



Hail and Farewell: An Interview with *Fafnir*'s Departing and Arriving Editors-In-Chief

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The only constant is change, and thus we at *Fafnir* are both excited to welcome a new editor-in-chief – Dr. Essi Varis – and sorrowful at the departure of a much-valued and long-serving member of the editorial team – Dr. Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay. We asked each of them about their thoughts on *Fafnir* and speculative fiction more generally.

LEG: Bodhi, What have you been most excited about contributing to *Fafnir*?

BC: Oh, so many things! Contributing to the first open-access research journal and platform for SFF as well as the only SFF journal from the Nordic countries, creating whole new sections for interviews and other kinds of focused content, pushing for a reviews editor, who has done wonders for the journal, and most significantly – editing itself. I'm happy about the things we have achieved as a team and really grateful to have been part of the journey with all my fellow editors, and I am excited about the next steps *Fafnir* will take!

LEG: What have you gained from your time as a *Fafnir* co-editor-in-chief?

BC: Those who haven't edited a journal may not realise how rewarding editing a journal can be. Editing *Fafnir* helped me develop an insider's understanding of the art of writing and publishing. If one has only read published academic content by others, they see an end-product that might have taken a long time to

get there, even after submission. As an editor, one has to see more than just the surface level of craft – a well-written piece with good language may not necessarily be the most innovative or ground-breaking. It might not even make a good argument, even if you know it's publishable. Sometimes, pieces that are just draft-like can have more potential, but you can see that it will be a long while before it's publishable quality, but will be a significant contribution to the field if published. The question is whether, as editor, you'll have time to pursue the latter. Too often in academia, we tend to prize the former over the latter since we need to get those issues out on time. As journal editors, one makes these calls every day. At *Fafnir*, I'm glad we take the second route, even though sometimes articles submitted for one issue get pushed to another until we feel they're ready. But what the process does help with is learning the most invaluable lesson from the insider perspective: patience. As a researcher, the insider perspective made me adjust better to the outside world of academic publishing, especially publishing schedules and delays.

The other thing I gained from my time is a better understanding of how powerful editing a journal can be. One gets to shape a field, a discussion, a discourse. I joined *Fafnir* as a postdoc in a decade of rapid transformations and expansion of the field of SFF in terms of what was being written, read, and recognised from all over the world. This expansion, in turn, was and is seeding new kinds of research. I'm leaving *Fafnir* as an associate professor, leading the first European Research Council project on contemporary SF from the Global South, and managing CoFUTURES, one of the world's largest SF research groups, period. There are current and incoming projects with CoFUTURES scattered across all the continents except Antarctica. In between, I'll be working on five other research grants on different things related to SF. One might think such things are unrelated, but they are not. Working at *Fafnir* gave me a better understanding of the field, and helped me learn how to run and manage a project, see first-hand the changes coming and feel the pulse of what was yet to come, and shape those changes too in my small way. I think I will carry these things with me as I move on to other things, including – ta-da – more editing. I'm currently co-editing (with the fabulous Taryne Taylor) a book series on global genre fiction with a major publisher and will be helming another one shortly. All of this has been possible because of my editorial experience with *Fafnir*.

LEG: What do you see are some important contributions that *Fafnir* can make to the field of speculative-fiction research?

BC: *Fafnir* is a small journal with an outsized impact. We get a ridiculous number of readers from all over the world. While a lot of older journals have moved to institutional repositories, our completely open-access model has helped us reach out to a lot of early-career scholars in addition to more established ones. A lot of these institutional repositories are simply inaccessible to scholars in poorer countries or institutions. Several big repositories are run by publishers with deeply unethical practices directly harmful to scholars from poorer countries. Independent scholars without institutional affiliations are also unable to access these journals. These access issues are not necessarily the fault of these journals. It is a problem with the

whole setup of academic publishing. So if you want to see the present and future of cutting-edge SFF research, then it's in *Fafnir* and other OA journals in the field. That's what people are reading. That's where they are sending their articles. If awards are a measure of impact, then I want to point out that we received the prestigious World Fantasy Award last year for our work at *Fafnir*, the first time in the history of the award that an academic journal has been so recognised. *Fafnir* is already making significant contributions. It just needs to keep doing so!

LEG: What would you say to people who are thinking of submitting an article to *Fafnir*?

BC: We welcome work by junior and early-career scholars, and we read them with the same care that we read work by more established names. We are also really interested in work on non-Anglophone materials and more experimental research than a traditional print-journal form allows. That said, we are highly selective about what we publish and have double (and sometimes triple) blind peer-reviews, so send us your best work!

Also, I know many scholars who are perpetually in a rush to publish in a publish-or-perish world. Still, my personal experience has been that quality rather than quantity is far more significant. One good article is worth a dozen regular ones. To quote a famous gruk by the Danish anti-fascist polymath Piet Hien - T.T.T. – “ting tar tid.” Things take time. Everything takes time, including ideas. I focus on writing just one good article a year, since I play with the idea for months or even years before getting to the writing part. The risk is that the article might still get rejected, which is also absolutely fine!

A golden tip: please follow the submission guidelines, and use the journal style sheet (<http://journal.finfar.org/for-authors/submission-guidelines/>). If you have any questions about any of those, please reach out to the editors and ask before sending your piece. It will save you – and the journal – from a lot of misery.

LG: Why do you love speculative fiction?

BC: The short answer is that it gives me hope for the future. If we can imagine better possible worlds, we can make it. It all begins in the imagination. The long answer will take a lifetime.

LEG: And Essi, what parts of your background and experience are you most excited about bringing to *Fafnir*?

EV: This is probably the most boring and straightforward answer imaginable, but just working with speculative fiction research and having this unique vantage point to what's currently going on in the field is a very exciting prospect for me. I've recently started working on a personal research project (funded by

the Finnish Cultural Foundation, 2020–2024) that investigates how texts and images are used as instruments of imagination, so speculation is very much on my mind at the moment. On top of that, I've always been a huge fantasy nerd; I even used to write my diary in tengwar (Tolkien's elvish script) in my teens. I wish 15-year-old Essi would've known that she'd be editing a World Fantasy Award-winning journal one day, because she would've freaked out!

I'm also used to being the one person in the team who knows about (Gothic) horror and visual narration, because I studied Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and graphic novels for my doctorate. I hope I get to dip into and expand those areas of expertise while working on *Fafnir* as well.

LEG: What do you see are some important contributions that *Fafnir* can make to the field of speculative fiction research?

EV: I've been active in Finfar for a long time, and the fact that our little society has been able to run an international peer-reviewed journal that's fully open access has always been a beautiful thing to behold. There're a lot of practices in academic publishing that feel exploitative and make zero sense, and just about all of them have to do with money and access. I believe information and scholarship should be made freely available for everyone, and I'm delighted to work for a publication that upholds and promotes those values.

Offering these free opportunities to publish and read quality research is especially important in marginal fields, I think, because it helps the entire scene to grow and mature. Hopefully, it also helps to alleviate some of the prejudices that pop-cultural topics like speculative fiction still face in the elitist end of academia. Some important professor somewhere might think that SF is not real literature, and hence, not worth studying – and if so, so be it. At least we have made the research readily available for them all along.

LEG: What would you say to people who are thinking of submitting an article to *Fafnir*?

EV: "If it's too strange for the mainstream literary journals, let us have a look"? Well, not really. But also, yes, really.

What I mean by that is I'd love to see articles showcasing original ideas, little-known works, unexpected viewpoints, maybe even some experimental or interdisciplinary methodology. Articles introducing speculative works from beyond the Anglophonic cultural sphere would be most welcome and refreshing. But at the same time, I expect the writing and the argumentation to be clear, sound, and properly referenced. I'm very theoretically oriented myself, so hiding weak argumentation behind mushy writing is never going to fly with me. If I could be notorious for something in academic circles, I'd like to be notorious for having an open mind and high standards. Why produce just another research paper, when you could write something only you could dream up and do it as well as you possibly can?

LEG: Why do you love speculative fiction?

EV: I feel my worldview has always been a bit speculative. That doesn't mean I couldn't discern what's real or possible or likely – just that I'm agnostic on principle; I enjoy keeping improbable options on the table more than most people. Making a living as researcher once seemed an almost fantastical idea to me, for instance. But I try to look at the world thinking that all kinds of things can and do happen.

That's an attitude you can cultivate with fiction in general and speculative fiction in particular. We already have to deal with a whole lot of reality in our daily lives, so I don't see why we should drag all those rules and limitations and banalities into fiction as well. Fiction, for me, is the one place where all the improbable options can be fully examined and all the rules broken, with no costs or consequences. In that sense, I believe fiction is closer to its full potential when it's speculative.

Also, dragons and vampires and steam-powered airships are just really cool and fun, don't you think?

LEG: Anything else you'd like to add?

EV: I'm just exceedingly curious to see what kind of texts and people this editorial post will bring to my attention and grateful for the opportunity to learn from my fellow editors. Let's give this mythical beast even more gems and treasures to guard in its archives!