

Conflux/Natcon 2021



Forging Tomorrow

2-4 October 2021, The Rex Hotel, Canberra

Introduction

Science fiction is often called the literature of change, envisioning possible futures while simultaneously reflecting upon contemporary concerns. The way we believe in the future is intrinsic to the fabric of our storytelling. It empowers us to connect us with others and give context and meaning to our lives.

After devastating fires, an increase in global tensions, and the world turning more and more towards political extremes, it takes concerted effort think beyond the gloomy nihilistic fog of apparent destiny to imagine positive, yet realistic ways forward in the face of climate change and other existential threats.

Writers & artists have a role to play in forging enduring sustainable futures. When we write about the future we are helping to create it. Relentless cynicism and despair lead to emotional fatigue and disengagement – such factors are enormous stumbling blocks on the pathway to forging a positive world. For this reason, Conflux's strategic intent is definitively positive, its theme intended to incorporate a range of viewpoints and visions including Solarpunk, Hopepunk, rebellion, alternative histories, science fiction, reimaginings of the classics, and fantastic transformations.

With every positive vision, there comes a counterthought – *but what if we fail?*
Traditionally, post-apocalypse stories are less about the end of the world than about overcoming and surviving it. Dystopias highlight heroic individuals gaining agency and fighting corrupt systems, serving as romanticized ciphers for our own personal life struggles.

Doomer lit, cli fi, dystopia, post-apocalypse, grimdark, zombies, wyrd, etc will run as a subtheme to ensure that Conflux/NatCon 2021 caters to all forms of speculative fiction.

Why Canberra?

As Australia's National Capital, Canberra boasts a diversity of attractions and experiences. There's something for everyone, from the National Gallery and Questacon to the Australian War Memorial, the National Portrait Gallery, Parliament House, the National Museum of Australia and the Mt Stromlo Observatory.

For nature lovers there are the National Botanic Gardens and Arboretum as well as lakes, hikes, bike paths and trails, mountains, creeks and waterfalls, tree lined streets, parks and beautiful gardens. A short drive will take you to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Corin Forest, the Murrumbidgee River corridor and a great many wineries.

Canberra is well known for its top-rated restaurants offering incredible culinary experiences. Wander through foodie haven precincts like [Braddon](#), [NewActon](#) and the [Kingston Foreshore](#) for an eclectic mix of cafes, restaurants, bars, pop-up stores and galleries.

And, last but not least, Canberra has a vibrant spec fic community, a bustling hive of authors, artists, gamers, editors and fans keen to welcome visitors to the biggest and best Conflux ever.

Strategic Intent

The aim of Conflux 2021 is to inspire positive visions of the future without shying away from the struggles and obstacles that entails. It is to give emerging and beginning writers the support and tools to put their visions into words and communicate to the greater world. Therefore, our strategic statement is:

Conflux/NatCon 2021 will give emerging and beginning writers the tools, inspiration, and connections to forward their craft, encouraging but not limiting writers to communicating positive world views while translating character agency to reader inspiration. It will leverage off the experience of established and career authors to engage with emerging writers to give practical advice and actionable knowledge. It will give hope and inspire while giving writers the means to action their stories in the future.

From this we have reduced the theme to the following:

Forging Tomorrow

The theme of broad interpretation has deliberately been chosen to ensure diversity among participant and attendees alike. While positive imaginings of the immediate future are expected and welcomed, we want to ensure all genres and perspectives are welcome. Everyone character, regardless of genre or timeline, has a tomorrow at some point. To make it better, to actively engage with their world and overcome the struggles of the day requires agency. *Forging Tomorrow* encourages taking charge of the future and naturally implies the drive forward that Conflux/NatCon aims to encourage.

Forging Tomorrow can be interpreted to suit any speculative genre, but encourages the concept that it is up to us to build a better world. As a NatCon event, we expect an even more diverse interest than usual, and therefore a broad theme is able to encourage an even greater range of stories, and to give them a greater platform to be heard.

Structure

Organisation: Conflux has a well-established committee with decades of combined experience in running conventions. We intend to use this plethora of experience to form a subcommittee to run in conjunction with the Conflux 2020 *Visions of Time* Convention. The subcommittee will be responsible for arranging Conflux 2021 alongside assisting with Conflux 2020. They will initially be a small team responsible for establishing the administration and starting the advertisement, before merging with the larger Conflux Committee in October 2020 to action the established plan.

Streams: Conflux/NatCon 2021 will follow three streams, all treated with equal precedence though actual session time will depend upon calls for workshops, panels, and other session ideas.

- a. **Youth Stream:** Conflux has an established committee with one of the youngest presidents in the history of Australian speculative fiction conventions. Alistair Ott's outreach to local youth organisations will enable Conflux/NatCon to build a strong foundation of emerging writers, and this will be a target demographic for attendance. This ties into the *emerging and beginning writers* element of the Strategic Intent, as well as looking at the future action element.
- b. **Worldbuilding:** This is a critical part of our strategic intent. We are looking to encourage stories that *communicate positive ways forward*. To do that, the worlds need to offer both a connection to the reader and a path that a reader can believe is possible. Building 'real' worlds in speculative fiction is a fundamental part of the craft, and therefore will have a dedicated stream. This will also look at the various technical elements present in 'punk' genres and 'hard' genres.
- c. **Positivity in Fiction:** This is perhaps the most relevant to the strategic intent. It will cover methods of portraying positive themes/characters, the problems (or lack thereof) with utopias, and will cover the subtheme of Omelasian views on perfect, sustainable worlds. It will essentially focus on how to be

positive enough to imbue hope without becoming unbelievable, and look at how positivity in fiction has impacted culture, politics, and people in the past.

Collaboration: In 2019, Impact Comics ran a convention on the same October long weekend as Conflux and we are approaching them with the concept of a combined Convention for 2020. Should this run successfully, we intend to invite them again in 2021, and use this relationship to strengthen the visual artist element of the convention.

Guests: Ideally a guest will be identified who has written in a form consistent with the strategic intent. We are in the process of generating a preference list that will be used to confirm a guest by September 2020 for announcement at Conflux 2020. Potential guests we might consider are Amie Kaufman & Jay Kristoff, Ramez Naam, Cory Doctorow, Kim Stanley Robinson, Madeline Asby, Paolo Bacigalupi and Martha Wells.

Location: Conflux has enjoyed the variety of locations constantly becoming available as Canberra continues to expand. We have recently toured several locations and believe that The Rex Hotel ideal for location, accommodation expectations, rooms available, catering facilities, and costings. Just a few metres from the tram stop and in vicinity of the Braddon restaurant precinct.

The floorplan of the Rex provides ample space for a variety of simultaneous sessions and contains a two-level rooftop bar/restaurant with excellent views of Black Mountain for Kaffeeklatches, or should attendees require refreshments throughout the convention.

As a trial, the 2020 Conflux Convention will be in the same location to confirm appropriateness. Secondary venues have been explored to provide alternatives should the Rex have any unexpected issues.

Budget: Conflux Conventions Inc have enjoyed the luxury of financial security over several years, enabling us to engage multiple guests of honour and move confidently between conventions without financial concern. While this provides us with a solid foundation for presenting NatCon in 2021, we are applying for grants that will enable the financial flexibility. Specifically, this will be used to engage with local educational centres and advertise in targeted areas (both geographically and online) and drive ticket prices down.

Conclusion

There are ample reasons to see the present through a bleak viewpoint. That said, we firmly believe that the future is malleable, provided someone is willing to mould it. To host NatCon would be a privilege in and of itself, however the ability to use the platform as way to encourage and engage young and experienced writers alike towards taking an active role in forging a better tomorrow.

We appreciate your consideration for a Canberra based NatCon in 2021, and look forward to NatCon forging the way towards a better tomorrow.

