

ALEXIAD

(ΑΛΞΙΑΔ)

\$2.00

Dawn is approaching in Hopkinsville and this morning I am remembering many dawns spent at my Aunt Mildred's house. There was always a delicious breakfast and grand times at night spent playing Monopoly with my cousins. My mother would talk with her sister while they cleaned up. Uncle Lloyd, Mildred's husband, would sit quietly but somehow even though mostly silent, very much present and a dark flame in the room. This morning I reflect on those past dawns as I sit at the computer. This afternoon I will say goodbye to my aunt for the last time. She died at the end of April. There will be no more dawns at her house.

— Lisa

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Comments are by **JTM** or **LTM**

The 147th Running of the Kentucky Derby was **May 1, 2021**.

The track was open to spectators, but distancing and other anti-COVID measures were enforced. Medina Spirit came in first, but there was a inquiry due to an illegal level of betamethasone, an anti-inflammatory drug.

The 146th Running of the Preakness Stakes was **May 15, 2021**.

Rombauer won, surging past at the last minute, while Medina Spirit, having led most of the way, faded to third.

The 152nd Running of the Belmont Stakes will be **June 5, 2021**.

Essential Quality won in a stretch duel. Medina Spirit did not

enter the race. Rombauer came in third.

The 96th Running of the Hambletonian (1st leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) will be **August 7, 2021** at Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

The 67th Running of the Yonkers Trot (2nd leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) will be **July 2, 2021** at Yonkers Raceway in Yonkers, New York.

The 128th Running of the Kentucky Futurity (3rd leg of the Trotting Triple Crown) will be held at a date to be announced later, at the Red Mile in Lexington, Kentucky.

The 66th Running of the Cane Pace (1st leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) will be **August 7, 2021** at Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

The 67th Running of the Messenger Stakes (2nd leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) will be **July 2, 2021** at Yonkers Raceway in Yonkers, New York.

The 76th Running of the Little Brown Jug (3rd leg of the Pacing Triple Crown) will be **September 23, 2021** at the Delaware County Fair in Delaware, Ohio.

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Deadline is **August 1, 2021**

Reviewer's Notes

Commerce is beginning to open up. The governor of Kentucky has lifted the restrictions, apparently giving up on a chance to rule by decree. Restaurants no longer require masks.

We can travel again. The family reunions that were canceled last year seem to be on for this year. Conventions are the same, though with no nearby ones that seems not to matter so much for us.

Last summer, I spent an undue amount of time driving Lisa to work, at a library an hour away. Now her own library is back, and now fully open. It seems a refuge from the pains of the outside world.

Meanwhile, so many faneds seem to have gafiated, or as the late Rodney Leighton put it, dafiated (Drifted Away From It All). I no longer have the energy to write letters, but it was interesting to see how others across the country or around the world were doing. But they get fewer and fewer. It has been replaced by the Internet community, which seems to spark feuds and bans with the flash of a tweet. Fandom was never peaceful or calm, but at least there used to be time to think about a comment and realize that it needed to be less immoderate. I expect this will get people angry at me.

— Joe

RANDOM JOTTINGS

by Joe



Buy my books. (All available on Amazon.com for quite reasonable prices, except the Hugo-nominated *Heinlein's Children*, which can be bought directly from George Price for a reasonable sum, or from ReAnimus Press in electronic format.)

https://www.amazon.com/-/e/B01BMIC4MU?ref=pe_1724030_132998070

<https://reanimus.com/store>

— Advt.

A team of medical researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital has released a study on the health of the British National Antarctic Expedition, the *Discovery* Expedition of 1901-4. Their findings were that Ernest Shackleton in particular and several other expedition members in general, had beriberi. They did not know much about vitamins then. (As they say, “Bury Bury is a fatal disease.”)

In the Land of White Death (Mezhdu zhizniyu i smerti) (1917, 1925, 2002) by Valerian Ivanovich Albanov (reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 1 #5) recounts a harrowing story of an Arctic expedition that went terribly wrong. At the time of the publication of the English translation of the book, nothing was known of the fate of the sailors who remained on the ship *Svyatava Anna* with Captain Georgy L. Brusilov, or the others who disappeared during Albanov's trek to land. In 2010 a Russian expedition led by Oleg Prodan found artifacts and skeletons from the ship and crew on the shore of Franz Josef Land.

On April 19, a helicopter with three members of an expedition attempting to find more artifacts crashed on Bely Island in the Kara Sea. All the people on board were killed including Prodan, who was also the leader of this expedition.

We have learned that in 2007 a Russian submarine, carrying some members of the Russian State Duma, planted the Russian flag on the seabed under the North Pole. Someone go out to Arlington and please tell Peary and Henson.

And you thought the Baltimore Gun Club had big ambitions (*Sans dessus dessous* (The Purchase of the North Pole (also titled *Topsy-Turvy*) (1889. 1890)).

OBITS

We regret to report the death of fanzine fan and apahack **Marty Helgesen**, on **May 23, 2021**. Marty was known as the editor of the religious-themed fanzine *Radio Free Thulcandra*. In mundane life he was a librarian in Malvern, New York. He was born in 1938. There was a funeral Mass on **May 28**.

MONARCHICAL NEWS

Karin Vogel is a healthcare professional in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany; she treats elders with chronic pain. She has a strange distinction.

Karin Vogel is the *last* person in the line of succession to the British throne. She is descended from Electress Sophia of Hanover through a cascade of Prussian and Württemberg princes, then a morgantic marriage and some minor nobles, down to the marriage of Dr. Wolfram Vogel, M.D., and Ilse von der Trenck, which produced two sons and then Karin.

If she has ever had any dealings with Franz Bonaventura Adalbert Maria Herzog von Bayern (and the Bavarian state government insists he be addressed as “Duke”), the Jacobite pretender, she hasn’t mentioned it.

Um . . . the Lancastrian claimant would either be Juan Carlos of Spain or Henry Somerset, Duke of Beaufort. The Yorkist claimant would be Simon Abney-Hastings (Earl of Loudon, but Aussies don’t use those pommy titles, mate). Edgar the Ætheling didn’t have any children and the descendants of Harold Godwinson and Edith Swan-Neck are uncertain.

The best Tudor claimant would seem to be Ralph Percy, the Duke of Northumberland, a descendant of Catherine Grey, Queen Jane’s sister. Of course his name is actually “Smithson”, as in the institution, but that’s all right because Hotspur (for example) was actually a Prince of Lorraine.

On **May 5, 2021**, a mass was said at Les Invalides in Paris on the 200th anniversary of the death of Napoleon. The Prince Napoléon was present along with the Princess. Also present were his father Prince Charles, his mother Princess Béatrice, his uncle Prince Jérôme and aunt Princess Licinia, the Prince Murat and his wife Princess Maria — and the Count and Countess of Paris! President Macron and his wife were also present.

After the Mass the Prince Napoléon laid a wreath at the Emperor’s tomb. The ceremony was guarded by a group of Imperial Guard reenactors, and representatives of the French armed forces were there.

YOU'RE SO VAIN

by Joe

There was an annular eclipse on **June 10, 2021**, visible in Ontario, Quebec, the Canadian Northern territories, Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), and the Far Eastern Province of Russia. The largest city where it was visible was Srednekolymsk. The path passed over the North Pole. Maximum annularity was in the Nares Strait off Greenland, and lasted 3 minutes 51 seconds. The eclipse was part of Saros 147, which began October 12, 1624 and will end February 24, 3049.

The next solar eclipse will be a total eclipse, on **December 4, 2021**, visible in East Antarctica, from the Ronne Ice Shelf to Marie Byrd Land. The path will be passing above the Pole and thus will run from East to West, instead of from West to East as most eclipses do. The maximum totality will be 1 minute 54 seconds, visible at 76° 46' S 46° 12' W, on the Ronne Ice Shelf. The eclipse is part of Saros 152, which began on July 26, 1805 and will end on August 20, 3049.

NASA Eclipse website:

<https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse.html>

Other useful eclipse websites:

<http://www.hermit.org/Eclipse>

<http://www.eclipse.org.uk/>

SUICIDE IS NOT PAINLESS

Commentary by Joseph T Major

Why I Have Not Committed Suicide
Peg Howard

The Devil sat me down to lunch
in a little crimson room.
He fed me on tea brewed of fresh hot tears
and cakes baked of violet gloom.

The tea was bitter and the cakes were hard
and I sweated from every pore;
but better such bitter fare, I said,
than the cold outside that door.

Yes, better the Devil’s crimson room,
and the Devil’s heated laughter,
than the awful cold outside that door,
and silence, forever after.

The suicide banquet in the novel *MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors* (1968) by “Richard Hooker” [Dr. Richard Hornberger, M.D.] is intentionally misleading. The would-be suicide, one of the staff, has concluded that his life is at an end because he is impotent. The other doctors set up a mock funeral banquet, at the climax of which he is given what he is told is a suicide pill but is actually a sleeping pill. When he awakens, he is being lowered from a helicopter, and the other doc-

tors ask him how the afterlife was.

This was an example of “going mad to stay sane”, doing something outrageous to adjust for the normally stressful events at an Army forward surgical hospital. At the time, it was funny.

But some people did not have the oversight of Hawkeye Pierce, Trapper John McIntyre, Spearchucker Jones, Duke Forrest, and Henry Blake (who did not die). Andrew Martinez committed suicide on May 18, 2006, at the age of thirty-three. Vicki van Meter committed suicide on March 15, 2008, three days after her twenty-sixth birthday.

In the nineties, they were briefly famous. The events were not world-shaking, or positive, or happy.

Andrew was a student at the University of California at Berkeley. There, it seems, all sorts of unusual behaviors are tolerated, if not commonplace. Andrew’s particular form of activism was going naked, beginning in September of 1992, during his second year there. This was not a Heinlein novel, or a utopian work by Robert H. Rimmer. He strolled about the campus wearing sandals and a backpack. His attitude was that he was not harming anyone by going naked, it was his right to go naked, and wearing clothes was an indicator of class restrictions. He became known as “The Naked Guy”.

This bothered some people there. He was frequently arrested, nevertheless, he persisted. The university passed a regulation forbidding nudity on campus. Feeling unwelcome, he dropped out of school. Finally, the city passed an anti-public nudity ordinance (naturally he showed up naked to speak against it).

After studies abroad (clothed) Andrew returned to the U.S. He was treated for schizophrenia. Finally, he was arrested for assault and battery after a fight at a halfway house. While waiting for trial, he was found dead with a plastic bag over his head.

A year after Andrew made his naked debut, Vicki van Meter set a record when she flew from Augusta, Maine to San Diego, California, beginning September 20, 1993. She was, as you can figure, eleven years old then. A year later, she flew across the Atlantic.

She became famous, invited to various public functions, was featured on television, and so on. She was seen as an avatar of feminist empowerment. She even had a meme: “Girls Can Fly”.

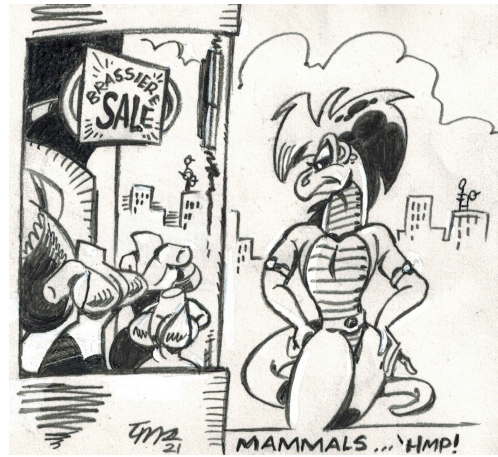
In 1996, seven-year-old Jessica Dubroff set out to beat that record. Like Vicki she had an instructor with her, and she also had her father. The flight would feature many interviews en route, arranged by her father. They set off on April 10 from Half-Moon Bay, California. (She seems to have slept during part of the flight.)

On April 11, she took off from the airport in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The weather was bad but they had to make the next event on the schedule. The plane crashed shortly after

takeoff, killing all three of them. Afterwards, the FAA banned record attempts by student pilots, thus putting an end to these stunts.

Vicki became a Peace Corps volunteer. However, after her return, she struggled with depression, and ended up shooting herself. Did she blame herself for Jessica Dubroff’s death?

There are eras where pushing the envelope of behavior is deemed admirable. All too many of these exotic border crossers find that there are good reasons for social or physical limitations, and they create stresses too hard to bear.



SHIFTING SANDS

by Joseph T Major

Darrell Schweitzer says in his LoC: “I think what we have here more than a generational divide is an electronic divide.” He is referring to awards but I think this is a small part of a deeper shift.

It’s coming along gradually, I think, a proposal here, a complaint there, bit by bit. I’ve commented on the bits as they come up, so here’s a listing along with the latest one.

Three or four years ago there was a posting on SlashDot. The poster had been to Worldcon and found it lacking. He spoke of several activities and complained that the convention had not offered them.

Was he unaware of volunteering? Conventions seem to be falling over themselves to offer activities that are proposed by and for small groups. But someone has to tell them.

Then there was the organizer who had a Big Idea. The Worldcon would change its methodology. Instead of a bid being a one-off, the bid would become a national bid. The winning Worldcon would be held at the national convention of the winning country. The U.S. would have to set up a national convention, and he proposed it be in Chicago, since that was a central location.

If such a proposal was ever submitted to the Business Meeting, it would be interesting to hear. This seems to have been a “build it and they will come” proposal, flung out for the

world to act upon. This sort of reply to arguments seems common in Net debate, where the presenter of one side will put it on a blog or tweet or something of the sort and expect the opponent to find it.

And last year, there were the concerned pros who were objecting to the Saudi Arabian bid, because of the poor human rights record of the country. In a statement issued perhaps two days before voting ended. A statement calling upon the “Board of the World Science Fiction Society (WSFS)” to take action.

Kevin Standlee, the long-serving (long-suffering?) Hugo administrator, one of the Permanent Floating Worldcon Committee, replied, patiently and trying to be informative. At the time, there was little notice as to whether the organizer of the open letter (who had been called out for leaving out one of the ConNZ con chairs) had worked on her understanding or proposal.

As if to show that such a lack of awareness is wider-ranging, Jon del Arroz announced his demands for the settlement conference with SFSFC, over his lawsuit over being banned from Worldcon 78. He wanted to be named to the board of Worldcon, as diversity officer. Just like the concerned pros said, “the board of Worldcon”. And I thought the corporate chapter of WSFS, Inc. had been allowed to lapse. He settled, but for not enough money to pay his legal fees, apparently, and no appointment. His supporters have been gloating.

And now we have the Hugo ceremony problem. Some people have been recommending that the Hugos be split off from the Worldcon. A good way to bring an end to both.

IN HORSE BLOOD

Commentary by Joseph T Major
on Thomas Thompson’s

BLOOD AND MONEY:

The Classic True Story of Murder, Passion, and Power
(1976, 2001)

Robert Ashton Hill is a lawyer in Maryland. Out of courtesy, it would not be desirable to discuss with him his ancestry, or the events recounted herein. Or even, perhaps, to call him “Boot”.

Ash Robinson, Davis Ashton Robinson in full, was a free-wheeling Texas oilman. Such people have been described in Bryan Burrough’s *The Big Rich: The Rise and Fall of the Greatest Texas Oil Fortunes* (2009), a chronicle of wretched excess. Having made and lost a couple of fortunes, Ash finally hit on something secure; he would buy shares in potential oil land; the landowner would have some money in hand, and if they hit oil Ash would have an income without risking the full price.

He seems to have been one of the less extravagant of the Houston oil crowd. Considering that this includes such people as Jim “Silver Dollar” West, who got his nickname by throwing around silver dollars at people, or more seriously, people who campaigned for the

retention of the oil depletion allowance, this has its own value. (In *The Patriot* (1964, reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 10 #3) Harold Bienvenu gave a description of such a man.) Mrs. Robinson, Rhea Gardere, was a supportive wife, but barren. In 1931 they adopted a baby whom they named Joan Olive Robinson. (Thompson speculates that Joan may have been Ash's biological daughter, but proving it would be expensive, annoying, and pointless.)

Joan was Daddy's Little Princess. Strangely enough, in spite of this treatment she did not grow up into a demanding, entitled woman. She had, it seemed, one outstanding skill; she was a superb horsewoman. She began by falling for a broken-down riding horse, but she and only she could make the horse perform like a champion.

Her career was outstanding; she won over five hundred trophies during her competitive days. (Yes, she competed here in Louisville.) Her particular trademark was wearing a gray habit, instead of the traditional black, when riding her favorite horse, a Saddlebred named Beloved Belinda which was a gray.

But Daddy's Little Princess had the problem of Daddy. (And you thought *Vader's Little Princess* (by Jeffrey Brown, 2013) had it hard!) Joan married twice before she was twenty, and Ash managed to break up each marriage. She became a fixture of the socialite crowd of Houston, and reading the gossip column descriptions of her doings makes one relieved that they don't do this any more.

Dr. John Robert Hill, M.D., was a prominent plastic surgeon in Houston. His parents had been working-class people who encouraged their children to do better, and both John and his brother Julian became doctors. They loved music.

John Hill's career could be described as "mixed". He had alienated his first medical partner by his inability to attract trade. He had made a number of hazardous and even potentially lethal errors in surgery. When he struck out on his own, though, he began wooing clients and seemed to have done well enough.

He was, apparently, an appropriate spouse for Joan Robinson, and in 1957 they were married. Daddy's Little Princess was housed in the Royal Palace with her consort, that is they lived with the Robinsons, which certainly helped Dr. Hill pay the bills during his residency. They must have always wanted her to marry a doctor. Eventually they moved out, but not far.

Dr. Hill loved music. Perhaps he loved it too well. As when he joined a music group of doctors, performing instead of spending time operating. And he built a superb music room in his new house. The prices Thompson quotes have the problem that inflation has struck, and by contrast technology has advanced. It would be possible now to build a music room about as good as his for the \$100,000 that Dr. Hill paid — but that would be a pittance by the prices and value of the dollar of the sixties. One can get a contempo-

rary figure on expenses by considering the Bösendorfer Imperial Grand piano that Dr. Hill bought, paying \$15,000. The company still makes them, and an Imperial Grand now costs \$256,000 (more if the computer system is added). And Joan felt shut out.

In 1960, Robert Ashton Hill was born to Joan and John. His grandfather took over the Prince, calling him "Boot". This may not have been the best of omens. The marriage staggered on.

Dr. Hill took his son to a summer camp one day in August of 1968. Someone else went. After seeing her fall into a river and come out with her clothing stuck to her body, Dr. Hill became exceedingly attracted to Ann Kurth. She may not have been the best choice for a wife, having been divorced three times.



He struck up an affair with Kurth, and not surprisingly Joan was not pleased. His fidelity wavered, and at one point he had the extremely dangerous idea to have his wife and mistress in the house at the same time.

This was very interesting. Dr. Hill provided pastries to his wife and her guests. He gave each one a specific pastry. For the next few days they had an argumentative life, but then surprisingly Joan announced that John had made up with her. She had been thinking about lawyers.

Then on March 15, 1969, Joan got sick. She was vomiting copiously. Over the next few days her condition deteriorated and she was having attacks of diarrhea. On the eighteenth, by which time she was slipping in and out of consciousness, Dr. Hill decided to take her to a hospital. He did not call an ambulance, but he drove her himself past a large hospital with an emergency room and other means of treatment (where he had hospital privileges) to a smaller facility that had no emergency room and no trauma facilities. (Did he have hospital privileges there?)

Her condition deteriorated rapidly after admission, with first kidney failure and then heart failure. Joan died early in the morning of

March 19. There was a perfunctory autopsy (for example, no blood samples were taken for analysis) and she was buried two days later.

Ash Robinson became enraged. He haunted the district attorney's office and the police, urging a prosecution of Dr. Hill for murder. Usually when someone gets so involved in the investigation of a crime, it turns out he's the perpetrator. (Or worse, in the case of Houston fitness center millionaire Richard Minns, who responded to a breakup with his mistress Barbara Piotrowski by urging her prosecution for theft of the furniture in their house; see *Sleeping with the Devil* by Suzanne Finstad (1992) for this tale.) He had the Houston Medical Examiner view her body before the burial, and then, had her exhumed for a third autopsy by Milton Helpert, the famous New York medical examiner. There were no clear indications of how or why she had died; nevertheless, Ash persisted.

Then in June, Dr. Hill married Ann Kurth — only to get divorced less than a year later. He had found she had turned into a harridan, and she claimed that he had tried to kill her. And then Ash's efforts finally bore fruit, when Dr. Hill was indicted for murder by omission. He had gone before two grand juries before a third finally handed down an indictment. Among other charming features of the testimony, Ann Kurth testified that not only had Hill told her he had poisoned Joan's pastry with bacteria, then injected more into her, and he had also tried to kill Kurth three times.

The trial began in February of 1971. Kurth repeated her testimony, which caused Hill's lawyer to request and get a mistrial. Dr. Hill got married again while waiting for his retrial. It never happened; on September 24, 1972, a man broke into the Hills' house and killed the doctor.

The perpetrator, Bobby Wayne Vandiver, was arrested in April of 1973. He finally confessed to the murder, naming two intermediaries and claiming that he had been hired by Ash Robinson. In a brilliant stroke of genius, the Houston police released him on bail — and he fled to Longview, Texas, where he lived under a pseudonym until a policeman killed him during an arrest.

The two intermediaries were tried. Vandiver's getaway driver got ten years, the hirer got 35. (They were a prostitute and a madam; nice work if you can get it.) Ash Robinson got away scot-free.

Ash Robinson died in 1985; his wife, Rhea, died in 1987. John's brother, Dr. Julian Hill, had committed suicide. Ann Kurth died in 1990. Kurth had made some odd claims before she died; she said that Dr. Hill had faked his own death and fled to Mexico. A friend had supposedly seen him there. The body was very badly battered about the face and Vandiver, or somebody, had wrapped bandages around his head before shooting him. And the autopsy had reported the corpse's eye color as being different from Dr. Hill's. She also claimed that John had killed Julian. (He seems to have been

disturbed at being homosexual.) Thompson said of Kurth, "She has one eye on the cash register and no eye on the truth." (She sued him but lost, because the jury found that Thompson's description of her was derogatory but true.)

Did John Hill kill his wife?

His behavior once she fell ill seems not to be up to the best medical standards; not calling an ambulance, not taking her to an adequate facility. This might be considered suspicious. Perhaps Ash Robinson should have sued for wrongful death, where the burden of proof is less. (The way they got O. J. Simpson.)

The Houston police bungled the case against Ash, letting Hill's killer get out and away. Could Ash have been convicted? He could buy lawyers, and a Texas jury might find it hard to convict a man who said he was doing it for his daughter.

It's interesting to compare this case with the case of Richard Minns and Barbra Piotrowski. After Minns broke up with her, she was attacked by two incompetent hit men; they were caught practically on the scene of the crime. Barbra was shot and left paralyzed from the waist down, but she seems to have recovered some motion. The two bunglers were convicted, so was the man who hired them, a Dallas private detective. But he kept his mouth shut about who had hired him.

Piotrowski (more or less, she changed her name in an attempt to hide) filed a suit against Minns and won a huge settlement, but it was overturned on appeal. Minns spent years slipping in and out of the country with a collection of passports, some forged and some honest. He was arrested for passport fraud in 1994 and got away with being expelled from the country. Right now he is a sculptor in Israel, where he has made some truly hideous statues in honor of *Atlas Shrugged*. Some people are better at planning.

Beloved Belinda died in a ghastly incident when she was hit by lightning. She was unaffected by this.

DA VINCI'S DEMONS

Review by Joseph T Major of

THE MEDICI GUNS

(1975, 2015; Curtis Brown Unlimited; \$4.99)

THE MEDICI EMERALD

(1976, 2015; Curtis Brown Unlimited; \$4.99)

THE MEDICI HAWKS

(1978, 2015; Curtis Brown Unlimited; \$4.99)

By Martin Woodhouse and Robert Ross

One of the defining characteristics of the various "punk" sub-genres is that the principal character is out of the mainstream of society. Originally, the protagonist was a young man who lived in the margins, took drugs, and conducted illegal computer activities in order

to reveal the wickedness of BigGov/BigCorp. With the shift in society, the protagonist became a super-intelligent and multi-skilled young woman clad in brass.

Therefore, these books are not "Renaissance Punk." The protagonist is a valued and stable associate of the authorities. He does not take drugs or even make everything of brass. Or build steam everything, either.



The first book begins with the men who will fire *The Medici Guns* doing their job. But they have bombards; large but slow-firing weapons hurling stone cannonballs at low accuracy.

Their boss, Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, would probably love to have ser Calvano de Morrifiglio to be gonfaloniere of Firenze. (H. Beam Piper was a student of Renaissance Italy and if he had only been told that these books would be forthcoming he might not have killed himself.) No such luck — except for the guy standing next to him, who is a local, and a match for him or even the legendary Misterioso Martino di Padova.

Enter Leonardo of Vinci, an artist moonlighting as, well, everything. (Since this is 1477, obviously Dr. Twitchell of Denver is not involved.) In the next few chapters, he demonstrates various small but useful bits of engineering, and is named chief engineer of Florence. One of the lesser people impressed by his skills is Countess Bianca Maria Visconti, a intellectually bright and bored young lady. She takes to him, perhaps too well for Lorenzo's state of mind.

Then having noted the low efficiency of the siege guns, Leonardo makes a proposal. This involves experimenting with various details of cannons. One enquiry requires a visit to Rome, which is a little dangerous since the Pope is agitating for regime change in Florence and his security just might react negatively to enquiries from Florentine agents.

Here one of the other interesting characters, even if he's on the other side, takes a hand. Cardinal della Palla is the Papal archivist. Having information gives him extraordinary

power, and surprisingly he looks well upon Leonardo. They become friends.

Finally, Leonardo goes off to test his inventions in the field. The gunners are a lively, diverse, and entertaining lot, particularly when Rigo Leone the chief gunner blows away a spy and assassin with grapeshot.

The need for action becomes urgent due to the Pazzi Conspiracy, where the members of the Pazzi banking family attempt to assassinate Lorenzo and do kill his brother Giuliano. At a Mass, which seems a little out of order. The coup is bloodily defeated.

Leonardo and his gunners set out. The weapons seem inadequate; they are four-pounders, which hardly seems able to damage the walls. But Leonardo has also invented rangefinders. In a dazzling effort, he knocks open the postern gates and sends four cannons into the town, where they proceed to blow things apart until the garrison surrenders.

But in the confusion of the surrender, the energumen of the affair, the clever and paranoid Girolamo Riario, Count of Imola, manages to escape pretending to be a priest.

The search for *The Medici Emerald* begins on a sinking ship, with a cabin boy trying to find a secret. But the searchers are Leonardo and Rigo Leone, going to Malta.

It seems that a certain independent sea captain is taking the Venetians to the cleaners, always coming in first with the hot new cargo. And he's the man dying in the first scene.

After a frantic scuffle in Rome (always putting himself at hazard) Leonardo and Rigo end up in Malta. They find the cabin boy and begin to inquire about his master's ways. Which involved shooting the sun's position every day, retiring to his cabin, and after a few minutes coming out to order a new course.

But he used to go ashore after every voyage. So Leonardo goes out and makes an interesting deduction from animal paths. The result is an encounter with a fugitive Arab scholar — who built a clock! This precursor of John Harrison (see *Longitude* (1995) by Dana Sobel for that story) has some explanations and advice.

However, there are also complications. Countess Bianca Maria has managed to escape being sent to a convent and has turned up in Malta. And the Venetians have their own people there. (Including one nasty little brat.)

In the course of the action, Leonardo has to invent a burglar alarm, devise ways to supply a diver with air, and create a prosthesis for Rigo Leone after the Venetians get brutal. The technological ventures are quite useful.

The climax of the plot is where Leonardo and the Medici Gunners have to sail from Malta to Venice, to arrive at a precise time, and carry out a daring rescue and enact vengeance.

The Medici Hawks fly over Otranto. Wherein lies a tale. The story begins with the Turks taking Otranto. The mercenary commanding the garrison asks their price for taking

service under the Sultan, and finds out that the Turk plays for keeps.

Leonardo and the rest get involved. They go from one hazard to another; being locked in a tower which has been set on fire by Riario's henchmen, rowing to Konstaninnye as galley slaves (and naturally Leonardo devises a means to make the galley get there faster) to rescue Countess Bianca Maria, who has been housed in the Sultan's Harem, surprisingly without the usual treatment meted out to infidel women being taken by the right hands of the jihadis, and other examples for Leonardo to show his technological skills.

The "Hawks" are straight out of Bradbury ("The Flying Machine", *The Golden Apples of the Sun*, 1953). Including the result of Leonardo's decision about what to do with them, though he doesn't quite do what the Emperor Yuan did. (This was during the Sixteen Kingdoms era and it seems odd that a ruler would give up a tactical advantage, but this is Bradbury for you.) He flies into captured Otranto to carry out a daring mission.

And in a dramatic climax, Leonardo counts the cannons Riario has available, and boldly walks to their muzzles — only to be interrupted by a earth-shattering BOOM!

In the broader sense this is "steampunk"; the technological advances Leonardo devises in the course of the narrative are all possible with the materials of the time. More than that, it's enchanting to see a man reasoning himself out of difficulties and into successes.

FIRST CONTACT

Review by Joseph T Major of
PROJECT HAIL MARY

(2021; Ballantine Books:
ISBN 978-0593135204; \$28.99;
2021; Ballantine Books (Kindle): \$14.99)
by Andy Weir

... Next month will see the first installment of the latest novel by the amazing Andy Weir. In *Project Hail Mary*, Weir applies his rigorous scientific background to an enthralling story of first contact in the midst of a desperate crisis on Earth ...
— Not from "Things to Come", *Astounding*

Let's face it, if this had been transported through some time-traveling effort to the fifties, it would have been snapped up at *Astounding*, and gone on to be the dominant novel of the era. Its merits and values are all the same universal.

Weir begins with a scrupulous foundation of rigorous scientific fact, from which he proceeds to hypothecate a massive threat to human life on Earth. In turn, this requires a massive mobilization of resources and will in order to solve the problem.

Add to that a First Contact with an alien that thinks as well as a human, but not like a human, a realistic portrayal of human ways

and means, and a grim mission to resolve the problem, and you have a quintessential work of science fiction that has literary values. And the language could have passed Miss Tarrant without the slightest problem.

But it begins with a man waking up and not having the slightest idea, even of what his name is. Gradually, he gets the idea that his mission has had problems. Like, for example, the other two astronauts with him are dead. (No, he can't blame the ship's computer!)

He begins to explore his surroundings, and make some sense of them. Gradually, bits and pieces of his memory come back.

It began when he discovered that the Sun was declining in output. That meant that the Earth's mean temperature would go down. And if you thought that global warming was bad ...

Gradually his memory comes back, in flashes. Which gives the author a perfect excuse for flashbacks, describing the coming of the astrophages and the desperate effort to find something that suppresses them. For Tau Ceti is not astrophage-infected, apparently.

"Who wounded thee shall make thee whole." Amazingly, astrophages turn out to be stores of energy, which makes them useful for interstellar spaceflight. But they can produce and store on the ship only enough for a one way flight. Which calls for interesting problems (though it does make for narrative continuity) when Ryland Grace, our narrator, the discoverer of the astrophages, is conscripted into being the third astronaut. [Oh great, "*Hail Mary*, full of Grace."]

Then Ryland finds he's not alone. There is another spaceship there, crewed by another sole survivor. An alien who thinks as well as a man but not like a man. (Where have we heard that before? Oh, that's right, he's been cancelled.) And his biology and technology are amazingly worked out — as well as one hideous scientific lapse, which ensured his survival and may enable Ryland to return to Earth. Provided they figure out how to suppress the astrophages.

This requires some scientific effort and even interspecies cooperation. And when it all works ...

MEPHITIC SEVEN

Review by Joseph T Major of
TIME SLIPS

(2021; Starship Cat Press: \$0.99) and
THE SECRET OF PAD 34
(2021; Starship Cat Press: \$0.99)
By Leigh Kimmel

Here are two splendid little stories of the Mercury Program and the Cthulhu mythos. No doubt HPL would have found them blasphemously squamous and rugose. (Should I tell Ask Lovecraft?)

Kimmel blends the historical events of the space program with the blasphemous events of the Mythos. Going into space may mean an encounter with the Elder Gods. If the stars are right, and the question becomes "Who will be eaten first?", the astronauts may be able to fly to

Yuggoth and evade this.

FEAR AND LOATHING IN THE BELLINGHAUSEN SEA

Review by Joseph T Major of
MADHOUSE AT THE END OF THE EARTH: The Belgica's Journey into the Dark Antarctic Night

by Julian Sancton
(2021; Crown:
ISBN 978-1984824332; \$30.00;
2021; Crown(Kindle): \$13.99)



Baron Gaston de Gerlach de Gomery did his part for his country in the International Geophysical Year, establishing the Roi Baudouin base in Dronning Maud Land. And he survived a plane crash in the Antarctic, too.

His father, Baron Adrien Victor Joseph de Gerlach de Gomery, had his own fame in the frozen south. Some of his subordinates did not do nearly so well, while another did superbly.

Adrien de Gerlach had that strange impetus that drives certain men into the wilds to do things that have not been done. In his case, it was opening up the frozen south. (Better there than the Belgian Congo.)

For three years, de Gerlach put forward his case. He had to acquire funding (always a great problem) and more so explorers. Nationalism was a prime issue, and while he was under pressure to take an entirely Belgian crew, he finally had to have Norwegian seamen, Polish scientists, and eventually an American doctor.

Nevertheless, he persisted, and on August 16, 1897 the *Belgica* set sail. With a stop just short of Dutch waters to load half a ton of explosives; the ship was already overladen with supplies and particularly coal.

The crew had to work out its differences, particularly linguistic. But they got down to the Antarctic sea, with a stop to pick up the doctor.

Now this doctor had a good reputation then. He had been on Arctic expeditions and had some idea about proper nutrition. This point has to be raised because the doctor was Frederick A. Cook.

The *Belgica* explored the area of what was then called the Graham Peninsula, except when it was called the Palmer Peninsula. Then they got frozen in, in the Bellinghausen Sea, which is west of the Antarctic Peninsula (which was what the two names were reconciled as). The *Belgica* was stronger than the *Jeanette*, but the problem was that the ship was underequipped.

There was not enough cold-weather clothing, for example.

Then people started getting sick. One man had already drowned falling over the side. Now Gerlache came down with scurvy; Cook and the leading Norwegian seaman took over command. The latter was Roald Amundsen, who would not be dissuaded from returning to the vicinity by this experience.

Scurvy wasn't the worst problem. Several of the men began to go mad. One Belgian tried to walk home, for example.

Cook remembered something from his own experience and suggested that people eat fresh meat. But the available meat, seal and penguin, did not appeal to some people's palates at first. Those who ate it recovered.

The *Belgica* drifted, but unlike the *Jeanette* she survived and broke free of the ice in February 1899. The expedition then sailed back to Antwerp, to international acclaim.

Gerlache carried out several expeditions to the Arctic, in the *Belgica*, over the following ten years. He died in 1934. Amundsen also explored, needless to say.

And Dr. Cook . . . Sancton is generous to him over his subsequent career, for all that the introduction has the last meeting of Cook and Amundsen, in Leavenworth Prison, where Cook had been sent for fraud. It is worth considering Robert Silverberg's thesis in *Scientists and Scoundrels* (1965) that Cook had gone more subtly mad on the *Belgica* expedition, as before it he had been honest, and after it everything he did was tainted with fraud.

CICADAS

by Lisa

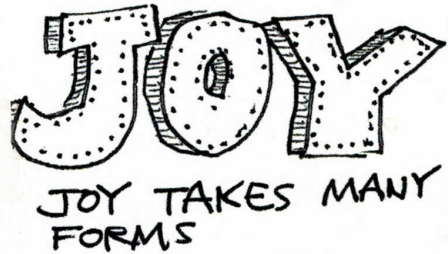
With the onset of the cicadas Amazon is offering many and varied merchandise concerning them. Earrings. Brooches. Garden Ornaments. Shirts. Refrigerator Magnets. Books. Bolo Ties. Tree Decorations. Toys. Paperweights. Fishing lures. Necklaces. Socks. Garden flags. Molds for soap or chocolate as you prefer. Tote bags. Scarf clips. Jigsaw puzzles. Pillows. Notebooks. Coffee mugs (no, I don't know if you can make coffee from cicadas. Nor do I want to try the experiment.) Patio Blinds. Art prints. Umbrellas. Cicadas in amber. Drawer knobs. Jewelry boxes. Wall tapestries. Embroidery cross stitch.

I am leaving the library when movement on the floor catches my attention. I look down and behold a cicada crawling on the floor. I reach down and coax it onto my hand. Carefully I curl my fingers around it. It pushes against my fingers, clearly not liking the sudden darkness. Tough. It's lucky nobody stepped on it in the mall. I open my fingers. Does the cicada fly off to a proper tree when I give it back its freedom? No. It decides to explore my hand and walks along my hand and arm with its prickly little feet. I stare at it and mutter something about its being perverse

as a cat. Finally I find a bush and insist that the cicada crawl onto it.

The Joy of High Tech

by Rodford Edmiston



Being the occasionally interesting ramblings of a major-league technophile.

Please note that while I am an engineer (BSCE) and do my research, I am not a professional in this field. Do not take anything here as gospel; check the facts I give. If you find a mistake, please let me know about it.

Precious Metal

Some things have an intrinsic value. Some things have a social value. What people are willing to pay for something is generally an amalgam (sorry about that) of these factors. Changes in either of these factors can result in a change in perceived value. Developments in technology is one of the main ways intrinsic value can change. However, things like diamonds and gold rarely drop in value just because new mining methods make them more available. Industrial diamonds did little if any harm to the gem diamond market. Even synthetic, gem-quality diamonds are worth less than natural diamonds, in part because modern analysis (and record keeping providing provenance) can identify them as artificial. On the other hand, some things do, indeed, go up or down significantly in perceived worth due to developments in technology. Changes in value due to changes in society are outside the purview of this column. :-)

The Washington Monument has an aluminum cap on it. Now, bulk aluminum is weather resistant and a good conductor, so this cap helps channel any lightning strikes safely to ground (through internal copper conductors) to reduce the chance of damage to the stone and mortar structure. (There were lightning rods in place from 1885, which were supplemented after the cap was struck repeatedly from 1885 to 1934, with a measurable amount of the aluminum being vaporized by these events). However, that is not the reason the apex is made of this metal. You see, at the time the cap was made aluminum was as rare and valuable as silver. Aluminum is an active metal, and while pure alumi-

num and many alloys of it form an impermeable coating immediately on exposure to air, except for very rare natural nuggets aluminum metal was almost unknown before the element was isolated by modern chemistry. It is this activity which makes "native" aluminum so rare. In nature, it eventually combines with other elements, especially oxygen. Aluminum is *so* active that early methods of chemically extracting it yielded only minute amounts for a great deal of effort.

The cap for the Washington Monument was cast by William Frishmuth of Philadelphia, and was at that time the largest piece of aluminum in the world. Before being installed in 1884 it was put on public display at Tiffany's in New York City. Yes, *that* Tiffany's. The casting was considered that rare and valuable. (It was placed on the floor, due to the size and weight. People were invited to jump over the cap while it was on display, so they could later brag they had jumped over the top of the Washington Monument.)

Before the Hall-Héroult industrial method of extracting aluminum from alumina (aluminum oxide) was developed in 1886 (followed closely by the Bayer process in 1889) the metal was barely known. The early chemical methods of extraction were mostly developed during the middle of the Nineteenth Century. In fact, though aluminum compounds had been used for such things as dyes and abrasives since antiquity, the metal was only isolated from ore in 1825.

A digression: In relation to the change in the bullion value of aluminum, I would find it greatly amusing if one of those treasure-hunting "reality" shows had a group of people following clues in an old document which purportedly lead to a valuable prize hidden by Confederates after their defeat. They finally track the treasure to an old, abandoned mine, where there is waiting a pallet loaded with a handful of silvery bars. Of aluminum.

Of course, just having a cheap source of aluminum wasn't enough to create an industrial demand for the metal. That required other technological developments. Part of the reason the industrial use of aluminum took off was the demands of World War One. Among other factors, aluminum's strength-to-weight ratio made it valuable in aviation. This included application in early airplanes in the form of duralumin alloy.

Before the development of cheap aluminum, tin was the metal of choice for some of the uses which aluminum eventually took over, with zinc also being used. (Some people still call aluminum foil "tin foil" and refer to all cans as "tins.") However, aluminum not only became the metal of choice for many of these uses, thanks to its chemical and physical properties, it also found many uses tin never dreamed of.

Not that tin is gone from the list of materials used by humans. Not by any definition! Like aluminum, it is active, but quickly forms an impermeable coating on exposure to air. It

is still the metal of choice for non-toxic, anti-corrosion coatings of steel. Calling a metal box a “tin” comes from the practice of coating steel with it. (Now I have the song “Little Tin Box” running through my head.) Though today many of the cans of food you buy at the supermarket are polymer coated, many still use good old tin. As well, copper cookware is often tinned on surfaces which come into contact with food, to keep the copper out of what is cooked. The metal is also still a component in many alloys, including with copper to make bronze. As well, tin is vital to the production of inexpensive flat glass, using the flotation method. There are many other applications of the element.

In a way, tin is lucky. Many materials have been not only been completely replaced but forgotten, or worse. Asbestos — found as a natural mineral — is reviled today, and rarely used for anything. Most of the applications which used to rely on asbestos now use fiberglass or rock wool.

A companion of tin is zinc, as mentioned above. Among other applications it was used in a wide range of alloys with copper, to make brass. It also found many uses in combination with other metals, as well as on its own.

A bit of change of pace, now, from metals to dyes. Mauve was the first commercially successful synthetic dye (discovered by accident by a man who was both a chemist and a painter, during attempts to make artificial quinine) and it quickly led to a plethora of synthetic dyes which in turn led to a multitude of natural dyes being abandoned completely. The synthetics were cheaper (many used what had been industrial waste products, such as coal tar) they were effective in producing a strong color in what was being dyed more quickly and surely, and they exhibited better fastness (that is, they didn’t fade or wash out). Indigo plantations were big business until synthetic dyes came along. Of course, some of the factories producing the new, synthetic dyes became sources of severe, toxic chemical pollution. That, however, is a topic for another column.

Similarly, new illumination methods using coal gas, natural gas, kerosene and the electric light killed the whale oil trade. Guncotton (to a small extent) and smokeless powder (to a much larger extent) greatly reduced the use of nitre (saltpeter) for producing propellants and explosives.

New methods of making steel directly from ore cut back drastically on the production of wrought iron. That material, famed for its corrosion resistance, is now a specialty product. Lawn furniture and decorative fencing and gates made from wrought iron have therefore become much more expensive. Other materials (including, of course, aluminum, as well as some polymers) have replaced wrought iron for things such as furniture meant for outdoor exposure. Wrought iron still sees a lot of use, but is now generally limited to those with money and is only con-

sidered fit for decoration. This increased expense is an odd reversal for something which used to be one of the cheapest forms of iron. (Of course, before modern production methods, all iron was difficult to come by and very useful, making it quite valuable.)

Another reason the saltpeter market slumped was the Haber process for fixing nitrogen. One of the nastiest industries before this (in a period known for nasty industries) was the global guano market. Many nations now found a significant — in some cases the most significant — part of their income rendered moot as the demand for guano vanished. Before this, even after black powder was largely replaced by smokeless, the guano market was thought to be a sure thing. After all, it was used to make fertilizer, and food is pretty important!

Refined cane sugar (*shakar* in Arabic) was originally very labor intensive. Sugarcane was domesticated about 10,000 years ago, but taking the sap from it (through crushing) and going through all the steps to refine and dehydrate it to make the actual, pure, white product was very, very expensive. (Maple Syrup goes through a similar process of boiling down, though usually not as far. Though you can get pure maple sugar granules. Maple syrup production is also less amenable to industrialization. Remember this when noting how expensive good quality maple syrup is.) Besides being used as a sweetener by the very wealthy in ancient Greece and Rome, sugar was thought to have medicinal properties. It is an excellent preservative, and can be used to treat infected wounds.

Sugar cane is a tropical grass. It grows well in warm, wet climates. That part is easy. Late Medieval invention in Europe of an improved press doubled the amount of sap which could be extracted. However, going from that to crystalized sugar still required a huge amount of work. Much of it involving boiling. Which was hot work in an already hot climate.

A connection between slavery, making cane sugar, and producing many alcoholic beverages (especially rum) developed. Humans crave sweets, but they also crave alcohol. Yeast eat sugar and make alcohol. Making cane sugar produced byproducts which could be used to make rum. Slaves were brought from Africa to many islands (especially in the Caribbean) and other lands in warm, wet areas to raise the cane, extract the juice, boil it down and purify it. Rum was used to help keep the slaves under control, as well as to sell for additional profit. The infamous Triangular Trade developed. Slaves were brought from western Africa to the Caribbean (and other areas suitable for growing sugar cane). Sugar went to New England, where some of it was turned into Rum. (Some was also made locally at the source as a byproduct of the cane sugar industry.) Rum went to western Africa. In part to pay for slaves, and even to be used in the acquisition of them. (Getting someone blackout drunk — especially someone not used to refined spirits — has been used for centuries to acquire cheap labor. Sometimes narcotics are added to the drink for additional effect.)

Actually, there were multiple Triangular Trades. Most of them depended on cheap labor from slaves to function.

Then improved technology came along and developed more efficient methods of harvesting, crushing, extracting, etc. for sugar production. Slavery was outlawed in many places, in part because of this, but goods made with slave labor took longer to be prohibited. Eventually, thanks to the development of technology, pure, white, cane sugar became cheap enough for first the rising middle class to afford, then even the poorest families. With slave labor eventually falling by the wayside. At least, legally...

One reason slavery was abolished was that the technology of modern industrial methods simply made it unprofitable; though of course social pressures were also important. The Southern US was behind the North in adopting industry, which is one reason slavery held on there after it was abandoned elsewhere.

Today, the coal industry is failing. Not due to any sort of environmentalist plot, but simply because the demand isn’t nearly what it used to be. Other fuels are cheaper and, yes, produce less pollution. There are still a few places which stubbornly depend on coal for things such as electrical generation. Coal is also used as feedstock in several industrial processes. China is one of the world’s biggest users of coal. These days, though, in most places, without government subsidies, coal-fired electrical plants simply aren’t cost effective. Especially if they are required to meet the same emission standards as plants burning cleaner fuels. Fighting to keep coal mines open when economic demand is falling requires large subsidies, and in the end is futile. Though there will likely be demand for coal long into the future, as previously happened to wrought iron it is in decline.

The phases of human technological development are often named for a material. For example, you have the stone age, the copper age, the bronze age, the iron age, etc. However, just because a new material has achieved transcendence doesn’t mean the old is gone. Even today, stone still has artistic uses, and is an important raw material. Sometimes, an old material long relegated to mundane use or even thought on the way out finds a new application. Or simply stays around, because there’s nothing better in terms of usefulness, availability and cost. Native Americans had copper tools more than a millennium before Columbus crossed the Atlantic. However, after quickly reaching a peak, copper use gradually declined. Given their physical and social environment, except for some specialized uses stone tools were less labor intensive to make.

As an example of a common material which has an intrinsic value, it’s amazing what you can do with sand. Even today, ordinary, silica sand is used for shaping and polishing many different materials. It is hard (though some specialty abrasives, such as emery (which is primarily aluminum oxide) are harder) it is often angular for a good grind, and it is cheap.

In many parts of the world there are actually shortages of some types of sand. The ancient Egyptians knew about sand. After all, they had a *lot* of it.

You can make a hollow, tubular drill of copper which will cut plugs out of granite. Just used sand in a water slurry as the actual abrasive, and turn the tube back and forth with a bow drill. It is thought this was the method used to shape such objects as the sarcophagus in the King's Chamber in the Great Pyramid. Cut cores and break them loose to rough out the hollow interior. Smooth with sandstone blocks. Polish with abrasive crayons made of sand and gypsum. (Mix those two ingredients with water, roll into shape and dry in the Sun.) Though there were probably intermediate steps involved.

Some people say we are entering a new stone age. It is true that tasks which previously could only be handled by metals are now the job of composites (especially things like carbon fiber composites) and ceramics. (Metal-ceramic materials have some amazing properties. So do ceramic-glasses. Even straight ceramics of special types can be useful for many things, such as cutting.) The low-thermal-expansion ceramic glass used in Corning's Visions cookware is available in large sheets for industrial use. It might make a better large telescope mirror than Pyrex. Though boro-silicate (there's sand again) glasses such as true Pyrex still have multiple uses. (Be careful; Corning sold the Pyrex brand name and most current Pyrex is actually tempered ordinary glass.)

Titanium metal was unworkable for a long time. Since the mid-70s, it got cheap enough and enough methods of easily working it were developed, for it to be used for bicycle parts and such. The metal is so reactive with oxygen that it is generally produced under an inert gas. With that technology, though, it can be worked in many ways, including welding. Aluminum also benefits from such technologies.

Remember, though, that these changes in value go both ways. As noted previously, economics are often influenced by technological developments. Equally, technological developments are often affected by economics. Many "rare" materials are actually common as percentages of the Earth's crust. Titanium is one of those, as are the "rare" earth elements. However, usable ores are another matter. Right now China is a major supplier in rare earth elements. The producers there haven't made much of a push to raise prices, perhaps because they realize all that's needed for someone to create a more affordable process to extract rare earths from currently uneconomical sources is a substantial rise in price from existing sources.

So, both usefulness of materials and their desirability affect their price. While the social factors involved in establishing the value of both raw and processed substances are difficult to predict and control, the technological

factors are usually predictable. Usually. There's always someone on the verge of creating the next Haber process, without regard to the effect this will have on guano mining.

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2020 NEBULA AWARDS

BEST NOVEL

Network Effect, Martha Wells (Tordotcom)

BEST NOVELLA

Ring Shout, P. Djélî Clark (Tordotcom)

BEST NOVELETTE

"Two Truths and a Lie", Sarah Pinsker (Tor.com)

BEST SHORT STORY

"Open House on Haunted Hill", John Wiswell (Diabolical Plots)

THE ANDRE NORTON NEBULA AWARD FOR MIDDLE GRADE AND YOUNG ADULT FICTION

A Wizard's Guide to Defensive Baking, T. Kingfisher (Argyll)

BEST GAME WRITING

Hades, Greg Kasavin (Supergiant)

THE RAY BRADBURY NEBULA AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING DRAMATIC PRESENTATION

The Good Place: "Whenever You're Ready", Michael Schur, NBC (Fremulon/3 Arts Entertainment/Universal)

THE SFWA DAMON KNIGHT MEMORIAL GRAND MASTER AWARD

Nalo Hopkinson

THE KATE WILHELM SOLSTICE AWARD

Jarvis Sheffield
Ben Bova (posthumous)
Rachel Caine (posthumous)

THE KEVIN J. O'DONNELL, JR. SERVICE TO SFWA AWARD

Connie Willis

WORLD CON BIDS

2023
Chengdu

Year of the Water Rabbit
August, 2023

<http://www.worldconinchina.com/index-e.html>

Memphis, Tennessee
August 23-27, 2023
<https://www.memphis23.org/>

Winnipeg, Manitoba
August 24-28, 2023
<https://winnipeg2023.ca/>

With the delay in Worldcon this year, the con bid deadline has also been pushed back, and CanFandom has leapt into the breach.

2024
Glasgow
August 8-12, 2014
<http://glasgow2024.org/>

2025
Seattle
Mid-August 2025

Brisbane, Australia
Mid-August 2025
<https://australia2025.com/>

2026
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
<https://jedddicon.com/>

Los Angeles

Nice, France
August 12-16, 2026
<http://nice2023.com/en/home/>

Orlando
Early to Mid-August 2026

2027
Tel Aviv
August 2027

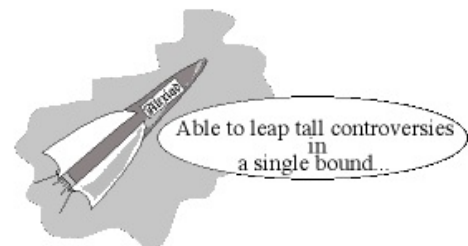
WORLD CON

2021
DisCon III
Washington, D.C.
December 15-19, 2021
<http://discon3.org/>

2022
Chicon 8
Chicago
September 1-5, 2022
<http://www.chicon.org>

And now, Bill Lawhorn has resigned as Chairperson of Discon III. This is not good news.

Letters, we get letters



I saw a comment mentioning Orwell and Hemingway, and somehow it took root.

—JTM

From: **Lloyd Penney** May 7, 2021
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penneys@bell.net
<http://lloydpenney.livejournal.com/>

It's just another pandemic Friday...not much to do, and not much planned. I suspect this weekend will be much the same. So, there are always good fanzines that need some response, and up comes *Alexiad*, WN 116. I will do my best.

The idea of a drone flying around on Mars is so snail, and an amazing thing that we can do with the technology we have. Ingenuity has a bit of the Wright Brothers' first aircraft, which is also so snail, and a very sweet addition to the payload. What a great idea. We won't be going to Discon III at Christmas, but we can report on a last-minute addition to the 2023 Worldcon bid ballot, Winnipeg. We were not asked to be on the bid committee, but that's fine, we wouldn't have been able to go to the committee meetings. It is never time to die, for other interests do arise, and friends do appear on occasion. We have many friends we will probably never see again, but that is life.

We did get our Astra Zeneca shots, but based on what the pharmacies tell us, we might not get our second shots until July. We have also read about booster shots that we may all have to take to bolster our resistance to not only the original coronavirus, but also the variants that have sprung up all over the world. This may become part of the annual flu shots that we are encouraged to take each fall.

The politics of Worldcon is one reason we do not go to Worldcon any more. Of course, the other is money. There are times when I wish some of those making Worldcon politics slimy would remember that the Worldcon is the World convention, and not the American national, no matter how often it is held in the US. I am sure fans from elsewhere in the world are tired of those politics, and that being tired may have been part of the effort to move Worldcon to elsewhere in the world.

Tom Feller (see above) isn't the only Fan who has given up on at least DisCon. The shift from participants to consumers has led to a shift in what is allowed to be consumed.

—JTM

I gather that a combination of lack of money (through an expected payment not coming in, and there may be some court action on that), and moving to Florida, means that Steve Davidson will not be able to publish and mail out the latest issue of *Amazing Stories* at this time. I don't know more of the details, but I am sure more are

coming. In the meantime, I am working on a YA novel written by now-former AS editor-in-chief Ira Nayman. I am assured by AS art director Kermit Woodall that more Amazing Selects will be coming RSN.

Time to make some dinner, so I will end this quickly, and fire away. I did get an unexpected refund cheque from a steampunk event in southern Ontario...their postponements from the pandemic has turned into an outright cancellation. I have responded via e-mail to find out if the cancellation is permanent. Many thanks for this issue, and look forward to the next.

From: **Darrell Schweitzer** May 12, 2021
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What strikes me the most about the Hugo and Nebula lists is how few of these items I am at all familiar with. I don't know most of the writers or even the dramatic presentations. Of course I was a fan of *The Expanse* before it was taken away and put on a streaming service I don't have. I think what we have here more than a generational divide is an electronic divide. The Hugos and Nebulas are not only highly politicized, but controlled by very techno-savvy readers who not only form a voting bloc of their own. These people do not read paper magazines. Hence no nominees from any of the traditional magazines or anthologies. They only read a very narrow range of the novels, so writers like, say, Kim Stanley Robinson or John Kessel are no longer in contention because they are of the wrong demographics. (I am sure it won't hurt their careers much at this point.) I myself feel very detached from all this. The awards no longer reflect the field I have read and worked in all my life. I myself have never been in a position to be eligible, except years ago when as a joke some of the readers of *Holier than Thou* proposed to nominate me for best fan-artist. Not that a counter-award would be any solution at all. We will just have to do without awards for a while. I have now joined the worldcon and expect to attend, and to vote, but I can't vote in most categories because I don't have the materials. I will use a NO AWARD vote in Best Related Work after I have considered what seem to be the only two serious candidates, the book about Octavia Butler and the Beowulf translation. The rest of that category is a trainwreck.

I thought your reviews and commentary, in places such as *Science Fiction Review*, were quite award-worthy. Your comments about the Best Related Work are extremely appropos. The field seems to be gaffiating from us. (Would any of those readers even understand that last sentence?)

—JTM

From: **Tom Feller** April 21, 2021
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Thanks for e-mailing the zine. Anita and I are now fully vaccinated.

I don't know what I will do with myself with so much extra time to read the Hugo Award finalists. I found I still had some unread stories from Seanan McGuire's October Daye series on my Nook left over from the last time it was nominated for Best Series. I see that the novel *The Relentless Moon* by Mary Robinette Kowal, which you reviewed, and the entire series made the Hugo finalist list. By the way, I do not plan to upgrade from supporting to attending, because of the way they treated Toni Weisskopf.

There are complaints about the change in Worldcons. That some of them come from Jon del Arroz and Larry Correia doesn't help their credibility.

—JTM

From: **Cathy Palmer-Lister** April 22, 2021
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Thanks, Joe.

The Covid virus has taken another member of MonSFFA, Sylvain St-Pierre. He was only 64 and in good health, so it was a shock. He died at home right after the diagnosis, it was that fast.

Be careful, the variants are lethal.

Most people who get it are asymptomatic (e.g. Grant), but those whom it hits it hits hard.

—JTM

From: **Nic Farey** April 23, 2021
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Thanks as always Joe. Mini-review in the 'Fanzines received' bit in *This Here...* #41 which will be out tomorrow — particular note of the Hemingway pastiche which is truly excellent...

Good arrers!

Thank you for the kind words.

I enjoyed Taral's article about the Great Pig War. I am left wondering who got the resultant bacon. Farmers in those days would have been too thrifty to let the pig go to waste. It is clear, though, why cooler heads prevailed and there was no shooting war. It was not in the interests of either nation to have one. The British could hardly conquer the United States. The Americans were in no position to conquer Canada either, although they were a lot more powerful than they had been when last heard from in 1812 and could have done enormous damage, particularly to British shipping, which would have made the cost of the war completely unacceptable. I am sure someone could write an alternate history about this if someone hasn't already. The US goes to war with British Canada over a pig and encourages the French Canadians to revolt. Meanwhile the British encourage the Southern states to secede. I'm not going to write it. I've never been all that much interested in alternate historical wars. I figure that the individual experiences of the characters, the suffering and the dying, would be pretty much the same as in any other war. The only time I've ever ventured into alternate history it was about changes in ideas. I did write a story once about what happened after Constantius II did not die suddenly in the year 361 and Arian Christianity prevailed. One of the alternate history stories I have always admired is de Camp's "Aristotle and the Gun," which is about how history was changed because a meddling time-traveler changed Aristotle's ideas about science.

Taras Wolansky: What I mean about publishers not taking risks is their avoidance of financial risk. Making sure their products are ideologically correct according to the latest pronouncements of the Ministry of Truth may actually be quite risky. All these "Woke" books might not sell. The whole field could go over a collective cliff that way. We don't know yet. Editors who select books that lose money tend to lose their jobs. If such books do well, then it is a sound strategy. Publishing is still a business. It is about making money. The editor's job is to select books which the publisher can issue profitably. Sometimes a risk really does pay off. It was a wild leap for Fred Pohl to have acquired *Dhalgren* for Bantam. They called it "Fred's folly." The book was met with hostility and incomprehension by much of the traditional SF fan audience. But it sold and sold and sold and is still selling to this day to people who were not even born when it was first published. Pohl's other wild and crazy choice was Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, which did rather well too. Either these were two incredibly lucky guesses, or Pohl had a better insight than most people did, and saw that there was an audience for these books. I also suspect that because he was a very senior person in the field even then, comfortably successful as a novelist, he was a lot less worried about losing the editing gig and so could take risks. But he didn't lose money. He was a success, and a very canny

one.

From: **Richard A. Dengrove** May 14, 2021
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Here are some comments on *Alexiad*, April 2021.

In your Reviewer's Notes, you list complaints about the WorldCon in DC. I agree that there are a lot of problems with it. Most due to the Coronavirus; some due to shooting oneself in the boot. On the other hand, DC is a hop, skip and a jump for me; so I'm going. Of course, mostly to troll for acquaintances.

In Shots and Injections, you complain about having to have iron infused into your blood. I would complain too. That goes far beyond the cure for Iron Deficiency Anemia.

I wasn't quite complaining. I have the same thing that Robert E. Peary died of.

Now for the book reviews.

In reviewing *The Moon as Hell*, you dislike the author's equating the Earth First Movement with Evangelicals. What can I say? Evangelicals encompass a whole bunch of views. For that reason, they are good targets for many people. Of course, that Evangelicals embrace a whole bunch of views also means some have to be heroes as well as villains. Maybe writers should specify which Evangelicals they're talking about.

In reviewing Psychonetology, you claim the problem with it is psychobabble. I think the real problem with it is all the quack cures some 'psychologists' are prescribing. With psychobabble to cover them up.

In reviewing Proofs of Conspiracy, you point out that, as far as anyone knows, the King of Bavaria put an end to Weisshaupt's Illuminati. However, many people pine for a secret conspiracy that embraces the entire world. It simplifies it: to hell with the facts. For that reason, the Illuminati remain with us after more than two hundred years. An additional advantage of secret conspiracies is you can do anything with them you want. The Illuminati afterwards need have nothing to do with Weisshaupt. In fact, Shea and Wilson have them doing something with porpoises.

Like the "Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal" strip where the conspiratorialist explains that the world is secretly run by baby-eating alien reptile ultra-Satanists and his target says, "But they're in charge, right? Someone's in charge?"

For Taral Wayne's articles, I have three comments for the three articles. One, bellissimo for the Pig War. Maybe I should write something about the War of Jenkin's Ear. Two, that

video game with the Thin Man sounds like it was a dream. A neat dream, though. Three, people with Ph.Ds can be as crazy as the rest of us outside their field and sometimes within it.

Now for the letters. Let's start with me. You ask me what do I have against Aramis? Nothing. But Dumas had a lot against him because he was a plotting Jesuit. In the original *Man in the Iron Mask*, as opposed to the movies, the other Musketeers disapproved of Aramis switching monarchs.

Next, a comment on Lloyd's letter. The coming remake of "Wizard of Oz" has to be worse than the original from the '30s. Which is why I want to remake "Plan 9 from Outer Space"; it couldn't be worse than the original.

To the memory of Ed Wood, who wanted to make movies in the worst possible way, and triumphantly succeeded. (That's an amphibology, kiddies.)

—JTM

Now a comment on George Price's letter. In short, George is an idealist who wants to go back to the past. At least to the ideals of the past.

With that, I finish my comments.

From: **George W. Price** May 23, 2021
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April *Alexiad*:

A Note on Style: In "Shots and Injections" Joe says he has gotten his first shot "for COVID-19." I frown on having that in all-caps. To be sure, Joe is in good company — both Chicago newspapers use all-caps. The Wall Street Journal makes it "Covid-19," capitalizing only the first letter. Better, but still not quite right. I say it should be "covid-19" with no caps at all.

The word is formed by telescoping "[co]rona [vi]rus [d]isease," which has no caps. It's like "radar," which comes from "[ra]dio [d]etection [a]nd [r]anging" — no one ever writes it as "RADAR."

Further, a disease's name is capitalized only if it is taken from a person or place, like "Alzheimer's" or "Wuhan virus." So it should always be "covid-19," like "measles" and "polio."

I see that my computer's traitorous spell-check wants it to be all-caps. I'm right, it's wrong.

Joe's review of *Doc Savage: The Sinister Shadow* mentions that other "Shadow," Lamont Cranston. After my family got its first radio, back in 1939 when I was ten, "The Shadow" on Sunday afternoon became one of our favorite programs.

Years later, when I was in college and had

long since given up listening to the radio program, I came across a “Shadow” pulp magazine, which I had not known existed. Each issue featured a “Shadow” novel. Reading it, I was astonished to discover that in this version, Lamont Cranston has no occult power to “cloud men’s minds.” He’s just superlatively good at disguise, and is able to look so completely ordinary that he escapes notice. But he is not invisible as on the radio.

Wikipedia says the Shadow started out in 1930 as the mysterious narrator of the radio show “Detective Story Hour,” created to sell Street & Smith magazines. That led to the founding in 1931 of the *Shadow* magazine featuring novels by Walter Gibson. Thus the radio narrator was transformed into the magazine character. In 1937 the character returned to radio in the program that we came to love. Apparently the radio show producers decided to tart it up with the invisibility shtick. That’s easy to do on radio. I suppose they thought that just making Cranston hard to notice was not dramatic enough.

On the radio show he was Lamont Cranston, and he had a companion named Margo Lane. In the magazine he was World War ace pilot Kent Allard. Naturally, Philip José Farmer used both, having one story about a man named Kent Lane. (As opposed to Jonathan “Jon” Kent, son of Lois and Clark, and best friend of Damian Wayne, Robin #5.)

Richard Dengrove admires my honesty in admitting that I am puzzled that our massive deficit spending has not resulted in the whopping inflation that free-market economic theory leads me to expect. Thank you for the compliment, but the matter is far from settled.

I notice, particularly in *The Wall Street Journal*, a rising number of economists warning of inflation when all that newly created money flows into the marketplace. Is it all hiding in savings? Let’s wait and see what happens when the lockdowns are lifted and those savings start competing for the available goods. The deficits are so damned big that it is hard to believe there will be no seriously harmful effects. Let’s hope I am wrong — in this case I dread being right.

Robert S. Kennedy remarks that Julia Roberts in the movie *Pretty Woman* “is much too good looking to be a streetwalker.” That reminds me of the fantastic story of the woman who could swim like a fish:

A middle-aged gentleman fell in love with a most attractive lady, also of middle years. She was very intelligent, quite good looking, and had a charming Italian accent. However, she refused to talk about her past. She said, “When I was young I did things that I am now

very ashamed of, and you must promise never to ask me about it.” He was besotted with her, so he promised.

One day they were strolling along a river bank when they saw a little boy tumble into the water on the other side, about a hundred yards away. The floundering and struggling child was obviously about to drown.

The woman instantly flung off her jacket, kicked off her shoes, and dived in. Her dive was so clean that she barely made a splash. Then she started swimming with great economy of motion and astonishing speed. Olympic champions could not have competed. She cut through the water like a torpedo!

Reaching the child, she buoyed him up and towed him to the bank, moving not quite so fast, but still with startling speed. Onlookers had gathered, and helped them out of the water, and you can imagine the fuss that was made over her. She was the heroine of the day.

After it was all over, her boyfriend said, “How in the world did you ever learn to swim like that?” She replied, “You promised to never ask me about my past.”

Well, he just couldn’t let it go. He kept on nagging at her. Finally she gave in.

“Very well, since you just have to know.” She swallowed hard. “I used to be a street-walker.” She paused. “In Venice.”

Popski Peniakoff promised one of his men that when they got to Venice, they would drive their jeeps around the plaza in Venice. By the time they got there, the man had died, but Popski got a landing craft, loaded jeeps on it, and fulfilled the promise. Kerb-crawlers, anyone?

—JTM

From: **Taras Wolansky** June 5, 2021
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Thanks for the April Alexiad.

Did you catch “My Grandparents’ War” on PBS? We follow English actors Helena Bonham Carter, Mark Rylance, Carey Mulligan, and Kristin Scott Thomas as they find out about the wartime adventures of grandparents they barely knew.

Scott Thomas’ grandfather, a Captain in the Royal Navy, had a particularly distinguished record, being involved in Dunkirk, then planting mines inside the minefields intended to protect Hitler’s projected invasion flotilla, then the Marmansk run.

Review of Mary Robinette Kowal’s *The Fated Sky*: Compared to the first “Lady Astronaut” book, this was a disappointment.

Kowal spends too much time on what we might call technobabble, with her heroine calling out masses of numbers. Kowal is proud of getting the numbers right; but this kind of material doesn’t work on the page. It can work on

the screen because skilled actors and directors can make it seem important, even if it seems like gibberish to the audience — or, as is often the case, even if it really is gibberish.

Review of Harry Turtledove’s “Amelia Earhart in World War II” novel, *Or Even Eagle Flew*: What is “Prince of Cats Literary Productions”? Is Turtledove self-publishing?

Award nominations: After reading — well, let’s admit, after a certain point skimming — the fantasy novel, *Piranesi*, I conclude that fans of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* were so eager for Susanna Clarke’s next fantasy novel that it would be nominated for the Hugo and the Nebula, no matter how tiresome it was.

As I read/skimmed the book, I came to see it as a gaudy Hammer Film from the 50s or 60s, with a young person in the clutches of an evil cult leader — played by, say, Peter Cushing or Christopher Lee — and rescued by a stolid but intrepid cop. Except that, back then, it might have been more typical for the ingenue in distress to be female and the stolid cop, male.

On the subject of nominated films, this was a pretty thin year, as I’ve said before.

I am part way through the Hugo and Nebula nominated *The Old Guard* on streaming, though the odds are good I will never finish it. Instead of showing their centuries of experience, the Guard ineptly walk right into an ambush and are all killed. And then, as the bad guys studiously avert their eyes, they slowly come back to life, pick up their weapons, and more clichéd mayhem ensues.

Birds of Prey (also a double nominee) I remember as colorful popcorn fare, though I don’t remember much about it now.

Eurovision Song Contest: *The Story of Fire Saga* (Hugo) is a likable piece of silliness by Will Ferrell on Netflix. I would never have thought to nominate it for the Hugo award, but check out the hilarious review on Tor.com that makes a case for it.

Darrell Schweitzer: My understanding is that Jerry Pournelle came back from Korea a Marxist, then drifted rightward to become a liberal Democrat as a political operative for Sam Yorty, and then farther to the right. Admittedly, when Glenn Greenwald is called a right-winger for debunking the Capitol riot, these labels have to be taken with a grain of salt. (Just yesterday, a Reuters story revealed that prosecutors assess the total property damage at less than \$1.5 million.) Your disapproval of DisCon’s actions probably has people dismissing you as a right-winger, too.

You’re right that this announced remake of *The Wizard of Oz* will eventually be forgotten. After all, we have forgotten all the other remakes, like *Emerald City* just a few years ago. There was also, I find, a TV series in 1990, a series of shorts beginning in 1961, and an anime series, among others. There was a big budget prequel, starring the now-blacklisted James Franco, about how an inept balloonist became The Wizard.

Thomas E. Simmons: I loved your “exper-

iment"! Quite right, the Rotten Tomatoes sensors probably have to scan thousands of entries every day. Nuance, subtlety and context are not in the cards. One should avoid certain words, even in the title of a poem by Shakespeare or a novel by Joseph Conrad.

Lloyd Penney: Trouble is, COVID-19 lockdowns sacrifice children to (hypothetically) protect old timers like me. Child abuse and neglect, as well as suicidal depression, will often go undetected if children are never seen by teachers. Given what we now know, the schools should probably have stayed open in most places.

In general, red states did better than blue states, but that may be skewed by the disastrous performance of my governor, Andrew Cuomo.

David M. Shea: The recent James Bond films are serviceable techno-thrillers, more in the tradition of Tom Clancy than the "classic" Bond films. Which is OK by me, as I never liked them much.

Richard Dengrove: D'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers are based on real people, according to D'Artagnan's (ghost-written) memoirs, though the real names of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis are unknown. So they had to die sometime.

From the review of *The Four Musketeers*, by Kari Maund and Phil Nanson (2006; reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 5 #4):

Maund and Nanson have explicated a complex structure of relationships in this work. They discuss the real d'Artagnan and the real Isaac de Portau ("Porthos"), Armand de Sillègue d'Athos d'Autevielle ("Athos"), and Henri d'Aramitz ("Aramis").

—JTM

From: **AL du Pisani** June 6, 2021
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The problem with power outages are not the scheduled outages – inconvenient, but you are able to plan around them. But the unplanned outages are worse – you have no idea how long it is going to take before you have electricity again.

So it was yesterday, when I was hit with an unplanned power outage two and a half hours before the planned two and a half hour power outage. I eventually decided to treat this as a five hour outage, and planned my life around that.

Worse was the power outage I had one Sunday, when the power went out. Upon investigation it turned out to be a planned six hour outage, which the municipality did not bother to notify people of in advance, and which overran by an hour.

The dreaded third wave of Wuhan Pneumonia hit locally, and we are in deeper lockdown than the medium level lockdown we had for the past couple of months. It looks like this time around there is not going to be a ban on the sale of alcohol, neither over weekends nor at all, which happened during the previous two waves of lockdown.

Our glorious government has started a roll out of vaccines, but it is going a lot slower than everybody anticipated or wants. I heard that at the current rate we can expect herd immunity in 9 or so years.

A bit of an update to Joe's Monarchy news – There have been a couple of interesting twists in the Zulu succession saga – the anticipated prince (Misuzulu kaZwelithini) has been named the new Zulu monarch, but it all happened in more confused circumstances than planned, since the appointed regent died shortly after taking office. And King Goodwill Zwelithini's first wife (Queen Sibongile) launched a court application that since she was married to him in community of property (and the rest of his six wives were not), she wants his will overturned, and to get half of his estate.

The real prize, however, appears to be control of the Ingonyama Trust – which controls about 2,883 million hectares of land. This is supposed to be land kept in trust for the benefit of the tribes and communities living on it, but the ANC government have had it in their sights as part of the whole expropriation without compensation plan to impoverish landowners.

And then there is also the around R66 million annual upkeep of the Zulu monarchy, including a salary of R1,239,918 for a king or queen.

I am not fond of my government, especially not of the way they have isolated me from my friends. All is not lost yet, but I rarely see people I used to see once or twice a month other than via video.

Healthwise: I had a hip replacement operation in February. Still got some discomfort remaining from the operation, and still do not quite have the full range of motion I can expect. I had to spend a long weekend in hospital as a result of a blood clot in the lungs, probably caused as a result of the initial operation. But in general I am fine, and have been working full time.

We are all getting past our sell-by date.

—JTM

I hope that you are well, and can get something to read or watch.

From: **John Hertz** June 3, 2021
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I must write before the 152nd Belmont or I'll miss your cut-off.

About the re-scheduling of Discon III for December, the concom did conduct a plebescite.

Two-thirds voted for an in-person con in December, weather and all, rather than a virtual-only con in August.

If you've lost the hope of just getting together and seeing old friends, of mourning those who have gone and welcoming those who are new, you aren't what I've thought you. Jerry Pournelle, whom I'm glad I could call my friend (the electronic may see <http://file770.com/we-met-for-lunch-and-disagreed/> 27 Sep 17), always said "Despair is a sin."

When Brother Schweitzer said Brother Pournelle was "generally viewed as an amiable crackpot" I didn't quite fall off my chair; perhaps as Brother Farey saw that, he did. So much for a tolerant and gracious fandom. Or, since Farey worries I may be insensitive to irony, perhaps I should consider Schweitzer may have been mocking those who so viewed Pournelle. I hope he was.

Ask Schirm about his relationship with Pournelle.

— JTM

As I've long moaned, we aren't tolerant, we just march behind a banner that says "Tolerance". My companions on the Left are much better at preaching tolerance than at practicing it. I'd be glad if even ashamed to see the Right superior on this point. So far I don't. But as La Rochefoucauld reminds us (literary present tense), the defect of hypocrisy is in having an insufficient quantity of virtue.

And in Tennyson's reminder, Better to promote the good than to rail against the ill.

Which brings me to the Hugo ballot. I hoped though did not expect to see *Forced Perspectives* (Powers), *Glorious* (Benford & Niven), *Starborn and Godsons* (Niven, Pournelle, & Barnes). The fan categories are sadder. Evidently we couldn't be bothered with even ten nominations for, say, Ulrika O'Brien. But that's done, or not done. Next year, if we're alive, can we please —?

June 4, 2021

It's worth another round of postage to make sure I didn't fail to applaud your printing fanart.

Schirmeister in particular (April 2021 issue) is as ever admirably distinctive, comical, and strange.

WAHF:

Martin Morse Wooster, with various items of interest.

Lloyd G. Daub, the same.

Steve Fahnestalk, **George Phillis**, **F. Paul Wilson** with thanks.

Trinlay Khadro, with a pactsard of good wishes.

The Mill Town

Since the depths of the Depression, Phineastown Loom & Mill had produced first-class cloth, linen, cotton, wool, and nylon when it came in. They pioneered permanent press and stain resistant fabrics.

Mr. Finn, the founder, had taken a chance in the economic downturn and through unsparing effort achieved success. He was proud to wear shirts made of fabric from his company; he extolled their qualities wherever he could. His children and grandchildren were less forward, but they did prefer the company's product.

All in all, Phineastown was a prosperous little community, with good schools, a first-rate hospital, lovely parks, an annual Historical Festival, and when that became popular, Green Days where volunteers picked up trash and litter. People knew each other and many retirees stayed around.

But the grandchildren got into the "I'm not ready to have children yet," idea. The next generation consisted of one boy, who died on an Adventure Tour into the Rockies, and one girl, who was into beads and crystals and chakras and auras, not that cloth thing. So her uncle, the last of the generation, set up a trusteeship before he died.

For a couple of years, all went well. Then the heiress found drugs. Understand, she was very popular, as she always had money to buy for the bunch. The trustees had to limit her withdrawals.

After she went through rehab for the fourth time, she was persuaded to sign a will that established a foundation, if she had no children. (A private doctor's report indicated that she was unlikely to do so.)

Then she died.

The foundation took over an abandoned office building (there had been some contraction of late) and remodeled it to form a bright new clean drug treatment charity. It sponsored seminars on the nature of drug detoxification (that just happened to take place at Caribbean resorts, Club Meds, cruises down the Danube, and the like).

The administrator and his senior staff all lived in a new gated development outside of town. All their shopping was done over the Internet, and in general they had little contact with the locals. Even the secretarial staff was hired through a firm in New York.

Over at the mill, the new management didn't quite understand cloth. The upper ranks of the company were now MBAs from out East, who lived with the foundation people, sent their few children away to school, and in various venues disdained the locals as ignorant and slovenly. Particularly after the new pay structure which essentially cut the pay of manufacturing workers, the lowered investment in new machines, and the postponement of maintenance. Layoffs took place about every other year, followed by an influx of new

hires for much lower wages.

The town became a little run-down. Green Day was more heralded than attended; the locals had to work and the outsiders were all off in Washington protesting. The hospital had to cut services, and hire more low-wage doctors. (There were a number of physicians working for the foundation, but they spent most of their time working on presentations.)

Indeed, the most significant effort of the foundation, besides its seminars, was its lobbying for government-funded drug detoxification clinics. This was the topic of many publicity releases. Meanwhile, the local paper, the *Phineastown Free Press*, went from daily to tri-weekly to weekly to a free weekly that was all ads.

Then, a scandal hit the foundation. A drug dealer was killed in a shootout outside of town, and his records showed he had been providing cocaine to the foundation and mill management. They tried to spin the scandal, but in the end dissolved the foundation and sold the company. The executives all moved on.

The new owners were a little hard to pin down. It was a company that somehow was in Switzerland, Ireland, and China simultaneously. They cut wages, reduced investment, and aimed to produce cheap cloth for export.

Finally, the profit margin was just not enough. The owners closed the mill and wrote it off. Anyone with a little money saved tried to move. The downtown was a lineup of empty storefronts, interspersed with a few revivalist churches and the like. The library had been closed and the books sent off to a used-book dealers. The schools were consolidated; ill maintained, a few teachers, a dispirited staff. The hospital was now a one-day-a-week clinic that offered mostly shots.

There had been fires in the gated community where cheaply-installed electrical systems (all the money had gone for the granite countertops) caused the empty big houses to burn down. The paid fire department had been closed for lack of funds and there was no effective volunteer fire department.

The police force had likewise been dissolved. A student had become addled and had gone down the street firing at random. When the two police who were all that was left had had to subdue him, his parents and their then spouses had filed a lawsuit which was settled at great expense, and had meant that the police force had to be dissolved. The county sheriff's department was underfunded and overworked, and sent a patrol through town perhaps once a day.

The town was now dependent on EBT, Social Security, and various family reuniting programs which for some reason seemed to produce a lot of single mothers and violent young men. The big-town congressional candidate who passed through it once on the way to a conference "to meet with the people" observed that these were the sort of trash the country was better off without.

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This is issue **Whole Number One Hundred and Seventeen (117)**.

Art: What we are mainly looking for is small fillos. Your fillo will probably be scanned in and may be reused, unless you object to its reuse.

Contributions: This is not a fictionzine. It is intended to be our fanzine, so be interesting.

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