

Askew #35

December 2021



No, no, NO! I said
“askew,” not “a screw”!
Sheesh...!



Finally! It’s another issue of the personalzine perpetrated by John Purcell.

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Art credits: all nicked from the aethernet and/or Word stock images, which does make my life easier. If anybody out there reading this feels artistic enough to draw little filler pieces, feel free to do so and send them my way. I definitely would be most appreciative.

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This fanzine was begun the first week of October. It is now one week before Christmas as I return to it. Fall Semester 2021 was horrendously busy for practically everyone at Blinn College as enrollments jumped due to classes going back to the traditional face-to-face format, in addition to the plethora of learning modalities now available thanks to the coronavirus pandemic – which is still going strong, if you haven’t been paying attention. All I can say is that I wish things were much more “normal” than they claim to be already.

There are so many things that can and likely will go wrong in the months ahead. Case in point: the current omicron variant is now making its way around the world, especially here in the United States where still too many people who should know better are not vaccinated. Part of me expects mask mandates to be reinstated in various states for various companies and institutions, such as nursing homes, clinics, and hospitals. Eventually Covid-19 will mutate itself into an endemic status, meaning it can be managed via an annual vaccination shot much as people willingly get their flu shots and other required inoculations for enrolling children in school or entering the military. That sort of thing.

For Valerie and I, we are intently monitoring travel restrictions and other indicators regarding getting up to Vancouver, British Columbia next March for Corflu Pangloss. At the moment our plans are on hold: our hotel reservation is made, but not plane reservations because this situation is in such great flux. Stay tuned, gang, for further developments.

Music, Music, Music!

To follow up on this topic I broached last issue, the demo I recorded at the end of May 2021 is currently in the planning stages for a remix that will entail some additional tracks being laid down to augment the original masters. This will probably require at least six hours down in the Red Barn Studio in Navasota,

Texas, which doesn't bother me at all mainly since I would like to record another song or two. Meanwhile back at the homestead, I downloaded Audacity (recording software recommended by Bill Mills out in Las Vegas) so that I can do some recording and mixing of tracks in the comfort of my own home, taking as much time as I want and saving money in the process. It's a win-win for the home team.

The other good news is that here in SouthCentralEastern Texas local music venues have slowly begun reopening, despite the onslaught of the Delta variant making Covid-19 infection numbers rise again last fall, and now venues have begun hosting open mic nights again. So far the only one on the docket for me is held on Wednesday nights from 9 to 11 PM at the 101 Club on Texas Avenue in Bryan, Texas, a short ten minute or so drive from home. The earliest open mic night started up at the end of August, and the Singer-Songwriter night (usually Thursday evenings) at the Village Inn Café in downtown Bryan has restarted as well. By the end of October 2021, other venues reopened with live music, too. I have since learned of quite a few other local venues with open-mic nights. This has been like watching a slow avalanche: it is happening, just be careful because if you're not you could get buried.

Face it. I wouldn't mind digging out from underneath a wealth of potential venues to play. The more one plays, the better one gets. At least that's the theory.

All Fandom has Plunged into Another Holy War

Again. This time it's about what happened over the site selection of the 2023 Worldcon at the just concluded (as I type this paragraph at noonish on Sunday, December 19, 2021) DisCon III. Sure, there are the typical gnashings of teeth and dentures being thrown at each other over the Hugo Awards, which is an annual hissy fit: at least, that is how I see them. At any rate, if you haven't heard already the 81st World SF Convention shall be held in Chengdu, China in mid-August of 2023, largely as the result of a swarm of mail-in ballots over the last few months. The runner-up Winnipeg bid fell far short with 807 votes; Chengdu received 2006 votes. Even though the Memphis bid was withdrawn a few months ago, it still received 7 votes, and there were 18 other write-in votes for assorted silly bids. I was disturbed by the lack of any Minneapolis in 73 votes, but I digress. My preference was originally Memphis, then shifted to Winnipeg because I know people there and they have a good solid fannish history going up there. The fact that Chengdu won with a large voting block does not surprise me. Over the past decade or so I have been impressed by the science fiction coming from China, and it keeps growing every year. There is obviously a huge sf fan base in Chengdu – and elsewhere in China – so I wish them good luck in getting their Worldcon up and running.

Apparently, the proverbial fecal matter hit the spinning air circulation system at the WSFS Business Meeting regarding the language in the site selection voting procedures. Okay. I am no parliamentarian nor a big fan of Worldcon running, let alone their rules and regulations, so this kind of thing goes flying over my head. Plus, I have no idea what transpired there, so everything I hear about what the Winnipeg people did and said comes to me at least thirdhand. In addition, I am well aware of the Chinese government's terrible treatment of the Uighur among many other humanitarian issues that the Beijing regime is responsible for over the years. The science fiction fan community in Chengdu will have a difficult tightrope to walk as it prepares for the 2023 Worldcon. I won't be going, that's for sure, but I do wish them all the luck in the world to pull it off and make their convention as successful as possible.

Meanwhile, the foofaraw over the site-selection voting and the politicizing about it is not something I wish to get into. I shall leave that to the fannish feud experts.

Recently Read Books

The last nine months have been a reading extravaganza for me. Herein are mini-reviews on the books I have read since the start of the school year (end of August 2021), in addition to the science fiction and mystery magazine subscriptions I receive. If I feel up to it, the next issue will likely tackle some of those.

***Riders to the Stars*, novelization by Curt Siodmak of the 1953 Ivan Tors movie of the same title. Ballantine Books, 1954. 166 pp.**

This book was a fun read, although it did not make me want to re-watch the movie this was based upon. Frankly, I read this so long ago that I barely remember the plot, and right now I have no desire to get up and find the book to see what the back cover blurb says. Let me just say this was an okay story thanks to Curt Siodmak, who scripted many a 1950s skiffy movie.

***The Girl in the Golden Atom*, by Ray Cummings: first published in 1919 as a short story in *Argosy* that was expanded into a full-length novel published in 1923. [Project Gutenberg, read on Nook]**

I have a lot of old science fiction, fantasy, and mystery books on my Nook, and this is one of them. Again, very dated sf, and quite sexist, but the concept of worlds hidden within worlds – that atoms themselves are comprised of even smaller structures – is well explored and even fun. Lots of extemporization with massive info dumps on the reader, but I can see why this story is considered an early pulp classic.



***The Rise and Fall of D.O.D.O.*, by Neil Stephenson & Nicole Galland. William Morrow (2017), 742 pp.**

Okay. This is a massive book, but it is massively fun and hard to put down. This is a grand bit of adventure spread out across a millennium as characters plunge back and forth through historical eras in an effort to save magic. I highly recommend it.

***The Compleat Enchanter*, by L. Sprague de Camp & Fletcher Pratt. Ballantine/Del Rey (1976), 420 pp.**

More classic fantasy by probably the best collaborative pair of authors I have ever read. These misadventures of Harold Shea, a unwilling time-traveling “wizard,” are fun, energetic, and a must-read for any science fiction and fantasy fan. Yep. Highly recommended.

***The Trial of Terra*, by Jack Williamson. Ace Books (1962), 159 pp.**

Jack Williamson was the first real science fiction author I read when I was 12 or 13 years old. Whenever I want a good, solid space opera to entertain me, he is one of my go-to writers. This particular book is not one of his best, but it’s still enjoyable. I love the concept of humanity being judged as being worthy of joining galactic civilization. Space Opera at its best and worst between covers.

***Honeymoon in Space*, by George Chetwynd Griffith, first published in 1901 in *Pearson's Magazine* as *Stories of Other Worlds*, [Project Gutenberg, read on Nook]**

Another Nook text, and while this does have some merit – the unique propulsion system and description of the spaceship is worth it – the vast majority of this overly religious polemic is overwhelming, especially in the last three chapters. Not exactly recommended except for its historical place in scientific romances that were popular in the late 19th and very early 20th centuries.

***The Stars are Ours!* by Andre Norton. Ace Books (1963), 183 pp.**

Many sf fans credit the works of Alice Mary Norton (1912-2005) as their introduction into science fiction. Norton's fiction is fast-paced with strong protagonists and thrilling adventures as they wriggle out of various tight spots, and *The Stars are Ours!* is one of her best. This is the story of Dard Norris and how Earth of the year 2500 AD hates science and enslaves scientists, and Norris unwillingly becomes a key figure in the fight for the future of humanity's freedom.

***Gulliver of Mars*, by Edwin L. Arnold. (1905), 161 pp. [Project Gutenberg, read on Nook]**

Another romantic fantasy from the turn of the century (1890-1910), this book is often credited with inspiring Edgar Rice Burroughs to write his Barsoom stories of Mars. The parallels are many: *Gulliver of Mars* reads very quickly, has a love interest for our intrepid hero from Earth, with lots of adventure and exploration of the unique civilizations on Mars. Definitely worth reading for its historical importance in science fiction literature.

***I Speak for Earth*, by Keith Woodcott (John Brunner). Ace Books (1961), 120 pp**

I speak for readers: don't bother! An early John Brunner effort that is Ace Doubled with the Ray Cummings' 1932 classic *Wandl, the Invader* (first published in *Astounding Science Fiction*), *I Speak for Earth* is interesting possibly only for its exploration of creating a multiple identity individual who is essentially an emissary to a galactic civilization – gee, that sounds familiar – to see if humanity can join in the fun.

***Trouble With Lichen*, by John Wyndham. Ballantine (1960), 160 pp.**

So you want to live a nice long life? Maintain your beauty for a couple centuries in the process? Not a problem. Use this cosmetic cream. However, immortality has its limitations, and John Wyndham – one of many pseudonyms of John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris (1903 – 1969) – explores very thoroughly how people would react in terms of science, religion, business, politics, and power. I have always liked Wyndham's fiction, and do recommend this book.

***The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction, Sixth Series*, edited by Anthony Boucher. Ace Books (1957). 254 pp.**

A great collection of short stories and a handful of poems first published in the pages of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in 1955 and 1956. Some authors in this anthology are Frederik Pohl, Ward Moore, Poul Anderson (two stories from him!), Cyril Kornbluth, Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon, Avram Davidson, and some hack named C. S. Lewis. There are other stories by Mildred Clingerman, Jay Williams, Charles Fortenay, Rachel Maddux, and Ron Smith. Not a clunker in the bunch.

Skewed Results

Letters, I get letters! It makes me want to wag my tail...

*MAIL!!! *ahem*My apologies. It is time to see what struck reader's attention in the previous issue. Topics in the 34th issue covered politics (again), books, music making, and a wee bit about the NHL playoffs.*

Ray Palm
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17 July 2021

You said you think we're screwed when it comes to politics, repulsive stupid Republicans, and lame too-polite Democrats. You wanted someone to convince you otherwise. Sorry, I can't.

I know Trumpian Repuglicans are and can be stupid but this incident wins hands down. Congressman Louie Gohmert doesn't believe climate change is man-made, it's just the forces of nature at work. During a subcommittee hearing he asked the associate deputy chief for the National Forest System if climate change could be fixed by altering the orbit of the moon or the Earth's orbit around the sun. (<https://bit.ly/3krbo8S>) I didn't know the Forest Service was part of the Space Force. *{Crazy Louie seems to think so.}*

Previously Gohmert claimed he got Covid 19 from wearing a mask. The GOP is the anti-science party. Gohmert and his ilk should've been alive during the Dark Ages. Then again, with the last president we were plunged into a dark age and are struggling to get out of it.



Good luck with your music endeavor. I have no musical ability and I admire people who can be creative through song.

Among the books you reviewed was *Swords & Deviltry* by Fritz Leiber, one of my favorites. I have to dig out my copy that's buried somewhere since I moved after being stuck in the same dump for 25 years.

Take care and don't wear a mask or you'll get Covid 19! And remember Rush Limbaugh said there were 18 other Covids before this latest one.

Ray Palm

{Thank you, Ray. In fact, even though I am fully vaccinated and now boosted, I still wear a mask in public. Oh, and did you see that Ted Nugent also ranted about how we never heard of the earlier 18 versions of Covid? The stupid, it hurts.}

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21 July 2021

Askew 34 is at the top of the list, and I seem able to stay about 15 zines behind, that's my pace, so here goes with a fast loc.

I really shouldn't pay too much attention to American politics, seeing we have enough Canadian politics to put up with, but it seems that right-wing parties are able to bypass logic completely. The Republican Party, and some in our own Conservative Party, are completely anti-vaccine and anti-mask. That flies in the face of logic, my logic anyway. I see CNN wondering what the Rethugs are smoking. The value of masks and vaccines have been proven repeatedly, but do they say these things because they honestly believe them, or are they saying these things to simply disagree with the Democrats? It's a total WTF. *{American politics is definitely a full-time job, and I have read a fair amount about what the Conservative Party in Canada promotes. My thinking is that leaders on the political right are practicing hypocrisy as a daily regimen: most of America's GOP leadership is vaccinated and boosted, yet they still push against wearing masks and are anti-vax. They want it both ways to (1) stay alive and (2) stay in power. That sounds rather simplistic, I know, but it sure makes sense. It is not a WTF to me: those in power will do whatever they want and can in order to maintain their power and control.}*

Good to see that Juneteenth is a national holiday in the US...but do many Americans realize why holidays are declared, or do they think any further than, "Hey! A day off!" I see lots of complaints about June 19th and wonder of all men in the US truly were created equal. Good words, but useless if they are not put into full effect. In our own politics, we are all being made to see how not only blacks and Asians, but our indigenous people are treated terribly. So far, for not only Canadian residential schools, but American schools as well, more than 2000 unmarked graves have been found around the schools, and most of them belong to children murdered, assaulted, raped, and otherwise killed by priests and nuns over the decades, all in the name of the Lord. Most of us are sickened by this...our government is offering an apology to all our indigenous peoples, and court cases may award their descendants billions of dollars in reparations. It will be tough, seeing that billions have already been spent to get us all through this pandemic, but I think it will be worth it. It may cause such a deep debt, we might not be able to get out of it, but something must be done. It is estimated that closer to 10,000 unmarked graves may yet be found once the geophysics is done on the various properties. *{Total agreement with you. These emerging stories sicken me, too. How can human beings become better human beings unless they can honestly address their past behaviors and atrocities in order to learn from these awful, horrendous events? There is today's rhetorical question, class.}*

The local...I am hoping for some serious action soon on the part of prosecutors, rounding up at least some of the Trump family criminals, and their cronies. It will be interesting to see if the Rethugs regrow their spines and tell Trump where to go. If not, there may be two right-wing candidates in your next election, which will definitely give Biden his deserved re-election. His hard work over the past six months is visible to all. I read that Trump asked his officials their opinion about his demand that those who might testify against him be executed. Some more WTF... America, you may never know how close you came to fascism and dictatorship. ALL politicians must be held up to scrutiny, no matter how good and

competent they seem to be. I agree that while Biden would like to work with the Rethugs, they are in no way agreeable to working with him. It's all a smokescreen. *{Yup. No argument there.}*

The numbers of people catching and dying of COVID-19 seem to be way down, but rather than wait for cases to drop to close to zero, right-wing pols announce that all is now open!, and go have fun, kids! I expect that our provinces with right-wing governments will suffer through a fourth wave of COVID cases. Sure, we'd like to get out there, too, but we are savvy enough to know that we must still be careful. We've had COVID, and gotten our two shots (the second ones on July 1st, Canada Day), and even now, there is the chance we might catch the Delta variant. We must remain vigilant if we want to get through this pandemic. We must also remember that while it seems to be in remission on this continent, the pandemic is still raging elsewhere in the world...

Fred Lerner reminds me that while I have enjoyed Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials and Dust trilogies, I have yet to fill out my collection with the associated books like *Lyra's Oxford*, and I think there's a couple more. Maybe my next treat...

I think I am done for the moment, and I can stand down and relax a little. Tampa Bay teams not only won the Lombardi Trophy, but also the Stanley Cup. I am no Habs fan, but it has been a very long time since a Canadian team has won the Cup. There is always next year, and I hope the Leafs won't choke like they did this year. With the easing of border restrictions, we have tentative plans to go to Astronomicon 13 in Rochester, NY around Hallowe'en. Now to see if we can really do that or have to buckle down for another lockdown. My greetings to the family, and see you with another zine RSN.



Lloyd Penney

(Thank you for writing, Lloyd, and a happy holiday season to you and Yvonne. () As I write this, the National Hockey league is shuttering team schedules and other games around the league due to Covid Protocols. Here we go again... (*) Our current convention plans still include Corflu Pangloss in March 2022, but that may be cancelled due to Covid travel restrictions, and beyond*

that nothing else is written in stone. I would love to get to Minneapolis for Minicon over Easter Weekend – I do have an attending membership – but again, I hafta wait due to potential travel restrictions. Welcome to the new fannish normal.}

WAHF listing: Jerry Kaufman, Ulrika O'Brien. That's all, folks!

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Ed Cox Memorial Doodle Space

TAFF ANNOUNCEMENT!

Hey, kids! Guess what is happening again? Yes, you are right, Virginia: there is a TAFF 2022 race!

Current Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund administrators Geri Sullivan (North America) and Johan Anglemark (Europe) recently announced that the 2022 East to West TAFF race is now open with four candidates all lined at the starting gate. Below is what I copy-pasted from the TAFF Facebook page; simply click on the embedded links or copy-paste them into your computer/laptop/handheld browser and read the full skinny on how this works and who is all in the running.



Voting in the TAFF race is now open. It will close on April 19, 2022, after Reclamation (Eastercon) in London. You can download the fill-in form ballot here:

taff.org.uk/ballots/taff2022_US.pdf (US Letter; A4 will follow shortly).

It has the candidates' platforms, the names of their nominators, and the voting instructions. Voting is open to anyone active in fandom before April 2020 who donates at least £3 (GBP), €3 (EUR), or \$4 (USD) to TAFF. Voting is also possible online here: taff.org.uk/vote.php.

Note: When counting the votes we will not apply the "20% rule" until the candidate with the fewest votes has been eliminated and there are just three candidates left.

Competing for the honour are these four great fans: Anders Holmström (Sweden), Fia Karlsson (Sweden), Mikołaj Kowalewski (Poland), and Julie Faith McMurray (UK). One of them will make a TAFF trip to Chicon 8, the 80th World Science Fiction Convention in September 2022.



As a previous TAFF delegate and administrator, I strongly encourage everyone to get involved and vote.