

Western Pennsylvania's longest running
Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror
literary conference returns
for its 32nd year!



Sheraton Pittsburgh Airport Hotel
July 21-23

Karen Yun-Lutz's
Pocket Program

Friday 2 pm: Lobby: Registration Opens

3 pm

Commonwealth West: Forgotten Classics: Science Fiction and Fantasy from the 1950s through the 1980s that You Should Have Read but Probably Haven't

What are the classic novels and short works and great authors that rarely get mentioned these days? Are newer readers familiar with Henry Kuttner? Andre Norton? Patricia McKillip? Who else should be remembered?

Jim Mann (M), Grant Carrington, Mark Tiedeman, Susan Dexter

4 pm

Ballroom 1: Filk Mad Libs

Commonwealth West: The Writing Life: Continuing to Write through Good Times and Bad

Joshua David Bellin, Susan Linville, A.J. Smith, Brandon McNulty (M)

908: Con Suite Opens

5 pm

Ballroom 1: Pegasus Awards Brainstorming Discussion

Commonwealth West: Rewriting the Future: Hopepunk, Solarpunk, and Optimistic SF

Susan Kaye Quinn (M), Ada Palmer, Vera Brook, Scot Noel

The panel looks at optimistic SF and how it can change the future SF imagines and impact our own future.

Commonwealth East: Short Fiction Is Alive and Well

Michael Swanwick, Timons Esaias (M), Lawrence C. Connolly, Elyse Russell

Short fiction was once the center -- almost the only part -- of the SF field. While novels get more notice, short fiction is often still the most vibrant part of the field, a form popular with both established and new authors. What makes short fiction so vital? What are some great recent pieces and where do you find your favorite short fiction.

Ballroom 3 & 4: Dealers Room Opens

6 pm

Ballroom 1: Concert by Greg Stone

Commonwealth West: The New Good Stuff: The Best of Recent SF and Fantasy

Stephen C. Fisher, A.J. Smith (M), Barbara Doran, Brandon Ketchum

The 21st century has given us a number of new SF, fantasy, and horror writers. The landscape is broader and more diverse than ever. Who are the best new writers, and who are some that aren't as well-known but perhaps should be.

Ballroom 2: Art Show Opens

7 pm

Ballroom 1: Opening Ceremonies

Kevin Hayes, W. Randy Hoffman, AJ Smith, Ada Palmer, Sassafrass, Rhiannon's Lark

Ballroom Lobby: Registration Closes

8 pm

Ballroom 1: Concert by Rhiannon's Lark

Commonwealth West: Live Improv Drafting: An "A Many Tale" Experience

Jacob White

Published weekly, A Many Tale follows a mouseling hero cursed to blip through realities and realms in episodic short fiction format. This live writing session will bring the audience into the improvisational sketchbook-style storytelling as author Jacob John White drafts a canon episode live.

Commonwealth East: Poetry Reading

Show up if you want to read poetry or listen to poetry. Those who participate can chose their moderator.

908: Registration reopens in the Con Suite

Ballroom 2, 3/4: Art Show & Dealers Room Close

9 pm

Ballroom 1: Concert by Triforce Quartet

Commonwealth West: Putting Poetry and Music into Your Fiction

Clif Flynt

225: Beer Tasting

Jim Mann, James Walton, Mary Tabasko, John Schmid, Heidi Pilewski

It's Christmas in July. This year we're tasting a selection of winter beers.

10 pm

Ballroom 1: Open Filk Song Circle

Commonwealth West: The Roots of Horror: Ghost Stories from M. R. James to Today

Alan Irvine, Brandon McNulty, Lawrence C. Connolly (M), Amaya Tenshi

Ghost stories are one of the oldest -- maybe THE oldest -- form of horror story. The panel looks at the history of ghost stories, and at who the great writers were and are.

[908] Registration Closes

Midnight [908] Con Suite Closes

Saturday

8am: [908] Con Suite Opens

8:45am: Ballroom Lobby: Registration Opens

9 am

Club Lounge (9th Floor): Writers Workshop: Getting Conflict on the Page and Getting Yourself Through the Muddle in the Middle Sign-up form This workshop runs until 11:50am.

Timons Esaias

Equinox: Writing Exercises: If You Build It, They Will Come (and Go): Exercises for Writing About Place

Joshua David Bellin, M. Christine Benner Dixon

In this one-hour interactive writing session, attendees will focus on strategies for constructing physical and emotional spaces in speculative worlds. Exercises will include world-mapping and developing the connection to place so important to character development. Attendees should bring their favorite writing implement (whether pen or laptop) and a sense of adventure as we take off for the far reaches of the possible and impossible.

10 am

Commonwealth West: The Social Science of Worldbuilding

Marie Vibbert, Frederic Durbin, Charles Oberndorf, Mark Tiedeman, Alan Irvine (M)

Maybe you can create a convincing physical world. But how do you create convincing societies to populate your worlds? How do you build things like economies, histories, cultures?

Commonwealth East: New Directions in Young Adult and Middle Grade SF and Fantasy

Rigel Ailur, Vera Brook, Barbara Doran

Solstice: Reading, Barton Paul Levenson

Equinox: Pitch Session 1

Advance signup required. Pitch your novel to Claire Eddy (virtually), executive editor at Tor Books—one of the leading publishers of science fiction (SF), fantasy, and horror!

225: Kaffeeklatsch with Scot Noel, Herb Kauderer

Ballroom Lobby: Stroll with Geoffrey Landis, Mary Turzillo

Ballroom 2 & 3/4: Art Show & Dealers Room Open

10:30 am

Solstice: Reading with Brandon McNulty

11 am

Commonwealth West: Disability in SF and Fantasy

Rigel Ailur, JL Gribble, Brandon Ketchum

How has SF handled issues of disability over the years? What are good (and bad) examples?

Commonwealth East: Time Travel Then and Now

Albert Wendland, Joshua David Bellin (M), Michael Swanwick, Stephen C. Fisher

Time travel has been a staple of science fiction, at least since H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*.

How has the treatment changed over the years? Have these changes been due to literary reasons or evolving scientific understanding (or both)?

Solstice: Reading with Susan Dexter

225: Kaffeeklatsch with Charles Oberndorf, A.J. Smith

Ballroom Lobby: Autographing with Barbara Doran, Amaya Tenshi

Ballroom 2: Art Show: Beginner's Guide to Nalbinding (2hr)

Nancy Janda

Make a small pouch the way the Vikings made mittens! Using a single needle, learn to use knots to create fabric with this stash-busting craft. Needles and hand-spun wool yarn provided.

Limit: 10 people. \$10 charge for materials. Session runs until 12:50pm. Advance signup required.

11:30 am

Solstice: Reading with Scot Noel

Noon

Ballroom 1: Concert by Summer Russell

Commonwealth West: Matriarchy in SF and Fantasy

Marie Vibbert (M), Susan Kaye Quinn, Cathy Seckman

Commonwealth East: Realistic Martians and Elves? Creating Believable Non-Humans

Grant Carrington, Frederic Durbin, Mary Turzillo, Ken Chiacchia (M)
Writers discuss how they go about creating non-human characters.

Solstice: Reading with Barbara Doran

Equinox: Pitch Session 2

Advance signup required. Pitch your novel to Becky LeJeune, an agent at Bond Literary Agency, a Denver-based agency run by Sandra Bond.

225: Kaffeeklatsch with Brandon Ketchum, Brandon McNulty

Ballroom Lobby: Autographing with Albert Wendland

12:30 pm

Solstice: Reading with Donald Firesmith

1 pm

Ballroom 1: Concert by Bard City

Commonwealth West: 50 Years Ago; The Best SF and Fantasy of 1973

Geoffrey Landis, Mary Turzillo, Stephen C. Fisher, Jim Mann (M)

In 1973, Clarke's *Rendezvous With Rama* won both Hugo and Nebula awards, beating out, among other nominees, *Time Enough for Love*, *The People of the Wind*, *The Man Who Folded Himself*, and *Gravity's Rainbow* (!). Harlan Ellison, Ursula Le Guin, James Tiptree Jr., and Gene Wolfe were among the winners for short fiction. How does the SF (award winners, nominees, and others) of 1973 stand up today.

Commonwealth East: The Future of Medicine and Public Health

Bernadette Harris, Marianne Porter, JL Gribble (M)

Solstice: Reading with A.J. Smith

225: Kaffeeklatsch with Ada Palmer

Ballroom Lobby: Autographing with Greg Frost

Ballroom Lobby: Registration

2024 early-bird memberships go on sale! \$50 full adult & \$25 full child for 2024 if you buy at Confluence.

1:30 pm

Solstice: Reading with Elyse Russell

2 pm

Ballroom 1: Concert by LEX the Lexicon Artist

Commonwealth West: The Impact of AI on SF Writing and SF Art

Scot Noel (M), Ken Chiacchia, Lawrence C. Connolly, Hazel Zorn

Some publishers are already looking at cover art generated by AI, and some magazines are being overwhelmed by AI-generated submissions. How will AI impact SF publishing in the future?

Commonwealth East: Writing and Researching Your Science Fiction

Vera Brook (M), Geoffrey Landis, Greg Frost, Frederic Durbin, Barton Paul Levenson

Hard SF, anthropologica SF, alternate history -- all types of SF can take research to get the details right. The panel discusses the when, how, and why.

Solstice: Reading with Charles Oberndorf

225: Kaffeeklatsch with Rigel Ailur and Grant Carrington

Ballroom Lobby: Autographing with Michael Swanwick, Mark Tiedeman

Art Show: Custom T-shirts

Susan Dexter

Create a custom T-shirt -- or customize your Confluence T-shirt -- using Susan's hand-cut stencils and metallic latex paint. Limit 12 people. Advance signup required. \$5 charge for materials.

2:30 pm

Solstice: Reading with Marie Vibbert

3 pm

Ballroom 1: GoH Talk: The History of Censorship

Ada Palmer

4 pm

Ballroom 1: Concert by Tonks & the Aurors

Commonwealth West: Can't Keep My Eyes from the Circling Skies: Space Projects at the Pittsburgh Supercomputing Center

Ken Chiacchia

How did the Universe begin? What do the weird exoplanets being discovered tell us about our own Solar System? And can humans truly become the spacefaring species that we like to

imagine and love to read about? Join Pittsburgh Supercomputing Center science writer (and minor SF author) Ken Chiacchia in a survey of the space-related projects that researchers across the world have been using PSC's machines to explore.

Commonwealth East: Realism in Speculative Fiction

Donald Firesmith, Charles Oberndorf (M), Michael Swanwick

Yes, SF and fantasy deal with fantastic situations. But the best have a solid, realistic grounding -- in setting, in character, in the way the world works. What are ways writers do this well (and are there examples where they did it not so well)?

225: Kaffeeklatsch with Marie Vibbert and Greg Frost

Ballroom Lobby: Autographing with Susan Dexter and Elyse Russell

Ballroom 2: Art Show: From T-shirt to Tote

Heidi Pilewski

Learn how to turn a T-shirt into a tote bag, and haul your Confluence loot in style!
\$5 materials charge. Advance signup required.

4:30 pm

Solstice: Reading with Grant Carrington

5 pm

Ballroom 1: Concert by Robbie Ellis

Commonwealth West: Mars Sample Return Missions

Geoffrey Landis

Commonwealth East: Creating Original and Believable Settings in Your SF and Fantasy

Greg Frost, Barbara Doran, Michael Swanwick, Albert Wendland, Brandon McNulty (M)

Solstice: Reading with Amaya Tenshi

225: Kaffeeklatsch with Mark Tiedeman, Timons Esaias

Ballroom Lobby: Autographing with JL Gribble

5:30 pm

Solstice: Reading with Brandon Ketchum

6 pm

Commonwealth West: Traditional vs Self, Online vs Paper: Choosing Where and How to Get Published.

Frederic Durbin, Susan Linville (M), Donald Firesmith, Clif Flynt

Solstice: Reading with Ada Palmer

Ballroom 2 & 3/4: Art Show/Dealers Room Close

Ballroom Lobby: Registration Closes

7 pm

Ballroom 1: Difficulties in Dating: a Commedia dell'Arte of "Time Travel"

The Confused Greenies return to our roots in semi-improvisational 16th Century farcical play but with a "time travel" twist and calendar confusion!

Commonwealth West: Fantasy in Your Neighborhood: Urban Fantasy

JL Gribble, Donald Firesmith (M), Amaya Tenshi

Urban fantasy has been very popular for several decades. What defines the genre? What are the key works, and who are the best characters? What tropes do you like, and which are you tired of?

8 pm

Ballroom 1: Featured Music Guest Concert by Sassafrass

Ada Palmer, Emily Lewis & Lauren Schiller

225: Triangulation Launch Party

9 pm

Ballroom 1: Open Filk

Commonwealth West: What We're Streaming Now

JL Gribble, Kevin Hayes, Heidi Pilewski, Jane Noel

The Mandalorian? Wednesday? Andor? What shows are you streaming? What are some good ones many are missing?

10 pm

Commonwealth West: Ghost Stories

Alan Irvine

11 pm

Commonwealth East: Incredibly Impromptu Improv at an Indecent Hour
Anything can happen during an improv comedy show with The Confused Greenies of Players' Patchwork Theatre Company - especially after dark when the censors come off! For mature audiences with an immature sense of humor!

Sunday

8:45 am Ballroom Lobby: Registration Opens

9 am

Club Lounge (9th Floor): Writers Workshop: Several Frighteningly Empowering Poetry Exercises Sign-up form. This workshop runs until 11:50am.
Timons Esaias

225: Writing Exercises: What's Too Painful to Remember: Forgetfulness as Narrative Strategy
Joshua David Bellin, M. Christine Benner Dixon
The human brain is designed to remember and forget. In these interactive writing exercises, we'll explore how writers of speculative fiction can use the built-in limitations of memory to enhance mystery, define character, and create convincing fictional worlds. We'll be doing lots of writing during the one-hour session, so don't forget to bring your favorite writing implement!

10 am

Commonwealth West: Let's Read Banned Books
Mark Tiedeman (M), Rigel Ailur, Susan Dexter, Susan Linville, Herb Kauderer
What does it mean when we say a book has been banned? What are reasons some people want books banned? Are books banned in years past different than the book banning efforts in some parts of the US today.

225: Kaffeeklatsch with Barbara Doran and Elyse Russell

Ballroom 2 & 3/4: Art Show & Dealers Room Open

10:30 am

Solstice: Reading with Albert Wendland

11 am

Ballroom 1: Doctor Whose Line Is It Anyway?
Pg 10

The Confused Greenies classic family friendly sci-fi convention improv game show hosted by a Dalek comes to Confluence for the first time! Where the points don't matter...but the losers may be exterminated!!!

Commonwealth East: The Future of Politics

Ada Palmer (M), Charles Oberndorf, Scot Noel, Marianne Porter

Commonwealth West: We Contain Multitudes: The Structure of a Fan-Fiction Super-Community

Phil Getz

A look at fan fiction communities and the ways they interact and become part of a larger fandom.

Solstice: Reading with Mary Turzillo

225: Kaffeeklatsch with Michael Swanwick and Sravani Hotha

Ballroom Lobby: Autographing with Brandon Ketchum and Barbara Doran

Noon

Ballroom 1: Concert by A Halo Called Fred

Commonwealth West: The Multiverse Goes Mainstream

Laurie Mann (M), Donald Firesmith, A.J. Smith

The multiverse in some form has been part of science fiction at least since Murray Leinster's "Sidewise in Time." But it became known to wider audiences later on TV via Star Trek and in a big way in comics. But now it's known to wider audiences, as more TV shows and movies embrace the concept. Everything, Everywhere, All at Once won the Best Picture Oscar. The panel explores good and not-so-good versions of the multiverse.

Commonwealth East: The Short Fiction Market: Challenges, Threats, and Opporunties

Susan Kaye Quinn, Elyse Russell, Marie Vibbert, Brandon Ketchum (M)

Solstice: Reading with Ken Chiacchia

225: Kaffeeklatsch with JL Gribble

Ballroom Lobby: Registration Closes

Ballroom 2: Art Show Closes

12:30 pm

Solstice: Reading with Greg Frost

1 pm

Ballroom 1: Concert by H-narb

Commonwealth West: A History of People Being Wrong About Vikings
Ada Palmer

Commonwealth East: Class and Caste in Science Fiction and Fantasy
Barbara Doran, Alan Irvine (M), Rigel Ailur

Solstice: Reading with Joshua David Bellin

Ballroom 2: Art Show Auction

1:30 pm

Solstice: Reading with JL Gribble

2 pm

Ballroom 1: Concert by Gr3ys0n

Commonwealth West: How to Conduct a Successful Siege
Timons Esaias

This talk will introduce you to the basic concepts of Vauban's method for conducting a 17th century siege, as explained in his book *On the Conduct of Sieges*. By the end of this talk, you'll be capable of taking any walled city in the course of six weeks' time. We'll also talk about the end of walls, and the Times Before Cannon.

Ballroom Lobby: Wrap Up and Feedback Session

2:30 pm

Ballroom 2: Art Show Pickup Deadline

3 pm

Ballroom 1: Dead Dog Open Filk

Ballroom 3/4: Dealers Room Closes

908: Con Suite Closes

Evening 908: Dead Dog Filk (check in 908 for the time)