

4th Street Convention Panel

Filename: hospitality2.mp3

File Length: 01:09:54

Casey Blair: [00:00:02] Hello, I'm Casey Blair, the programming director for 4th Street Fantasy and you are listening to our special 2020 podcast edition of 4th Street Fantasy. Our topic today is in which we consider the role of hospitality in stories, with panelists Marissa Lingen, Matt Doyle, Reuben Poling, Max Gladstone and phantom panelist, Pamela Dean who is tragically out with a migraine today but graciously sent in some of her thoughts and we wish her all the best.

[00:00:30] We're going to run this as much like a 4th Street panel as we can so once our panelists have taken it away for a while, I or Scott Lynch will jump in at the end with a couple of audience questions. So without further ado, let's turn it over to today's moderator, Marissa Lingen.

Marissa Lingen: [00:00:43] Hello 4th Street in absentia. I'm Marissa Lingen, I'm going to be your moderator. I've written a large variety of short science fiction and fantasy stories. And gotten them published in all sorts of places, and now I'm on to writing essays and poetries as well, so that's a little confusing.

[00:01:03] I'm going to ask my panelists to introduce themselves, starting with Matt Schmidt.

Matt Doyle: [00:01:11] Hi, my name's Matt. I write a webcomic called Madcap Archaeology and this is my 8th 4th Street, I think? It's really the highlight of my year.

Marissa Lingen: [00:01:27] Next, Reuben please?

Reuben Poling: [00:01:30] Hello and thank you for having me. I'm Reuben Poling, I'm a writer, tech worker and rabble rouser in Seattle. Or I guess more accurately, a rabble-rouse-ee. I'm very easily roused to rabbling. I graduated Viable Paradise in 2014. I've officially lost count of how many 4th Streets I've been to, which is a testament to both the joy I take in this every year and how bad I am at keeping track of what I'm doing.

Marissa Lingen: [00:01:59] Great, Max?

Max Gladstone: [00:02:01] Hi, I'm Max Gladstone, I'm the author of the Craft Sequence and Empress of Forever and I can just imagine Elizabeth Bear's dagger

eyes in the audience forcing me to refer to it as the Nebula Award-winning *This is How You Lose the Time War*. Hooray. Co-author with Amal El-Mohtar of that one. And I wasn't prepared for the AA opening part of this panel but I think I've been to six, seven? 4th Streets? Question mark, question mark, question mark? Love it. Love coming back and am really glad to be virtually 4th Streeting with you all.

Marissa Lingen: [00:02:40] I can't even say how many I've been to but the answer is all of the new ones, so however many that is. All of them.

Max Gladstone: [00:02:46] Hooray.

Marissa Lingen: [00:02:47] Okay, so our panel description in final panel tradition, it says 2020 marks the 30th anniversary of the publication of *Dealing With Dragons* by local writer Patricia Wrede. Common element in the enchanted forest chronicles is that while the heroes buck many traditions, they also maintain manners and respect for the ways other people do things even when they don't understand. Still, they will enforce boundaries against those intending harm when hospitality is abused. In cultures around the world, the importance of hospitality in stories goes back as long as we've had stories. Even when that hospitality is taken advantage of, people don't throw out the tradition wholesale. How do we tell the difference in our stories between honoring hospitality and valuing courtesy that becomes a vehicle for tone policing, rules lawyering and enforcing the status quo, or the line between a malicious actor and one who is wrong but can be corrected. Why is commitment to hospitality so engrained and transgressions against it so reprehensible? This panel will discuss what, in our current era, fantasy can do with the concept of what it means to welcome and why that matters.

[00:03:52] So, yeah, that's kind of great and I guess we can start with *Dealing With Dragons* if people have thoughts on that because I know I do. It is one of my favorite fantasies to recommend to all ages of reader and I think one of the things that I particularly appreciate about it is that a lot of times the easiest way to show hospitality is food and it does that but it also goes through other kinds of hosting and details of hosting in ways that I think are often missing. Does anybody... yeah, Matt. What did you think about that?

Matt Doyle: [00:04:33] So these are some of my favorite books. I think I first read *Dealing With Dragons* when I was about eight or nine years old, got my hands on the rest of the series over the next few years and in the fourth book, which I understand was actually written first, second, something, there's a line that doesn't. It's more about manners than hospitality, but I

have thought about this line literally every day of my life for the past 22 years. And that's, "Daystar, if you're going to be rude, do it for a reason and get something from it."

[00:05:17] And not only is that just a wonderful piece of character writing, but I think it really gets to what courtesy and hospitality are about. They're not just generosity, niceness, good character. That isn't to say they aren't those things. But they are tactical. They're tools. They have purposes. When they don't serve that purpose, you use a different tool but there's a reason why it's a default toolset and I think that that has a lot... I think there's a lot in those books that explores that idea.

Marissa Lingen: [00:06:04] Well, you and I and Pat Wrede all live in Minnesota, and I think one of the things that has struck me about...

Matt Doyle: [00:06:10] Ah. No, no no no. Just connecting a couple things in the back of my head, please keep going.

Marissa Lingen: [00:06:18] That strikes me about hospitality in this climate is that it is sometimes literally a matter of life and death.

Matt Doyle: [00:06:27] Absolutely.

Marissa Lingen: [00:06:28] And I see that in Sagas particularly. But it makes sense to me that you have to be able to rely on someone to shelter you when you need shelter because shelter is a question of will you survive this.

Matt Doyle: [00:06:45] Yeah, I could go on for longer than we have panel about hospitality in the classical near east and how important it was to the ability to travel places. When you don't have the ability to call ahead and make hotel reservations you still need to have somewhere to sleep that night where you won't be robbed by bandits. You still need not to starve to death if your pack horse gets swept away by the river. The role of shared resources in the preservation of a community is vital and it's vital even when you don't like the other people very much. I also have some Saga examples, but I think we can get to those later.

Marissa Lingen: [00:07:53] Well I think the even if you don't like those other people much is a direction I wanted to see if we could go. How do we show which cultures have which hospitality obligations? Who is outside the realm of your hospitality?

[00:08:11] In the Steerswoman books, there are times when people can place themselves outside of the Steerswoman process and the care that they give by their own behavior. There are specific choices that are very

exacting that you can make that will deny you guest right. Does anybody have any other examples of places where you can be denied guest right in fantasy literature? Can we think of that? Are we doing that? Or should we do more of that?

Max Gladstone:

[00:08:46] By extension of fantasy literature, perhaps, I think the John Wick films turn on a certain presentation of hospitality. This gets more true the further you get into the cinematic John Wick universe. But these are all films that are taking the rough trope structure of a sort of gun-centric Hong Kong action noir kind of picture and telling a fairy tale with it. Or emphasizing the fact that these stories are basically fairy tales anyway. So you have a character who is wronged and then must take vengeance for it in a very sort of mythical fashion.

[00:09:33] One thread woven through the movies is this hotel called The Continental where all of the sort of borderline mystical competent assassins go. They're all members of The Continental. They all go there to drink in relative safety. Nobody is supposed to transgress the rule that you can't kill or do any violence on The Continental. Once or twice people might try to push the edge of it, but everyone respects this until various characters make decisions not to for some reason, and that's getting back to Matt's question. Are you going to try to take the exceptionally valuable contract that's going to then put you outside of the closed borders of hit man society and have everyone shun you and come for you forever? Or are you going to let the person who you want to kill above all people in the world walk free just because they happen to be hanging out and having a drink at the Continental bar.

[00:10:35] There's another context, again, more science fiction than fantasy, but Ada Palmer's *Terra Ignota* books feature a sort of highly elective legal system. Characters can choose, in this future setting, can sort of choose what set of laws they want to be bound by. There are the white laws, which are sort of most inclusive, most sort of speech-restricting, take care of everybody kind of laws that include governing sort of, microaggression-like conduct. There are the gray laws that restrict themselves more or less to property rights, and then there are the black laws which are literally people who are bound by the black laws are only bound by more or less the seven to thirteen principles that Hobbes writes out as natural laws in *The Leviathan*.

[00:11:35] And if you choose to be bound, whatever law system you choose to be bound by determines what kind of legal aid you can call upon, what kind of force people will bring to your rescue and under what circumstances. So there you're also kind of deciding, you're making a

tactical decision about what hospitality you will accept, what you will reject, and what statement that makes about your own identity.

Reuben Poling: [00:12:01] I really like that example, Max, from Terra Ignota, because as I recall, a lot of the people who participate in the black law system, particularly, are kind of characterized as just very bored. They're in this utopian society and they're kind of aping the manners of a version of the manners and mores of a half-imagined past where the idea of going out and getting in a sword fight is just like, oh, this would be so cool and I have no problems so, I guess I'll get in a sword fight because I can't think of anything else to do with my time. And it creates this really, kind of... I mean, obviously there's a lot else going on in the story, but it creates this very bizarre picture of just, you've got a world that is as hospitable to most people as a world could possibly be and a lot of people are, or an interesting subset of people rejecting it just because they have run out of other things to do, I suppose.

Max Gladstone: [00:13:11] And sword fights are extremely rad.

Reuben Poling: [00:13:12] Sword fights are rad.

Marissa Lingen: [00:13:15] Well this actually reminds me of the connection with the literature of the fair folk where they are often portrayed as bored. They are often portrayed as immortal and bored and therefore capricious. And that kind of gives me a segue to read what Pamela sent so I wanted to include that since she can't be here to jump in, herself. Let's pretend Pamela would have jumped in instead of having to be coaxed.

[00:13:42] So Pamela says, fairy hospitality tends to be a trap of some kind. You can trace this back to Persephone of course, but the danger of eating or drinking anything when under the hill is widespread in stories. I ended up connecting this to Hansel and Gretel, though to what degree a gingerbread and candy house actually qualifies as hospitality is perhaps questionable.

[00:14:07] I also went off on a digression about the Follow Man, particularly Milton's version of it in Paradise Lost where it's evident that whatever Satan may actually say to Eve, she eats the apple because she's hungry. This led onto the perfection and the enticing scent of the poisoned apple in many versions of Snow White.

[00:14:27] So that was Pamela's thought on fair folk and hospitality, but I think she is right about it being a trap and there are a lot of places, I think, in Irish mythology in particular where people have, their bound by,

I don't know how to pronounce the word, I'm probably going to butcher it. Is it a geas?

Matt Doyle: [00:14:47] Geas or geasa, yeah.

Marissa Lingen: [00:14:49] Where you have something that you are required to do or not to do and this is often a source of conflict because it often throws you into opposition to the rules of hospitality, that you have to take the food that is offered to you by your host, but you cannot eat that food. Oh, no, disaster.

Max Gladstone: [00:15:16] And of course, you've got Sir Gawain and the Green Knight as another take on this option, right? What happens when you're in a very complicated moral situation vis a vis your possibly magical host?

Reuben Poling: [00:15:31] Yeah, that story is a relatively benign example, of, I think, of hospitality as a weapon. Taking someone under your roof and going well, my roof, my rules, thus making them complicit in whatever goes on there. And that story is largely to Gawain's benefit. It's all just a extremely elaborate ploy to get him to be a better person. But uh...

Max Gladstone: [00:15:58] But that by itself is interesting compared to many of other Gawain's other exploits. I think of him, and granted, this is coming off of the later French romances, as being kind of meathead who's happy running around and spoiling everybody's day.

Reuben Poling: [00:16:16] There's a very good parody retelling, oh God. I'm already forgetting what it's called. It's very internet voice kind of thing. Maybe someone can think of a very excitable guy typing in all caps retelling fairy tales. Better Myths, bettermyths.com. But the Gawain retellings are great. He describes Gawain as a guy who just is constantly falling out of bed and tripping into a threesome.

Marissa Lingen: [00:16:39] Yes.

Matt Doyle: [00:16:40] There are several like that. But I actually think, so this is right in my wheelhouse. I was looking through Arthurian mythology for examples of this and the Orkney brothers, Gawain and his brothers are at the center, or near the center of almost every hospitality conflict that happens in Arthur's time. And interestingly, Gawain usually acquits himself pretty well.

Marissa Lingen: [00:17:18] I was gonna say...

Matt Doyle: [00:17:18] There are large exceptions. But, so for people who aren't necessarily familiar with Gawain and the Green Knight, I think most of

our audience probably is. But a green knight shows up at Arthur's court and says, I want an exchange with one of your knights, please strike off my head and if you fail then I'll strike off your head next year. And Gawain volunteers. In some versions, getting in the way of Arthur volunteering because he recognizes the sort of inherent trap of the fairy hospitality. And then the green knight picks up his head off the floor and says, "Cool, see you in a year," and walks away.

[00:18:18] And when Gawain gets to the castle and there's the exchange with the host of the castle, where the host goes hunting every day and they're supposed to exchange what each of them hunt, although Gawain isn't leaving the castle and the knight's wife keeps coming onto him. And so Gawain winds up kissing the lord of the castle every evening. Um. Which is, yeah, there's other levels of that story. But that isn't the only one.

[00:18:51] There's a similar tale called Gawain and the Turk, where Gawain winds up sleeping with somebody's wife and the gentleman, just to remind him of hospitality codes just lays his sword across his neck, not like holds it there. But Gawain wakes up in the morning and there's just a sword sitting on his throat.

[00:19:16] Dame Ragnell and the Loathly Lady where Gawain is coerced into a supernatural marriage with a supernaturally ugly woman but because he's so courteous to her the curse falls away from her and she's revealed to be the most beautiful woman in England or whatever.

Marissa Lingen: [00:19:39] See, and that's where, when Matt, sorry, not Matt. Max said that he's kind of a meathead. He's the meathead who treats women better than basically any of the other knights. Especially by modern terms.

Max Gladstone: [00:19:54] That's fair. Gawain is the absolute Dudes Rock! Character.

Reuben Poling: [00:20:01] That's, however, I think it was Gawain who on his first quest for Arthur ignored a maiden's plea for mercy for her knightly lover and then as he was going to cut the guy's head off, she threw herself in the way of the sword.

Marissa Lingen: [00:20:21] Right, I've...

Reuben Poling: [00:20:22] So his courtesy towards women is in at least some versions of the myth, him making up for beheading a woman who was pleading for mercy.

Marissa Lingen: [00:20:29] Right.

Max Gladstone: [00:20:32] This is also part of the reason I was raising my sources as being later. The French romances, which, at least in my sense, are a lot friendlier to Lancelot because he's the French self-insert character and take steps to sort of distance or downplay Gawain as the great knight of Arthur's court, which was more of his role in the root mythology. At least that's my impression.

Marissa Lingen: [00:21:03] Yeah, I think so too.

Max Gladstone: [00:21:03] Please feel free to correct me if I'm wrong.

Marissa Lingen: [00:21:04] No, I think so, too, Max.

Reuben Poling: [00:21:07] That's largely correct, yeah.

Marissa Lingen: [00:21:10] And I think it's interesting to watch the layers of who is important in this court go along with what culture are we dealing with. Because it was not the same culture throughout all of the making, and of course, people are still writing Arthurian legends, so they're still changing culturally, who is considered important. But this is my sister's son, original culture that was doing that, that is one of the most important roles that a war leader can have in his band is his nephew.

Matt Doyle: [00:21:46] And that change says a lot, also, about the... you can look at it for an example of different cultural mores of hospitality and how important it is. Because as I recall, Lancelot is a tremendously shitty house guest. He's constantly sleeping with people he shouldn't and going crazy and going out a window, quite literally. Just always ruining everywhere he goes.

Marissa Lingen: [00:22:09] He's not invited here.

Reuben Poling: [00:22:13] Wow, disinvented to Minnesota, rough.

Matt Doyle: [00:22:18] Lancelot from his very first appearance in Chrétien de Troyes' is somebody who is outside normal codes of honor and manners. The Knight of the Cart features Lancelot at one point riding in a cart which is supposed to be this incredibly demeaning, disgraceful, dishonoring thing for a knight. And Lancelot is essentially, like, you know, I needed to get somewhere and I don't have a horse right now. It's not exactly hospitality, but since he's on his way to rescue Guinevere from someone who kidnapped her, and there are several breaches of hospitality in that story, I think it sets him apart. And tying that back into Gawain's family, Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris are killed by Lancelot by accident when

Lancelot's riding to rescue Guinevere from her execution because the two of them were honor bound to guard her on her way to her execution and they objected and said, well, we won't do that, but we have an obligation so we will escort her but we will be unarmed and unarmored.

[00:24:04] That whole family is often positioned in the middle of hospitality conflicts and they usually come out pretty good. Except Agravain and Mordred.

Marissa Lingen: [00:24:17] Right. So, we've said hospitality violations a couple of times. Let's talk about one of the biggest hospitality violations in modern fantasy and let's ask Reuben to talk about it a little bit, because of course, I'm talking about the Red Wedding.

Reuben Poling: [00:24:36] Ah yeah. I mean, it's one of the most prominent examples of sacred hospitality in recent genre fiction thanks to Game of Thrones status as a pop culture sensation. And it is historically founded. It's based on the Black Dinner in Scottish history as well as the Glencoe massacre. Really getting a theme of bad things happening at Scottish dinners through this whole podcast. But I think why it succeeds so well is it goes beyond its historical antecedents. It's a violation of taboo so strong that it echoes backwards and forwards through the story. You have characters all over the world having premonitions and visions of the Red Wedding long before they or the reader know what they're witnessing.

[00:25:24] And that serves a two-fold purpose. For one, it's just great writing. It seeds the imagery through the story and adds to the sense of unfolding dread and horror that makes the scene so powerful. You don't really know what you're reading about when you're reading about visions a wolf howling at a feast and no one heard his grief. But it creates this subconscious climate of dread that really makes the horrible chapter land so much worse.

[00:25:54] And then, beyond the strictly [Inaudible 00:25:57] purpose, it shows the metaphysical power of guest right in Westeros. That's a geas so strong that defying it has a real cost. When the architects of the Red Wedding start suffering misfortunes of their own very shortly thereafter I think it's clear that it's not just the Game of Thrones at work, you know, everyone rising and falling just due to their own subterfuge, but it's the magic that undergirds the story. If fantasy posits a meaningful world then this is that world noticing what the Freys and the Boltons and the Lannisters and punishing them for it.

[00:26:39] And that's why I think it's just the perfect example of sacred hospitality played straight in fantasy, that it's this trust that has weight

to it and it's a stone that you can cling to, but it will also pull you down if you betray it.

Max Gladstone: [00:26:55] Thinking it of a crux is especially interesting to me because it is a structural one as well. You can sort of reductively view the first Game of Thrones novel as, I guess Game of Thrones... you can view the first book as an attempt to sort of go down the list of fantasy tropes and either undercut, subvert, or play skew each of them, one by one. The prophecy about [Inaudible [00:27:32] does not come true, or at least doesn't come true the way that anyone's expecting for it to.

[00:27:39] Ned Stark is not the hero. We're not going to even care about the zombies for another two books. All of the very obvious clues for how this epic fantasy is going to go get used as a set up to a joke and the punchline is, nuh-uh. But by the time we get to the Red Wedding, there's a sort of deeper fantastical logic that is beginning to assert itself. It's a little different from the logic of, I don't know, what I'd think of as commercial epic fantasy, for sure.

Marissa Lingen: [00:28:11] Well, and at the same time, I think one of the reasons it succeeds is that while it is setting up that hospitality is metaphysically meaningful in this universe, it's doing so with a ritual that is familiar to us. And nobody here who has been to a wedding, I think, has probably feared that there was going to be somebody jumping in and slaughtering the wedding guests. But on the other hand, you don't have to explain, okay, here's what a wedding is, here's why it's important to these people, because we already have that. So I think it's very cleverly an overlap of familiar and unfamiliar to kind of bootstrap the reader into the part that's unfamiliar.

Matt Doyle: [00:29:05] Yeah, and some of that baked into the way that we structure weddings. That's one of the reasons we have groomsmen is so that there's a bunch of guys standing up there if someone decides to try and kidnap the bride or shoot all the wedding guests with crossbows.

Reuben Poling: [00:29:27] Yeah.

Max Gladstone: [00:29:30] 'Course there are some weddings where kidnapping one or the other party is the whole point.

Reuben Poling: [00:29:35] Yes. We could probably do a whole panel on that.

Marissa Lingen: [00:29:39] Fantasy weddings, actually, yeah. I kind of like that. Or even, like, birth, death and marriage. So that's another panel.

- Reuben Poling: [00:29:50] Yeah, that's a great other panel.
- Matt Doyle: [00:29:54] Did we have anywhere particular we were going after this because I had...
- Reuben Poling: [00:30:03] If there's time I wanted to quickly spin off another example of guest right and sacred hospitality in Song and Ice and Fire that's kind of like the dark mirror version of it that I'd love to get people's thoughts on. Which is Craster's Keep. Craster is just one of the absolute worse people on a very bad planet. And it's really driven home by showing he's in league with the Others which are the actual, inhuman existential evil of Song of Ice and Fire, but his roof offers shelter to the heroic Night's Watch, who are the institution that's supposed to be the actual enemy of that very same evil. They're supposed to be above all the human conflicts and pay attention to what's really bad in this really bad planet.
- [00:30:44] But they accept his hospitality and that lends him legitimacy. He is officially a host even though he's this person who just visits horrible crimes on his own children and is in league with the great enemy of life. And they pay for it. The first time they shelter at his house, they ride out and get their asses kicked by Craster's own patrons and then the second time, they collapse in a violent mutiny. And I think that's a sign of his hospitality being poisoned. By sheltering under his roof, they become complicit in his crimes. And I think that's a really good trope of hospitality as a dangerous thing. If you say to someone, I accept the shelter of your roof, then what you're saying is, you have the right to grant or withhold that shelter. And I think there are a couple interesting questions about what that right actually entails.
- Marissa Lingen: [00:31:41] Well, and there are also examples both in the real world and in fantasy novels where people will deliberately not accept someone's hospitality when they desperately need it. Or will deliberately not offer hospitality when it might be traditional to do so so that they do not have that relationship with that person. So that they cannot be said to be complicit. And if they have to go and shoot crossbows at them, they can. That is a place where people have agency in this. It's not just, oh well, you showed up on my doorstep. There are times when you can say, no, I will not break bread with you.
- Matt Doyle: [00:32:28] Yes.
- Max Gladstone: [00:32:29] Or an element or episode in Wizard of Earthsea is Ged ending up in exactly that kind of situation running away from the shadow that's he's summoned, he ends up in a tower with a beautiful lady who seems to be very excited about taking care of him and keeping out the shadow.

She's working for a very wise wizard, everything seems to be going great and Ged realizes that she is in league with the old earth powers of Earthsea and she's the same sort of baddies that we run into in the Tombs of Atuan later. And he has to reject their hospitality and go back out into the wind at great personal risk.

Marissa Lingen: [00:33:16] Yeah, cool. Matt, you had mentioned to me that the new She-Ra series has things with threatening hospitality in it as well, and I was intrigued by the threatening hospitality. Can you say more on that?

Matt Doyle: [00:33:29] Oh, there's... it's in the final season. There is an amazing dinner party thrown by Horde Prime who's just this evil lord of the universe type. He's conquered most of known space. And the villain through most of She-Ra is Hordak, who's just one of his clones. So we've sort of... we've graduated from the local evil to the big evil. And he's serving this dinner full of all these alien delicacies to Glimmer, who is a powerful political leader on She-Ra's world. And he asks her how she likes the food. And then lets her know that all of these dishes are exceptionally rare because he's caused the extinction of all life on the planets that prepared them.

Marissa Lingen: [00:34:41] Whoa.

Matt Doyle: [00:34:48] And you know. He waits a little bit into the dinner to drop that.

Marissa Lingen: [00:34:51] Like you would.

Matt Doyle: [00:34:53] But it's absolutely the... look at how hospitable I'm being to you. Now look at what happens if you don't accept my hospitality.

Marissa Lingen: [00:35:02] Well, and there's again the element of complicity. The, you have—

Matt Doyle: [00:35:07] Yeah. You've now eaten...

Marissa Lingen: [00:35:09] You've eaten how many endangered species in the last 30 minutes? That's uh...

Matt Doyle: [00:35:14] Yeah, the last cheesecake in the galaxy.

Reuben Poling: [00:35:21] I love the idea of hospitality of a weapon, of my roof, my rules. Because, I think this is a pretty blunt force weapon. But, Bluebeard where the fairy tale, Bluebeard tells his wife, you can go anywhere in my house except for this one room. Of course she's going into the fucking room. Everyone knows that. He knows that. It's a hurdle set up to trip her

and give him license to do what he really wants. But by making it dependent on an action she takes, no matter how inevitable that action is, it gives him a sort of twisted license. That like, you can't complain about being murdered and hung in this room because all you had to do was not open this door.

[00:36:04] And that's a pretty, like I said, a blunt force version, but you can really think of that as using the power of your hospitality to coerce people into doing things that would otherwise have come harder to them because, again, they're complicit.

Matt Doyle: [00:36:21] I just want to touch, while we're talking about people not accepting the bargain of hospitality, or not offering it, on one historical example that many of us may have seen in a movie but evidently actually did go that way. Is when Saladin was re-taking Jerusalem and he captured Guy de Lusignan who was king of Jerusalem and Raynald de Châtillon who, if you've seen Kingdom of Heaven, the real Raynald de Châtillon was way worse in stupider ways, even. When you go, oh man, nobody could be that crass and stupid and vile. Oh no, the real guy, they couldn't put him in the movie because nobody would have bought it.

[00:37:15] Saladin offers Guy water at which point Guy knows that he will not be killed because he's been given hospitality. Raynald takes the water which was not offered to him and drinks it, trying to put himself under that same protection.

Marissa Lingen: [00:37:34] Ooh.

Matt Doyle: [00:37:36] And Saladin says, I wasn't offering that to you, and beheads him. And taking into account the fact that various factual historical accounts may have been written dramatically rather than accurately, but that is in both Islamic and Middle Eastern and European Christian accounts as how that scene actually played out.

Marissa Lingen: [00:38:08] Wow.

Reuben Poling: [00:38:13] Great movie, by the way, Kingdom of Heaven. Everyone should watch the 12 hour director's cut. It's a much better movie than the theatrical release.

Matt Doyle: [00:38:18] Oh, it's amazing.

Marissa Lingen: [00:38:22] Well, you know, this has all been very dramatic about the bad consequences of accepting the wrong person under your roof or whatever. But one of my favorite books that I was thinking about when

we were preparing for this panel is Jo Walton's *Lifelode*. And the things that happen for the characters who give somebody hospitality who is not a pleasant person are more interpersonal conflict. And I really like what Jo did with making that important. And it does ramp up to a siege because it's a fantasy novel and that's where she took it. But it doesn't ramp up to, and you accepted the wrong person in and now all your guests have been shot with crossbows. It is just we are... I'm getting a lot of background noise here.

[00:39:23] It's just, oh, we're doing this and now we have to put up with this person behaving badly. And because this is someone who has our, has right to be here, because of who this character is, we have to give her hospitality and we have to deal with the interpersonal fallout from the chaos that she causes.

[00:39:50] So sometimes it's a Red Wedding and sometimes it's your really annoying relative.

[00:39:59] Wow, that's a lot of feedback. Okay, so I, yeah. Let me see. Where have we gotten in the panel description. We've talked about malicious actors and why it's so ingrained. So I think Matt had something to say about Chelsea's, Chelsea L. Polk's *Witchmark* and *Stormsong* and I wondered if we could bounce off of that.

Matt Doyle:

[00:40:26] Oh yeah. So we kind of touched on that earlier as to the point at which someone crosses that line and in both *Witchmark* and *Stormsong*, there's a group of ambassadors who attempt an assassination plot after their nation has been militarily defeated. And one of the big arguments, especially in *Stormsong*, is about to what extent they're protected by diplomatic privilege. Because they personally weren't the assassins. So is the fact that they were responsible for the assassination enough to void their hospitality and make them safe targets to imprison or execute? Or not? And the fairies say that these people should still be immune and the people who were almost assassinated say, uh, no. We've thrown them in prison. And yeah, I don't want to get into spoilers for *Stormsong*, although it is fantastic and that is only scratching the surface of the role of hospitality in *Stormsong*, but that's what I had to say about that.

Marissa Lingen:

[00:42:03] Well...

Max Gladstone:

[00:42:05] I really like, sorry go ahead.

Marissa Lingen:

[00:42:07] No, go for it.

Max Gladstone: [00:42:11] Oh, well, I was just going to say that it's interesting to bring up the notion, the question of official hospitality and official respected roles here because I think that does play differently and does raise other questions about state power. I'm reminded of, and justification for that matter, poisoned hospitality. I'm reminded of the Secret History of the Mongols explanation for the later conquests of Genghis Khan. Which is extremely relevant for this story.

[00:42:54] Now Genghis Khan starts off as an extremely family-less poor kid. He's a slave for a little while, his mother is living up on the sort of northern reaches of the Mongolian territory. And he rises to become the leader first of a small warband, then of a larger warband and then, eventually consolidates control over what we would think of as Mongolia, or the people who are living in Mongolia. And a couple of neighboring principalities that historically went to war with the Mongols a bunch. And at this point, the sort of we are going to unite the people justification for the war starts to peter out, and he's 40-something and many people would regard that as a good life's work. I've built my nation, okay, cool. I'm going to govern it and hang out.

[00:43:49] But something else happens and the thing that happens is he sends a messenger, a number of messengers out to neighboring cities and one in specific, the name of which I'm forgetting, on the Silk Road, asking basically for a tributary kind of relationship. Send us some stuff, or at least let's have diplomatic relationships. This sort of opening bit.

[00:44:16] And the prince of this particular city kills the messenger and sends him back to the Mongols and has desecrated the body. In the Secret History, this is the entire justification for the later in life westward war effort push of the Mongolian Empire that ends up conquering all of Central Asia. Genghis Khan is just so mad at this one asshole that he puts all of Mongolia on horseback and starts riding west. And once you start, I don't know, once you start conquering cities the way he conquered cities you just keep going and they eventually stop when they get to Hungary.

[00:45:06] So, you know, obviously, a slightly self-serving position. But this is also the episode in history where they crowned with gold event comes from. The source for what ends up happening to Viserys in the first Game of Thrones novel. The prince who kills the ambassador gets, Genghis Khan is like, oh, well, you're a big shot, huh? Let me crown you.

Marissa Lingen: [00:45:38] Wow.

Max Gladstone: [00:45:42] So, obviously if you are a sort of great powers historian you could say, well, Genghis Khan wanted to conquer Central Asia west of

Mongolia anyway, he needed something to do to keep his various warbands together and pointed in the right direction or in the same direction anyway, rather than resorting to civil war as they had in the past. So he needed to go somewhere and this was as good a direction as any, and it's all a justification and it's all pretext. But you can, I think, tell, even if you're going to grant that argument, something about the underlying nature of the culture and the underlying value system of the culture by the precise sort of pretext that's given.

[00:46:23] And in that case it seems clear that even if we're going to discount the narrative entirely as something that was true about Genghis Khan himself, he thought that it would feel justified to his people as a cause of war. That this story would get everybody riled up and make them think, yeah, let's go and spend 30 years conquering stuff because...

Reuben Poling:

[00:46:56] You know, if... oh sorry, go ahead Marissa. If I have time to sneak it in, something Matt was saying about Stormsong and Witchmark about who hospitality applies to made me think about something that I've been mulling over, which is the other way around, of who really offers hospitality. So real quick. Take the classic fantasy story. Hospitality of the castle thing. The lord offers weary travelers shelter for the night, they make a pact not to harm each other, abide by the rules, everything's great. What does that actually mean? It means that the lord's kitchens have more mouths to feed and he's not going to be turning the spit or filling the wine cups. It means the chambermaids have more beds to turn down. The stablehands have more horses to look after and if these guests are important, it means that the authority and power that the lord exercises over his servants and tenants is now vested in his guests as well.

[00:47:47] You wouldn't want to piss off the baron by refusing a request from his honored guest, would you? Now there's a reciprocal nature to hospitality. You know, this is my house, don't abuse it. But if your host is careless with his dishware, sloppy with his cleanup and drinks his wine cellar dry, you're going to follow suit. What if he's abusive to his permanent tenants? Are they not guests under his roof as well? Can my landlord invite people to my house, I feel like legally he might be able to make a case, right? You hear horror stories of people having their permanent dwellings rented out as AirBnBs without their knowledge.

[00:48:23] Because it's legally their house, the landlord's house, they just live there. So who has the power to offer hospitality, I guess, is what I'm asking and what can you do if hospitality is offered on your behalf and you're the one who's going to have to do the work of making it real.

Marissa Lingen: [00:48:42] Well, I think there's an overlap there between hospitality and feudal obligation. That I think it would be very difficult to characterize the scullery maid as a guest. But what she is is a vassal at the very lowest level. That she has the lowest rung of I will obey you and you will provide for me that feudalism has to offer. And I think one of the things that we see in the late stages that sort of take over the modern perspective on feudalism is that people forget that it was an obligation that went both ways. And they forget that it was an obligation that went both ways because the people in power also tended to forget that there was a difference between you are my vassal or my serf because I say so and you are my vassal or my serf because we provide each other with reciprocal services. Not the same, but reciprocal.

Reuben Poling: [00:49:56] I don't think think that failure to understand the reciprocal nature of service ended at that point in history. I mean, the AirBnB example I gave, or right now we are living through a period where you know... a lot of unrest and a lot of uprising is predicated on the idea of people with an obligation failing to meet that obligation. I'm talking about the police of course. And while they are not hosts, or unless you've been thrown in jail for a night. It does... there is a parallel there, I think, of hospitality being kind of one of the great obligations that grants you power but carries responsibility with it.

Marissa Lingen: [00:50:42] Right. Right. Well, we're 50... do you have something, then, quick?

Matt Doyle: [00:50:47] Yeah, I was just going to say with regard to the feudal obligations, there's also a difference between retinue and entourage. I was actually just reading about this yesterday. A feudal lords retinue are the people who work for him that are under his protection, that he has a reciprocal oath with to look after. There's a larger group called the entourage who are people who are under that feudal lord's employ but whom he does not have oath-bound obligations towards. So the maid is probably entourage, not retinue.

Marissa Lingen: [00:51:30] Well, we're over 51 minutes into our hour here. I have a couple of questions from Twitter but also I don't know if we had, did we have questions, Casey?

Casey Blair: [00:51:42] We do. I have kind of a question on two different sides, actually. So the first one I wanted to talk about is because we talked so much about the tactics of hospitality and I started thinking this when Max brought up John Wick in that the consequences to violations of hospitality in those movies sometimes seem firm the consequences are applied unequally. And since we brought up briefly, the police, we can

talk about that, too. But I wanted to talk about in fantasy how you deal with someone. In John Wick, he gets exceptions because he is just so good at killing that in his assassin world, they will make exceptions for him. And in our world, what do we do when consequences for hospitality violations are applied unequally? When some people get more rope than others? Some people have more offers of hospitality? Some doors are closed to some people? And I was wondering if the panel could talk about that for a second and then I will ask the other side of this question?

Marissa Lingen: [00:52:54] Well, Sarah Zettel has an interesting young adult series, the titles all three end in Girl. So if you look at, I forget which one Golden Girl is in the series. Bad Luck Girl. But they are a fantasy series set in 1930s America and because the protagonist is Black, she needs to navigate the Green Book in her journeys across the country. That she cannot rely on having hospitality at every roadside stop even in exchange for money. So I think that that combined with the fairy nature of those books makes them an interesting example of unevenly applied rules and consequences.

[00:53:46] Anybody else? Go on, then, Casey.

Casey Blair: [00:53:49] All right, the other side of this I wanted to talk about is because although we've been talking a lot about tactics, we haven't kind of talked about the other side, which is welcome. And there's hospitality can be a thing that you use, but it can also be a thing that you give freely. And hospitality is such a feature, not just in our cultures, but we make sure to bake it into our stories. And I wanted to talk about not just why boundaries and enforcing those boundaries matters in terms of what that then changes you, but why hospitality and welcome matter and are so important as a concept and such a foundational element in fantasy.

Reuben Poling: [00:54:43] Can I get meta for a second?

Casey Blair: [00:54:45] Absolutely.

Reuben Poling: [00:54:46] I do think there's a lot of value in having ceremonies of welcome into a secondary world. Into a place where the reader is going sort of on... the reader is trusting the author to tell them about this place where they don't have necessarily a lot of information. You might have common, we talked about how the Red Wedding was effective because it was built on cultural tropes that you could generally assume a reader would be familiar with. But you still have lots of... even if you're using those tropes, obviously a big part of fantasy writing is exposition. And I think the ceremonies of welcome, they both create a natural occasion of exposition, which we all love and value. But also, I think can be used to

sort of create a sense of comfort for a reader. Not necessarily comfort in the cozy sense but comfort in, I trust this world. This is a place where people are able to make a life no matter how much of a grim dark hell hole, or a very confusing, elaborate 1200 page doorstopper I'm walking into. People still go over to their friends' houses and are offered a beverage.

[00:56:06] It's this kind of sensation of feeling at home in a book which is really, I think, what all writers strive for to some extent.

Marissa Lingen: [00:56:15] Well, and I think... it can give us a beat of relaxation that every story needs a few beats where you are not action, action, action all the time. And I'm thinking of the Beornings of Beorn in Tolkien, but I'm also thinking of Chonicles of Narnia's beavers. There are so many horrible things happening and oh my God, there's a witch and we're in a different world and she might kill us and she might ruin everything. And we have found this refuge that is not... it is a bit tactical. The beavers hope that the Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve are going to help them out. But it's mostly a moment of rest for the reader as well.

[00:57:06] Max, did you?

Max Gladstone: [00:57:07] Yes. Sort of building off of that and what Reuben was saying a minute ago, and also off of Casey's earlier question. I see all of this on a kind of meta level. To my mind, every book is a closed house. You know very little when you're going into a story, when you're going into a novel. You might know what the cover says. You might have glanced at the cover picture or read the background description, but sometimes those don't even exist depending on the novel.

[00:57:52] You're really going in blind, plus or minus whatever you heard about the author. That's a position of real dependency. It's not unlike getting washed up in Nausicaa's kingdom. You as a reader are arriving in a strange land in the absolute power of a person that you don't know, and you don't know if you can trust.

[00:58:20] And that's... this is something I think about a lot, especially as it connects to communities that don't traditionally feel like they can be welcome, especially in straight, cis-het, white society. People who feel like they have to keep some part of themselves back, or secret, or behave in a certain way in order to be accepted, in order to be welcomed.

[00:58:54] Hospitality in the sense of welcome feels like one of the profound responsibilities of an author, especially an author of fantasy in

this particular moment. Fantasy being a genre of, it's built around wonder, discovery, growth, exploration. These are all feelings that can so easily be crushed and they can be very easily crushed by the sense that your host isn't particularly interested in you or wasn't thinking about you when they sort of put the party together.

Marissa Lingen: [00:59:33] Yeah, Matt, what did you have, there?

Matt Doyle: [00:59:35] In terms of creating that welcome and reciprocity as a central component of this, people give... good people give the welcome they want to receive. [Inaudible 00:59:54] considerate people may be rather than giving the welcome they want to receive think about what does their guest want. But in a book, a couple of us might have read, Emma Bull's Bone Dance, there's a... when Sparrow, the main character, who operates by this very transactional ethos of the deal winds up being taken in by the Hoodoo engineers. We get this interval of healing and peace. They're trying to create a better world than the world that Sparrow has been living in and giving that kind of welcome is the magical work they're doing to create that world both in a metaphysical sense and just in a practical sense. And it's also a point in the book where we as the readers really need that break.

Marissa Lingen: [01:00:54] Yeah, I'm noticing that in some 4th Streets past, there were some attendees who were really focused on authoritative voice. That they really liked a book with authoritative voice, and that that was what helped you to settle in, and I feel like for me, a hospitable voice is preferable both as a reader and a writer. I would rather be welcomed than dictated to. And I think that this conversation has made me think about the meta levels of that. Welcoming rather than laying down the law, even though welcome comes from a certain authority in itself.

[01:01:37] So we're at an hour. How long do we actually go, here, Casey?

Casey Blair: [01:01:50] We probably shouldn't go on too much longer. If you had any questions from Twitter that you wanted to address quickly, we can go a few minutes over, but we should probably wrap up in the next five-ish minutes.

Marissa Lingen: [01:02:01] Okay, well, what Macey said, this is Jennifer Mace's question. I'd love to hear y'all's take on cross-cultural hospitality. As an immigrant, I've confused many work folks by trying to make them tea, for example. How does this play between races/species? How do we see it worldbuilt? What can we show with this?

[01:02:21] And the first thing that I thought of when I read that question from Macey was C.J. Cherryh's [Inaudible 01:02:24] books, that it is a long series that is constantly referring back to the different species having different food needs and in effect food allergies that can be fatal. So there is in every single book, there are multiple scenes of here's what's safe for you to eat, here's what we made sure is an okay tea for you to drink. We are different species, and trying to navigate this alien relationship, but we are doing so by making sure that we have things that physically can welcome you.

Matt Doyle:

[01:03:06] I think that's a great way of playing with power dynamics in a story, too. If you have a character who's sort of... who has been an audience camera for some time, who they are comfortable with and who is perhaps written more with an expectation of cultural overlap. To have them be welcomed, then, into a different set of traditions and a different set of expectations within the story is a good way to both jar and welcome the reader. It's a sort of... you know, you talked about hospitable voice. I think that's a really good way of doing a hospitable voice that is not familiar. It is making the new and the different into something welcoming. And obviously, there are a lot of different ways you can tweak that if you want to really play with reader expectations. But I think that's one of the most... the best ways to kind of expand the cultural outlet of a story is to find out what it's like when someone walks into the home of someone whose language they don't speak.

Reuben Poling:

[01:04:16] Yeah.

Max Gladstone:

[01:04:16] Building off of that, Reuben, and also getting, sorry, Matt, and also getting maybe a little meta for a second. I think there is a sort of protagonist or a narrator, rather than protagonist who's presented as a sort of hospitable character. A sort of easy identification point via the voice, even in situations where the cultural norms have shifted to such a degree that the modern reader no longer feels that this person's particularly identifiable. But still that voice, that presumption of identification can let you trip and fall into them sometimes.

[01:05:03] The sort of nearest in time examples that I can think of for characters like John Watson who, while still feeling very modern is nevertheless massively removed from any modern reader in terms of his background, upbringing, social norms, this sort of presumptive character. And you can start to see... you can see ways that Watson handles things that a modern version of him or a modern doctor would never. And then it only gets more pronounced when you look at, I don't know, somebody like Genji or even the narrator of Genji in The Tale of

Genji. You know, 1,000 years old in the Heian court and the rhetoric treats so much of many things about the world as [Inaudible 01:05:53] So of course you're necessarily familiar with it.

[01:05:56] At least when I'm reading stories with me, it's so easy for me to start nodding along and saying, oh yeah. Of course you don't cross [rokuyo?] after dark because of the zodiac prohibitions. Or because there's a curse on it right now. Yeah, sure, absolutely. Everybody knows that.

Matt Doyle: [01:06:15] As far as cross-cultural hospitality, one of my favorite comedies of manners is Robert Heinlein's *Citizen of the Galaxy* where Thorby is this orphan on this alien planet who keeps being adopted into different cultures. And so there are five different hospitality codes that he learns to navigate and in each section of the book, he manages to grievously offend someone by acting appropriately for the last set of hospitality codes he learned.

[01:06:59] And I love that. I would love to see even more novels like that. Of course, *Citizen of the Galaxy* is largely based on Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, which is similar in some ways but doesn't have... *Kim* doesn't adopt as many new cultural trappings. It's about the conflict between two big ones.

Marissa Lingen: [01:07:27] Well, it looks like we are running out of time here, but does anybody have any final thoughts that they want to wrap up the panel with? I've been jotting down a thing for a next project so I guess 4th Street online still counts as 4th Street. Anyone else with more than that?

[01:07:52] It looks...

Reuben Poling: [01:07:55] I've got one that we didn't get to and I feel like we could do it as a whole other panel which is gifts as hospitality.

Max Gladstone: [01:08:02] Oh yeah.

Matt Doyle: [01:08:03] Oh.

Reuben Poling: [01:08:05] I made so many notes about *The Lord of the Rings* and the rings as gifts and also if you're staying at Galadriel's house and she gives you a belt, don't make any plans for the next week.

Matt Doyle: [01:08:28] I want to just real quick bring up that we had talked earlier, very close to the beginning of this panel about hospitality in Minnesota. Which was obviously partially just a joke given that half our panel is from Minnesota, thereabouts. But it is interesting in this moment, given what

is occurring in Minneapolis, and one of the things that's occurring in Minneapolis is the occupation of a Sheraton hotel with the cooperation of the management staff, turning it into a shelter for unhoused residents during the uprising of Minneapolis. And I think that's just... that's an example of radicalized hospitality. Of valuing the safety of your guests and valuing the bonds that that creates and valuing shelter and food and a roof over your head so much that if you don't have one to offer, you can just go out and take it.

Marissa Lingen: [01:09:29] Yeah.

Casey Blair: [01:09:29] All right, are we all set?

Marissa Lingen: [01:09:38] I think we are, thank you so much, everybody.

Casey Blair: [01:09:41] All right, then that's it.

Max Gladstone: [01:09:42] Thank you.

Casey Blair: [01:09:42] Thank you panelists, for joining us, and thank you everyone who tuned in to listen to our podcast edition of 4th Street Fantasy 2020. Take care and we hope to see you folks at the con next year.