

# the fact sheet

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## Seen Online...

Wil McCarthy, GoH at Apollocon 2009, talks about the moon and *Moon*, the movie, in an article on SciFi Wire (<http://scifiwire.com/2009/07/columnist-wil-mccarthy-mo.php>). Dr. Paul Abell is one of McCarthy's listed sources.

Ted Gioia has a piece called "Curse You, Neil Armstrong! Did the Apollo Moon Landing Put a Dagger in the Heart of Science Fiction?" on conceptualfiction.com ([http://www.conceptualfiction.com/moon\\_landing\\_and\\_sci-fi.html](http://www.conceptualfiction.com/moon_landing_and_sci-fi.html)).

See the July interview with Jayme Lynn Blaschke, "Made in SA," at Missions Unknown (<http://missionsunknown.com/2009/07/made-in-sa-jayme-lynn-blaschke/-more-1386>).

See August interviews with Chris Roberson at Falcata Times (<http://falcatatimes.blogspot.com/2009/08/interview-chris-roberson.html>) and The Manakalita Manifesto (<http://manakalita.blogspot.com/2009/08/i-havent-read-your-angry-robot-book.html>).

## Newsy Bits

### *Board of Directors Takes a Break*

The FACT board of directors, at the June meeting, agreed that the lack of pressing business and the involvement of several board members with ArmadilloCon was sufficient grounds to cancel the regular August board meeting, scheduled for Saturday, 8 August. The board will meet next on Saturday, 12 September, at the Carver Library, 1161 Angelina Street, Austin, at the regular time of 1 p.m. I happen to know some of them are in Montreal, anyway...

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*Pictures from the recent fundraiser for Aaron Allston  
(Photo credits: Dan Tolliver)*



Allston (L), Person (standing), C. Siros, Denton, Meschke (R)



From left: Denton, C. Siros, W. Siros, Allston, Meschke

## Con Reports

*Apollocon 2009 by Elze Hamilton*

This year marked the 40th anniversary of the Moon landing, and it was noted in this year's ApolloCon opening ceremonies. Kim Kofmel, the con chair, said she watched the moon landing on a very small black and white TV in 1969. As a child, she was aware that this had never happened before. Back then she believed it would happen more. Even now she hasn't given up the hope.

Since ApolloCon is in Houston, every other fan here appears to have a connection to NASA. The most prominent example was, of course, ApolloCon special guest, astronaut Stanley Love. The rest of the congoers have never escaped Earth's gravity, but some of them are friends with astronauts, and they have second-hand stories from space to tell. According to one such person, astronauts in space can't really see billions of stars (contrary to popular imagination). The reason is "too much light," she said. Why didn't they dim the cabin lights, somebody in the audience quipped. It's not the lights inside the space station that obscure the stars, the woman explained. It's the Earth light. Also, astronauts get used to lack of gravity surprisingly fast; when her astronaut friend brushed her hair the first few times after coming back to Earth, she was surprised that the brush fell on the floor when she let go of it. The expectation that the brush will float developed after spending as little as two weeks in space.

Discrepancies between real-life rocket science and its portrayal in the media were discussed in the panel "Rocket Science or Rocket Fantasy." For example, in a movie, Columbia shuttle would not have broken up. After discovering that pieces of insulating foam had broken off the shuttle, a Hollywood version of NASA would not have concluded that there's not much anyone can do about it.

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In a movie, astronauts would have performed a spacewalk, patched up the shuttle, and returned safely to Earth. The latter is rocket fantasy, the former rocket science.

### *Material Sciences Theme*

Another subtheme I noticed in ApolloCon 2009 was that many panels had something to do with material sciences. This isn't surprising, since Wil McCarthy, known for his explorations of programmable matter, was the Guest of Honor. Combine that with the space theme, and you'll get panels like "Beg, Steal or Borrow: Precious Commodities in the Space Colony." By the time I got to the panel (rather late), the panelists must have decided that begging, stealing, or borrowing won't get them far, because they were talking of manufacturing those precious commodities. You can ship oxygen you make on the Moon to a space colony in a lower orbit, cheaper than you would ship it from Earth. If you are just shipping freight, you could have a robot shipping system. Most of it could be automated. You could use solar sails as far as the asteroid belt. You could mine materials in asteroids, process them, and move them wherever they are needed. In many cases, what you need is just a fraction of the mass of the asteroid, not the whole thing. On the other hand, you should be careful with the economics of asteroid mining. If you mine a 700-meter-diameter cast-iron lump, you may dump too much of a good thing into economy, creating inflation.

Material sciences, or habitat design, was also the theme of "Architecture of the Future Living in a Materials World," but the panelists mostly complained how hard it is to build, or maintain, houses in Houston, where the climate is so tough on buildings. Well, that wasn't *all* they said, but the discussion was mostly about the present, not the future.

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*Wil McCarthy on programmable matter: from a science fictional idea to implementation*

The Guest of Honor, Wil McCarthy, is a science fiction writer who actually has implemented his own ideas (to a degree, at least) in reality. In his keynote speech he talked about turning his ideas in fiction into actual technology.

McCarthy's first work of fiction on programmable matter was a novella titled "Once Upon A Matter Crushed" (1999), which later became the first third of the novel *Collapsium*. In this novella McCarthy was trying to write a fairy tale, a fantasy with technologies that would seem like magic—for example, materials that change on voice commands. After it came out, he got mail from people who said, "I thought you were a hard SF writer! What's this nonsense with magic matter?" McCarthy replied that there was a real science behind this material. McCarthy's correspondence with his readers turned into articles, and those articles then became a nonfiction book, *Hacking Matter*. By the time the book was in the making, he realized programmable matter was a patentable idea, and filed a patent application. Scientists came up with objections why his idea won't work, but none of them were fundamental. A typical objection was, "You need a million wires—your material would be all wires." But that's an engineering problem, said McCarthy.

Among the people who read *Hacking Matter* was one of the co-inventors of the Blackberry. He called up McCarthy one day and asked how much of this stuff he could really do. Wil said, probably a fair amount. So the Blackberry guy sent him a plane ticket, and they got together. At the end of the visit the Blackberry guy said, "I want to give you guys a million dollars just to see what happens." This was the start of meaningful programmable matter engineering. Wil McCarthy's startup bought some equipment and

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formed an alliance with the University of Colorado, to use its facility. Then they started building devices. Initially they were working toward aerospace sensors. Unfortunately, timespans in aerospace engineering are very long. It was going to be a couple of years at least until revenue started to flow. There was no way to sustain the work over that period of time.

McCarthy wanted people to understand that the key feature of programmable matter was that you could change its properties on demand. In that respect it's analogous to a computer. Computer manufacturers don't know what a specific computer is going to be used for. It's a general purpose device. However, the business community does not respond to the same argument regarding programmable matter. They want materials that do very specific things, serve very specific goals.

*How does one market programmable matter to investors?*

Feeling overwhelmed by business issues, the startup hired a CEO. That was a smart move, says Wil McCarthy. The CEO told them to forget aerospace materials. Can you do something for building materials, he asked? Wil said, that's easy. We can make windows that turn reflective when it's hot. Apparently this well exceeded the CEO's expectations, since he thought Wil was joking. So now the company's primary focus is construction materials, though the technology may also have applications in video displays. The primary angle of their marketing is that their materials save energy. This statement makes people sit up and listen.

McCarthy avoids the word *nanotechnology* for marketing his company's products. The field of nanotechnology is already too crowded with companies pursuing the same things. He doesn't think he's smarter than the scientists in those companies; but if you're not smarter than all of them,

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there's no point in getting into it, he says. However, people in building materials are not very smart, he says in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek fashion, so that's why he's pursuing that.



Wil McCarthy shows clear glass turn reflective under heat  
(Photo credit: Elze Hamilton)

To demonstrate the capabilities of materials his company has manufactured, McCarthy showed the audience a piece of clear glass, then heated it with a hair dryer. An irregularly shaped reflective blob grew on the glass—the heat turned the glass reflective. This has potential to make windows in buildings much more versatile than they are now, he explained. In an ordinary building, your windows and light fixtures are built into the ceiling or the wall, but in a house made of programmable material you could build windows into anything you wanted. Your windows could follow the sun—or not, whichever you preferred. Your lights would be configurable too. In the future, an idea that lights and windows were objects would seem quaint, said McCarthy.

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The audience asked how the new kind of glass stands up to shock and vibration. McCarthy replied that the material is flexible, so shock and vibration are not a problem, but the glass starts having problems at around 60°C (140°F). Interestingly, this might make it inadequate in countries near the Arctic circle, where the sun never sets in summer. Due to constant exposure to sunlight, temperature in skylights can reach as high as 95°C (203°F).

The audience also questioned weaponization potential of this work. McCarthy doesn't think programmable matter, at least the kind that's being developed by his startup, has any weaponization potential. "You can only change thermal and optical properties. But you can't make it give off a lot of energy," he says. "So you can make plutonium, but it wouldn't be radioactive?" a person in the audience asks. McCarthy confirmed. However, there's another flip side to this technology: programmable houses are vulnerable to hackers. "Giving hackers the key to matter itself is something we want to do very, very cautiously," he joked.

*His startup destroyed his writing career*

When he was young, Wil McCarthy juggled a full-time job, a full-time writing career, and a personal life on four hours' sleep a night. But then he had kids, and it became impossible. He says his startup completely destroyed his writing career. He doesn't have time for writing anymore, only for science. He felt his programmable matter career was something the world pulled him into it. When people kept finding out he could actually engineer some kinds of programmable materials, they asked if he could also create other kinds of materials. This has been different than his job as a writer, which is a push-job: You try to convince people to read your novels over someone else's.

View pictures at <http://pic.geekitude.com/v/sf/apolloCon2009/>.

**FACT Calendar**

August 9-15						
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
			Aaron Alston Jim Riggs		ArmadilloCon 31 In Theatres: <i>District 9, Ponyo, The Time Traveler's Wife, Grace</i>	ArmadilloCon 31
August 16-22						
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
ArmadilloCon 31		North Reading Group, 7pm, A.T. Campbell's house, <a href="#">The Accidental Time Machine</a> , by Joe Haldeman				
August 23-29						
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
			Kenneth Tolliver		Bubonicon 41 (bubonicon.com) Nina Siros In Theatres: <i>Halloween II, The Final Destination</i>	Bubonicon 41
August 30-September 5						
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Bubonicon 41			Willie Siros		In Theatres: <i>Gamer, Carriers</i>	

**Board Meeting Minutes**

MINUTES OF THE JUNE 2009 MEETING  
OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR THE  
FANDOM ASSOCIATION OF CENTRAL TEXAS

The monthly meeting of the board of directors for the Fandom Association of Central Texas was called to order on Saturday, 13 June 2009, by Board Chair Jonathan Miles at 12917 Candlestick Place, Austin TX 78727, at 1:10 p.m.

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Present in addition to the chair were Directors Elizabeth Burton, Marianne Moul, Brian Price, Charles Siros, William Siros and C. Dan Tolliver, FACT President Karen Meschke and FACT Officers Eric Hollas, A. T. Campbell and Wendy Snyder.

The secretary presented the minutes of the May meeting.

Following determination several errors needed to be corrected, it was moved by Mr. C. Siros, seconded by Mr. Price they be accepted as amended. In the absence of objection, Mr. Miles declared the motion passed by acclamation.

CORRESPONDENCE: Ms. Meschke noted she had distributed mail to the appropriate recipients. An email was received from the manager of Dragon's Lair comics, which will be addressed under new business.

## OFFICER REPORTS

### CHAIR

★ Mr. Miles reported attending the June 6 gathering at the Siros residence, and that his other activity was all convention-related.

### PRESIDENT

★ Ms. Meschke noted she attended Book Expo America, where she promoted ArmadilloCon to those likely to be interested. She has also attended the North Reading Group regularly.

### VICE-PRESIDENT

★ Mr. Price reported attending both *Star Trek* and *Terminator: Salvation*, and has been listening to several SF-related podcasts that are interesting. He added he and his family plan to go see *Up*.

### TREASURER

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★ Ms. Moul reported that as of 5/31/2009 the FACT account balance was \$14,514.30.

★ Ms. Babcock's report was not received in time for this month's meeting and will be presented in July.

SECRETARY

★ Ms. Burton advised that the signature policy change has been initiated at the bank and the new signature cards mailed to Ms. Meschke for hers and Mr. Miles's signatures.

REGISTRAR

★ Mr. Hollas reported there are currently 59 active members, and that three renewals were received.

★ Mr. Hollas advised receiving an email from Andrew York, who stated he had sent his membership check in December but the check had not cleared and he is not receiving his copy of the *FACT Sheet*, which he gets by mail. After some research, Mr. Hollas said he found an email in which it was stated the check would be given to the treasurer; Ms. Moul advised that had she received it, it would have been deposited. Mr. C. Siros suggested that Mr. York be advised to void the earlier check and issue a new one, and that his membership will be credited to the original due date.

SOCIAL EVENTS MANAGER

★ Ms. Snyder reported the picnic at the Siros residence was well-attended, and that she is working on organizing the fundraiser for Aaron Allston, about which she will provide details under old business.

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## HISTORIAN

★ Mr. Tolliver advised some items have been received for the auction for the Allston fundraiser, including an “item of historical significance” donated by Mr. W. Siros, and that he has been assisting Ms. Snyder.

## MIS

★ Mr. Campbell reported he has updated the website as requested by Mr. Miles and Mr. Price; provided contact information for local writers, artists, and fans to Ms. Snyder as requested; forwarded a request from a fan in Dallas who asked to be removed from the mass mailing address list and started to investigate document retention on the website, per Mr. Miles’s request.

## PUBLICATIONS

★ Ms. Juday advised by phone she is working on a flyer for the fundraiser. Ms. Snyder asked if that could be ready by 19 June, but Ms. Juday requested that be extended to the 23rd, which was accepted.

## QUARTERMASTER

★ Mr. C. Siros advised that the storage locker rental is paid for the year, noting the company is very good with late notices but not renewals. He added he has also obtained their regular office phone number. He recommended adding a renewal reminder to the FACT calendar, with an alarm to be sent out April 15. Mr. Miles suggested placing it on a list of to-dos to be prepared for the new board and given at their first meeting.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

ArmadilloCon

★ Ms. Antell provided a comprehensive report in lieu of minutes. She reported 67 memberships have been registered to date, including 10 who will attend the writer's workshop. Dealers are registering, and 13 artists are signed up for the art show. Travel arrangements for the guests of honor are due for completion within the next two weeks, and the questionnaires for programming should be sent out shortly.

Hotel Committee

★ No activity

Bylaws Committee

★ No activity

Membership Committee

★ Ms. Burton requested committee members meet briefly after the board meeting to schedule a meeting.

Reading Groups

★ Mr. Campbell reported the North Group has held two meetings. The discussion of *The King of Elfland's Daughter* had 11 attendees, *Soon I Will Be Invincible* had 13. The group picked books for the reading schedule through December 7. He said he has been talking with the librarian at the North Village Branch, the prior meeting site that reopened recently, about moving back.

★ Ms. Burton reported she is still a solo attendee, but has a proposal under new business she hopes might improve that situation.

OLD BUSINESS

1. **Party Materiel** Mr. C. Siros has purchased those items that needed replenishing; however, the email asking if anyone knows where the missing banners are still needs to be sent. The checklist requested by the board is underway and will be ready for ApolloCon.
2. **Signature Cards:** As reported, the cards were sent to Ms. Meschke.
3. **ArmadilloCon 32:** No bids have been received.

#### NEW BUSINESS

1. **Membership Scholarship Fund:** It was moved by Mr. Price, seconded by Mr. W. Siros that an application received be approved. Ayes: 5, Nays: 0, Abstain: 0. Mr. Miles suggested this be considered a function of the membership committee, and that they be empowered to review any subsequent applications and present their recommendation to the board.
2. **Request to purchase Meet-Up subscription:** Ms. Burton requested funding to purchase a subscription at Meet-Up.com as a way to promote the South Reading Group. She noted up to three events can be listed using a single subscription, which would allow for addition of the North Group and gaming as well. It was moved by Mr. Price, seconded by Ms. Moul, that a six-month subscription be purchased and the matter be evaluated when that is due to expire. Ayes: 5, Nays: 0, Abstain: 1
3. **Dragon's Lair request for co-operative activities:** An email from the manager of Dragon's Lair was referred to Mr. Price and Mr. Hollas for follow-up to determine if that

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would be a good site for monthly gaming, to be reported to the board at the next meeting.

4. **Allston Fundraiser:** Mr. C. Siros asked if food will be served, and whether we will be charging for food or just an admission. Ms. Snyder responded current plans call for selling food and for admission, since all proceeds go to Mr. Allston. It was noted that FACT could provide the food ourselves, but catering would be better, especially as there might be some legal issues for selling food. Mr. Siros stated that we need to approach food providers to donate, because it would be prohibitively expensive.

In addition, it is questionable whether we may legally be sole support of an event to support a single member. Although this event is supporting Mr. Allston as a Texas author, this issue needs to be kept in mind when planning such events.

Mr. Tolliver noted we first need to determine if we can, in fact, have a catered event at the venue. It was also stated that we will not charge for admission but will ask for donations.

Publicity will include contacting newspapers, Channel 8, flyers. Ms. Burton agreed to work with Ms. Snyder on PR. Mr. Tolliver moved we designate a nominal budget of \$150, seconded by Mr. C. Siros. Ayes: 5, Nays: 0, Abstain: 0.

There being no other business before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 2:40 p.m.

### **Other Stuff**

Send material for the September issue of the FACT Sheet to [factsheetgirl@yahoo.com](mailto:factsheetgirl@yahoo.com).

# **The FACT Sheet**

The Fandom Association of Central Texas

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**FIRST CLASS**