

Alasdair Stuart Interview

Rebecca: [00:00:00] Before we start, if you could say your first and last name to make sure I pronounce it right. And give your pronouns if you'd like to.

Alasdair: [00:00:12] Yes, of course. Hello. I'm Alasdair Stuart and my pronouns are he/him

Rebecca: [00:00:19] Hello and welcome to Shelf Healing UCL's bibliotherapy podcast. I'm your host Rebecca Markwick. Our guest today is Alasdair Stuart. Alasdair is a professional enthusiast, pop culture analyst and writer. He is a multiple Hugo finalist. He's a finalist for the best fan writer category as well. A British Fantasy Society best nonfiction finalist for his weekly pop culture newsletter, *The Full Lid*. Also Hugo nominated. He co owns the Escape Artists podcast network and hosts their horror podcast, Pseudopod, along with the Hugo award nominated science fiction podcast Escape Pod. He's a frequent guest and presenter on multiple podcasts, with voice acting credits, including the 2019 Audioverse award-winning the *Magnus Archives* his most recent work is the *Day of the Doctor*, the 50th installment in the black archive collection of academic Doctor Who treatises by Obverse books. He has two volumes of expanded essays from Pseudopod, as well as multiple short stories, all available from Fox Spirit Books. So the first question to get us started is theoretically nice and easy. Do you feel that reading is therapeutic?

Alasdair: [00:01:26] Massively so and I'd argue now more than it has ever been. Strangely because of something. I mean, I can, I can, I do read a lot, but it has really driven home its therapeutic dimension has really been driven home to me by something I can't do at the moment. I love cinema. Cinema is one of my go-to media, it is to quote *Faithless* of all people, *it's the place I go to heal my hurt*. I go out of my head for a couple of hours. Not being able to do that for 18 months. And that has been hard. Um, It's made me appreciate the other media, the ones I do have access to all the more. So I have shotgunned so many audio dramas and so many podcasts and read so many books because of that thing, where it takes you out of the frame of the present and puts you in something else.

And every concern you have is there, but it's behind a wall and it helps immensely.

Rebecca: [00:02:20] Definitely. Do you find, I mean, most of your job is writing. Do you find writing is therapeutic and if so, is it in a similar sort of way that you find reading therapeutic?

Alasdair: [00:02:30] Yeah, that's actually something I've steered onto more and more across the last couple of years.

Strangely enough. One of the worst things that was ever said to me was at university. When a friend of mine said, you just base everything, you write on people around you. And I was like, no I don't. And then I proceeded to not have any form of real world influence in my work for about five or six years.

And more and more, I find that just isn't the case because on two levels. There's a lot of, a lot of time stuff which happens, influences my non-fiction. I mean, there's a piece going up in *The Full Lid* in about an hour, which is directly relevant to a couple of news stories from

the last week. And a lot of the rest of the time where I find is that it's kind of, how can I put this..

The easiest, fastest path to work, which you like and work, which feels has worth is honesty. And there's another thing which the last 18 months or so I've taught me. I'm not really okay. In a couple of ways that no one's really okay. In a couple of ways. And that's all right. And it's all right. As long as you can look at it. Because the moment you look at it and talk about it, it has edges and the moment, it has edges, it's finite. And there's more and more and more across the last year there's been stuff which I've written and stuff, which has spoken to that, which has helped immensely. I don't think I've been more reassured by books than I have in the last year and a half.

Rebecca: [00:03:52] Is there a particular book that's sort of profoundly affected you recently or over the course of your life?

Alasdair: [00:03:59] This is a very strange, strange, strange question for me because there is there's an expectation that people go back to, to reread books and I rarely returned to the scene of the crime.

I will tend to read something once and push on, but there are things which kind of circle back to more than once. And I've done it in a couple of cases because of, of my favorite nerdy thing, which is when the next book in the series comes out and you're like, well, obviously I have to read these from the start again.

There's a fantastic structurally weird series, which is the living embodiment of sometimes you can judge a book by its cover. If the cover is awesome, called *Six Stories* by Matt Wesolowski . And the cover to *Six Stories* is an audio wave form for a podcast, except it's also a treeline caught in water. And I remember just looking at this one day going, oh, that looks cool.

I have no idea what that's about. I'm buying it. And it's, it's about a true crime podcast. And the idea is that six stories is a show that takes unsolved mysteries and interview six people in association with them. And then the seventh episode of each season, is well, here's what we think happened.

And Matt throws a really big ask around part five of this. And if you can get past that, it's brilliant. And he's actually gone on to do another five or six. All set in this universe and the, they become progressively more fortian and mildly fae in that kind of, this is the weird thing you sometimes see on the Yorkshire Moors at 4:00 AM, which is either someone burying some stolen goods or something with one too many kneecaps.

And they're all really, really good. And I've really enjoyed going back through those a couple of times as each successive one has come out. There's been a few comics as well, which was the one which I went with most recently, a really strange one *More than Meets the Eye* and *Lost Light*, which are Transformers titles, and the absolute last thing anyone expects when, when you say so there's this, this Transformers comic that's really good, is for you to then follow up with, picture Red Dwarf combined with *Waiting for Godot*.

And that's literally what the, what it is. It is the story of these immortal gender fluid, unkillable protean machines. They've had this million year long war, which has finished and they're really bored and they don't know what to do. So they go off on quests and it is incredibly screamingly funny in places because they're incredibly incompetent.

It seems like every time something happens, Hot Rod, who is the captain of his particular quest, will hold a whole parties with banners. Say *We Achieved Something* on them. And at the same time, it's unbelievably sad and poignant and kind. And I think it might be the best written comic of the last 15 years, which also happens to be involved, transforming cars that punch people in the face.

So that I've been through a couple of times as well.

Rebecca: [00:06:51] Yeah. You're obviously, a pop culture journalist. Do you find that the analyst in you ever interferes with your ability to enjoy your media, your book sort of therapeutically, or does the little analyst fly away?

Alasdair: [00:07:05] I actually find that helps and I think it's, I think it's because of how the analyst came to be there.

I'm trained in two different, but strangely complimentary disciplines, I have an MBA in Contemporary Literature. And I'm a trained stage magician. Thank you.

Rebecca: [00:07:21] I did not know that!

Alasdair: [00:07:22] It's been a few years since I've been on stage, but I think it's still pull cards out of people's hair. If I need to, the really weird thing about magic that no one tells you is it's all stories and more interestingly, still the originality of the story doesn't actually matter, the execution of it does. And what learning magic as a kid taught me was to appreciate craft. The best example I can give you is Penn and Teller. The US magician duo have all had a TV show called *Fool Us*, where they have other magicians on and they perform. And if Penn and Teller can't guess how they did it, they win a prize.

And if not, they don't. And it sounds very competitive. But the brilliant thing about it is they have actually tricked a TV network into paying them to geek out with their magician friends. Because the magicians will come on and perform a trick and go, so it was this right. And they're like, yeah, cool.

That was awesome though. And they go into huge detail about it without actually breaking anything apart. And that, that thing that they do, and they talk about a lot. I've seen them live a couple of times and they talk about how their favorite thing to do is go see another magician, see something they weren't expecting.

Then go have some pie and coffee and go. So how did that work? I love that. I love being, I always kind of picture it as the, the 3D engineering heads up from Iron Man. I love being able to look at a story and go sit that goes there. That goes to discuss. So what happens if we move this around? All this kind of stuff.

And the analyst for me is also the part of me that appreciates, like I say, execution. So a lot of the time I'll be half an hour into a movie and I'll go, I'm pretty certain, I know how this is going to work. But they're doing all right. That's an interesting twist that I didn't see. I'd like how that's been presented.

So if anything, it teaches me to appreciate the journey. As much as the destination,

Rebecca: [00:09:07] I love a good magic show. My dad was very into magic. He used to do a stage magic and close up magic and stuff. So we used to go to loads of like really good magic shows, but I think you're right though. It's that how it works, doesn't necessarily detract from the brilliance and the joy. If you come at it in the right mindset.

Alasdair: [00:09:26] I also have a very weird Penn and Teller story. I saw them in Vegas because a friend of mine got married. Two friends of mine got married at the neon statue graveyard in Vegas because they are that rock and roll. And we went to see Penn and Teller that night and they were great.

And after the show they wait, they actually wait and they will shake the hand and take photos with everyone who wants it. Like 500 people a night and they will do this one on each side of the gift shop, which is the most brilliant pincer movement I think I've ever seen. The really cool thing is I have four weeks later, I was in Shoreditch covering the premiere of the Twilight Zone theatrical adaptation, which is amazing by the way, it's a really, really good play. And there's a running gag through it because it interweaves about eight episodes of towards the end of a story, one character will become possessed by the spirit of Rod Sterling and look to the audience and start talking in far more Stentorian tones about, the labyrinth of the night and what happens when we are trapped inside them, and they'll produce a cigarette from seemingly out of nowhere. And it's a little piece of little bit close up magic. So we get to the interval and I'm making my way out out. And this big guy moves past me. I'm not small. And I'm six two. This goes about five, six inches on me and we make eye contact.

Hey boss. Hey, and I walked five more steps and a little guy, he comes past me and just nods and I go, no, I think get out the door, take two steps and go that was Penn. That was Teller. And they were in, it is so weird given how physically distinctive they are in civilian clothing, they're invisible. They just look like tourists.

And they, I felt I did some research and they knew the magician who taught the produce to the cast. And they'd been invited to the premiere to come and see how well it had gone. Um, because I'd seen them like two weeks previously, my face was still a visual memory. Very cool. But very, very strange. Very cool experience.

Rebecca: [00:11:23] Yeah. That's amazing. I love stuff like that, you know, and like you said, they're so distinctive, but unless they're wearing those lovely fancy suits, I can imagine how easy it would be to, to just not recognize them. Oh, now you're, you're a pop culture person, you know, let's be brutal, the science fiction and fantasy genres, which are the best genres just, just putting it out there.

For anyone that isn't watching, I've got a beautiful Patrick Zircher panel behind me of Shuma Gorath I'm really upset. Right? So this is a full page panel and there's Dr. Strange

down here, but zoom has just like cropped it. So basically it looks like Shuma Gorath is coming out of my head, which to be honest, it's fantastic.

But, uh, it is great. Now you write the Hugo nominated weekly newsletter, The Full Lid which has a fancy comic section. So it covers pop culture across film, TV books, audio and comics. There's the weekly deadline nature of such a brilliant newsletter ever affect sort of the wellbeing and therapeutic effects that you've gained from consuming the media that you're analyzing.

Because for anyone that doesn't subscribe to The Full Lid, newsletter was like an understatement. These are like great big essays on everything. It's so brilliant that I can imagine.

Alasdair: [00:12:46] This is a really interesting week to be having this conversation because the answer is yes and no life gets in the way.

Sometimes there's a studio 60 episode, the old Aaron Sorkin show where they have to rewrite one spot five times in one night. And the DL Hughley has this beautiful pained delivery. When they finally get to, this is not the comedy we were planning on bringing you, cause even this, that line very nearly went into this week because I had a beautiful issue, all laid out.

I knew exactly what I was talking about. It was going to be fantastic. And then I was ill for two days. And then it was then yesterday morning, about 9:00 AM. My brain went, Hey, Hey, do an essay, it'll be fun. And seven hours later here we are.

I try really hard to try and keep it loose so it can react to stuff that's happened in the week. But at the same time, give it a little bit of structure. And that's really what we're working on at the moment, which is trying to kind of put the structure in place a little bit more so as we expand and we are looking at expansion across the next couple of years, we're able to keep the high quality of the content.

And at the same time, ensure that we get to bed before 1:00 AM

Rebecca: [00:14:02] Very important.

Alasdair: [00:14:03] Yes.

Rebecca: [00:14:06] Yeah. So it's been, it's been Hugo nominated, which is huge. I think I'm not sure what, I can't remember. You've been nominated in so many categories. I can't remember which category that says, is this the non-fic isn't it? The section?

Alasdair: [00:14:18] Yeah. Um, Full Lid is up for best fanzine this year. I'm up for best fan writer con Zealand fringe is up for best related work. And as a member of the Escape Pod team, I'm up for best semi-pro zine over there as well.

Rebecca: [00:14:33] I always get them so confused. The semi-pros in and the semi fanzine. There's a distinction that, and I never forget, there

Alasdair: [00:14:39] are three or four Hugo categories, which are buckets that just a lot of stuff gets chucked in .

Rebecca: [00:14:45] It's it's obviously everyone in, in the genre community loves it obviously. And you break it down into. for anyone that doesn't again, subscribe to *The Full Lid* goes subscribed to *The Full Lid*, but it gets broken down into movies, into TV stuff, into books and to audio and to comics.

And then there's a nice little signal boost that you do for the people, which I think is a lovely little addition. When you're, when you're writing about stuff, there are, there are certain people that pop up more frequently than others. I imagine I want to write about this. We're going to chat about paper hats.

Now a couple of weeks ago, by the time this episode will come out, we will have a. There, there was a *Full Lid* with, with the wonderful new Nick Cage film *Jiu Jitsu*, where there is a, well, there's a lot section or Nicholas Cage, just making paper hats. Now we're chatting before, before we started recording this podcast about the joy that is Nicholas Cage and the weird things that he agrees to do.

And in *Jiu Jitsu*, it's the paper hats. And you spend a lot time talking about the paper hats. Would you like to continue your talk about?

Alasdair: [00:15:55] Yeah, I just, I tend to do too much research if it's, for some of these things and *Jiu Jitsu* is definitely one of the things I did too much research for research and found out that I think Alain Moussi the notional lead.

Oh, I mean, you know, like anyone in the Nicholas Cage movie who isn't Nicholas Cage is going to be someone you remember, he's, he's a fantastic martial artist. And he's also a very generous interviewee. And he did like 25 interviews about this thing. And talk in detail. Someone said, so Cage just showed up for his, uh, his scenes.

Right. And he's like, oh no, no. We had him for the whole production. He was great. He did as many of his stunts as he could, he was really invested and involved and he brought it in like a lot with some ideas. And as near as I could tell a lot of these ideas in both the moment where you find out his character lives in a cave with a piano and makes newspapers that makes paper, hats out of newspapers.

How can I put this? Cage strikes me that the thing that fascinates me about Cage's career trajectory is I think there is the definitive Nicholas Cage role out there, and I don't know what it is, and I think he's been hunting in his whole life. And I think he's getting closer and closer and closer. And *Jiu Jitsu* is actually surprisingly close.

He is having so much fun in that movie as you'll see. Probably more fun than everyone else. I mean, he does a lot of, he does a lot of the exposition. He gets to have a couple of fights, so really good hat. One of them is paper. It's all good, you know, but I can't help, but feel that, that, and I also saw a Netflix show with a *History of Swearing* at about the same time, which he presents, I go and help her feel that there's a triangulation point coming because in *Jiu Jitsu*, he's very kind of battered warrior kind of look. And in *History of Swearing*, he's

someone who's held him down and shaved him and put them in a nice suit. So he looks like the Twilight Zone holiday cover, and he has so much fun because someone's basically put a camera on him and gone Nick. Yeah. Talk about the swear words. It's 20 minutes. Cool. He's getting to something it's like his career is solving an equation and I don't know what this is, what the solution is going to be, but I'm really enjoying seeing him work because it goes in so many weird directions. Yeah.

Rebecca: [00:18:07] And also I've, I must have watched the clip with him in the paper hat about 20 times by now.

It's not even a very fancy paper hat is like the most basic paper hat you can make. And he's so proud of it. I love it. It's just, it's just perfection. I want that.

Alasdair: [00:18:23] Even better, by by that point in the movie, you realize he has been in that cave a long time.

Rebecca: [00:18:31] Oh, but this is, this is the thing I think about the genre community, the scifi fantasy, you get things, actors, IP that people flock to and they love, and they absolutely adore. So as a self declared professional enthusiast, do you ever find that there's a therapeutic benefit to those fan communities that surround certain IP and does the professionalization of sort of your fan, does that ever cause you problems perhaps when the fan in you loves the IP or the actor, but the journalist and analyst, and you see so many flaws in the product that there's sort of a little battle between the analyst

Alasdair: [00:19:16] I'll get the second question first, because that also allows me to give you my secret origin as a journalist. I looked 15 from the point from aged about ten. And I grew up in a time where you could rent videos from your local news agent videos. Cassette tapes.

Size of your head, and

Rebecca: [00:19:35] Rewind them before you take them back.

Alasdair: [00:19:37] Exactly. And I, I remember renting a terrible, terrible horror movie called *Deep Star Six*. And it was because there was this whole scotch of weird, horrible things happen under the ocean movies. And *The Abyss* is one of them was one of my favorite films. So of course I thought that's great. I'll watch these four shoddy do-overs of it as well.

What could go wrong? And I remember watching it and I remember my dad being in the room at the time. Doing that, that thing, which parents are uniquely equipped to do, sometimes his version of which was I am reading the paper and I'm rustling it so loudly, I'm telling you I'm reading the paper and not watching your movie, I disapprove and, and we go to the end credit scene, looked around and went well, that was rubbish.

And quick as a flash I responded with yeah but the monster design was actually really good. And that felt like a major part of my personality locking in where, you know, I, I w I've always been kind of able to go. That was reasonable. That bit was, was appalling. That extra was great. The design was fantastic. And I was able to articulate that years later when I was talking to my, my journalistic mentor, uh, a man who is, who now lives in Austin, Texas, and

whose claim to fame is the governor's office will not answer the phone to him unless he, his opening statement is,

Hello, This is Richard from the Chronicle. It's a legal matter.

He's good. He's good fun. And the thing which he taught me, which always really stuck with me is this, it is almost impossible to get a large scale project, like a movie finished, anyone who does deserves a modicum of respect. A lot of them deserve absolutely no more than a modicum of respect, but they all deserve a modicum of respect.

So that thing of. Does my desire is my desire, my desire to love it conflict with the fact that bits of it don't work. Those two are constantly there. Those are the angel and demon on my shoulder, and I'm always trying to balance the, this could be bad to add more at the moment. That's always with representation.

I mean, I'm making my way through *Parks and Recreation* for the first time. I haven't

Rebecca: [00:21:42] The first time? I've been following you, tweeting that, thinking that you're rewatching it. I can't. That's it? Oh, you've there's so much good stuff coming up.

Alasdair: [00:21:49] Yeah, I am. I love it purely and completely. And I love it even more.

Now I've got to season five where the fat jokes have started to fall away. And prior to this, I've gone through *New Girl* for the first time. And I mean, you go has Winston. Winston is the greatest sitcom character of all time. I love him fully and completely. And he's fantastic. And without fail every second episode, there are three or four fat jokes for seven seasons.

And I'm at a point in my life now where my critical faculties are sufficiently sharp and my awareness of how I am perceived in society. I'm a big guy means that I don't want like entertainment to go. Yeah. Hey, you who's watching this. Yeah, you suck. I don't want that. And the thing which I'm really responding to with *Parks and Rec* from kind of season four onwards, is the fact that they've stayed away from the occasional obesity jokes on to the far more weird and obtuse stuff.

Also, I kind of want to be Ron.

Rebecca: [00:22:47] Ron has the best character arc I think I've ever seen in a long running sitcom because by the time you get to the finale, he he's, it's just you know when long running sitcoms come to an end, and everyone's always disappointed in how people's things got. But Ron's arc from the very first episode of season one through to the very final episode of the final season.

It's just perfect. He is a certain type of man in a certain type of job who likes a certain kind of thing. And then at the very end, without giving spoilers, at the very end, when everything changes as it does in a finale, Ron is still exactly the same person. And instead of everyone like getting cross and annoyed at him, they just make him more, that person, which is. Perfect.

Alasdair: [00:23:34] I love that. I love that. So yeah, that, that, that's going to question two, question one. The, the, do I find, do I find comfort in fan communities?

Rebecca: [00:23:44] Yeah. The therapeutic benefit of a fan community, which I think is particularly, it's a particularly strong element in the genre community, the scifi and fantasy people, their fandoms are diehard, I think. Compared to other people's fandoms

Alasdair: [00:24:00] That that's always, that's been a really weird experience for me because I, especially when I kind of first started out, I always felt like an outsider. And some of that, like I say, is the fact that, you know, six foot two. And, but like adult and people tend to see that before they hear me speak, you know, the, the, and especially is couple of things, you know, I like to get my, my hair short.

I was going to start. So I look a little scary and then you hear me and I'm a teddybear but I'm not actually from here, I'm from the Isle of Man. And that has become weirdly important to me across the last decade, where a few times I found myself going. This isn't even my piece of country side. I need to go stand there some sheep, and I've always kind of valued that kind of, that slight, slightly outsider perspective.

And that has kind of tied into never feeling, especially connected to a lot of these communities. And because of it, of general fan communities also tend to be a little insular. That's meant I've tended to kind of always be at the outside of it. I mean, I had a very weird experience, literally two days before the pandemic came down.

Where I had picked up a press job, covering the launch of a Darlek escape room. Two days before the pandemic came down, half a mile away from my house. So I walked down that there's a whole bunch of journalists from various locations. All of whom kind of look me up and down. Like I'm, I've just wandered in off the street, which I have.

And then just starting to feel a little bit, we had an apple place when Nicholas Briggs from big finish, who I've met like a week before at a studio visit with Alice, you did to come over and belligerently talked to me and not them for an hour and a half. So I've always found kind of slightly weird ways into these communities.

There are some communities though, which I I've very, I've kind of found very welcoming. The stranger is one is *Leverage* which I never expected, but it has such a great fandom surrounding it. And it's one of those fandoms, which is very good to only talking about the show, but going, Hey, have you seen this?

It's fantastic. Here's how you should start. Or there's a leverage podcast called the Pod Job, which is here are two diehard fans of the show and someone who's never seen it before. They're going to discuss this episode this week. And I love stuff like that. I love fandoms, which aren't just about celebrating and maintaining what they love, but also opening the door to, Hey, come on in.

You can play it.

Rebecca: [00:26:23] Hmm. And it must be so weird because obviously as a journalist, as a critic, you're sometimes poking holes in IP that people are obsessed with in the nicest possible way. And obviously you love what you do. You love the things that you're watching, that you're reading, that you're embodying in your lovely little essays and your, your pieces of journalism.

But there's got to be out of that little worry that some fans will get upset at you for pointing out a flaw or pointing out a whopping great big plot hole that in the community, we know there are whopping great big plotholes in a great many of our favorite things. Does that ever reduce your enjoyment or

Alasdair: [00:27:02] I'm sure there's jobs I haven't got because of opinions I've expressed. I think that that's probably the case with everybody. I can tell you the two and kind of two and a half instances where I know for a fact there are people who have raged against me for daring to make some opinions way back. Uh, as no amount of years, I do not want to say out loud.

I was one of the final trio of editors on a PDF comics magazine called *Savant* and I was a comics retailer at the time. So obviously they went, Hey, write about running a comic shop with the shop I was running. It was not quite as large as the office I'm talking to you from now was an ex butcher shop and the meat safe had become the toilet.

I still miss it, actually, it was a lovely little store, but one week inevitably, I, I real, you know, I did a thing about Comic Store Guy and how he's a very damaging stereotype and this was like the top of the century. So you just to see the respectability of mainstreaming of comics start to explode. So this thing goes live.

I don't think anything, all of it. And then I get this 5,000 word essay from someone and he was really polite actually in fairness, which opened with, Hi Alasdair like your work. But I have to say, I have a real issue with the problems you've got with Comic Store Guy. Cause you see, he's not the villain here. He our boy is the hero and I can prove it. And he went in 500 word modules explaining citing multiple episodes, why Comic Store guy was better than a particular character. And he did this for like 10 of the major characters from the show. So

Rebecca: [00:28:38] that's impressive. That's hardcore fanning right there.

Alasdair: [00:28:42] Absolutely. And the other one is there is I think they're still out there somewhere. There is a small group of Red Dwarf fans who loathe me, um, because when I was doing some work on the early issues of SciFi Now they ha they had me come in and do a piece about Red Dwarf series one and two. And I talked a lot about how I always, I really liked the aesthetic of the early years of Red Dwarf.

Well, it's *Waiting for Godot* on a tramp steamer in space and, and slide to do the kind of very slightly dark character driven episodes as highlights. And they hated me for that. They were just like, how dare he? How dare he overlooked the big science fictiony pieces? I want explosions. I don't, I just, I stumbled across it entirely by accident, I think researching the next piece in the series. And it would have been so easy to be upset, but I looked at and I was like, well, you read it. You know.

Rebecca: [00:29:32] Talking of that, you've been nominated for a lot of awards there's yeah. I can't even count how many awards you've been normed for this year. It's mad. Four Hugo's just to start with, and for people not in the know the Hugo's are, are like the Oscars of the scifi fantasy community.

So four of them across a very wide spectrum we mentioned earlier what they were. It must be a lovely feeling to be so supported and rewarded for your very hard work writing and podcasting and the lovely world of scifi and fantasy. And this is the second year in a row. I think that the podcast has been isn't it.

Alasdair: [00:30:10] Third I think

Rebecca: [00:30:11] I feel like I've lost all of last year. I don't even want to think about the keyboards from last year. No, no. The Hugo awards 2020 did not happen. Um, other than everyone like winning their stuff, they actually no. So huge on the, on the podcast for such a, probably again, it's scifi fantasy niche podcast, the Escape Pod and, and the Pseudo Pod as well the horror. It must be lovely, you know, to, to be recognized and, and all that.

Alasdair: [00:30:43] It really is, and there's an interesting element to it, which is both very nerdy and strangely reassuring. There's a thing that happens after each go, uh, ceremony, which is the, the numbers are released. And those in, uh, in of themselves are like, here's the, here's how the books broke down round by round.

Here's the people who almost made each, each list. And, and so on and so forth. And my partner Marguerite who is a genius has for the last six or seven years, painstakingly kept these numbers and graphs. And that's way about three years in, she was able to go with, we're going to win one of these quite soon now, because each year we had shows moving up the long list.

Uh, my work was moving up the long list, and then suddenly we had stuff that was. You know, step seventh place when sixth place gets you on the short list and that's that slow progress has been fuel for the company, because it's the one thing, especially with, with a year round show, you just don't get you.

You don't get that sense of making any progress. And because of that, because of stuff like the visibility with the BFAs as well, which has been great. We've been able to go back to the crews of 25 to 30 people who make these shows go. This thing that you're doing, where it feels like all you're ever doing is shoveling coal into an eternal furnace.

You're not it's working. Keep going. And I'm so happy about that. And I'm so happy as well about the diversification of the work, the awards, you know, folks like the IGNYTE awards, which launched last year and Aurealis, which is really starting to gain ground now and also, um, the Vogels, the New Zealand awards, which, because it will come notionally big in New Zealand last year have got a lot more visibility this year.

So you're seeing a lot of very different perspectives in that those in the fields. And that can only be a good thing.

Rebecca: [00:32:30] Definitely. And obviously you're a fan writer and you're also a voice actor, like I said, in your bio you've, um, you were in the 2019 audio versus award-winning the Magnus Archives. Is there a specific media that gives you the most joy to kind of put your stuff out there in, is it, is it the writing? Is it the reading? Is it the FA the fanzine? Is it the podcast? Is it that voice acting or is it all just sort of the same level of awesome?

Alasdair: [00:33:00] I love it all, but I think if I had to pick there are two I'd pick. I've worked at Pseudopod longer than I have held any job in the real world, which is a frankly, a horrifying realization.

And I'm still trying to work out how I feel about and Pseudopod, and this will sound quite hyperbole. Pseudopod changed my life. I remember downloading the first episode on the 56 K modem on a green perspex iMac, because I had to plug into a wall. I don't remember it taking 20 minutes

Rebecca: [00:33:30] That's not too bad for dial up

Alasdair: [00:33:33] Yeah was alright for dial up, not too shabby. But because I've volunteered for Pseudopod, which is I would, I would never volunteer at that time in my life. I had no confidence because I was able to do two things. The first is I was able to start and I didn't realize I was doing this until I have a very good friend of mine, pointed it out. I was able to process the very bad things that were happening in my life at the time.

And brilliantly this culminated as they stopped in my friends who always get into lift into work with at the time who ended this about six weeks behind on the show. And I remember getting into the car one morning and her going, Jesus, are you all right? And I thought for a moment, and then you got to April, haven't you?

Yes. Yeah, I'm fine. That was just a bad week. I met my partner through the show, you know, Marguerite was a listener and a fan and we got talking and one day I, I. Again, did the thing. I never don't be done like tweets about how it had a really bad day. And she said, you want to talk about it? And I said, yeah.

And 18 months later I was on, I was on a plane to JFK to spend a summer in California, auditioning cities to live in a nine years later. Here we are. That was a pretty good call all the way around. I think that the podcasting pretty much gets the win. The other thing that I like every now and again, I let myself misbehave, I have to let myself misbehave with other people's licensed fictions.

This is the thing we do on the, on the stream, on the stream show quite regularly. Uh, I call it, it's a section of the, of the, um, the newsletter called my ex fever dream. And it's basically, if, if something has come up in pop culture news that week, It'll either be that, or it will be something which has been on my mind.

And I think the first one I did was the announcement of that *Event Horizon* was being developed for a TV show, not bloody love *Event Horizon*. It's great cathedrals and the Hellraiser movies explode in orbit above Neptune what's not to love about that. So I wrote this 2000 word piece about how I do the *Event Horizon* TV show.

And then a few months after that, I had this idea for what, what the *Expendables Four* needed to be. And obviously it needed to be the, you know, the acknowledgments and exploration of the deep seated and very, very tender love affair between Lee Christmas and, and Barney Ross culminating in them, flying off into the sunset and a new at the new plane, which has had Just Married, shot it to the back of it.

And one of my proudest achievements last year is getting my very good friend, Nick Crowley, who was a superb author to read on stream my *Expendables* fever dream, because Nate has studied Jason Statham, his work in detail and. Yeah, that that was a very special half hour. I'm pretty happy with, with both of those.

Rebecca: [00:36:19] Yeah. And for those of you that want to find more of Alasdair he has a fabulous website, very easy to get to you just type in Alasdair Stuart into Google, or your choice of internet provider. Browser, whatever

Alasdair: [00:36:36] other browsers are available.

Rebecca: [00:36:39] Gotta be, I don't know. I feel like I'm the BBC. When I say that.

And on that, we've got fabulous links to Alasdair's Twitch, where he does live streams, your all of your podcasts that you do, the Pseudo Pod, the Escape Pod. Links are the Escape Artists, which is the company behind both of those pods, some of your voice work, all of your fiction, all of your non-fiction pretty much anything Alasdair you can find on Alasdair's website, including links to The Full Lid, which again is really good. If you don't have time to watch everything, you've got time to read The Full Lid, which is great. Also Alasdair puts a little video clips in The Full Lid . So if you don't know what he's talking about, there'll be a video clip and you can just go and watch it.

And it's great. Fabulous stuff. Well, thank you so much for coming on. One final question Alasdair, this is a really, really hard one. I've saved it for last. Is there a particular, one thing, book comic graphic novel film TV series that you would recommend for someone to read if they want to improve their feeling of mental wellbeing?

Alasdair: [00:37:43] That is a spectacular question. *Amelie*. French movie from the early noughties. Uh, I have completely forgotten the director's name, which is shameful.

Rebecca: [00:37:57] Jean-Pierre Jeunet

Alasdair: [00:37:58] That's him.

Rebecca: [00:37:59] It's got a brilliant poster that film

Alasdair: [00:38:02] Yes, it should be saccharin. It should be incredibly schmalzy uh, it's about a waitress who decides to a series of unusual events, to help the people around her in very tiny and meaningful ways.

And at the same time, she's pining for a guy who she keeps seeing briefly. And it's odd you, it externalizes her rich internal fantasy life and does so in a manner that uses different types of

film and special effects and music and changes in viewpoint. And it is one of the most funny kind witty movies I've ever encountered.

There is the single best running gag involving a gnome I have ever seen in this movie. And it's just, you come out of your side of it and you just feel better about everything.

Rebecca: [00:38:49] Yeah. That is a fabulous recommendation. I will second that. And I'd forgotten about the gnome until the moment you said it. And then all of the gnome just rushed back into my memory.

So thank you so much, Alasdair for coming on. That's it for this week's Shelf Healing in case you couldn't tell, I had an absolute blast chatting with Alasdair huge. Thanks to Marguerite who helped schedule this all into everyone's very busy diaries. Really appreciate everything you do, Marguerite thank you very much.

Like I said, everything will go into the show notes, links to Alasdair's website, to the podcasts, to The Full Lid , which if you're into film comics, scifi books, fantasy books, anything genre, or even Doctor Who'd lots of Doctor Who stuff do check out The Full Lid . I hope you found that as interesting as I did from the perspective of a pop culture analyst and journalist, I'll be back next week with another episode of Shelf Healing.

Thanks as always to Nicholas Patrick for our music.