

Askance #49



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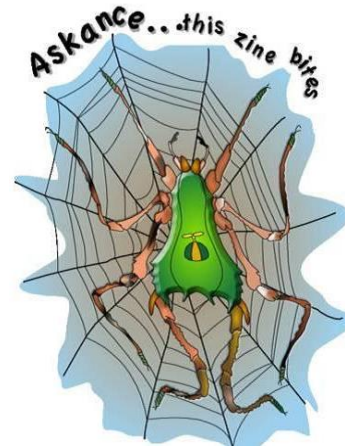
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What you have here in your hands (or on screen) is another Mythical Publication. Copies of this fine, back on a quarterly schedule fanzine can be had for The Usual, which means expressed interest, submission and eventual inclusion of articles and artwork, letters of comment, and cold hard cash in the amount of \$3.00 USD if you want a printed copy mailed to you. Bribes are also accepted. Of course, if you send in locs, articles, and artwork, you just earned a life-time free subscription. Consider yourself lucky, indeed.

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Bemused Natterings

Well, that worked out alright

Sometimes a fanzine unexpectedly comes together in all the right ways. The issue before you did just that. I never asked for any particular topic or theme for people to contribute for this, the 49th issue of *Askance*, but lo and behold, a theme actually developed all on its lonesome.



There is a lot of fannish humor in this issue: bad puns courtesy of two Sherlock Holmes pastiches, two filk songs, a fun story from an old convention, a brief story about an encounter with Rod Serling, a Figby cartoon, filler art, and letters of comment. All of these possess this amorphous entity called “fannish humor” and together these components give this issue a fun atmosphere. Nothing of any real earth-shaking importance is to be found within these pages, but that’s okay. My goal as a fan editor is to hopefully produce a pleasant fanzine that people will enjoy and then respond by writing letters of comment. Of such are dreams made.

Saying this raises the obvious question, what the heck exactly *is* this undefined thing we call “fannish humor”? Not surprisingly, there is no set-in-stone definition of the term. Usually, what science fiction fanzine fans call “fannish” is really that aforementioned amorphous entity, or they give an example, which they point to and say with a deep pronouncement of gravitas, “***This*** is fannish.” That does not exactly work very well because that simply leaves such a definition to the individual. In an endeavour to maintain a sense of rigorous research into this matter, I decided to see what *Fancyclopedia 3* had to say about this problematic issue. Interestingly, *FanCy 3* has two entries from the two previous editions of this most august and academic treasure trove of fannish minutiae. Here they are:

From [Fancyclopedia 1](#) ca 1944

[Fans](#) excel in humor. Burlesques pedigree back to [Hornig's Wonder Stories](#), as does [fan fiction](#). [Cartoons](#) are usually humorous. Puns and similar witticisms are irrepressibly scattered all thru [fan](#) writings, even the most serious. Magazines devoted entirely to humor, however, have not fared well; apparently [fans](#) don't want you to walk up and say "this is funny" before telling it.

[Fan](#) humor is of a sophisticated (*sic*) sort, strongly characterized by [double inversion](#), and often bordering on the [Shaggy Dog](#). The [MFS Silly Story](#) should be mentioned. With a few exceptions, funny stuff published in [fanzines](#) is clean; your chronicler wouldn't know about that in correspondence or conversation, being a nice boy who doesn't listen to such things. [Elmer Perdue](#) has a method of recording things on tape which must be developed, which he thinks is sure-fire to dodge the postal authorities.

From [Fancyclopedia 2](#) ca 1959

[Fans](#) excel at humor, relative to the [mundane](#) people. Burlesques pedigree back to [Hornig's Wonder Stories](#), as does [fan fiction](#). Cartoons are usually humorous. Puns and similar witticisms are irrepressibly scattered all thru [fan](#) writings, even the most [sercon](#). Magazines devoted entirely to humor, however, have not fared well; apparently [fans](#) don't dig people walking up and saying "this is funny:..." before telling their story.

[Fan](#) humor is of a sophisticated sort, strongly characterized by [double inversion](#), and often bordering on the [Shaggy Dog](#). The [MFS Silly Story](#) should be mentioned. With a few exceptions, funny stuff published in [fanzines](#) is clean; your chronicler wouldn't know about that in correspondence or conversation, being a humorless prudish clod who doesn't listen to such things.

These definitions really do not help us understand fannish humor at all. The only difference that I notice is the beatnik phrasing "fans don't dig people" from 1959 compared to the "fans don't want you to walk up" phrase in the 1944 edition. And I really want to know what that Minneapolis Fantasy Society (MFS) Silly Story reference is all about. Andrew Hooper, your turn to step up and elucidate if you can.

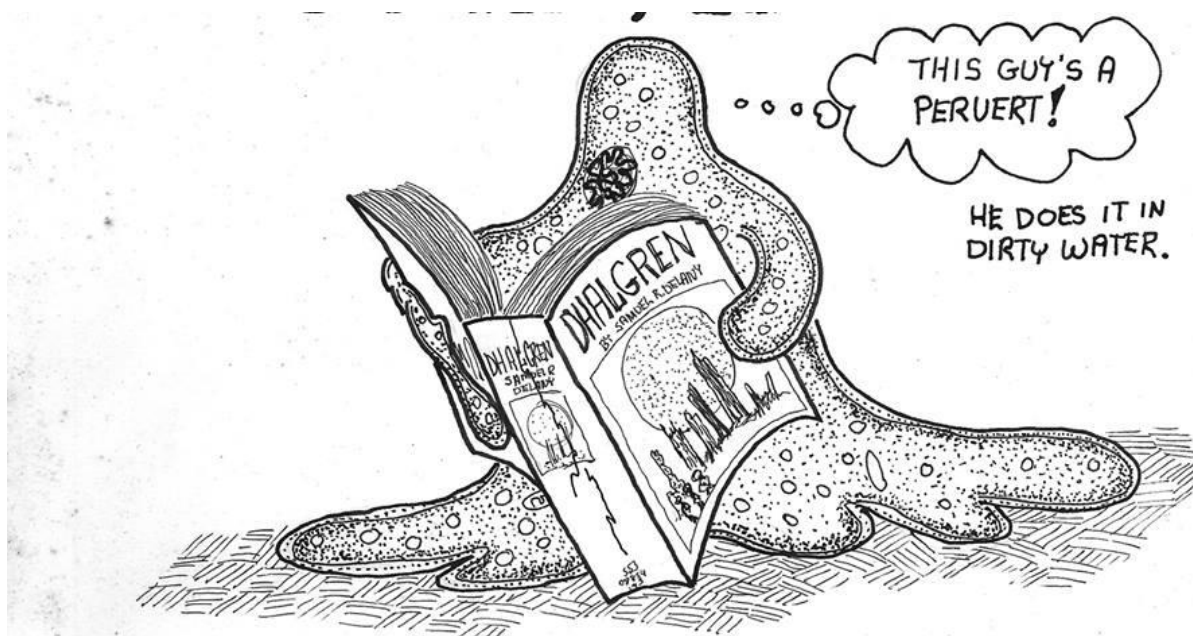
In any event, one thing that I have learned from reading fanzines for nearly fifty years is that science fiction fans enjoy fun in all its guises and venues, ranging from conventions, to recordings, to writings. We like to have a good time, and there is nothing wrong with that. Therefore, since this is a science fiction fandom-oriented fanzine, I might as well have fun exploring just a few examples of fannish humor. Do note that there is no faanish humor – the extra 'a' added to denote its just about fans and their activities, or so I understand how that works – in here, unless you count Sam Long's filk songs, which do indeed meet that definitional criterion. Whatever works. In my fanzine review column I shall turn my attention toward a discussion, along with some examples, of what passes for fannish humor. Sercon – serious and constructive – fanzines can be a topic for another issue some day.

This was a fun issue to assemble. I hope all y'all enjoy it, and take the time to write in and contribute to the lettercolumn.

WOOF: the Worldcon APA

The latest edition of the Worldcon Order Of Fanzine editors (WOOF, as its acronym goes) was assembled by Guy H. Lillian III to coincide with this year's 79th World Science Fiction Convention, the virtual ConZealand, and is now available on [efanzines.com](#) for the general masses. WOOF is an interesting APA - amateur press association – conceived by the late Bruce Pelz in 1976, and admitted to this being his "second dumbest idea," but the danged thing is still going. I have even been the Official Editor (OE: have you ever noticed that fans love acronyms?) of WOOF twice: first in 2013 at LoneStarCon III, and then again in 2017 when Simo Suntilla and I co-OE'd WOOF at the Helsinki Worldcon. This is actually a fun thing to do, and what most contributors do is put together a small fanzine specifically tailored for the

Worldcon. Some contributors use WOOF as a venue for distributing their regularly appearing fanzines, such as Juan Sanmiguel running the OASFIS newsletter and Guy Lillian his personalzine *Spartacus* in a WOOF distribution. This latest disty has the third issue of my WOOF dedicated zine, which I call *Woofers and Tweeters*, which I then used as the basis for the 31st issue of my personalzine *Askew*. This is what fans do. It is a fun hobby, and a great way to see what fans from around the world contribute. Look up the latest edition on efanzines.com; I hope you enjoy it.



I'm not waiting on a lady...

...I'm just waiting on some contributions for the next issue of *Askance*, which will be its 50th issue. A couple years ago I thought this fanzine would never make it this far, but here we are. Consider this an unabashed plea for contributions of articles, reviews, artwork, and such for that ~~millstone~~ milestone issue. Already I have a cover for it being created by the talented Ulrika O'Brien, and Alan White has agreed to send a batch of his artwork that I can feature as an art gallery display. I think Christopher Garcia has something in mind to write for it as well, and the regular cartoon features of Figby and Chat, the Fhannish Ghod will likewise be present. However, my goal is to make the Fiftieth Ish a good-sized one featuring a bunch of fanzine fandom's finest fan writers. By all means, send your stuff in. That issue will be out before Christmas – that's my goal for publication – so there is time. Thank you in advance for helping to make that a successful issue.

“Gentlemen all, I do suspect this trash to be a party to this injury.”

Who's in this issue

I am positively thrilled with all of the contributions from these individuals. Will this be a precursor to the next issue? Stay tuned for a few more months and find out.

Bill Fischer

Figby returns with yet another installment of our favorite researchers at a South American socio-cultural conference on aboriginal religions. What could possibly go wrong?

Sam Long

Here are two more filk songs from a compilation of same that Sam sent my way over a year ago. These particular choices fit neatly into this issue's theme of fannish humor.

Ray Palm

This gentleman reciprocated in kind – I sent him a short article for his fanzine *the Ray X X-Rayer* – by sending a short article telling the tale of something he actually did a very long time ago.

Lloyd Penney

It has been a while since Lloyd contributed one of his many “Tales from the Convention” articles, and this particular one is a classic example of what fans will do on the spur of the moment when challenged.

Tom Sadler

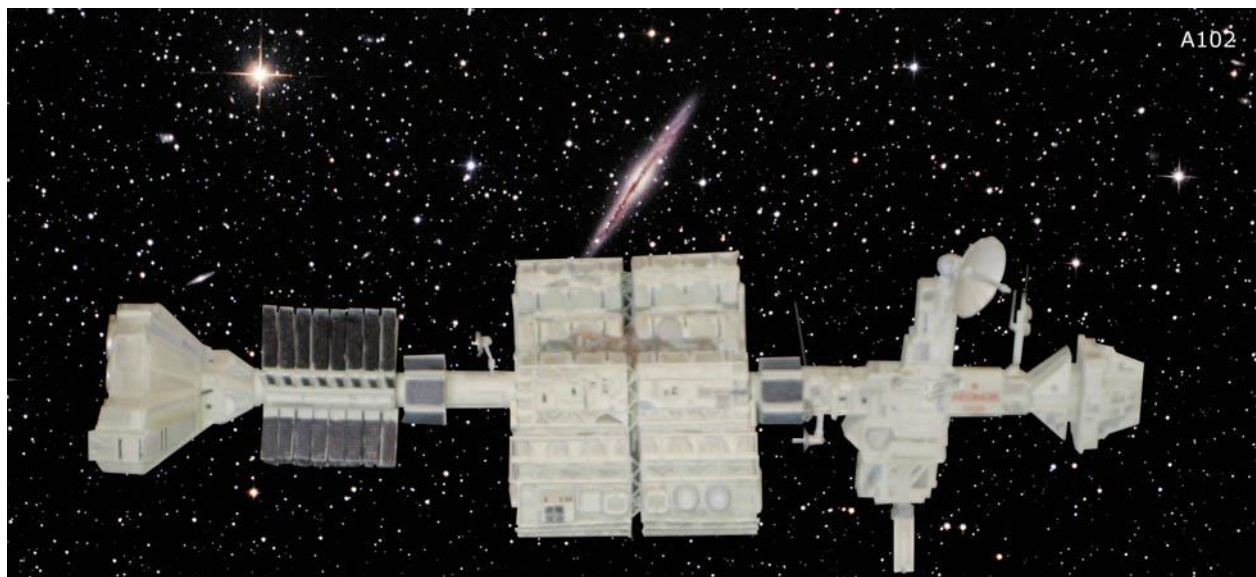
This is a reprint from *Askance* #21 (September 2012). I include it again because it is a fine example of what is called observational humor, something which fans seem to be very good at.

Taral Wayne

Do I really need to introduce Taral? I didn't think so. He has become one of sf fandom's most consistent and productive fan writers in recent years, and here he offers up a Sherlock Holmes pastiche.

Walt Wentz

Not to be outdone, Taral's proofreader Walt contributed his own Sherlock Holmes pastiche. Sounds like fun to me. The game is afoot!



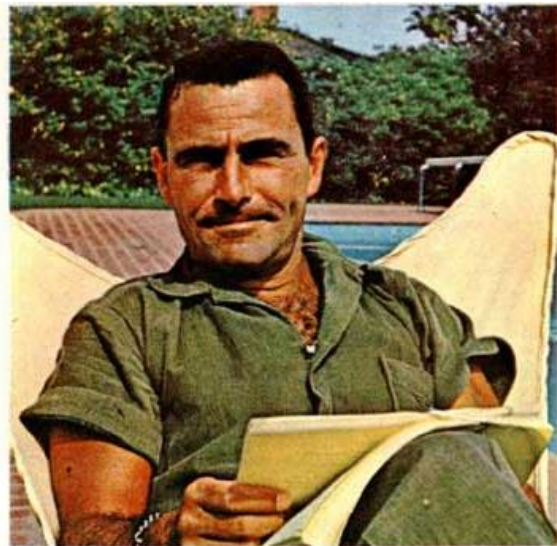
How I Embarrassed Rod Serling (But Didn't Mean To)

© 2020 Ray Palm

Mystery: Why did Rod Serling act uncomfortable when I posed a simple question to him? Years later I would happen to learn the reason.

You kids nowadays. You don't know how easy you have it with your newfangled internet and the Great God Google.

Back in the day access to information was very limited. You might learn about something in a magazine, on TV and radio, maybe word of mouth.



Before the web was prevalent, I came across by chance a reference to an article that made everything fall into place about the incident.

Serling spoke at the local college and as a fan I made sure to attend. For those unaware (all three of you) he was the creator and head writer of the classic TV SF/fantasy series *The Twilight Zone*.

One main topic of his talk was disgraced ex-President Richard Nixon. He stated that Nixon was not only a crook but insane. An oft-repeated observation during this time from the Watergate investigation: "What did the President know and when did he know it?"

I didn't care for Nixon, but I had another subject on my mind. After wrapping up his lecture he invited questions from the audience. I asked Serling about his thoughts regarding correspondence courses that taught how to write fiction. I was interested in the topic because I was taking such a course but not the one he was associated with, Famous Writers School. He and other well-known authors posed in a group photo that accompanied advertising for the FWS school in various magazines. As a member of the Guiding Faculty Serling did a TV spot promoting the school, showing students who were helped by its program.

Besides writing the course textbooks the print advertising implied the authors group also reviewed student tests.

When I asked my question Serling tensed up, looked away from me. He said college courses might be better and then quickly scanned the audience for another question.

Years flew by after the lecture. One day I came across mention of an article by Jessica Mitford, *Let Us Appraise Famous Writers*. Thanks to a helpful librarian I was able to read a reprint of the article.

Uh-oh. Jessica Mitford exposed Famous Writers School as a scam. She interviewed the founder of the operation Bennett Cerf, publisher and TV personality, uncovering some disturbing facts. Serling and his fellow writers did not review student works even though that was implied in the print ad. The operation was a writing evaluation mill, other unfamous writers reviewed the submissions. A student wouldn't get the same instructor which meant there was no continuity with critiques. What one reviewer liked the other hated.

Jessica cited the story of someone ordering a test and then purposely submitting a substandard writing example that evinced no budding talent. But the person was admitted anyway, meeting the main criteria: they were able to write some words on paper especially on a check.

What did Serling know and when did he know it? Did a smart man such as himself didn't suspect something might be amiss?

12 famous authors start a new kind of writing school

If you show you have writing talent worth developing, they are interested in helping you achieve professional success... right in your own home, and in your spare time.

I live with writers who professionally have an opportunity never before available. Twelve of America's most famous authors have joined together to create a school of professional writing... in high speed correspondence and personal instruction... not to give you a false sense of security or professional success and recognition.

The writing is supervised by Rod Serling, creator of *The Twilight Zone*, and author of the popular TV series, *The Untouchables*. Other famous authors include: William Faulkner, author of *The Sound and the Fury*; John Updike, author of the TV show *Doctor G*; and other famous authors and professional writers. Rod Serling, author of the TV show *The Untouchables*, and other famous authors and professional writers. Rod Serling, author of the TV show *The Untouchables*, and other famous authors and professional writers. Rod Serling, author of the TV show *The Untouchables*, and other famous authors and professional writers.

Famous Writers School

Send for Famous Writers Talent Test

For select people, with writing talent worth developing, the Famous Writers School has created a revolutionary Talent Test. The complete test will bring you a copy, along with a descriptive brochure about the school. When you have completed and returned the test, it will be graded without charge by one of the professional writers on our staff. This is not to be confused with one-on-one instruction. If the results of your test indicate writing talent, you are then eligible to enroll in the school. You are, however, under absolutely no obligation to do so.

Famous Writers School

Send 40¢ for Talent Test

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Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Occupation _____

The Famous Writers School is located in the following address: 1000 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003.

During his lecture he talked about appearing in a TV beer commercial. One time a reporter asked him if he actually endorsed the product. Serling replied the ad wasn't a beer commercial, it was about him taking a urine sample to his doctor. The beer company asked him to retract the statement, he refused, and the contract was canceled.

So he did have some principles. He had the option to look into the FWS operation before signing on, seeing if it was the real deal. Whatever he thought he couldn't pass up the easy dinero.

In my younger years I admired Serling – he was a great writer -- but I now know he was also a man with weak spots like the rest of us. Feet of clay? In this case feet of BS.

Footnote: I completed the correspondence course, gaining some tools to write fiction. I learned more from that program than I did with any college creative writing courses. In fact the head of the English Department gave me three credits for it. He had taken the same course when he was in the Navy.

Ray Palm

Sources:

Let Us Appraise Famous Writers, Jessica Mitford, The Atlantic –

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1970/07/let-us-now-appraise-famous-writers/305319/>

Rod Serling Famous Writer School TV ad – <https://youtu.be/9GBBRaXz3PY>

Famous Writers School – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Famous_Writers_School

“How poor are they who have no patience!”



Waltzing with Fandom

An Appreciation by *Taral Wayne*

Walt Wentz and I go back a long way. It was 1987 when I was introduced to him by a fellow artist, who had worked as an illustrator for Walt before, but, for some reason or another, was too busy to take on more assignments. So I was passed on to Walt, who as an associate editor of a small magazine based in Oregon state.

Ruralite was not an impressive magazine, but it was professionally printed and had an enormous monthly print run or more than 250,000 copies, in various editions that were mailed free to members of electrical co-ops in several Northwest states. Being a general-interest family magazine, mailed free to a “captive” audience, it did not have to compete for readers, *Analog* or *Locus* did. But it paid reasonably well, considering, and Walt seemed quite happy to throw as much illustrative work as he could in my direction. Over the next fourteen years, I illustrated some sixty freelance articles for *Ruralite* ... including a couple I wrote myself.

Times change, however, and Walt eventually was shifted out of the “freelance editor” spot, and the new freelance editor didn’t care for drawings ... he preferred photographs. So *I* was out of a job as well. Fortunately, Walt and I had become good friends in the meantime. He is retired now, and has been generous with his time by not only proofreading my articles and fanzines over the last many years, but offering valuable suggestions on how I can make the material *better*!

Sadly, I am not an entirely *natural* writer. I have the imagination to write, but not always a firm grasp of grammatical niceties. Spelling is nearly a closed book to me, and typos leap into my writing as easily as salmon swimming upstream! There is no question that without Walt’s assistance, my efforts would be badly marred by my own occasional awkwardness with the written word.

I mean no disrespect to proofreaders, but Walt is not merely a passive grammar jockey. He is a playful writer in his own right, who composes mainly for his own amusement. He has written satire, biographies, pastiches, parodies, how-tos, space operas, furry smut, political diatribes, letters to editors and – yes – fanzine articles. If I’m not mistaken, more than one of the latter have appeared in the pages of *Askance*.

No doubt John will have words of his own to add, but I feel more than a little indebted to Walt for his patience with my persistent misuse of possessives, and clueless inability to grasp conjunctions of all sorts, and so I feel he deserves all the appreciation I can heap on him. And all the praise that John can add as well.



Worse Than a Crime

A Holmes & Watson Misadventure

Taral Wayne



It had been one of those unusually vile periods of inclement English weather – chill, damp, and miserable. The yellow fog that curled around thousands of poorly functioning chimneys was perilous to normal respiratory function, and all but the most healthy were wracked with a persistent cough. Day or night, there was only a pervasive gloom in which footsteps echoed, but all sense of direction was lost. It was, in other words, a London Spring.

Sherlock Holmes had been scratching at his Stradivarius for three continuous days, improvising novel scales with which to mangle familiar favourites from Gilbert and Sullivan. He did this primarily to irritate Watson, who was lately fond of the Savoy Theatre's repertoire, and, true to form, the Good Doctor finally stormed out of the apartment at 221B Baker Street, in search of a tune that was not better suited to a Turkish seraglio.

"Score one the World's Most Bored Consulting Detective," thought Holmes, smiling at Watson's discomfiture! "He'll be back in a more forgiving mood once he has fortified himself with three or four pints of black and tan, and fallen asleep in the corner of his favourite pub until closing time!" In the meantime, Holmes would be free to stuff his pipe with his roughest shag tobacco, and remove the hypodermic syringe from its concealment in the hidden shelf under the clock on the mantelpiece. Holmes sighed in contentment, knowing that he had several hours that would be entirely his own!

Unfortunately, the best laid plans of mice and sleuths go oft astray.

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Even before the knock came at Holmes's door, he had deduced that the visitor was a woman, five-foot, seven and one quarter inches tall, wearing fashionable high-laced boots, a floral hat whose feathers brushed the ceiling of the hallway, a waist-length wrap, and a hand-bag of a size capable of concealing a more than adequate revolver, all the articles of toiletry that any woman could require – and a heavy object wrapped carefully in cloth. It was child's play to deduce the fact that the woman was conscientious enough to wipe her boots, two or three times, before rapping briskly on the door of Mrs. Hudson's upstairs tenants. Before she could knock again, Holmes called out, "Please come in, my dear Mrs. Adler!"

Anticipating Holmes, the Incomparable Irene Adler glanced about the entryway and observed, "How unfortunate that my friend Dr. Watson has only just stepped out!"

Not at all dismayed by the woman's rare display of perception, Holmes urbanely ushered her into the disarray of his sitting room.

"Still injecting a seven per-cent solution of refined cocaine, I see," said the Perceptive Mrs. Adler.

"Remarkable," said Holmes. "No doubt you have deduced this from the rubber cord knotted around my bare left arm, and the marks from the many times I have injected myself."

"No need to be sarcastic, Holmes," retorted the Brusque Mrs. Adler. "Your faithful amanuensis has recorded all the details of your private indulgence in one of his colourfully named adventure stories."

"He did? I expressly told him *not* to mention such indiscretions," Holmes replied, nettled. "Such revelations give the public a poor impression, as though I were incapable of producing an insight without chemical stimulation! Unfortunately, I find Dr. Watson's prose to be quite unreadable twaddle! I suppose I shall have to pay more attention to his scribbling in the future."

"But as we both know, the cause of your dependence is entirely a product of ennui ... is that not correct?" drawled the Sympathetic Mrs. Adler.

"Indeed it is, Madam," said a despondent Holmes.

"I, myself, much prefer peyote buttons as the means of escape from the banalities of everyday life," the Complacent Mrs. Adler commented. "I find they stimulate the imagination to a much more refined state."

"Indeed," Holmes admitted despondently.

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Holmes secreted his "works" once more in the secret compartment beneath the mantle clock and composed himself in a stuffed chair opposite the Redoubtable Mrs. Adler. That Woman had taken Holmes's *own* seat, the towering armchair in which he habitually took command of the conversation with the advantage of its more imposing size, its singular position away from the other chairs and with

its back to the fireplace, which cast the Great Detective into inscrutable shadow. In the less-strategically located seat, he felt peculiarly unprepared to deal with This Remarkable Woman.

"It is apparent that you have unexpectedly found something of considerable value, and wish for my services to restore it to the owners in a discreet fashion!" Holmes opened the consultation ... for such it *was*.

Not to be outdone, the Astute Mrs. Adler observed that Holmes had a large volume listing prominent booksellers open upon his desk. Taking note of numerous newspaper clippings, used theatre tickets and wrinkled Pound notes used as bookmarks, she casually remarked, "Did you enjoy your Sarasate recital last week? It rained heavily that night, and I fear that your evening dress must have gotten quite



drenched. But to the point, Mr. Holmes. You have obviously heard that the fabulous, 'lost' Shakespearian tragedy, 'Elizabeth, the Queen,' was missing?"

"Indeed, I had acquainted myself with the facts of the case ... of which there were very few made public," Holmes added, archly.

It was true. The controversial play was not commonly known, as there had been considerable reason to doubt its authenticity since its discovery in an obscure bookstore in Bury St Edmunds in 1749. While a minority of academics vigorously supported its genuine authorship by the Bard of Avon, an even larger faction scoffed at the possibility. Yet it had proven to be impossible to entirely dismiss the chance that the volume might be genuine! As a consequence, while the play had never been entirely discredited, on the other hand the academic community at large had tacitly ignored it, as far as humanly possible.

"So far as has been stated in the newspapers," said Holmes, "the folio was reported missing over two months ago. Lestrade at Scotland Yard made several misguided arrests ... none of which suspected miscreants seemed to have been involved in the theft, nor to have any information that was in the slightest way helpful toward clearing up the mystery. It will be a miracle if the Yard itself is not shortly under fire from the government, for its inefficient and generally ineffectual efforts!"

"Indeed. As usual, Lestrade is in hot water of his own making," said the Imperturbable Mrs. Adler. "What if I were to reveal to you that the missing play had been found? But you knew that already, Holmes, didn't you?"

Holmes smirked in his wonted complacent fashion. "Of course I do! Shall I tell you how I knew that you know what I knew?"

The Intuitive Woman in question replied, "Elementary, my dear Holmes! It was obvious that the absence of further developments could only lead one to the conclusion that, 'Elizabeth, the Queen' had been found! When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth! But there was a complication that could not yet be disclosed to the public. Is that correct?"

"Indeed it is, my dear lady. And you are about to disclose *your* connection to the missing play's disappearance, and its subsequent recovery, am I correct?"

"Not *quite*, my dear Mr. Holmes!"

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Beginning to run short of patience with the game of matching wits, she said, "It is time we cut to the chase."

Mrs. Adler explained that, in the course of the last few years, she had fallen into more or less similar circumstances as Sherlock Holmes himself. Lamentably, the handsome young man she had married had proven incapable of intellectual work, and barely scraped by on his clerkly earnings! However, by

unraveling mysteries that appeared impenetrable to others, Mrs. Adler had discovered a talent in herself which enabled her to realize a comfortable living.

"I was approached in New York only two weeks ago by a highly placed member of the American State Department, on a confidential matter that required not only my discretion, but also my adept intellectual attainments," she related. "In short, I was asked to solve a puzzle. The purported Shakespeare play that had been stolen, had been found ... not in the United Kingdom, as had been supposed, but in the United States! The trail that ultimately led me to the missing volume is of no real importance, and there remains now only a matter of placing it into the hands of the proper authorities."

"Extraordinary!" cried Holmes. "I was not anticipating this. But what motive would anyone in America have in pilfering an Elizabethan play of doubtful provenance?"

"Fenians, perhaps," Mrs. Adler shot back. "It does not matter... "

"It matters very much," retorted Holmes, just as quickly. "Because the play has actually been recovered only *four* days ago, by myself!"

"What?" expostulated the Incredulous Mrs. Adler.

"Exactly. It was my most recent case, the conclusion of which is the reason for my present state of indolence. It only remains for a delegation to reclaim the volume and return it to the library at Bury St Edmunds, in two more days' time!"



For once, neither the Great Detective nor the Unparalleled Mrs. Adler had anything to say.

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"But that is preposterous!" objected Mrs. Adler, breaking the silence. "I have the folio in my possession! It is here, in my bag!"

"But, my dear Mrs. Adler, the very same folio is here, in a desk drawer situated at the other side of this very room!"

"Well," sniffed the Unexpectedly Perturbed Mrs. Adler, "you might have said something about, it and not led a lady into a disconcerting *faux pas*."

"My apologies. But it appears that we have an overabundance of folios. We have two, whereas we only need one!"

The Great Detective rose suddenly, to begin pacing the floor. He was deep in thought, and no longer felt any need for his seven per-cent solution. The sudden mystery of how two identical folios had come to be had banished everything else from his mind.

After a minute, Holmes said, "Might I be allowed to view the supernumerary copy of the 'Elizabeth?'"

"Of course, Mr. Holmes," replied Mrs. Adler. She lifted her bag onto her lap, and removed a package wrapped in muslin, bound with twine. Using a pen knife to sever the twine, the volume was soon revealed. It was roughly quarto size, bound between leather covers and nearly two inches thick.

"Take it," she said.

Holmes swept the clutter from the nearby desk onto the floor, and laid the book on the cleared surface, then lifted an identical leather-bound volume from a drawer and placed it next the one provided by the Obliging Mrs. Adler.

Laid side by side, the two volumes were indistinguishable.

"What now?" asked Mrs. Adler. "How shall we determine which of the two folios is the authentic one?"

For the next several hours, Holmes and his guest pored over the two documents, and found that for all intents and purposes there was not a hair's width of difference between them. The paper was the same, even when examined closely with Holmes's best microscope. A tiny amount of ink scraped from a randomly chosen page proved chemically identical to a sample chosen from the other manuscript. The binding and discoloration of the covers were the same. Even the location of wormholes and watermarks were perfectly identical in every detail!

"Oh, botheration," cried the Exasperated Mrs. Adler. "Whoever created the spurious 'Elizabeth' must have been a forger of no mean order. I have never seen a forgery as flawless as this! It is an work of genius!"

Of course, there were several incidental, unresolved details about the re-appearance of the unauthenticated play that weighed heavily upon Holmes's mind, but those questions would have to be answered at another time.

"There is only one thing left that we can do," said Holmes. "We shall have to read the two folios side-by-side in order to compare the texts. If there is *some* discrepancy, however small, we shall *find* it!"

"And if not, Holmes, we are outwitted!"

Neither the Proud Mr. Adler nor the be Vainglorious Sherlock Holmes were able to think of a better course but to begin reading.

The hours grew late, and even the busy London streets grew quiet. Only the solitary steps of the occasional straggler on his way home disturbed the night. One o'clock. Then two o'clock, and all up and down the street could be heard distant calls of "Time, gentlemen, please!"

"Watson should be fumbling at the door latch any moment now, a little the worse for wear, but more than likely quite able to register a complaint if he is kept up any later by our deliberations," Holmes said wearily. He knew full well how cranky the good doctor could be when he had been well lubricated with drink. "Perhaps I should call for a cab to carry you to your hotel, and take this matter up at a later time? You are staying at the Royal Albert, are you not? Of the more suitable accommodations near Baker Street, the only other is undergoing renovations that would pose an inconvenience."

"Agreed," said the Weary Mrs. Adler, "Let us ... " But then, she was bought up short. At the same moment, both she and the Great Detective spotted the glaring difference in the texts that they had spent most of the night comparing! So great was their relief that the lady laughed in a most unladylike way, and even Holmes broke out into a broad, unwonted smile.

"We have found it, Holmes!"

"Indeed we *have!*" he echoed. Although we have devoted our most careful attention to the text, we have, all unconsciously, passed over the one page in a book which *nobody* reads at all carefully... the title page!"

"Nobody, that is, except the printer who sets the type," corrected the Precise Mrs. Adler. "But how is it possible? So fundamental a mistake as failing to proofread and correct a single word, at the very beginning of what would have been a most perfect forgery! To have made such an obvious error while committing a crime so brilliant as this, is a crime in itself!"

"No," said the Great Detective, hearing Watson's key in the door, "It was not a crime, as Tallyrand put it, but something worse ... it was a *mistake*."

A befuddled Watson staggered into the parlor, and upon seeing two figures before him, mumbled, "Blimey," and passed out on the carpet.

It was the Witty Mrs. Adler who had the last word, however. "It was worse than a *mistake*, my Dear Holmes ... it was a *mis-print!*"

Holmes chuckled indulgently. "Indeed! And, although it has been the greatest of pleasures to work with you in elucidating this little puzzle, my dear Mrs. Adler, I must say I deeply regret that you have devoted such effort and expense to merely retrieve a clever forgery."

"No matter, my dear Mr. Holmes," smiled the Philosophical Mrs. Adler.

"Although I shall not receive the promised reward from the authorities, I shall, at least, have the satisfaction of possessing a truly unique memento ... an *almost* perfect forgery!"

Regarding the Recumbent Doctor Watson, she continued. "I perceive that the good Doctor has surrendered to the snare of intoxication. I suggest that you put him to bed, while I shall collect my things and let myself out, to go to my own repose."

"Ah, but you must allow me to escort you to your accommodations, my dear Mrs. Adler!" Holmes said gallantly. "The streets may be dangerous for a lady at this time of night."

The Indomitable Mrs. Adler merely cocked a sardonic eyebrow, and patted the significant bulge in her handbag. "Give it no thought, Mr. Holmes! Do you imagine that any two-a-penny Limehouse thug could be a match for *me*?"

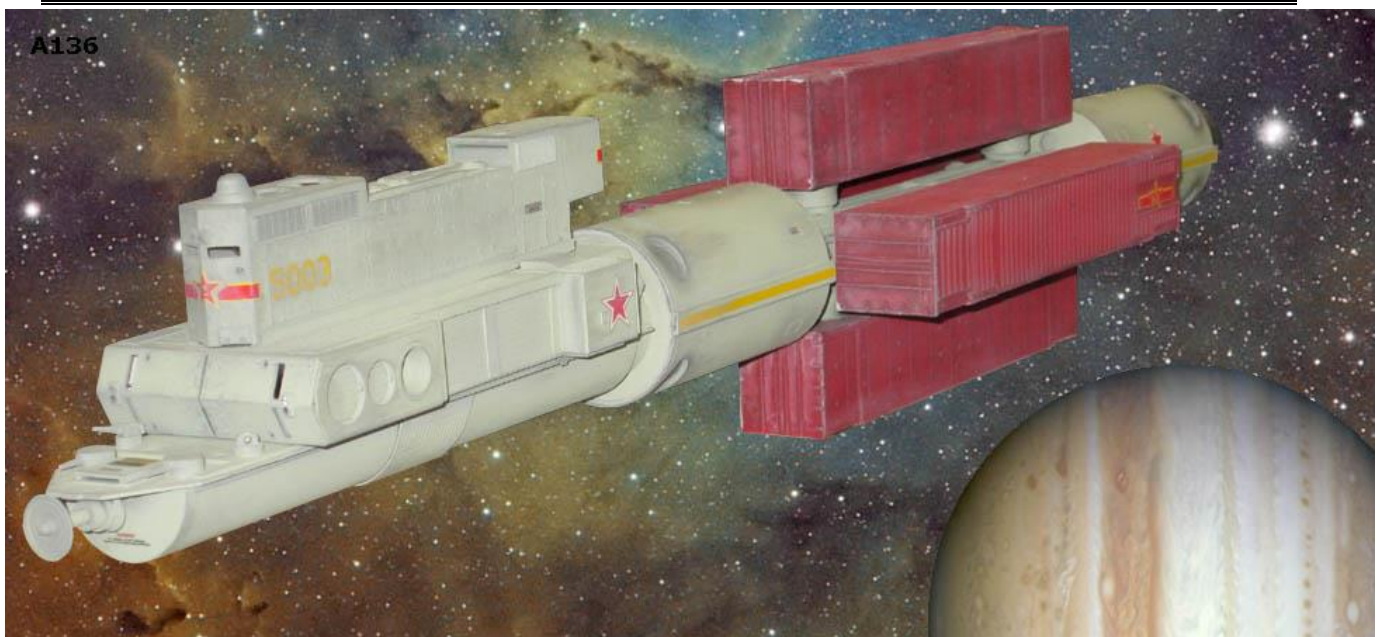
Holmes smiled. "Indeed, I do *not*, Mrs. Adler! Very well then, and I bid you a rather belated good-night ... and a most admiring farewell."

So saying, Holmes threw one sinewy arm about the unsteady Dr. Watson, and half-carried him to his bedchamber, where he allowed the doctor to collapse upon his bed. As he was drawing off Watson's boots, he heard the click of the latch as the Incomparable Mrs. Adler let herself out.

Holmes simply said, "Remarkable women."

Then, with a sudden suspicion, the Great Detective hurried into the parlor for a closer look at the genuine "Elizabeth." It would not be the first time the *Unscrupulous* Mrs. Irene Adler had gotten the better of him!

Taral Wayne



"What an eye she has! Methinks it sounds a parley to provocation."

A Switch in Crime

A Holmes and Watson Misadventure

Walt Wentz

The next morning, Doctor Watson was rather subdued. Holmes was, as usual, monopolizing the morning newspapers with his breakfast, while Watson was fortifying his shattered system with a cup of very strong tea and a slice of dry toast.



Idly opening the cover of the aged folio lying upon the desk, Watson gazed for a time at the antique printing of the title, and then remarked, "Oh, I say, Holmes, I'm quite aware of the irregular spelling of Elizabethan times... but I'm dashed if I've ever seen "Queen" spelt as "Q-u-e-n-e."

() ()

For two days, the Great Detective had been quite out of sorts. The photographic portrait of the Remarkable Irene Adler which sat upon the mantel had been turned to face the wall.

When Watson ventured to inquire why the ancient folio on the desk had so soured Holmes's mood, the curt response he received was: "It's rubbish, Watson! A dangerous forgery. Throw the thing into the fire, like a good fellow."

For the rest of the day, their rooms smelt abominably of scorched leather... which was, perhaps, preferable to the smell of the streets below.

Early on the morning of the second day, Mrs. Hudson, their landlady, came to the door with the news that a Mr. Cyril Thwaite desired an audience.

Mr. Thwaite proved to be a slight and mouselike little man, who sat gingerly on the edge of the proffered chair, clutching his bowler hat in his lap with both hands and nervously twining his feet together.

"It's about the matter of the lost Shakespeare which we referred to you last month, Mr. Holmes," he squeaked.

"Of course," Holmes replied. "You wished to report that it has now been returned, and the reward claimed, by a rather statuesque lady of impeccable manner and appearance?"

"Er... Quite so, quite so," quavered Mr. Thwaite, staring down at his throttled bowler. "We are really quite distressed."

"Distressed? How so?" Holmes said sharply.

"Well... We were so delighted by the return of our lost treasure that we gave it only the most hurried and cursory examination. But... on further reflection, we recalled that our folio contained a peculiar feature. When it was printed, someone, perhaps a careless printer's devil, had misspelled the word 'Queen' on the title page. In the folio we received, the word was spelt correctly."

For a full minute, the Great Detective sat silent. Then he inquired, "But in every other respect, the folio seemed authentic?"

"Yes... but still..."

"Well then, very possibly the folio you received was a previously unknown second printing, in which such careless errors had been corrected," Holmes said smoothly.

"That possibility had occurred to us," Mr. Thwaite admitted. "But still, we feel a proprietary attachment to our own, long-held copy..."

Holmes rose from his armchair. "I am afraid, Mr. Thwaite, that the recovery of your folio is now beyond my meager powers; perhaps it may be discovered by the time of the Greek Kalends, or never, whichever comes first. For now, however, I must be content with offering my congratulations upon your museum's fortuitous acquisition, and to wish you a very good-morning."

After their guest had gone, Holmes went to the mantel and turned the portrait of Mrs. Irene Adler back around, to face the room.

"A Most Remarkable Woman, Watson!" he said, smiling. "This is the second time she has outwitted me... although I take some pleasure in that fact that, in outwitting me, she has also outwitted herself!"

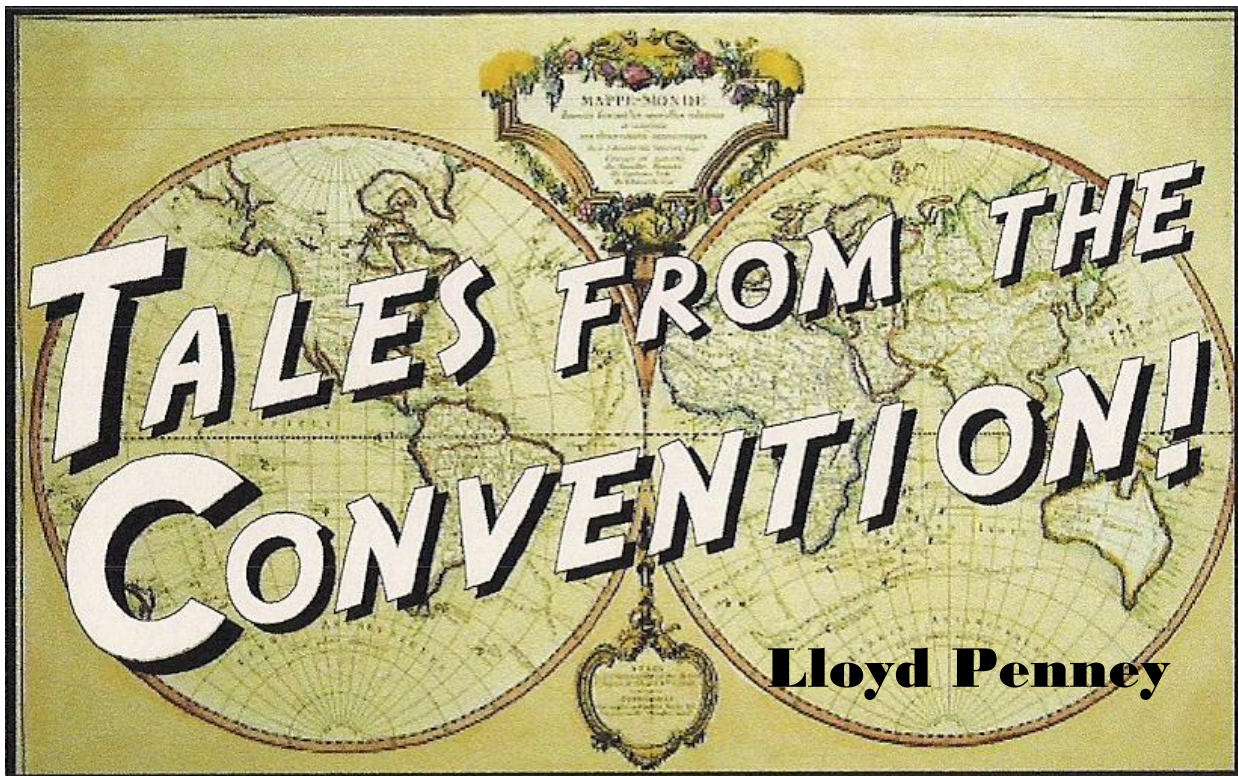
"Good heavens, Holmes!" Dr. Watson burst out. "Can it be that we have inadvertently destroyed an irreplaceable literary treasure?"

"Irreplaceable? Piffle, Watson!" Holmes said complacently. "Many of our ancient treasures have been preserved until today only through the humble industry of myriad unknown copyists, translators, plagiarists, imitators ... and forgers. *Ars longa, vita brevis* ... Art is long, life is fleeting, and breakfast-time draws on apace. Pray ring down for Mrs. Hudson, to inquire if our morning repast is ready."

Walt Wentz

Your humble editor here.

One of my favorite types of fannish humor – besides bad puns and well-written pastiches of famous fictional characters – are retellings of events that happen to fans at conventions. I have experienced many of these over the years, as we all have. Over the years Lloyd Penney, besides writing a ton of letters-of-comment, has written a series of brief articles of just such experiences throughout all of his years of convention attendance. Herewith, on the next page, is yet another one of these fun stories.



8 - We're From Star Fleet, and We're Okay

Chicon IV in 1982 was our first Worldcon, and we were excited. We'd heard and read so much about what a Worldcon was like, and we knew we probably wouldn't catch a tenth of what was going on, but we had to go and learn.

A group of us wanted to go...Yvonne and me, plus friends Danny Lozinski and Larry Tetewsky. We wanted to do something a little fannish, a little Canadian, and a little visible at a big convention. We had noticed that the costumes from the second Star Trek movie (red blazer, black pants and boots) looked like Mountie uniforms. So, Yvonne made four uniform blazers, we all dug out black pants and boots or shoes, and with a campaign hat, we were the Royal Canadian Mounted Star Fleet. With something to smile about, we were ready to go to the Worldcon.

But what would we do once we got there? In reading the one or two progress reports we received, we found out there would be a big trivia contest at the con, and they were wanting teams of four to enter. We'd enter under the RCMSF name, and we'd clean up.

Chicago...we flew down, arrived at the hotel and checked in, found registration and got our badges, and there we were, in a large convention full of strangers. We asked about how to sign up for the trivia competition, and found that there was one large room in which to sign up for everything... kaffeeklatches, competitions, art show auction, masquerade and more.

We all got into costume, and wandered the convention, getting lots of good vibe from the convention. We might have been the first attendees to wear Wrath of Khan costumes. The four of

us went to sign up for the trivia competition, and right beside that table was the sign-up table for the masquerade. The girl behind the table saw us, raved about our costumes, and begged us to enter the masquerade. Well, we hadn't made any plans to do anything like that, well, no...please! Please! You've got to enter!

We asked what we needed to do if we were to enter the masquerade, and we had to have some kind of presentation, song and dance, anything to show off your costumes. We reluctantly said yes, signed up, and then we were committed. Or should have been.

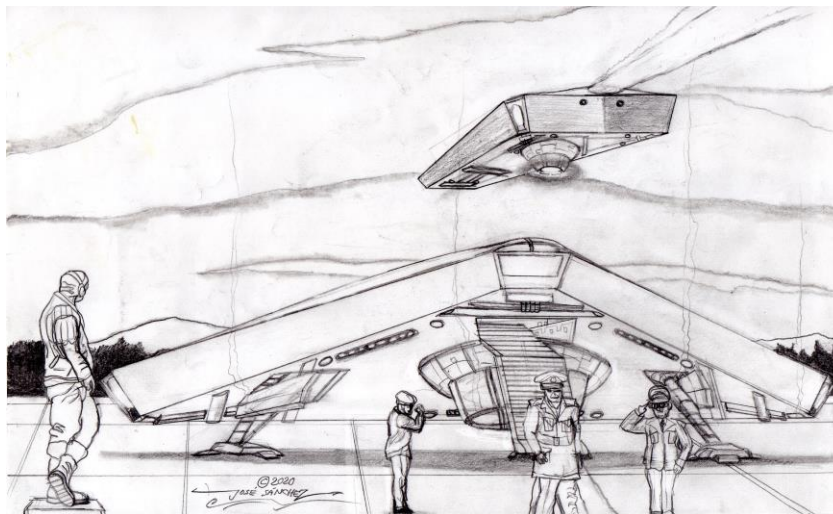
We went to the trivia contest, and we were eliminated in the first round. So much for that first reason for the costumes, but now, we had the masquerade to worry about. What to do? What to present? We had our time to appear and be on stage, and we had about half an hour to create our presentation, and half an hour to rehearse. What to do? Desperation is the true mother of invention, for we came up with the following song, ripped off shamelessly from Monty Python's Lumberjack Song...

*Oh, we're from Star Fleet, and we're okay,
We warp all night and we beam all day.*

*We're quickly charging phasers,
and going after Khan,
We're going to blow the ass off Ricardo Montalban.*

That's what we sang when we got on stage, and we brought the house down. The first person to greet us once we got off the stage was Mike Glicksohn, who hugged Yvonne and twirled her around. We won some prizes, Ralph McQuarry prints, if I recall, and that burst of fun and egoboo launched me and Yvonne into a career in masquerade that lasted through the 80s. However, our best designs and hard work never got us further than did the impromptu Royal Canadian Mounted Star Fleet.

Lloyd Penney



AUSTRALIAN FANNISH MARCHING SONG

ca. 1966;

With apologies to Andrew B. “Banjo” Patterson.

Tune: “Waltzing Matilda”

Once a jolly fake-fan camped at a worldcon
Under the shade of the NF3¹,
And he sang as he watched and waited till his corflu boiled,
"Who'll come a-pubbin' my fanzine with me?"
 "Pubbin' me fanzine, pubbin' me fanzine,
 Who'll come a-pubbin' me fanzine with me?"
And he sang as he watched and waited till his corflu boiled,
"Who'll come a-pubbin' my fanzine with me?"

Down came a femfan to publish at a mimeo.
Up jumped the fakefan and grabbed her with glee
And he sang as he stuffed that femfan in his jiffybag²,
"Who'll come a-pubbin me fanzine with me?"
 "Pubbin' me fanzine, pubbin' me fanzine,
 Who'll come a-pubbin' me fanzine with me?"
And he sang as he stuffed that femfan in his jiffybag,
"Who'll come a-pubbin' my fanzine with me?"

Down came the concom sitting on their folding chairs
Up came the gofers one, two, three.
"Who's that jolly femfan you've got in that jiffybag?
Who'll come a-pubbin' me fanzine with me?"
 "Pubbin' me fanzine, pubbin' me fanzine,
 Who'll come a pubbin' me fanzine with me?"
"Who's that jolly femfan you've got in that jiffybag?"
"Who'll come a pubbin' my fanzine with me?"

Up jumped the fakefan, sprang into the hotel pool.
"You'll never take me alive!" said he.
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that worldcon:
"Who'll come a-pubbin' my fanzine with me?"
 "Pubbin' me fanzine, pubbin' me fanzine,
 Who'll come a-pubbin' me fanzine with me?"
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that worldcon:
"Who'll come a-pubbin' my fanzine with me?"

¹ More commonly the N3F or National Fantasy Fan Federation; but cf. SL's "Road to Fandalay".

² Or Jiffy bag, a padded mailing envelope made by the Jiffy Co. (now Sealed Air Corp.) formerly much used for mailing small packages or bunches of fanzines.

TUCKER PUB ZINES (AND I DON'T CARE)

Tune: "Jimmy Crack Corn"

[Oh] When I was young I used to wait
On Tucker, and help him collate,
And pass the Jim Beam when he got dry,
And never, ever, mention "sci-fi". Oh...

REFRAIN:

Tucker pub zines and I don't care,
Tucker pub zines and I don't care,
Tucker pub zines and I don't care,
My duper's gone awry!

And when he'd write in the afternoon,
I'd proofread in the very next room,
Ol' Tucker being apt to cry
When any loccer mentioned "sci-fi". Oh..
(REFRAIN)

One day he strode around a con.
Neos so numerous, they did swarm.
Fakefan asked him, on the sly,
"Tucker, have you written sci-fi?" Oh..
(REFRAIN)

That Tucker run and jump and scream,
Knock over bottle of Jim Beam,
Collapse (and all trufen knew why—
Fakefan must've uttered "sci-fi"). Oh..
(REFRAIN)

They laid him under a LE ZOMBIE.
Its colophon is plain to see:
"Neath this ish I'm forced to lie,
Victim of [a] fakefan's 'sci-fi'!" Oh..

Tucker pub zines and I don't care,
Tucker pub zines and I don't care,
Tucker pub zines and I don't care,
My duper's gone awry!

The substitution of "[faned] pub [ish]", e.g., "Tucker pub PONG, and I don't care" or "Lynches pub MIMOSA, I don't care" in the refrain is authorized as long as it scans. —SL

Back again. () Another form of fannish humor is how fans tend to look at life, especially when writing about various experiences they have had or simply making general observations, often making pithy witticisms in the process. Perhaps one could say that fans tend to look askance at the world as they write about it. *ahem* Deep from the bowels of the **Askance** files, here is a reprint from the 21st issue, published in September 2010. Tom Sadler, the editor/publisher of the wonderful fanzine **The Reluctant Famulus**, wrote this fine example of what I like to call experiential fan writing that deserves to see the light of day again.*

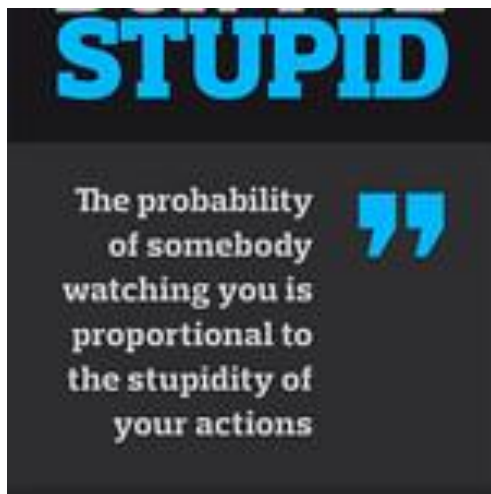
Not Quite The Marching Morons, but . . .

T. D. Sadler

Albert Einstein was quoted as saying something which I particularly like and try to keep in mind: “The difference between genius and stupidity is that genius has its limits.” How very true that is, and we humans try to prove that every day in one way or another.

We all make mistakes and we all do and say stupid things from time to time. What gets me the most, though, is that the infinite human stupidly refuses to let things go at a simple acknowledgment of the error or the stupid thing and instead will blow such things way out of proportion to the actual initial incident.

Then of course there are those fools who deliberately tease or torment wild animals and then are surprised and upset when the victim of their treatment naturally retaliates in an effort to end its humiliation. As, for example, those people who while visiting a zoo manage to bypass the barricading intentionally installed to protect both the humans and the animals and is consequently attacked by the animal and seriously injured if not killed. If that isn’t a prime example of human stupidity I don’t know what is.



But there is also the practice in Spain called “the running of the bulls” wherein crowds of people race along the streets in which probably enraged or at least panicked male bovines are let loose. Inevitably during the running one or more of those people get gored or trampled by the bulls or otherwise injured in the tumult. Surely that could be considered a stupid activity.

I remember once many years ago on a Sunday forenoon at the end of a convention I had attended alone in, I think, Indianapolis. It had rained earlier on--and in fact may have still been raining lightly at the time. I had just taken the left lane of a two-lane entry ramp to the Interstate when some guy in a white pickup went flying by me in the right lane. I watched in surprise and fascination as the truck made it onto

the Interstate--and then went into a 360 degree skid across the highway, almost ending up in the median dividing the the opposing lanes. The driver was extremely fortunate in that the traffic was very light at that time and--I’m not completely sure after all these years--there were no other vehicles in that area when the truck performed its little trick. Still, talk about stupid! The man had to have known even vaguely what the pavement would be like, and he should at least have suspected there might be other

vehicles on the highway when he took the entry ramp. But he got partially lucky because he wasn't killed in some spectacular crash.

But then that driver isn't the only one who drives in such a dangerous or thoughtless manner. Drivers weave in and out of traffic frequently, pass other vehicles on two-lane roads when there isn't sufficient room, switch lanes abruptly without signaling ad/or, apparently, not even looking to see if it's safe. It isn't just the average driver who does such idiotic things. Even so-called professional driver--truckers, they're called--drive too fast for the conditions. I've seen semis speed by in a near blinding rain definitely moving at a higher than maximum speed. I've also seen semis on their sides on the right hand berms of Interstate highways or in the "no-mans land" between northbound/southbound and eastbound/west bound lanes, in some instances with another semi or two which were somehow involved. Those guys know how large a rig they're driving, how much of a load they have, the need for a much longer stopping distance than the average auto, and, maybe, the kind of damage their rigs can do to the rig itself, other vehicles, and anything they may smash into if the driver loses control. You'd think so. But I've seen semis pass wrecked semis and never slow down the slightest unless forced to by traffic backups and state police.

Another somewhat similar incident I personally witnessed happened a long time ago, back when I was working the the Parks and Trees Department of the City of Adrian. In late Summer one year a major storm swept through Lenawee County and Adrian was among the victims. The storm resulted in a lot of downed tree limbs and trees almost citywide. The cleanup job fell mostly to P&T and lasted close to two months (though I suspect my memory is faulty in that regard and it only seemed that long). It probably would have taken longer but someone high up in the city found a contractor who owned a piece of machinery called a Gradall. It was similar to a backhoe but instead of a jointed "arm" with a bucket at the end it had a straight, telescoping boom and a three-fingered metal claw. The regular kind of Gradall just described was used primarily for digging wide trenches and cleaning out roadside ditches. The modified model the city hired was used for gathering up items such as railroad ties and piles of lumber or--brush.

For the relatively brief period we had the use of that machine it was a real time-saver. But to continue. This Gradall was attached to a turntable on the chassis of a large truck. The cab of the Gradall was as wide as the truck chassis but somewhat longer. When the machine was situated to pick up whatever material was to be removed the Gradall operated off the right, or curbside, of the truck. Thus when the machine was picking up the items or material the rear end of the cab extended three or four feet beyond the left side of the chassis and presented a potential traffic hazard. Because of this fact, we partially blocked off whatever street we were working on and had someone to direct traffic.

At the time of this incident I happened to be the one directing the traffic, which was light, fortunately. As I recall, a pickup truck had come up to where we were working at the time the Gradall operator was about to drop a load of brush onto a large high-sided stake bed truck. I signaled for the driver to stop, then turned to check on the Gradall which had just finished. I turned back to the pickup truck just as it began moving forward, without waiting for a signal that all was clear. Before I could say or do anything, the truck was passing me and quickly abreast of the Gradall as it started to rotate back to curbside to grab another bundle of brush. What followed took only a few seconds but they were terrifying ones. I stood there, stunned, expecting at the least the passenger side of the truck being caved in and at the worst . . . By some stroke of dumb luck on the idiot driver's part he made it past before any damage was done. But it was damned close. From then on, when I was directing traffic, *nobody* got past me until I gave the okay.

Another prime example of human stupidity at its finest.

Independence Day provides great opportunities for people to do stupid things, especially with fireworks. I confess I did something like that, once, when I was a kid but which fortunately for me was relatively minor. We were “playing” with those small firecrackers, the ones not much bigger than a kitchen match. I had lit one and had just brought my hand back to toss it away when--bang!--it went off in my hand just as it was almost past my ear. There was an instant of shocked surprise and a very numb and slightly tingling thumb and forefinger. Thanks to some sort of luck to which I probably wasn’t due there was no other damage to those two digits, no torn flesh or blood. But the feeling of stupidity was just as bad. Needless to say, I *never* did that again.

Other people haven’t been so lucky. Take this past Independence Day as an example. On the 4th--the evening news, I think, though it might have been the following day--there was a film clip of a fireman who was presumably demonstrating something about fireworks. He had on his usual yellow fireman’s gear and safety helmet and had what looked like one of those small rockets fastened to a stick which is inserted into the ground. He took it to the side of the road, holding it out at arm’s length, and lit it. The rocket did what it was supposed to do after being launched—it went off. But the fireman-caught some of the back blast in his face. He hurried over to the nearby fire engine, his hand near his face, likely seeking first aid. He was not, apparently, seriously injured. But he probably felt really stupid--as he should have. When I saw that clip, I couldn’t help wondering why he wasn’t wearing one of those plastic full-face safety shields which, one would think, would have been mandatory.

There was also a news story around the same time about some man in, I think, New York state who wasn’t quite so fortunate. He was allegedly firing rockets from some sort of metal tube affair and one appeared not to have gone off. He went up to check it out and, according to the news story, somehow the firework blew off his left arm. The damage, though it sounded serious, might--and I say this with no certainty--not have been because as he was being rushed to a hospital emergency room some friend of his followed after with his arm packed in ice for possible reattachment. I haven’t seen any follow-up on the story and so have no idea if any reattachment was attempted.

We can’t forget those “genius” bank robbers who write their holdup notes on the backs of deposit slips or some other piece of paper which contain their personal information.

For those who may not be aware of them, there are the Darwin Awards, given out (often posthumously) in honor of people who voluntarily remove themselves from the gene pool. Generally, that involves some stupid action on the award winner’s part which results in serious injury and, often as not, death. A couple of examples should suffice to show what I mean.

Dinant, Belgium, September 26, 2009. Two bank robbers tried to make a sizable withdrawal from an ATM with dynamite. They greatly overestimated the amount needed. The resulting blast demolished the building in which the bank was housed. Nobody else was in the building at the time of the attack. One robber was rushed to the hospital with severe head trauma but died shortly after arrival. Investigators assumed his accomplice had managed a getaway, but the second bungler’s body was excavated from the debris twelve hours later. The would-be robbers weren’t exactly impoverished--their getaway car was a BMW.

Quebec, Canada 13 August 2009. A 24-year-old woman was ironically successful in her attempt to catch a bus in Quebec City. The woman ran into a restricted area and tried to flag down the 45-foot bus that

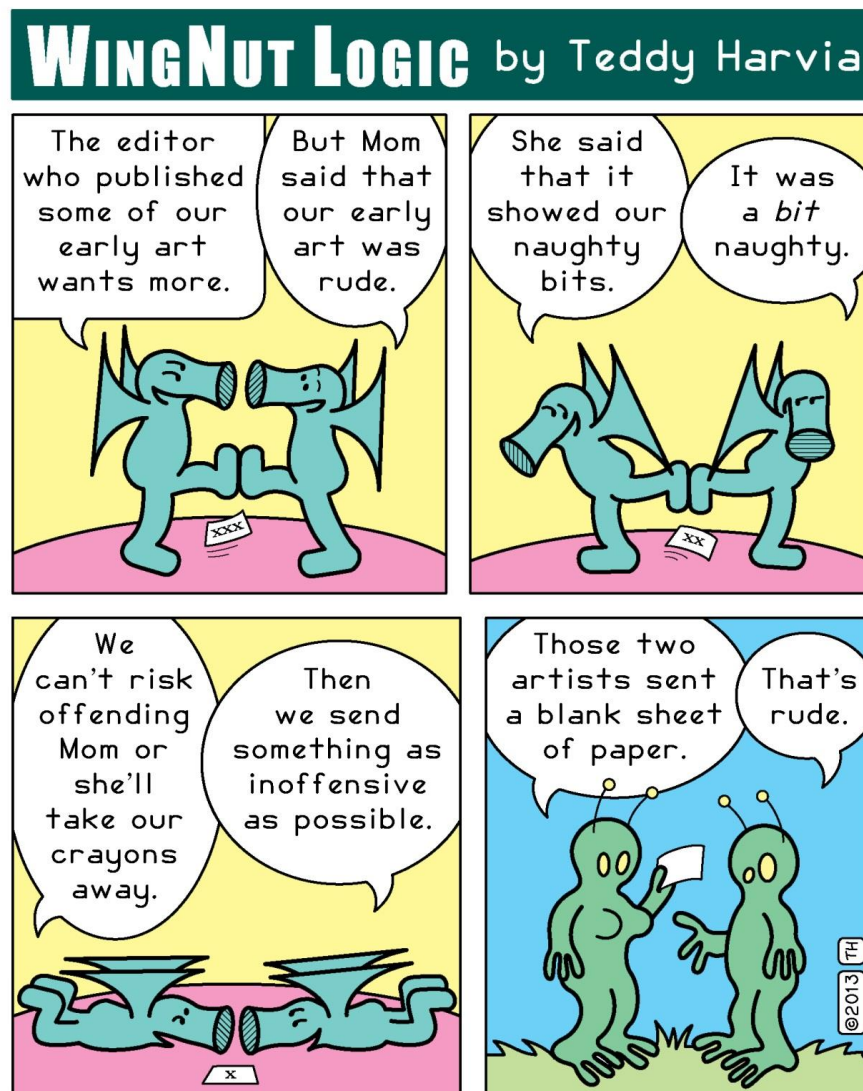


had left on time--without her. As she tried her best to get herself noticed, she failed to notice the bus was making a swift turn in her direction. The woman disappeared beneath the wheels of the turning bus. A former nurse, who rushed to the woman's aid, that she was no longer able to worry about getting there on time. Instead of riding home in a crowded bus, the deceased enjoyed the luxury of a one-way trip "home" in a private hearse.

And there you have it, a small sample of human stupidity.

Unfortunately, in the end, it seems impossible to stamp out or even control human stupidity. There are just too many of us around and it's probably also impossible to predict when any given individual will do something stupid. I guess I'll just have to live with it as will everyone else.

Tom Sadler



What to say when you answer an unnamed caller:
"It's done, but there's blood everywhere."



FANZINES

If you haven't been paying attention, by now you might have guessed the general theme of this issue of *Askance* is "fannish humor" (for non-American fans, that would be "fannish humour"), so this fanzine review column is a brief overview about this topic.

As I attempted to provide in the editorial section of this issue, there really is no cut and dried definition of "fannish humor" that can easily be referenced. *Fancylopedia 3* does not effectively help in this regard, so it is not surprising that fans often need to point a finger at something and exclaim, "Now, *that* is fannish humor!" Perhaps the best thing for me to do for a starting point is to invoke the name of one of the greatest purveyors of the craft of writing humorous fannish text, Bob Tucker.

Ages ago, on a panel about fanzine writing at some convention in the 1970s, Tucker mentioned that he spent as much time on his fanzine articles that he spent on his professional writing, perhaps more. "Writing fannishly," he noted, "is hard work. It is not easy to write funny material." Those words of wisdom still guide me since I first heard them over forty years ago. Heck, this is my third try at starting this column: the first two attempts were good ideas, sure, but the more I thought and wrote things down about this topic, I found myself writing more of a historical review of fannish humor than focusing on which writers I believe are among the best fan humor writers in the year 2020, and in which fanzines readers can find their work. Thus, those drafts were tossed into the pixelated trashcan, and so here I sit, once again looking for a transition that can direct me into the rest of this column.

And now I have found one.

In answer to the question, "What makes a good fan writer?", the only real answer that I can come up with is that this is a person who has the ability to make every day common occurrences enjoyable reading by writing about them in an engaging, entertaining manner. That is what I tried to keep in mind while writing the various chapters of my 2017 TAFF Report that were published in various fanzines over a two-year period – three years, actually. Reading previously published TAFF Reports was very helpful, too, and for anybody who wants to write fannishly (or even "faanishly," the definition and examples of which would make a fine topic for a future column here), I definitely recommend reading the works of people like Tucker, Jack Speer, Robert Bloch, Harry Warner, Jr., and the great Irish fan-writing trifecta of Walt Willis, Bob Shaw, and James White. There are obviously many other wonderful humorous fan writers of the not-so-distant past worth reading, too: Terry Carr, Ted White, Lee Hoffman, Bill Bowers, Richard E. Geis, Charles N. Brown, Mike Glicksohn... Oh, hell! I could fill out the rest of these pages with names. Just do your research and read old fanzines to get the idea of what works and doesn't work in

terms of humorous fannish writing. In my experience, the best part of it all is not trying to recreate what has been written before, but simply immersing yourself in these waters and luxuriating in the word-craft of all these fan writers. Do not try to write like them: find your own voice and work at it. Bob Tucker did, and so did Willis, Carr, and all the rest. The result is wonderful entertainment.

So who do I think, in my most humble opinion, are some of the better writers of fannish humor these days? Well, there are a lot of them. In no particular order, except as these names came to mind, here's my short list: Robert Lichtman, Andrew Hooper, Randy Byers, Ulrika O'Brien, Christine Lake, Grant Canfield, Sandra Bond, Pete Young, Claire Brialey, Mark Plummer, Steve Jeffery, Pat Charnock, John D. Berry, and Taral Wayne. All of these people demonstrate a skilled approach at finding that balance between tone, word choice, and insightful commentary, often using turns of phrases that can make a reader stop for a moment and think about what was just said. For example, a long time ago, Barney Neufeld wrote a convention report in which he was describing a pub crawl, and Barney wrote the line, "at that point, Mike Glicksohn turned into a pub." Now, in context, that may not be very funny, since this group of fans was in search of the next drink, but this phrase creates a fun image of Mike morphing into a proper Victorian era English drinking establishment. Stu Shiffman would have been the perfect artist to draw that illustration. My point here is that this is a good example of a fan writer who has found a perfect little phrase to paint the scene by using a fun image. This is something that a writer in any genre does to create a scene and make it entertaining enough so that the reader keeps reading.

Of course, the shared background between science fiction fans helps a great deal, and all the writers I listed above are very good at exploiting that shared knowledge base. One of the best examples of this can be seen in issues of Robert Lichtman's *Trap Door*, which appears far too infrequently, but when it does the contents are consistently excellent. It doesn't hurt that Robert's contributors are people like Greg Benford, Robert Silverberg, John Berry, and Grant Canfield, but when you've been active in fandom for 70 years, you meet people. And all these writers work at their craft, be it professionally or fannishly.

At any rate, my ultimate point is that it takes a lot of work to write funny fannish articles. Subject matters in *Trap Door* and other fanzines range from medical procedures to automobile/travel mishaps to riding on subways to attending conventions to hiking mountain trails to... Well, you get the picture. For your reading pleasure, current fanzines, I recommend are *Raucous Caucus*, *Beam*, *Banana Wings*, *The White Pages*, *QuasiQuote*, *Chunga*, and *Flag*, to name a mere few. If you go to the websites efanzines.com and fanac.org, search their archives for older fanzines like *Hyphen*, *Slant*, *Pong*, and *Warhoon*. The research material is so much fun and worth the effort. Enjoy the search. Even more: enjoy the history.



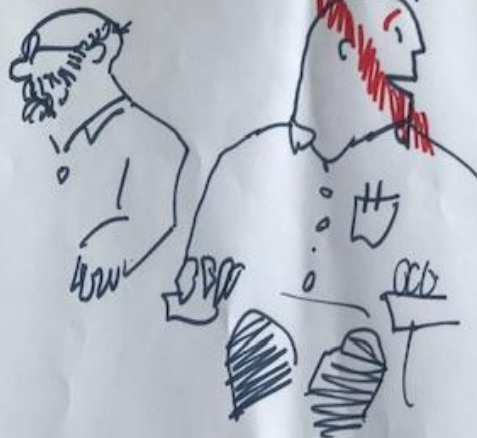
FIGBY By Bill Fischer

Belize to Lima Flight - In Search of
The "Lost Edifice of Apuhualcohuapta..."

AH, FIGBY! I LOVE THESE LOCAL FLIGHTS!
THERE IS SOMETHING QUAINT AND GENUINE
ABOUT THE OLDER PLANES AND THE NATIVE
FLIGHT STAFF! I CAN'T WAIT TO GET TO
LIMA!



SPEAKING OF FLIGHT STAFF WHY DON'T YOU GET
SOME OF THAT GREAT, SOUTH AMERICAN COFFEE?



LA 'OP QA'VIN CHAW' A NUQHEH?

VERY GOOD, FIGBY! YOUR COMMAND OF LOCAL
DIALECTS IS IMPRESSIVE. I'M GUESSING
EARLY, CLASSIC, LOWLAND QUECHUA, RIGHT?





FROM THE HINTERLANDS

Letters from readers – Well, there *were*!

I truthfully hate to say this, but when I went to check the “Fanzines: Askance” folder in my email files last weekend, my heart sank to the substrata beneath our house when I saw a completely empty folder. The “Fanzines: Askew” folder did have some emails in it from letter writers and correspondents since the beginning of August 2020, but nothing dated earlier. A quick check through other folders where emails would likely also be stored – such as the sent, important, and

trash files (in case I accidentally deleted the correspondence from these fanzine folders) – were likewise composed only of emails since August 1st.

With that corollary established, it became apparent that a major accidental info dump occurred at the end of July. Then I remembered doing a reset at that time on my new home PC because there was suspicious activity that I wanted to clear, and in the process of doing this, it appears I inadvertently deleted all of the emails from my G-mail and old Yahoo accounts. For the record, my ancient Yahoo! Email address still works, but I use that as a decoy away from my personal and business accounts. It appears that ploy has so far been effective, except for when I try to do a reset and clear out files by accident. At those times I am my own worst enemy.

Fortunately, nothing seriously important was deleted. I do not keep important personal and financial information on the computer: things of that nature are moved elsewhere for safe keeping. Still, I am kicking myself for trying to be too efficient in terms of security and wiping out perfectly good emails of comment from friends who took the time to write and send them to me.

I could just scream.

Now, there are people out there in this fanzine’s audience who are probably wizards at retrieving lost computer files and such. Please do not bother offering your services because I am fine: mistakes happen, and like I said, it was nothing of any serious importance. However, for those of you who did write letters of comment on *Askance* #48, if you still have those emails in your files, I leave it to your discretion to resend them. But you don’t have to go through all that trouble. I am fine. Really, I am.

It is good therapy to scream in private.

WHAT'S NEXT

It is pretty apparent what is coming up next issue: the grand 50th issue of *Askance*.

The simple fact that this is happening is a shining example of how much fanzine fandom means to me, and fandom itself. *Askance* is the longest running fanzine I have ever published in both length of time and number of issues. My first fanzine, *This House*,

barely lasted a total of 13 years (Summer 1976 to Spring 1989), but there was a seven year gap between its last two issues, #14 and #15. Reaching a milestone issue like this gets me once again reflecting on why the heck I enjoy producing fershlugginer fanzines.

There are a number of reasons. First off is the simple fact that I do enjoy writing, so this is one means of satisfying that urge. There is definitely an ego-rush - what fans refer to as egoboo (ego boost) – when an issue is finished and you see your name in print, plus the zine gets mentioned in other people's fanzines, and so on and so forth. No doubt in my mind, fanzines are a lot of fun to create.

However, even more fun is reading what other fans have written in their zines. Sometimes you get lucky and receive an unsolicited article or artwork from somebody else, and that's really cool. Back in the day I was pretty self-conscious about asking for contributions, but eventually I got over that and discovered that most science fiction fans who were into fanzines truly enjoyed sharing their work with others. Before long *This House* was getting longer, and the mailing list eventually topped 300 people around the globe.

Two years ago I was seriously contemplating the end of *Askance*. At that time I was a bit burned out, mostly as a result of a successful TAFF campaign, trip, and resulting report (which is now completely written, meaning now it's time to assemble the finished product). Producing a regularly appearing fanzine began to feel like a bothersome chore, and I toyed with the idea of ending the zine, but starting up a Steampunk-themed fanzine, which would be much shorter in length. That idea never got off the ground, but it's still in the back of my head. One day that Steampunk fanzine may emerge from its germination stage, but until then I have this fanzine demanding my attention.

So here I am now, staring at the 50th issue of *Askance* now a mere three and a half-months away from appearing. Slated for that issue is The Sound of Fanac, my fannish musical, a cover by Ulrika O'Brien, a artistic focus on the work of Alan White, and hopefully some other contributions. Feel free, dear readers, to, in the words of Rod Serling, submit something for approval. It should be a fun issue.

See everybody then!

