

A very irregular fanzine. Needs more fiber.



The Personal Fanzine from John Purcell, in which he declaims on issues both fannish and non-fannish in nature. Heck, nature topics are fair game, too.

ASKEW #31

Publication date: August 2020.

This zine is from John A. Purcell, 3744 Marielene Circle, College Station, Texas USA 77845

Contact him via email at askance73@gmail.com

Yet another Mythical Publication. © 2020 by John A. Purcell

All rights revert to original artists and authors upon publication. All images are purloined from the Internet and clip art. Artists, take note: send filler type artwork!

Life Above Ground in War Time

Well, that's how it feels these days, doesn't it? The COVID-19 pandemic rolls merrily along, and the battle lines have been clearly drawn. By this I mean the positions are either you wear a mask and do all the CDC recommendations to minimize exposure to the pandemic, or you deny the pandemic's existence and refuse to play nicely with your neighbors. The vast majority of the people I know dutifully wear their masks in public, minimize the need to venture forth into the wider world outside their doors, and are mostly confining themselves to working from home (if their job can be performed that way, that is). Funny thing, I have friends who belong to all political stripes, so this very large group is a cross-section of local society, and in this part of Texas, that means a lot of conservative voters are obeying CDC guidelines. Apparently, the personal threat to kith and kindred far outweighs their loyalty to their political party. This is, I believe, How It Should Be.

On the other side of this battlefield of differing opinions is what I call the Contrary Mary Coalition. In short, this sizeable group is comprised of science deniers, hard-right and alt-right conservatives, gun-owning, bible-toting, Trump worshippers who are firmly entrenched in their beliefs, and any factual information simply falls on deaf ears. Even if they do acknowledge hearing the facts, they flat out won't believe it just because it's against their personal beliefs. This position claims that the scientific method, the pursuit of verifiable information to support a position, is anathema to their existence; on top of it all, the kicker is that it violates their right to form their own opinions.

“I love animals. They're delicious.”

A very irregular fanzine. Needs more fiber.

Well, I can concede to this last point. Yes, indeed, every American citizen has the right to form their own opinions and express them publicly. That is protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the Republic of the United States of America. This is not the crux of the argument, though. The question is a matter of ethics: what is the right thing to do here? Save lives no matter any individual's political affiliation, or dig your trenches so deep that there is no way to climb out in order to save even your own life, nor even your own family's lives?

My conclusion, based upon nearly fifty years of conscientious public awareness of living in America, is that the conservative side of the American public has been brainwashed by their churches and political leadership. This segment of the population has lost the ability to be skeptical and seek creative, truthful solutions to problems. In fact, I think "truth," to these people, exists solely inside their own belief system, and to question this system is dangerous. These are the brainwashed masses: the end product of the Republican Party's long game to reshape and control America according to their own beliefs, and regard any opposing positions as anti-American. These people live in a black-and-white world; no gray areas exists in which differences of opinion can be negotiated. You either toe the line, or you're out.

Well, I much prefer the way of the scientific method mainly because the reality of what is happening cannot be denied, and I feel that this is what too many people are doing: denying reality. That is no way to live. As bad as the real world is, this is where we live, so let us do what we can do deal with it.

As of the end of August 2020, I have yet to be tested for the Coronavirus – and no, I am not allergic to Corona beer; it's just not "beer" to me – and don't yet exhibit any of the symptoms.

During my scheduled appointment for my annual physical on the afternoon of

Monday, August 17th, I was not tested for the virus as part of that exam: you must request the test. So be it. Valerie and I haven't attacked each other yet after almost six months of self-isolation, which is a good sign. Sure, there have been a few instances of "differences of opinions," but for the most part we've been good. Healthy, too. So, we are keeping on in a good way. She has begun work on a major painting in addition to attempting to garden in this beastly hot Texas climate, and I am in the middle of teaching the next semester already, but also have time for playing my guitar a lot more often. This leads naturally into the following header:



Map of COVID-19 testing sites in south Texas.

"If you can read this bumper sticker, you're too close."

A very irregular fanzine. Needs more fiber.

Let the Music Play

It is very simple: I love music and have been playing a musical instrument of one sort or other since the age of 9 when I started in the cornet in grade school band class. Originally, I wanted to play the clarinet because dad had a few dozen jazz records, mostly big band with some small combo stuff mixed in, at home and he would listen to them fairly often. The Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw records were my favorites, and the Pete Fountain ones also were good, which is why I wanted to play the clarinet. However, the band director, Mr. Rochet (gad, I still remember his name), said, “Hmm. Looking at your mouth structure, the lips, I believe you would have a good embouchure for playing the cornet.” Well, that depressed me since my heart was set on playing like Benny Goodman. When I got home and told my father this, he went over to his stack of LP’s and pulled out a few, then started playing Harry James, Al Hirt, and other big band albums that featured the horn players, especially the trumpeters.



That worked. If you will pardon the pun, that got me jazzed up on playing the cornet in school. Then Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass hit it big. Nine years later I started college as a music major, main instrument the trumpet. Of course, along the way I started in the guitar at the age of ten – wanted to play like Rick Nelson, Scotty Moore, the Beatles, and others – and learned other instruments along the way: self-teaching myself piano and drums in the music practice rooms at school, and shifted around on all the brass instruments throughout junior and senior high. There was no doubt in my mind what I wanted to be: a composer. Not a performer nor band teacher, but I loved writing music. In fact, I still have some old music staff sheets and folios with compositions I wrote way back when. My song catalog dates from the beginning of 1975, and now contains over 250 songs; this does not include what I wrote before then. I am not sure, but my earliest attempts at songwriting were in junior high school when I was 13 or 14 years old, and they are definitely best left forgotten. If I do not remember them anymore, fine. Let the damn things lie lost in time.

Which brings me back to the present. Since May of this fucked-up year of 2020, I have actually completed a few songs, and composed another dozen chord progressions and melodies that have potential. What I want to do lyrically with these wordless tunes is yet to be determined. When the mood hits, I will know.

But this song-writing – and fanzine activity, too; can’t disallow how important this is – has helped immeasurably to deal with the pandemic and isolation of this surrealistic existence we call the year 2020. I am reminded of that old Zager and Evans hit song: “In the year 2525, if man is still alive, if woman can survive, they may find...” Indeed. What *will* they find? At the rate we’re going, humankind may not make it that far. Until then, thank Ghu I still have my music.

“I sure wish I knew where the rest of my life went.”

A Virtual WorldCon? Inconceivable!

Who would have thought this would happen so quickly? Granted, the technology for holding major conferences online has existed for many years now, so why the heck not? It is definitely terribly sad that it took a global pandemic to bring this concept to reality – holding the World Science Fiction Convention online – this year. The question is, will it really work?

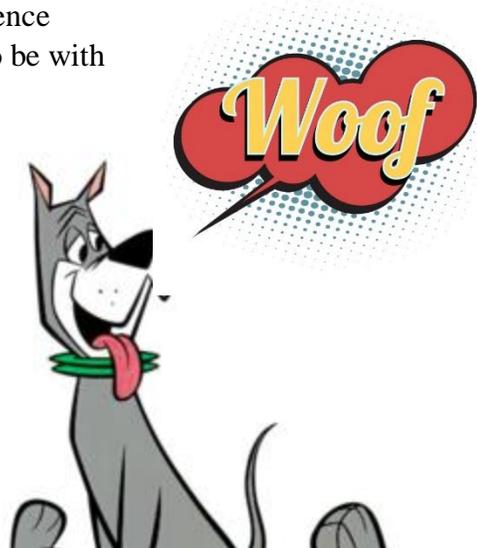
Well, so far, based on what I have seen on Facebook postings on the CoNZealand page and other locations – GUFF delegate Alison Scott ran a virtual GUFF trip report on a Facebook page, for one example – in assorted social media sites and formats, there is a mixed reaction. The wait-time for logon is an issue, and I have heard a lot of grumbling about the dollar amounts involved. Granted, that can be expected considering the physical location, but I am not going to pay that kind of money unless I can actually be there for the event. Then again, the CoNZealand committee did the best they could considering the situation. I truly feel bad for them, and what they did to convert this baby in such a short period of time is phenomenal. The third-party postings I have seen so far are interesting, but it’s just not the same as being there. For me – and for many of us – a convention means being together with longtime fan friends and making new friends.

Look. I admit it: as much as I enjoy producing fanzines and nattering back and forth online with fannish friends around the world, it is much more fun to physically be in their presence. The face-to-face conversations, the dinner groups, running into familiar faces you haven’t seen for at least a year... All that and more. It is good we can still communicate via the technology, but I much prefer my conventions be held in a hotel or in a convention/conference center so I can hang out with my peeps. I simply want to be with my friends. It is just that simple.

At the end of this month (August) I will participate in my first virtual convention. ArmadilloCon 42 in Austin, Texas is scheduled for August 28-30, 2020, and will be in this virtual format. It is free (or so it says here: <http://armadillocon.org/d42/>), so I figure, why not? I shall give it a go. It should be interesting.

But I still would rather be *with* my friends.

John Purcell



“Ruh-ro, George!”

A very irregular fanzine. Needs more fiber.

The letter column. Some good responses from assorted fine people, and all is right in the world. The writer's text is in nice font like this Times New Roman size 12 font, and my responses will be in *dark brown Calibri, size 12 font like this*. That should work. Onward!

Skewed Results

Mark Plummer
59 Shirley Road
Croydon, Surrey
CR0 7ES United Kingdom

1 August 2020

You say, of the virtualised CoNZealand, 'I have my doubts that it will be as successful as an in-person, real world sf convention' but I don't think anybody is claiming that it will be. There's an argument that it makes the Worldcon accessible to people who for various reasons would never be able to attend the in-person event, but for those who intended to go I think it's pretty clear that the online incarnation is only a shadow.

The question is, I think, whether an online Worldcon is better than no Worldcon. Obviously, the Worldcon couldn't have gone ahead as an in-person event and as originally planned. It was an option to push back to later in the year, always assuming the facilities were available, but honestly I think it unlikely that a Worldcon-as-we-know-it will be viable at any time this year. The British Novacon (November) has already postponed to 2021. It's their 50th and they've conceded that that even if they can go ahead they won't be able to do justice to the milestone.

I'm sure that many people who would have attended the in-person convention will have little or no interaction with the online substitute, some for technical reasons, some because the time-shift makes it difficult, and some because it just doesn't appeal. I do hope CoNZealand publish some figures on how many people bought memberships after the convention went virtual. Personally, I thought NZ\$300 was too expensive, especially when so many other virtual conventions are free or only charge a token membership. A lower membership fee would have attracted more people and possibly even made more money. Then again, I wasn't privy to the discussions that led them to set that price and the rationale for doing it.

In a way, I think conventions next year have it harder. CoNZealand staff had obviously put in a lot of work over the last decade but it wasn't long between the scope of the pandemic becoming clear and them having to make a decision about the convention's future. Events like Corflu (late March 2021), the British Eastercon (April), and even the DC Worldcon (August) have to proceed on the basis that they could happen almost as normal, but they could be forced into a very different

A very irregular fanzine. Needs more fiber.

model and may still not be able to run at all. It's bad enough to have your work rendered futile, but worse to have to carry on doing it anyway knowing that it may be rendered futile.

Mark

{Now that CoNZealand is over, consensus opinion is that parts of the virtual Worldcon went very well and other aspects did not. I am quite impressed that the committee was able to make this work as well as it did, although the Hugo presentation was a hot mess, but perhaps we need to keep in mind that this was the first time anybody has ever tried this. Future Worldcon committees now have this experience to know what to do and what to avoid should this need ever reoccur. Valerie and I decided not to even pay the supporting membership due to the cost. If we are lucky, next year will see us in Bristol for Corflu 38 (whenever) and Washington, DC, for the Worldcon in August. We shall see how the world's travel situation changes if the pandemic allows travel again.}

Paul Skelton

St. Ockport, UK

Paulskelton2@gmail.com

2 August 2020



Thank heavens we had the sense not to try for Corflu Heatwave! Just one day here last Friday with the temperature 32/33 C and we were both totally cream-crackered. We don't do serious heat. Not even a Corflu would be able to offset that. Of course the other potential reason to have attended would have been to spend some significant time with you and Valerie again, and indeed such a concept briefly appealed, but it was always obvious that you'd have other things claiming your attention over those few days.

I suspect, the way things ended up you took on a bit too much, though as far as I can see the only post-mortem hassle involved some of the vote-counting decisions, with the overriding impression that the con itself was excellent, so you are perfectly entitled to bask in the warm glow of a job well done.

It is understandable, in the nature of fandom, for interested parties to sift the ashes and decide if they might have done certain things differently but I'm glad to see that you were only temporarily miffed at this. It is the nature (if not the number) of the beast. As it happens Nic's latest issue arrived here within a couple of hours of your zine and I will be explaining to him how to resolve all such dilemmas in future. As to your 'Politics' piece I can only comment that I agree with what you wrote and that I think you said

A very irregular fanzine. Needs more fiber.

everything that needed to be said and said it well. In fact, the only room for significant response I can see would be from folk who disagree with you.

Covid-wise, Stockport is part of Greater Manchester, which has just been put into restrictive measures. Not quite back into lockdown, but the national easing no longer fully applies here. No having extended family visiting and other such restrictions. We can. Though. still go to pubs and restaurants.

Anyway, thanks for this issue.

Skel

{Yes, indeed, the nature of fandom is to beat dead horses deep into the ground in the hopes of finding something of note to use. My hope is that the errors of my ways (viz, FAAn ballot counting and category definitions) might be avoided in the years to come. Heck, it was an experiment on my part, and for the most part I think my effort to streamline the voting procedure worked in principle, but fell down on the tabulation side of things thanks to some zines being eligible and thus listed in multiple categories. If anything, that's the thing to avoid in the future. I wish Nic all the luck in the world with it. () Texas is trying its best to whittle down the herd by reopening public schools, restaurants, stores, etc., and now the infection rates are bouncing way up again. I am expecting all schools to be returning to a full online format yet again at some point in September of this year. Things are not looking very good.}*

Ray Palm

Boxholder

P.O. Box 2

Plattsburgh, NY 12901-0002

8 August 2020

You said where you grew up in Minnesota was a progressive and relatively quiet area. No doubt but like other communities most likely there were a few self-serving thugs on the police force. It's good that the problems with LEOs using excessive force are being brought into the sunshine. Locally there's a federal lawsuit against the city and its PD for the actions of some uniformed thugs caught on jail video manhandling an arrestee suffering from PTSD, mocking the veteran for not being that tough. The George Floyd video provided evidence that wouldn't exist before the smartphone. Videos have more impact than just a verbal report. Who watches the watchmen? We all do.

One key problem with Trump is that his approval rating hovers around 40%. Too many morons in this country. Harsh? Not really. What else would you call someone attending a risky Trump event by signing a waiver that states that if they die from COVID-19 it's on them, they can't sue Trump. Lamebrain lemmings. Some say we should open up communication with Trump suckers, trying to help them see the way. You would have better luck communicating with cows.

“Watch out for that tree!”

A very irregular fanzine. Needs more fiber.

There's a story on the web about a woman who says she never thought about having a dictator run the US but she does now with Trump, he would be a good ruler. I don't think re-education centers could help such people. How do you re-educate the brain dead?

Ray

{The way that people are acting these days – and I include everybody across the entire spectrum of political and social thinking here - I am reminded of the old Frank Zappa song “Who are the Brain Police?” because in one way, shape, or form, citizens of the USofA are being manipulated to act in accordance to the master plan of the 1% theocratic oligarchy of the power brokers in Washington, DC and Wall Street.

And just in under the wire this afternoon (August 29th), here are two paragraphs from our favorite loc-writer from the Great White North (is that racist?) that are worth sharing.}

Lloyd Penney
1706-24 Eva Rd.
Etobicoke, ON
CANADA M9C 2B2

26 August 2020

I did attend via Zoom AmazingCon 2020, an online convention to promote and celebrate the current version of *Amazing Stories* magazine. Right now, the Coldwater Steampunk Festival is online, and Yvonne and I were up in Coldwater near the start of the month to help create some online content for organizer Suzy Burtenshaw. We spent a day in our steampunk finery (Yvonne brought back Queen Victoria II, just for the occasion), and another day dressed as professors from Hogwarts. We had a great weekend there; we're not sure how our performances were received, but we are hopeful that it will return to its original format, a huge main street festival that will turn a small town of 1,100 into a madhouse with more than 5,000 people, mostly in costume.

My loc... I promise to nominate the next time around when it comes to the FAAn Awards. I admit I haven't been much for awards the last few years. Yvonne and I have been very busy...writing, editing and voicework for me, and sewing and making Hawaiian-style shirts and masks for Yvonne. Who's got the time to laze around? Well, I wish I did, but I don't have time! I'd rather be goofing off on the couch.

Lloyd

{ArmadilloCon 42 is online right now this weekend – I've been popping in an out since last night – and there's some fun stuff going on. It is simply, sad to say, not the same as actually being there. With luck, it will be back to sort-of normal in 2021. Keep your fingers, toes, and eyes crossed, folks!}

I Also Heard From: John Nielsen Hall, George Phillies.