

THE SF WORLDING OF THE ALT-RIGHT:
CONSPIRACY, SABOTAGE, AND FATAL MISREADINGS

By

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

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The term “red pill” saw a parallel rise in popularity with the advent of Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign. It has come to be a shorthand for a right-leaning, ideological conversion that is often experienced after engaging with digital media, like memes, messageboards, and video games. The term derives from the 1999 cyberpunk film *The Matrix*, directed by the Wachowskis, in which a hacker-hero must decide between a blue and red pill—the former a way to maintain his current, doldrum life; the latter, a path to understanding that the “real” world exists outside the computer-generated simulation called the matrix. The fate of the world depends upon him choosing correctly. Initially used in online men’s rights communities, the “red pill” also became associated with the alt-right political movement, indicating insularity and affinity. But the term’s science-fictional source material is significant. In this thesis, I chronicle the ways science fiction and its fandoms have been used as a means of engaging with, recruiting, and converting fans to reactionary and often white nationalist ideologies. By demonstrating multiple instances of what I term “subcultural infiltration” and attempts to foment divide within fan communities, I argue that speculative fiction is an area ripe for indoctrination mechanisms, especially given the devotion of fans, many of whom counterfactually deem the genre a space outside of or beyond politics—and thus beyond critique.

ABSTRACT

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This thesis argues that the science-fictional genesis of the term “red pill,” along with multiple other instances of science-fictional poaching and misreading, insists upon a thorough troubling of the ways in which the genre and its fandoms have been weaponized as recruitment tools for alt-right and white nationalist rhetoric and ideology. The term itself, deriving from the 1999 cyberpunk film *The Matrix*, implies that its taker chooses to undergo an intellectual, and, more importantly, ideological transformation, one which exposes the “truth” of the real world. Despite the film’s progressive and at-times radical philosophy, the alt-right and similar digital-born reactionary groups have harnessed the hacker-hero archetype as a means of what I call “subcultural infiltration,” using it and other science-fictional works to disseminate and propagate misogynistic, xenophobic, and racist ideology. In this thesis, I interrogate this methodology by examining three key components—idealization, initiation, and imitation—used to curry favor with and build affinity in SF fandoms, thereby indoctrinating and recruiting members to the white nationalist cause. Acknowledging this process, I argue, is vital to abnegating its lethal influence.

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This thesis is dedicated to my family and to the memory of my dad.
Thank you for always believing in my writing, even when it mostly comprised unicorn stories.

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I also want to acknowledge the faculty and administration of Michigan State University’s Department of English, in particular Dr. Zarena Aslami, Dr. Kristin Mahoney, and Marina Valli, whose professionalism and support allowed me to continue my research despite the onset of a pandemic in my second semester of graduate school.

My foray into this field began with Dr. Johannes von Moltke’s graduate seminar on critical theory at the University of Michigan. His early research on the alt-right, its seeming obsession with the Frankfurt School, and its propagation of the cultural Marxism conspiracy theory put me on this path in early 2017, and he continues to motivate and hearten my scholarship.

PREFACE

I began writing this thesis the day Marjorie Taylor Greene, a QAnon supporter, won the Georgia House of Representatives primary runoff. It was also the day news broke about a Florida police sheriff banning his staff and visitors from donning masks, except in special circumstances; that day, COVID-19 deaths in his county broke the previous record, at 13. Those numbers have only increased since.

These events are undoubtedly related. Conspiracy theories like QAnon, and their proponents, have been gaining mainstream traction for years, long before Trump codified them through retweets and other digital vindications. But it is important to understand that conspiracy theories are narratives. They are attempts to apply linear and lateral logic to illogical, chaotic, disjointed, and, often, wholly unrelated events, concepts, and ideas. To conspire means to “breathe together”; ultimately, it must be a collective undertaking, and, for many, learning of a surreptitious ur-plan, whether orchestrated by the government or reptoid invaders, is enspiriting: there is a reason, after all, for bad things to happen in the world. To believe a conspiracy theory may therefore be a kind of release, a sigh: a breath taken and let out with others in-the-know; a communal act; a way to explain that which seems beyond the realm of humankind—and humanity.

But to frame conspiracy theories as a form of camaraderie is particularly difficult in our current moment—particularly difficult today: August 12, 2020. In writing this thesis, I must recognize two things: that that camaraderie is increasing, and that it now has the undeniable potential to be lethal. In an email to my thesis advisor, I wrote:

What I’m struggling with the most right now is the scope of the thesis. A good chunk of it will have to address conspiracy theories (namely, their narratological/rhetorical

strategies) and paranoia, but the whole “COVID-19 is a hoax” sentiment has thrown me for a loop. It’s an obvious, and arguably expected, distillation of our “post-truth” moment. ... But because of what’s at stake—hundreds of thousands of human lives—I suppose I’m uncertain how best to ethically approach it. In other words, I’ve known since the outset that this work is tied to dangerous, fascistic ideas, and that those ideas can manifest violently—*metaphorical* pathogens. But COVID-19 is an *actual* pathogen buttressed by misinformation.

That which hinges upon *metaphor*—that which comprises much of this project—was thrown into the literal world after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The alt-right, (neo)fascism, white nationalism, and other varied iterations, along with the conspiracies they promulgate, have very clearly caused violent, physical damage. But COVID-19 marks a certain kind of event horizon: misinformation, spread with a click and a share, directly correlates to increases in outbreaks, new cases, and deaths. Real-world, violent consequences of conspiracy theories no longer need to be mediated by human actors; instead, a single utterance, a respiratory spray, can enact totalizing damage to generations.

To that end, I proceed cautiously, but with urgency. This project attempts to investigate the ways in which the alt-right and white nationalism comingled to infiltrate science fiction and fantasy fandoms, as well as digital geek culture, to increase rank-and-file members and instantiate their ideologies both within and beyond mainstream political avenues and discourses. (As I will demonstrate, there were some arenas in which little prodding was needed.) I therefore trace how such infiltration, tempered by seemingly nascent but well-moored conspiracy theories, brought us to our current moment—the moment in which wearing a mask broadcasts your political leanings instead of your commitment to public health; the moment in which militant,

armed protestors can congregate on the steps of the Michigan Capitol building while Black Lives Matter activists are tear-gassed; the moment in which a lie became a battle-cry.

April 2021 addendum: This preface was written almost a half-year before the January 6, 2021, insurrection. A second draft was finalized before the Baen Books controversy in February 2021. As such, this work is simultaneously emergent and instantly out-of-date. My instinct was to revise and expand, weaving in the varied, updated examples of white nationalist violence and vitriol we have witnessed globally. But expanding as intended would mean this document would never fully be completed. I believe this preface, as-is, thus serves as both artifact and example: that day at the Capitol (D.C., this time) was by no means a surprise, and discounting it as such, or considering it an isolated incident, ignores, obscures, and dismisses the thrust of this movement at our peril.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of (neo)fascist factions like the alt-right has focused attention on the ways in which the internet, anonymity, and conspiracy theories have disseminated and normalized violent, white supremacist ideology. Recent research by Alexandra Minna Stern, David Neiwert, and Mike Wendling, among others, has demystified these insular groups that trade in memes and irony to sow affinity, build ranks, and further proselytize their racist, xenophobic, and misogynist Weltanschauungs. But there is a surprising lacuna on another form of community- and trust-building within these factions: that of speculative fiction (SF) and its fandoms. Indeed, one of the most recognizable alt-right maxims, “to be red-pilled,” derives from the 1999 cyberpunk film *The Matrix*, and is used as a metaphor for reactionary conversion.¹ This borrowed vocabulary serves to cast alt-righters in the role of the heroic hacker Neo, and such self-insertion is often by no means hyperbolic—many alt-righters envision themselves as intellectual saviors whose rationality allows them to see through the false, shadowy world of so-called liberal propaganda. By codifying the genre thusly, such communities evoke an SF-type of worlding to (re)frame their cultural identity, prefiguring themselves as protagonists fighting for the continuation and propagation of the white race. Likewise, canonical SF texts, many of which center or imply white male characters, have been instrumentalized within the visual meme culture of these groups, including ones depicting Donald Trump as a “God Emperor”;² and have been reinterpreted according to white nationalist readings. But the intertwining of SF fandom and digital, reactionary groups began years before the alt-right gained notoriety. In 2013,

¹ Alexandra Minna Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate: How the Alt-Right is Warping the American Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019), 16.

² Note that, although most “God Emperor” memes derive from the Warhammer 40K tabletop game and universe, some also derive from the *Dune* franchise.

conservative SF writer Larry Correia exploited his fans' dislike of "heavy handed," social-justice-oriented SF that often dealt with "politically correct" themes to influence the Hugo Awards voting process.³ The self-named Sad Puppies, and its more reactionary off-shoot, the Rabid Puppies, attempted to manipulate the voting process for years, causing immense controversy within SF and its fandoms, and division concerning what should constitute "authentic" SF.

Such division begs the question: To whom does speculative fiction belong, and to what end? This paper will examine how this question has been weaponized by digital-born communities like the Sad Puppies, Gamergate, and the alt-right to delimit SF's political and social boundaries, its audience, and its influence to the domain of the heterosexual, Western white male. It will also map the lineage of these white supremacist positionings, which are often the product of xenophobic, racist, and sexist conspiracy theories made and promulgated by white nationalists, and further spread by anonymous trolls. Finally, it will outline a methodology I have termed "subcultural infiltration" used by white nationalists to lure SF fans to their agenda, comprising a tripartite approach that includes *idealization* of media, *imitation* of format, and *initiation* through familiarity. By analyzing and exposing the pernicious structures that exist and operate within SF fandom, I hope to defang an organ of white supremacy that has long been overlooked, discounted, and underestimated, while simultaneously troubling the implicit, often facile boundaries that codify "authentic" SF.

³ Larry Correia, "How to Get Correia Nominated for a Hugo. :)," Monster Hunter Nation, last modified January 8, 2013, <http://monsterhunternation.com/2013/01/08/how-to-get-correia-nominated-for-a-hugo/>.

SECTION I: Racefails, Sad Puppies, and Rabid Puppies: A Subcultural Animus

It is necessary to contextualize the legacy and influence of digital fan communities, and the state of fandom immediately prior to the rise of the Sad Puppies, to understand the current landscape of reactionary fandom. In *Science Fiction Culture*, Camille Bacon-Smith documents the cultural history of computer-mediated SF fandom that, originating in the 1970s with an “SF-Lovers” e-list, became more accessible as technology improved and expanded.⁴ Among the most successful communities was GENie, a byzantine collection of discussion groups which, in the 1980s and 1990s, boasted thousands of users connecting from multiple points of origin. GENie, argues Bacon-Smith, set the stage for later SF communities, organizing itself as a virtual convention, and “replicating” the same flotsam and jetsam thereof: Susan Schwartz, quoted in *Science Fiction Culture*, compared the SF subculture to an “intellectual biker gang ... perceived by other boards as very arrogant.”⁵ Membership within this community, therefore, provoked a fierce sense of belonging, and an equally fierce level of offense to perceived outsiders or meddlers, regardless of their standing in the community. Flamewars, which Schwartz defines as what happens when “you are angry and you say so,” happened so often that they were even rated on an “Olympic scoring scale,” with more points awarded for witty, incisive wordplay. Often, Bacon-Smith writes, these flamewars recapitulated famed feuds from the early days of fandom; being given a space to “vituperate” was therefore welcome and necessary.⁶ Likewise, early instances of trolling, chief among them the Great Cattle Raid, wherein ASCII cattle were posted

⁴ Camille Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 64.

⁵ Bacon-Smith, *Culture*, 69.

⁶ Bacon-Smith, *Culture*, 69–70.

across multiple boards, reimagined the pranking of real-world conventions, indicating that virtual life reflected—and refracted—the more knavish sides of fan culture.⁷

Digital communities have thus been integral to SF fandom for decades, shaping and reshaping fan culture with each iterative process. Indeed, as GENie membership declined with the advent of the internet, SF communities migrated to different platforms that could accommodate their exuberant devotion to both the genre and to each other. Groups on AOL and Yahoo, and personal websites hosted on Geocities and elsewhere, were among the most popular gathering spaces. Some offered messageboards, like Hatrack River (hosted on the official Orson Scott Card website), and Baen Books' forum, Baen's Bar.⁸ Fan interactions were, by and large, contained to these siloed websites. But the landscape began to change when the blogging website LiveJournal gained popularity in the early 2000s.⁹ LiveJournal accommodated both personal blogs and group discussions, with a GUI that was accessible and easy-to-use regardless of one's computer literacy. Fans therefore need not be relegated to one messageboard for interaction; indeed, cross-communication between groups and users was one of LiveJournal's most inviting draws, allowing for a much more diverse and global community to form. Of course, the flamewars that originated on GENie and other virtual platforms were not left there, and a digital culture mired in, perhaps shaped by, such processes does not create a new *modus operandi* simply based on platform migration.

⁷ Bacon-Smith, *Culture*, 72.

⁸ "Hatrack River Forum," Hatrick River - The Official Web Site of Orson Scott Card, accessed April 23, 2021, <http://hatrack.com/cgi-bin/ubbbmain/ultimatebb.cgi>; "Baen's Bar," accessed April 20, 2021, <https://baensbar.net/>. Baen Books will be discussed at length in section five.

⁹ "Frequently Asked Question #4. How did LiveJournal get started? Who runs it now?," LiveJournal, accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.LiveJournal.com/support/faq/4.html>.

But the digital flamewars of old, as vitriolic, loud, and divisive as they were, could have hardly anticipated what came to be contentiously known as “Racefail ’09,” a blog-based schism that took place mainly on LiveJournal (though some other websites, like Blogspot, were included). Earlier flamewars could end friendships and eject members from conferences and subcommunities,¹⁰ but RaceFail ’09 was something different. Perhaps hinging on the community’s willingness and proficiency for heated debate, it elicited a thoroughgoing refutation of problematic SF writ large. Though somewhat difficult to disentangle, its genesis is most often tied to a series of misguided blog posts written by established science fiction authors attempting to outline or suggest approaches to writing the Other. A post by writer Jay Lake, in which he commented on the seeming hypocrisy of cultural appropriation in a genre that is “at its best ... about Writing the Other,”¹¹ prompted writer Elizabeth Bear to create a “how-to” guide, delineating her best practices for writing cultures other than her own.¹² This post, titled “whatever you’re doing, you’re probably wrong,” backfired for fans of color who saw it as simplifying complex and difficult issues related to race, representation, and lived experiences. Blogspot user Avalon’s Willow¹³ and LiveJournal user deepad,¹⁴ both writers and fans of color, expanded the conversation by correctly identifying problematic and racialized characters in

¹⁰ Bacon-Smith, *Culture*, 83.

¹¹ Jay Lake, “Another shot at thinking about the Other,” LiveJournal, last modified January 8, 2009, <https://jaylake.LiveJournal.com/1692287.html>.

¹² Elizabeth Bear, “whatever you’re doing, you’re probably wrong,” LiveJournal, last modified January 12, 2009, <https://matociquala.LiveJournal.com/1544111.html>.

¹³ Avalon’s Willow, “Open Letter: To Elizabeth Bear,” last modified January 13, 2009, <https://seeking-avalon.blogspot.com/2009/01/open-letter-to-elizabeth-bear.html>.

¹⁴ Deepad, “I Didn’t Dream of Dragons,” Dreamwidth, last modified January 13, 2009, Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130326212231/http://deepad.dreamwidth.org/29371.html>.

Bear's writing, and contested her overgeneralizing. Bear acknowledged these responses, explaining that her works attempt to "*address the point [Avalon's Willow] made about it,*" but many in the comments section found this explanation performative and superficial.¹⁵ Others lambasted the "overreaction" by fans of color to Bear's initial post, derailing the conversation entirely by implicating such fans' emotionality and misplaced furor as the source of the problem, instead of very real, very justified concerns.¹⁶ From there, RaceFail '09 cascaded across multiple personal blogs, each responding to one another, and good-faith attempts to think carefully about these topics were often buried under posts by white writers, some of whom doxxed other participants.¹⁷ Instead of giving fans of color space to vent or to suggest new approaches, the bulk of the "fail" rested on the outsize defense of and by white participants. Essentially, a call for change was denigrated because some were irritated by a sound breaking through the silence of the status quo.

RaceFail '09, in content, did not tread new ground—indeed, writers and fans of color have been making (and often continue to make) these same arguments for years, if not decades—but, despite its derailing and topic-drifting, it did engender a shift in how *some* writers approach their craft. On her personal blog, Hugo-award-winning writer N.K. Jemisin argued a year later, in 2010, that:

... RaceFail was the big thaw for the SFF field. Fans of color, and white fans who were tired of the old ways, literally heated things up with an outpouring of long-pent rage. That

¹⁵ Elizabeth Bear, "real magic can never be made by offering up someone else's liver," LiveJournal, last modified January 14, 2009, <https://matociquala.LiveJournal.com/1544999.html>. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ cdguyhall, January 14, 2009, 2:43 p.m., "comment on," Elizabeth Bear, "real magic can never be made by offering up someone else's liver," LiveJournal, last modified January 14, 2009, <https://matociquala.LiveJournal.com/1544999.html>.

¹⁷ Jiyeon Kang, "Call for civil inattention: 'RaceFail '09' and counterpublics on the internet," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 105, issue 2 (2019): 134.

fury was utterly necessary, because it shocked the whole genre enough to make it pay attention. Without that, SFF would have remained resistant — frozen — against such radical ideas as *why are all these futuristic stories full of white people, when they're already a minority on the planet now?* and *y'know, maybe erasing the brown people from your fantasy continent, or making them allegorical orcs, is a bad idea.*

Jemisin goes on to recontextualize the “-fail” suffix, claiming that, counter to what some may think, it did not function as a descriptor of the event as a whole, but of the works that have missed the mark. Because of RaceFail '09, she writes, “a number of well-known or influential personalities in the field said things that revealed problematic assumptions/thinking about people of color, or race issues in general,” and that fact alone “heated things up” in SF.¹⁸ Such heat was generated not just by writers of color attempting to share their experiences and point out longstanding problems, but also, and inevitably, by the friction they encountered from gatekeepers who deemed their perspectives anathema or unimportant to the genre of SF.

Jemisin was also aware that a “refreeze” would happen—and it did, perhaps even quicker, and with more intensity, than she imagined.¹⁹ In a January 2013 blog post on his website, Monster Hunter Nation, SF writer Larry Correia wrote a call to action: to “stick it to the man” and “make literati snob’s heads explode [*sic*]” by nominating his novel, *Monster Hunter Legion*, published by Baen Books, for a Hugo Award,²⁰ one of the foremost emblems of SF culture that has recognized “excellence in the field of science fiction and fantasy” annually since

¹⁸ N.K. Jemisin, “Why I Think Racefail Was the Bestest Thing Evar for SFF,” NKJemisin.com, last modified January 18, 2010, <https://nkjemisin.com/2010/01/why-i-think-racefail-was-the-bestest-thing-evar-for-sff/>. Emphasis in original.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Correia, “Hugo. :)” It is important to note that Correia’s Monster Hunter Nation blog does *not* contain (or, at present, does not contain) a post directly acknowledging RaceFail '09. This also seems to be the case on his archived Blogspot website.

1955.²¹ Decrying “message-fic”—SF that promotes social justice at the expense of “authentic” SF themes—that the Hugos had allegedly been lauding for years, he asked his fans to buy WorldCon memberships to secure Hugo voting rights,²² nominate *Monster Hunter Legion*, and demonstrate the fallibility of the awards and of message-fic in general. Correia laid out what he saw as the two poles of SF in his post:

Should I vote for the heavy handed message fic about the dangers of fracking and global warming and dying polar bears and robot rape as a bad feminist analogy with a villain who is a thinly veiled Dick Cheney? Or should I vote for the LAS VEGAS EXPLOSION SHOOTING EVERYTHING DRAGON HELICOPTER CHASE ORC SACRIFICING CHICKENS BOOK!?! Grglglggggsllll.....BOOM!) [sic].²³

Unlike flamewars that generally dealt with a singular topic, or even RaceFail '09's attempt to open conversation, Correia instead seemed bent on negating SF's capacity to ask its readers to think, to be challenged, and to encounter complex themes. And, although exalting entertainment over more “literary” works is by no means controversial, it is, as Elizabeth Sandifer in *Neoreaction: A Basilisk* points out, disingenuous to suggest that the Hugo Awards has, in its seventy-year history, ever apotheosized “thrilling adventure fiction” over works of a political or progressive nature.²⁴ Such an implication misreads, ignores, or elides foundational, progressive SF texts that helped shape the genre.²⁵ Additionally, it dramatizes the divide between pulp and

²¹ “Hugo Awards FAQ,” The Hugo Awards, accessed October 24, 2020, <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-faq/#What%20are%20the%20Hugo%20Awards?>.

²² Ibid. The Hugo Awards are “run by and voted on by fans.”

²³ Correia, “Hugo. :)” Correia’s hyperbole and humor, here, recapitulate tactical irony so often found in digital communities.

²⁴ This is not to suggest that the “intent” or “goal” of speculative fiction isn’t debated; rather, I am arguing that the genre has never been either *one* or the other. Even bifurcating it in terms of “hard” and “soft” SF doesn’t reduce the genre to mere political poles.

²⁵ A contribution to 2003’s *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, titled “Race and ethnicity in science fiction,” succinctly chronicles multiple instances of writers carefully considering race in their SF, from W.E.B. Du Bois (writing in 1920) to Octavia Butler to Ray Bradbury. The essay demonstrates that

literati, characterizing “message-fic” as something insidious, conspiratorial, and, most importantly and incorrectly, emblematic or symptomatic of “politically correct” SF. In other words, it erroneously imbricates the old rivalry with new polemics, conflating SF’s history with the thrust of contemporary, right-leaning politics. Correia, essentially, wanted to return to a fictitious past within the genre, unmuddled by moralizing, “heavy-handed” works. Of course, such a past never fully existed. But this yearning for an atemporal utopia—a genuine “no-place”—is by no means accidental, as I will reveal in section four. In fact, it is patternistic within reactionary communities. Moreover, instead of the forced multiculturalism and politically-correct themes Correia points to as corrupting of and antithetical to SF, what may have been materializing in the genre was the precipitate of RaceFail ‘09, and of readers’ and writers’ earnest attempts to redress problematic and minoritizing depictions—the *beginnings* of a genuine cultural shift instead of an elitist proscribing. But this precipitate was hardly a known quantity—indeed, RaceFail ‘09 was contained mostly to LiveJournal users, representing only a portion of the fandom community, and the reaction against it, or against attempts to listen to people of color (or to invoke racist attributions to their concerns) is indicative of the larger SF landscape at the time.

The provocation, however, was enough and, only a few years later, Correia’s attempt to defend SF from influences that could be considered resultant of RaceFail ‘09 resonated. His fans promised to purchase WorldCon memberships and follow Correia’s voting guidelines.²⁶

Although the 2013 Hugo Awards curiously reported a remarkably high voter turnout with 1,848

these conversations are not new, and have never been divorced from or rendered extraneous to the SF genre.

²⁶ I will address in section four the seemingly contradictory desire to be lauded or recognized by the same institutions one is criticizing.

valid ballots, “the third highest ballot count in history,”²⁷ Correia ultimately failed to place. But the invective was far from over. Now calling his group of anti-message-fic fans the “Sad Puppies,”²⁸ Correia devised a voting bloc for the 2014 Hugos that would launch Puppy-approved texts into multiple categories, including best novel, best novella, best fanzine, best long-form editor, and more. Unsurprisingly, works by Correia led these slates, as well as two by Brad Torgensen and one by Theodore Beale, writers who shared Correia’s distaste for SF’s alleged new progressivism.²⁹ This time, the Sad Puppies managed to get seven of their twelve recommendations on the ballots (one was ultimately removed due to ineligibility). Though none won outright, many placed within the top five, including Correia’s *Warbound* novel; and Torgensen’s novella, *The Chaplain’s Legacy*, and novelette, *The Exchange Officers*.³⁰ The strategy, it seemed, was working—but not without controversy. Many voters were shocked that Correia instituted such a methodology to influence the voting process (despite technically falling within WorldCon’s rules).³¹ Correia responded to those outraged by his campaigning on his blog:

I’ve said for a long time that the awards are biased against authors because of their personal beliefs. Authors can either cheer lead for left wing causes [*sic*], or they can keep their mouth shut. Open disagreement is not tolerated and will result in being sabotaged and slandered. Message or identity politics has become far more important than

²⁷ “Hugo Awards,” Lone Star Con 3, accessed November 2, 2020, <http://www.lonestarcon3.org/hugo-awards/index.shtml>.

²⁸ Amy Wallace, “Who Won Science Fiction’s Hugo Awards, and Why it Matters,” *WIRED*, last modified August 23, 2015. <https://www.wired.com/2015/08/won-science-fictions-hugo-awards-matters/>. In the *WIRED* article, Correia says that the name is based on prototypical ASPCA videos that show neglected pets in cages and in other abusive situations, implicating social-justice-oriented SF or SF that deviated from their definition of authentic as being harmful, abusive, and/or immoral.

²⁹ Larry Correia, “MY HUGO SLATE,” Monster Hunter Nation, last modified March 25, 2014, <http://monsterhunternation.com/2014/03/25/my-hugo-slate/>.

³⁰ Some works were outvoted by “No Award,” which became a symbolic method of denouncing the Puppies slate.

³¹ Sandifer, *Neoreaction*, 352.

entertainment or quality. I was attacked for saying this. I knew that when an admitted right winger [sic] got in they would be maligned and politicked against, not for the quality of their art but rather for their unacceptable beliefs. ... If one of us outspoken types got nominated, the inevitable backlash, outrage, and plans for their sabotage would be very visible. So I decided to prove this bias and launched a campaign I called Sad Puppies (because boring message fiction is the leading cause of Puppy Related Sadness).

Correia thus categorizes himself as a truth-sayer, an “outspoken” artist whose personal beliefs compel him to resist the “silencing” of the left-wing hegemony. More than that, he implies Sad Puppies, despite its comically satirical name, is the vessel through which he can expose this silencing and sabotaging. Such a framing makes Correia read as almost heroic—as if he were up against a monolithic, dystopic cabal.³² And, as Correia states, being “attacked” and “politicked against” is part of that narrative, and only serves to validate the Puppy platform. As such, he was emboldened to continue the movement, aided by 2014 nominee Brad Torgensen. A new voting slate—this time chosen by Torgensen and featuring over sixty endorsements—was introduced for 2015. In a blog post, Torgensen, like Correia, decried the Hugos for what he deemed a bias toward literary SF, as opposed to more popular, entertaining works, ones that “would *not* otherwise find themselves on the Hugo ballot without some extra *oomph* received from beyond the rarefied, insular halls of 21st century Worldcon ‘fandom.’”³³ Such anti-elitism is often twinned with anti-PC sentiment, and reflects a long history of populist, right-wing conspiracism, which I expand upon in section three.

But 2015 marked the arrival of a second, hand-chosen slate. Conspicuously dividing himself from the Sad Puppies, Theodore Beale, a 2014 Sad Puppies nominee, created the Rabid

³² Compare this to the red-pilling narrative and the desire to become Neo.

³³ Brad Torgensen, “SAD PUPPIES 3: the 2015 Hugo Slate,” last modified February 1, 2015, <https://bradrtorgensen.wordpress.com/2015/02/01/sad-puppies-3-the-2015-hugo-slate/>. Emphasis in original.

Puppies, a more reactionary cousin to Correia's Sad Puppies. Responding to the "corruption and ideological rot that is rife within the world of modern science fiction and fantasy" (again invoking terminology reflective of anti-PC conspiracism), Beale's slate comprised sixty-seven endorsements across all categories aside from "best fan artist," the majority of which were somehow associated with Beale's imprint, Castalia House, including the *Sci Phi Journal*.³⁴ Under Beale's leadership, the Rabid Puppies swept the 2015 Hugo Awards: sixteen of the available seventeen categories had at least one Rabid Puppies nomination, with four coming in first place.³⁵ However, apprised to the Sad Puppies' previous machinations, fans did react: the Hugo's "No Award" category was used to protest the Rabid Puppies' slate, and accumulated thousands of votes, placing ahead of Beale's nominations in six categories.

Beale, who writes under the penname Vox Day, is a problematic figure in SF who has gained a reputation for being a white supremacist, racist, and sexist—and his involvement in the 2015 Hugos is therefore significant. As Sandifer writes, the Puppies' 2014 endorsement of his short story was ultimately "a Faustian bargain,"³⁶ one that demonstrated a clear allyship between Correia, Torgensen, and a self-described "Christian nationalist" or "Western Civilizationist,"³⁷ to upset SF and SF fandom writ large.³⁸ Indeed, Beale's views were well-known when Correia

³⁴ Vox Day, "Rabid Puppies 2015," last modified February 2, 2015, <https://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/02/rabid-puppies-2015.html>.

³⁵ "2015 Hugo Statistics," The Hugo Awards, accessed November 2, 2020, <http://www.thehugoawards.org/content/pdf/2015HugoStatistics.pdf>.

³⁶ Sandifer, *Neoreaction*, 354.

³⁷ Vox Day, "Why John C. Wright is not a libertarian," last modified December 15, 2015, <https://voxday.blogspot.com/2015/12/why-john-c-wright-is-not-libertarian.html>.

³⁸ It is therefore unsurprising that his pseudonym and blog, titled Vox Populi, are nods to Latinate Christianity.

nominated him for the Sad Puppies slate. A year earlier, he had been expelled from the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) organization for tweeting a link from the official SFWA Twitter account to a derogatory post on his blog, in which he called N.K. Jemison an “ignorant half-savage.”³⁹ (In that blog post, he states he is “quite willing to publicly debate Ms Jemison [*sic*],” a common form of rationality-theater the alt-right pursues to invalidate or denigrate their opponents while building up their own intellectual reputation; such “debates” are often later misquoted and misrepresented in memes).⁴⁰ He also helms the controversial Castalia House Press,⁴¹ which has published books by SF writers Jerry Pournelle and John C. Wright; by alt-righters Mike Cernovich and Milo Yiannopoulos; and paleoconservative William S. Lind, a key figure behind the cultural Marxism conspiracy theory, which I unpack in section three.

Digital landscapes, as I have demonstrated, have helped shape SF fandom for decades, and internecine arguing is integral to it, for better or worse. But the reactions to RaceFail ’09, and the extreme alliances that formed in response, place both outside the realm of mere flamewar. The attempt to protest progressive SF, only a few years later, by actively snubbing “message-fic” at the Hugos stands as its own kind of evidence: SF, to some, is considered beyond critique—a domain of straightforward entertainment, and not of capacious and critical thought.

³⁹ Vox Day, “A black female fantasist calls for Reconciliation,” last modified June 13, 2013, <https://voxday.blogspot.com/2013/06/a-black-female-fantasist.html>.

⁴⁰ Mike Wendling, *Alt-Right: From 4chan to the White House* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 4.

⁴¹ Castalia House works by Beale include *SJWs Always Lie*, *SJWs Always Double Down*, and *Jordanetics: A Journey into the Mind of Humanity’s Greatest Thinker*.

SECTION II: Gamergate: “Ethics” in Toxic Fandom

To fully understand the Rabid Puppies’ success, it is important to contextualize Beale’s influence in other digital communities. In 2014, as the Sad Puppies continued to gain momentum among right-leaning SF fans, the Gamergate controversy erupted, and Beale’s SF pedigree and status as a game designer and developer⁴² made him a perfect early figurehead for both. Gamergate was a catalyzing event in video game culture that fomented misogyny and anti-feminism among fans and developers alike. It began as a blog post (later termed the “Zoë Post”) written by Eron Gjoni, the ex-boyfriend of video game developer Zoë Quinn, that lambasted Quinn and implied she received positive reviews of her game, *Depression Quest*, because she slept with critics.⁴³ Though this was later discredited,⁴⁴ Gnoji’s post rippled through the gaming community, which began to loudly repudiate what they deemed to be alliances between reviewers/critics and women developers, as well as an overall PC-tinged conspiracism they believed was infiltrating their subculture. (It is pertinent to note that *Depression Quest* dealt with themes that fall under Correia’s definition of message-fic: mental health, the realities of public health policy, and lived experience.) Hiding behind an ostensibly objective mantel demanding “ethics in gaming journalism,”⁴⁵ Gamergaters sent thousands of death and rape threats to Quinn and other women with whom Quinn was believed to associate. Among them were Anita Sarkeesian, a cultural critic and creator of *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*, a video series that

⁴² Vox Day, “A game developer on #GamerGate,” last modified November 4, 2014, <https://voxday.blogspot.com/2014/11/a-game-developer-on-gamergate.html>.

⁴³ Eron Gjoni, “The Zoë Post,” last modified September 12, 2014, <https://thezoepost.wordpress.com/>.

⁴⁴ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 64.

⁴⁵ Donna Zuckerberg, *Not All Dead White Men* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2018), 21.

brought a feminist lens to video games, and Brianna Wu, a developer.⁴⁶ All three women were doxxed—their personal information, including phone numbers and addresses, were posted online by anonymous Gamergate supporters—and anyone who attempted to show support was similarly denigrated and maligned, especially people of color, who received racialized, often misogynoir threats.⁴⁷ Sarkeesian aptly observed that these supporters “[did] not see themselves as perpetrators [of crimes] ... They [saw] themselves as noble warriors,”⁴⁸ a position that sustains the “heroism” of right-wing crusaders like Correia and trolling culture more generally, especially as it pertains to the alt-right. Analytic feminist philosopher Kate Manne, in her book *Down Girl*, attempts to deconstruct Gamergate’s seemingly hyperbolic anger:

Quinn had outdone many male game designers in getting a moderately positive review of her game on the website. ... This “beating the boys at their own game” and infiltration of a highly male-dominated subculture would have been a perfect storm of factors to elicit a disproportionately strong, intense, and prolonged misogynistic reaction from members of the gaming community, according to my analysis—which it did indeed.⁴⁹

Quinn’s perceived “outdoing,” then, needed to be discredited by any means necessary, and the Gamergate methodology was totalizing: masses of comments, YouTube videos, and opinion pieces flooded the internet and were regurgitated on social media. This tactic successfully mainstreamed Gamergate, especially in right-wing media. Breitbart News, in particular, hailed Gamergate as an internet-based culture war that exposed an “army of sociopathic feminist

⁴⁶ David Neiwert, *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2017), 214, 234.

⁴⁷ Talia Lavin, *Culture Warlords: My Journey into the Dark Web of White Supremacy* (New York: Hachette Books, 2020), 104.

⁴⁸ Casey Newton, “Anita Sarkeesian shares the most radical thing you can do to support women online,” *The Verge*, last modified September 13, 2014, <https://www.theverge.com/2014/9/13/6145169/anita-sarkeesian-shares-the-most-radical-thing-you-can-do-to-support>.

⁴⁹ Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 119n12.

programmers and campaigners, abetted by politically correct American tech bloggers” who were “terrorising the entire community.”⁵⁰ Since 2014, hundreds of Breitbart articles have referred, in some way, to Gamergate: an outsize number considering Breitbart’s dearth of reporting on video games before the controversy.⁵¹ Indeed, Milo Yiannopoulos—again, now a Castalia House writer—admitted that, previously, he “mock[ed] video gamers as dorky loners in yellowing underpants.”⁵² But Breitbart, whose founder, Andrew Breitbart, quipped that “politics is downstream from culture,”⁵³ seemed to understand the cultural cache—and opportunity—Gamergate represented. Despite Yiannopoulos’ insults, Breitbart’s continued reporting on Gamergate helped elevate it through additional right-leaning news media, amassing legions of supporters across the internet and within conservative communities—many of whom had had little to no interest in video game culture prior.

Beale, as an early proponent of Gamergate,⁵⁴ certainly seems to have used his growing reactionary currency within video game culture to his advantage with the 2015 Rabid slate. Although interaction and comingling between Gamergaters and Sad/Rabid Puppies is difficult to prove due to the ephemeral nature of the internet and anonymous messageboards, based on historical connections between SF and video game fandoms,⁵⁵ as well as the litany of SF tropes

⁵⁰ Milo Yiannopoulos, “Feminist Bullies Tearing the Video Game Industry Apart,” Breitbart News, last modified September 1, 2014, <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2014/09/01/lying-greedy-promiscuous-feminist-bullies-are-tearing-the-video-game-industry-apart/>.

⁵¹ “#Gamergate,” Breitbart News, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.breitbart.com/tag/gamergate/>.

⁵² Yiannopoulos, “Feminist Bullies.”

⁵³ Conor Friedersdorf, “How *Breitbart* Destroyed Andrew Breitbart’s Legacy,” *The Atlantic*, last modified November 14, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/11/how-breitbart-destroyed-andrew-breitbart-legacy/545807/>.

⁵⁴ Zuckerberg, *Not All Dead White Men*, 21.

⁵⁵ Bacon-Smith, *Culture*, 261.

and themes deployed in video games, it is likely that the overlap was quite large. Likewise, because the Rabid Puppies nominations swept so many categories, that number may be far from trivial. Indeed, their goals were practically identical, and represented larger reactionary, conspiratorial aims: to combat political correctness—in the guise of message-fic and feminist video game criticism—in order to maintain dominion over the hallowed communities they most closely identified with.

SECTION III: A Familiar Pattern: Instrumentalizing Conspiracy Theory

In *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump*, David Neiwert chronicles the history and documents the contours of an entirely new country—Alt-America. This is the land one inhabits after taking the red pill, a parallel America buttressed by xenophobia, ethnonationalist goals, and, most prominently, conspiracy theories. And, despite often being overlooked or castigated by the “political establishment,”⁵⁶ Alt-America’s population is increasing rapidly. Neiwert writes:

Alt-America is largely the creation of an increasingly entrenched conspiracy industry that generates one theory after another about the truth that lies behind the public narrative generated in the mainstream media. ... It’s a self-contained universe. ... [T]he overarching story and general nature of The Enemy is always the same: namely, some variation on the New World Order [NWO], or “globalists,” or any other term used to name the secretive cabal they believe is conspiring to rule mankind.⁵⁷

The first major wave of contemporary expatriates to Alt-America comprised Tea Partiers who saw Barack Obama’s presidency as evidence of NWO—often code for Jewish—influence.⁵⁸ The Tea Party, through grassroots organizing and the use of social media, became a “living embodiment of right-wing populism,” one that “expressed hostility to ‘liberal’ elites and ‘parasitic’ minorities and immigrants.”⁵⁹ Though their aims were largely to oppose and discredit Obama in all shapes and forms, the Tea Party, like Gamergate, found purchase with right-leaning news media, chief among them Fox News, whose emphasis on “fair and balanced” reporting seemed to legitimize Tea Party ideology. Such ideology is not novel; in fact, the Tea Party

⁵⁶ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 6.

⁵⁷ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 38.

⁵⁸ Chip Berlet, “Dances with Devils: How Apocalyptic and Millennialist Themes Influence Right Wing Scapegoating and Conspiracism,” Political Research Associates, last modified April 15, 1999, http://www.publiceye.org/apocalyptic/Dances_with_Devils_1.html.

⁵⁹ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 4.

followed established conspiratorial logic weaponized by the John Birch Society in the 1950s, the “patriot” movements of the 1990s—and the cultural Marxism conspiracy theory promulgated by Castalia House writer William S. Lind.⁶⁰

Cultural Marxism represents a pinnacle of reactionary conspiracism founded upon a malicious misreading and misrepresentation of primary sources. Essentially, cultural Marxism posits that the group of critics and academics who comprised the Frankfurt School and fled Nazi Germany were, in actuality, communists bent on infiltrating and destroying American democracy and culture through dictates like political correctness.⁶¹ As with most conspiracies, there is a nebulous, duplicitous grain of truth to this: Adorno, Horkheimer, and other Frankfurt theorists *were* Marxists, fleeing a fascist country organizing a genocide; they *were* critical of the American culture industry, policy, and capitalism writ large. But the cultural Marxism conspiracy takes these two points and grossly distorts them to fit the shape of its conspiratorial narratology, whether it be “feminism, gay rights, birth control, socialism, atheism, relativism, environmentalism, immigration, multiculturalism,” or other PC-bogeymen.⁶²

It is highly doubtful that those spreading the cultural Marxism conspiracy theory have attempted good-faith readings of *The Authoritarian Personality* or *Eros and Civilization*. Indeed, it seems more common to volley insults at Frankfurt School texts and theories, and to label their works pretentiously opaque or intentionally inaccessible in order to preclude or prevent

⁶⁰ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 3, 35; Rachel Busbridge, Benjamin Moffitt, and Joshua Thorburn, “Cultural Marxism: Far-Right Conspiracy Theory in Australia’s Culture Wars,” *Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, vol. 26, issue 6, June 29, 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13504630.2020.1787822>: 729.

⁶¹ This, of course, does not account for the temporal distance between critical theory and the neoliberal adage of political correctness.

⁶² Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 81.

engagement or proper criticism thereof. Perhaps most flagrant is the fact that those who fear cultural Marxism tend to highlight its Jewish origins.⁶³ Such an anti-Semitic ploy recycles NWO-derived themes to subtextually suggest connections between the Frankfurt School and that storied, “secretive” global cabal, and pinpoints academia as the locus of such propagandizing. Higher education, and its radical elites, therefore must always be with treated with contempt and suspicion.

The origins of the conspiracy are difficult to locate, but its first instance is widely attributed to a 1992 article in the journal *Fidelio*, written by Michael Minnicino and titled “New Dark Age: The Frankfurt School and ‘Political Correctness.’” *Fidelio* was “an organ of the Lyndon LaRouche movement *cum cult*,” and was in-league with various paleoconservative thinktanks that helped “[churn] out slickly produced shows promulgating its various opinions” for National Empowerment Television (NET), which broadcasted its programs via satellite television.⁶⁴ In 1999, William S. Lind alerted NET viewers to the ills festering behind the walls of academia in his video, “Political Correctness: The Frankfurt School.” Remarkably, Frankfurt School historian, academic, and cultural critic Martin Jay is interviewed in the video, ostensibly to validate and lend authority to Lind’s (mis)interpretation. Jay’s contribution is, of course, heavily edited. As he writes in *Splinters in Your Eye*:

When I was approached for the interview, I was not informed of the political agenda of the broadcasters, who seemed professional and courteous. ... I naively assumed the end results would reflect my opinions with some fidelity ... But what happened instead was that all my critical remarks about the hypocrisy of the right-wing campaign against political correctness were lost and what remained were simple factual statements confirming the Marxist origins of the School, which had never been a secret to anyone.⁶⁵

⁶³ Martin Jay, *Splinters in Your Eye: Frankfurt School Provocations* (Brooklyn and London: Verso Books, 2020), 156.

⁶⁴ Jay, *Splinters*, 154.

⁶⁵ Jay, *Splinters*, 155.

Jay is homing in on two distinct tactics. First, concocting the narrative that the Frankfurt School's open and obvious Marxism was actually a closely-guarded secret ascribes to them a furtiveness that gels with LaRouchian conspiracism. National Empowerment Television, therefore, can wear the guise of journalistic credibility for "unmasking" a threat to American democracy—despite there never being a mask at all. Second, this perfidious brand of bait-and-switch, using an academic as a "useful idiot,"⁶⁶ to legitimize and thereby propagandize demonstrates a remarkable level of forethought, as if Jay's presence forecloses any impropriety on their part. Though video editing always, on some level, compresses interviews of any kind, Jay's contributions were manipulated—again, to fit the narrative being peddled. It lays bare the fact that those accusing the Frankfurt School of institutional infiltration and agitprop were doing it themselves. Ultimately, there were projecting. Neiwert explains that this is a defining facet of Alt-America, and rightfully points out a more glaring, dangerous hypocrisy: Alt-Americans fear the shadowy faction operating behind the scenes, organizing to take away guns and "round up" patriots; but, "their own political agenda would result in the rounding up and incarceration of millions ... while imposing a dictatorial regime ... that would silence any kind of leftist impulse."⁶⁷ Thus, to negotiate these contradictions, they must create corroborating, in-step conspiracies that conveniently displace blameworthiness while bearing the burden of their own inclinations.

Since the late 1990s, cultural Marxism has been a favored talking point of paleoconservatives like Pat Buchanan, right-leaning politicians like Donald Trump, neo-Nazis, white nationalists—even the mass murderer Anders Breivik.⁶⁸ As digital culture evolved, it

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 45.

⁶⁸ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 224–225.

gained a foothold within reactionary web communities, and slowly trickled down into anonymous messageboards like 4chan and 8chan. Knowledge of the conspiracy seemed to affirm one's intellectual credibility: to know the *real secret* behind the Frankfurt School's "motivations" was to be able to see through the miasma of liberal pretention and subversion. But such "knowledge," far from being privileged information, is easy to come by and discloses that same impulse to dissemble what is plainly, easily probative. Thus, cultural Marxism memes are ubiquitous: often depicting overwrought, frenzied flowcharts, cultural Marxism purportedly connects everything from dysgenics, newspeak, and gender roles to the Frankfurt School. The memes are also grossly anti-Semitic.⁶⁹

Such memes were invoked in the Gamergate scandal, as cultural Marxism and political correctness were blamed for Quinn's nominal success and Sarkeesian's feminist aims.⁷⁰ Talia Lavin, in *Culture Warlords: My Journey into the Dark Web of White Supremacy*, concretizes Gamergate as "a [reaction] to what [gamers] see as the domination of the world by global multiculturalism and the rise of popular feminism," and that the movement represents "a retrograde populist ideology which reacts violently to suggestions of white male privilege."⁷¹ As such, Gamergate provided an opportunity for alt-righters to exploit gamers' fury, as well as their unique brand of almost criminal trolling. Essentially, Gamergate, which we can assume had Sad and Rabid Puppies in its ranks, was the perfect melding of contemporary digital culture with

⁶⁹ Untitled rabbit-hole meme, accessed October 12, 2020, <http://i0.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/original/001/001/046/825.png>.

⁷⁰ Neiwert, *Alt-America*, 214.

⁷¹ Lavin, *Culture Warlords*, 104.

established, white nationalist conspiracism. Lavin goes on to demonstrate how Gamergate's methods were co-opted by the alt-right and later deployed in Trump's bid for presidency:

[Gamergate] showed trolls that they could use tactics old and new to abuse targets en masse in pursuit of reactionary, antifeminist politics. As racist ideology became more mainstream in the era of Donald Trump, many of the men involved in GamerGate became part of campaigns that utilized the same tactics to push racism, anti-immigration sentiment, and white-nationalist rhetoric. ... The young men energized by reactionary politics, radicalized by participation in harassment campaigns, and ready and able to engage in nimble, hard-to-foil propaganda operations were ripe for recruitment by America's organized racist movements.⁷²

Such validation only served to confirm positionings within Gamergate and the Sad/Rabid Puppies that what they were doing—infiltrating, coopting, trolling, threatening—were necessary and *heroic* actions. Indeed, Wendling contends that the alt-right views itself as “something fundamentally countercultural,” something as rebellious and contentious as punk rock: “Alt-righters rail against what they see as an oppressive establishment. The difference is that their establishment is made up of academia, the Washington ‘swamp,’ and influential leftists in the media, rather than the corporate world and free-market politicians.”⁷³ As with cultural Marxism, the irony and overall contradictions seem not to register. Trolling, therefore, becomes a means of displaying and demonstrating cultural and often ethnic pride: hate speech, articulated via memes, conspiracism, and YouTube videos, transmogrifies into patriotic duty on the frontlines of the culture war.

⁷² Lavin, *Culture Warlords*, 105.

⁷³ Wendling, *Alt-Right*, 8–9.

SECTION IV: Subcultural Infiltration: Fatal Misreadings and Alt-Right Methodology

In a preface to a blog post dated September 17, 2018, Greg Johnson, editor-in-chief of Counter-Currents Publishing, wrote: “we need to craft ethnonationalist messages for all white groups, even Trekkies. This is my Epistle to the Trekkies.”⁷⁴ What follows is almost three thousand words outlining the ways in which “technological utopianism” is “compatible with ethnic nationalism”—and *incompatible* with “liberalism and globalization [that] undermine technological progress.”⁷⁵ Such a statement is harrowing, hateful, and difficult to move past. But the “we” Johnson is addressing, which comprises the 150,000 monthly visitors to the Counter-Currents website, is already initiated: they know the value of such a strategy.⁷⁶

Johnson is recognized by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) as an “alt-right white nationalist” who, “through books, articles and podcasts” has become the “flag-bearer of ... the ‘North American New Right.’”⁷⁷ Johnson, who purportedly holds a doctorate in philosophy, has apparently used his time in academia to his advantage, and the SPLC labels Counter-Currents as the “epicenter of ‘academic’ white nationalism.”⁷⁸ In fact, using his standing as an erstwhile

⁷⁴ Greg Johnson, “Technological Utopianism & Ethnic Nationalism,” Counter-Currents, last modified September 17, 2018, <https://counter-currents.com/2018/09/technological-utopianism-and-ethnic-nationalism/>.

⁷⁵ Johnson notes that this is the text of a speech he gave at the fourth Scandza Forum, a white nationalist gathering founded by the pseudonymous Frodi Midjord—a name that translates to “Frodo Middle Earth,” further revealing connections between white nationalism and speculative/fantasy fiction, according to the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights.

⁷⁶ Patrik Hermansson et al., *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?* (New York: Routledge), 253.

⁷⁷ “Greg Johnson,” SPLC, accessed November 5, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/greg-johnson>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

academic, Johnson successfully submitted a paper to a 2016 SF literary conference on Philip K. Dick, hosted by California State University, Fullerton.⁷⁹ According to the *Jewish Journal*:

Johnson's paper claimed that the novel's underlying myth is the passion of the Christ with an emphasis on the role of Jews both in persecuting Jesus at the time, and "their present-day descendants who continue to mock him and his followers." It is laced with anti-Semitic references to Jews' alleged intellectual arrogance, lack of empathy, and eagerness to follow the dictates of the Old Testament to exploit animals and other human beings for their own selfish and subversive ends. ... Johnson notes approvingly that "Philip K. Dick had a good deal of wisdom about Jews and the Jewish question."⁸⁰

Johnson was later disinvited—due to the fact that this paper had already been published on the Counter-Currents website, and not explicitly because of his anti-Semitism and white nationalism. Interestingly, as the *Jewish Journal* points out, a Counters-Currents comment posted on November 26, 2015, asks Johnson to submit the paper for the upcoming conference, despite acknowledging the "hostile political climate on college campuses to diversity of thought." Less than an hour later, Johnson replied: "I just submitted it. Thanks for the heads up." This comment—and Johnson's response to it—illustrates how the alt-right and white nationalists have turned to the internet to not only disseminate their diatribes, but to find new ways to doggedly infiltrate institutions and subcultural communities alike.

It is important to note that Johnson's anti-Semitic interpretation of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is a misreading that hinges upon erroneous, grandiose, and unfounded connections. For example, Johnson writes:

When Deckard frees himself from the fake police department and tracks down Luba Luft, he notices that, although she does not come with him willingly, "she did not actively resist; seemingly she had become resigned. Rick had seen that before in androids, in crucial situations. The artificial life force that animated them seemed to fail if pressed too far ... at least in some of them. But not all" (p. 529). This brings to mind holocaust

⁷⁹ "Philip K. Dick: Here and Now," California State University, Fullerton, Pollak Library, accessed November 5, 2020, <https://www.library.fullerton.edu/visiting/exhibits/exhibit-2016-philip-k-dick.php>.

⁸⁰ Joel Bellman, "Philip K. Dick Conference disinvites white separatist," *Jewish Journal*, last modified April 26, 2016, https://jewishjournal.com/los_angeles/184751/.

stories of Jews allowing themselves to be passively herded en masse to their deaths. (This seems unlikely, for based on my experience, Jews do not lack self-assertion.)⁸¹

The animalizing of Holocaust victims and the editorializing in the parenthetical trade in stereotypical white nationalist anti-Semitism, and such writing concretizes his hatred and exposes his faulty reasoning. His anti-Semitism is further compounded by the lowercasing of “Holocaust,” a shorthand used by many white nationalists to evoke Holocaust denialism.⁸² Moreover, the “essay” is more accurately categorized as a synopsis, braided with additional anti-Semitic claims like the talk show, *Buster Friendly and His Friendly Friends*, is evidence of a Jewish-led media conspiracy, instead of being a commentary on the ways television breeds apathy and dangerous complacency.⁸³ To a literary critic, these errors are egregious, obvious, and appalling—indeed, Johnson even seems to suggest that his (mis-)interpretation is intentional, qualifying the post by stating that “I do not argue that this brief but rich and suggestive novel can be reduced entirely to this [anti-Semitic] dimension”⁸⁴—and yet, he was able to submit an abstract with the intent to present at an SF conference. Overall, the post represents a clear example of *idealization* within the alt-right ideology: the adulating of (often canonical) subcultural or pop-cultural works, that, through alt-right readings, act as possible vehicles for “subcultural infiltration,” which I argue is a tripartite *modus operandi* instrumentalized by white nationalists to recruit others to their ranks. It is impossible to say what came first—the fandom or

⁸¹ Greg Johnson, “Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* as Anti-Semitic/Christian-Gnostic Allegory,” Counter-Currents, last modified April 4, 2014, <https://counter-currents.com/2014/04/philip-k-dicks-do-androids-dream-of-electric-sheep-as-anti-semiticchristian-gnostic-allegory/>.

⁸² Stern, *Proud Boys*, 47.

⁸³ Johnson, “*Androids*.”

⁸⁴ Ibid.

the white supremacism—but through idealization, the two can come together to serve the latter’s agenda. Indeed, just like with *The Matrix*’s “red pill/blue pill” cooption, alt-righters have learned that, to fully gain credibility in fandom and gamer subcultures, they not only need to speak the language, they also need to profess a corresponding and demonstrable level of adoration.

In a different post, dated August 15, 2014—the day before the Zoë Post was published, and two days before the 2014 Hugo Awards were presented—Johnson lauds Frank Herbert’s *Dune* as a masterpiece that, because of its status as the “best-selling science fiction novel of all time,” requires thorough alt-right attention. For Johnson, *Dune* is the ultimate representation of alt-right and white nationalist themes, taken to their (il)logical conclusions. Johnson writes:

[W]e must pause to ask why these novels have such a powerful appeal on the Right. The answer, of course, is that Frank Herbert was no liberal. No liberal praises feudalism over democracy, hierarchy over equality, and martial virtues over bourgeois ones—but Frank Herbert does. No liberal attaches great weight to heredity, speaks of racial memories, praises eugenics, and explains the Darwinian benefits of subjecting human populations to the ruthless culling of harsh environments—but Frank Herbert does. ... Herbert believes in essential differences between men and women, which was uncontroversial when he began writing *Dune* more than 50 years ago, but today it is considered the height of reaction. ... Herbert’s novels are deeply and disquietingly anti-humanist and anti-individualist. He thinks in terms of the evolution of the human race over vast spans of time. ... Herbert traces the rise and fall of civilizations through great cycles, moving from vital and heroic barbarism to cynical, sclerotic, and decadent civilizations, which are then liquidated by fresh barbarians.⁸⁵

As with *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Johnson makes overzealous connections that are bent to fit alt-right ideology. But the idealization of *Dune* seems even greater than *Sheep*, thanks to Johnson’s incorrect assignation of Herbert as a political ally. Johnson’s white nationalist reading goes on to praise *Dune*’s archeofuturistic themes, signaling its paradigmatic potential to create a “third” category beyond “progressive” and “reactionary.”⁸⁶ Developed by French New

⁸⁵ Greg Johnson, “Archeofuturist Fiction: Frank Herbert’s *Dune*,” Counter-Currents, last modified August 15, 2014, <https://counter-currents.com/2014/08/frank-herberts-dune-part-1/>.

⁸⁶ Johnson, “Archeofuturist Fiction.”

Right theorist Guillaume Faye, a favorite among alt-right intellectuals, archeofuturism is “the reemergence of archaic social configurations in a new context.”⁸⁷ This anodyne definition is buttressed by an eschatological impulse operating on the assumption that a full-scale, global catastrophe⁸⁸ will occur “in the next two decades.”⁸⁹ Archeofuturism is thus a return to the past framed in futurological terms. Alexandra Minna Stern unpacks these “reactionary timescapes” in *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate*, noting that such revisioning is emblematic of the alt-right’s larger cooptions—but with more “insidious and alarming dimensions”:

[U]nderstanding these reactionary timescapes sheds light on the alt-right’s contempt for equality and individualism, which it views as deracinated principles designed to unfold in sequential and analog time. In distinction, alt-right temporality is anchored to hierarchies and blood and soil collectivism; it moves in cycles, through catastrophe and grandeur, always with its finger on the eternal.⁹⁰

Stern’s reading of these timescapes likewise reveals Johnson’s normalizing and extolling of feudalism, eugenics, gender binarism, biological essentialism, and other hallmarks of white nationalist ideology are not simply markers of hatred, but methods to enact and propagate it. Thus, *Dune*, as a piece of idealized alt-right SF, is less fantastic and more schematic: Paul Atreides, through Bene-Gesserit eugenics and messianic mysticism, becomes the leader and savior of the Arrakis ethnostate.⁹¹ Compare this reading to my earlier argument that alt-righters

⁸⁷ Guillaume Fay, “The Essence of Archaism,” Counter-Currents, last modified July 17, 2010, <https://counter-currents.com/2010/07/the-essence-of-archaism/>.

⁸⁸ It would be fruitful to compare white nationalist apocalypse narratives to post-World War II cozy-catastrophes; such SF serves as the prototype for many white nationalist survival fantasies. Likewise, it is important to examine the plethora of econationalist texts hailing the homegrown white ethnostate.

⁸⁹ Faye was writing this in 1998.

⁹⁰ Stern, *Proud Boys*, 34.

⁹¹ Of course, this reading diminishes the role of the Fremen in Arrakis’ liberation from the Harkonnens. Likewise, Johnson seems to gloss over the glaring metaphorizing of mass corporate influence throughout *Dune*.

often envision themselves in the role of such heroic, masculinist characters (through idealization and also through trolling), and it is clear what Johnson is communicating between the lines—SF, especially canonical SF, can and should be instrumentalized by white supremacists and nationalists to initiate, ingratiate, and inspire new supporters. As with the cultural Marxism conspiracy, these misreadings—intentional or not—are tactical.

A particularly striking component of this tactic is Johnson’s vocabulary, which draws heavily from academic texts and certainly *looks* the part. Indeed, many of Counter-Currents’ publications seem to mirror the visual and iconographical elements, as well as naming conventions, of other academic texts. Such titles include: *From Plato to Postmodernism, Toward a New Nationalism*, *Heidegger in Chicago*, *Novel Folklore: On Sadegh Hedayat’s The Blind Owl*, and *Sexual Utopia in Power*. As with the publishing organ, Johnson’s posts are meant to mimic in order to legitimize. It is a shrewd form of *imitative* cooption, a second major component of subcultural infiltration that media critic Johannes von Moltke describes as “conceptual high-jacking,”⁹² that the alt-right implements to legitimize, normalize, and sustain its ideology. Johnson, by weaponizing such landmarks of pop culture and fandom, and by developing what look to be educated readings of them, can breed dissent and doubt while simultaneously propagating disinformation. Johnson, and those who read his work, have the benefit of *appearing* to follow the academician’s logic of close-reading and careful contextualization—without doing either. Compare this to the cultural Marxism theory, in which one’s awareness of the schema is coded as a specialized, intellectual advantage that only those in-the-know possess. Johnson, therefore, seems to be addressing educated alt-righters and

⁹² Freie Universität Berlin, “The Meme is the Message,” YouTube video, 1:10:05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7e7lSGlSWs>.

demonstrating that they, too, can apply white nationalist “theory” as a lens to reread canonical texts.

Stern writes, while researching the “quasischolarly” intellectual alt-right oeuvre for *Proud Boys*, she noticed that “[a]lthough unlikely to ever survive academic peer review, this sizable body of literature strategically adheres to scholarly conventions, reflecting the graduate training of a good many of the alt-right mandarins.”⁹³ This methodology is, at first gloss, counterintuitive: why would the alt-right, to properly support its ideology, use the dictates of the institutions they lambast and denigrate? But such a reaction misinterprets or underestimates the aims of the alt-right’s intellectual arm: mimicking academic conventions suggests a certain understanding that, to be taken seriously, one must engage with the power structures ones wants to overthrow. It could also represent a general mimesis or misplaced idolatry of academia as a one-time bastion of rational thought, now overrun by Frankfurt Schoolers and political correctness: to uphold their intellectualism, alt-righters must seem capable of passing as genuine academics. Perhaps, more simply, it is similar to the projection found in conspiracism: imitation represents a way to rally against the same institutions that took away or proscribed their opportunities to be professorial in the first place, all while looking and seeming the part themselves.

Johnson’s “Epistle” to Trekkie culture, therefore, is a perpetuation of this same tactic, honed with precision to appeal to fans who, like the Sad Puppies and Gamergaters, may indeed be questioning how SF narratology functions in the world today. This is the third and final leg of what I consider to be the core tenets of alt-right subcultural infiltration: *initiation*. There are numerous ways to initiate prospective alt-righters, and, for the most part, it happens via memes

⁹³ Stern, *Proud Boys*, 4.

(which I have, in other papers, termed “memesis”), anonymous messageboards, and through hate speech veiled (or seemingly veiled) in irony. But, for Johnson and many other alt-righters who bill themselves as academics or intellectuals, initiation needs to be more nuanced. Of course, the Trekkie post is a blatant call-to-action to initiate via subcultural infiltration, but what I have found most often, especially with Counter-Currents and Castalia Press, is a concerted effort to take mimesis to the extreme: instead of Gamergate-style trolling or meme-production, they have opted to publish and uphold reactionary fiction and reactionary writers, categorizing such works as benign or straightforward SF. Perhaps most notable is Ward Kendall’s 2001 novel, *Hold Back This Day*, published through Counter-Currents (though now out-of-print on their website), which is widely recognized as a post-apocalyptic, white survivalist fantasy. In Kendall’s words, *Hold Back This Day* asks readers to “stand up now and take action [against white genocide]” so as not to “leave it to the last generation of whites to deal with”⁹⁴—invoking the noxious “white genocide” conspiracy theory that is rampant within alt-right, white nationalist, and fascist factions.⁹⁵ Kendall, therefore, represents a fusing of SF narratology and conspiracy theory. Though Kendall is open about his racism—readers, by and large, know what they are getting into—the Castalia House imprint operates differently. Indeed, because they publish work by Jerry Pournelle, who has been past-president of SFWA and frequently collaborated with hard-SF great Larry Niven, and Nebula-award winner John C. Wright, Castalia House represents an entry point for SF fans who may be wholly unaware of their alt-right lineage. Both Pournelle and

⁹⁴ Ian Allen, “Inside the World of Racist Science Fiction,” *New York Times*, last modified July 30, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/30/opinion/inside-the-world-of-racist-science-fiction.html>.

⁹⁵ Stern, *Proud Boys*, 52.

Wright identity as right-wing,⁹⁶ but it is entirely possible to read Pournelle and Wright and initially miss what is between the lines. Moreover, because William S. Lind’s dystopian novel is available from the same publisher and falls within the same genre, it is *also* entirely possible that a reader will unintentionally purchase a propagandist piece from one of the key progenitors of the cultural Marxism conspiracy theory—and therein lay the appeal. Unlike racist and conspiratorial memes, this type of tendentious initiation can be covert, refined—even subtle. One can flirt with white nationalism while asserting at least some kind of plausible deniability. This kind of SF, divorced from overt alt-right plotting, becomes the ultimate red-pill—one that precludes a decision-making process altogether.

⁹⁶ Jerry Pournelle, “Charlemagne or Akbar—or Liberty?,” last modified October 13, 2011, <https://www.jerrypournelle.com/chaosmanor/2011/10/13/>; John C. Wright, “Dinosaur-sized bigotry,” last modified February 1, 2015, <http://www.scifiwright.com/2015/02/dinosaur-sized-bigotry/>.

SECTION V: Addendum: The Baen's Bar Controversy⁹⁷

In February 2021, SF writer and fan Jason Sanford published an “investigative report” that exposed an upsetting theme on the Baen’s Bar forum. Sanford’s report includes multiple screenshots from the politics section of the Bar, many of which hint at or openly call for reactionary violence.⁹⁸ The timing of these posts is crucial: the January 6, 2021, insurrection occurred only a month prior, giving such vitriol—sincere or not—an urgency that may have previously been discounted or relegated to the realm of the ironic or satirical. Sanford highlights the fact that many Baen authors are “outspokenly conservative,” Larry Correia among them, and suggests that some of Baen’s readership may skew similarly right in their political leanings. However, Sanford stresses that such authors do not make Baen a de facto conservative publishing house; indeed, he makes mention of multiple left-leaning or even socialist Baen writers, like Eric Flint, Joana Russ, and Harry Turtledove, to dispel such notions.⁹⁹ Instead, Sanford was attempting to point to a seemingly noxious trend among the moderators to not only allow for violent, vitriolic discussion, but to encourage and even add to it. A rather benign example of this is included as a link to a screenshot in which one moderator, “theoryman,” comments that “rendering ANY large city is [*sic*] uninhabitable is quite easy ... And the Left lives in cities.” Other examples cite calls for mass killing, or ideas for how the next Civil War, abbreviated “ACW2,” will commence.¹⁰⁰ Writing post-insurrection, military-SF author Tom

⁹⁷ I am grateful to Dr. Isiah Lavender III for pointing me to this controversy that erupted after I completed the first draft of this thesis.

⁹⁸ Jason Sanford, “Baen Books Forum Being Used to Advocate for Political Violence,” Patreon, last modified February 15, 2021, <https://www.patreon.com/posts/baen-books-forum-47582408>.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Kratman imagines “where Trump and the nation go from here,” including the creation of a militia that is “neatly but simply uniformed. ... A simple shirt and bluejeans for non-firearms related activities / head busting.”¹⁰¹ The forum invariably appeared to be the perfect case study of successful subcultural infiltration. Indeed, such posts, contained within an SF forum that has been a part of the digital community almost from the very beginning,¹⁰² encapsulate examples of the tripartite methodology; users, through idealization, imitation, and/or initiation, have banded together not only to spread polemical diatribes, but to insist upon violence shortly after a deadly political transition from an alt-right darling to an elected Democrat.

This is not the first time Baen Books has experienced controversy based on the political leanings of its authors. In 2014, Correia, modeling an earlier post by Torgensen, penned a defense of Baen Books after “a straw effigy of our publisher [Toni Weiskopf] got burned for things she never actually said by a mob of butt hurt Social Justice Warriors.”¹⁰³ Correia’s synopsis oversimplifies: Weiskopf, guestposting on Baen author Sarah Hoyt’s personal blog, comments on what she sees as a “vast cultural divide” in the “greater American culture,” which is being “reflected” in SF.¹⁰⁴ Though she does not outwardly remark upon the Sad Puppies controversy, its timing and content makes clear that Weiskopf is commenting on the state of the genre *as a result* of the controversy. Weiskopf seems to warn that, although feuds and

¹⁰¹ Mike Glycer, “Pixel Scroll 1/9/21 Magnetic Monopoly: Do Not Exceed C, Do Not Collect 200 Zorkmids,” File770, last modified January 9, 2021, <http://file770.com/pixel-scroll-1-9-21-magnetic-monopoly-do-not-exceed-c-do-not-collect-200-zorkmids/>.

¹⁰² Bacon-Smith, *Culture*, 84.

¹⁰³ Larry Correia, “Why I Publish With Baen Too,” Monster Hunter Nation, last modified March 17, 2014, <http://monsterhunternation.com/2014/03/17/why-i-publish-with-baen-too/>.

¹⁰⁴ Toni Weiskopf, “The Problem of Engagement: A Guest Post by Toni Weiskopf,” According to Hoyt, last modified March 10, 2014, <https://accordingtohoyt.com/2014/03/10/the-problem-of-engagement-a-guest-post-by-toni-weiskopf/>.

flamewars were part-and-parcel of the community (she references “The Great Exclusion Act” as an example of political propagandism), a new generation of fans is upsetting the careful balance achieved through the “open culture” format of SF fandom and dismantling it through ignorance. According to Weisskopf, “[g]eeks are chic, but somehow we’ve let the fuggheads win.”¹⁰⁵ Her invocation of insular fan terminology hints at who she deems blameworthy for the “cultural divide” in SF:

These days ... you can watch Game of Thrones and Star Wars and anime and never pick up a book. And there’s enough published material out there that it is entirely possible to have zero points of contact between members of that smaller subset of SF readers. ... So the question arises—why bother to engage these people at all? They are not of us. They do not share our values, they do not share our culture. ... And I’m not sure there is a good enough argument for engaging them.¹⁰⁶

While Weisskopf is certainly correct in her depiction of the changing SF media landscape, what she is ultimately suggesting is that one cannot “have a say” if one is not a member of legitimate fan communities. In other words, only trufans matter, and newcomers’ opinions are invalid and unwelcome. Moreover, Weisskopf believes that fandom, to be successful, must *overcome* political difference to “concentrate on the thing we all [love].” But Weisskopf is writing because of a “divide” furthered by a Baen author’s attempt to rally fans of a certain political leaning to disrupt the Hugo voting process—as a result, a call to forego or surmount politics seems impotent at best.

Thus, that Baen’s Bar skewed heavily conservative in 2021 was hardly surprisingly but oddly incongruent with Weisskopf’s own imagining of proper fandom. Also unsurprising was the response to Sanford’s article, which was met with immediate controversy. Many writers and

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

fans took him to task for seemingly cherry-picking posts to highlight while actively ignoring the diverse political opinions of Baen contributors (despite Sanford pointing to this in the original article); or accused him of attempting to overthrow or demolish Baen because of its alleged, by-association politics.¹⁰⁷ But these complaints seem to misinterpret Sanford's thesis, which is that the Bar's moderators did not intervene when rhetoric became undeniably violent, and it was imperative, he argued, for Baen Books to take accountability and explain *why* such an approach to moderation was taken. Sanford began receiving Gamergate-style threats as a result of his reporting—a familiar leitmotif wherein any attempt to expose violent subcultural rhetoric is simultaneously denied and proven outright by a targeted demonstration of that very same rhetoric.¹⁰⁸ But the Bar controversy, much like the Sad Puppies one that helped shape it, succeeded only in bringing attention to these more pernicious and hateful aspects of fandom, and the forum was ultimately locked to the public.¹⁰⁹ Most notably, because of the controversy, Weisskopf was disinvited from being a Guest of Honor at the 2021 DisCon, an unprecedented move in the history of the convention.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Eric Flint, "The Controversy About Baen's Bar," EricFlint.com, last modified February 17, 2021, <https://ericflint.net/information/controversy-about-baens-bar/>; Larry Correia, "Publishing House Baen Books Attacked by Cancel Culture," Monster Hunter Nation, last modified February 16, 2021, <https://monsterhunternation.com/2021/02/16/publishing-house-baen-books-attacked-by-cancel-culture/>.

¹⁰⁸ Cat Rambo, "Opinion: On Baen Books, Moderating Discussion Boards, & Political Expression," The World Remains Mysterious: The Writing of Cat Rambo, last modified February 18, 2021, <http://www.kittywumpus.net/blog/2021/02/18/opinion-on-baen-books-moderating-discussion-boards-political-expression/>.

¹⁰⁹ Toni Weisskopf, "What I Saw at the Bar 2021," Baen's Bar, last modified April 9, 2021, <https://baensbar.net/index.php?t=msg&th=174011&start=0&>. Baen's Bar was put on hiatus soon after Sanford's article was published. That hiatus has now ended, but the forum has closed publicly; only verified purchasers of Baen Books and previous members are invited to contribute.

¹¹⁰ Bill Lawhorn, "Update on Editor Guest of Honor," DisCon III, last modified February 19, 2021, <https://discon3.org/news/update-on-editor-guest-of-honor/>.

What Sanford also succeeded in revealing is that previous divisions among political ideology in the fandom have transformed into something demonstrably vicious and serious. Weisskopf, in 2014, was reacting to the same thing Correia was (perhaps in more diplomatic terms)—a push against the progressive tilt in SF; at that time, it was contained to “revising” a voting procedure for an award. Now, however, this animus, in and beyond SF fandom, has become a legitimate and violent threat—and certain users on Baen’s Bar seemed to be expectant and excited for more catastrophic, political upheaval.

CONCLUSION: Uncovering and Abnegating Hateful Lineages

What I have expanded upon in this paper represents only a small segment of the alt-right and its SF influence, and offers mere glimpses at the larger theoretical questions I have regarding SF as a genre and as a basis for fandom. Part of what shapes this research is an understanding that my source material is fluid, shifting, dynamic, and such nimbleness belies a massive scale. Daily, I had to edit, revise, or update my findings based on news stories revolving around alt-right and white nationalist violence, or new connections I found between SF writers and the alt-right. I also acknowledge that, due to the hundreds of thousands of memes, blog posts, comments, and other transitory, internet-based media, it is entirely possible that I have missed or overlooked more glaring connections, some of which may have since been taken down or hidden behind paywalls. But what I have found—what connections I have made—are emblematic of pronounced schematizing within and beyond subcultural communities, especially SF.

Idealization, imitation, and initiation are often imbricated and operate concurrently. Combined, they comprise the tripartite methodology of subcultural infiltration that seeks to tantalize and beckon, to win approval through familiar tropes, themes, visuals—even through suspicion. And it is perilous to discount its efficacy. Indeed, such a methodology has proven an engine in alt-right conversion, and it continues to be fueled by anonymous trolls, politicians, and conspiracy theorists alike. Alt-righters and white nationalists like Johnson and Beale, and anti-PC SF figures like Correia and Torgensen, are not unique in their positioning, in their plotting. They are merely the most visible and the most traceable—at least, for now. And it is through them—through the Sad Puppies’ animus, general conspiracism, and unmitigated trolling—that the alt-right and white nationalists have successfully disseminated their views and homologous conversion and initiation methodologies. Indeed, Trump’s 2016 win and continued hold upon

GOP leadership and ideology evinces the efficacy of such dissemination, as does the mobilization of conspiracy theory throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (much of which hinges upon the same narratological structures I discussed above). The lethal White House transition marked a sobering time in American history, one from which we cannot ever look away—nor should we. Subcultural infiltration in digital fandoms, be it via white nationalist misreadings, alt-right cooption, or violent rhetoric on forums, will not end or dissipate because someone else is at the helm—as the Baen’s Bar controversy, among others, have shown. Thus, it is imperative that we, as scholars, researchers, and, most importantly, *fans*, continue to root out and abnegate these lineages, and uncover the deleterious motivations behind them.

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