

Sunday

10:30-11:00 am

Plenary Session Room

Young Readers' Receptions of Tolkien: An Interactive Session of Survey and Interview
Luke Baugher

This session will be chaired by Luke Baugher, who is currently researching the responses of young readers to *The Lord of the Rings* for his dissertation through Cardiff Metropolitan University. If you or your child are under the age of eighteen and have read *The Lord of the Rings*, please consider participating in this session! Participants will fill in a survey about their thoughts and opinions about *The Lord of the Rings*. They may also decide to sign up for a private interview about their opinions on several characters and settings from the story. These interviews will use pictures and kinesthetic elements to help memory and discussion. The results will be analyzed as part of the PhD thesis. Any reference to individual responses that are used will be made anonymous, making it impossible to determine the identity of an institution or individual. These findings will be used for analysis and will be compared with scholarly understandings collected in a previous phase of the project. Detailed informational sheets and consent forms will be provided at the beginning of the session, and participation is, of course, voluntary.

Breakout Room 1

The Bicameral (Hive) Mind: *Westworld* in Conversation with Forensic Fandom
Thomas Johnson

This presentation will examine how the reception of HBO's *Westworld* reflects a larger debate among television critics about the validity of fan theorizing as a mode of viewer engagement in the age of peak TV. The responses of prominent critics to *Westworld* reveals an increasingly moralistic stance towards puzzle-box television and the "forensic fandom" (Mittell 114) that dissects its mysteries online, at a time when the outlets publishing these responses are leveraging forensic fandom in order "to turn *Westworld* into another consistent traffic-generating series in the vein of *Game of Thrones* or *The Walking Dead*" (McNutt).

I will argue that some critics' alarmist rhetoric portraying theorizing and appreciating thematic depth as mutually exclusive practices is a manifestation of a "dualistic structure" that emerges when a medium undergoes unprecedented change, and which "makes it quite inevitable for the mind ... to sort the opposing terms out into a good one and a bad one" (Jameson 59). *Westworld* deconstructs this ethical binary between forensic fans and thematically-engaged viewers, or thematizers, by presenting its mysteries and its themes of memory, trauma, and artificial intelligence as interlinked and mutually sustaining. Through a close reading of the visual syntax *Westworld* uses to portray its embedded timelines, I will demonstrate that the show is a televisual example of Roland Barthes's "ideal text," a "triumphant plural" (5) that accommodates both thematic and forensic modes of engagement. Using Barthes's concepts of equivocation,

snarcs, connotation, and denotation, I will illuminate how *Westworld's* depiction of non-linear chronology both encourages forensic fans to become "an accomplice, not of this or that character, but of the [show's] discourse" (145), and permits thematizers to accompany the protagonists on their journeys of self-discovery. The presentation will conclude by arguing that the show's incentivization of repeat viewing allows forensic fans to ultimately become thematizers, and vice-versa.

Breakout Room 2

(No session)

11:00-11:30 am

Plenary Session Room

Isaac Asimov and the Rise of the Nerd-Hero
Arthur Harrow

Early science fiction leaned towards the adventurous, with brave, brawny heroes, marvelous mechanisms, and a sometimes condescending attitude towards those with an intellectual bent. All this changed in 1941 when Isaac Asimov burst onto the scene. Asimov's works gave heroes to boys who were not muscular and to girls who did not want to scream and be kidnapped, and changed the face of science fiction forever. I propose to examine earlier science-fiction heroes and discuss how Asimov opened new frontiers in imaginative fiction, providing heroes and role models for those of us who might be called, for lack of a better word, nerds.

Breakout Room 1

Soteriology of Non-Human Sentient Beings (or Hnau) through the Reimagined *Battlestar Galactica*
Kevin Hensler

My previous paper "Soteriology through Tolkien and Lewis" focused primarily on the soteriological status of non-human sentient beings (to use Star Trek terminology), or non-human hnau (to use Lewis's terminology from his Space Trilogy), through the works of Lewis and Tolkien. The exploration of non-human hnau soteriology is also a major theme in the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* series which ran from 2004-2009. The series goes in a direction Tolkien and Lewis did not, however, in that it explores the soteriology of creatures originally created by other creatures "playing God." Tolkien addresses this idea in a very limited manner with consideration of Aulë's creation of the dwarves, and Lewis may also go into the subject in *The Abolition of Man*, but it is not a primary focus of either one. While *Battlestar Galactica's* soteriology is not necessarily pinned down or entirely coherent, it does give us a great way into

this very interesting topic, and will hopefully prompt some great discussion among both sci-fi fans and those interested in theology.

Breakout Room 2

(No session)

11:30-12:00 noon

Plenary Session Room

Political Prescience: How Game Theory Solves the Paradox of Foreknowledge in Frank Herbert's *Dune*
Dom Nardi

In Frank Herbert's sci-fi classic *Dune*, Paul Atreides uses the power of prescience to see into the future. However, prescience presents a paradox. If a person possesses knowledge of the future, can he/she also possess free will? On the one hand, Herbert describes prescience as the ability to view all possible futures, not merely the future. Moreover, prescience is limited by external factors, much like the human sense of vision. On the other hand, those with prescience generally treat their visions as reliable. In *Dune Messiah*, Paul could still "see" the world after becoming blind because he remembered details from his visions. In *Children of Dune*, Paul's son Leto bemoans the fact that prescience robbed him of the joy of being surprised.

In this paper, I argue that prescience in *Dune* can be understood as a way to solve complex game theoretic models. Like prescience, game theoretic models show all possible futures based on all possible decisions an individual can make. With enough information, it is possible to determine which branch of the game is most likely to occur. In this state, none of the players will make a different decision, even though they have the free will to do so, because the mix of opportunities and threats from other players will compel them down that path. This analogy helps explain how prescience allows us to determine which possible future will occur, even while still having the potential, if not the incentive, to change that future. I then explain why prescience proved so devastating to the political status quo in *Dune*. Before Paul, political power was structured around uncertainty and the inability of ordinary political leaders to see the future. I use a bargaining model to show how prescience enables Paul to take extraordinary risks and to consistently win.

Breakout Room 1

Inner Limits: Metanoia in *The Lord of the Rings*
Kate Neville

Tolkien's legendarium is full of physical boundaries which serve as catalysts of change for the characters who encounter them. Sometimes, however, the most difficult boundary to cross is psychic rather than physical: the Greek word for this is *metanoia*, a fundamental change in one's understanding of self. It is almost a psychological form of eucatastrophe, but metanoia

requires the active participation of the self. This paper will look closely at three unambiguous examples of metanoia in *The Lord of the Rings* — the stories of Gimli, Théoden, and Éowyn. A close reading of their experiences illuminates subtler examples in the trilogy as well as the dearth of metanoia in *The Silmarillion*.

Breakout Room 2

(No session)