

Sue Burke, Writer in Residence

by Bob Shamo

Confident, focused, purposeful? Yes, that is Sue's manner, but also warm and enthused as she relates how she and her husband, Jerry, found their way to Park Tower from Spain. And positively glowing as we engaged on her work as a writer of the award-winning science fiction novel, *Semiosis*, and its recently-released sequel, *Interference*.

Like all good stories, we began at the beginning. Sue grew up in Milwaukee, WI and lived for a time in Austin, TX. For so long as she can remember, she wanted to be a writer. Her first job was reporting for her local newspaper while still a teenager. Since then, she has continued to report and in addition to edit, freelance, write essays, haiku and poetry. Sci-fi was a favorite subject, and the first of her 30+ short stories appeared in 1995.

Even before they married, Sue and Jerry had wanted to live abroad, experience that culture as fully as possible, and immerse themselves in the language of the country. So when the opportunity presented itself in 1999, they moved to Madrid, Spain.

For a time, Sue taught ESL classes (English as a second language) to Spanish teenagers. And to become fluent themselves, she and Jerry attended eight years of language classes – helped along by TV and everyday social interactions.

Meanwhile, she never missed a beat in terms of her own work. Sue continued writing in her accustomed genres, and in English. But encouraged by that intensive language study, she added translations to her portfolio, and in the years that followed rendered a variety of Spanish texts into English. Among the most widely read are her translations of classic Medieval and Renaissance works.

In 2016, after seventeen years abroad, Sue and Jerry moved back to the States. The European economy was sluggish, a reality both for Jerry who works in IT and for writers who, like Sue, appreciate being paid for their work! With roots and family still in the Midwest, they decided to return and live in Chicago.



Which brings us to Sue's current projects. They are many, but the ones she invests the most time in nowadays are novels. *Semiosis* has been nominated for several awards and made *Forbes* list, *Best Science Fiction Books of 2018-19*. Its sequel, *Interference*, was published just this past October. They are her first novels; others are in the works.

Semiosis is a word linguists use to describe the relationship between language and behavior. These two sci-fi novels introduce and dramatize the challenge of semiosis on a fierce new planet where humans must learn to communicate with plants, the dominant life form that enslave animals and aim to do the same with these pioneers from Earth. Read the shaded box!

As you might guess from the subject matter, Sue is fascinated with plants and has a gorgeous array in her living room. And she has made an interesting offer: **To exchange house plant care with other Park Tower residents who, like her, sometimes go on vacation. Email her at sue@sue.burke.name**

Sue likes to write at home. Her schedule depends a lot on publication deadlines, so a typical day might see her laying down 1000 new words, revising an earlier chapter, or even making a midcourse correction in the flow of a book. "It's really hard work," she says, "but it's what I love more than anything else in the whole world!"

Recent Review of *Semiosis*

Semiosis is a multi-generational story that takes place over the course of many years, following a group of human colonists who have traveled light years from Earth to settle on a planet they dubbed Pax. The first pioneers, made up of mostly young scientists and activists who were saddened by the plight of their polluted and war-torn world, hoped to start over and establish a peaceful society on this newly discovered planet. However, they were wholly unprepared for the alien environment that awaited them, nor did they anticipate Pax's bizarre flora and fauna and the surprising ways they interacted with their surroundings ...

Despite the settlers' lofty goals to live in harmony with the land, Pax's plants and animals behaved in strange and unpredictable ways, causing the humans to adjust and alter their game plans on the fly. With every new generation also came new challenges, both biological and social ... Society adapted to the planet, and Pax adapted in turn.

This review is from [BiblioSanctum](https://us.macmillan.com/series/semiosisduology), a book blog for speculative fiction. *Semiosis* and *Interference* are published by Tor Books (specializing in science fiction) and can be purchased from local bookstores and online booksellers. Samples and audio excerpts are available at ..

<https://us.macmillan.com/series/semiosisduology>



Having learned about our building from a friend, Sue and Jerry now live in an 11-tier unit. Among their delights are the ever-present lake to the east, weather fronts moving in from the west .. and the many friendly residents who've made them feel welcome here at Park Tower.  