

## A DAY AT THE FAIR

Off and on, for many years, we ran a subscription table in the Dealers' Room at the annual World Science Fiction convention. Authors would help out by signing books while pitching subscriptions. Frequent con participants knew this was the place to go for the year's most heavily discounted subscription. The subscription offers worked well for us, too, because the sale was made straight to the consumer—no middleman to share profits with and no expensive direct mail campaign. I always found working the table exhilarating. It was a great opportunity to meet long-time readers as well as solicit new subscribers.

Many of the authors, like George R.R. Martin, Connie Willis, and Joe Haldeman, made hilarious sales pitches. Others, like Nancy Kress, Cory Doctorow, and Allen M. Steele, took more decorous approaches. All of these methods contributed to sales and fun adventures.

One such occasion occurred during Philadelphia's Millennium Philcon in 2000. Connie Willis signed books and magazines while my seven-year-old hollered out "get your half-price prescriptions." Our commotion soon caught the attention of a brand new conventiongoer who happened to be looking for an autograph from one of her favorite authors. That's how I first met the singer/songwriter and SF reader Janis Ian.

An awkward incident occurred while working the table with Cory Doctorow. We were approached by a man who I erroneously assumed was an *Asimov's* or *Analog* reader. I was about to make the usual sales pitch when some clue seemed to imply a certain level of disinterest. After a brief conversation with Cory, the man continued on his way through the Dealers' Room. Cory then explained that our guest was a founder



Sheila Williams, Robert Reed, and Emily Hockaday

Photo by Jackie Sherbow

of the shared software movement. His enthusiasm for free and collaborative teamwork made it seem unlikely he would have welcomed my come-on for a *paid* subscription to *Asimov's*.

Despite this close call, my passion for the table never waned. Spending time there was a great way to hear about the items subscribers particularly liked as well as their gentle suggestions for improvements to the magazine. Alas, though, our official days in the Dealers' Room came to an end. No more adventures at the table and a harder time making face-to-face contact with readers.

For the past couple of years, though, I've had the chance to meet readers in a new venue. Two years ago, the mystery and science fiction editorial assistants—Jackie Sherbow and Emily Hockaday—suggested we attend the Brooklyn Book Festival as vendors. The fair is held in the fall at Brooklyn's Borough Hall. Book related events occur all week long and there is a swanky vendors party the night before the festival. Fellow guests at this year's party included Alaya Dawn Johnson and N.K. Jemisin.

All these events are exciting, but the best part is the day at the fair. On a crisp Sunday morning, Emily and Jackie set up a beautiful table decorated with printouts of some of our most classic covers. We distributed free magazines and great subscription offers to our four fiction magazines—*Ellery Queen* and *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazines* in addition to *Analog* and *Asimov's*. Two years ago, Michael Swanwick came up from Philadelphia to sign autographs and hang out at the table. This year, Robert Reed flew in from Nebraska and Tom Purdom took a bus from Pennsylvania to do the same thing.

Visitors to the 2013 table included Jane Yolen, Ellen Kushner, and Delia Sherman. New *Asimov's* writer Jay O'Connell stopped by as did 2011 Dell Magazine Award winner Seth Dickinson. Jay had recently sold me four stories, but this was our first opportunity to meet in person. I was also delighted to see Seth who has started to sell tales to publications like *Lightspeed*, *Clarkesworld*, and *Analog*.

I didn't meet as many subscribers as I would at a science fiction convention, but we did entice a lot of fairgoers to our table. By the end of the day, we had given away over three hundred copies of *Asimov's* and hundreds of subscription offers. We'd touched base with some stalwart subscribers, reconnected with some lapsed readers, and introduced *Asimov's* to a bunch of new people.

When the last copy of *Asimov's* flew out of my hands, I hurried over to the Festival's "Youth Stoop" to catch Alaya, Jane, and Delia's five P.M. panel on "Realms of Illusion and Imagination." Hearing the authors' thoughts on YA books and other worlds was a nice finish to a fun day connecting with writers and readers. Maybe next year, I'll see you at the fair!