



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

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While we're always wistful when *Fafnir* editors-in-chief move on to new opportunities, that also means we get the exciting privilege of welcoming new editors-in-chief, who contribute their unique skills and insights to the journal. We talked with Esko Suoranta, who has wrapped up his time with us, and Elizabeth Oakes, who has just joined us, about *Fafnir*, and about speculative fiction in general.

LEG: Esko, what have you been most excited about contributing to *Fafnir*?

ES: Gosh, it has been such a rush in many ways! I think it originally had a lot to do with the opportunity to call myself an editor-in-chief of an academic journal – to be doing that as a very junior scholar, long before finishing my dissertation (ed. note: still unfinished at the time of publication). Editors are such essential personnel in making the academic world go round that counting myself among them is really a point of pride for me.

With that vote of confidence from Finfar, I've then been able to do so many exciting things in the role. I've solicited articles from interesting scholars, promoted *Fafnir* in conferences and online, and reached out to prominent voices in the field to pen prefatory essays. And on top of that the rewards of seeing our authors polish their articles into the gems we then get to publish. It's a heady rush, an academic journal!

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

ES: There's so much, to be honest, I must count the experience as central for my development as a scholar. I've learned what goes into editing and publishing a journal, keeping it running issue to issue without losing sight of possibilities for development.

I've especially found the value in the role of the editor as a partner to scholars in getting their best work out there. There have been so many opportunities to work with amazing people in the field around the world, looking for the best possible articulation of their insight through peer-review and feedback.

Being an editor has also made me a better colleague, I believe. It is a position I can take when reading someone else's work in seminars I go to, being able to think about how another editor somewhere might view a piece of research.

And, let's be real, I did also get to become the first Finn in history to receive a World Fantasy Award. It still weirds me out!

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

ES: *Fafnir* still has untapped potential, even when it is already doing so much. I think promoting early-career scholars from various backgrounds is a definite forte for the journal. It has already been building an interdisciplinary understanding of the study of speculative fiction in accepting various approaches to its subjects. *Fafnir* also draws authors from non-Anglophone countries and is committed to publishing in the Nordic languages – which is something I wish more authors took up! Let's get that research in Norwegian, Danish, and more out there!

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

ES: "Do it."

Seriously, do it. *Fafnir* was the first place where I ever published research, as a wee Bachelor of Arts no less, and those experiences taught me so much about the realities of scholarship. *Fafnir* editors are excellent at navigating the submission process and peer-review, and the journal really does its best to guarantee swift publication without compromising on academic rigor. And when you fashion your submission in accordance with the journal's guidelines, the mileage you end up receiving from the editors is significant.

Also if anyone out there is worried about how their work might fit *Fafnir*'s scope, never hesitate to reach out to the editors. Or me, for that matter!

LEG: Why do you love speculative fiction?

ES: For so many reasons, really, and in many ways that's just the cultural air I breathe. The contemporary fiction I work with I love for the way it's ahead of so many curves unfolding in our time, anticipating what so-called mainstream fiction picks up five to ten years later. It can be so attuned to nuance and complexity when it turns its eye on the contemporary moment and thinks how that should be shown in a new light, to spark new thinking.

Then there's the stuff I've loved since I was a kid, of course. Think of the incomparable rush of the original *Star Wars* trilogy or the sweet escapism of Krynn. Without forgetting the sandbox of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* I still get to play in!

And finally, the stuff that really pushes the envelope, making my brain go boink, being so weird that they break the mould of fiction, or being so perfectly executed in their generic niches. Read Nick Harkaway's *Gnomon* or Adam Roberts's *The Thing Itself* for SF that runs with scissors at you. Or play *Disco Elysium* for an experience like no other computer RPG captures. Watch "The Expanse" for a masterclass in solar-system-scale SF that feels alive, limitless, and visceral.

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

EO: My experience centres on computational, stylistic, and otherwise linguistic approaches to literature. Speculative fiction, especially science fiction, has been classically accused of lacking style or characterised as a genre in which language is subordinated to ideas. There is a little truth in it, but by and large, I find the characterisation unjust, especially considering contemporary trends in speculative fiction. In recent years, speculative fiction has been studied from the viewpoint of language and style more frequently. I really hope to see some of that work come *Fafnir*'s way, to have the chance to use my expertise to promote this area of research.

I am also excited for what I will learn. It's an opportunity to read cutting-edge research in many subfields and develop broad general knowledge of speculative-fiction studies, as well as a chance to learn from the expertise of my co-editors-in-chief.

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

EO: Because *Fafnir* accepts research in such a range of sub-fields and from a variety of theoretical perspectives, the journal has the potential to forge connections between different dialogues within the general area of speculative-fiction research. It also has the advantage of being Nordic-focused while having international range. It's a great platform for connecting Nordic scholarship to global conversations.

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

EO: Please do. Go for it! From the perspective of an author, I published an article in *Fafnir* back in 2018, and the process from submission to publication was smooth and facilitated by open communication, and proved an excellent resource for developing and improving the article along the way. From the perspective of an editor, I look forward to the chance to consider any well-researched article in any area of speculative fiction.

LEG: Why do you love speculative fiction?

EO: Like many, my love for speculative fiction started in childhood. When I was a kid in a very small, rural American town in the 80s and 90s, science fiction and fantasy books often undermined, subverted, or completely shattered a lot of gender and other societal norms prevalent in other media and in that society generally. Speculative fiction provided a rare avenue for articulating other ways of being, and that felt both liberating and instructive. So, it is a genre filled with a lot of good memories.

It's also a genre that has grown with me, or maybe I have grown into it. These days there is a lot of philosophically complex, stylistically nuanced speculative fiction available, and I feel lucky to be developing an academic career at a time when the scholarly study of speculative fiction seems to be in full bloom.

Also, it's got the best cover art.