



Stories from
the Science of
CERN

AN ANTHOLOGY OF
SHORT STORIES OF
FICTION

Co-edited by
Connie Potter & Rob Appleby

IPPOG Thursday 30 November 2023
CONNIE POTTER

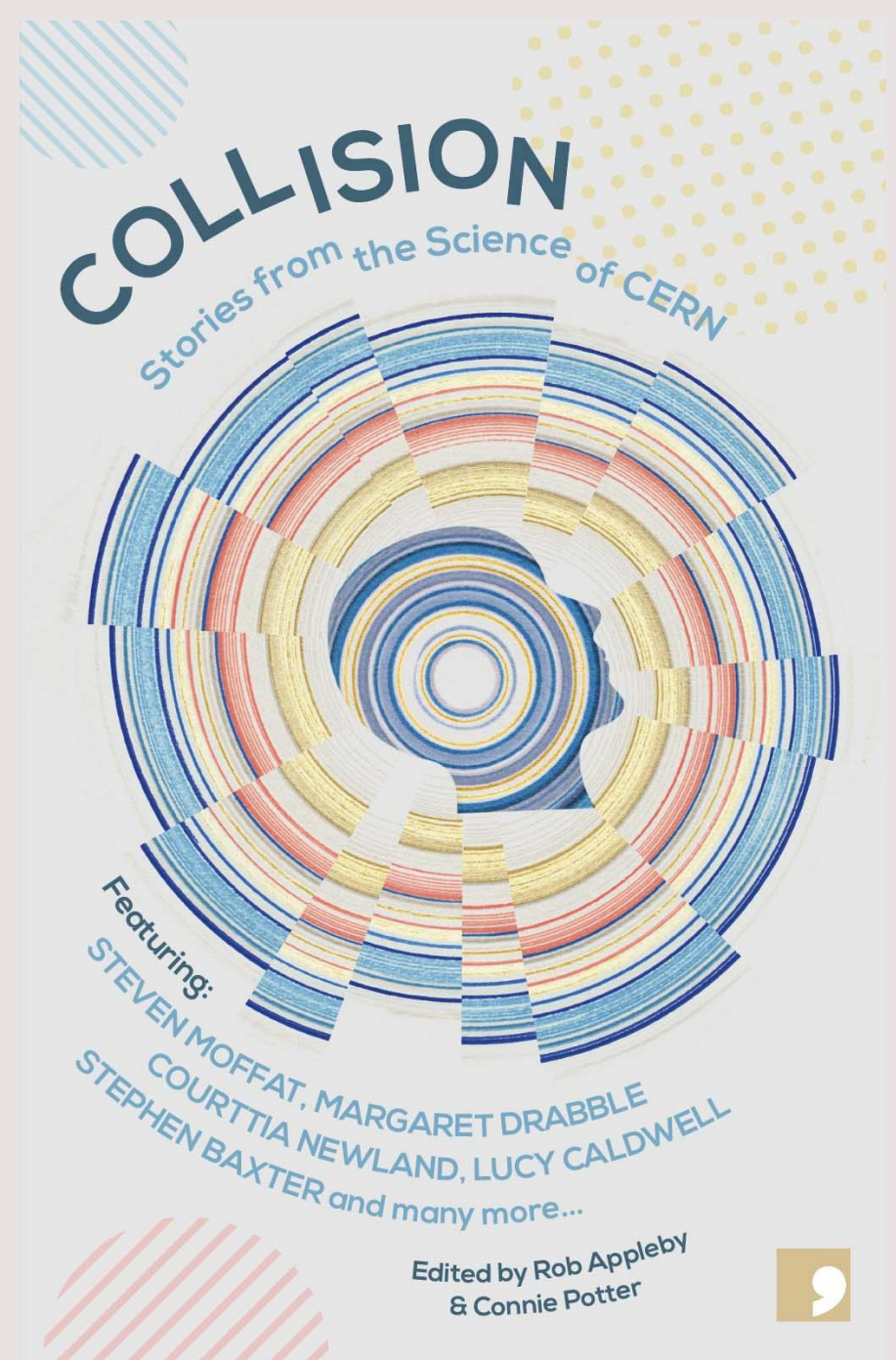
What is it?

A first-ever collection of short stories bringing established, professional authors together with members of the CERN community

Non-profit publisher Comma Press (<https://commapress.co.uk/>), managed by Ra Page, had already worked with Prof. Rob Appleby, Manchester University and head of UK-LHC, on a previous anthology on another topic

Rob secured a tiny grant, seduced Ra with the idea and then convinced Connie Potter/CERN to become part of the project

Started work in Spring of 2021 : team of Ra, Rob and Connie



The process.

Step One:

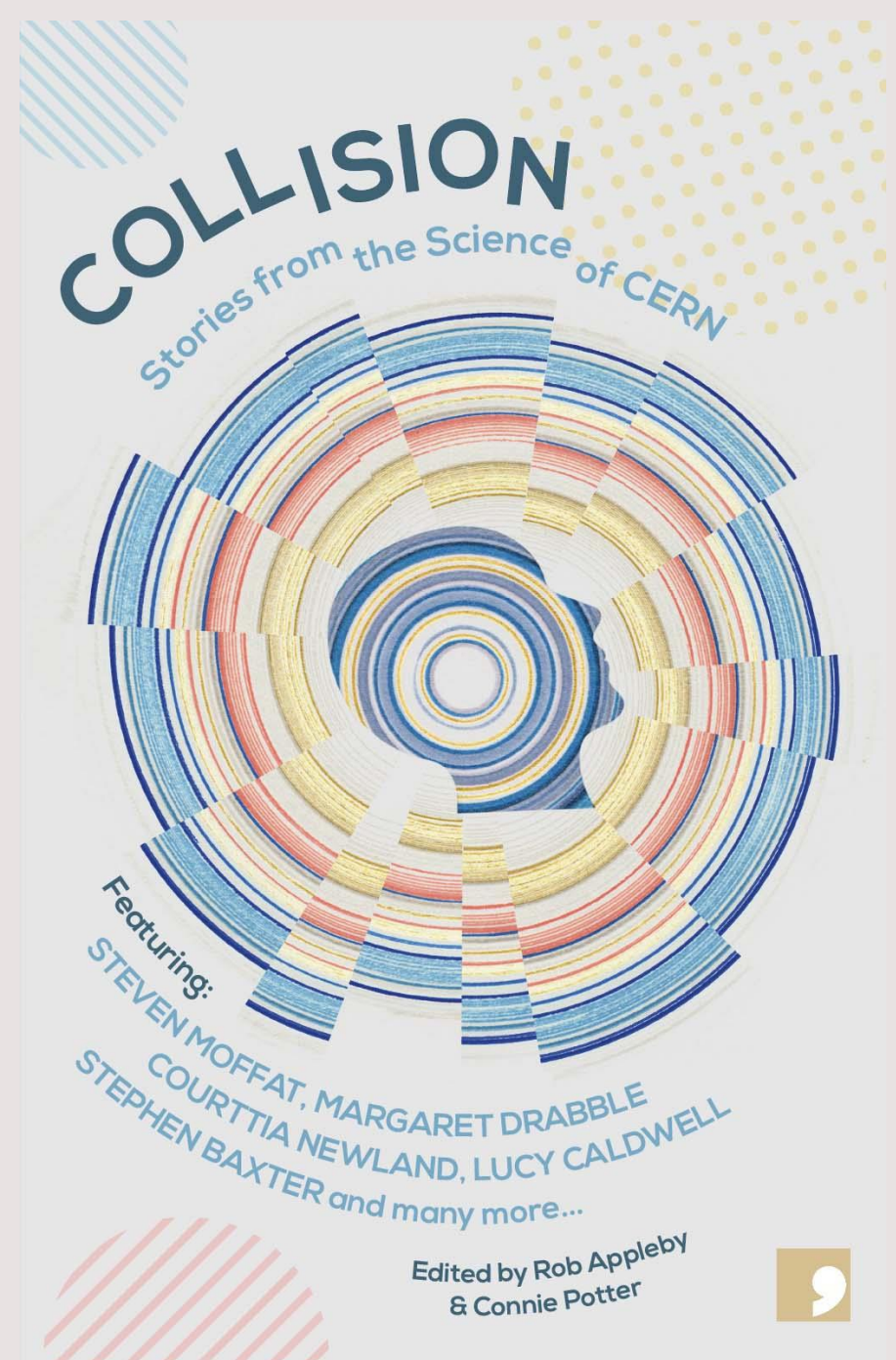
Email every single mailing list in the worldwide CERN technical and scientific community

'Come up with a very short pitch for a fictional short story, based on something you have worked on at CERN in the past, are working on now, or an original, interesting idea for the future'

Over 300 proposals received

Ra contacted select writers to propose the book idea to them.
Connie also reached out to a couple of Special Guests she had shown around CERN to see if they were interested

All said yes. Immediately.



The process... continued

Step Two:

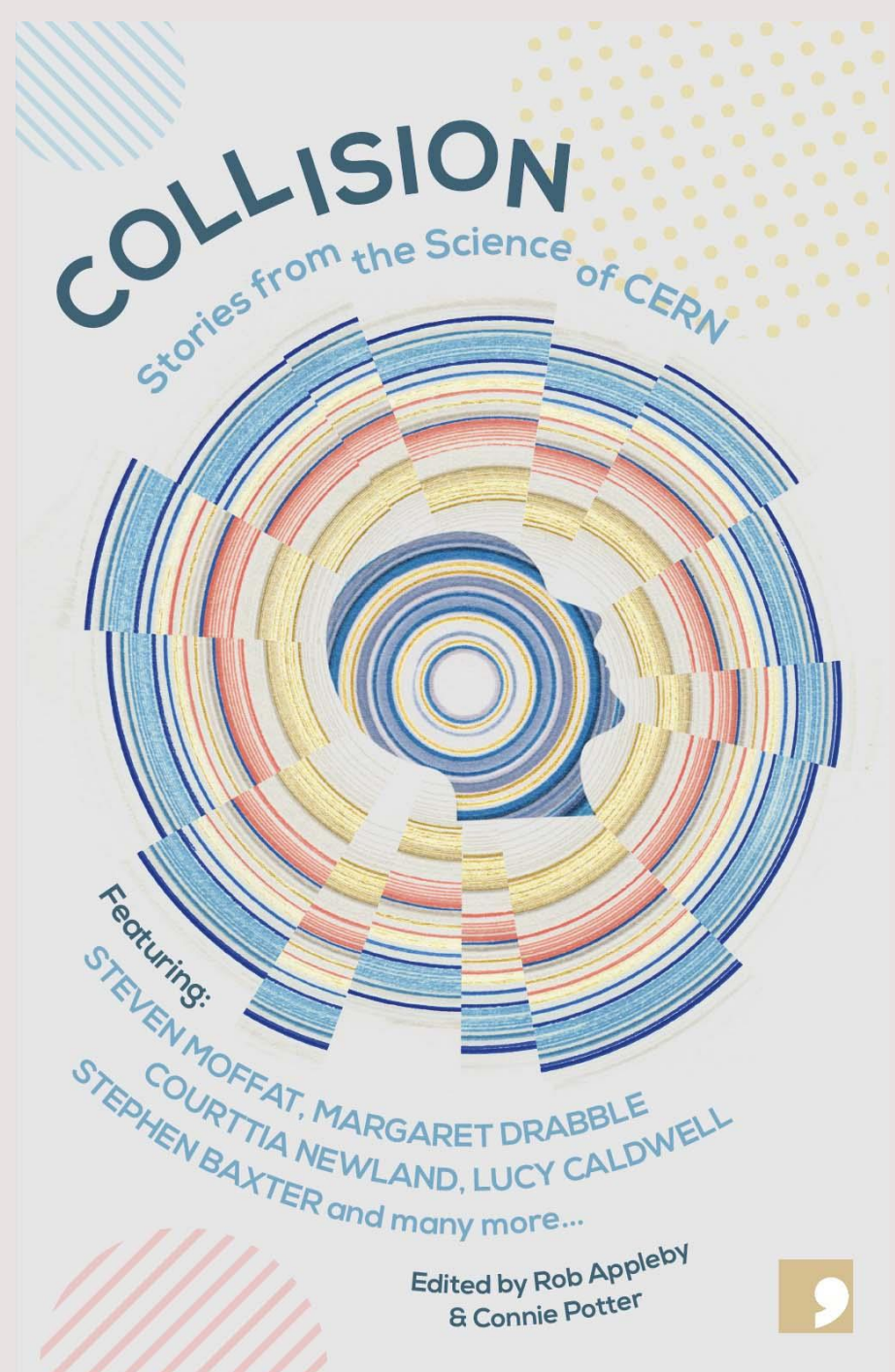
Spend weeks working on the proposals, shortening, editing, condensing into a central database

Step Three:

Share list with authors. Talk through with them some of the ones on their shortlist

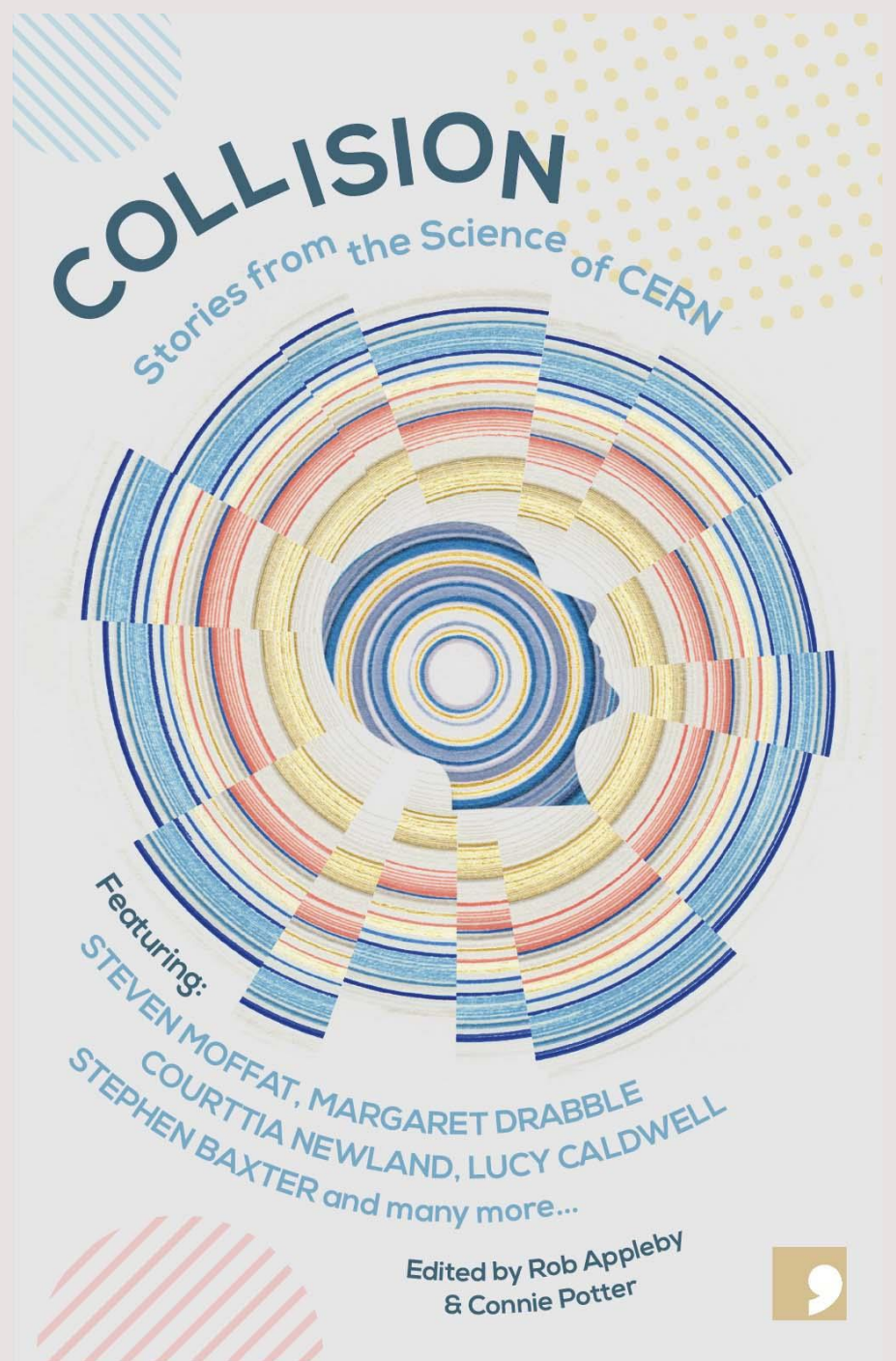
Step Four:

Inform submitters their idea had been chosen and connect author and submitter



The pairings

| | | |
|------------------|---|-------------------|
| Adam Marek | → | Andrea Giammanco |
| Bidisha | → | Kristin Lohwasser |
| Courttia Newland | → | Daniel Cervenkov |
| Ian Watson | → | Andrea Bersani |
| Lisa Luxx | → | Carole Weydert |
| Luan Goldie | → | Carole Weydert |
| Lucy Caldwell | → | Joe Haley |
| Margaret Drabble | → | Tessa Charles |
| Adam Marek | → | Andrea Giammanco |
| Pete Kalu | → | Michael Davis |
| Stephen Baxter | → | John Ellis |
| Steven Moffat | → | Pete Dong |
| Desiree Reynolds | → | Jens Vigen |
| Lilian Weezer | → | Gino Isidori |



The process... continued

By end 2021 almost all authors had met the scientists at least once for a long zoom meeting

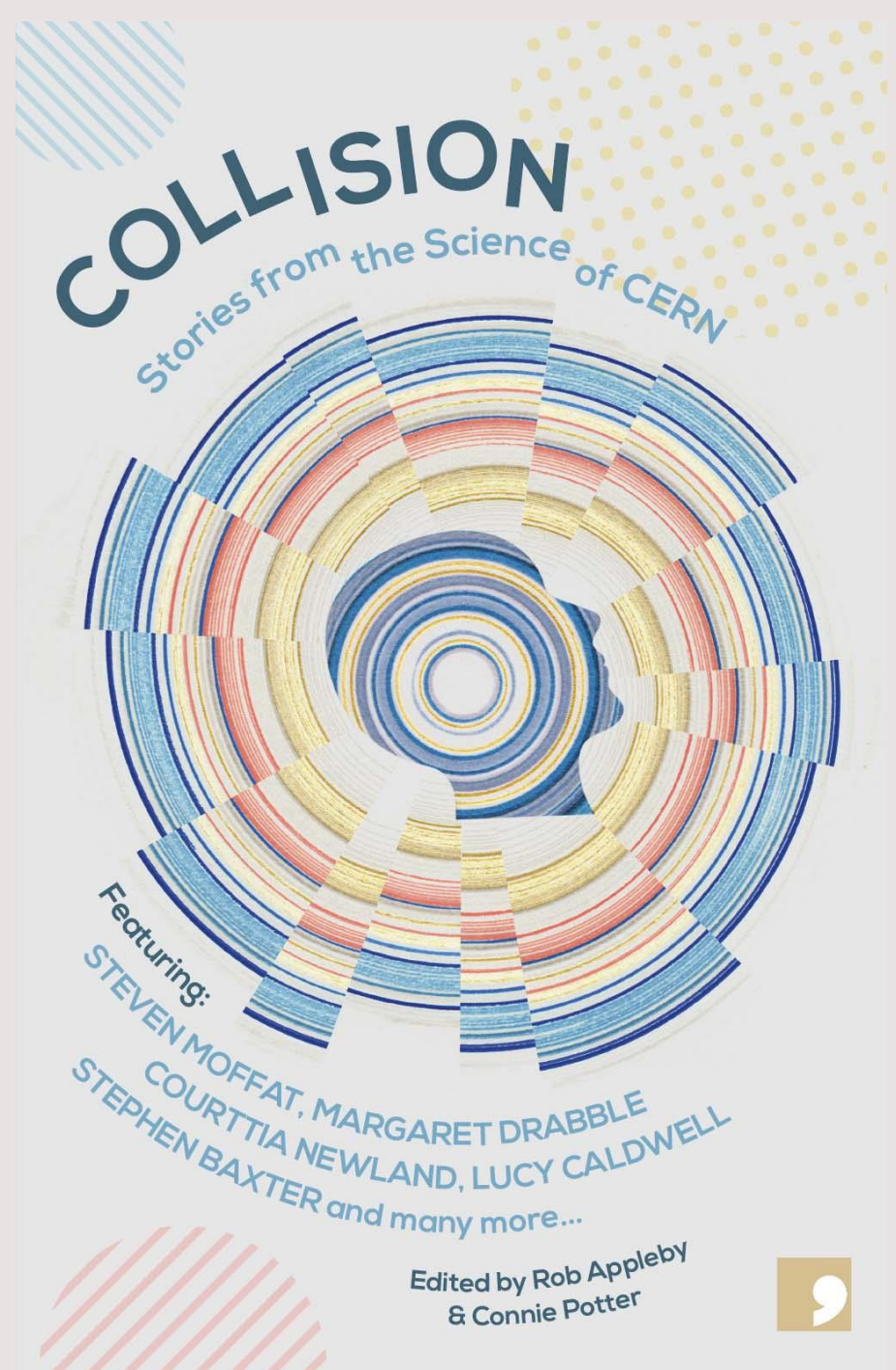
Mid March 2022 : Visit of a large fraction of the final authors to CERN over two days

Some writers adapted or even re-wrote their story after the visit

By end 2022 a first draft of the final book was ready with afterwords written by the scientific partners

'blurb' quotes for the book jacket were obtained from musicians Peter Gabriel and Wayne Coyne and Oscar-winning screenwriter Kenneth Lonergan

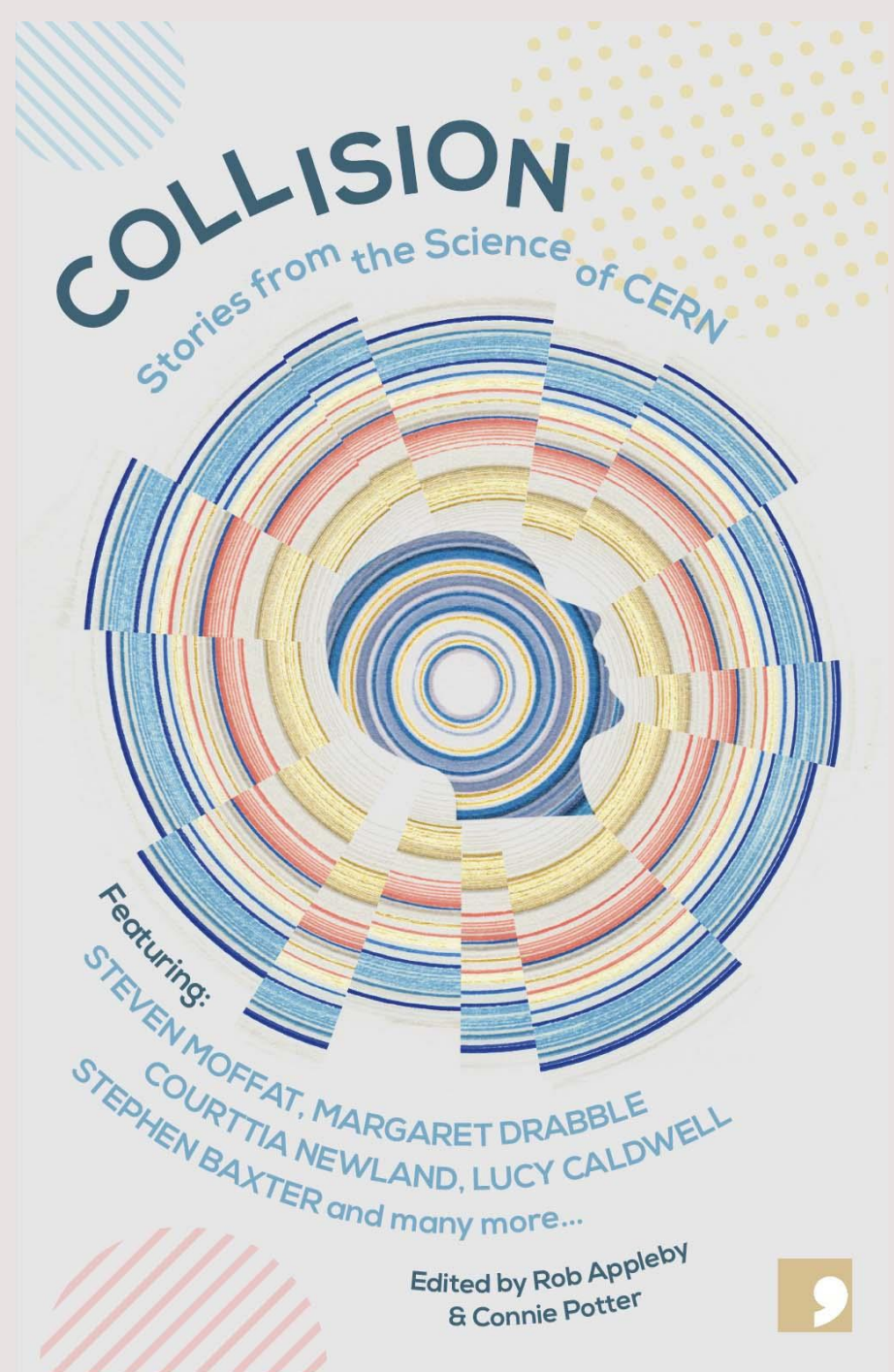
Book came out in March 2023



What happened next?

Since the book came out, there have been interviews, articles, reviews and live, in-person events and book readings in the UK and the US.

Here's a sample



Watch Adam Marek and Prof Rob Appleby talk about the project on BBC's [The Click](#)

Listen to Steven Moffat and Lucy Caldwell talk about the project with Samira Ahmed on BBC Radio 4's [Front Row](#)

Listen to Steven Moffat and Prof Peter Dong talk to Ian McMillan about 'Going Dark', reverse causality, the measurement problem and consciousness on Radio 3's [The Verb](#).

'Collision review: How CERN's stellar secrets became sci-fi gold' - [The New Scientist](#)

Featured in The Guardian's [best science fiction round-up](#)

Featured in The New Scientist's [best science fiction round-up of 2023](#)

Reviewed in [E&T magazine](#)

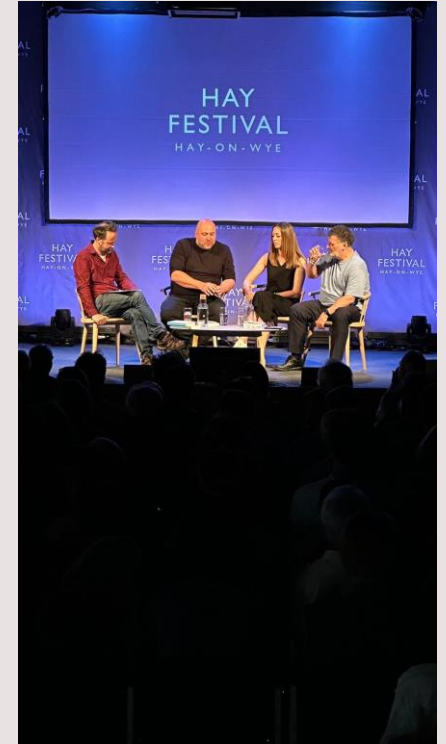
Reviewed in [The CERN Courier](#)



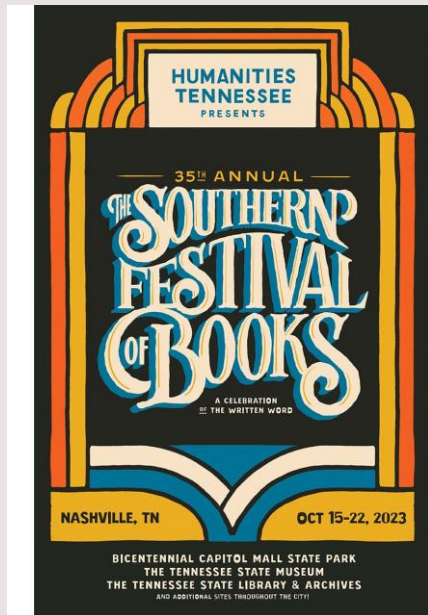
British Science Museum, London 'Late' event with writers Steven Moffat, Bidisha, Luan Goldie, Adam Marek Hosted by Rob Appleby and Connie Potter



Hay Festival in Wales panel with Lucy Caldwell, Steven Moffat, Ra Page and Rob Appleby



Panel at the **Bluedot Festival in Cheshire** with Courttia Newland, Lisa Luxx, Rob Appleby and Ra Page



Southern Festival of Books, Nashville, Tennessee Panel and Reading With Lucy Caldwell, Rob Appleby and Connie Potter

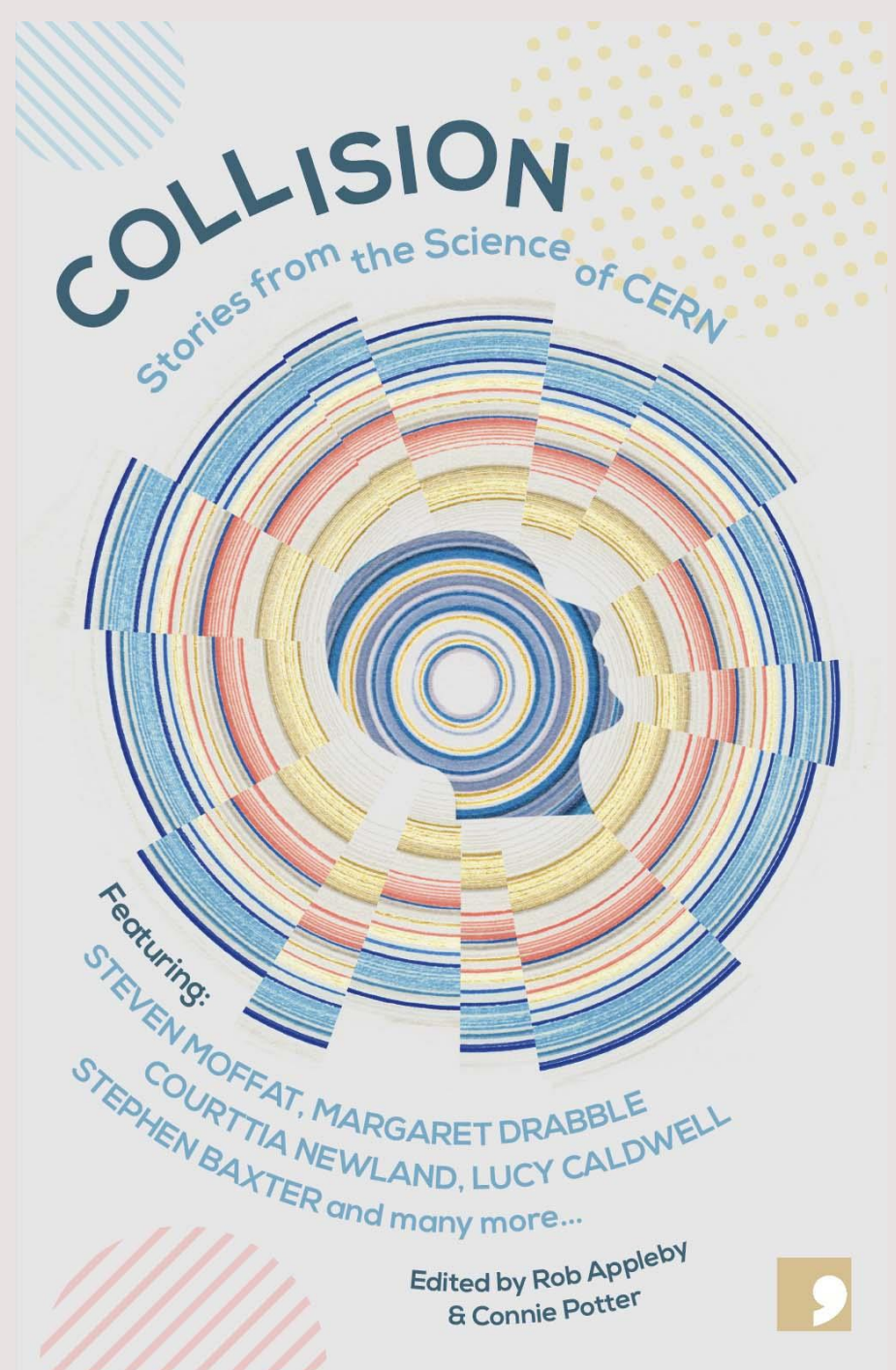
Upcoming

1 December 2023 at the [Royal Institution in London](#): Panel, reading and signing with Lady Margaret Drabble, Steven Moffat, Kristin Lohwasser and Connie Potter, hosted by the BBC's Spencer Kelly

18 February 2024 at the [Northern Ireland Science Festival](#):

Dark Matters: A Night of Short Fiction Inspired by John Stewart Bell and CERN with Lucy Caldwell and Michael Davis

Interview of Connie Potter and Rob Appleby in [Nature magazine](#)



Result?

Hard work.

Incredibly successful.

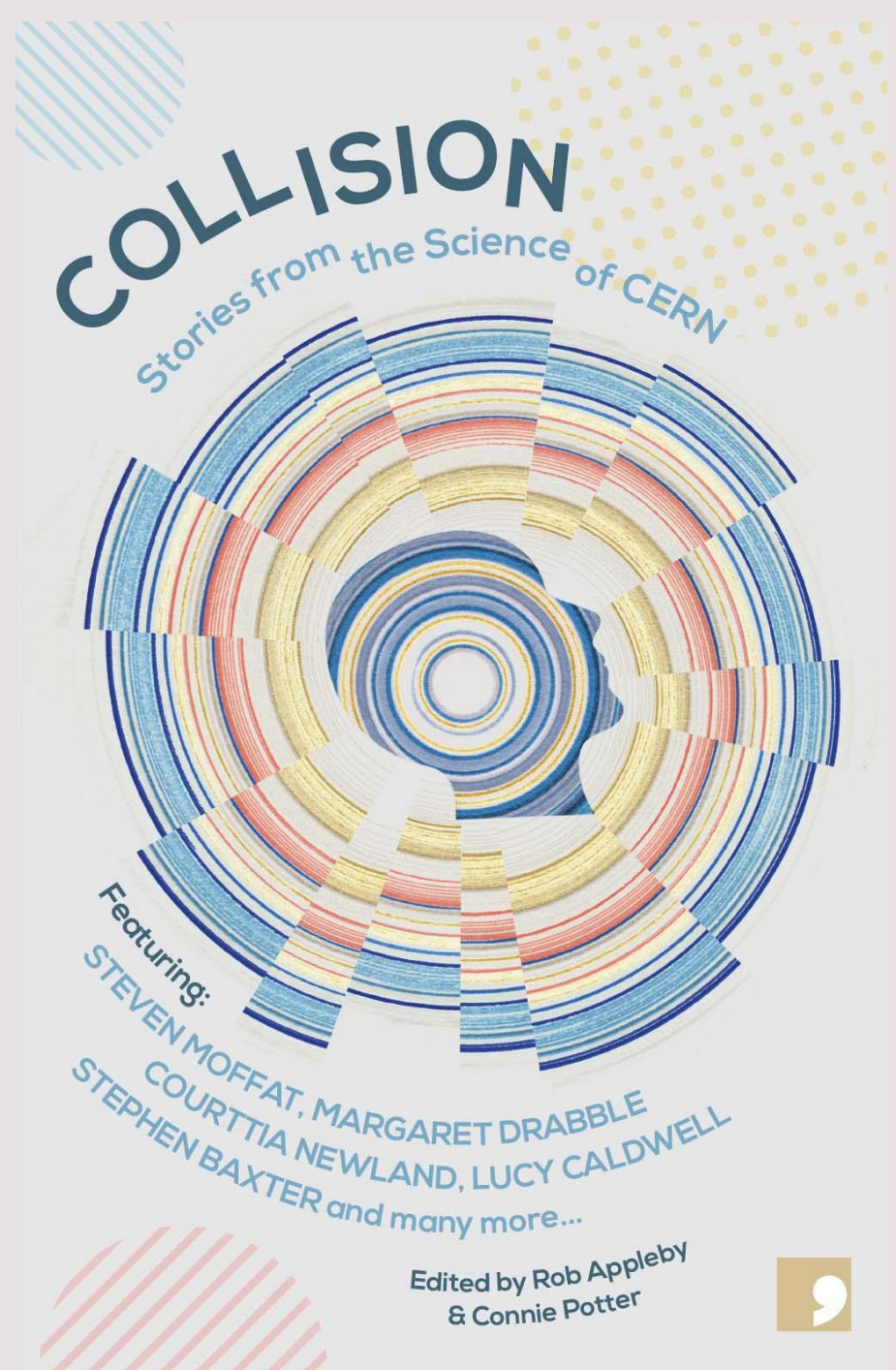
Over 3500 books sold so far.

Interest in turning one or two stories into TV or film

Interest in an 'American' version of Collision

Get a feel for it was received here with this very short film

Video play <https://cernbox.cern.ch/s/HAzfMLm9nq7gN9z>



Conclusion

Very successful way of combining physics and literature to reach a new audience.

Each story is quite different. Each writer's voice varies considerably.

Stories are the writers interpretation of what they have seen and heard.

The afterword from the scientific partner is quite unique and has proven popular.

Do not be afraid to try something new. We didn't know how this would be received. Could have flopped. It's a chance one takes.

Instead it flies high.

Get your copy at the CERN shop in the Science Gateway

Thank you

