

Toastmaster Speech

It's eleven-thirty at night. We're driving in a borrowed land rover through places like Knox City, Texas, population 342. My wife and I are wearing the same clothes we had on yesterday. The smell coming off of both of us could knock a buzzard off a meat wagon. We've driven and hauled our belongings back and forth across Texas a total of 1,600 miles in eight days. As we sat in the car, eyes peeled for giant wild boar, deer, and any other varmints that might sashey into the path of our vehicle, and trying really hard not to smell each other, I thought of ArmadilloCon.

I'd been thinking about ArmadilloCon a lot these past four weeks. This has been my local convention for as long as I've lived in Austin. And as I packed all of my belongings up, my countless boxes of books I'd bought here over the years, and as I watched the off-duty firemen pick up those boxes and swear at me, I realized that this wasn't going to be my local convention any more. I'm officially an expatriate of Austin.

Part of what makes this show so unique is the number of locals that attend, and the fervor with which we talk this show up. Everyone knows everyone. There's an easy familiarity (and no small amount of inappropriate touching) that goes on here. It's nice. It's a nice con, because all of you make it nice. I don't like using the word "Family" to relate to fans, mainly since my father wouldn't have been caught dead wearing an "I Survived GrokCon III" T-Shirt.

No, I prefer to think of us as comrades-at-arms. Brought together from uncommon circumstances, for a common goal: the appreciation and enjoyment of genre fiction. And inappropriate touching. We all have a common knowledge base to pull from; a shared lexicon; a communal history.

Looking around the world of pop culture, I see that the rest of the planet has finally caught up to us. After years of folks just shaking their heads in disbelief, the "straights" are coming around to our way of thinking: Super heroes are cool, and cool for everyone, not just man-children and imbeciles. The last three Star Wars movies sucked canal water. The Internet is not just for nerds.

This puts us in a unique position in current events. We need to step up, throw off the Jedi Cloaks, and start leading the uneducated masses to The Good Stuff. After all, all Battlestar Galacticas are not created equal. Han Solo DID shoot first. So shall it be written, so shall it be done.

For the first time ever, WE are the experts, the ones with all of the answers. We are the people they turn to in the office when they want to know what the name of Blue Falcon's robot dog was. We are the people who are constantly asked about the new Conan movie, or Princess of Mars. They expect us to know, in the same way they expect that jock in accounting to know how far away the Rangers are from first place. That's a baseball reference.

So, we should use this power for good. We're responsible for the continued goodwill of the Geek Nation. When asked

these questions, don't assume the defensive stance. Don't attack back. Don't start the answer with, (nerd)"Well, anyone who knows ANYTHING about the X-Men would know that Nightcrawler has blue fur..." Don't be that guy. You don't have to be. If Vin Diesel can proudly admit that he plays Dungeons & Dragons, then it's okay for us to step out of the shadows and be the geeked-up, action-style, chaos-math, quirk-riddled experts that we know we are.

We are a mercenary band, the lot of us. Knight errants, crusaders, and brigands. Some of us have swords. Some of us carry plus five swords of somethingorother. Some of us carry Light sabers. A few of us can even use the sound of our voice as a weapon. But enough about Rick Klaw. The point is, I'm glad to be back here amongst my comrades-in-arms, my peeps, my crew. In that spirit, and in anticipation of the drinking that will occur, I'd like to welcome you all to ArmadilloCon 28!

I didn't come here to tell you any of that. I came with a confession. This, the Centennial Year of Robert E. Howard, will hereforth be known as the year the story broke.

For the past eleven years, I have kept a secret from even my closest friends. I have been fooling you all. For you see, I am Esther Friesner.

The whole thing was a lark, really. I was at an AggieCon with Rick Klaw and Ben Ostrander, and we were discussing James Tiptree, Jr. and literary hoaxes. I thought it could be pulled off, and of course, Klaw thought that the burgeoning Internet would kill any potential mischief.

Well, anytime Klaw says I can't do something, that just makes me want to try harder.

I chose the penname Esthner Friesner from two sources: the show Sanford & Son, and my favorite Kitchen appliance. Thus shielded, I sat down and started writing. The short stories that I wrote were well-received. I banged out a few novels. Big whoop. But I wanted a larger project to work on.

I came up with an idea for an anthology of sword and sorcery stories, but what I didn't want was the same old misogynistic cliché. I mean, what's the point of another naked barbarian, rescuing another naked princess, from a big naked demon guarding some sort of...naked treasure? That's when I got the idea to turn the clichés on their head and work off of them. That's where the Chicks in Chainmail series was born. I think somewhere, somehow, Robert E. Howard and Karl Edward Wagner are really proud of me.

Soon, the demand for Esther to appear at conventions was overwhelming. So, I opted out and hired my mother to play Esther—my mother, who had me at the young age of 18—has been acting as Esther all these years.

The hardest part of all of this was maintaining the deception of a minor, struggling writer even as I was racking up the accolades as Esther. Every time I threw a party, I had to hide my Nebula. As the foreign language editions stacked up, I hid them in "comic book" boxes so no one would get suspicious. The Clockwork Storybook guys never knew anything. Then again, most of them were heavy drinkers.

I'm sick. I'm ashamed of myself. But I've gotten it off my chest now, and for your time and patience, I thank you, and I'm truly, truly sorry.

Introduction of Guests

Special guest James P. Hogan

James P. Hogan was born in London in 1941, his father Irish and his mother German. After studying general electrical and mechanical engineering, he graduated as an electronics engineer specializing in digital systems. He produced his first novel as the result of an office bet in the mid 70s—a bet he won, by the way. The loser of that bet was forced to sit on top of the then ten thousand dollar Xerox machine and photocopy his butt—and he's the documented first person to do so—but enough about Scott Cupp.

James continued writing subsequently as a hobby, his works being well received within the professional scientific community as well as among regular science-fiction readers. In 1979 he left DEC to become a full-time writer, moving to Florida and later, California. He now lives in the Republic of Ireland. He has six children now grown, giving him the distinction of having engendered three trilogies: one male, one female, and one literary.

He has written over 20 novels to date, several collections of short fiction, and even a couple of nonfiction books. Please welcome our special guest, James P. Hogan.

Fan Guest Grant Kruger

Grant loves fandom. Grant has been in fandom since he was about 10 when his family discovered SFSA (Science Fiction South Africa) in Johannesburg during the late 1970s. He contributed to the clubzine from early on and was highly active in the club. He came to the US in late 1995 and only discovered US fandom in 1998 at that year's Worldcon. Since then he has been on staff for many Worldcons, from junior jobs of all kinds through running promotions, recruiting volunteers and being this year's party maven.

Since settling in Mississippi for a time, he became involved in Southern fandom which is a lot like Northern fandom except that they say Klaaangon instead of Klingon. "If you've got a scale model of the USS ENTERPRISE, made entirely out of beer cans, up on blocks in your front yard, You might be a southern fandom redneck."

He remains deeply involved with SFSA, being their US agent, contributing to the zine, promoting the club in the US and running SFSA parties at Worldcons. Worldcon is like a pilgrimage for him and he has made friends all over the world through these connections. Not for nothing has he been called a fandom and Worldcon evangelist. Please give a nice big Texas fandom welcome to Grant Kruger.

Editor Guest Diana Gill

Senior Editor Diana Gill's criminal history need hardly be recounted. She is tired of answering questions about the 2001 BulletTrain Hold-up. And she has disavowed all knowledge of the 1998 Trump Tower heist. Her record clearly spells out the facts—thirty seven arrests and no convictions.

That's worth remembering as we discuss her other accomplishments. She has edited a variety of books from science textbooks to fantasy novels. She started her career at W. H. Freeman in 1996 and moved to Morrow in 1998, where she now runs Eos, the science fiction and fantasy imprint. The authors with whom she has worked include Mario Acevedo, USA Today bestselling author Trudi Canavan, William Gibson, New York Times bestseller Kim Harrison, Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough, Mary Stewart, Steph Swainston, Karen Traviss, and Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, among others. In addition to sf and fantasy, her editorial interests include commercial and historical fiction, supernatural novels and thrillers and historical and travel nonfiction. Please welcome and keep your pitches short for Diana Gill.

Artist Guest Ellisa Mitchell could not be here due to emergency surgery. She's having ... what? Oh, she's having death rays installed into her eyes. Oh, that's nice. Well, we wish her a speedy recovery in any case.

Guest of Honor Julie E. Czerneda

Author / editor Julie E. Czerneda has been a finalist for both the John W. Campbell (Best New Writer) and Philip K. Dick Awards. Her novel, *In the Company of Others* also won Reviewer's Choice, Best SF of the Year for 2001 from RT Magazine.

Julie has published ten bestselling biology-based SF novels with DAW, all still in print, including two ongoing series, the Trade Pact Universe and the Web Shifters. Her latest is the trilogy: *Species Imperative*, in which the potential impact of biological drives on civilization are examined through the eyes of a BC salmon researcher. *Survival*, on the Nebula Award Preliminary ballot, came out in May 04 followed by *Migration*, (May 2005) and *Regeneration*, May 2006. The first prequel to the Trade Pact series, *Reap the Wild Wind* will be released next year. She has five more novels scheduled for release. As editor, Julie's *Space Inc.* explored daily life off this planet. With Dr. Isaac Szpindel, she is co-editor of the acclaimed alternate science history anthology *ReVisions*, both from DAW.

A former biologist, textbook author/editor, and publisher, Julie edits the original Y/A SF anthology series based on science curriculum topics, *Tales from the Wonder Zone*, winner of the 2002 Special Award for Science & Technology Education from the Golden Duck Committee, as well as the new *Realms of Wonder* YA fantasy anthology series linked to language arts, both from Fitzhenry and Whiteside. She also sings like an angel and dances like a leprechaun.

Upcoming titles include the fantasy anthologies *Mythspring*, *Inspired by the Lyrics and Legends of Canada* with Genevieve Kierans (Red Deer Press), *Under Cover of Darkness* with Jana Paniccia (DAW Books), *Misspelled* (DAW Books), and YA science fiction anthology *Polaris*, *In Celebration of the International Polar Year*.

Julie is a sought-after speaker and conducts presentations on science, scientific literacy, science fiction, and writing in both Canada and the US, as well as serving as SF Consultant to *Science News*, *Science News for Kids*. Ladies and Gentlemen, your guest of honor, Julie E. Czerneda.

Other Guests

We've also got a number of other guests here. They're called "regional guests," which is a polite term for "We see you bastards here every year." These folks are all scheduled at panels and various other programming functions. Please stand up and give a wave when your name is called, so we'll know who to blame later when this all goes horribly, horribly wrong.

- Joseph Abbott
- David Lee Anderson
- Kurt Baty
- Paul Benjamin
- Carol Berg
- Scott Bobo
- Elizabeth Burton
- Bill Crider
- Scott Cupp
- Aaron de Orive
- Scott Dennis
- Bradley Denton
- Rhonda Eudaly
- Brad Foster
- Bill Fountain
- John Gibbons
- Beverly A. Hale
- Joan Upton Hall
- Scott A. Johnson
- Julie Kenner
- Katharine Eliska Kimbriel
- Rick Klaw
- Joe R. Lansdale
- Alexis Latner
- Zane Melder
- Karen Meschke
- C. J. Mills
- Elizabeth Moon
- John Moore
- Chris Nakashima-Brown
- Jess Nevins
- Gloria Oliver
- Lawrence Person

- Gretchen Phillips
- John Picacio
- John S. Quarterman
- Jessica Reisman
- Carrie Richerson
- Chris Roberson
- Josh Rountree
- Patrice Sarath
- Mike Sciolli
- Rie Sheridan
- Willie Siros
- Caroline Spector
- Warren Spector
- Michael Sumbera
- Mel Tatum
- Mikal Trimm
- Howard Waldrop
- Lynn Ward
- Martha Wells
- Wendy Wheeler
- Steve Wilson
- Sherlock

FACT and This Year's Chairs

The Fandom Association of Central Texas, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization dedicated to the promotion of science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction. We sponsor many activities aimed towards furthering the cause of literacy and the enjoyment of the genres. The best example is ArmadilloCon, our annual literary conference. Every Armadillocon is made up of volunteers from F.A.C.T. and I'd like to take a moment to recognize this year's committee.

This year's Chair is **Kimm "Don't talk to me about the wedding" Antell.**

Our Treasurer is **Karen "Why on Earth can't we take this money and go to Mexico with it?" Meschke.**

The Hotel Liaison is the **Mighty Mighty Fred Duarte.** Fred has retired his Godzilla impersonation this year, folks, so please don't ask for demonstrations.

Registration was helmed by the incomparable **Patrick McGehearty.** Patrick will be doing Godzilla impersonations, but only in designated areas, like the front lobby.

The Writers' Workshop was organized this year by **VestMeister Jayme Lynn Blaschke and the Saintly Melissa Tyler.** They both waded through the primordial ooze of basically a slush pile to come up with...well...they did a great job, honing the edge of tomorrow's writers.

The Programming & Participants were wrangled by the only man to ever successfully eat an entire set of Star Wars Legos, **Chuck Siros**

The Program Book was designed by the man who once impersonated Harlan Ellison for an entire WorldCon, **A.T. Campbell**.

The Dealer's Room was handled by **John "No I am NOT Gumby!" Gibbons**.

This year's Art Show & Auction are under the capable direction of the **Dapper and Dashing Scott Zrubek**.

The Charity Auction is under the protective aegis of **Sonia "don't touch me, I don't know where you've been" Santana** Gaming this year was spearheaded by **Brian and Angela Price and Ray Harlan**. No, really, they actually put heads on spears. It was pretty gross.

Hospitality is coordinated by the effervescent **Melissa Tolliver**. Never make fun of someone who can poison your food.

Volunteers were conscripted by **Kimm "Stop bringing up the wedding every five minutes, will you?" Antell**.

Guest Relations is under the capable direction of **Renee "I know waaay too much about cats to have a comfortable conversation with you" Babcock**.

And if you visited the lovely Armadillocon website, you can thank Webmistress **Kimm "If you mention the wedding one more damn time, I'm going to smash you in the nose with my shillelagh" Antell**.