

Report of the Semi-prozine Committee to the Reno WSFS Business Meeting

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This report consists of a report summarizing our discussions and reasoning and a motion made and seconded by the Committee. In addition, there are 3 minority reports, attached.

Discussion

A long time ago in a fandom now quite distant from us, the Hugos were born. At that time there was a vigorous fanzine culture of printed zines typed on stencils with print runs of a few hundred copies at most and available to anyone for "the usual" (a contribution of an article or a letter of comment or enough money to pay for printing and mailing the fanzine). For short fiction and most novels, the professional magazines were where the action was. The prozines were professionally printed and edited, the writers were (usually) paid, and the magazines with their glorious color covers were available only for cash. There were only a few things in between -- mostly amateurish wannabe fiction magazines -- but they were not thought to be good enough or numerous enough to be worth considering for a Hugo. So we had two categories, Best Fanzine and Best Professional Magazine, and no one needed to define either because everyone knew quite unambiguously what was what.

Fast forward a few years when *Locus* began as a classic fanzine. It was not noticeably different from other fanzines, at first, but *Locus* grew and eventually became something new: It still had traditional fannish newszine contents, but it was slick and professionally printed and people earned their living from it. And *Locus* and a few other giant, slick fanzines dominated the Best Fanzine category. WSFS ultimately created the Best Semi-Prozine category to provide a home for these giant fanzines so that the traditional amateur (and always underfunded) fanzines could still compete. Note that the differences between Best Fanzine and Best Semi-Prozine and prozine were defined entirely in terms of size and resources and not at all in terms of content, medium, or format.

Since then the field has grown more complicated still. Professional fiction magazines sometimes have landed in Best Semi-Prozine, and entirely new forms (blogs, websites, podcast, on-line fiction magazines, corporate websites, and others) have developed until we have a continuous band of eligible works running smoothly and without natural boundaries from a classic small-circulation print fanzine up to the traditional prozines and beyond. For award purposes, this continuum -- the zine continuum -- continues to be divided into three categories: Fanzines and Semi-Prozines which are eligible for Hugos themselves, and professional magazines whose editors are eligible for a Best Editor Hugo. As always, content is no guide as to where to draw the lines.

The task before this committee was to devise a new set of dividing lines which still divided the zine continuum into three chunks but modified so that the competitors in each were of a comparable "weight class", and to draw those lines so that Hugo voters and Hugo administrators could reasonably know which works were in which category. This concept of "weight class" is important since the only real reason to subdivide the continuous range of publications is so that size alone does not determine winners.

This turned out to be quite difficult.

The first thing we discovered was that there were *no* criteria which were available to the average voter which resulted in a well-balanced set of weight classes. All of the clear and easy choices turned out to be too simple and persistently assigned works to obviously wrong categories. (For example, one proposal made the criteria either a payment any size to contributors or non-general free availability. This put some professionally funded websites in Fanzine and obvious semiprozines into Professional and consequently was rejected.) For each of the options we considered, we examined how it would impact the existing fanzines, semi-prozines and prozines which contend for Hugos and insisted that our general sense of what ought to go where was largely met. The impact of these proposed changes are detailed in the Appendix. Note that the committee proposal basically moves several publications from the high end of Semiprozine into professional. (Note that Ben Yalow's minority proposal effectively does away with the semiprozine category by moving all contenders into Pro.)

In the end, we decided to focus on the amount of money resources available to a publication to divide the zine continuum into three parts: Prozines, Semiprozines, and Fanzines. Basically,

- Prozines are owned or staffed by wage-paying entities. They're basically commercial enterprises or run or funded by commercial enterprises.
- Semiprozines may pay for content or charge for copies, but they pay no one a living. There's money involved, but not too much and the staff does not participate in it -- they're basically labors of love on the part of their staff.
- Fanzines are available without paying cash, and pay no one for content. They are labors of love on *everyone's* part.

The boundaries among these categories are not always easy to discern. (The same is true of the present category definitions, for the same reasons.) As such, we propose to ask the publications themselves (who would certainly know!) to declare their status as part of the nomination process.

We believe that this proposal is a good compromise between being simple for voters to understand and use, and actually putting publications into weight classes in which the competition is fair and balanced. (And we call as witness that this is a good compromise that no one is particularly happy with it!)

Consequently, the Committee recommends to the WSFS BM the adoption of the following motion:

Moved, to amend the WSFS Constitution:

Add a new section: 3.Y.Z: A Professional Publication is one which meets at least one of the following two criteria:

- (1) it provided at least a quarter the income of any one person or,
- (2) was owned or published by any entity which provided at least a quarter the income of any of its staff and/or owner.

Amend the sections 3.3.12 and 3.3.13, by replacing them with:

3.3.12: Best Semiprozine. Any generally available non-professional publication devoted to science fiction or fantasy, or related subjects which by the close of the previous calendar year has published four (4) or more issues (or the equivalent in other media), at least one (1) of which appeared in the previous calendar year, and which in the previous calendar year met at least one (1) of the following criteria:

- (1) paid its contributors and/or staff in other than copies of the publication,
- (2) was generally available only for paid purchase,

3.3.13: Best Fanzine. Any generally available non-professional publication devoted to science fiction, fantasy, or related subjects which by the close of the previous calendar year has published

four (4) or more issues (or the equivalent in other media), at least one (1) of which appeared in the previous calendar year, and which in the previous calendar year met neither of the following criteria:

- (1) paid its contributors and/or staff in other than copies of the publication,
- (2) was generally available only for paid purchase,

Add to the end of Section 3.9 (Notification and Acceptance): "Additionally, each nominee in the categories of Best Fanzine and Best Semi-Prozine shall be required to confirm that they meet the qualifications of their category."

Appendix: The effect on this proposal and Ben Yalow's minority report on recent nominees.

	Nominees				Revised	
	2008	2009	2010	2011	Committee	Yalow
Interzone	Semipro	Semipro	Semipro	Semipro	Pro	Pro
Locus	Semipro	Semipro	Semipro	Semipro	Pro	Pro
NYRSF	Semipro	Semipro			Semipro	Pro
Clarkesworld		Semipro	Semipro	Semipro	Semipro	Pro
Weid Tales		Semipro	Semipro	Semipro	Pro	Pro
Helix	Semipro				Semipro	Pro
Lightspeed				Semipro	Pro	Pro
Ansible	Semipro		Semipro		Fanzine	Fanzine
Challenger	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine
The Drink Tank	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine
File 770	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine
Banana Wings		Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine
StarShipSofa			Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine
Argentus	Fanzine	Fanzine	Fanzine		Fanzine	Fanzine
Electric Velocepede		Fanzine			Semipro	Pro
PLOKTA	Fanzine				Fanzine	Fanzine

Minority Report from Stu Segal

I oppose the proposal adopted by the majority for the following reasons:

1. The current proposal, were it applied to this years' Semi-prozine nominees, would have the following effect:

- Clarkesworld - QUALIFIES as a Semi-prozine.
- Interzone - DOES NOT QUALIFY as a Semi-prozine.
- Lightspeed - DOES NOT QUALIFY as a Semi-prozine.
- Locus - DOES NOT QUALIFY as a Semi-prozine.
- Weird Tales - DOES NOT QUALIFY as a Semi-prozine.

These are the 2011 peoples' nominees for Semi-prozine; adopting a set of rules which eliminates 80% of the peoples' choices is completely inappropriate.

2. The committee was formed to create a proposal to "fix" the problem with what had become sarcastically called "The Locus Award", as Locus had won the Semi-prozine Hugo in 17 of the prior 21 years. Interestingly, the proposal to eliminate the Semi-prozine Award, followed by the formation of the Committee, focused so much attention on the category that fresh new nominees appeared in the last three years; subsequently Locus has not won the Hugo in the Semi-Prozine category since the issue was brought to light 3 years ago. I submit for your consideration that the problem we were trying to correct has, in fact, been corrected as a result of the attention focused in the last 3 years; I conclude that no "fix" is currently needed.

Minority Report from Ben Yalow

I believe that the general idea that money is a good measure is worth supporting. However, I believe that money applies in an additional place. therefore, I propose the following amendment:

Title: Paying Money for Content

Moved: To amend Sec X.Y.Z by adding:

"(3) paid professional rates for a significant amount of its content."

Discussion:

The purpose of the distinction between "professional" and "non-professional" is to ensure that works of equal degrees of professionalism are compared to each other, and works which are able to improve themselves by applying extra money to improve the work aren't compared against works with less money. This ensures that works with comparable money resources are in competition with each other, leaving the skills of the creators to distinguish among works, which ensures that the skill is recognized.

Money can be used, at the decision of the creator of the magazine, to either be used to purchase better staff, or to pay more for content, which can be used to get better content to improve the work. In the current proposal, we use "paying staff" as a way to distinguish between non-professional (don't pay staff) and professional (do pay staff). This amendment adds paying real money for content (sufficient to be considered professional rates) as something that makes the work professional. Without this, a work can be competing with a professional work like Analog for the content by paying professional rates, but still not be considered professional.

Minority Report from Saul Jaffe

While I believe that the committee has made a good attempt to find a solution to the perceived problems and to recommend a solution, I disagree with the proposal because the end result is too confusing and requires the average Hugo nominator to have specialized knowledge about the financial workings of the individual publications.

The criteria for Hugo Awards should be simple to understand. A person should be able to pick up a magazine, decide that it is worthy of the award, and by simply reading the criteria in the WSFS Constitution, be able to determine which category the magazine falls in: Professional, Semi-Professional, or Fanzine. By requiring other knowledge outside what's immediately known by looking at the magazine itself, the rules would require a person who is considering nominating that magazine to do some extensive research, or to nominate blindly and have his/her nominations potentially rejected by the Hugo Administrator. To me, this is unacceptable. I believe this has been an ongoing problem with the Semi-Prozine category and one of the things this committee was supposed to "fix". I'm not sure how many people nominated magazines in the Semi-Prozine category because they knew the magazine met the criteria as opposed to nominating it in that category because that's where it had been! nominated before by others. In other words, did people really check to see if the magazine met the criteria or did they just put it in that category out of habit or because others did?

The proposed addition to the end of Section 3.9 that requires nominees to certify that they meet the qualifications in the category is not enough to alleviate the problem. That certification happens AFTER the potential slate of nominees is determined. It does not help the person who is deciding what to put on his/her nomination form. In my opinion, this could lead to campaigning during the nomination period to get word out to potential nominators what category a particular magazine should be nominated in.

I also disagree with Mr. Segal's Minority Report which suggests that no fix is needed. I believe the Semi-Prozine category has been problematic for a number of years, and part of that problem is the complexity of the criteria and the specialized knowledge needed about the financial arrangements of individual publications. Therefore, I recommend that the proposed amendments put forth by the committee be REJECTED, and the committee reformed to reconsider the problem and to report back to the Business Meeting next year.