



Library podcast

Clarion West Presents Ann Leckie

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[00:00:35] Good evening. I'm Misha Stone, she/her pronouns. I am a Reader Services Librarian here at the Central Library, and it's so nice to have you all here tonight. We are delighted to have Ann Leckie here for the final reading for the Clarion West Writers Workshop summer reading series. I want to mention that this event is sponsored by the Seattle Public Library Foundation, who makes so many of our free library programs possible. This is also thanks to Gary Kunis and his sponsorship of our literary programming, and it's presented in partnership with The Seattle Times and the University Bookstore. And now I want to pass it over to Susan from the Clarion West Board.

[00:01:19] Hello, I'm Susan Gossman, a Clarion West board member and a longtime speculative fiction fan. Have you ever read *Everfair* by Nisi Shawl or the excellent anthology *New Suns*, edited by Nisi? Have you watched the TV series *The Expanse*, co-written by Daniel Abraham? Have you read the young adult novel *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi? I know many of you have read *Ancillary Justice* by tonight's guest Ann Leckie. These are just a few of the many works written by Clarion West graduates held annually for the past 35 years, Clarion West is an intensive six week workshop for talented science fiction, fantasy and horror writers.

[00:02:12] The workshop gives students essential tools for improving their writing, as well as friendships and professional contacts that can last a lifetime. Although we did not charge an entrance fee, it costs money to publicize and organize events such as tonight's reading. Tuition collected from students only covers a fraction of the total cost of the workshop and its outreach efforts. We work really hard to control costs, but funds are required for items such as our rent, our small but excellent staff, airfare for instructors and my personal favorite liability insurance. Also, Clarion West worked hard to make sure that no qualifying student is prevented from

attending the workshop because of lack of funds. Without full and partial scholarships, a significant percentage of students could not afford to attend the workshop. I understand that this year priority for donations is given to organizations such as the ACLU with children separated from their parents and placed in overcrowded, filthy cages. Lord knows we need nonprofits like the ACLU. However, books can also have a profound impact on society right now. Popular books include *Handmaid's Tale*, *1984*, Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad*, and N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season*. Speculative fiction can serve as a warning or inspiration influencing actions taken by people. We need stories that inspire young people to become scientists, engineers and community activists and lease, and last but not least, right now a lot of us need good escapism stories. This year, Reading Series is received support from King County 4Culture, Seattle Office of Arts and Culture, Hugo House, the University Bookstore and the Seattle Public Library.

[00:04:21] Also, I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered together on the ancestral land of the Coast Salish people. So together let us honor their elders, both past and present. Upcoming Clarion West events, include our September 24th evening of beer, food and a trivia contest at Lagunitas Brewing. Right now, we are in the midst of our annual fundraiser. The Write-a-thon, which is like a walkathon, but with writing. What I love about the Write-a-thon is it both raises money for Clarion West and motivates writers to create new stories. Thank you to the writers who are participating in the Write-a-thon as well as the donors supporting those writers. There is still time to donate to the Write-a-thon. And right now we have a two thousand five hundred dollar challenge grant donated by an anonymous donor and our own Todd McCoy, board member. So don't forget, writers matter. Stories matter. Books matter. So please donate Clarion West. Thank you.

[00:05:34] Before we introduce the wonderful Ann Leckie, Jay and I have a couple of announcements to make. So I hope you will indulge us. First, we would like to introduce to you the Clarion West class of 2019 who are in their final work writing and critiquing in our summer workshop, Celeste Rita Baker

[00:05:53] Phoebe Barton. You can hold your applause because we'll go through a bunch of names.

[00:06:00] Derrick Boden, Tim Chawaga, EA Crawley, Nelly Geraldine García-Rosas, Minal Hajrawala, Millie Ho, Isha Karki, M. L. Krishnan, Rosco Oz Lance, Monte Lin, Gardner Thomas Mounce, C.S. Peterson, Kristina Ten, Eugenia Triantafyllou, Kristina Willsey, and Filip Hajdar Drnovšek Zorko. Clarion West Class of 2019.

[00:06:42] Could you please stand up together?

[00:06:49] We all wish you a safe and happy reentry into the outside world.

[00:06:54] Everyone.

[00:06:55] These are the people we'll be looking for on the on the physical and electronic shelves and honors lists in the future. So keep an eye out for those names. Now we would like to announce the instructor lineup for 2020. Can we have the traditional drum roll, please?

[00:07:15] Week one, Andy Duncan. Week two, Eileen Gunn. Week three, Tina Connolly and Caroline Yoachim. Week four, Nalo Hopkinson. Week five, editor Neil Clarke. Week 6, Ted Chiang.

[00:07:45] Thank you so much. It's going to be an amazing year, maybe as wonderful as this one. And now to introduce Ann Leckie. I first met Ann when she attended the illustrious Clarion West class of 2005, it was obvious then that Ann had wonderful stories to share and the skill to write them. But no one could have predicted that eight years later, she produced the first of a record breaking science fiction trilogy, which would go on to win the Triple Crown of awards, the Hugo, the Nebula and the Clarke Awards. The list of her wins and nominations goes on to include all of the other major awards in the field. BSFA, Locus Award, etc. Her novels are all of the things: groundbreaking, smart, humane, adventurous, intellectually challenging, but also readable, moving from the large galactic scale of exhilarating space opera to the everyday details of human life. Critics describe her work better than I can, though, of course. One critic describes a very common reaction. Opening her review with, "It is difficult for me to write this review without simply gushing. Read this now. But, seriously read this now," which is telling enough. Yes. I was particularly happy to find this description of her work in futurism, ambitious style, believable characterization and a gripping conspiratorial plot deals with big ideas and challenges some big ideas, too.

[00:09:26] While it strives to discuss the arbitrary nature of the categories our culture creates, and explores issues of faith, gender and empire. It also presents deeply felt and well-written literature. It manages to set itself apart. This is not just about piecing together a fairly familiar alien world. This is about coming to terms with the boundaries we place on knowledge. It is not about exploring a universe, but being educated into one. The book accomplishes this too deeply satisfying affect. The L.A. Review of Books said the Imperial Radch trilogy is thoughtful, exciting, well-paced, fascinating and inspiring. In its narrative, intricacies exemplifies not only

what the best space opera can achieve, but also the best of what science fiction can offer. Her most recent novel, *The Raven Tower*, is her first published fantasy novel, and it also has received acclaim. Kirkus gave her a starred review, saying it's sharp, many layered, and as always, for Leckie, deeply intelligent. Please welcome the final reader of Clarion West 2019 summer series, the wonderful Ann Leckie.

[00:10:52] Hello, everybody. Look at you all. It's wonderful to see you. It's so wonderful to be here. I thought if you all were interested, I would read the beginning of a short story. There is an anthology coming out September 3rd, edited by Navah Wolfe and Dominik Parisien called *The Mythic Dream*. And it's an anthology full of amazing people, and then me. It's all retellings reinterpreted of various myths. So I thought maybe I would read the first part of that if that's OK with you that.

[00:11:33] It's called the "Justified."

[00:11:36] Het had eaten nothing for weeks but bony gape-mawed fish, some of them full of neurotoxin. She'd had to alter herself so she could metabolize it safely, which had taken some doing so when she ripped out the walsel's throat and its blood spurted red onto the twilit ice, she stared, salivary glands aching, stomach growling. She didn't wait to butcher her catch, but sank her teeth into skin and fat and muscle, tearing a chunk away from its huge shoulder. Movement caught her eye and she sprang upright. Walsel blood trickling along her jaw to see Dihaut black and silver walking toward her across the ages packed snow and ice. She'd have known her sib anywhere, but even if she hadn't recognized them, there was no mistaking their crescent topped standard. Months and years tottering behind them on two thin insectile legs. But sib or not, familiar or not, Het growled, heart still racing, muscles poised for flight or attack. She had thought herself alone and unwatched had made sure of it before she began.

[00:12:42] Her hunt. Had Dihaut been watching her all this time? It would be like them. For a brief moment, she considered disassembling Dihaut leaving them dying on the ice. Months and years in pieces beside them. But that would only put this off until her sib took a new body. Dihaut could be endlessly persistent when they wished.

[00:13:02] And the fact that they had come all this way to the frigid desert at the farthest reaches of Nu to find her suggested that the ordinary limits of that persistence, such as they were, could not be relied on.

[00:13:15] Besides, she and Dihaut had nearly always gotten along well. Still, she stayed on the alert and did not shift into a more relaxed posture. This is the eye of Merur, the Nobel Dihaut, months and years as Dihaut drew near its high, thready voice cut startlingly through the silence of the snowy waste.

[00:13:35] I know who they are, snarled Het. The standard made a noise almost like a sniff. I only do my duty, Noble Het.

[00:13:44] Dihaut hunched their shoulders, their face, arms, torso and legs were covered with what looked like long fine fur. But this being Dihaut was likely feathers, mostly black. But their left arm and leg and part of their torso were silver-white.

[00:13:58] Hello, Sib, they said, sorry to interrupt your supper. Couldn't you have fled someplace warmer? Het had no answer for this. She'd asked herself the same question many times in the past several years.

[00:14:11] I see you've changed your skin. Dihaut continued. It does look odd, but I suppose it keeps you warm. Would you mind sharing the specs?

[00:14:19] They shivered. It's clothes, said Het. A coat and boots and gloves. Clothes. Dihaut peered at her more closely. I see. They must be very confining. But I suppose it's worth it to be warm. Do you have any you could lend me? Or could whoever supplied you with yours give me some, too. Sorry, growled Het, not introducing you. Actually, she hadn't even introduced herself. She'd stolen the clothes when the fur she'd grown hadn't kept her as warm as she hoped. Dihaut made a wry, huh? Their warm breath puffing from their mouth in a small cloud. Well, I'm sorry to be so blunt. They gave a regretful smile. All Dihaut in its acknowledgment of the pointlessness of small talk. I'm very sorry to intrude on whatever it is you're doing down here. I never was quite clear on why you left. No one was, except that you were angry about something which... they shrugged. If it were up to me, they raised both finely feathered hands, gesturing vaguely to the dead walsel at the silver one. I'd leave you to it, would you? She didn't even try to sound as though she believed them. Truly, sib, but the ruler of Hehut, the founder and origin of life on Nu, the one sovereign of this world, wishes for you to return to Hehut. At this months in years waved its thin sticklike arms, as though underlining Dihaut's words she'd have sent others before me.

[00:15:41] But I convinced her that if you were brought back against your wishes, your presence at court would not be as delightful as usual.

[00:15:48] They shivered again. Is there somewhere warmer we can talk? Not really. I don't mean any harm to the people you've been staying with, said Dihaut. I haven't been staying with anyone. She gestured vaguely around with one blood-matted hand, indicating the emptiness of the ice.

[00:16:06] You must have been staying with someone, sib. I know there are no approved habitations here, so they must be unauthorized, but that's no concern of mine unless they should come to Merur's attention or if they have animas. Please tell me, sib, that they don't have unauthorized animas here because, you know, we'll have to get rid of them if they do. And I'd really like to just go right back to Hehut where it's actually warm.

[00:16:28] Unbidden, her claws extended again just a bit. She had never spoken to the people who lived here.

[00:16:33] But she owed them. It was by watching them that she learned about the poisonous fish. Otherwise, the toxin might have caught her off guard, even killed her. And then she'd have found herself resurrected again in Hehut in the middle of everything she'd fled.

[00:16:47] They don't have animas, she told Dihaut. How could they? When their bodies died. They died. Thank all the stars for that. Dihaut gave a relieved, shivery sigh.

[00:16:57] As long as they stay up here in this freezing desert with their single cold lives, we can all just go on pretending they don't exist. So surely we can pretend they don't exist in their presumably warmer home.

[00:17:10] Your standard is right behind you, Het pointed out, listening. It is, Dihaut agreed. It always is. There is nowhere in the world we can really be away from Merur. We always have to deal with the one ruler. Even in the end, the benighted, unauthorized souls in this forsaken place. They were by now shivering steadily. Can't she leave anyone, even the smallest space? Asked Het. Some room to be apart without her watching for just a little while? It's usually us watching for her, put in Dihaut. He waved that away.

[00:17:43] Not a single life anywhere in the world that she doesn't claim is hers. She makes certain there's nowhere to go.

[00:17:49] Order, sib said Dihaut. Imagine what might happen if everyone went running around free to do whatever they liked with no consequences. And she is the founder and origin of life on Nu. Come on, Dihaut. I was born Aeons just before Merur left the ship and came down to Nu. There were already people living here. I remember it. And even now, it depends on who you ask. Either Merur arrived a thousand years ago in Aeons and set about pulling land from beneath the water and creating humans. Or else she arrived and brought light and order to humans she found living in ignorance and chaos. I've heard both from her own mouth at different times, and you know better. You are the historian.

[00:18:28] They tried that regretful half smile again, but they were too cold to manage it.

[00:18:32] I tell whatever story is more politic at the moment and there are, after all, different sorts of truth.

[00:18:39] But please, they spread their hands placatory. I beg you, come with me back to Hehut. Don't make me freeze to death in front of you. Noble Dihaut, piped their standard. Eye of Merur, I am here. Your anima is entirely safe. Yes, shivered Dihaut. But there isn't a new body ready for me yet. And I hate being out of things for very long. Please, sib. Let's go back to my flier. We can argue about all of this on the way back home. And well, now that Dihaut had found her, it wasn't as though she had much choice. She said with ill grace. Well, fine then. Where's your flier?

[00:19:17] This way, said Dihaut, shivering and turned. They were either too cold or too wise to protest when Het bent to grab the dead walsel's tusk and drag it along as she followed.

[00:19:28] It rained in Hehut, but barely more often than it snowed in the icy waste Het had left, but rivers and streams veined Hehut under the bright, uninterrupted blue of the sky, rivers and streams that pooled here and there, into lotus-veiled lakes and papyrus marshes. And the land was lush and green. The single-lived working in the fields looked up as the shadow of Dihaut's flier passed over them. They made a quick sign with their left hands and turned back to the machines they followed. Small boats, dotted the river that snaked through the fields, single-lived fishers hauling in nets here and there. The long gilded barque of one of the justified shining in the sun.

[00:20:05] The sight gave Het an odd pang. She had not ever been given much to nostalgia, or to dwelling on memories for her various childhoods, none of which, to her recall, had been particularly childish. But she was struck with a sudden, almost tangible memory of sunshine on her skin, and the sound of water lapping at the hull of a boat.

[00:20:23] No, not, she was sure, a single moment, but a composite of all the times she'd fled to the river to fish, or walk, or sit under a tree, and stare at the water flowing by, to be by herself as much as she could be anyway.

[00:20:38] Almost there, said Dihaut reclined in their seat beside her. Are you going to change? They had shed their feathers on the flight here and now showed black and silver skin, smooth and shining. Het had shed her coat, boots and gloves, but left her thick and shaggy fur. It would likely be uncomfortable in the heat, but she was reluctant to let go of it. She couldn't say why. I don't think I have time. Noble Eyes of Merur said months and years upright at D house elbow. We will arrive at Tjenu in fifteen minutes. The one sovereign will see you immediately. Definitely no time to change. So urgent, asked Het. Do you know what this is about? I have my suspicions. Dihaut shrugged. One silver shoulder. It's probably better if Merur tells you herself.

[00:21:23] So this was something that no one, not even Merur's own Eyes could safely talk about. There were times when Merur was in no mood to be tolerant of any suggestion that her power and authority might be incomplete. And at those times, even admitting knowledge of some problem could end with one's anima deleted altogether. Tjenu came into view. It's gold covered facade shining in the hot sun. A wide dark avenue of smooth granite stretching from its huge main doors straight across the gardens to a broad entrance in the polished white walls. The Road of Souls, the single-lived called it, imagining that it was the route traveled by the animas of the dead on their way to judgment, Dihaut's hands. As large as the building, was a good kilometer on each of its four sides and three stories high. Most of Tjenu was underground or so Dihaut had told her. Het had only ever been in the building sunlit upper reaches, at least while she was alive, and not merely an anima waiting resurrection Dihaut's flier set down within Tjenu's white walls beside a willow edged pond. Coming out Het found Great Among Millions her own standard waiting, hopping from one tiny foot to the other, feathery fingers clenched into miniscule fists. Still, the next moment, its black pull pointing perfectly upright, the gold cow horns at its top, polished and shining. Eye of Mirror, it said, its voice high and thin.

[00:22:44] Noble Het, the justified, the powerful, servant of the One Sovereign of Nu, the ruler of all in her name of self created, in her name of she caused all to be, in her name of she

listens to prayers, in her name of sustain, or of the Justified, in her name... Stop! Het commanded.

[00:23:00] Just tell me what she wants. Your presence, gracious Het, it said, with equanimity Great Among Millions, had been her standard for several lifetimes and was used to her immediately. Do forgive the appearance of impertinence noble Het. I only relay the words of the One Sovereign. I will escort you to your audience. Months and Years coming out of the flier piped Great Among Millions. Please do not forget the noble Het's luggage. What luggage? Jest Het. Your wassel Noble Eye, replied Months and Years, waving a tiny hand. What's left of it. It's starting to smell. Just dispose of it, said Het. I've eaten as much of it as I'm going to. Great Among Millions gave in a tiny, almost hop from one foot to the other, and stilled again. Noble Het, you have been away from Tjenu, from Hehut itself, without me for 53 years, two months and three days. It almost managed to sound as though it were merely stating a fact and not making a complaint. But not quite. It's good to see you again, too, Het said. Her standard unclenched its little fists, and gestured toward the golden massive Tjenu. Yes. Het acknowledged. Let's go.

[00:24:08] The vast audience chamber of the One Sovereign of Nu was black, ceilinged, inlaid with silver and copper stars that shown in the light of lamps below. Courtiers, officials and supplicants alone or in small, scattered groups murmured as Het passed. Of course, there was no mistaking her identity, furred and unkempt as she was Great Among Millions followed her. She crossed the brown gold flecked floor to where it changed brown shading to blue and green and Merur's near presence where one never set foot without direct invitation.

[00:24:39] Unless, of course, one was an Eye in which case one's place in the bright lit vicinity of Merur was merely assumed a privilege of status. Stepping into the green, Great Among Millions tottering behind her, Het cast a surreptitious glance, habitual even after so long away at those so privileged. And stopped, and growled. Among the officials standing near Merur, three bore her Eye. There were four Eyes; Het herself was one. Dihaut, who Het had left with their flier, was another. There should only have been two Eyes here. Don't be jealous, Noble Het, whispered Great Among Millions. It's thready voice sounding in her ear alone. You were gone so very long. Almost accusing that sounded. She replaced me, Het snarled. She didn't recognize whoever it was who, she saw now, held an unfamiliar standard. But the Justified changed bodies so frequently. If there was a new Eye, why should Merur call on Het? Why not leave her be? And you left me behind, continued Great Among Millions. Alone, they asked and asked me where you were, and I did not know though I wished to. It made a tiny, barely perceptible stomp. They put me in a storeroom, in a box. Het, my Eye approach! Merur calling from where she sat under her blue canopied pavilion. Alone, but for those three Eyes and the standards and smaller lotus and lily-shaped servants that always attended her. And now, her attention turned from Merur's other Eyes. Het looked fully at the one sovereign herself, armless

legless. Her snaking body, cased in scales of golden lapis, Merur, circled the base of her polished granite chair of state. Her upper body leaning onto the seat, her head standard human, her hair in dozens of silver plated braids falling around her glittering gold face. Her dark eyes were slit-pupiled. Het had seen Merur take such a shape before, as well as taking new bodies at need or at whim. The Justified could to some degree alter a currently held body at will. But there were limits to such transformations and it had been long, long centuries since Merur had taken this sort of body.

[00:26:47] She should have concealed her surprise and prostrated herself, but instead she stood and stared as Great Among Millions announced in a high carrying voice.

[00:26:56] The fair, the fierce, the Burning Eye of the One Sovereign of Nu, the Noble Het.

[00:27:01] My own Eye, said Merur, I have need of you! Het could not restrain her anger, even in the face of the One Sovereign of Nu. I count four Eyes in this court. Sovereign, those three over there, and the Noble Dihaut. There have always been four. Why should you need me to be a fifth? Behind her, Great Among Millions made a tiny noise. I shed one body, admonished Merur, her voice faintly querulous, only to reawaken and find you gone. For decades, you did not return.

[00:27:32] Why, no one accused you of any dereliction of duty, let alone disloyalty. You had suffered no disadvantage. Your place is my favorite Eye was secure. And now, returning, you question my having appointed someone to fill the office you left empty. You would do better to save your anger for the enemies of Nu.

[00:27:50] I can't account for my heart, said Het crossly. It is as it is. This seemed to mollify Merur.

[00:27:56] Well, you always have had a temper, and it is very honesty that I have so missed. Indeed, it is what I require of you! Here, Merur lowered her voice and looked frightfully from one side to the other.

[00:28:07] And the standards and flower-form servitors scuttled back a few feet. Het, my Eye. This body is imperfect. It will not obey me as it should, and it is dying far sooner than it ought. I need to move to a new one. Already? Het's skin prickle with unease.

[00:28:25] This is not the first time a body has grown imperfectly, Merur said, her voice low. But I should have seen the signs long before I entered it. Someone must have concealed them from me. It is impossible that this has happened through mere incompetence. I have dealt with the technicians. I have routed out any disloyalty in Tjenu. But, I cannot say the same of all Hehut, let alone of Nu. And this body of mine will last only a few months longer, but no suitable replacement, one untampered with by traitors will be ready for a year or more. And I cannot afford to leave Nu rulerless for so long! My Eyes I trust, you and Dihaut, certainly after all this time. The Justified, are for the most part, reliable and the single-lived know that Dihaut will judge them. But I have never been gone for more than a few days at a time. If this throne is empty longer, it may encourage the very few wayward to stir up the single-lived. And if in my absence, even among the Justified can be led astray – no. I cannot be gone so long unless I am certain of order.

[00:29:25] Dismayed, Het snarled. Sovereign, what do you expect me to do about any of this? What you've always done! Protect Nu. All trace of unrest, of disorder must be prevented. You've rid Nu of rebellion before. I need you to do it again. That shining silver river, the fishers, the lilies and birds had all seemed so peaceful so much as they should be. When Het and Dihaut had flown in. Unrest? What's the cause this time?

[00:29:53] The cause? Merur exclaimed, exasperated. There is no cause. There never has been. The worthy I give eternal life and health. They need only reach out their hands for whatever they desire. The unworthy are here and gone, and they have all they need an occupation enough. Or if not, well, they seal their own fate. There has never been any cause, and yet it keeps happening. Plots, rumors, mutterings of discontent. My newest Eye, Merur did not notice, or affected not to notice, Het's reaction to that, is fierce and efficient.

[00:30:23] I do not doubt her loyalty, but I'm afraid she doesn't have your imagination, your vision, your anger. Two years ago I sent her out to deal with this, and she returned, saying there was no trouble of any consequence. She doesn't understand. Where does this keep coming from? Who is planting such ideas in the minds of my people? Root it out, Het. Root it out from among my people. Trace it back to its origin and destroy it so that Nu can rest secure while my next body grows so that we can at last have the peace and security.

[00:30:53] I have always striven for. Sovereign of Nu, growled Het. I'll do my best. What choice did she have after all?

[00:31:02] She should have gone right to Dihaut. The first place to look for signs of trouble would be among the animas of the recently dead, but she was still out of sorts with Dihaut, still resented their summoning her back here.

[00:31:13] They'd made her share their company on the long flight back to Hehut and never mentioned that Merur had replaced her. They might have warned her, and they hadn't. She wasn't certain she could keep her temper with her sib just now, which maybe was why they kept silent about it. But still. Besides, that other Eye had doubtless done the obvious first thing and gone to Dihaut herself. And to judge from what Merur had said, Dihaut must have found nothing or nothing to speak of. They would give Het the same answer, no point asking again. She wanted time alone. Time that was hers. She didn't miss the cold, already

[00:31:48] Her thick fur was thinning without any conscious direction on her part. But she did miss the solitude and the white landscape stretching out seemingly forever silent except for the wind and her own heart. The hiss of blood in her ears. There was nothing like that here. She left Jjenu and walked down to the river in the warm early evening sunlight. Willows shaded the banks and the lilies in the occasional pool, red and purple and gold, were closing. The scent of water and flowers seized her plucking at the edges of some memory. Small brown fishing boats sat in neat rows on the opposite bank, waiting for morning. The long, sleek shape of some Justified Noble's barque floated in the middle of the channel leaf green, gilded, draped with hangings and banners of blue and yellow and white. She startled two children chasing frogs in the shallows. Noble, the larger of them, said bowing, pushing the smaller child beside them into some semblance of a bow.

[00:32:42] How can we serve you? Don't notice my presence, she thought.

[00:32:46] But of course, that was impossible. Be as you were. I'm only out for a walk and then considering the time, shouldn't you be home having dinner? We'll go right away. Said the older child. The smaller voice trembling, said, Please don't kill us, Noble Het. Het frowned and looked behind her, only to see Great Among Millions a short way off. Peering at her from behind a screen of willow leaves. Why would I do such a thing? Het asked the child. Are you rebels or criminals? The older child grabbed the younger ones arm and held it tight. The Noble Het kills who she pleases, they said. The smaller child's eyes filled with tears. Then both children prostrated themselves.

[00:33:25] How fair is your face, beautiful Het. The older child cried into the mud, the powerful, the wise and loving Eye of the One Sovereign. You see everything and strike where you wish. You were gone for a long time. But now you've returned, and Hehut rejoices.

[00:33:39] She wanted to reassure them that she hadn't come down to the river to kill them. That being late for dinner was hardly a capital offense. But the words wouldn't form in her mouth. I don't strike where I wish, she said. Instead, I strike the enemies of Nu. May we go, beautiful one?

[00:33:54] Asked the elder child and now their voice was trembling too. You commanded us to go home to dinner and we only want to obey you. She opened her mouth to ask this child's name seized as she was, with a sudden, inexplicable desire to mention it, to Dihautt, to ask them to watch for this child when they passed through judgment, to let Dihaut know she'd been favorably impressed. So well spoken. Even if it was just a hasty assemblage of formulaic phrases of songs and poetry, they must have heard.

[00:34:21] But she feared asking would only terrify the child further. I'm only out for a walk, child, she growled, uncomfortably resentful of this attention, even as she'd enjoyed the child's eloquence. Go home to dinner. Thank you, beautiful one. The elder child scrambled to their feet, pulled the smaller one up with them. Thank you.

[00:34:39] The smaller child, and they both turned and fled. Het watched them go, and then resumed her walk along the riverside. But the evening had been soured, and soon she turned back to Tjenu.

[00:34:50] The 36 met her in their accustomed place, a chamber in Tjenu's walled with malachite and lapis white lily patterns laid into the floor.

[00:34:59] There were chairs and benches along the edge of the room, but the 36 stood stiff and straight in the center. Six rows of six white linen kilts perfectly pressed a golden Silver Star on each brow. Eye have Merur's, said the first of the 36.

[00:35:12] We're glad you're back. They're glad you're back, whispered Great Among Millions just behind Het's right shoulder. They didn't spend the time in a box.

[00:35:22] Each of the 36 had their own domain to watch, to protect their own assistance and weapons to do the job with. They had been asked to do this sort of thing often enough, over

and over. Het had used the walk here from the river to compose herself to take control of her face and her voice.

[00:35:39] She said, her voice smooth and calm,

[00:35:41] The one ruler of Nu, creator of all life on Nu wishes for us to remove all traces of rebellion once and for all, to destroy any hint of corruption that makes even the thought of rebellion possible.

[00:35:53] No word from the silent and still 36. Tell me, do you know where that lies? No reply. Either, none of them knew, or they thought the answer so obvious that there was no need to say it. Or perhaps they were suspicious of Het's outward calm. Finally, the first of the 36 said, generally problems begin among the single-lived Noble Het. But we can't seem to find the person or the thing that sends their hearts astray time after time, the only way to accomplish what the one sovereign has asked of us would be to kill every single-lived soul on Nu, and let Dihaut sort them one from another. Are you recommending that, asked Het. It would be a terrible disruption, said another of the 36. There would be so many corpses to dispose of. We'd want more single lived, wouldn't we? Ask yet another. Grow Nu free of the influence that corrupts them now? It might. She seemed doubtful. It might take care of the problem. But, Eye of Merur, I don't know how many free tanks we have and who would take care of the Nu children. It would be a terrible mess that would last for decades. And I'm not sure that it just seems wrong. She cast a surreptitious glance toward the first of the 36.

[00:37:02] And forgive me, Noble Eye of Merur. But surely the present concern of the one sovereign is to reduce chaos and disorder at the current moment. So that at least was well enough known or at least rumored. The newest Eye, said Het, closing her still clawed hands into fists, willing herself to stand still. Willing her voice to stay clear and calm. Briefly. She considered leaving here, going back to the river to catch fish and listen to the frogs. Did she request your assistance? And did you suggest this to her? The eradication of the single lived so that we could begin afresh? She thought it was too extreme, said the first of the 36. Was that a note of disappointment in her voice? It seems to me that the sovereign of Nu found that Eye's service in this instance to be less than satisfactory. You think we should do it? Het asked her. If it would rid us of the trouble that arises over and over, the first of 36, the first of the 36 agreed. If I order this, then Het persisted, clenching her hands tighter. You would do it? Yes. The foremost of the 36 agreed. Children as well? Het asked didn't add even polite, well-spoken children who maybe only wanted some time to themselves and quiet by the river.

[00:38:14] Of course, the first of the 36 replied, If they're worthy, they'll be back eventually. With a growl, Het sprang forward, hands open, claws flashing free of her fingertips, and slashed the throat of the first of the 36. As she fell, blood splashed onto the torso and the spotless linen kilt of the 36 beside her. For a moment Het watch the blood pump satisfyingly out of the severed artery to pool on the white lilled floor, and thought of the walsel she'd killed the day before. But this was no time to indulge herself. She looked up and around. Anyone else? Great Among Millions skittered up beside her, Noble Het, Eye of Merur, there is currently a backlog of Justified waiting for resurrection, and none of your 36 have bodies in the tanks. Het shrugged. The 36 were all among the Justified. She'll be back, eventually. At her feet the injured 36, breathed her choking last, and for the first time in decades Het felt a sure gratifying satisfaction. She had been made for this duty, made to enjoy it, and she had nothing left to herself but that, it seemed. The single lived come and go. She declared to the remaining 36 who has remained the same. All this time.

[00:39:28] Silence. Oh, dear, said Great Among Millions.

[00:39:43] So. I think we're at the question and answer portion of tonight. Does anybody have a question or a something they want to ask or know or. I see a hand there in the gray jacket. So the question is that Margaret.

[00:39:59] Margaret Atwood in the book *Negotiating with the Dead*, spoke about the creative process is bringing something out of the dark.

[00:40:06] I'm not sure I would articulate it that way, but I do feel like a lot of work is done unconsciously in the back of of the brain.

[00:40:15] And that part of writing is sort of hacking, figuring out what hack will make your unconscious spit out the work that you need. So I think those are very similar sentiments. So, yeah.

[00:40:27] The person in the red shirt there? Yes.

[00:40:30] Oh, OK. So the question was the difference between what I expected, leaving Clarion West in terms of what it would be like to be a professional writer and then what the actual reality was, right? Very different, very, very different. I mean, in some ways what I expected was what happened, which was I expected to write a lot of things and get a lot of

rejection letters and maybe sell some stories in my most extravagant fantasy. I would sell a novel if I was feeling really outrageously unconnected to reality. I would have the opportunity to write a sequel to that novel. It would maybe sell a few copies and it would be awesome. And I would feel that I had really succeeded.

[00:41:12] It was kind of different.

[00:41:16] Everything went pretty much the way I expected up to when I sold that first novel and then everything became just completely hallucinatory.

[00:41:25] Yeah, but and there were a number of things I didn't expect the amount of like administrative paperwork, office work.

[00:41:35] Although once you're actually like selling a book and doing stuff, all the the non writing work that is part of writing, I didn't expect that at all. And I actually kind of wish that someone had warned me about like quarterly taxes and, you know, that kind of stuff.

[00:41:51] But I guess we don't talk about that very much. That's a thing to talk about tomorrow. Yeah, I guess. And so those things were very different, but a lot of things I actually feel like in a lot of ways Clarion West did prepare me pretty well.

[00:42:07] And if they didn't give me specific information, gave me the pathways to ask for the information that I needed.

[00:42:16] Oh, a favorite book that I've read recently that's kind of hard because I do get a stack of books every now and then, that isn't out yet. So and then I have to remember what I've read and what I haven't read. So I'm going to strongly recommend Arkady Martine, *A Memory Called Empire*, which is super awesome and wonderful. A novella, oh, and I forget who wrote it, but I remember it was really good. *Border Keeper*. I blurbed it, right. Those were both fairly recent reads and they're both out. That's the virtue of those.

[00:42:51] I just read Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Children of Ruin*, which I really enjoyed a lot.

[00:42:57] Course, I really enjoy *Children of Time*. Or I wouldn't have read the sequel. Right. And they're both really excellent books. Not so recent. But I always plug it, *Murderbot*.

[00:43:08] If you haven't read *Murderbot*, you should totally read *Murderbot*. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:43:14] Oh, that's a good question. So the question was the anthology is of retellings of myths and what myth was this one? This is Sekhmet.

[00:43:27] You know, the story of Sekhmet who when humanity rebelled against Ra, he sent Sekhmet to kill them and she was really having a good time killing them, and Ra finally was like, oh, this is way too much.

[00:43:40] She needs to stop.

[00:43:40] And she was like, Oh no, I am having such a good time. I am never going to stop this. I guess I won't spoil it if you don't already know how.

[00:43:52] But there was. The Egyptians had a yearly festival in honor of the fact that Sekhmet was convinced to stop slaughtering humanity.

[00:44:01] Yeah.

[00:44:04] So the question is, when I'm when I'm worldbuilding, when I'm designing stories. Do I set out to deal with these large issues, the big ideas, the. Or does it develop? It actually develops along with the story. I don't generally sit down and say, now I'm going to write a story about Empire. But I if I say to myself, now, I'm going to write a story about oh, this is cool. A character with multiple bodies.

[00:44:28] Then if I'm going to get much of a story out of it, I need to ask myself, at least from my process. Why am I interested in that?

[00:44:37] And then how am I going to stay interested in it for the length of a novel? And usually just looking into the things that will answer my first questions digs up a bunch of things, and then they're just going to end up in the story.

[00:44:50] So I don't generally set out to do it, but I feel like every story is going to end up with a person's politics there on the page. And so I figure when I find them myself in my ideas, I may as well just lean into it. I don't start out to do it, but I know it's gonna happen and it's better if I am conscious of it. If that makes sense. Yeah.

[00:45:13] Oh, how do I generate story ideas? That's - I don't know.

[00:45:18] Mostly I read a bunch of things and look at a bunch of things and I see something that's really kind of cool and interesting. And I think, oh, that's cool and interesting. And then later I'll see another thing that's cool and interesting and I'll go, oh, that's what if I put it together with the other cool and interesting thing and then it kind of builds stuff up.

[00:45:34] And that's not a very helpful, satisfying answer. Yeah. And there was somebody over here. Yeah.

[00:45:40] So what do I think young children should focus on with the writing process? So my opinion on this is heavily influenced by my experience with my kids who now are like 19 and 23. But I remember when they were little sixth graders and I feel like the best thing to emphasize is just the habit of writing, just sitting down and putting words on the paper and not going, this is terrible and tearing it up.

[00:46:05] Right. But I'm not a teacher. I don't have any expertise in teaching little kids to write.

[00:46:13] Yeah, I do. I do remember having. Please don't do this thing.

[00:46:19] My kids coming home from school with a list of spicy words they could use, including which was fine as far as it went. But what this meant was that the kids who were into it were just going to throw spicy words everywhere, whether or not they were the right words. And among the spicy words was a long list of synonyms for said so hollered, shrieked, screamed.

[00:46:41] And I was like, oh, children, no, don't do that, please. You know, but honestly, I think the worst thing.

[00:46:51] I don't think there's a specific thing that's good or bad. As long as you're encouraging the enjoyment of putting the words down and maybe the enjoyment of reading each other's things, you know that having a little class library where people can put stuff and saying, oh, look at your awesome story, you know, which will be a sixth grader story, but it's gonna be awesome.

[00:47:13] Right. So I think just not interfering with the joy of putting things down and letting communicating to them. The joy of writing it down. Yeah.

[00:47:28] So to be entirely frank, so I should repeat the question, was there any point after the selling the book part where I said to myself, oh, OK. I think I'm going to make it doing this right. It was that first royalty check.

[00:47:42] I didn't think my book would earn out. And so when it did, I was amazed. And then I thought, oh, OK. Yeah. This might actually work.

[00:47:53] Yeah.

[00:47:55] Yes.

[00:47:57] The question is any advice for folks in creative endeavors who struggle with the administrative side, and I wish I knew if you can afford to be sure to hire a good tax person or what, I don't really have an assistant. I know lots of people have assistants, but I. And that's expensive, right. And that's not I can't just say, oh, everybody who's creative hire an assistant that'll fix all your problems out of self-defense. I've sort of developed a habit of when anything comes in, a check, a thing I have to put into my tax spreadsheet, you know, anything that has to be signed, I do it right then bang. I do not put it in a pile and do it on Sundays or whatever, because it would never happen. It would never happen. It would be six foot high pile of paper. I would never be getting paid. People would be calling me going. We sent you a check. You know it. No. So that's one thing that I try to do, is just do things as they come in. I don't wait till tax time to get all my tax receipts together as soon as I have a receipt or a statement.

[00:48:58] I immediately type it into the spreadsheet so that when tax time comes, I just send that to my tax person and there's no doing stuff right.

[00:49:07] But other than that man, I wish I knew, right? I didn't get into the arts because I was a good administrator. Yeah. Huh.

[00:49:18] Oh, my gosh. Heavens, no. OK. So the question was the names, which. This is a lovely compliment. The names in the Radch trilogy all seem sort of cohesive and coherent, like they belong to particular ethnic groups. And they kind of I did not study linguistics. I'm entirely a hobbyist.

[00:49:35] I use a random name generator that allows me to put in parameters. So I start with an idea. I say, okay, I know, I know there are some theophoric names. There are a number of theophoric names of characters. Right. And so I know what the elements are and I need a God name.

[00:49:55] So I know it has to have a T or a say and then something behind it. And so I type T or say and tell me some random things that could go behind those.

[00:50:06] And then I do that hit refresh several times until I see one. That sounds really good. And I do that for other things like oh, I want this kind of sound cluster in this name.

[00:50:15] And I just hit refresh the name generator is rinkworks dot com. It's got a little bit of a learning curve to it, but I really like it because you can type parameters into it. Now there's the check shirt all the way in the back there. You wanted about the process of selling a novel and getting a contract for the trilogy.

[00:50:37] It worked out really well for me, actually. So basically I this is one of those things I didn't have to do a lot of the stuff for that because I have an agent.

[00:50:47] And so essentially, I sent out *Ancillary Justice*, signed with an agent on the strength of that novel. Did not and I don't recommend this did not tell him it was the first of a trilogy.

[00:50:58] It didn't have bad consequences. But it's not a good idea to not communicate with your agent. And then he went out and tried to sell it. What happens when there is interest from a publisher is then your agent sets up a phone call with the editor who's interested. I actually did three separate phone calls. There were three publishers who were interested. Two of them made an offer and then my agent handled everything after that and just consulted me about what offer

[00:51:22] Did I want to take in fact, at one point he said to me, you know, if I can get Orbit to offer you a three book contract, do you think you could do two more books in this?

[00:51:31] And I was like, oh, I think I can.

[00:51:35] I was already part of the way into the next book and I hadn't told him. And so that was how that worked out. That sort of took Orbit by surprise.

[00:51:43] When they didn't realize that they initially said, oh, it's gonna be a loosely connected trilogy because they didn't know it was already a trilogy. But my agent said to me, you're gonna have to write synopses for the next two books so that the publisher knows what the next two things are. And I was like, Oh, please don't make me write synopses, please. I can't write outlines. They should be illegal. I can't do it.

[00:52:06] And he was like, no, it doesn't matter if they're good. It doesn't matter if you stick to it. You just have to write something. So I started and then I just gave up and went back to writing the book.

[00:52:14] And then my editor quit. And I was several months without an editor. There was an assistant who I will always remember who made sure all the various things kept happening.

[00:52:22] While there was no editor, the new editor came in and I guess nobody realized that they didn't have any outlines for the next two books.

[00:52:29] So the second book was due roundabout October and roundabout November. I get this plaintive email from my new editor.

[00:52:36] Could you kind of tell us what it's about so we can put something in the marketing material? And I was like, oh, sure.

[00:52:43] Because I was about done with it at that point. Right. And so did that. Didn't say anything about the next book.

[00:52:48] So the next year I was almost done with book three and I get the same e-mail.

[00:52:52] Could you at least give us a little bit of something for the marketing material as I go?

[00:52:57] I'm almost done with that. So that was how that worked out. So I was super lucky and didn't actually have to write an outline. But normally, I should have had to write an outline for those two books. Yeah.

[00:53:08] Yes, in the all the way in the back there.

[00:53:11] What was my inspiration for *Ancillary Justice*? That's a complicated. That's a complicated topic. It started with the idea of the character with multiple bodies and then it just kind of snowballed.

[00:53:23] Right. And many, many things went into it, but it began with that little core.

[00:53:29] I know there was somebody, the person in the black right there. Yeah.

[00:53:33] So meaningful differences or similarities between writing sci fi or a fantasy in some ways they're very similar. Unsurprisingly, I mean, the two we talk about them as separate genres and there is a very different feel often between them. But you know, you want to start a fight, define the difference between the two. And there'll be a knockdown drag out in here for hours. Right. So I don't necessarily approach writing the two very differently. But there is a big difference in terms of when I'm doing a secondary world fantasy that's, and fantasy usually is not very high tech society. It's much easier for me to envision the settings because I can copy things that exist much more easily. I was saying to someone this afternoon, it's really easy for

me to say I want a castle. Well, I've stood in a castle before. I stood in a couple of different castles. I can go look at pictures of castles. I can steal terrain or weather patterns from earth very easily where I can't just go look at a space station. Right. And see what it feels like to be on a space station. So that part is a little bit easier to get those images together. But in a lot of ways, the process isn't that different for me.

[00:54:45] The question was *The Raven Tower*. A lot of the initially the reviews were people reading it said, oh, obviously it's the first of a trilogy or I can't wait for the sequel and find out what happens next or various things.

[00:54:57] And I find that very interesting because it was very deliberately a standalone and the person says when they read it, they got to the ending and at first was, wow, that's abrupt.

[00:55:06] And then it's well, it couldn't have ended any other way. No, it couldn't have, at least not in my opinion.

[00:55:12] Right. There are people who disagree. There are people who feel very strongly and, you know, all feelings are valid very, very strongly.

[00:55:20] That was a cliffhanger kind of an ending. And there has to be more. And they need to know what happens next. In my reply to that is that's what fanfic is for.

[00:55:30] I'm. Yeah.

[00:55:33] I you know, I love fanfic. I do not read the fanfic of my own work for various reasons. Mostly, though, because I don't it's not for me.

[00:55:43] It's and I don't think that people who are writing it should need to feel like I'm looking over their shoulder. Right. They need to feel free to do whatever it is they want to do without worrying about me going, oh, god, no. And I'm sure there's stuff on AO3 that would make me go, oh, god, no.

[00:55:59] But I'm so glad it's there. And so every now and then I go look at the number, right. When they say how many pieces of fic? And I go, who? It's almost 300.

[00:56:11] What was the inspiration to make the radch? I have no concept of gender, so that began with me very naively saying, you know, I want to write this space opera adventure thing, but I don't want to.

[00:56:25] I want to relax and not have sexism be a thing.

[00:56:28] So I wanted to be a society where people just don't care what gender anyone is and they can just be who they are and there's no prejudice.

[00:56:36] And I started out writing. There's an entire novel. In fact, there are two entire novels. No one here is ever going to read them. They're dreadful. Two entire novels written in that world where I assigned binary genders to the characters and call them he and she.

[00:56:49] Right. And I realized rereading them, that I was doing the thing where the characters were gendered along lines that I mean, I didn't want to do it right.

[00:57:01] I set out to not do it, but I still had the personalities along stereotypical lines.

[00:57:06] And I was very unhappy with myself and very unhappy with how this was. And I was like, how do I how do I short circuit that? How do I get out of that?

[00:57:13] And how do I really convey this world where, you know, sure, people have gender because people do have gender, but nobody cares.

[00:57:23] Nobody genuinely cares. And so that's how that happened now. At the time, I was like, that's a really simple idea. It'll be easy. It'll be great. And. And as I, you know, get more and interested in reading things, people's because I realized it was going to be a little harder than I thought.

[00:57:39] And listening to conversations about people's experience of their gender and how gender worked and what gender is even and all this. And I was like, oh, my God.

[00:57:48] Right. It was a big learning experience, but it began very, very naively.

[00:57:56] So is there a story behind the importance of tea in the Radch world?

[00:58:00] So I'm a huge, huge fan of C.J. Cherryh's *Foreigner* books. I hear you all. Yeah. And so there are a number of deliberate hat tips to those books in the trilogy. The main character, it might interest you to know those of you who have not read these books. The main character of the *Foreigner* books is named Bren.

[00:58:23] That's not an accident that Breq is named Breq.

[00:58:28] There are a number of other deliberate hat tips, but tea is also very important in those books and are very important to the atvei. And so I said, well, I'll bring in tea. And besides, I like tea. So that's how that happened. But once it was there, it was a thing that could carry emotional freight, especially since I was sort of using it in similar ways to the way it's used in the *Foreigner* books. And so I just kept leaning on it more and more. And that's it kind of ballooned out of control, I guess. Yeah.

[00:58:57] A favorite little detail that I dropped into the books.

[00:59:01] I don't know, I like I like a lot of them. Little details are fun, aren't they? It's really neat to be able to say, oh, you know, here's a thing that I saw on a museum and I'm going to put it in the book. Well, here's a thing that I'll. So in *Ancillary Sword*, there's the gardens with the pond that has the fish and the children come to feed the fish. Right. I grew up in St. Lewis. And those of you who visited the Missouri Botanical Gardens. I don't know. Yeah. Which is a wonderful botanical garden. They have a Japanese garden with a beautiful wooden bridge. And these ginormous carp that have been there since I was a small girl.

[00:59:38] That garden was built when I was a small girl. And some of those fish date back to the 70s. So the fish in the garden on Athoek Station are the fish from the botanical garden in St. Lewis. They're there as kind of sort of memorialized for me. So that's a little detail that I

kind of put in, you know, sort of like tuckerizing the fish. Only nobody knows it but me. And actually, the dome over the garden was when I saw somebody tweet that they were in St. Lewis visiting the Botanical Gardens. And those of you who have been there have seen the Climatron and someone saw the Climatron, which is this big geodesic dome, and said, oh, my gosh, it's the gardens from Athoek Station because I know Ann Leckie is from here.

[01:00:18] And I was like, yeah, actually it's a fair copy, right?

[01:00:24] Oh, this is an easy one. The element, the plot point of the element that has made me most want to cackle gleefully.

[01:00:31] All right.

[01:00:32] When before the first book was published, a friend of mine who had read it was saying, oh, this book is going to enrage a lot of people because they won't be able to tell how many penises there are.

[01:00:51] And I said. You know, you're right. But you know what? I'll fix that in the next book.

[01:01:00] So in the next book, I made the Genitalia Festival where the whole station was decorated with bright colored little penises and the children dedicated their penises, and that says, well, what about the children who have other sorts of genitals as well? They don't use real ones. They buy them in a shop.

[01:01:22] And I was like, so I'll give them and then they can distribute them however they like. I said to my friend and I did it, too. And every now and then somebody will be like, What was that about?

[01:01:33] Nothing like that was a joke, as I know you've been waiting there.

[01:01:42] Yeah. So where did I where do I go? For non-fiction to read up?

[01:01:48] I have to admit that usually when it comes to stuff about gender, I have mostly eavesdropped on conversations on Live Journal or Twitter and listened to people talking. I've only read a tiny little bit of like academic stuff. I mostly I mostly listened to people talk about their experiences or generally speaking. I will read history and anthropology.

[01:02:09] Those will be where I go for for stuff when I need worldbuilding things. And your second question was, it was one that made me laugh. Did I ever write fanfiction? There we go.

[01:02:18] Actually, yes, but it's not on AO3. And I wasn't ever part of the fanfic community. I was at one time and enthusiastic, frequently posting member of a C.J. Cherryh message board.

[01:02:30] And as a joke, we were talking about some story thing. And I said, oh, it must. It would play out like this. And I wrote a little thingy with two MOS fare and teenagers, you know, and wrote this little skit sort of thing. And everybody liked it. So I ended up writing a new one every week until I ran out of steam. And it was kind of popular on the message board.

[01:02:51] And at one point I wrote a parody like a page or two of, you know, spoof imitation of C.J. Cherryh's prose.

[01:02:59] But it was I was never part of the fanfic community. It's not AO3 or anything. You might be able to find them, but I'm pretty sure I've taken them down.

[01:03:11] Do I have a favorite type of tea? Oh, it's hard to choose, isn't it? It depends on my mood.

[01:03:16] Right now I'm drinking a lot of shou pu-erh where I really love a nice oolong when I can get it. Milk oolong is nice. I love a really nice iron goddess, but there are a number of ones that, you know, don't aren't well-known, but that I'll pick up at some retailer or whatever. There are some yunnan black teas that I just adore, the ones that are sort of sweet and almost cocoa-y, you know. And then sometimes I'm in the mood for, you know, a Japanese green tea for a sencha, you know, where a gyokuro or something like that. What I hardly ever get. I can only get it once a year. And then I have to be sure to order. It is the essential Sakura with the cherry blossoms in it. It's a very delicate flavor that you almost don't notice. And of course, you can only get it once a year and in very small amounts. And so I always look forward to being able to get that.

[01:04:08] So the question is, do I still engage in sacred harp singing and how does one maintain hobbies when there's a lot of travel and work and stuff? I have not been to singings in a very long time and I do need to go back. It's one of those things like if you're really tired and you think, Oh, I'm not going to go to singing tonight and then you go and you feel so much better, right? I haven't been in a long time for those. Do you all know what sacred harp singing is or what shape note singing? Yes. Some of you do. So it's a I'm gonna call it a folk music tradition, but I don't. Not sure that it really is. There are a number of tune books with 4, 3 and 4 part hymns written out in a special notation that was meant to make it easier to learn to sight read. And people will get together at conventions and sight read out of these tune books at large. Communities will do it. There are a number of different books. Each book kind of has its own community that will sing out of the book. Although there is a lot of overlap.

[01:05:04] It's a kind of singing that requires no particular. You don't need to have a particularly good voice. You don't have to audition. There is no audience.

[01:05:12] You just get together and sing because it's fun to sing. And it's really amazing and fabulous. And I haven't done it for a very long time. It is hard to maintain that kind of a hobby.

[01:05:23] It's important to have something to do, especially, you know, I do knit and crochet, although I haven't for a while. I will bead. There's always a new craft that, you know, there is to learn. Took some metalwork classes recently, which oh, my gosh, the fire and the metal and the hammers. It's really awesome. There's nothing more therapeutic than banging in on a piece of copper with a great big hammer. Right. So I try and do as much as I can because you really need to do something besides work. But yeah, I need to get back to singing. Yeah.

[01:05:51] So the question is they want to know more about the choice to use she is the default pronoun. And did I consider other pronouns and was it in conversation with other works like *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which very famously uses he for a non gendered race of humans? So as I said, I started out using he and she with binary genders for the characters. And I said, well, what if I try using he for everybody? Right. And I actually wrote a short story, which, thank goodness, never sold, in which I used he for all the characters, but noted in the footnotes. The story had a bunch of footnotes. Like I said, the story never sold.

[01:06:30] And there were a bunch of big footnotes and explained in the footnotes that he didn't really mean anything because, you know, and it just read like a science fiction story full of guys.

[01:06:43] And which is fine. But there are a lot of those, right?

[01:06:45] And so I thought about using they and they is they is a perfectly good pronoun. It's perfectly good as a singular pronoun. It does introduce some ambiguities when some of your characters have several bodies. And I thought, oh, that's yeah. Maybe that won't work. I did think about some of the the neopronouns. They were much less familiar to me at the time and they felt really awkward in a way that I didn't feel like I could make it work for an entire novel. I don't know if that was true. Maybe if I had done it for the entire novel, it might have worked. I don't know. But ultimately I thought, well, what's left? I could use she.

[01:07:29] I think that's gonna sound weird. I don't. I don't know if I like that. It just sounds weird in a way that using he all the time doesn't sound weird. At the time I didn't go hmmm, right. But I thought.

[01:07:41] But, you know, it's it's the alternative. That's before me. And the thing about writing, as I've told at least one or two students today, is that if you do something and it's a mistake, you don't break your leg or anything. Right. And just go back and fix it.

[01:07:54] So I said, let me rewrite the first two chapters to which I had already assigned binary genders to the character and was not happy with it. And let me go back and just call everybody she and see what I think. And at first I was like, this is weird.

[01:08:07] This weird, this is. No, I like this.

[01:08:11] No, this is really working for me. And the more I did it.

[01:08:14] What was really super interesting to me was the way that characters who I had gendered masculine when I used she all of a sudden my internal image of that character slipped.

[01:08:29] And I said, oh, that's really interesting.

[01:08:33] That's really interesting because that should not be happening and yet it's happening. And so I said, no, I really like that. And so I just continued to write it. Right. And I was convinced that it would make the book unsaleable.

[01:08:47] Friend of mine actually told me that she read the book and she said, this is really awesome and you will never sell it.

[01:08:53] And I said, you're right, but you don't get into the writing game if you're not a little bit stubborn.

[01:08:59] Right. Or you don't last very long in it. Should I say. And I said, I'm gonna do it anyway, because who's going to stop me? And what's the point of doing all the work if it's not the book I want to write?

[01:09:08] Right. And and I was convinced I wouldn't sell it. But of course, I went ahead and did all the things anyway. And I was oh, so wrong. I was wrong. And I'm so glad I was wrong.

[01:09:19] So why did I write so much of *The Raven Tower* in second person? And what was maybe difficult about it and what was liberating about it and what was so I would be 100 percent completely honest. I had read *The Fifth Season* and I said to myself, this book is awesome because it is, right? Yeah. And then I said, second person, I haven't read second person for a while and second person is really cool. It reminded me of how cool second person is when it's well done. And I said, I want to play with that toy.

[01:09:52] So that was why I did that 100 percent honest because Nora had done it beautifully and I was like, Oh, let me do that right.

[01:10:00] And so I sat down to figure out how I could do it in a way that would work for me once I came up with the idea of it being the address of the one character who would talk about their own life and then talk about the other person's life.

[01:10:13] Then that sort of gave me some parameters. The really tough thing about it was that the character who's narrating for those of you who haven't read *The Raven Tower*, the

character who's actually telling the story cannot lie. They can say things that aren't true, but it can.

[01:10:31] That can cost the character a lot. And so the character is very, very careful to only ever say things that they know are true. And so when it's narrating somebody else's story, it can only say certain things. And that was difficult. I had to go back over the narration frequently and make sure I had not slipped up and said something that the God couldn't say that I wouldn't know. And I had to be very careful to figure out how it knew the things that it was saying.

[01:11:00] I did it because that's fun, right? I did that kind of thing because I enjoyed doing that kind of thing.

[01:11:05] And so the difficulty was kind of the point of it. It was kind of the fun part.

[01:11:11] The one thing and I think this sort of shows and in some of the reactions, the one thing that I was worried about was that because I could never convey all those thoughts, that he might not be on the page as well as I wanted him to be. And I have found that different readers respond very differently to him as a character. Some really are there for who he is. And some are like, I don't know who Eolo was because I never could see inside of him. And I mean, that's legit. That was a risk I took when I did that.

[01:11:44] One more. OK. One more question.

[01:11:48] How many books did I write that were not published before I got here? I wrote two books that were not published before I got here. After those two novels, I stopped writing novels and I turned to short stories for a while because it was less frustrating and because that was the traditional narrative of how you become a professional writer.

[01:12:04] You do short fiction and then you move into novels. But as soon as I could. As soon as I felt like I could, I went back to novels. Yeah, it's typical to have one or more novels in your drawer before you sell one.



[01:12:15] Just for information can maybe I can get this person's in the red shirt real quick too, because that was.

[01:12:21] What elements of a story make me excited to read it? I am always here for A.I. stories.

[01:12:26] I am always here for stories that involve lots of intrigue and like emotional intensity and plotting and stuff behind people's backs. Those are and I'm also always here for like planets exploding like big explosions and stuff.

[01:12:43] So that combination is guaranteed to get me every time. Yeah, well, thank you. I will sign books now if people want me to sign books.

[01:13:00] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

