

# REPORT FROM PLANET MIDNIGHT

*IN 2009 I WAS A GUEST AUTHOR at the International Conference of the Fantastic in the Arts, which takes place each spring in Florida, USA. The conference theme that year was “Race in the Literature of the Fantastic.” Other invited guests included Native American writer Owl Goingback, Chinese-American writer Laurence Yep, and Japanese science fiction scholar Takayuki Tatsumi. It was also the first year that more than a handful of the conference attendees were people of colour.*

*I’d known since 2008 that I was going to be a Guest Author, and that I would have to speak to the conference theme during one the luncheons. And I’d been dreading it. Talking about difference and marginalisation in active science fiction community is rarely easy.<sup>1</sup> Although some of us are*

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1. By “(active) science fiction community” I mean the people who attend and organize science fiction and fantasy conventions, who identify as science fiction/fantasy fans, and who are conversant and current with much of the body of science fiction/fantasy literature, a genre of storytelling that can be found in text-based, time-based (films, television, etc.) and visual media.

*people of colour and some of us non-Western, the community is dominated by white, middle-class people from the more “developed” nations of the Western world. Many of us are of an egalitarian bent, at least in principle. We are an intelligent, opinionated, and outspoken bunch. Many of us are geeks. We know too much about too many things that other people don’t care about. Many of us are socially awkward observers who often don’t quite get the hang of mainstream status signalling vis-à-vis dress codes, slang, mating rituals, and material possessions. We are often ridiculed by people who do understand those complex codes. We have created an active, passionate community centred on our love for science fiction and fantasy and devoted to the principle that no one should be singled out for being “different.”*

*But principled does not de facto mean politicised. In practice, people in our community who try to talk about marginalisation are often seen as fomenting divisiveness. We become the problem. In this community, many of us will firmly call bullshit when we see it. But that doesn’t mean that our analysis is always informed, rigorous, or honest. Many of us come from backgrounds of relative privilege that we don’t perceive, and are ignorant of what daily life is like for those with less of that privilege (even keeping in mind that relative privilege is always contextual). Many of us don’t think beyond simplistic analyses of power that ignore systemic power imbalances in order to lay the blame on the victim. Just as much as the mainstream world, we are hierarchical. We can be dazzled by fame. Some of us are the cool kids and some are not.*

*I’m told that when I originally gave this speech, some of the academics in the audience were offended that I used my time at the podium to discuss what they saw as an issue from the “fans” and therefore beneath them. In 2009, one of the*

*most far-reaching, paradigm-shifting (I fervently hope) community debates was burning up communications networks right beneath their noses, and they were proud of having been ignorant of it, and indignant that I would lump them in with fans.*

*Active fannish community not only constitutes a significant and enthusiastic portion of our audience for science fiction and fantasy in all media, it is the community that organises, for love of the genre, the many annual conventions throughout the SF/F world which bring together artists and audiences to celebrate, share, debate, and critique the narratives of social and technological evolution in science fiction and fantasy stories.*

*I love the science fiction community fiercely and I will call you to task if you ridicule it or dismiss it lightly. I have found friends, allies, and fellow travellers here, of many racial, class, and cultural backgrounds. I have found stories that entertained me, made me marvel, made me hopeful. But it is not a haven for the perfect meeting of like minds (thank heaven, because how dull would that be? Not to mention impossible). I speak not to belittle my community but to participate in it.*

*It is common for science fiction and fantasy writers, most of whom are white, to say that they don't write about people of colour because they don't know anything about us; or don't know what it's like to live as a racialised person; or, perhaps more honestly, because they don't want to piss us off. It is common for science fiction and fantasy writers to say that they set their stories in imaginary worlds among imaginary beings because that allows them to deal with fraught issues such as power and marginalisation divorced from the real-world effects of such issues. But there are also many writers who see it differently.*

*In 2009, white science fiction writer Elizabeth Bear published a blog post in which she challenged her fellow authors to include racialised and otherwise marginalised people in their stories. That post ignited an Internet firestorm of discussion and argument about race, racism, and representation in science fiction/fantasy literature and community. Fans, major editors and writers in the field, and emerging writers took part. Some people of colour expressed their frustration, pain, and rage at the field's ongoing racism. Some white people engaged thoughtfully, with understanding and respect. But many others responded quite negatively. They were indignant that we dared express rage in rageful ways.<sup>2</sup> Some of them loudly denied the existence of racism in the field, in ways that demonstrated their lack of understanding of how systemic racism operates. For a time, some of them appeared to be policing the Internet posts of politicised black women writers in the genre and attempting to verbally intimidate, berate, and belittle us. A couple of the major editors in the field, perhaps understandably upset at how some of the rage was being expressed, made statements of the ilk that they would never again allow communication from any of those they considered guilty of offence.*

*Among the angry people of colour were unpublished and barely published writers. Our field is quite small. There's only a handful of large professional houses. They currently only publish a handful of people of colour. To their credit, many of them want to publish more of us. But from my perspective, when key representatives of one of the most powerful houses in our genre say that they never again want to hear from people*

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2. You'll notice that my "we" shifts according to context. In other words, when I say "we," I don't always mean the same group of people. Think Venn diagram.

*who could be the future SF/F writers, editors, illustrators, and publicists of colour, and who are the current SF/F readers of colour, that's a pretty clear expression of both the power and the will to actively keep the genre as white as possible.*

*I do not believe I overstate. I do believe that is not how they meant it; they are well-meaning people. But that is how it would have been heard by those who have been implicitly and explicitly, through ignorance or wilfulness, largely rendered invisible for decades. When you're historically the one with the power relative to another, if you really want to correct the imbalance, you have to be willing to hear pent-up rage and not retaliate. You have to be willing to acknowledge your actions that make you complicit. You have to be willing to apologise and then take visible, effective steps towards righting the imbalance.<sup>3</sup>*

*Some of the editors who made that type of statement have since been taking a little extra effort to be seen to be supportive of people of colour in the genre; but they have not, to my knowledge, acknowledged why they are doing so. And they have not, to my knowledge, acknowledged fault and apologised. You can't bring about reconciliation by doing little or nothing. You can't make change that way. So at some level, perhaps the will really isn't there. I know some of these editors and I respect the good books they've made happen. But at the moment I have no reason to trust them and I do not wish to be published by them.*

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3. I'm not asking people to do anything I haven't done. I've wronged and probably will wrong enough people in my time that I've had ample opportunity to put myself through the process of apology, addressing/redressing and hopefully reconciliation. I know in my bones how badly it grates. But I also know that it works, and that the subsequent healing soothes away the grating feeling.

*I believe it was a clueful white person who coined the phrase “RaceFail ’09” to signify the more vehemently recalcitrant white voices in the debate. A couple of those voices have adopted the nomenclature “failfandom” as a pejorative to denote people in the community, especially people of colour, who unapologetically name the racism we perceive. RaceFail ’09 generated thousands of Internet postings, links to many of which have been archived on the Web.<sup>4</sup>*

*So that is the context in which I attended ICFA in 2009. It took me a long time to get over being so scared and angry that I couldn’t write my speech. I actually completed the bulk of it at the conference the day before, when I had a bolt of inspiration about an angle from which to tackle it. I decided to make the first half of my address somewhat performative. It is a culture-jamming of references from fantasy, science fiction, and linguistic and cultural references from the American and Caribbean parts of the African diaspora. I’ve footnoted some of them here. Because the first half of the speech was in effect a script, there were a few performance notes in it that I’d written to myself. These are between square brackets, in capitals. There is also an afterword about an exchange I had minutes after finishing my speech.*

#### A RELUCTANT AMBASSADOR FROM THE PLANET OF MIDNIGHT

Good afternoon. I’d like to thank the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts for dedicating this year’s ICFA to the theme of race in the literature of the

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4. See Rydra Wong’s LiveJournal blog at <http://rydra-wong.livejournal.com/146697.html>.

fantastic, and for inviting Mr. Tatsumi, Mr. Yep, me, and many others to address the topic.

The first thing I'd like to say is . . .

[BE LIGHT-HEADED. THEN BECOME THE HORSE<sup>5</sup>]

Uh—oh my. It worked. I'm here. [LOOK AT HANDS, THEN AT AUDIENCE]

Dear people, please don't be alarmed. I mean no harm. I really don't. I'm riding on the head of this horse only for a short time, I promise you. Please don't hurt me. This was an extreme measure. There seemed to be no other way to communicate directly with you.

I come from another planet. For decades now, we have been receiving broadcasts from your planet that seem to be intended for us. We are delighted, and honoured, and also puzzled. We have teams of our best translators working to decipher your messages, and we cannot honestly tell whether they are gestures of friendship, or of aggression. As you might imagine, it's quite important for us to know which. If it is indeed friendship, we would be delighted to reciprocate. If of aggression, well, as one of our ethnocultural groups might say, "Don't start none, there won't be none."

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5. Papa Legba, ouvre baye pou mwen, Ago eh! In African-derived religions of the Caribbean, the "horse" is a believer who, during a ceremony of worship, voluntarily consents to being temporarily inhabited by one of the deities. The worshipper then exhibits characteristics specific to that deity (sometimes in defiance of their own physical capabilities when not in trance state), and is said to have the deity riding on their head.

I should be very clear: I do not represent my whole planet. Neither do I represent my whole ethnocultural group. Or even all of the translators assigned to this project; try to get any two of us to agree to the same thing . . . There was vehement disagreement among us about whether I should attempt this dire method of direct communication. So, frankly, I snuck away when no one was looking.

[FIDDLE WITH CLOTHING]

My, this horse does dress most uncomfortably, doesn't she?

[TAKE TOP SHIRT OFF TO REVEAL T-SHIRT THAT READS "SPEAKER TO WHITE FOLKS"]

This? This is merely my name, dear friends. Or my title, if you will. I hope I may indeed call you friends. But to help ensure my safety, or at least to create a record of what happens this day, I am accompanied by my companion, Dances With White People, and his recording device. [INDICATE DAVID FINDLAY, WHO'S VIDEOTAPING<sup>6</sup>] Again, please don't be alarmed. It is not a weapon of any kind.

So. To the business at hand. It is my hope that if I repeat to you some of the most vexing phrases we've received from your peoples, that you might be able to clarify their meanings. I decided to address this conference because, as you might imagine, we, as a different race of beings than you are, are very interested in the stories you tell each other

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6. A video recording of the 2009 speech is available at the following address, courtesy of artist/writer David Findlay: [http://nalo-hopkinson.com/2010/05/30/reluctant\\_ambassador\\_planet\\_midnight.html](http://nalo-hopkinson.com/2010/05/30/reluctant_ambassador_planet_midnight.html).

about interracial relations. We have had bad experiences with the collision of cultures. Some of them even between groups on our own planet. So I'm sure you can understand why we are concerned.

Our first sign that perhaps our responses to you were going awry was when we released this document into your world:

[SLIDE: ORIGINAL COVER OF NOVEL *MIDNIGHT ROBBER* ACCURATELY DEPICTING THE PROTAGONIST, WHO IS A BROWN-SKINNED LITTLE GIRL WITH BLACK AFRICAN FEATURES]

When one of the cultures of your world reconfigured it, this was the result:

[SLIDE: COVER OF ITALIAN TRANSLATION OF *MIDNIGHT ROBBER* (*IL PLANETA DI MEZZANOTTE*) SHOWING PROTAGONIST AS A BLUE-SKINNED YOUNG WOMAN WITH EUROPEAN FEATURES AND STRAIGHT HAIR, WEARING A BRA TOP AND FRINGED MINISKIRT]

As far as our translators can tell, the title of this version can be rendered as *The Planet of Midnight*, which, according to your understanding, seems to be where the blue people live. We have noticed a preponderance of wistful references in your literature to magical people with blue skin.

[SLIDES: NIGHTCRAWLER; MYSTIQUE; THE BEAST (ALL FROM THE X-MEN); KALI; KRISHNA; DR. MANHATTAN; PAPA SMURF; SMURFETTE; THE COOKIE MONSTER; ETC. BUT NONE OF

THE BEINGS FROM AVATAR, CUZ I'M ORNERY THAT WAY AND DON'T WANT TO INVOKE THAT PARTICULAR FARCE IN THIS SPACE TODAY. BESIDES, THE CONNECTION SHOULD BE SELF-EVIDENT]

Since none of the images of real people from your world show such blue-skinned beings, we can only theorise about what these images symbolise or eulogise. Perhaps a race of yours that has gone extinct, or that has self-destructed. Perhaps it is a race that has gone into voluntary seclusion, maybe as an attempt at self-protection. The more pessimistic among us fear that this is a race being kept in isolation, for what horrendous planet-wide crime we shudder to imagine; or that it is a race of earlier sentient beings that you have exterminated. Whatever the truth of the matter, we're sure you realise why it is of extreme importance to us to learn whether imprisonment, extinction, and mythologizing are your only methods of dealing with interspecies conflict.

Here are some of the other communications with which we're having trouble:

You say: "I'm not racist."

Primary translation: "I can wade through feces without getting any of it on me."

Secondary translation: "My shit don't stink."

Our dilemma: To us, someone making this kind of delusional claim is in immediate need of the same healing treatments we offer to people who are convinced that they can fly. Such people are a danger to themselves and

to others. And yet, the communications from your world are replete with this type of statement from people who do not seem to be under treatment of any kind, and few among you take any steps to limit the harm they do. We are forced to conclude that you must be as laissez-faire in your response to people who think they can fly. This can't possibly be true, can it? Few of us are willing to visit a planet where we would clearly have to dodge plummeting bodies with every step. [FLINCH, LOOK UPWARDS]

You say: "This story is a universal one."

Translation: "This story is very specifically about us, and after all, we're the only ones who matter."

Our attempts at translating this one caused quite an argument in our ranks. Several feuds have started as a result, and one or two of them have gotten quite ugly. Because why would any sentient race say something that means its exact opposite? Well, one of our number did point out that we ourselves do occasionally display this regrettable habit. But that's an us thing; you wouldn't understand.

You say: "That thing that you made doesn't belong to you. It's universal."

Now, this one is complicated. To make any sense of it at all, we had to proceed from statements of the previous type, in which "universal" means, approximately, "we own it."

Therefore, our attempt at a primary translation is this: "I like that thing you made, so I'm going to claim it's mine. And I'm bigger than you, and nobody who counts really

likes you anyway, so you can't stop me."

Secondary translation, for brevity: "I think yours is prettier, so I'm just going to help myself to it."

You say: "Ethnic."

Primary translation: "Those quaint and somewhat primitive people over there."

Secondary translation: "Unnatural, abnormal, or disgusting, as in your term 'ethnic food.'"<sup>7</sup>

You must understand that on our planet, everyone has an ethnicity. With cultural mixing, some of us have more than one. To us, "ethnic" means "the cultures of everyone." Clearly we are missing something crucial, and "ethnic" is not the word you actually mean. We beg you to provide us with clarity.

You say: "God, you people are so exotic."

Primary translation: "I, by the power vested in me as a representative of a dominant culture that needs never question its certainty that it is the centre of the universe, hereby dub you 'the entertainment.'"

Secondary translation: "God, you people are so ethnic."

One of our translators offered a tertiary translation: "Just take this money already and pose with my kid so I can take a picture." But, between you and me, he's somewhat, um, argumentative at the best of times.

You say: "But I'm not the one who enslaved your people. That was my ancestors."

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7. Tip o' the nib to Sally Klages.

Primary translation: “I benefit from the inequities that were institutionalised before my birth, and I have no interest in doing anything to disrupt that comfortable state of affairs.”

Secondary translation: “I feel really guilty about this stuff, but it’s bigger than me. I’m powerless.”

Tertiary translation (from you-know-who): “Suck it up, bitches.”

You say: “I don’t have any culture of my own; that’s why I want yours.”

Primary translation: “I am wilfully unaware of or repulsed by how ubiquitous my rich and powerful culture has made itself. I’d really rather hang out with you guys.”

Secondary translation: “I’m bored! This stuff is hard!”

You say: “I don’t see race.”

Primary translation: “If I keep very quiet, maybe you won’t see me and ask me to do any work.”

Secondary translation: “I’m just a little black rain-cloud, hovering under the honey tree.”<sup>8</sup>

You say: “Eventually this race stuff won’t matter, because we’ll all interbreed and become postracial.”

Primary translation: “If I keep very quiet, maybe you won’t see me and ask me to do any work. Plus you might have sex with me.”

Secondary translation: “I don’t want to do my homework! This stuff is hard! I want some cookies! Are we there yet?”

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8. Tip o’ the nib to Winnie the Pooh and to A.A. Milne.

You say: “My grandparents had a hard time too when they came to this country.”

Primary translation: “Oh, shut up, already. Let’s talk about me some more.”

Secondary translation: “La-la-la, I can’t hear you. That’s because I don’t see race.”

You say: “But we can’t do that! That would be affirmative action!”

Primary translation: “I don’t want to do something that’s proven to work, because then, well, it might work.”

Oh, dear. The horse is coming back online. She’s putting up quite the struggle. Feisty little filly, ain’t she? So I’m going to have to take my leave of you, and before I could get my answers, too. I’m so sorry. You have my questions, though? You heard them? You can send the explanations out via the usual channels through which you’ve been sending us messages. I promise we’ll hear the . . .

[BECOME NALO AGAIN]

Wow. What happened there? Never mind, probably just nerves. [TAKE OFF T-SHIRT. UNDERNEATH IS A PLAIN BLACK DRESS. INDICATE T-SHIRT] Dunno where that ratty thing came from.

Anyway, every few years I come up with another statement about what fantasy and science fiction do. I don’t discard my previous notions; I just add new ones for the consideration of myself and others. I don’t consider them definitive or all-encompassing, and I consider them at best only

partially descriptive. But I find them fun to contemplate. The other day, our roommate told us that he'd asked his grandmother what technological invention had revolutionised her life. He thought she'd say the television, but she replied, "No, that thing destroyed my social life."

She told him that in fact it was the refrigerator that had changed her life. She said it freed up hours of her days, creating leisure time that allowed her to go and see a movie occasionally, and to hang out with friends.

My roomie's story left me thinking about just how labour-intensive it is to maintain a single human life, never mind a family of humans. We are a lot of work; really, to have any quality of life, we are more work than we can manage by ourselves.

Time was, if you were rich, you had servants to do a lot of the drudge and administrative work for you. Hang on; that one hasn't changed.

If you weren't rich, you got together in communities and shared what labour you could, and you had children to help with the rest. And that one hasn't changed much, either.

And if you weren't the breeding kind, you found other ways to make yourself invaluable to the people in charge. I don't suppose I'm saying anything about this that is news to this crowd, so please bear with me while I build my argument.

So that's a really glossed-over version of how the balance of labour and power has traditionally tended to play out. But as disempowered groups in society become more empowered, they begin to be able to make more choices about where they are going to place their labour efforts.

We've made magic; we've created this near-intangible substance called "money" (it's almost more an idea than a substance, really) which you can use—if you have enough of it—to compel or persuade others to do some of your work for you.

In many countries of the world, women and men can now choose to have fewer children.

Sometimes, people are able to choose to do blue-collar work over relatively unskilled labour; can get the education that allows them to do white-collar work, or even end up in the highly skilled labour pool, the one in which you find doctors and lawyers. If you manage to boost yourself there, you can afford to hire people to do a lot of your drudge work for you.

But the necessity for somebody to do the hard labour to sustain human lives and communities hasn't gone away. One way we make sure that there are always people to do that work is by deliberately keeping portions of our populations disenfranchised so that they have little choice but drudge work.

We also create "labour-saving" devices. But as anyone who's ever used a computer knows, in many ways, those just create new forms of work.

We're always imagining new ways around the dilemma. So it seems to me that one of the things that fantasy and science fiction do is to imaginatively address the core problem of who does the work.

Science fiction looks at technological approaches to the problem, and at all the problems the solutions create. (You know, the discovery that a computer isn't exactly a labour-saving device. Or the question of what happens when our machines become so complex that they are in effect sentient beings able to demand rights.)

Fantasy looks at the idea of work. Instead of using technology, it uses magic. But both are labour-saving devices.

And both fantasy and science fiction wrestle with the current and historical class inequities we maintain in order to have people to do the work.

Especially in North America, class differences have historically become so entrenched that they are characterised as or conflated with cultural or racial differences.

And as someone brilliant has said, "Race doesn't exist, but it'll kill ya."

So one might say that, at a very deep level, one of the things that fantasy and science fiction do is to use myth-making to examine and explore socioeconomically configured ethnoracial power imbalances.

That's why those of us who live in racialised bodies, and who love and read fantasy and science fiction because we relate so strongly to it, can get so bloody irritated at the level of sheer, wilful ignorance that members of the dominant community bring to the discourse about race and its real-life effects. The discussion is everywhere in the literature, but some of the people in this community can be so adamant about being blind to it, and so determined to derail, belittle, obstruct, and silence those of us for whom it can literally affect the quality of our lives!

I've known for quite some time now that I'd end up on this podium, speaking on race in the fantastic. That was challenging enough, being a person of colour addressing a mostly white crowd in North America on the issue of race in anything. I was already anxious and exercised about the whole thing. But then, white people in this community instigated the disturbance in the Force that we're now calling RaceFail '09, and what was already loaded became outright trigger-happy.

I know that some of you already have your backs up because I just said that white people instigated it. So be it. I'm not going to get into defending that statement. I'm up here presumably because somebody in this organisation thinks I know what I'm talking about. My point is that writing this speech has been no doddle. I've been composing it in my mind for over a year now, through apprehension and anxiety. When it came down to the actual writing of it, I had to take frequent rage breaks.

In the course of RaceFail '09, I have heard white people in the community who are angry at the anger displayed by people of colour in the community; people who say that we don't deserve to be listened to if we can't be polite. I couldn't figure out why this statement felt wrongheaded to me, until I read a post by my colleague, writer Nora Jemisin, on RaceFail. She pointed out that discussions of race in this community have been happening, politely, for decades. And though there has been change, it has been minimal. When we people of colour started to blow up, suddenly there were more of you paying attention. That's the thing. I've said that when you step on my foot once or twice, I might politely ask you to get off it. But by the thousandth time you do it, the excuse of "I didn't see you there" starts to sound a hell of a lot like, "I don't care enough about you to pay attention."

The vehement response of people of colour to RaceFail got more people paying attention, both white and of colour. It showed us people of colour that we do have a certain strength of numbers, that there are more of us than the one or two visibly of colour people you'll usually see at a convention. People of colour in this community have started publishing ventures together as a result of RaceFail. Some white people in the community began addressing the issue and began creating forums for discussion. Some of them held fast, even when they came under attack from all sides. A small handful of them had the guts to examine their own statements and actions, perceive where they had been racist, and admit it. Without saying that they were now afraid to go to conventions because of angry brown people (in my experience, the wrath of the white majority

is much more dangerous), without name-calling, baiting, or (black!)listing, and without deleting their whole blog right after posting an apology on it.

Some of you will recognise yourselves or friends of yours, or, hell, friends of mine in the actions I'm describing. It doesn't necessarily mean that I hate these people. Believe it or not, my default is towards friendliness. People make mistakes. People say things they haven't thought through. People do things they later regret. People hurt other people. People propagate systemic inequities because they don't understand or care how the system works. I know that I do all those things. I'm learning that it's what you do after you make the mistake that counts. The people who took their courage into their own hands and apologised probably discovered that they didn't die from it. In fact, maybe they felt a little better than before.

More positive change that came out of RaceFail: fans of colour began daring to blog their experiences and their feelings about systemic racism in fantasy and science fiction (both in the literature and in the community) because they realised there was some backup. Fans of all stripes—and by that I mean “white people, too”—began challenging one another to read books by people of colour and review and discuss them, and they are by heaven doing it. Can I just say that I love me some fandom? Fandom is not exempt from the kind of wrongheadedness that humans display every day. But when fans conspire to do a good thing, it is most well done indeed, with verve and enthusiasm.

The white fantasy and SF community has a culture of arrogance and entitlement that is infuriating. It became clear last year just how patronizing some of you could be, just how little you trusted us to have any insight into our own experience, an experience about which many of you are proud to say that you're blind. If I'd ask one thing of you, it'd be to demonstrate your own impulses to equity and fairness—I know they're there—by beginning from the assumption that people of colour probably know whereof we speak on issues of race and racism.

It also became clear that many of the white people who are able to make that collegial leap of equality and respect are so mired in guilt and trying to take the fall for the rest of you that they are somewhat paralysed. That doesn't help either, and I'm not sure what the solution is. I think you could stand to talk amongst yourselves about that one.

One of the things I really wanted to say from this podium: people of colour in this community, I love allyou. I love allyou can't done. I love how you stepped up to the plate in this past year; I kept feeling that love even when rage led to regrettable actions from some of you. I love how you looked out for each other; I love how you got energised. It's bloody terrifying to be up on this podium right now, but you give me the courage to keep going, and for that, I thank you. When RaceFail first began to happen, I was dismayed. I didn't think the Internet with its trolls and incendiaries was the place to have the discussion. I was wrong. Tempest Bradford, I was wrong, and I love you for holding strong, for keeping your sense of humour, and for speaking hard truths while being honest with and

generous to pretty much everyone (by “everyone” I mean, “white folks, too”).

There are so many names to be named of people who did the right thing through all this. I cannot name them all. Because I’ll tell you, people, I tired. Oonuh, I tired to rass. I get seen as one of the go-to people when it comes to race in this community. I spent most of the last two years homeless and couch-surfing with my partner, recovering from illness and fighting a still ongoing struggle to get enough to eat from day to day. I simply didn’t have the energy to take RaceFail on the way I wanted to. And when I began to hear from some of the more arrogantly obstructive white people in the community who were all of a sudden being friendly to me without acknowledging their actions and the reasons for their overtures, I saw red. All you think I just come off the banana boat or what? That is one of the oldest tricks in the book, and my mother didn’t raise no stupid children. I am not your tame negress. I mean, I know I’m published by a mainstream house and have achieved some recognition. I know I’m in the house, people. But house negroes get a bad rap for being inherently complicit with Massa. There were and are freedom fighters among them, too. I know that a large part of the reason I’m up here has to do with the brave actions of people on the inside, of all colours, at the IAFA. And I thank you all profusely for it.

By the way, to the people in the community who have coined and are using the term “failfandom” to mock people of colour who dare to call you on your racism, that’s using derision, minimizing, and discrediting as tactics of

suppressing dissent. And we see you coming a mile away.

Sure I'm angry. I also love this community and this genre to pieces. This literature and some of the people in this community have kept me alive; in these past four years, sometimes literally so. That's why, as much as I can, I keep fighting for and with the community to be the best it can be, to live up to its own visions of worlds in which no one is shut out. I'm very, very happy to be here, and happy to have been offered a podium from which to talk to this group of people on this topic. Any space created in this community for people of colour, and any space we can make for ourselves makes it possible for more of us to find it easier to be ourselves, to speak up; makes it easier to write, or possible to write at all. That is true when we do it for any disenfranchised group of people within the larger fantasy and science fiction community: women, disabled people, queer people, poor and working class people, chronically ill people, old people. I'd lay odds that everyone in this room experiences at least one of those disenfranchisements. Making room makes room for all of us. It makes the possibility for even more great writing in a field where we are already blessed with so much of it. How wonderful would that be? And come right down to it, the writing is why we are all here, nah true?

#### AFTERWORD

*A postscript, if I may; a few minutes after I gave this address, an audience member approached me privately and asked whether I was a Marxist. Surprised, I asked him why he thought*

*I might be. He said it was because I had “reduced” the lofty subject of art to a mere question of labour. (Paraphrasing mine.)*

*To him I’d like to say, Mister, I am an artist who supports herself on the strength of her art and her ability to keep producing it. You’d be hard put to convince any artist that art isn’t work. And you can’t convince me that there’s no art to labour. You can’t convince me that art and the labour that creates it can be easily teased apart and considered as separate objects, and you sure as hell can’t convince me that the latter is somehow base and impoverished in comparison to the former.*

*And how sad is it that you apparently managed to ignore the main gist of my speech so profoundly that all you got from it were the few paragraphs I used to contextualise a much larger discussion of how fantasy and science fiction approach race?*