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A~ZYN

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A BIT TOO LONG EDITORIAL

MARCIN “ALQUA” KŁAK

Years ago I was writing for a *Smokopolitan* fanzine. It was a great adventure. The seventh issue was a special one, prepared for the Barcelona Eurocon in 2016. Funnily, the seventh issue of *A~Zyn* is also a special English issue. Yet, this time it is prepared for Corflu Craic in Belfast. The truth is, however, that Corflu will be very small and it will be at Eurocon in Uppsala when the fanzine reaches a broader audience. Unfortunately, *Smokopolitan* didn't survive the trial of time – it had only eleven issues. I hope that in this regard *A~Zyn* will be different and that I will be publishing it for a long time.

For many years it was common for fanzines in Poland to contain mainly short stories and only a few articles. The proportions differed of course, but often the stories were the main focus. This is a big difference when compared to the anglophone fanzine scene. I recall reading once that the reason was limited access to the SFF literature in Poland, and

fanzines allowed to partially fill in this gap. Of course, once this idea settled in, it stayed with us. I wanted *A~Zyn* to be different. My idea was to publish mainly (or even only) articles. So far, I am managing to do so.

So, what you may expect inside? Firstly, I must mention interviews with the laureates of the Janusz A. Zajdel Award in 2022 – Michał Cholewa and Magdalena Salik. I allowed myself to write a short piece introducing the Award as it may not be known to everyone. Thanks to the collaborations of my friends in different countries, there are quite a few pages of the impressions of Polish fandom – how we are seen by visitors. There is also my text presenting briefly the history and the current landscape of the fannish life in Kraków. As we are a gaming nation, I couldn't imagine this fanzine without a gaming accent. Thanks to Cyrus Bukowsky you can play a single-player RPG where you will take the role of Cyber Pigeon in futuristic Kraków. Lastly, you can find my article that covers some of my considerations about fannish life in general. I wanted this issue to showcase Polish fandom with some skew toward Kraków. I hope that I succeeded in that.

This issue would not be created if not for the help of multiple people. I would like to thank all of them from the bottom of my heart. On the cover, you can find the picture by Olga Furman-Szczotkowska. When I approached her, I didn't have any idea about the cover. I just asked her to make something “related to Kraków and SFF”. When she showed me the initial sketch of the cyber pigeon, I was enchanted. It also sparked an idea for the game in Cyrus' mind. Speaking about Cyrus – I need to thank him not only for the game, but also for the DTP. Krzysztof Kietzman was kind

enough to translate the interviews from Polish to English, while Katarzyna Ophelia Koćma and Fox Mori offered their help with proofreading. I cannot forget about everyone who contributed their texts and is not mentioned above (in alphabetical order): Michał Cholewa, Liz Danforth, Ivan Seán Kranjcevic, Esther MacCallum-Stewart, Sergii Paltsun, Mihaela Marija Perković, Gillian Polack, Magdalena Salik, Valerija Strutinskaja, Geri Sullivan, and Ian Watson. Another person to whom I am grateful is Joanna “Szyszka” P-R, who created the picture mascot of *A~Zyn* – the crocodile on the skateboard. I also want to thank Olivier Darkshire who agreed for us to publish the game inspired and partially built upon his works. Last but definitely not least, I want to thank other people who supported me in creating this issue – the ones with whom I was consulting certain ideas, those who advised me, and those who helped me with finding some of the materials.

I could end my editorial here, but there is one more topic I would like to cover before allowing you to delve into the articles. Namely – the Fan Funds. They are very important to me, and I believe to fandom in general. I had the pleasure and honour to be a GUFF delegate in 2018. Since then, I am trying to do my best to support the funds. I cannot miss this opportunity to tell you about them and mention some of the ongoing races. I believe that many readers are already aware of what the Fan Funds are – yet for those who are not, let me briefly introduce them. Generally speaking, Fan Funds are cultural exchange programs. Their purpose is to provide and tighten the links between regional and national fandoms. Each of them is different – some are big while others are small. However, I believe all of them are valuable.

The person selected as a delegate receives the funding to attend the convention in another region, country, or even continent. The far-away trips are usually longer and consist not only convention, but also of weeks spent with the local fandom.¹

Fan Funds need you to thrive. And they need you in more than one way. Firstly, the funds need candidates to apply for them. If you are active in fandom – consider doing so in the future. I can guarantee that becoming a delegate is an unforgettable experience. The next step is to vote in the races. It is also a crucial element that serves two purposes. One of them is raising money (as to vote one needs to pay a small fee²). Though the second reason is, in my opinion, more important. Voting is the way to shape the funds. Your votes decide who will be the delegate – and this creates the shape of the fund and the cultural exchange. Your vote also shows the interest of fandom in such programs. The next thing you can do to support Fan Funds is to spread the word. The more fans are aware, the more may stand for the race and vote. Lastly – Fan Funds would not exist without the fannish generosity. In order to send someone to a different part of the country, continent, or world, we need money. Fans helped to collect it for years and they still continue to do so. Support can take a form of a direct donation of money. Also donating items for the Fan Fund auction at a convention where it takes place is a great way of support. Of course, bidding in the said auction and buying the donated stuff is also helpful.

1 You can read more about the Fan Funds on Fancyclopedia: fancyclopedia.org/Fan_Funds [Access: 02-03-2023].

2 Although there may be some funds where the fee is not required.

Each of the delegates tries to create a trip report from their journey – and they can be bought or sometimes read for free online with a suggestion for donation.³

I am mostly connected to three Fan Funds, and I will mention them here. The first of them is GUFF (Get Up-and-over Fan Fund, or the Going Under Fan Fund). It was created to exchange fans between Europe and Australia and New Zealand. It is the fund I was a delegate of, so I think this is understandable why my heart is close to this one. Due to the pandemic, no physical trip took place since 2019, but the winner of the 2020 race had a virtual trip and awaits the in-person one. There is no ongoing race for GUFF, but if you wish to support this fund, you may use PayPal to donate to: guffeurope@gmail.com.

The second fund I am relatively close to is TAFF (Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund). It features the exchange of fans between North America and Europe. The pandemic delayed one trip, but so far two trips were completed – one to North America and one to Europe. I am close to this fund because of two reasons. Firstly, in 2019 I had the pleasure to host Geri Sullivan who was a delegate that year, and last year I also had the chance to meet Orange Mike during his trip. This year I am nominating Mikołaj Kowalewski for the race. The voting takes place when I am writing these words. If you received this fanzine before the voting deadline (11th April 2023), please consider voting. You can do it here: taff.org.uk/ballots/taff2023.html. As a nominator, I am biased and I recommend Mikołaj to be

your first preference. Yet the second candidate – Sandra Bond – is also a great candidate! And if you wish to support TAFF with a monetary donation, you can PayPal the money to EUTAFF@gmail.com.

And the third fund is a new one. A long time ago I was inspired by Mihaela Marija Perković to create a fund that would concentrate on the fannish exchange within Europe. It took me some years to start working on this idea, and I would not complete it without the help of other fans. Yet finally the European Fan Fund (EFF) was born, and the first race takes place now. There are two candidates Matylda Naczyńska from Poland and James Shields from Ireland. As I am the administrator for the EFF, I will not make any suggestions apart from the one – please vote! The voting period closes on 10th April. The voting form is here: forms.gle/uzXzS4t9qimmczmZ9.⁴ As the fund is very young, it also needs more support to build up financial stability. If you have the option to support it, please donate via PayPal to europeanfanfund@gmail.com.

This would be the end of this a bit too extensive editorial. I hope you will enjoy *A~Zyn* and that you find some interesting information inside. I wish you a pleasant reading time.

P.S. A~Zyn always looks for submissions. Articles can be in Polish or English and should cover topics related to broad SFF and fandom. We would also gladly receive some art to feature on the future cover or inside the fanzine. Please send your submissions to kssf@kssf.org.pl.



³ My report is available online at ozfanfunds.com/?-page_id=143 [Access 02-03-2023]. I also have some printed copies left, so you may approach me to order them.

⁴ You can read more about the race here: fandomrover.com/2023/02/02/eff-race-begins/ [Access 02-03-2023].

FANDOM IS A...

MARCIN “ALQUA” KŁAK

I think that the first time I saw the phrase “Fandom is a Way of Life” was at Tricon Eurocon back in 2010. I had no idea what it meant – I just thought someone called their talk in the programme that way. I wanted to attend, but I missed it (I don’t remember why). It was probably years later when I learned about the true meaning of FIAWOL and FIJAGH.¹

I don’t want to dispute the differences between FIAWOL and FIJAGH here, and especially I don’t wish to argue which approach is better. Yet I keep thinking about fandom a lot and those two attitudes somehow appear in my mind. What I want to discuss is a collection of my fannish thoughts. I’ll try not to make it a stream of consciousness, but it may be diverting into that direction a bit.

When asked “When I joined the fandom?”, I could easily provide an exact date. It was March 2nd, 2002. On this day my first convention – DOJIcon 2 – took place. This is not exactly true. I had some links to fandom before the con; I somehow learned about it. I even helped a bit beforehand. On the other hand, should I consider the moment I entered the convention venue the true beginning of being in fandom? The truth is that I don’t know or simply don’t remember when it happened. Maybe “joining fandom” is not a single point in time, but

rather a continuum. What I can be sure of is, that at some point in 2002 I was certainly considering myself a fan – a member of fandom.

Not so long ago I was reading a book, *Geek Elders Speak* – a collection of essays and interviews with women involved in fandom. One thing struck me, or maybe just reminded me of something I already knew. Some of them were writing about the “entry moment,” how they attended a convention and knew they found their “people” (or maybe “family”, or “tribe”). The wording may be different, but that was the sense. I am sure I have heard similar phrases before. Well, in fact I am describing my first convention the same way. And it is funny. The truth is, I don’t remember it too well. I would be lying stating I could recall the exact moment when this feeling of “those are my people” hit me. Yet the truth is that in my own head I was feeling it in exactly that way.

The above brings me to another memory – not so far in the past. It was in 2018 when I was on my GUFF² trip. During one day in Melbourne, I was sitting in a cafe with Narrelle, and I believe, Julian. And we talked about our fannish memories. It was a great and joyous surprise to learn that Narrelle and I had very similar memories regarding the fanzine creation. You see – my first fandom steps were related to the Polish manga fanzine *DOJI*. I had written some articles there in early the 2000s. Narrelle started her journey earlier than me and she was involved in the Australian fanzine. Yet

¹ Those are two different approaches to fandom. FIAWOL – Fandom is a Way of Life. FIJAGH – Fandom is Just a Goddamn Hobby. More information can be found in Fancyclopedia: fancyclopedia.org/FIAWOL fancyclopedia.org/FIJAGH.

² GUFF (Get Up-and-over Fan Fund, or the Going Under Fan Fund) is a fannish “cultural exchange programme”. It is about sending fans from Europe to a convention in Australasia and vice versa. More details can be found here: fancyclopedia.org/GUFF.

despite years and location differences, our memories were so similar! The matter of used techniques, covered topics and so on were not so important. What we did was important, and it was the same.

And getting back to “finding my people at first convention” – this situation is almost the same. The way in which I picture my feelings from March 2nd, 2002 is very similar, or even identical, to how fans from different continent described their entry point thirty or forty years earlier. What does it mean? I am not fully sure, yet those similarities in our experiences must mean something. Maybe we all just forge our memories based on what we are experiencing later? But I think this is not true. I suppose that some of us (as those experiences are probably not universal) are similar enough to experience things in the same way.

We are not the same though. The pure existence of FIAWOL and FIJAGH terms proves that. The way we are involved in our fannish activities differs. The way we interact with other fans differs. The importance of fandom in our lives differs. I always considered myself deeply involved in fandom. I spent countless hours indulging in different activities. I cannot even try to count the hours I spent at voluntary works – being at conventions, fanzines, or other activities. At one point I went to Kontakt Eurocon in Zagreb, Croatia. There I met a fan and he completely changed how I pictured myself. It seems he had enough money to attend the convention but not enough to be able to stay in Zagreb. He told us (as I was with a few friends) that he slept in a park and used fountain to wash himself. Whenever I think about FIAWOL – I envision this conversation. Please don't misunderstand me,

I am not judging this behaviour. I don't imply we should all be so devoted to fandom. I see a lot of issues with such dedication but at the same time I don't want to criticize it. I want to illustrate how strongly we differ in our love of fandom. Since that meeting years ago, I do not see myself in the same light as before. I learned more about myself, my limits, and my priorities. I know I would never travel to another country for a con without the place to stay there.

Finding fandom was one of the best things in my life. I learned about it thanks to a coincidence and I am glad that it happened. Now I am unable to imagine how my life would look like without it. The common experiences I share with so many others is a great thing to reflect upon. Looking at the differences allows me to learn more about myself. I love observing how fandom is changing and how my perception of it has changed too. I would be lying if I said I enjoyed every change but I think they are inevitable. We are all close enough to feel we belong to the same community yet we differ in so many ways that we don't share one common vision of where that community should be heading. Despite these differences, I believe we can concentrate on the aspects that bond us together.



JANUSZ A. ZAJDEL AWARD – A POLISH HUGO

MARCIN “ALQUA” KŁAK

The Janusz A. Zajdel Award is, in my opinion, the most important of the Polish SFF Awards. It is handed yearly in two categories – best novel and best short story.¹ I compare it to Hugo Awards because it is similarly voted by the fans. The rules for them are not the same though, but there are enough similarities to justify the comparison.

The full name of the award is Janusz A. Zajdel Award of Polish Fandom.² Yet it is seldom used. In most cases we abbreviate it to the Zajdel Award, or even refer to it as “Zajdel” only. All fans of SFF literature can nominate for it but only the people who are attending or are supporting members of Polcon (Polish national convention) can vote.

Why do I consider it the most important award in the field in Poland? That is a tough question! For one, it is old. It was originally given in 1985 for the works from 1984 while Śląkfa (award of Silesian SFF Club) is one year older. I think that the importance is related to a few facts. It is an award of fandom. Zajdel is not limited to any particular club or region. Although the number of voters is not very high (I believe around 300 in recent years), anyone can feel it is “their” award. Many people view it this way. Another factor is the relationship to our national convention – Polcon. For years it was the most important



The Janusz A. Zajdel Award trophy

convention (at some point also the biggest). Thus, the value of the award came from tradition, openness and being, for many fans, it was the central part of the fannish year. I believe its importance is due to fact that many of us perceive this award to be important.

Of course, it doesn't mean that everyone cares about it. Unfortunately, for many it is just some unimportant thing that “no one cares about”. There were also some controversies around the Zajdels. Certain writers were complaining about how and to whom it is awarded to. One of the previous winners even wrote an open letter to Jadwiga Zajdel – Janusz A. Zajdel's widow to ask her to withdraw the patronage of her late husband over the award. She didn't agree with him and refused. Despite these difficulties, the award is handed regularly as many believe it remained extremely important.

¹ The distinction is not the same as in the Anglophone world. Novel is a work of at least 100 normalized pages. One normalized page is 1800 characters (including spaces). Short story is anything shorter than that.

² Nagroda Fandomu Polskiego im. Janusza A. Zajdla.

Historically this award had different name. It was established in 1984 as the “Fandom Award,” initially named Sfinks (Sphinx). It was originally awarded a year later during the first Polcon in Błażejewko, near Poznań. At this time, it was voted by the SFF clubs, not by individual fans. It was decided that the award should go to Janusz A. Zajdel for his novel “Paradyzja”.³ As the author died in July 1985, he was not able to collect this distinction. It was the next year when Jadwiga Zajdel received the award at a subsequent

³ I believe that the fact that none of the major SFF works of Janusz A. Zajdel were translated to English is a great omission. Although at the time his works were read (and probably also written) as anticommunistic they are in fact opposing any kind of totalitarianism and are still valid now – around forty years later.

Polcon in Katowice. Then the Polcon Committee decided to change the name of the award, and Jadwiga Zajdel agreed. This is how the award got the current name.

I won't bore you with more details about the history of the Zajdel award. The role of this short article was to function as an introduction to the two following interviews. I asked a few questions to the winners of the Janusz A. Zajdel award selected at Polcon in Kraków in November 2022. Let me then invite you to the short interviews with Magdalena Salik and Michał Cholewa.



INTERVIEW WITH MAGDALENA SALIK

MARCIN "ALQUA" KŁAK

Alqua: How did you begin writing?

Magdalena Salik: For me, it was natural. I began just after I'd learnt how to put words together, or when I was seven. Back then, I wrote a short novel on four tankmen on horseback. Then, throughout my life, I had this thought that I should "get serious" about writing. But I found the courage to try late in life, in my late twenties. Now I regret I didn't try sooner. I would've been able to make all those inevitable mistakes sooner and feel more confident in front of the keyboard.

A: Your latest novel – "The Flame" [Płomień] – received two of the most prestigious awards in the field of Polish speculative fiction: the Janusz A. Zajdel and Jerzy Żuławski awards. How did that feel?

MS: In both cases, it was a great surprise. I was very happy about the nominations themselves, and the fact that they resulted in getting the awards is both amazing and quite frightening. I'm aware that my next book will be compared to "The Flame". It's not easy to write with such an awareness.

A: If you had to describe "The Flame" in a few words, how would you go about it?

MS: It's about preparations for a space mission, which were going well at first, then led to a spectacular failure, but everything ends in relative success. About a romance between two scientists participating in the preparations and its end. And about the adventures of two soldiers who are battling



Picture by Mikołaj Starzyński

through a city after the apocalypse and about a space pilot who must deal with the feelings of futility and isolation in a planetary base.

That's all as far as the plot is concerned. The text also tackles the issue of the shaping of ethical norms in conditions, in which one lacks points of reference. How do we determine whether emerging new things – new technologies, theories, plans of operation – are good or bad? Would we be able to do away with such descriptors or is the moral need too strong to resist? And what if in the course of thinking about such things, we break the older, well-known norms?

And if that wasn't enough, the novel also deals with the classic theme of SF: what would happen if we had access to a technology enabling brain emulation? What principles would it be based on – neurological, engineering-wise – and how would

this process look like? What would happen to those who had undergone it? How would they feel without a biological body? What would they think about themselves?

A: As I was thinking about your novel, it occurred to me that it's a book from the Golden Age of Science Fiction, but also one clearly written in the 21st century. What do you think about this?

MS: It's the sweetest compliment I heard. My most beloved science-fiction novels are from the Golden Age. Lem, Dick, Asimov, the Strugatsky brothers and others are authors who excel not just in SF, but in literature in general. I keep coming back to them once in a while – for instance, I just finished reading “His Master’s Voice” and I’m very impressed by passages on the relationship between man and technology. Some of the sentences which Lem had written in 1967 seem just like they come from the present discussion on the opportunities and threats tied to rapid scientific and technological development.

Which, by the way, shows that one should not count on quick, fast-food solutions to the most intriguing issues which appear in modern discourse. Our relationships with technology need further, increasingly newer descriptions, approaches, and considerations from individual perspectives. Only repeated, calm conversations about problems, jotting down our thoughts and feelings and noting inter-generational similarities and differences will perhaps lead to the emergence of some kind of a dominant trend which will shape our future. And this trend will remain after our age of rapid technological acceleration and it will influence the next ones, which come after.

By the way: I am very curious about these trends. Or rather – how much they will differ from our own, even most far-out idea about them.

A: You started publishing in the publishing house RUNA, and when it went under, you decided to self-publish the third volume of the “Valleys of Darkness” [Doliny Mroku] trilogy. What’s behind that decision?

MS: Well, it went under. The first volume appeared in print, the second only as an ebook. And then my publisher folded up its business. I suspected that there’s no chance of publishing the third somewhere else. I was even unsure whether or not to write it at all, as that was already after RUNA closed down and I was sure no one will publish “The Song of Living Rocks” [Pieśń żywych skał]. But as my husband was correct to point out, I had the obligation to finish the story. I also felt responsible to provide the readers with some kind of closure. I asked myself: “Suppose that five or a hundred people will be interested in reading the third novel. Does it really matter how many in particular? Is there some threshold, upon crossing which you will tell yourself: I will write the book – and below which – I will not?”. I decided that looking for such a threshold is pointless. And that those five people are equally obligating and motivating as a thousand.

So the third novel came to fruition. By the way, in contrast with volumes one and two, I remain quite satisfied with it.

A: A large number of writers of speculative fiction emerge from the fandom itself. How was it in your case? What’s your relationship with the fandom?

MS: Quite fresh. Contrary to appearances, I'm quite a shy nerd and I don't initiate conversation, don't go anywhere on my own, and don't volunteer. Moreover, I did not have any friends, with whom I could e.g. attend a con. I only overcame my reluctance this year and attended several. And I'm very glad I did, because it was amazing each time.

My problem was that I never wrote short stories, which are a way to get close to the fandom. Once, about twelve years ago, I tried writing several stories, only to consider the end effect to be worthless and abandon the idea. I only ever found the courage to show one story to someone, and then, despite some encouragement, abandoned the idea altogether for a good decade. By the way, I still don't feel comfortable with the short story as a form of writing.

A: What are conventions to you?

MS: Places where – as it turns out – there's a mass of people who are interested in different weird things that also happen to interest me. And who geek out about things I geek out on. Where I can speak and listen to other speak about artificial intelligence, robots, technology. Where there are loads of people with astounding knowledge on speculative fiction, pop-culture, and science. I also immensely enjoy the fact that cons are attended by people who wish to learn something new. This may seem obvious, but not really. In reality, there aren't that many people who are able to approach new ideas without bias, with pure curiosity.

A: You work as a journalist and mostly deal with popular science. Does work in this area inspire you to write speculative fiction?

MS: To clarify: I mostly dealt with editing and managing publishing process. In other words, I mostly read things written by others or thought about what they may write about. And yes – it was extremely inspiring. “The Flame” began with an article in “Focus”, by Andrzej Mischczak, I think, about potential engines of future space-ships. One of the described options dealt with accelerating a ship to a fraction of the speed of light. I started to think about how such a mission could look like, what challenges would it be faced with, and how it should be organized. The rest of these deliberations is in “The Flame”.

A: Aren't you tempted to write an article about the fandom for some “mainstream” magazine? Familiarize normal readers with this community?

MS: I don't feel I'm knowledgeable enough in this regard to write something like you suggest. On the other hand – there would have to exist a “mainstream” magazine which would want to publish something like this. This second obstacle may be harder to overcome than the first. The term “fandom” is not enough – it must be provided with some kind of a context. For instance, the holiday edition of “Newsweek” featured an article on the appearance of an entire group of women writers of Polish speculative fiction. It deals with the fandom to some degree, but the main topic is different.

A: Thank you for speaking with me.



INTERVIEW WITH MICHĄŁ CHOLEWA

MARCIN "ALQUA" KŁAK

Alqua: How did you begin writing?

Michał Cholewa: That's a very complicated question. I began writing at nine years old – or perhaps ten? – with an adventure novel on the Bermuda Triangle, a deserted island, and shipwrecks. I remember the text also featured an assault helicopter, because I liked them, and an enormous gorilla. The gorilla was the bad guy and the pilots of the assault helicopter – the heroes, which, more or less, show how little I'd known back then about people and gorillas. I never finished the novel, but naturally, I was convinced that if were only to complete it, it would bring me instant fame. Then I had a somewhat longish break from writing (except for school writing competitions, participation in which gave me the opportunity to improve my grade in Polish).

As an adult, I came back to writing in about 2006 or 2007, in the context of the Literary Section of the Silesian Science-Fiction & Fantasy Club. I stumbled upon their meetings quite by chance and remained for good. That's how "The Well" [Studnia] came about – my first published story (in *The Essence* [Esensja] e-fanzine). I must admit that working in the Section really helped me along.

A: You received the Janusz A. Zajdel Award for the second time, this time for the short story "The Escape" [Ucieczka]. How does that feel?

MC: What a strange question – of course it's a great feeling! First, being nominated



Picture by Jakub Jankiewicz

itself is a great privilege – and receiving the award feels even better. Second, I received the award in the short story category, and I personally consider the short story to be the most important form of genre fiction writing. This was a very important moment for me.

A: If you were asked to describe „The Escape” in a few words, how would you go about it?

MC: "The Escape" is a story about, well, escaping, in at least several meanings of the word. In the most obvious sense, it's about a mining colony and a family caught between the privileged administrative-urban caste and the definitely less privileged group of miners. Due to a quite mysteriously bloody rebellion of the latter, the family discovers that it is too "metropolitan" to be considered comrades by the miners and at the same time too "minery" in order to be

protected by the privileged part of the society. In effect, it seems not to fit anywhere and can no longer remain in the place it considered home.

In another sense, it is a story about how easy it is for people to resort to a one-sided outlook on a given situation, particularly when a different perspective would be hard and disconcerting.

I cannot mention the third sense, as it would spoil the story.

A: You wrote „The Escape” in the course of Whamageddon. That's a rather unique way of writing. How was it?

MC: I admit that from my perspective, it was very hard – a demanding exercise indeed. I'm naturally accustomed to an entirely different way of writing, both in terms of the pace and the publishing method itself. In the case of texts written during Whamageddon, some things must appear in the text. First and foremost, some deadly song must appear in one form or another, accompanied by rules of its operation, similar to those of Whamageddon. Each day should also have its own accent, its own, shall we say, culmination point. Which means that not only do I have to arrive at it in the course of writing, but I must also design the text in such a way, as to always be able to arrive at such a mini-culmination point. And there's always the risk of becoming a Whamageddon victim – I always need to have an ending ready, should it turn out that I lose the game myself.

A: “The Escape” is very deeply rooted in last year's events on the border of Poland and Belarus, where refugees were detained in the border zone. Was the aim to comment on this situation or did you simply find it

emotional enough that it “slipped” into the text on its own?

MC: Absolutely, the story had a lot in common with this situation – though the situation presented in the text was different than that on the border itself.

The general idea was the result of my observation of a fascinating – albeit in a bleak way – mechanism in discussions on the issue: namely that it seemed that there can only be two different approaches to the matter. Either the refugees were entirely innocent victims, and they should have been admitted to Poland unconditionally, or they were an evil weapon of hybrid warfare and in that way were not so different from bullets. For some reason, it was impossible to state that while the appearance of the refugees could have been the consequence of hybrid warfare, they still remained hungry and frightened people, who did not wish to be a weapon in anyone's hands.

And that's basically what this text is about: a situation in which the refugees are used as a weapon or as hostages. But they nonetheless remain people.

In fact, this text has been met with considerable criticism precisely because I did not want to adopt a singularly one-sided viewpoint.

A: When you were receiving the award, you said that “this is a clear sign that I shouldn't write lighthearted stories.” Do you prefer writing serious or humorous texts?

MC: I prefer texts with humor – if I knew how, I'd write them more often. But writing a genuinely funny short story is very hard indeed. Sure, you can write one or two, but it's quite hard to write, say, five

and not make the jokes repeat and let them remain fresh. It's hard not to turn the plot into a sequence of gags. At least for me – I don't doubt there are others to whom this comes naturally.

A: Does your professional work inspire you to write or is literature a departure from the daily grind?

MC: I work in the Institute of Theoretical and Applied Informatics and teach machine learning and artificial intelligence. I'm writing a novel on AIs. What do you think ;-).

In all seriousness, my work provides me with a plethora of inspiration – not just in an obvious way through day-to-day contact with scientific issues and folks who can really hold a conversation on any topic and respond to any idea.

A: What's your relationship with the fandom?

MC: I don't know what it is to live outside of it. I'm part of the fandom since... Probably since I was six, when my dad took me to the meetings of the Silesian Science-Fiction & Fantasy Club. Back then, the Club was located at Mariacka Street, but it moved three times since then. There, I explored the large library (I was too young for most of its books, but I really enjoyed the vibe) and watched movies on VHS tapes. I also listened to long conversations on literature, from which I understood almost nothing, but which appeared to me as if at a threshold to a large magical world.

The first convention I can reliably locate in my memory is Silcon in 1989, which I attended – can you imagine? – because of movies. Soon after, correspondents of the Silesian Science-Fiction & Fantasy Club

started gathering at my dad's house – two-day club events attended by a large number of people (particularly in the eyes of a ten-year-old). Back then, I mostly watched others play pen-and-paper RPGs and felt exactly like Bilbo listening to dwarves singing in his living room.

Even now I consider these sessions one of the most magical moments in my life.

And then I was simply part of the fandom. I don't know a better place to be.

A: You regularly attend conventions. What's their significance?

MC: My approach to conventions changed over time. At first, I attended in order to watch movies, later – to play RPGs. Then, I had a phase of actively participating in a plethora of panels and events, you know, in order not to miss out once I'm there. Now, I mostly attend to meet current friends and new people.

I always considered conventions as magical events. They are attended by people whom I either already know and like or whom there's a great chance I will like once I get to know them. They have similar interests (for a given value of "similar," of course) and passions and your conversations can go on for hours. I can always learn something new or meet my favorite authors and ask them what's new. You can listen to talks held by passionate people or just wander about. You can also stay in one place and you're guaranteed to meet someone.

I think life without conventions would be... remarkably hollow.

A: Thank you for speaking with me.



Keep rolling new events until one of the followings occurs:

- > When your **CYBER** reaches 4, cyberschizophrenia strikes. The implants take over. You are a bloodbath incarnate, berserker with an electric machete. Until your batteries are drained, your system crashes, and you flatline.
- > When your **CYBER** reaches -2, the implants fail. You die in slow agony of collapsing systems. Your place is taken by some young whiz from the Kombinat who was just waiting for an opportunity.
- > When your **GRAIN** reaches 4, you are on a roll. Grain is pouring, you have a following and a reputation. At least until you are targeted by a killer hired by the Municipal Cleansing Company.
- > When your **GRAIN** reaches -2, creditors get you. You make for a cautionary tale for suckers who think pigeons in Cracov can be tricked. Your carcass ends up hanging on the City Hall Tower.
- > When your **SMOG** reaches 4, Cracov pervades you thoroughly. You become enlightened, develop a supernatural awareness and penetrate the vapor with your very eyes. For a while you are seen in the Old Town wearing a scarf and a beret, then you disappear into the depths of the Dragon's Cave.
- > When your **SMOG** reaches -2, you leave the city that no longer cares about you. You abandon your paths and fly off to the suburbs, or even further. Are you even a pigeon still? You don't know, and you have no one to ask.

THIS CITY DO BE LIKE THAT

Any time **SMOG** is one of your lowest stats, you can lower **CYBER** or **GRAIN** by 1 to raise **SMOG** by 1. You don't have to pay if you sigh dramatically and nostalgically or sing a verse about Cracov out loud.



CYBER PIGEONS ON CRACK

You are a cybernetic pigeon fighting for your position in Cracov, a smog-soaked city of the future and the past. A cyber-pigeon's life is a fast and furious one. You die quickly, if you're lucky.

You have three stats, each starting at 0.

-2 0 4

CYBER ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇

GRAIN ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇

SMOG ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇

You are an animal following its instincts, patched with illegal technology. To start the game, choose **CYBER** or **GRAIN**, and raise it by 1. Next, your bird brain decides what you do:

- If **CYBER** is highest, roll **D6** + **CYBER** on **NEON ROBBERY**
- If **GRAIN** is highest, roll **D6** + **GRAIN** on **DECADENT SWAG**
- If **SMOG** is highest, roll **D6** + **SMOG** on **POETIC SENTIMENTS**

If more than one stat is the highest, your bird brain glitches, and you have to choose one of the available tables.

NEON ROBBERY: D₆ + CYBER

0 For a brief moment you feel like an ordinary pigeon. Then you realise. You don't remember what it was like before the first implant.

1 The organ snatchers get you. You go home without your elbow, spleen, and dignity.

2 -1 CYBER
Elegant extortion on tourists. Asking for a PIN is easy with cyberclaws.

3 -1 GRAIN
You're battling a rival gang on the Bionia. This time they came on top. A heartless wind drowns out your pitiful cooing.

4 +1 CYBER +1 GRAIN
Bingo! You rob a food truck that was a front for an illegal implant clinic. You pick up crumbs, and a new eye.

5 -1 CYBER +1 GRAIN
You almost got smashed, but you managed to get a good grain out of that truck.

6 +1 SMOG
A moment of respite from the constant struggle. You wonder for a moment if slaughter and grain is all that awaits you in life.

7 The battle stimulants are wearing off. You don't remember what happened for... you don't know how long. Has your tongue always tasted like this?

Swap the values of two chosen stats.

8 +1 CYBER +1 SMOG
You win in cybergliadiator tournament in the underground of the Cloth Hall. Everyone on the Main Square looks at you with fear and awe.

9 -2 CYBER
You've caught the eye of the Pigeomers. They catch you and strip you of your best implants and then release you into the wild.

DECADENT SWAG: D₆ + GRAIN

0 In the line for grain, you wonder how much longer you'll be able to live like this. Probably not long enough to settle down and nest.

1 -1 GRAIN
You buy trinkets at a souvenir stall, hoping to sell them at a profit to tourists. Loser.

2 +1 CYBER
You show up at trendy clubs in Zabłocie. The next day you are contacted by an agent of one of the Producers with "free samples."

3 -1 GRAIN +1 CYBER
You are met with a unique opportunity at an antique market. You can buy retro cyberware if you want (of course you do).

4 +1 GRAIN
You arrange a deal to smuggle crumbs from Kazimierz to Nowa Huta. A generous percentage lands in your pantry.

5 +1 GRAIN -1 SMOG
You pose for a photograph wearing a necklace of bread. People are throwing you seeds. You are quite good at this modeling job, as long as you are young.

6 -1 SMOG
Breathe proudly puffed and booming coo, you walk the streets, looking for company. You find plenty of inspiration for bad poetry instead.

7 After the last Kitsch party, you can't collect your thoughts. The next time you roll, you can choose which table to use.

8 +1 GRAIN -1 SMOG
You organize an aerial race from the top of Szeźlektor. The wind in your flights reminds you what you're missing.

9 -2 GRAIN
Your lair in the Barbican meets the criteria for a Biological Hazard Area. You barely escape the MCC commandos. You have to start almost from scratch.

POETIC SENTIMENTS: D₆ + SMOG

0 Will this city ever end? It stretches along and across, into the future and into the past, forever.

1 +1 SMOG
You spend a lovely morning with an old lady on a bench on Planty. You never meet her again. Not the same one.

2 -1 GRAIN +1 SMOG
Craow has never had as much poverty as today. You can't cry anymore, so you spread the seed to those in need. This brings some relief, at least for a while.

3 -1 SMOG +1 CYBER
You gather materials to build a nest. Then you remind yourself that you have no one to live with in that nest. You sell the sticks, and buy yourself new chrome for consolation.

4 -1 CYBER +1 GRAIN
On Bracka Street it's raining, your exposed wires crackle with short circuits. The owner of the cafe takes pity on you, and lets you take shelter in the gate by the garbage containers.

5 You feel that your circuits are pulsing with power and your pockets are weighted down with seeds. You know perfectly well that those are fleeing. Just which one is more so?

6 -1 GRAIN or -1 CYBER
You're waiting for the wind that will chase away the dark curled curtains. For the first time in years you see the sun. Or is it the moon? You don't know.

7 -1 SMOG
You look down from the radio tower at the pulsating lights of the city. Up here, the air is sometimes thinner, almost swallowable. Will you stay here until morning or go back?

8 +1 SMOG or -1 SMOG
You track and kill a royalist who was rallying for moving the capital to Craow. *(No paszani!)*

9 +1 SMOG
You find a moment to record your experience for posterity. Maybe this will help someone avoid your miserable fate.

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POLISH FANDOM IN A FEW GLIMPSES

MARCIN "ALQUA" KŁAK

I wanted this issue of *A-Zyn* to show Polish SFF and Fandom. Yet I decided that I should not write everything as my view is heavily biased. Being "inside" the Polish fandom gives me a lot of insights, but at the same time, it prevents me from seeing some things. When I was thinking about it, I got an idea. It was not mine though – I just remembered something I saw before. Some years ago, in one of the special English issues of Croatian fanzine from Zagreb – *Parsek* I read brief notes from SferaKon's¹ Guests of Honour. I thought: why shouldn't I do something similar?

I asked some of my fannish friends about their impressions of Polish fandom. It was my decision to ask only those who had the chance to visit Polish cons or meet Polish fandom here in Poland. I didn't have anything very specific in mind. The question I asked my friends was to describe briefly how they "see" Polish fandom. I thought I would receive a series of short articles with basic information and some general opinions. How wrong I was! When I started to receive replies, I realised that what I initially imagined would be a bit boring. What I got is exactly the opposite² –

-
- 1 SferaKon is a convention organized by the local SF Club in Zagreb called Sfera.
 - 2 There is one thing I completely didn't see coming (and I should have!). Those impressions too often mention myself what makes me feel embarrassed.

I learned something new about the fandom I spend the most time with. To me, those pieces were fascinating – I hope they will be the same for you.

The most difficult part was to put those articles in order. Doing it alphabetically would be the easiest, but I wanted them to tell a story. The plan was to change them from a series of impressions into a bigger entirety. It is not for me to judge how well I achieved that though.

So now – please take a moment to look at Polish fandom through the eyes of fans and pros from all over the world.



Ian Watson

UK AND SPAIN

My first experience of lively Polish fandom was when Mad Magda hosted me in Warsaw for a couple of days prior to us taking the train to Polcon 2001 in Katowice. Magda was involved in a shooter game across Warsaw with a replica gun. We went to a huge market surrounding a stadium to eat tripe soup, wary of ambush. Next morning an elderly neighbour knocked and together we watched the Twin Towers burn and collapse on TV without any idea why. Magda decided not to run around Poland again with her mock gun.

In the ambitious programme book for 2001 there's a multi-page history of the Silesian Fantasy Club, by no means the only thriving regional fan group. I believe groups are linked by ZSFP, The Polish SFF Association/Polish Fandom Community. This reminds me that here in Spain just recently, the Cel-

sius 232Festival has been in contact with the enthusiastic Julianna Grefkowicz of the Silesian Club about a collaboration with the ZSFP regarding sharing space in our mutual publications.

Unlike in the UK, Polish fans don't hold their conventions in hotels. At UK conventions, fans fully occupy a large hotel with their programme and their socialising. They live in that hotel for 3 or 4 days, with occasional expeditions to Indian restaurants. Every night by 2.00 a.m., another lake of beer has been drunk. For me, impressionistically, conventions in Poland evoke say, a huge concrete university of engineering for the programme, cooking sausages on a bonfire in a forest (like Boy Scouts), mead being traded, lots of gaming by devotees, much more heroic fantasy than I'm used to — along with heaps of enthusiasm, energy, and hospitality mostly.

A decade before the collapse of Communism, I was already aware of SF fandom in Poland as a go-ahead force compared with elsewhere in Eastern Europe. For instance, with editor Wiktor Bukato attending UK conventions, then Dorota Malinowska too at the helm of *Fantastyka*, the first independent SF magazine from behind the Iron Curtain. Nowadays Marcin Klak is an equivalent ambassador, so you have him to blame for these semi-informed paragraphs of mine.



Sergii Paltsun

UKRAINE

I first met Polish fans en masse in 2010 at Eurocon 2010 (Tricon). I was very impressed by this convention: 1500 participants, 12 parallel program streams, events in four languages... I had never seen such a scope before.

Naturally, after Tricon, I wanted to visit other Polish conventions and became a regular visitor at Polcon and Pyrkon. I'm inclined to make observations and generalizations, so in this case, I also noted the features of Polish fandom that make it stand out among other fandoms I know.

The first feature is that Polish fandom is very young. Not in the sense of history, but in the sense of most of the fan's age. Of course, the core of the fandom still consists of those who are over thirty, but at conventions most of the participants are under twenty.

By the way, as it turns out, 1500 Tricon participants is not a lot. The Poznań-based Pyrkon gathers up to tens of thousands of people. So, the second feature of Polish fandom is its multiplicity. Once I saw a map of conventions held in Poland during the year. I started to count them, but after four dozen, I lost count. And behind every convention, there is a club! It seems that in Poland, there are science fiction clubs in every town, and often more than one.

Here it is appropriate to mention the third feature of Polish fandom, its organization. With so many clubs and conventions, one would expect a myriad of small local prizes. But Polish fans were able to organize a common annual Zajdel Award. This prize really matters and fans from all over the country vote for it.

I haven't been to Poland in the last three years. First, because of covid and then because of the war. I heard that there were problems in Polish fandom, but now they have successfully been overcome. And so, with all its internal contradictions, Polish fandom is a healthy one that knows how to solve problems and move on. I wish its future to be no less glorious than its past. And I wish myself to get to the Polish convention again. I really miss them.



Ivan Kranjcevic

CROATIA

Polish fandom is one of the best fandoms I ever encountered.

My first contact with Polish fandom was at my first Eurocon in 2010 in Cieszyn and Český Těšín. Back then we put our bid for Eurocon in Zagreb, which we won. At that convention everybody was very friendly, and they helped us by going above and beyond. For me, the best part was that the conrunners tried, way back then, to have English translators even on some programme items that were held in Polish or Czech. I remember that I went on one panel which was in Polish, but some guy sat down with me and tried to translate almost everything. From that time, I just knew that Polish fandom is similar to ours, warm, welcoming, and eager to help in every way.

Later on, I went to Pyrkon, the biggest Polish convention, where we – the Croatian fans – helped with some English programme track at its beginnings. We were

made to feel very welcome as if we were part of Polish fandom. Local fans did their best to accommodate us and succeeded at it, so much. Honestly, I never had such a warm welcome at a convention, and this was, for me, by far the best convention and the best people.

I will always be grateful to Piotr, who showed us the whole EXPO and all the rooms even when he was probably too busy to think. It was not only the beginning of a wonderful friendship, but also the beginning of many collaborations across fandoms and across Europe, which are great even today. We call each other to see how the other one is doing on a monthly basis still.

I can say that, in my opinion, Polish fandom is young, energetic, capable and filled with awesome, enthusiastic people. For instance, many of us know Marcin Kłak who is one of the biggest promoters of Polish fandom in Europe and the world. He has been to many conventions around the world and online. He always tries to help and promote other conventions and is always there to check it out when something new comes up. Or he comes up with it, like the European Fan Fund he launched recently.

When Pyrkon con runners came to Zagreb for the first time, they asked us “uff, this feels like home, do you need some help?”. It is not a short trip, that one, to make for a single weekend. And they were ready to lend a hand and not just kick back. When you meet someone like that, you know they are great people. So, yes, my personal view is – Polish SF fandom is great. #speaking-fromexperience.



Valerija Strutinskaja

CROATIA

Once upon a time, when I was much younger, during one of our weekly SFera meetings, I heard about a planned trip to visit Pyrkon. My adventurous spirit decided, “Yes, I wanna go”, and launched a cascade of events and summoned help from fellow con-goers. Someone found out about the sleeping hall, someone lent me an air mattress, and someone found a travelling bag so I can pack.

I knew Pyrkon would be big, but I was utterly unprepared for how big it turned out. I have never seen such a long queue at the entrance. The sleeping hall was more like a camping hall, and to get to the lecture you were interested in, you had to start going there 10-15 minutes beforehand.

How to describe a culture shock that actually didn't happen? I knew Poland was a big country and I felt pleasantly surprised that at any given weekend there is some geeky event: a convention or festival. The collection of artists, publishers, or presenters was astonishing. Ten to fifteen minutes were needed for going to the lecture became thirty because I was googling cosplayers.

The most fascinating part was actually the lack of need for the outside world. I entered Pyrkon venue Friday morning and exited it Sunday afternoon. Sleep, food, shower, and party time; all those needs were met in some of the specialized halls. It stayed with me for a long time, but life, obligations, and later the pandemic got in the way of travelling once again to this magical geeky land.

The most amazing thing was, that even though I found myself more than a thou-

sand kilometres away from home, surrounded by dialogues in a different language, I didn't feel much out of place. Maybe it was Slavic heritage, similar history, or just that all the geeks around the world have something in common. I met some nice people; with some of them I stayed in touch, while others I didn't.

Fast forward six years later to Eurocon. During Saturday drinks at the party, I found myself drawn to the Polish representatives. We were talking about similar problems. At one point we were criticizing this Polish TV show on Netflix, and all I could think was “Wow, I had heard this all, almost word for word few months back when we were talking about a Croatian movie.” For some reason, this showed me that we are closer than I previously thought.

Conclusion writing is the hardest part for me, as I don't want the story to end. So, I'll leave it like this. In hope that the story will pick up again soon, some acquaintances will become friends, and distance is not such a problem.



Mihaela Marija Perković

CROATIA

In 2012, we had a special track of the Zagreb Eurocon for the European SF fandom and literature inspired by our con name – Kontakt. It was envisioned as a track that would make it a bit easier for people from different European fandoms to connect, since it seemed that we all had more ties to English speaking fandom than among ourselves.

The track had its ups and downs, but what I personally got from it, was actual contact – I met Polish fans Radosław Kot and Gata Kinga Kowalewska. The thing I do remember is that I had heard of Pyrkon from them. And I believe it was Gata and Radosław who had sent me an invite to Pyrkon in 2013, which I could not attend as it was at the same time as my GUFF trip to Australia and New Zealand.

Receiving the Pyrkon programme guide in the mail and seeing that it had English programming, made me plan to go the following year, which I did. When Marcin Klak asked me to write a little bit about Polish fandom, and my impressions of it, I said yes, very enthusiastically. Then I wrote this text more than once, and abandoned it more than once, too, ‘cause I cannot seem to do it justice. Polish SF fandom is big, organized, very active and very welcoming.

And yes, I know Polish fandom is so much more than Pyrkon, but Pyrkon, as I experienced, it is everything Polish fandom is to me: hugely impressive, young, highly-organized, open, inclusive and, I will say it again – fun, fun, fun.

Huge fun. And when I say huge, I mean huge – more than 50 000 people visited the last few editions, and it was, for the most part, still run by volunteers. It blew my mind! A fan-run con with such big numbers? A fan-run con with such big numbers which managed to stay inclusive of all facets of SF fandom – TV, movies, comics, games, cosplay... and books?! It had never occurred to me that anyone, anywhere on the planet could pull off a successful merge of a Worldcon-type con and a Comicon-type expo event. And the Polish fandom did it, on volunteer steam. The only

thing more surprising than that was the fact that all the people who I spoke to were ever so modest about it. And young. Sooo young – in their early twenties and thirties, running the con.

Of course, it was not just the organizers that made my head spin with joy. It was the atmosphere at the con, one which everyone contributes to, and that was an energy that was so positive, it did not stop me from going there again, even if it did mean a 12-hour drive one way.

When I went to Pyrkon the second time, more Croatian fans came with me and I will never forget what one of the younger ones said to me. Some place between the Pyrkon pavilions and oh-so-many cosplayer hugs: “You know what, I love SFeraKon, and I like Worldcon, but this con feels like I found a home.” And I cannot think of any higher praise than that.



Esther MacCallum-Stewart

UK

Glasgow 2024 was the Guest of Honour for Polcon/Imladris (2022) and I was one of the people representing the convention as its Chair. Over the four days I was in Krakow, I got to spend time at the convention, in the city, and of course, in the fantastic local bar hired by the convention each evening.

When you are a conrunner yourself, you are always noticing these little things, and how people respond to them! Polish fans are not only very welcoming, but they are very creative, always coming up with clever solutions and not really worrying too much

Gillian Polack

AUSTRALIA

about tradition, or what has happened before. At the convention, we had a whole room with an English-speaking track for the day, which was absolutely great. This was a clever solution to making sure that people coming into the room knew in advance what to expect, and for me, it was very typical of my experience of the week. It felt like everyone was always willing to try new things – for example, the convention suggested that we brought ribbons (a big tradition elsewhere), for people to put on their badges, but they'd also created a scavenger hunt with stickers. Similarly, when a room got changed for an award ceremony, it was moved with very little fuss, and everyone just followed the quickly arranged guides and got on a bus to the other site. Our liaisons had already asked for my part of this, so when I got up to speak, a translation magically appeared behind me, to much laughter!

Polish fans are also thoughtful. Both our liaison Mikołaj, and the other fans talked to us into the night about things like how best to use non-binary pronouns (which are very difficult to create in the Polish language), and the outcomes of their annual meeting. Similarly, the decision to put two large conventions together (Imladris, and Polcon), was the subject of debate in how it changed the ways the convention was run, who attended, and what this meant for the way it was regarded.

I had a wonderful time in Krakow and came home with many ideas for Glasgow 2024. As a conrunner, that's just perfect for me – knowing that I had a great time and learned many new things!



How do I 'see' Polish fandom? Online. Completely and entirely, these days. Before the pandemic, though, I met Polish fans all over western Europe, at Worldcons and Eurocons.

My favourite early meet-ups include the time I chatted to a group of Polish conrunners in 2014. They gave me a t-shirt and also some fannish material for fanfunds. Each and every piece was popular at the fanfund auction at the next Continuum in Melbourne. They were talking to Europeans, in theory, in 2014, but in practice, they were just as generous with their time with this random Australian. I still have that t-shirt.

The next time was at the Helsinki Worldcon. The day before, I volunteered to pack bags, and so did several Polish fans. We chatted, had lunch together, and chatted some more. One of the (many) outcomes of the chat was that Marcin Kłak came to Australia as the GUFF representative.

The moment I started to rethink my views about Poland, Polish fandom reached out to me. Since then, every year at Konline, I'm invited to give talks, and every year I make friends, despite the fact that I speak no Polish whatsoever. Konline is such a good place to hang out and to talk about everything: from big issues to cooking methods or how *The Witcher* is quite differently perceived in Poland than in Australia. One of the great secrets of Polish fandom is that they understand Australian accents. Most of them will apologise for their lack of English, then ask a question that perfectly demonstrates they understood everything I said. Polish fandom, then, in my experience, is full of very cool people with mad language skills.

I have some very special moments in my life thanks to Polish fanfriends. Let me give you two of those moments, ones of particular importance to me.

The first: I have had an isolated pandemic, because I'm one of the unlucky people with exactly the wrong chronic illnesses. When I turned 60 (in 2021), my Polish friends held an online party for me. Their gifts included something amazing. A group of friends recorded walks around town for me. They introduced me to my lost family history through these walking tours.

The second: some of you may know that I have a bit of an obsession (just a bit) with food history. Polish fans posted me a very important Polish historical cookbook, and we're exploring it together.

What does this say about Polish fandom? I have no idea. All I know is that my friends in Polish fandom and every Polish fan I've ever met are wonderful people.



Geri Sullivan

USA

Active. Enthusiastic. Welcoming. (Oh, so welcoming!) Interested. Engaged. And So Much More.

This describes each of the Polish fans I've met to date, and seems a fair description of Polish fandom as a whole.

I met Marcin Kłak first, both electronically and then in person. Marcin won a scholarship to attend Smofcon 35 in 2017. I put out a call for photos from past Smofcons for a presentation Ben Yalow and I put together,

and Marcin wrote asking if we'd like photos from a convention-running convention held in Poland. It was outside our remit, but I'd previously only known of other conventions for convention runners in the US and Britain. I was willing to bet such a convention in Poland would be news to other Smofcon members, too. So I said "Yes, please" and the images Marcin sent enhanced the slide show and stories we shared.

That bit of interaction before the convention made it all the easier for me to invite Marcin along on a dinner outing with 4 or 5 others at Smofcon. A small enough group for good conversation. Marcin fit right in and added a lot of sparkle to the outing. Good times.

A Facebook friendship followed. My desire to spend time on my TAFF trip stretching my comfort zone, making sure to include fannish outreach as well as spending time with fans in my more familiar stomping grounds in the UK, led me to ask Claire Brialey to quietly reach out to Marcin and see if it might work for me to visit Krakow (and perhaps even stay with him). I was surprised and delighted by just how excited Polish fans were to have a TAFF delegate visiting Poland for the first time. Meeting Marcin Segit and Magdalena Grajcar at Dublin 2019: An Irish Worldcon set the stage and tone for my thoroughly delightful stay in Krakow a few weeks later. Radek Wit Polański told me about Imladris and gave me a few souvenirs from that convention. Marcin Kłak arranged for me to talk about international fandom at a local community center! It was my first time working with a translator and I thank everyone for making it friendly and easy. We toured the city center, where we visited

a few museums, cathedrals, and the castle. We pointed out books we liked among the used books at a street market, drank beer, and just plain enjoyed each other's company. I look forward to future opportunities to do more of the same, and hope to host Polish fans visiting the USA, too.



Liz Danforth

USA

I was invited to Pyrkon in June 2020 but obviously that didn't happen. So I was delighted to accept another invite for 2022. I did not know it would be like coming home.

Let me explain.

I discovered organized fandom attending Westercons in the early 1970s. I enjoyed countless gatherings thereafter: small local cons, or big Worldcons, World Fantasy Cons, GenCons. In one busy year, I was at shows for more than 2 months out of 12.

My great honor was to be AGoH at NASFiC (Seattle) in 2005. But by then, I no longer felt at home. Yes, I was a recognized pro. Strangers wanted to hear my stories, talk about my art. But panel topics were too familiar. I treasured my sleep enough not to party all weekend. I admired cosplayers, but lacked pop culture context. Among my fellow pros, some were friends I wanted to visit with. Some? Not so much. Too much baggage.

So I admit that Pyrkon was partly an excuse to visit exotic and foreign Central Europe which, when I was young, was all Scary Commie Iron Curtain Countries. (Insert mid-60s Tom Lehrer songs here.) Would I be once more an outsider in a fannish

setting, just a travelling tourist? Those who knew the history of fandom and games called me "one of the legends" (which embarrassed me) yet I wondered what I could offer that anyone would care about.

The first day coming to the campus where Pyrkon was to be held, I was slack-jawed to see crowds waiting to get in. Once I was myself inside, I soon felt the verve and energy I knew from decades ago. These people loved everything: science fiction, fantasy, HEMA, gaming, novels, art, and most of all IDEAS. The "sense of wonder" was *the essence* of my early fannish experience. Here it thrived still, without the jaded "been there, done that" I felt at US cons. My literal foreignness mattered less than all I shared with the fans, their palpable energy and joy to be among others of like minds and hearts, their delight in otherness and their soaring imaginations.

Even though few knew who I was, I connected with some who became new friends. I felt like part of a tribe, of a circle of companions, a fellowship once again. And when I had a touch of illness (not Covid) a week later, strangers came to my rescue, fannish friends of friends whom I had no connection with except for being part of the tribe.

I treasure connection and community and friendship above almost all else in life. Polish fandom brought this back, brought me home to the special things that set my feet on the path of my whole life and career. I am grateful.



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DE FANDOM CRACOVIENSI

MARCIN "ALQUA" KŁAK

I think it was when I started to attend international conventions, I heard some rumours about the Eurocon 1991 (called Cracon 1991) that took place in Kraków. And I must say the rumours were not good. Later, when I tried to look for more details, it was not so easy to find them. After some research, I was able to find negative reviews (although mainly in Polish). I was also able to talk to people who were there and were rather positive when commenting about the event. From what I read; it seems that a lot of mistakes were made by the organizers. Yet, it didn't stop fans from having fun.

I don't want to write about this infamous Cracon 1991. It was how it was, and the word is out there. The fact is that when I researched it, I decided it may be good to write what changed since then. It has been over 30 years; a long time for fandom. I must warn you however, although I will write a bit about the history, it won't be a research paper on fan history. I rather, want to show how we developed and where we are right now.

I haven't found any indication about conventions organized in Kraków prior to the Cracon'91. It may have been the first convention in our city. I am not fully sure but fans who remember those times do not recall anything prior. The event was formally organized by a young club – Krakowski Klub Fantastyki (SFF Club of Kraków). In the programme book (or rather a souvenir book?) they put descriptions of many Polish SFF Clubs, including themselves. The description suggests that there were for-



A pin from the Eurocon 1991 in Kraków.

mer fannish organizations here, but there are no details. So, the beginnings of the Kraków fandom lies in darkness for me.

Yet what is important is that the local fandom didn't die after Cracon in 1991. Since 1994, a new convention called Krakon¹ was established. It ran for fourteen years (until 2007) and at certain point was really big. Later in 2011 the event was revived by a different team but lasted only for three years. The opinions were not too good. In the late 90's another series of conventions were established – Imladris. It ran for a few years (again until 2007). The organization that stood behind Imladris (and also last few of the "old" Krakons) was Galicyjska Gildia

¹ I found some information that there was also Krakon in 1993 but I was not able to find any evidence for that. On the contrary, I managed to check some historical materials that suggest (although not fully confirm) that Krakon in 1994 was the first one.



A badge from DOJIcon 2 – manga & anime convention from 2002.

Fanów Fantastyki (Galician Guild of SFF Fans). Imladris continued the “tradition” of being resurrected and it came back in 2013 thanks to the Historia Vita Foundation. It is luckier than Krakon. The revived con received rather positive responses and is still organized yearly. In fact, Imladris 2022 was hosting Polish natcon – Polcon.

Some time ago I had a crazy idea of photographing each of the conventions’ venues where cons were held in Kraków. I included different types of events – starting with more traditional SFF cons, and going through cons for M&A fans, RPG & LARP players, and wargamers. I am sure my list is not complete (and sometimes making the decision whether an event is a convention is not so easy). So far I counted over 150 events. Some of those had only a single occurrence, while others made a short series and some lasted for many years. The variety is huge!

There is no point in listing all of them as it would take a lot of space, yet I believe some of the cons should be mentioned. I will start with DOJIcons – those were M&A conventions held between 2001 and 2008. For me, they were the entry point to fandom. This is where I became a conrunner (at DOJIcon 3), while DOJIcon 4 was the first con I chaired. Magnificon is the longest living M&A convention in Kraków (and I believe also in Poland too). It has ran since 2003 and is now one of the biggest events for M&A fans in the country. In the beginning it was organized by unassociated fans but now it is run by an event company established by the chair of Magnificon 1. Lajconik (around 200 members currently) is a small convention for RPG gamers. It is run by the Krakowska Sieć Fantastyki (SFF Network of Kraków). The event is a set of subsequent RPG sessions with an option to play board games. Somehow it is one of my favourite (if not the favourite) conventions. And, of course, there is Imladris – which I mentioned above. There is also another company hosting manga conventions – FunCube Events (officially called Ryucon Ltd), making two conventions per year. I tried to count how many cons were held in Kraków in 2022. There were about five events that must be called conventions (one strictly SFF, two M&A, and one furry) and seven that were other shows for the broad community of SFF, M&A, and games fans.

So, members of fandom that live in Kraków cannot complain about the lack of conventions. There is a large selection of conventions within Kraków that everyone with fannish hobbies can thrive by attending only local cons. On one hand, this is fabulous While on the other hand, it means that many (if not most) fans do not travel to cons

Games room during
Lajconik 2019.



in other places. This was the case for years. There is a group of “travelling fans” and a way bigger local community that appears only at local cons. Kraków is not unique in this regard. I have seen similar tendencies in other big cities in Poland, yet I suppose it may be true for some other countries too.

Yet despite my love towards the conventions, they are not the only manifestation of fannish life. Although fanzines in Poland are not such a big thing anymore, there are some fannish magazines still being published (either physically or online) in the country. *A-Zyn* which you are now reading is one of them and comes from Kraków. Last year, another fanzine – called *Horyzont Zderzeń Fantastycznych* (SFF Collision Horizon) was started here.² So far only one issue

was released but I know that the work on the second one is ongoing. The first issue was thick – over three hundred pages full of SFF short stories and articles. The group that made this zine also published some short story collections. And when speaking about fannish publishing – there is the Alpaka Publishing Group. I cannot say they are a Kraków initiative but part of them are located here. On the formal end, they are a part of *Krakowska Sieć Fantastyki*. Alpaka did a lot in last few years, including the e-zine “Mlem!”, and a few anthologies.

Over the years there were different groups and clubs. Some of them being formal while others informal. Over time they tended to “switch” between those options. I already listed four formal entities – Mi-Ohi (running *Magnificon*), Ryucon Ltd (running other M&A conventions), *Historia Vita Foundation* (running *Imladris*) and *Krakowska Sieć Fantastyki* (taking care of *Lajconik*). I must admit I am not strongly involved in the M&A part of fandom anymore, thus I cannot say a lot about the

² Translating the title is a bit tough. It is a word play – the term for event horizon in Polish is “*Horyzont Zdarzeń*”. In the title word “*zdarzeń*” was replaced with very similar one “*zderzeń*” – collisions or clashes. The word “*Fantastycznych*” has a double meaning in Polish – it means anything related to broad SFF but also something which is amazing – or simply fantastic.

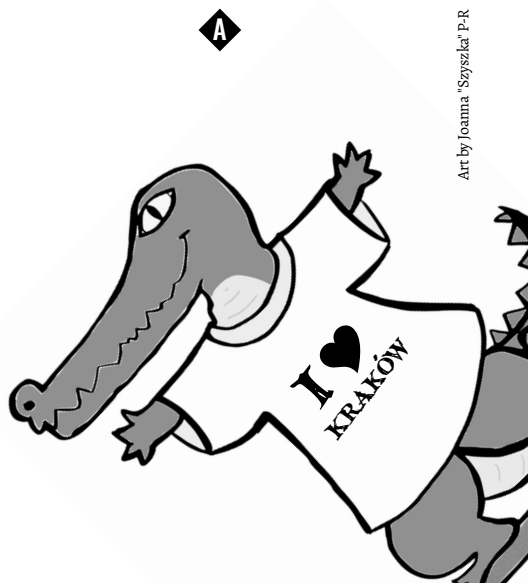
first two companies. Yet I know a bit more about the latter two. The team running Im-ladris, apart from doing the con, has some more private connections and tends to run some semiformal events. Krakowska Sieć Fantastyki is a society that tries to broaden their activities. And I must say – I am completely not objective as I am chairing this society. KSF has almost weekly meetings (either in person or virtually) that are directed towards different groups of fans. Over the course of a month, we can offer something for RPG gamers, board gamers, readers, and watchers. We also try to have some more informal events for socializing too. On top of that there is a literary group of writers that meets weekly to discuss their works, help each other and learn from each other. This group stands behind “Horizont Zderzeń Fantastycznych” which I remarked above. What I didn’t mention yet is Krakowskie Stowarzyszenie Komiksowe, (The Comic Society of Kraków) that runs yearly the Comic Festival and does some other meetings.

I would be lying if stating that those were the only groups! There is way more happening here. The truth is, I am not aware of everything. At least two youth culture centres have regular meetings for war-gamers, some groups play collectible card games, and some do organized RPG play too. There are at least a few pubs/cafes directed to gamers (either board or RPGs) and I can easily list a few shops that have some communities built around them. Not all of those initiatives are purely fannish – many are businesses who are helping to grow the fannish base and fandom. Some events over the years were in fact organized by pubs or in collaboration with them. All in all, any member of fandom should be

able to find some interesting options every month even if they do not know anyone in the city.

We also have three museums that are dedicated to the works we enjoy. There is a relatively new Comic Museum which I haven’t yet seen. We also have two gaming museums, the Krakow Arkade Museum and the Krakow Pinball Museum. I may argue that that the latter two are rather gaming spots and not museums but, they are still a lot of fun.

I tried to briefly describe the history of fandom in Kraków. I also shed some light on the current fannish landscape in the city. The topic is quite broad, yet I barely scratched the surface. Although I am fully aware I didn’t manage to cover everything since there are many other events happening. What I hoped is to show how rich the current fandom in Kraków is. Fans here have plenty of fannish opportunities. On top of that, some local businesses were either created “for us” or at least we are one of their target audiences. I hope that our societies will continue to expand in the years to come.

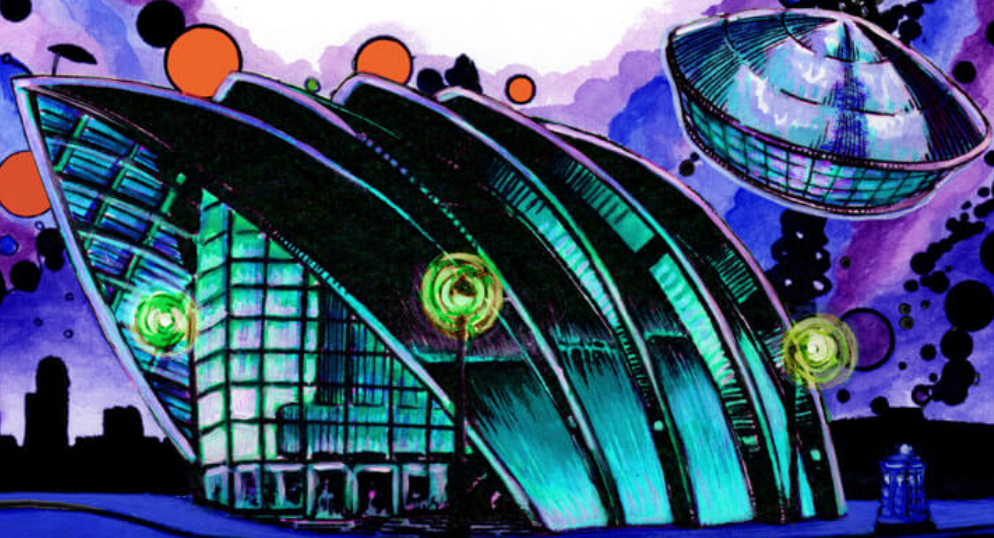


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