



The personalzine of John Purcell, resident itinerant at the following location:

3744 Marielene Circle, College Station, Texas 77845 USA Email address: askance73@gmail.com

All content copyright © 2022 by John A. Purcell. All rights revert to original author upon publication.

Art Credits: clip art – 1, 2, 10; nicked off the internet - 1, 3, 7, 9, 11.



Amazingly enough, it was a mere two months ago that I finished off the previous issue of *Askew* and posted it on efanazines.com and sent it off to fellow fanzine fans around the world, and here I am again, tippy-tapping away on another issue. As usual, I was beset by my typical end-of-the-year blahs, this time exacerbated by a busier than usual semester and other craziness. I wrote a brief bit about this over in *Askance #52* which was pubbed at the end of December 2021; as usual, I lamented being tired of doing this fanzine, wondering if and when the next might appear, and so on. This is a common affliction that hits me every couple of years, and as usual I overcame my lethargy and started in on writing letters of comment – that’s “locs” to the unaffiliated – in addition to working on an article for Justin Busch’s fine fanzine *Far Journeys*. Two weeks ago I was inspired to begin **another** fan arkle, and recently I even dashed off a quick bit for Chris Garcia’s upcoming Beatles issue of *Drink Tank*.

Yeah, I am feeling much better now.

Unfortunately, the real world – if that is the appropriate word to describe it – intrudes on my thoughts.

Daring to Talk Politics

The stupid continues.

Perhaps the biggest development here is not from the mouths of Marjorie Taylor Greene, who spews nonsense at least twice a week, nor Matt Gaetz, who is wisely keeping silent while the legal noose tightens around his past behavior, nor Madison Cawthorne, who is likely to be removed from office this fall in the midterms if not before by his own party, nor even the biggest media mouth of all, Tucker Carlson, but the blatant admission of der orange führer himself that he wanted Vice President Pence to overturn the electoral college votes in four specific states.

Face it. The House Select Committee has long had enough goods on Humpty Trumpty to push him off the wall of implausible deniability and straight into jail, do not pass “go,” and stuff like that. What bothers me the most about the “progress” that this Select Committee into the January 6, 2021 insurrection attempt

– which is exactly what it was, albeit by literally a rag-tag mob hellbent on overthrowing or at least delaying the certification of the November 2020 general election results – is how long it’s taking. It simply amazes me how these people actually believe the lie that the former president constantly spews and that his die-hard acolytes in both chambers of Congress parrot. Let me just say that I am appalled that this idiocy has gone on for so long. To me, this is all a waste of our tax dollars. There is no question in my mind that Humpty Trumpty repeatedly violated his oath of office, that he is unfit for public office, emotionally unstable, and exhibits classic symptoms of Alzheimer’s. Plus, he is a life-long con artist who was always protected by daddy’s money. Just arrest this orange-faced crook and throw him and his entire family in jail already.

I understand that the House Committee and New York Attorney General Letitia James are seeking documentable, unassailable proof to convict #45, but it’s taking too long. At this rate, maybe the best thing that can happen is he will die on the golf course or in the McDonald’s drive thru lane.

One can always hope.

I Can Hear Clearly Now

This is true. On January 13, 2022, I was presented with my very first set of hearing aids. As of now – March 1st – I have been wearing/using them for six weeks, and I have to admit the difference has been remarkable. Yes, they are expensive – the total cost was nearly \$4,000 USD, but thank Roscoe for a good employer-provided health insurance plan! Each ear was covered for a thousand, so my portion to pay was the difference, which *definitely* made a huge difference. If it wasn’t for Corflu Pangloss being postponed until mid-October this year, there was no way we could have afforded the hearing aids and our trip to Vancouver. This was without a doubt a bit of serendipity that resulted in the question, “Can I get substitutes for a few days’ worth of class in 8 months?” The answer is very possible, but the key is whether or not we can rebuild necessary funding for the trip and stay for that convention. We shall see. Both Valerie and I still want to go to Corflu Pangloss, so there is still time for the bank account to grow without needing to sell one of the grandchildren.



As for the hearing, it is amazing the sounds I have been missing for many years. It is so much easier to understand what somebody is saying from across the room without having to ask that person to repeat themselves more clearly, and also to hear awesome harmonies, bass lines, and other nuances in music, or dialogue in television show or movies, and so on. This is really neat. Even when I play guitar there is a massive difference in hearing tones and all the squeaks of fingertips on the strings. This is pretty danged cool, and I am very glad I went through with this process. The good news is that these hearing aids – ReSound is the name brand – are completely paid off and very easy to use and maintain. I cannot believe how small and light they are; people I am talking to cannot even see them, which is not a real concern of mine, but I am now very used to wearing these ear pieces. Heck, sometimes I even forget to take them out at night, they are so comfortable. It’s awesome, really it is.

Even better is that these make it easier to ignore the grandkids and things my wife says by simply turning them off. Pretty slick trick, eh wot?

The REAL Football

The way I figure it, if Nic Farey can write about “Footy” in his FAAn Award-winning personalzine *This Here...* on a regular basis, I can also write in my personalzine about what Americans call soccer to avoid confusion with what is called football in the rest of the world. ***(Does the grammar in that sentence hold up? Lemme check... Yeah, I think that sentence makes sense. Sort of.)***

In short, I have always enjoyed playing the game of soccer/football/kick-the-damn-ball. When I was in junior and senior high school, despite my love for the sport of ice hockey and my ice-skating ability (I am a native Minnesota boy, y’know; kids there learn how to ice skate years before learning how to ride a bicycle), I was not physically large or muscular enough for ice hockey, and definitely not American football. Oh yes, I played hockey all the time at the local park with all of my neighborhood schoolmates and friends. As a typical American teen, I also played baseball as a pitcher, first baseman, or outfielder in Little League and Pony/Colt baseball leagues. Then as an adult I was on the St. Paul Company’s men’s softball team for seven years (we won our league three times, advancing to the state regional quarterfinal round once), but my school years also exposed me to soccer. Thanks to playing soccer since the age of twelve, I had very good stamina and speed. I once ran the half mile in gym class during my junior year in high school in under two minutes (exactly 1:58, I remember; only Sheldon W., who was on the cross-country team, was faster), which had the gym coach groveling to get me onto the high school track team. I tried out for the school soccer team, was even named the starting goalie on the St. Louis Park High School JV squad, but couldn’t commit to it: at the same time, I was in the marching band, which created a massive scheduling and time conflict, so I went with my true love, playing music. **sigh** I could have been a contender...

At any rate, my three favorite sports are, in order, ice hockey, baseball, and soccer. And this brings me to why I want to write something about “footy” in *Askew*.

I really do enjoy watching what the rest of the world calls football on television. Our DirectTV satellite system allows access to games from around the world on multiple channels. It’s a great set-up. My favorite



teams are, naturally, the Minnesota United FC team (worst nickname in the league, the Loons), the Houston Dynamo, and Austin FC of the Major Soccer League (MSL) in North America. I regularly watch games from the Premier League and the European Super League, too. Atletico Madrid is my fave in the Euro League. In England I really don't care who's playing; I'll be watching. Here in the western hemisphere, there is an international league with many good teams, called CONCACAF: the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football. Every year CONCACAF holds qualifying games to determine which national teams will play in the World Cup, which in 2022 is being held in Qatar.

So I was pretty stoked when I saw on the tv schedule that the United States Men's National team was host to the Honduras team in third round play on February 2, 2022, in – get this – St. Paul, Minnesota. Game time was 6:30 PM CST, and the temperature at kickoff was exactly 0°F (-17°C) and since there was little wind, it felt like a balmy -10°F (-23°C) on the pitch. Apparently, the schedule was determined months before, so I guess nobody in CONCACAF with rational thinking skills and a laptop bothered to look up what the weather in St. Paul, Minnesota is like during the first week of February. Anyway, Allianz Field is the home of Minnesota FC in the North American MSL. The stadium holds 19,400 and for this frigid soccer game there were 19,029 diehard soccer fans in attendance. The poor Honduran team probably had been warned about what the weather might be like, but how and why, in all that is holy, did CONCACAF set this game to be held in the frozen tundra of Minnesota? The commentators constantly commented on it.

I am positive Twin Cities soccer fans didn't bat an eye at the temperature. Heck, I grew up there; pregame tailgating in parking lots before Vikings, Gophers, North Stars, and Kicks games is a longtime tradition up there, and barbecue grills, beer coolers, and whiskey bottles were *de rigueur*, and likely a transition-into-manhood tradition, no matter the weather. It was easy to tell by watching the game on ESPN that the fans were having a grand time and almost made me wish I was there. Almost.

As for the game itself, the USA team won 3-0, sending the team into a match against Mexico on March 24th, 2022. That should be a good game to watch. The weather will be warmer, too, since this game will be held in Estadia Azteca in Mexico City. The crowd will be much bigger, as well; that stadium's capacity is over 87,000. I just hope there are no earthquakes during the game. Although that would definitely shake things up, hee-hee.

Lovecraft Does Not Age Well

No, crazy old Howard Phillip Lovecraft's fiction-telling craft does not work very well almost a full century after his stories first began appearing in print. In mid-January I read a collection of his stories in the Carroll & Graf 1991 edition of *The Watchers Out of Time* (1991). This book contains 15 stories that H. P. Lovecraft had either started or had notes on, and were finished (well, all but the last one was completed) by August Derleth. This simple fact alone actually helps the readability of these stories. Face it: Lovecraft's writing style is...shall we say... pretty thick. Getting through some of his classics like "At the Mountains of Madness" (1936) or "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928) is a heavy slog – and those are probably among his most readable stories. Thankfully Derleth knew pacing, character development, and how to incorporate dialogue into a story. Lovecraft? Not so much.

This collection has 15 stories: 11 are written in Lovecraft's favorite point of view, first person. that always presented a heavily descriptive style in which HPL could demonstrate his extensive vocabulary of eerie and evocative adjectives. After a while the word "noisome" becomes quite noisome itself. The remaining four tales are in the more palatable third person voice, making them more interesting and enjoyable. All

are interconnected tales set around Arkham, Massachusetts and its environs, with the occasional foray into Boston or Salem, occasionally Providence, Rhode Island, and dealing with the same families: the Peabodys or the Taylors. This makes for a fun bit of cross-referencing between stories; however, the writing style, despite Derleth's influence, is still ponderous at times. In addition, there are passages that indicate Lovecraft's racial prejudice, and there are occasional female characters to make plots more interesting. "The Shadow in the Attic" has Rhoda Prentiss, the fiancé of the main character, Adam Duncan, and "The Dark Brotherhood" not only contains Rose Dexter, but the narrator is named Arthur Phillips, and Rose and Arthur meet multiple copies of a "Mr. Allen," who strongly resembles Edgar Allan Poe, on their "nocturnal explorations" around Providence, Rhode Island. Very stfnal, imho. This particular story is my favorite of this collection. It is suitably eerie. Not noisome, but it's well-paced spooky fun.

Overall, *The Watchers Out of Time* is much easier to read than, say, *Fungi From Yuggoth*, Lovecraft's Dunsanian fantasy *The Dreamquest of Unknown Kadath*, or many other collections of his work. As many other critics and readers have stated, HPL is an acquired taste. However, I would recommend *The Watchers Out of Time* as a good introduction to Lovecraft. August Derleth, too, for that matter; his Solar Pons books are worthy of a review in this zine someday. (FYI: HPL used foreshadowing like a hammer.)

Music Idols We Have Lost

Since last year I have been planning on writing tributes and remembrances about Charlie Watts and Michael Nesmith in this fanzine, but life, work, and additional losses to the rock music firmament have included too many others. Ronnie Spector and Ian McDonald are just two more of these losses, and all together these wonderful singers and musicians contributed so much to my childhood and teen years. Face it. Very few Boomers born in the first half of the 1950s would not know of the Rolling Stones, the Ronettes, the Monkees, King Crimson, and Foreigner. I guess all I can say is how much their music has meant to me as a ten-year-old with his first guitar and eventually as a musician in my early twenties. I learned how to play guitar along with the 45's of the Rolling Stones and the Monkees; loved Ronnie Spector's voice and cheered for her when she was freed from Phil Spector's grasp; marveled at the tonalities and music of King Crimson, then head-banged and danced to Foreigner in the 70s. What a great body of music these four left behind. RIP to all.

Fans off to the Consuite in the Sky

The obituary section of Dave Langford's fanzine *Ansible* grows in length by the month. In January of this year science fiction fandom lost some significant members, all of whom I have known in one way or another.

Frank Denton (1930-2022) was a longtime Seattle, Washington fan who I traded fanzines with for years, starting with his zines *Ash-Wings* and then *Rogue Raven* back in the mid-Seventies with my first zine, *This House*, and we kept swapping and locking each other until the late Eighties. We were typical correspondence fans who never met each other but it felt like we were fannish brothers due our linkage through fanzines. When I heard that he had passed away in January of this year, I felt so sad that I had never traveled to Seattle to meet not only him, but many other of that region's wonderful fans.

Two months later another Seattle fan, **Jane Hawkins (1951-2022)**, died on her own terms on January 7th, after fighting cancer at the age of 70. Again, to my knowledge we never conversed in person, but definitely knew of each other probably because she was married to Luke McGuff, a fellow Minneapolis fan, for a

brief time. If anything, Jane and I probably met each other back then (ca. 1989-1992) at a convention or two. Based on the tributes I read on Facebook, I wish I had known Jane much better. She sounds like an incredible woman. My condolences to all those who called her a friend.

Bill Mills (1952-2022) started his fannish career in LASFS back in 1969, eventually moving to Las Vegas, Nevada, and was not only an apa-hack (we were both in SNAPS – Southern Nevada Amateur Press Society - for a few years about ten to fifteen years ago) but also a fellow musician (Bill filked a *lot*), and we would often call each other on the phone, share songs and recordings, and generally jabber about all sorts of stuff. Again, we never met in person, but it was so much fun to talk music, guitars, and recording techniques with him. I was stunned to hear of his sudden death on January 9, 2022. Damn it! Valerie and I were really looking forward to meeting Bill and his wife Roxanne on a westward vacation either this year or next.

Fandom was knocked back again with the death of long-time fan and member of Second Fandom, **Roger Sims (1930-2022)**. I knew Roger from Midwestern conventions like WindyCon, Minicon, and the first Kansas City Worldcon in 1976. The man was a lifelong fan, co-chaired the 1959 Worldcon Detention, was actually registered in the famed room 770 at the 1951 New Orleans Worldcon, won the 1995 DUFF race with his wife Pat, and worked on tons of conventions over the years in a multitude of positions. Roger is very much missed by all.

And then another fannish stalwart, **Bill Wright (1937-2022)** of Melbourne, Australia died on January 16th. Besides publishing numerous fanzines over the years, Bill was secretary of the 1975 AussieCon, a founding member of ANZAPA (Australia-New Zealand Amateur Press Association), did this, did that, and also won the 2013 DUFF race that brought him to LoneStarCon III in San Antonio, Texas. I was in charge of the fanzine lounge there, so naturally he spent a lot of time there, and we chatted away about all sorts of things fannish and non-fannish. Somewhere in my stash of photographs there is one of me with Bill and Dave Kyle sitting and talking. Not exactly an action shot, but I was agog at being in their presence.

Yes, January 2022 was a bad month for science fiction fandom. We lost many fine friends, and our lives are forever blessed by memories of them all.

Hey! I Even Read a Whole Book!

Farmer, Philip José. *Lord of the Trees*. Titan Books, 2012, 187 pp.

This was a fun book to read, especially if you have read Farmer's two "biographies" from the early 70s, *Tarzan Alive: A Definitive Biography of Lord Greystoke* (1972), and *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life* (1973). Those were the first two books of The Nine, tales of the Wold Newton Universe. *Lord of the Trees* is written in the rapid-fire prose style of the pulp magazine era, and not surprisingly blends the characters of Doc Savage and Lord Greystoke, the latter being the focus and narrator of this novel. There are no chapters, the action is nonstop, and there are good guys versus bad guys with the requisite damsel-in-distress scenario tossed in a couple of times. The frantic action is centered in a remote region of unexplored Africa, naturally, and the narrative zooms right along. Well, it can't help but do that. Let me just say that this book was a fun way to kill a few hours – along with at least dozens of bad guys, too.

=====

"You can even smell how cold it is. Not pleasant at all."

Skewed Thoughts: letters of comment

The previous issue, posted a mere two months ago, resulted in a fair amount of response, which is greatly appreciated. Now if I could get a return like this on my genzine my life would be complete. Apparently, this fanzine contains topics that get people writing. Cool. Thank you, folks, for making me happy to open emails these days. () Not surprisingly, Lloyd Penney rose to the occasion twice, but who's counting?*

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

21 July 2021



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.

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 if 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 [in] 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. ***{Without question, this is an astonishing, emotional issue.}***

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. ***{Fodder for a future issue, this.}***

=====
"Tonight's game might as well be played on a concrete pitch."

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...

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 {**Montreal Canadians**} 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

{Well, life continues on its merry way despite all the idiocy happening in the world. It was a very nice change to read about Pullman's books, and even sports in your loc, Lloyd, which give me hope that things are trying to return to a semblance of normalcy. Let's see what your more recent letter said:}

15 January 2022

The slow catch-up continues. I took a lot of December off to pursue a handsomely-paid opportunity to actually edit a book, an e-book of classic space opera, for a British author. It took close to three weeks to get it done, and I had to let the zines pile up. And did they ever... Next up is *Askew 35*.

The Omicron variant means a return to the lockdowns we had to deal with early last year, and no one is happy with that. Our monthly pubnights are conducted on Zoom calls again. Some countries are actually thinking of making the vaccinations mandatory, which automatically turns people off. We are fully vaccinated, three shots plus a flu shot, but you'd think some had never heard of the Spanish flu. Maybe they haven't, turning this pandemic into one not only of the unvaccinated, but the short-sighted. COVID might become endemic, or another stronger variant may arise. Let's get vaccinated and stop that potential variant.

It would be nice to go to the Vancouver Corflu, but we will not be there, just can't afford it. I suspect that flying from Toronto to Vancouver on a domestic flight would be much more expensive than flying from your nearest airport to Vancouver. This is a big continent...Audacity is good software. I have used it in the past to record voicework for clients.

The Republican Party continues to prove that the stupid truly burns. While there aren't any previous 18 COVIDs (no matter what senior Repubs seem to think), I have already seen story stubs that include a COVID-23, or COVID-37, depending on the year the story is set in. We had the odd Canpol who makes a

ridiculous statement about masks and vaccines, and two new mini-right-wing parties have been started because of total disbelief in this pandemic and all it entails. The January 6th Commission is chugging away, and someday, we will see the Orange Monster in prison orange. I did get the associated books surrounding Pullman's Dust trilogies, and they were enjoyed. And the convention in Rochester was cancelled, and scheduled for November of this year. Still, no guarantees.

Lloyd Penney

{There is actually a bit of good news on the prosecution of Dolt 45 front. The January 6th investigative committee has released a brief stating that they believe The Orange-faced Shitgibbon likely committed crimes against the United States federal government, and this announcement resulted in a lot of speculation regarding if Humpty Trumpty will actually face trial for his actions. Stay tuned, everyone, and make sure you have a lot of popcorn on hand.}

Mark Plummer
Croydon, UK

mark.fishlifter@googlemail.com

21 December 2021

Thanks for sending that, John. Some... interesting, antiquated sf reading there. The only thing I know or recall about the Brunner/Woodcote *I Speak for Earth* is that the cover has the tagline 'The Man with Seven Faces' while the Emswiler artwork clearly shows a man with six faces. The flip of the Ace Double, *Wand the Invader*, features a spectacularly awful alien which is almost exactly not as described in the book.



That's an even-handed take on the 2023 Worldcon site selection.

We weren't in DC and were following along to a degree online. I'm sure I have a seriously incomplete picture of what happened but there are a few individuals whose actions struck me as less than glorious. Yes, there are political issues with a Worldcon in China but it seems to me that Chengdu's win is a result of strong grassroots support for the idea of a Worldcon in China. Like you, I won't be going but then I wouldn't have been going to Winnipeg either.

Good to see you plugging TAFF, for all that I'd expect you to be doing it. We're backing Anders Holmström (of the Stockholm Holmstoms), a 'Swedish all-purpose multifunctional fan' as his platform puts it. We've known him since 1996, and he's been a fan a lot longer than that. In particular, he's long struck me as an intensely social fan, an ideal TAFF delegate really who knows people all over the place -- through all sorts of often unlikely chains of connection -- and can quickly become at home with those he's not met before. Anders for TAFF, as they say.

Mark Plummer

{All the old scientificfictional stuff I read is meant to be a distraction and a bit of fun for my weary mind, and the cover art on old sf books, notably the Ace Doubles, is either excellent or wretched. What is even more fun is seeing the same artwork used multiple times for very different books. Are we not surprised? (*) The fact that Chengdu won the 2023 Worldcon bid doesn't surprise me, nor shall I be attending. As

for TAFF, you had better believe I support this worthy endeavour. I am not sure which candidate I shall vote for this year, but all four of these folks are excellent choices. There is still plenty of time to deliberate and cast my vote. I encourage everyone else to participate, as well.}

Ray Palm

raypalmx@gmail.com

20 January 2022

There could be a variation on your pun that opens page one, referring to a certain publication by one Al Goldstein.

The long hard slog continues with COVID. One of my friends was hit a second time but this bout wasn't as bad. I suspect it was the omicron variant. He picked up the infection from an asymptomatic coworker. A local cafe was allowing customers to be maskless if they had vaccination proof. I wonder if a carrier had stopped in.

Good to hear that things are picking up with your music. You mentioned over at *Askance* you were thinking about dropping out of zinedom. Since you're comfortable in front of a microphone, maybe you could try podcasting. Just short segments on what is on your mind.

Since you follow politics, what do you think of the two fifth columnists working for the GOP, Sinema and Manchin?

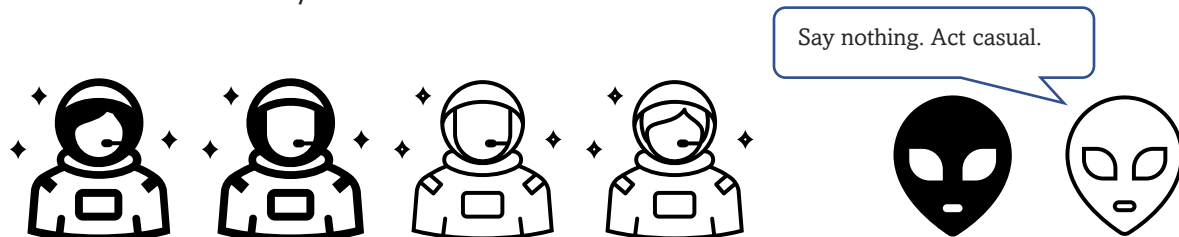
Have fun singing and playing,

Ray Palm

{I most certainly am enjoying being musically active again, especially the playing and writing aspect of. Singing, needs work. () As you can see by this issue seeing print and what I have written herein, my interest in fanzines is still there. It is going to take a lot more than an unexpected attack of fannish malaise to stop me from pubbing my ish. It's in me blood, it is.}*

I ALSO HEARD FROM:

Leybl Botwinik, Tom Feller, Bruce Gillespie, Jerry Kaufman, Jose Sanchez, Garth Spencer, Joel Thingvall, and Dan Tolliver. Thank you all!



=====
"The players are puffing out clouds of smoke like frozen steam engines."

Everyone looks to Europe

Publishing a sort of frequent fanzine gives a person the opportunity to discuss and expound upon current events in the world. Faneditors of the past and present have done this; the two current faneditors who do this the most are Guy Lillian in his personalzine *Spartacus*, and Arhvid Engholm in his zine *Intermission*. To be fair, so does Nic Farey in *This Here...*, and I can recall Chris Garcia sometimes discussing current affairs in *The Drink Tank*, and Perry Middlemiss in *Perryscope*. In short, fans do this sort of thing. A lot.



Well, the last week or so has been fraught with concern and fear since Russia invaded Ukraine. I am sure that I do not need to recapitulate everything that has happened since February 24, 2022, namely the battles, the embargoes, the sanctions, and all the conflicting reports of what is happening on the north shores of the Black Sea. It is definitely a very bad, very dangerous, very volatile situation that could go south in a hurry.

So, yes, I have been watching this war very closely. The ramifications of what and why Russian “President” Vladimir Putin is doing are frightening. Possibly the fate of the democratic nations of Eastern Europe are in danger of falling under Russian influence yet again. Putin has made no pretense of what he wants: Russia must be respected and feared once again.

I don’t know how many of you, my faithful readers, know that my minor field of study at Iowa State University was in Russian Studies. Overall, I have had nearly three full years learning the Russian language, and studied the history, literature, culture, including a two-course of study in Soviet Military History. During my senior year in high school, I took one year of the Russian language, and Richard Russell, the teacher, made it interesting and fun. Mister Russell had issues of *Russia Today* in the classroom, and by the time I graduated I started subscribing to that magazine. In those pages I learned much about not only that nation’s history, but also its culture, literature, architecture, economics, agriculture, natural resources...the works. Russian history is a fascinating study that reveals much about the current situation. What follows is my thinking about the current Russia-Ukraine war, courtesy of old college textbooks.

What Americans need to understand is that Russia is long-accustomed to being ruled by strict authoritarianism, with an elite aristocracy supported by a strict hierarchical social structure for over a millennium. The Russian Empire dates back to the ninth century AD when Kievan Rus was established by the Eastern Slavs, with Kiev (currently spelled as Kyiv) as its capital. This was followed by the Rurik Dynasty ruling from Kiev until it was overrun by the Mongols in 1237, and the Khan of the Golden Horde controlled the land until 1480 when Ivan the Great drove out the Mongols. It was Ivan III who shifted the seat of power to Muscovite rule during his reign. His son, Ivan IV – known as Ivan the Terrible – was the first Czar of Russia, and the infamous history of Russia’s “rule by terror” began in earnest. The Muscovite era ended with the rise of the Romanov Dynasty early in the 17th century. This was the start of the greatest growth in Russian culture, government, and geographical expansion under the aegis of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great during the 18th century. Thanks to their efforts, the Russian Empire became a major

player in European affairs. The Romanovs would rule Russia until 1917, when the Bolshevik Revolution ousted Tsar Nicholas II, and soon after the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – the СССР (Союз Советских Социалистических Республик) – was established with Vladimir Lenin as leader. Not surprisingly, Communist rule was ruthless, further cementing the strict social structure of Czarist Russia (aristocracy, merchant class, working class, serf class) into communist stratification. As a result, the USSR became a valid world power under Josef Stalin, and Nikita Khrushchev was quite good at maintaining tight control over the nation following Stalin’s death in 1953.

Now, please forgive my history lesson here, but what truly needs to be emphasized, and some news outlets have finally started mentioning this in their analyses, is that Vladimir Putin was a KGB official – a.k.a., *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*, English Committee for State Security, the foreign intelligence and domestic security agency of the Soviet Union - who rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the KGB by the time the USSR collapsed in 1989. I believe this is a very important fact to remember.

Here is why I assembled this brief history lesson as background. Vladimir Putin was a career Russian KGB officer with designs on rising even higher in the ranks. By 1999 he had maneuvered his way into the leadership of Russia and has held onto, if not considerably consolidating, his power and control of that nation ever since. In fact, a few years ago he “democratically changed” Russian terms of office so that he could conceivably remain in power until 2036. By then Vladimir Putin will be 84. See, at present Putin is 69 years old; he will turn 70 this summer. Essentially, he is using a semblance of “democracy” to control Russia much like his preceding communist premiers.

And Putin is not alone. Assuming that many Soviet soldiers, officers, and government officials were in the age range of 25 to 50 in 1989, by now they are anywhere from 57 to 82 years old. To me this is key, and here is why. Many former Soviet officials are resentful of Russia’s loss of influence and being able to dictate much of the international dialog. There exists a lot of resentment and anger about this loss of global influence in these people, and that is something that too many Americans – civilians, politicians, and military leaders – either ignore or simply do not care about. My contention is that this resentment and anger are driving the desire of those currently in Russian leadership to become relevant once again.

At the heart of Putin’s desire to reclaim Russian dominance is control of the Ukraine. Take a look at a world map. Ukraine sits on the Black Sea, so it has year-round open water ports, including the vitally important Crimean Peninsula. Ukraine is located in a geopolitically strategic location for trade and military operations, and possesses a moderate climate with abundant agricultural and fossil fuel resources to boot. Plus, Ukraine has a long history of being part of the Russian Empire and the USSR. Being a Western-leaning democratic republic makes Ukraine a sore reminder of Soviet Russia’s loss of prestige in the world. Putin, along with many other former Soviet autocrats, want that position back, and the cost of regaining this status might very well be meaningless to them.

Need I remind anyone that the latest developments of the Russia-Ukraine war include the dangerous fact that both Chernobyl and the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plants are now occupied by Russian forces? That raises a powerful spectre over the world summed up in one word that drives rulers like Putin: Fear.

Fear is a powerful weapon in the hands of the fearless. Or, to put it another way, in the hands of those who don’t care. My concern is that Vladimir Putin only cares about saving face. Perhaps the only way out of this mess is if members of his inner circle recognize the potential disastrous results of Putin’s war and try to somehow end it. We can only hope so, because presently hope is almost all we have left.

I truly hate ending a fanzine on such an ominous note, but this is what I keep thinking of these days.

See you all next issue.