

ODE Response to Accusations By Erin Cairns

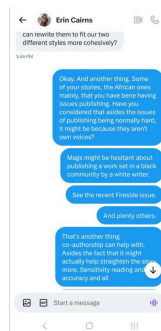
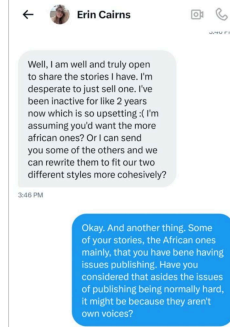
So there's been allegations of misconduct, and unethical, generally bad behaviour, against me by Erin Cairns.

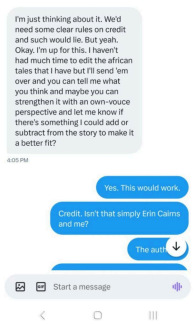
Erin Cairns, a writer published a report which you can see [here](#), accusing me of "unethical behaviour and bad faith dealings". Also, the 78 page document included mostly screenshots of interactions we have had that are supposed to show those unethical behaviours. The first accusation in the report...

My name is Erin Cairns.

I am reporting Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki for unethical practices. He submitted a story entirely written by me into a black voices magazine without my name on the byline. He lied about who he knew and how well he knew them. He obfuscated information about publications and editors and manipulated me to such an extent that I still struggle to trust myself and others.

I submitted a story, written entirely by her, that's not true. It was a collaborative piece. She consented to it being collaborative, before and after. She was satisfied with my contributions and okay with me sending it out. I gave her updates, before, during and after.

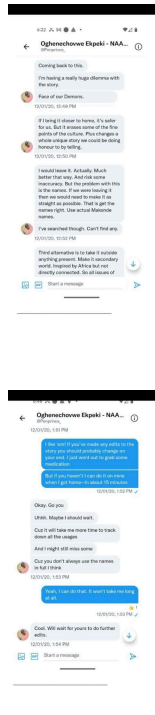




Note that she's fine, even excited about the idea of co-authorship. Happy to sell her stories, because they hadn't been making money for her. ERIN CONSENTED TO A CO-AUTHORSHIP. Notice the words "I am well and truly open to share the stories I have. I'm desperate to just sell one."

Erin was fine with my contributions, name change, settings, grounding the story regionally. These things are valid contributions which she consented to, accepted and was happy with. That constitutes a collaboration.





These are from Erin Cairns own screenshots on her document which show us deliberating on the story. The grounding and changes I suggested which were made. Which she was fine with. So it wasn't solely written by her. It had contributions from me, which we agreed on. That it was solely written by her, is just not true. After we dropped the story, she reached out to ask me for permission to send out her version without my contributions



Erin Cairns



July 27, 2023

Just letting you know-- I'm sending The Face of Our Demon to Flame Tree today, under my own name-- I'm sending the version I wrote first, with the names I chose. :)

2:16 PM

If I didn't add anything to the story, why is it a different version from what it was? What names was she removing that was different from what she chose? Is there an exact quantity of contributions to work that constitutes a collaboration. Far as I know, consent is all that's required. Even a name is a valid contribution. Like just the name of the collaborator. But I actually added things to the story, from her own account. A lot of this is in her own original document.

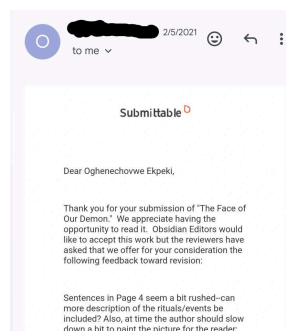
Lastly, it's not a "Black voices magazine". The tag line of the magazine literally says African Diaspora.

Literature & Arts
in the African Diaspora

Black, African, and African Diaspora creatives globally.

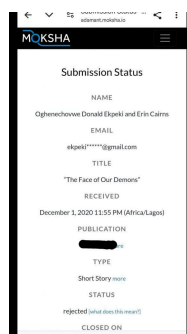
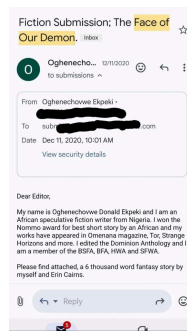
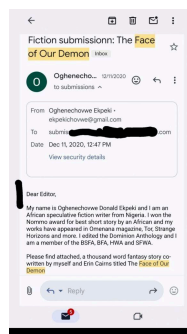
It's not a Black voices magazine (alone). It caters to Africans and African diasporans. So there was no malfeasance there. She was eligible to be on the mag. None of what Erin has said so far has been accurate. I haven't submitted work written entirely by her to a Black voices magazine. All wrong.

As for her name not being on the bi-line, even if that were true (which it isn't), it would not be theft, or even an attempt at theft, just an oversight, unless there was an intention to eventually publish it without her name on the bi-line. But I informed the editors (again) the exact day the story was accepted. You can see my email there. You can also see me discussing changes about the work with the editor, in her own screenshot. The editor knew there was a collaborator who was Erin. So how could it have been possible to have an intention to steal?



her about something she already knew and let it go on. She never engages with that. Then or now. That statement is in her screenshots and she doesn't address it too. Just slides over it like it's not there. Ignores it because it doesn't fit that narrative that characterizes me as a thief. I send her the document before this, same document I sent the mag, and follow up with this to let her know. She doesn't acknowledge any of this.

Let me show you something else. I sent this story to several other more prestigious, paying venues. See how I sent it...

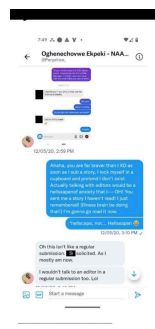


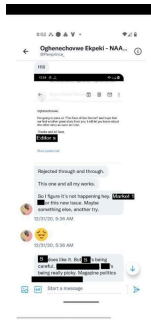
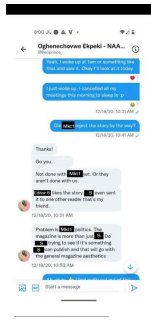
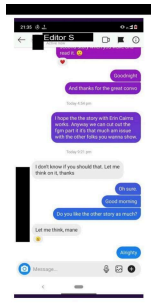
If I sent it to these prestigious, paying mags with her name on the bi-line and didn't try to steal the story, why would I then try to do so with the mag that doesn't pay? Then offer to personally pay her from my own personal funds and story sale? I was losing by her publishing there. What kind of thief loses from the theft, then pays the victim from their own legitimately earned funds? The answer is...not a thief, but someone trying to help.

Did I fail to tell the magazine while submitting the story? No, I didn't. I initially thought I did, but I didn't even. If you check my chat with Erin, you see where I corrected that impression. The other picture shows I and the editor chatting about Erin so they knew she was involved in the work. I also informed the magazine of the work being co-authored again, ON THE VERY SAME DAY (02/05/2021) the story was accepted. This is all in addition to sending it with her name as I did each time. So I couldn't have stolen the work, couldn't have even attempted to steal the work, when they knew who the co-author was. Their name was in the story. I informed them again after it was accepted because I thought I didn't. But I did again to double check, sent them Erin's bio and information. She knew this, but still went ahead to claim I submitted a story authored entirely by her without her name on the bi-line. Both are not true.

What Erin Cairns has been carrying around is not correct or factual. This did not happen. Her claims are not accurate. They are wrong.

If you check, from Erin's own screenshots, in her document, I kept her in the loop, informed her and updated her of the submissions, before, during and after.



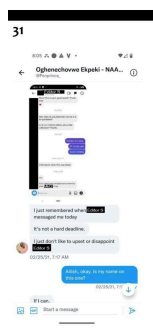


Could I have communicated better? Of course. You always can. But you must remember that we are both disabled, chronically ill people. And one of them, me, lives in way worse conditions, in the poverty capital of the world, with little to no access to health care. If anything there's a human being who is less than perfect, doing the best he can, which could yet be better. Not malfeasance or lack of ethics, or malice or an attempt at theft. There was a lot of miscommunication and misunderstandings and assumptions on both

sides from two people in not great situations. But one of us is being automatically saddled with malice and ill intention, called a thief and fraudster.

Another thing to clarify, the market in question, where the story was accepted, is a non paying market. So what motive did I have to steal a story that I wasn't going to get anything from. At this point I was already selling stories to paying markets. In the end, my aims genuinely, were to help Erin get published.

Remember when she said she was desperate to have something out? That's what I was trying to help happen at this point. I had nothing to gain from even this collaboration at this point. I even offered to split my own sale to a paying market with her, so it was a win win. She gets published, and got paid. I was willing to lose money, to earn less, to see her happiness complete.



Communication got wonky at a point and there were misunderstandings. But that's just being human.

We have never met or spoken outside of emails or twitter DMs. My first interaction with Ekpeki was in late 2018 when I posted on twitter that I had won a writing award. We interacted on twitter for a while, exchanging stories for critique which I had done many times before. But this gradually shifted into me editing stories, which at the time I did not know was for his co-edited anthology, **Anthology D**. When he told me a story I'd worked on was going to be in the anthology, I questioned him about what I'd been doing. He told me that for my help and work, my name would be in the acknowledgments of the book.

A bunch of things are not correct about these claims. She did not edit stories, not the plural which were for the anthology. She edited one story, mine, which appeared on it. How can I acknowledge you in a book that's not mine, for one story I have in it? Do people give credits for one story being copy edited, in the whole book? I do not recall promising this.

When the book was released, I bought a copy, and my name was nowhere to be found. Those messages about credit in **Anthology D** were sent from a twitter account which later that year was suspended for what he told me was political statements. He resumed contact with a new twitter account in 2020. I also had started a new twitter account I had been planning on using to promote my writing and focus more on the writing community. ¹

None of the work I did for Ekpeki has ever been publicly acknowledged. The extent has been

Where would I have acknowledged the copy editing? Is it in front of my story? On the title? Erin Cairns helped copy edit this story? It was copy editing, not a co-authorship. We didn't agree on a co-authorship. If that's what Erin Cairns wanted, she never communicated it. We always used the word editing with the work she did for me. And I've never seen a copy editor of one story credited in an anthology.

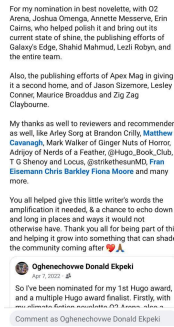
planning on using to promote my writing and focus more on the writing community. ¹

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None of the work I did for Ekpeki has ever been publicly acknowledged. The extent has been that he included my name in a 'writer's boost' once or twice (a tweet with a list of writers usernames). This was fine-ish. It was a lot of work, it was hard work, and sometimes it was work I did not believe in, but there were no contracts. I knew I should say no when it became clear I wasn't going to get credit, but I didn't. I tried once, but he sent me a story anyway, and I did it. By that point it felt like a firmer 'no' was going to cost me a connection in the writing world I had already poured a ton of time and work into.

Now this is confusing, and contradictory. None of the work she ever did was publicly acknowledged. But also, I included her name in a writer's boost once or twice. Now I have to ask, how many times am I supposed to include it in a writer's boost. And is that not public? How else would I publicly acknowledge her contributions. It wasn't a co-authorship, again. So it can't have been a bi-line. Not that it couldn't have been if she asked. But she didn't. Never did. It seems to me that Erin Cairns had expectations she didn't communicate. This is called miscommunication, which again, is what this is at worst, not violation of ethics. Oh and....





“It was a lot of work, it was hard work”. For which I offered to pay her repeatedly. By her own admission. This is from her own document. Yes i offered as time went on, and far past when she did the work, because that's how payment for writing comes. Always a while after. If you sell stories, you know this. Nothing odd about that.

I would like to note that as time went on, he started to offer payment, especially as he started to rise in popularity, but I always refused. In this exchange I missed that he'd offered payment again.²³ I would have refused again if I had seen it. I refused it again when next he offered it. Money never exchanged hands. Whenever he offered it, it was always far past the time I'd done the work and that always felt odd to me. So I insisted he also worked hard on the stories he sent me and declined the sudden offers of payment again and again.

For the next 2 months I was engaged with health concerns, and he then contacted me on February 25th ²⁷ to tell me that the story “the Mask of Our Demon” had been accepted²⁶

So get this. I offered her money, she refused. I shouted her out online and thanked her publicly, but it wasn't public enough. She never asked for a bi-line. So how exactly was I deficient in appreciating her?? How did I use her? I offered money for her work. I shouted out to her.

There's a number of things I want to respond to.

Much later, in 2021 he said: “I really wish you hadn’t gone off the radar around when I was doing **Anthology D**,” as a way to say he would have published my work in that anthology. But I was on the radar, editing a story for **Anthology D**. I did not submit to the call (though I had been sent the submissions link by a friend, and did not know I was at that time editing a story in said anthology) because the submissions guidelines said “white South Africans need not apply,” and I am a white South African.

He hadn’t been transparent with me about his involvement with **Anthology D** when it was being put together, even while I was editing for it. And when I asked about the other stories I was critiquing or editing for him, he would give me vague answers like he wanted it to be a pleasant surprise. ³

When the conversation about co-authoring began², I assumed maybe he was asking me if I would like to put a story in a new anthology.⁴

There’s a lot of insinuations here and assumptions. Co-authoring means co-authoring, not that. The anthology said “white South Africans need not apply”. It wasn’t my anthology. I was brought in to co-edit. I didn’t make the rules.

In the same conversation he brought up the issues of some of my stories perhaps not being publishable because they are told in an African style.⁸ I am a white South African, and moved to America with my parents when I was young. What he was saying made me feel uncomfortable, but I explained the red flags away to myself as this was justifying good changes and contributions he could make to a manuscript.⁹

But it embedded itself in my consciousness as a rebuke, that I should not have written these stories and that they did not belong to me.

Exactly. I said “perhaps”. I had some ideas and theories about them at the time, some of which may have been wrong. But there’s nothing wrong with being wrong or sharing theories. If I didn’t it would have been said I wasn’t transparent or offering any value. It was not a rebuke. I was trying to help by sharing my thoughts, wrong or right. The suggestion to collaborate and ground the story in a culture and collaborate came out of that need to help. It also came out of certain convos we had. For one thing, she mentioned once feeling like she stole an African identity because she published a story

in a name people would assume was a Black person's especially with the content of the story and other things

[REDACTED] wanted to add me to a 'black authors' piece they were doing, and it was the first inkling I had that everyone thought I was black. I quickly disabused them, but it was super unpleasant experience and now I feel like I've done some sort of blackface. My only saving grace is that no one knows [REDACTED] is Erin Cairns, and I guess that's the way it's going to be from now till the grave.



5:36 PM

Dear

That might be problematic.

I felt co-authoring a story in an actual culture the co-author was also from would make it better. Hence the name changes in the story. Perhaps I was wrong. But this does not make me a thief, any more than it makes her. She also talked about a feeling of displacement and being estranged from a South African, and African identity. I encouraged her to join the African Speculative Fiction Society and did my best to make her feel welcome as you can see from these interactions



Erin Cairns



Oh! I'm glad you enjoyed the read! :) It's nice to hear some good comments after so much rejection. I just have lived so long in america, I went to highschool and college here and i just feel like I don't have any connection to anyone or anything in either SA or the US. I'm feel like I've dissociated completely from any... Objective identity?

I still have family in SA, but they came to visit recently and I just had a big shock of just how different we were.

10:00 PM

Well it's your your heritage. You can't lose it.

Meanwhile for the purpose of asfs, you qualify.

africansfs.com/about/join

So join up. 🍌🍌🍌



We want you



Start a message





Erin Cairns



The second story. Reminds me of why I loved your writing.

It has that hardness. That musical quality to the magic and writing generally.

But you were right. It's all over the place.

9:51 PM

Why did you say you are not really South African anymore?

9:55 PM

Anyway..



WHO IS AFRICAN



Start a message





Erin Cairns



So why the worries

Sense of displacement?

7:32 PM

I am? Yeah. Big time sense of displacement.

I have no idea where I belong now :/



7:32 PM

You are actually qualified to enter for the Nommo award and join the African speculative fiction society

And a couple other things.

Like be in my anthology. Holy s*** I could have published you.

Can I call you



7:33 PM



Start a message





Erin Cairns



could have published you.

Can I call you sis?

7:33 PM

Huh! I should get on that probably... Ahaha XD whatttt? I mean sure XD I honestly thought there was a clause in the submission clause about white South Africans not subbing?

7:35 PM

I'm getting you on it. You don't have a choice.

And chill with the displacement and judging yourself so harshly

You are African. And Nigeria too. I'm adopting you.

And American.



Start a message





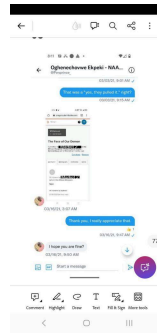
These were also part of the reasons for the idea of co-authorship. In fact that was the only reason, at the point where it was going to a non-paying mag and I was literally losing money to see that happen. So what? It's unethical to offer someone money repeatedly and to share the payment for your own work, while doing the unpaid labour of helping them submit the story they said they were desperate to sell?

Under his direction, I search-replaced the names in my story to names that he said would be better¹² and I sent the manuscript to him to make the other changes. [I found out much later that he'd made no changes.³²] I had started to get a bad feeling. The timing between his messages was strange and I thought once or twice he'd sent a story out while we were still discussing them.

She agrees to collaborate. Then she followed my directions and we made alterations to the story. She agreed to this, did this herself, then later claims it's not a collaboration. Is there a number of words or other contributions that specifically make a work a collaboration?

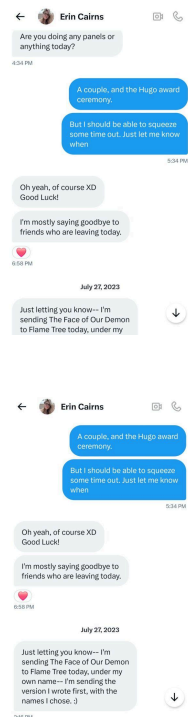
I think there was a lot of assumptions from, a lot of misunderstanding and miscommunication on both sides, a lot on me, because I am handling a lot, while working and living in terrible conditions, while being chronically ill. It's the curse of being poor and disabled and in Nigeria. And I apologize for the pain that caused. But I did not try to steal from Erin. She knew what she was getting into and getting from it. She consented to it, was excited about it and taking the lead some of the time. The mag knew she was a co-author. They had her bi-line from me, from the beginning, and then again. I am a flawed, human being who makes mistakes, like anyone else. I still remember a Black exclusive mag publishing an author's story without even sending an acceptance or a contract. This has happened with multiple mags. These things happen and are brushed off as mistakes. Imagine if they were accused of theft and hounded out of existence then. And they have a dozen or so staff. There's just me, from Nigeria, doing what I can. Why can't I get cut the same slack? Your favourite editors make mistakes. And none is operating from the conditions I am.

There was miscommunication and misunderstandings, for which I apologise for my role in. I pulled the story when she asked.



After she pulled it, I had no idea there were any issues or thoughts or attempted theft. She continued to interact with me amicably. She reached out to me, at the Chicago WorldCon, for us to try to meet. If I had any idea she was this unhappy with how things went, I'd have tried to straighten things out. But she didn't talk to me about it. She talked to everybody but me. And I was busy trying not to die.





Like I said before. Nearly all the claims she made are incorrect.

1. It wasn't a Black, own voices magazine.
2. It wasn't sent out without her name on the bi-line.
3. I repeatedly acknowledged her work publicly and offered her money as it came.
4. She didn't communicate anything else she deserves or whatever and I failed to provide it.

The story was never published. It was a collaboration she consented and agreed to, even if she expected more than I delivered. There was miscommunication and misunderstandings. We were both chronically ill and one of us was operating from way worse conditions. We make a lot of claim to diversity and inclusion in this industry. But if the minute any Is aren't dotted and Ts aren't crossed and people don't operate up to the optimum standards and values of the industry it's down with their heads, we are basically telling people like me who struggle, that we aren't welcome. A lot of us are neuro divergent. I am. And we don't communicate in the ways that others may. It's easy to label

us difficult and manipulative. But who does that help? I forget a lot of things because I am sick and overworked, not because I am evil.

I have paid out tens of thousands of dollars to Black and African writers across Africa, the diaspora and rest of the world. Some of it my personal funds earned from my work, converting from the naira and paying in dollars, pounds, euros, etc. I donated about \$1500 to the African Speculative Fiction Society. Why would I give money to organizations that don't ask me, then withhold money from people that do? I gave out another \$500 of my personal funds in the Emeka Walter Dinjos Memorial Award For Disability, which I founded. In that award I gave out more than I was supposed to. I got extra sponsorship and gave extra \$50 to the finalists even though they wasn't originally announced or planned. I also gave out more than the prize money in one of the categories that had two winners. Instead of them splitting the category prize money or \$250, I made it a round figure or \$300 so they could get 150 each. It's not a fortune in that clime, but it is in mine. And this was personal funds from money I earned, not crowfunded. The sponsorship I got for the award was \$200. \$550 of it was my personal funds. Why would I give money to people who I don't personally know and not to someone who helped me, if they asked? I practically begged Erin Cairns to take my money severally, she said no. How am I withholding money from people and also begging the exact same people to take money from me? I was also loaning out thousands of dollars of my money to writers with no interest. I'm giving out money to writers, more than I should, more than I am obligated to. How can I withhold what they deserve or even ask at the same time? I don't. I've even hand delivered money to writers I edited, in their personal homes when they didn't have access to payment systems like Paypal. And hand delivered books to them when delivery systems didn't do the job.

I do all this, not because I'm rich, or it's easy, but because I believe in us growing together, as a community. I have edited/published over a hundred and twenty writers in 5 anthologies since 2020, and I am working from a different place from most of you. A place of darkness literally, and desperation. The short story sales that feel negligible to many of you are how I live, like physically keep my life in my body. I eat when I sell stories, purchase my meds, when I sell stories. Without that, I die. And this is not a metaphor, or a guilt trip. This probably won't matter anyway. I've been cancelled, my thread sniped, and I'm on death row now, just waiting to go. I just want to say that despite everything, I love this work, whether anyone appreciates it or not. It is worth my life.

My health is very fragile. Mental and physical. I have life threatening conditions. That is to say, all this has been very difficult for me. I've been gravely ill since this broke. I've been besieged and attacked relentlessly by the white supremacist trolls that have been doing so for years. Just explaining why it's taking me a while to respond and it might take

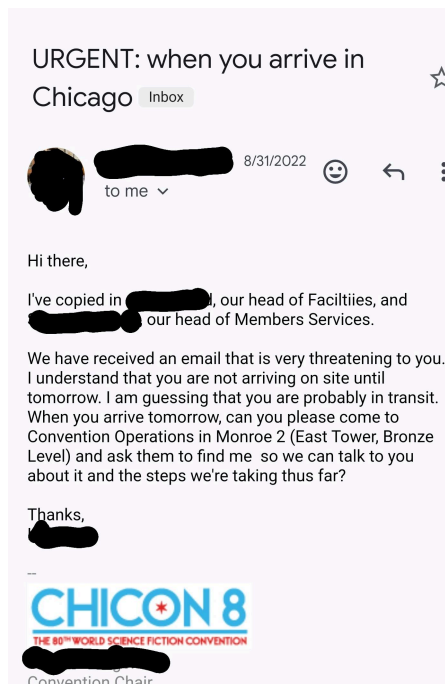
me more to respond to anything further. I would appreciate as much grace as is given to any human being. In Erin's post she also said this...

I believe his preemptive defense in case I or anyone else ever came forward is that he is beset by racist trolls that refuse to believe he writes his own work.
Those trolls and their comments are awful. Their rhetoric is despicable, and their actions inexcusable. I personally believe Ekpeki uses them at least to some extent as a smokescreen

9

This is like saying I'm playing the race card and using my marginalisation to my advantage. Using something dangerous, that can kill me, to my advantage? What kind of advantage would that be?

The racist trolls Erin Cairns mentioned here are not trolls but white supremacist cultists. They harass people to suicide, dox, swat people and generally carry out behaviour that borders on terrorism. They are extremely dangerous and have been hounding me and some other people I know, for years. They are being investigated by authorities in the US, and have been responsible for some deaths. They are a life threatening danger and when I was at the Chicago WorldCon they sent death and bomb threats to the event. Threats that were credible enough for the WorldCon body to offer to provide security to



follow me around at the event.

It was also reported here <https://file770.com/chicon-8-reveals-anonymous-death-threats-were-made-against-two-program-participants/>

Several other journalists who merely reported this and haven't even been years long targets were harassed so badly and dangerously, they had to back off.

Their harassment, especially in the wake of all these accusations has been horrendously bad for my already fragile health and is life threatening. To suggest that I am using this as a smokescreen or as a defence for something like this is a really really unfair, and too harsh characterization of me, and imputing more malice on my actions than is reasonable.