

**Science Fiction Book Club
Interview with Peter F. Hamilton (June 2020)**

Peter F. Hamilton is known for writing bestselling space operas as epic in scope as each book is in size. His works include the Greg Mandel series, the Night's Dawn trilogy, the Commonwealth Saga, the Void Trilogy, and the Salvation Sequence.

Andrew ten Broek: Are there ideas unexplored from the Commonwealth universe /saga? (Even though you've finished writing about that universe).

PFH: I don't have any ideas or themes on file. I haven't said I've definitely finished writing in the Commonwealth universe. However, I would have to develop an idea, which would fit.

Marina Akushskaya: I read a Commonwealth Duology and really liked it, so, thank you! My question is: Your books are very long and complex. How much does editor usually contribute to the final draft?

PFH: Glad you enjoyed the books. By the time the manuscript goes in for editing there is very little room for the editor to contribute or change within the overall structure. I always have the plot mapped out in advance to ensure it does work and the characters are where they need to be. The editor's contribution comes in the form of pointing out discrepancies and suggesting that some passages aren't clear enough and need more development, and the opposite -some descriptions go on for too long.

Tom Alaerts: Will we see a sequel to Great North Road? It looked like a universe with more elements to explore.

PFH: I deliberately wrote Great North Road as a stand-alone book. There won't be another book set in that universe.

Anna Johnson: I'm curious to know: what was your job/career prior to full time writing and did you do much in the political and/or business spheres, as your descriptions of corporations, political organizations, characters, etc. are so authentic? If not through personal experience, what kind of research did you do to write with such authenticity?

PFH: I did have some jobs in local factories a long time ago, so I'm aware of the structure of such organizations. I also have several friends in management, who provide plenty of insight into that world. Keeping up to date (as much as possible) with global current affairs tells me plenty about politics.

Tom Alaerts: Has there been interest in adapting the Commonwealth books as films or (ideally in my opinion) TV/streaming series?

PFH: There have been several producers interested over the years. My agent has sold the option (usually for 18 months) more than once, but each time it expired before anything was put into production.

Tom Alaerts: How did you come up with MorningLightMountain, one of the more unique aliens ever encountered in the genre?

PFH: Essentially, I worked backwards. Once I'd established what I wanted the Prime to be like, I worked out the biology and environment which would produce that kind of evolution.

Andrew ten Broek: Given the choice, would you rather travel the universe on a FTL starship or by a train through a wormhole?

PFH: On a train. Definitely.

Robin Hart-Jones: As you hid one in your books, do you have a secret desire to write a pure fantasy series?

PFH: My children's trilogy, The Queen Of Dreams is a magical fantasy story. As to if I'll ever do another, I don't currently have a plot for one. But if I do get an idea, then I'll try and write it.

Richard Whyte: Your novels are some of the longest in SF, so I wonder - how detailed is your planning and do your stories always go according to the plan?

PFH: My notes are as detailed as I can get without actually writing sections of the book. Typically, a trilogy will take 4/5 years to write. The first six months+ of that is spent purely on making notes, for everything from characters to worlds, technology levels, politics, economics...

Georges Parrod: What relationship do you have with the translators of your books in foreign languages ?

PFH: I don't have very much contact. Though I'll often be asked to expand or explain obscure phrases, and sometimes clarify context.

Tom Alaerts: Your earlier books showed a lot of hedonist lifestyle, which I found quite fitting in a post scarcity future. Your recent books are more "tame" in that respect. Why?

PFH: It's not a deliberate trend or decision I took. The behavior of characters within each book is determined by the culture of the societies they live in. The more recent works have featured societies where the options available to their citizens are limited for varying reasons. Of course, there are always rich (financially/politically) people in any society, who will live in what is essentially in a post-scarcity environment even though those who provide it for them don't.

Molly Greenspring: How do you do research for your books?

PFH: As above: I keep informed as best I can on political and economic developments. Extrapolation of trends and technology is a key component of structuring a future universe. When it comes to science, if there is a specific technology that will feature in the book, I'll read up on it as much as I can to insure I can at least understand the basics.

Molly Greenspring: When you meet other science fiction writers what do you talk about?

PFH: They tend to be social events, so publishing-related talk is a minimum. Sometimes I'll talk over possible ideas with writers who are old friends. Mainly it's the same kind of conversation you'd have with anybody in a bar.

Molly Greenspring: If you could choose the readers of your books, what would you look for in readers?

PFH: People with an open mind, and those who enjoy a sense of wonder (as I do) in a story. Hopefully, they'll pick up on an idea and question it.

Harris Coverley: I'm sorry to say I've never as of yet read any of your novels. Where would you recommend I start?

PFH: They are rather large books to commit to, so I'd suggest the short story collection, Manhattan In Reverse. Which has some varied stories in it. That or one of the stand-alone volumes; either Fallen Dragon or Great North Road.

Judy Badger: Do you have a personal favorite of the books you have written?

PFH: For me it's always the one I'm currently writing, as I get very involved with the characters and their world while I'm detailing everything that happens to them. That's not to say I dislike the older books. But the ones from -say- twenty years ago would probably be written slightly differently now.

Anna Johnson: I'd also love to know about your writing process. How long does it take to finish one of your typical long book? Do you follow an outline and how many drafts do you go through?

PFH: Partially answered above. My books take between 12 to 18 months to write. They are extensively plotted, but with just enough leeway to allow new ideas to be incorporated if any come along during the writing -which generally leads to a frantic re-write of the outline half way through. Drafting is something I don't think applies to my method, mainly down to the ease of word processing. I'm constantly altering (hopefully improving) the text as I go along so when I've finished the manuscript it will be ready to submit right away.

Eva Sable: Let's just say, not at all hypothetically, that I am old, unhip, and have a tendency to be suspicious of new things ... What would you suggest that I read of yours to get a sense of who you are as a writer, and perhaps even be hungry for more?

PFH: Well, we're starting from the same place... Try Great North Road. One of the main characters Sid, is a detective, an everyman trying to do his job and raise a family with minimum fuss in a very complex world.

Michael Rowe: How does he come up with the names of future tech in his Pandora Star series? The names are just so evocative.

PFH: Names can be either abbreviations, or the German method of shoving words together to make new ones. I try and make them as applicable as possible, so the name hints at function.

Margaret Shooshani: Beyond the rich world-building, I really love that you have brought back some of my favorites in other stories. Any hope of Ozzy or Nigel focused novels? I'd love to read a prequel or more back stories featuring them and the Commonwealth.

PFH: No plans currently. After seven books, I'm taking a break from the Commonwealth. I'm not sure I'll ever write prequels, though the Void books did revisit earlier times, but if I develop a plot idea which fits the Commonwealth, I'll be happy to go back there.

Jossh Spurlock: Have you ever thought about returning back to the Fallen Dragon universe? I was always fascinated with the colonies pods sent through a one way wormhole in them. Love your books can't wait for the last salvation book and to ones after that.

PFH: Thank you, Jossh. I did leave several openings in Fallen Dragon to go back there. I just haven't got round to it yet. Maybe one day, but don't hold your breath.

Heather Prince: When you are starting a new series, do you plan the entire thing out? Or do you take it one book at a time?

PFH: I'm a plotter. Given the size of most books I write, I have to know I can end it to my satisfaction. So a trilogy will have a loose outline before I start the first book. Then when the first is finished, I can move on to a more detailed outline for book two, and so on.

Heather Prince: How did you feel about Night's Dawn being split up into 6 books initially?

PFH: It was a commercial/ practical decision. That was the only way the publisher could see to get them out there, and I accepted that logic. In Italy it was released as twelve books.

Heather Prince: Do you consider your work more hard sci-fi or space opera?

PFH: I think it's a bit of a balance between the two. They are space opera, but with the science as real as possible.

Heather Prince: Do you find writing easier now that you have written so many series? Or is it harder to come up with new ideas?

PFH: Coming up with new ideas is always the tricky part, though thankfully I haven't run out yet. I'd like to say writing gets easier the more you've written, but I haven't found that. If anything I'm getting more critical about what I've written.

John Grayshaw: Who are some of the science fiction writers who inspired you as you discovered the genre?

PFH: This was back in the 70's, when the genre wasn't so expansive, so it was mainly the 'classics' of that time: Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein, Simak, EE Doc Smith. Then into the early 80's with Niven, McCaffrey, and May. Nowadays my TBR pile is just ridiculous.

John Grayshaw: Who are some science fiction writers you are friends with? How have these relationships influenced your writing?

PFH: I know quite a lot of the UK writers through conventions and author events, some of them for nearly 30 years. The main problem with reading SF, especially by people you know, is trying not to be influenced by their style and ideas.

John Grayshaw: Do you enjoy going to science fiction conventions? Have any fun stories from going to them?

PFH: I do enjoy them. I don't get to as many these days as family time comes first. At the 1996 worldcon Forrest Ackerman asked me if I was the Peter Hamilton that edited the Scottish SF magazine Nebula (the last edition came out in 1959, a year before I was born) I didn't know if I was amused or offended. But Forrest was a nice guy.

John Grayshaw: One of your strengths is giving us multiple characters offering a variety of viewpoints. But how do you decide on the different voices that will be necessary to tell the story?

PFH: There's no set rule for this. If one story line is larger than others I often tell it from several viewpoints, in which case it's the ones that 'feel' right to me personally, especially when that gives me the chance to present both sides of the argument. I will try for a character that isn't necessarily one you'd expect to be telling the story.

John Grayshaw: What are your hobbies other than writing?

PFH: At the moment, gardening. During lockdown I've been building a long stone wall in our garden, which is on a steep slope. The wall helps to give us a level section of lawn.

John Grayshaw: Do you have a writing routine that you stick with?

PFH: Generally, in the morning I'll go over what was written the day before, which brings me back to the point I stopped, so in the afternoon I'll carry on from that to write a new section. I don't set myself a daily word rate, but I'll typically do between one and two thousand fresh words a day. This can be longer as the deadline approaches.

John Grayshaw: What are you working on now?

PFH: Just finished proofreading the Saints of Salvation. Proofreading is something every writer hates, so I'm now trying to get a new set of notes into shape.

L Bruce Gray: The simplest question is often the best - "What's Next?"

PFH: More far future space opera. Different universe than before -I think.