis of *Dust & Cannibals*, my second book. Along the way, I wrote a piece for a book of collected Vietnam stories entitled *TANS*.

Why do you like speculative fiction?

As a pre-schooler I learned to read above my grade level. That led to my first exposure as a third grader reading a fifth or sixth grade book from the school library about a family building a spaceship in their backyard and flying to the moon. This was in 1953, and I've been hooked ever since. My dad worked in aerospace, which also kept me looking at the sky and beyond, and copies of *Aviation Week* kept my imagination alive. College courses introduced me to Jorge Luis Borges and his magical realism, expanding my thoughts further.

What are your interests and influences?

To name a few, I attended thirteen elementary schools in five states and got good at taking IQ tests, which were all the rage. I settled down when it was time for high school and went two years at Tucson HS, which had 5,900 students. My graduating class at California High School in Central Missouri had sixty-four. My interest in flying got me within two weeks of an Air Force commission at University of Missouri, but they released me from duty in 1966. I enlisted in the Army in 1967, which resulted in thirty months in Vietnam. After I got out, there were several jobs, including a finance company, and an experimental tomato greenhouse in Tucson. My time spent in the hospitality business felt like its own lifetime, working for properties in Arizona, including one owned by the White Mountain Apache Tribe, followed by hotels in New Mexico and Wyoming. Escaping the hotel business, I joined the Wyoming National Guard, first on weekends and later full-time, retiring as a soldier in 1999 and as a civilian in 2004. Since 2005, I've been on a small ranch in Nebraska with a blonde horse lady learning to speak equine.

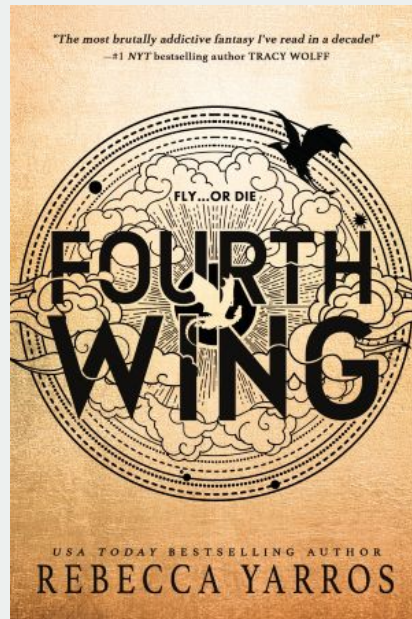
What are your novels and where can readers find them?

My main series is *Dust & Cannibals*, a post-apocalyptic western set in south-central Nebraska. Book 1: *Dust & Cannibals*; Book 2: *Mud & Horizons*; Book 3: *Snow & Sanity*; Book 4: *Fog & Fate*. Other works include *The LaGrange Legacy* and *Touch Stones*.



Amazon <https://www.amazon.com/stores/Bruce-I-Schindler/author/B004WTRAIU>

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/BruceISchindler/>



Not Your Mama's Dragonriders

Rebecca Yarros' *Fourth Wing* Reviewed by JK Washer

First, a kudos to Anne McCaffrey, the Irish science fiction-fantasy writer whose *Dragonriders of Pern* I first read and fell in love with at fourteen. Ms. McCaffrey combined telepathy, peril, dragons and action with a dash of romance into a science fiction-fantasy merger. She took the overarching plot of a world in danger and created a series of sequels and prequels which lasted almost forty years. I always thought she was a great storyteller.

Many dragons have appeared in print and with technological advances on screen since then, among them *The Neverending Story*, *Eragon*, GRR Martin's *Game of Thrones*, and *The Witcher*, as well as in children's animation as in *How to Train Your Dragon* and its sequels.

In 2023, a book emerged called *Fourth Wing*. It won a staggering number of awards. The author is Rebecca Yarros, a member of Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers, who lives in Colorado. She has already sold the movie rights to Amazon Prime.

What makes it special? The blurblet of "Fly...or Die" for starters. Add Dragonriders, telepathy, empathy, sex and language—with a deserved adult rating for both of the last two. This is a far grittier product than Ms. McCaffrey's books. The story follows an unlikely heroine named Violet who is small and weak and eagerly anticipating her education as a scribe and historian. That is, until her mother, a general in the army and commandant of the war college, orders Violet to the dragonriders quadrant. Think fast-paced brutality, the constant specter of death hovers over Violet as the first-year dragon college students must survive physical trials, challenges from other students, and selection and bonding with dragons. Romance and friendships exist between

the humans and bonds between humans and dragons, but even relationships between dragons are complicated.

Strengths of the book include huge world-building, a complex plot with far more magical but far less science fiction elements, complex and sometimes dark inter-familial relationships, lots of action, cliffhangers, plot twists, and overall, the chef's kiss of the very conventional trope that hard work and teamwork are the keys to success... or at least at the Dragon College, to survival. Ms. Yarros' writing reminds me a little of McCaffrey in that storytelling is her forte.

Weaknesses for me include the overarching *déjà vu* of McCaffrey's specter, weak suspension of disbelief in some of the magical areas, repetitive serious injuries, torture, and trite sexual allusions like lightning, thunder and fire-echoing orgasms.

Obviously, given the awards and sales, the combination of elements has been a rousing success. And the book is no quick read at nearly 600 pages—imagine the physical size of one of GRR Martin's or Diana Gabaldon's tomes. One book can substitute as a doorstop any day. Special offerings in early editions included “sprayed pages” in solid black or with white dragon icons peppering the black. These were available to entice hard-copy buyers. An audio-book is available broken into Parts I and II, using a voiced acting cast—that's like 20 hours of audio-book, folks! The novel is also available as an e-book, although I have since purchased hard-copies for those sprayed pages.

The best news is this book is the first of at least a trilogy. The second volume, *Iron Flame*, is already out, and given its blurblet “Burn It Down.” delivers more of all of the above, including more plot twists and cliffhangers.

Fourth Wing is worth the read.

EDITORIAL



Hugo Awards Bow to Chinese Censorship

Though we don't normally include editorial articles - we prefer the focus of our website and newsletter to be on the fun aspects of writing speculative fiction - the recent actions and events surrounding the 2023 Hugo Awards have left me angry and dismayed. As President of the Speculative Fiction Writers Association, I wanted to share my perspective.

For those who don't know, the Hugo Awards are one of the preeminent speculative fiction awards. They call themselves a 'science fiction award', but many of the nominees and winners are clearly in other genres like fantasy, time travel, or even the supernatural. The Hugos date back to the 1950s and are named after Hugo Gernsback, founder of the pioneering sci-fi magazine *Amazing Stories*.

The Hugos are awarded to works based on the voting of members who sign up for the annual World Science Fiction Convention, or WorldCon, though they don't actually need to attend to vote. Any work published within the past year is eligible, and members can nominate up to five works in each category (novel, series, screenplay, short story, etc.) The top six nominees make up the final ballot with a final vote to choose the winner. Though the underlying process is a bit complicated, the results are normally straightforward.

But not last year. With the 2023 WorldCon held in Chengdu, China, organizing members of that convention, either through direct or indirect pressure from the Chinese government, decided to eliminate any work that the Chinese might consider offensive. The public may have never known if not for a requirement that the nominations tally be made public. The WorldCon organizers have 90 days to provide the information, and in every previous WorldCon, the nomination numbers were provided nearly instantly--within hours after the tally was complete.

Not with the WorldCon in China. Organizers waited until the very last day of the 90-day window to provide the nomination results, well after the convention was over and winners announced. But these nomination results showed several works had enough nominations to be on the final ballot but were not included. These omissions affected world-renown authors including R.F. Kuang, Neil Gaiman, and Xiran Jay Zhao. And though none of these works were directly critical of the Chinese Communist regime, their elimination from contention is nothing short of censorship.

The beauty of speculative fiction in all its flavors and genres is its willingness to explore social, economic, and political issues. Censorship and book banning is nothing new to speculative fiction. Ray Bradbury's book *Fahrenheit 451* even explores the issue of banning (and burning) books!

But though it has happened before, censorship has no place in the world of speculative fiction - or any art. People should have the right to read what they want, to think what they want, and to do what they want as long as it doesn't hurt others. Respect and courtesy. There is far too little of each in today's society – which is why telling these stories is so important. And we need to acknowledge those who do it well.

Shame on the Hugos. This certainly tarnishes their quality and reputation in my eyes. To me, they are no longer the pinnacle achievement in speculative fiction. I now look at the Nebula Awards for that distinction.

And shame on China, Russia, North Korea and every regime that oppresses their people and keeps them from thinking for themselves. Totalitarian oligarchs and theocratic dictators are the fuel for our stories, so be warned.

Speculative Fiction is coming for you.



Mr. Cushing has written speculative fiction stories since high school. His works have garnered recognition from both the Roswell Award (an international sci-fi award) and the Gold Rush Literary Awards (a national fiction writers award). He has degrees from UC San Diego and Yale University and is a member of the Triple Nine Society, Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers, and the Speculative Fiction Writers Association. Visit his website at <https://www.matthewcushing.com>

MEMBER NEWS



James RD Hilton Releases New Cover for *Into the Known Universe: A Cosmic Love Story, Kinda*

Into the Known Universe: A Cosmic Love Story, Kinda is a science fiction adventure centering on Stuart Bode, a junior reclamation agent in the employ of GaliCor, the largest supplier of goods and space appliances in the known universe.

He is offered the promotion of his dreams in exchange for tracking down a stolen freighter and retrieving its cargo; unfortunately, the “cargo” turns out to be his boss’ wife, Janna. She wants to see the stars. He just wants his stapler to stop disappearing.

Though their journey into the known universe is just beginning, it’s shaping up to be one hell of a ride.

Into the Known Universe: A Cosmic Love Story, Kinda will be released in May through FriesenPress. Visit <https://www.jamesrdhilton.ca> for more information and updates. To receive a free sample chapter, you're invited to subscribe to his newsletter -- sign up in his website's footer.

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/jamesrdhiltonauthor>

Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/jamesrdhilton/>



Paul Martz Published at Uncharted Magazine

Paul Martz is pleased to announce that his flash fiction piece, “More than Electric Sheep”, has been published online at Uncharted Magazine.

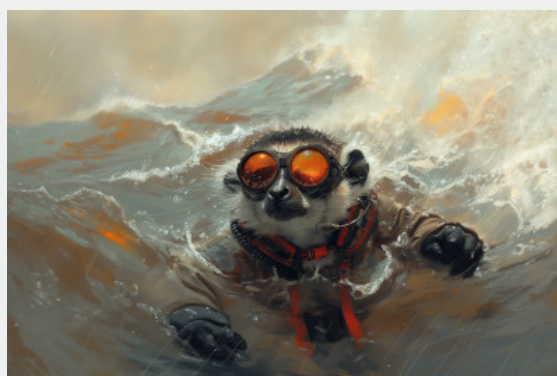
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In under 1000 words, “More Than Electric Sheep” tells the story of Albert, a retired AI with an unfulfilled goal. “But the story isn’t really about AIs,”

Paul says. “It’s about loneliness, isolation, and how we treat the elderly.”

He thanks his critique partners: Jeff Jaskot, Nova Wolf, and especially Naomi Jacobs for the awesome title suggestion.

Read the full story at: <https://www.unchartedmag.com/stories/more-than-electric-sheep/>



Nathan McWayne Published at Sci Fi Shorts

Nathan McWayne announces his short story “Carlin’s Approach” has been published online at Sci Fi Shorts.

“Carlin’s Approach” is a flash fiction story of revenge, justice, and reflection.

Read the full story at: <https://www.scifishorts.co/premium/carlins-approach/a9e07247-2736-4335-99dc-a3fa8a16254e>

SCI-FI LINGO



Terms from the *Dune* Glossary

Bene Gesserit - the ancient school of mental and physical training established primarily for female students after destruction of “thinking machines” and robots

Crysknife - the sacred knife of the Fremen on Arrakis manufactured from the teeth of dead sandworms

Kwisatz Haderach - “Shortening of the Way” The label applied by the Bene Gesserit to the genetically engineered male savior whose mental powers would bridge space and time, aka Paul Atriedes

Lisan Al-Gaib - “The Voice from the Outer World” In Fremen messianic legends, and offworld prophet, aka Paul Atriedes

Melange - the spice on Arrakis that comes from sandworms and allows interstellar space travel

Shai Halud - the great sandworms of Arrakis

ON OUR WEBSITE



Sensitivity Readers: What They Do and Why You Need Them

by Naomi Jacobs

It all began with my fascination with Navajo Code Talkers. Their ability to rapidly send messages in a code they invented, derived from their native language, provided a huge advantage to U.S. Forces in the Pacific Theater during World War II.

I was so excited about them, I wanted to put them in a scene in my novel. I read three books about the Code Talkers, explored the nature of their code, studied Navajo (or Diné) myths, and watched actual footage of them. I researched the name of every single Code Talker who died in battle. I thought I had done a splendid job honoring them.

I was wrong

When I asked a Diné friend to read over the passage, he was so distraught he had his older daughter communicate with me. I had my Code Talkers speak openly of death, but in fact among the Diné, that is a taboo topic. I had one of my characters relate a certain myth, but that myth was only recited in connection with a certain festival. What's more, not every Diné is an actual storyteller. And so on, and so on.

Diversity Matters

Classic sf and fantasy frequently focus on the stories of able-bodied cis het white men. Many speculative writers today, however, would like to write stories with diverse characters. In doing so, one is making a clear statement that our present, past, and future includes a wide range of different kinds of people and cultures...

Read the full post at: <https://specificwriters.com/what-are-sensitivity-readers/#more-3507>

Thanks For Reading!

If you want to know more about the Speculative Fiction Writers Association, read our blog full of articles on writing and critiquing, or learn about our members, please visit us at <https://specficwriters.com>

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