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[INTERVIEW WITH MIRIAM SEIDEL](#)

Recently the New Door Books staff had a chance to chat with author Miriam Seidel about her novel *The Speed of Clouds*, forthcoming in April 2018. Here are some excerpts from the conversation:

NDB: *The Speed of Clouds* centers on a community of sci-fi fans. What inspired you to write about fandom?

Miriam: Going to Cons! I always felt there was something magical about grownups getting dressed up, transforming into their favorite characters or fictional species. To me it's a primal thing, with a thread that goes back to our earliest kinds of storytelling and rituals—to putting on masks and feathers, transforming into gods, heroes, or sacred animals, and dancing around the fire. And then here are these people, who do other things during the week, willing to enter into this fictional world without any reservation or irony, coming together as a community in this celebratory way. And I also loved that fictional world myself. When my son was little I dragged him along to Cons—I told myself it was something he wanted to do, when it was really me who loved the whole thing.

NDB: Hah! I hope your son has forgiven you. But why did you set the story in 1999, right before the new Millennium?

Miriam: I first discovered the world of fandom around then. At the time, printed fanzines were still a central feature of that world, but by 1999 many fans were finding ways to congregate in online groups, and they were publishing fan fiction online. So it was a moment of transition, with its own built-in tensions. And, to me, the shift to the new Millennium makes a good analog to the big shift we've all been making toward living more and more of our lives online. That's such a massive change, and we're so immersed in it, that it's easy to let it sink into the background. But I wanted to make it more visible.

NDB: Your main character, Mindy, is disabled. Can you talk about that?

Miriam: Mindy came to me fully formed, and her disability was a part of her. At the time I was writing short fiction and scripted work, like librettos for operas, and I thought she might be a character in a performance. But then the story grew around her. It seemed she was strong enough to be at the center of all these swirling subplots and themes. In terms of my own life, I don't have a similar disability, but my youngest brother was born with a developmental disability, Williams Syndrome, that has also affected him physically. To make sure I

understood Mindy's condition, I spoke with people about their experiences living with spina bifida. Although Mindy isn't inspired by a specific person, I do believe that disabled people are a strong part of science fiction/fantasy fandom.

NDB: How did you go from writing opera librettos to writing a novel?

Miriam: I had been fascinated by the crazy, outsized story of Nikola Tesla, the legendary inventor, and I felt it had to take the form of an opera. Also, I was entranced by the possibilities of new opera, where narrative, visuals and music could interact in new ways. I had been a visual artist, and before that I trained in classical music, so it kind of brought everything together for me. But then, in *The Speed of Clouds*, I was able to feature a character who's a visual artist and another character who's experimenting with electronic music, and I had so much fun imagining and describing their work, which becomes part of the story. The beauty of writing novels is that you can bring everything in—without building sets or costumes!

NDB: Who are some of your favorite authors?

Miriam: Ursula K. Le Guin, for her wisdom and foregrounding of women's experience in what was a male-skewed genre; Saul Bellow, for his language; Doris Lessing, for the *Canopus in Argos* series; Octavia Butler; David Mitchell; Chris Adrian. I also love the books of Louise Erdrich and Marilynne Robinson. And I'm thrilled to see the rise of women's and minority voices in SF/F, including N.K. Jemisin and Fran Wilde, who have both completed really powerful trilogies in the past year.

Miriam Seidel is a writer, curator, librettist, and longtime sci-fi fan. She wrote the libretto for an opera about the visionary inventor Nikola Tesla, performed in Belgrade, New York, and Philadelphia, and a sci-fi radio play for New American Radio. She's written about visual arts and performance for *Art in America*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and other publications, and her writing has won fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. *The Speed of Clouds* is her first novel.

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