

ASKANCE

51



ASKANCE #51

Volume 13, Number 3

Whole Number 51

May 2021

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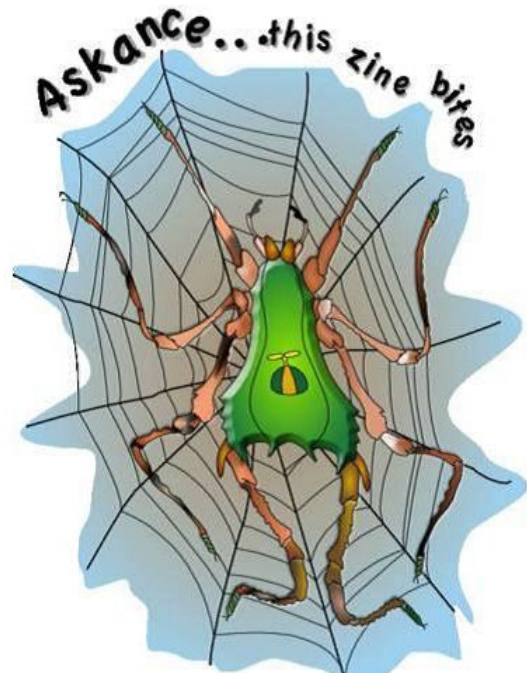
Front Cover: Alan White Back Cover: Steve Stiles

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There is nothing here to see. Move along, citizens.

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Bemused Natterings

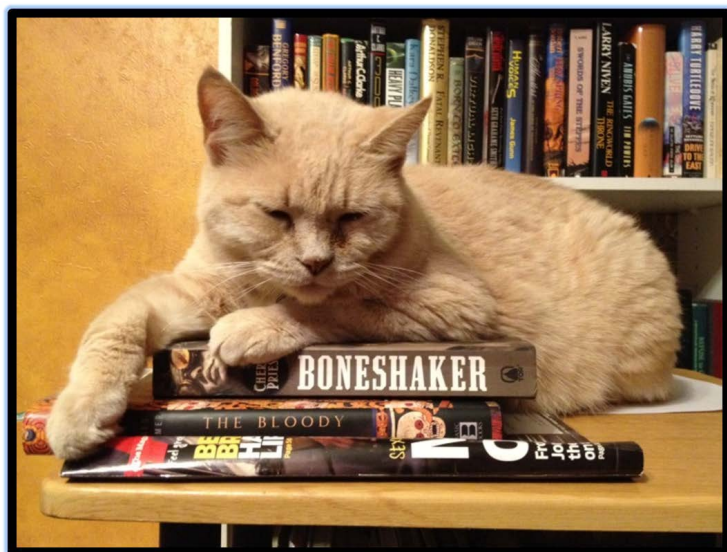
Spring Forward, Fall Over

Well, another semester has careened to its end, and once again I find myself woefully behind on fanzine and other fan writing production, but honestly, this is completely understandable. To be perfectly honest, this fanzine, which began as a bimonthly back in 2007 and has morphed into a whenever publishing schedule, should properly be labeled as a perpetual Real Soon Now publication. Quite frankly, that suits me just fine.

For the second year in a row I decided not to teach a summer class at Blinn College. Granted, the extra money would definitely come in handy since Valerie and I are currently planning out our week-long Vancouver Vacation next March to coincide with Corflu Pangloss (set for the weekend of March 18-20, 2022), but the cashola is not really necessary at the present time. Thankfully, we both have jobs that can be done online, so unlike too many unfortunate souls who lost their jobs over the past year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we have been okay. Plus, the recent CDC announcement regarding not wearing masks for fully vaccinated people allows us all to breathe a little bit easier now – see what I did there? – and thus face-to-face conventions and gatherings will be resuming this coming fall, possibly late summer. However, I am skeptical of this development due to how the novel coronavirus can mutate at an extraordinary rate. I shall still be wearing masks – stylishly made by Valerie – whenever I go shopping or partake in other outdoor activities where a large number of Texans are gathered. My reasoning is that there are too many mask-defying pandemic deniers in this state, so the way I look at it, it is best to play it safe. Therefore, I shall.

R.I.P., Toulouse (1999 - 2021)

This is turning into a bad habit. For those readers of this fanzine who are not on Facebook, shortly after the New Year began we said goodbye to the oldest pet in our household, Toulouse, who joined the Purcell Petting Zoo with two other kittens from the same litter in the summer of 1999, Marie and Berlioz (yes, these three cats were named after characters in the Disney movie *The Aristocats*). All three of them made the trip to Texas from Iowa, and sadly Berlioz



and Marie died over a decade ago and are buried side by side here in our private pet cemetery. Sweet Toulouse kept on going, though, and over the years he has been a source of joy, warmth, and numerous photo ops. Here he is, from the cover of *Askance* #34 (August 2015) incubating my copy of Cherie Priest's novel *Boneshaker*. As can be seen, he had the softest fur and totally loved being loved on. We miss him dearly and have his ashes in a carved oak box near a matching oak box holding the remains of Duckie, our beloved Labrador who left us just before this past Christmas. If Toulouse had made it to this summer – we believe he and his kin were born in early June of '99 – he would have been 22 years old. Pretty amazing. But then again, Toulouse was an amazing cat. We miss him very much.

Amazing Feats of Courage

When I first wrote down this heading last weekend I had something in mind, I really did; sadly, that topic has slipped from memory, never to be seen again. Oh, well. Fortunately, other events have transpired since then, which means I now have something to fill in this blank space to make the page count come out even.

On Saturday afternoon of May 22nd, 2021 –exactly two months after my birthday – I drove twenty-some miles down the road to Navasota to fulfill my birthday present by spending four hours (five, actually) in a recording studio. My goal was to record a decent demo of four songs I have written to create something I can use to send off to local venues as potential gigs. A quick check of the ring binders I have filled over the years tallied up to 335 songs written since the start of 1975. At first I thought selecting a mere four songs out of 46 years’ worth of material to record would be a chore, but it was not as difficult as expected. Two are from the late 90s, one I wrote at the tail end of last year, and the fourth is from 1990. I had a fifth song on stand-by if I had enough time left, and that was written in 1978. Without question, May 22nd was definitely a fun afternoon.

As a cross section over the decades, it is interesting to see my development as a songwriter and musician. Musing about this gives me an idea of something else to write about, but that belongs in *Askew*, my personalzine, which I am planning to rattle off as soon as *Askance #51* is completed.

Who is in this Issue

Not too many contributors, sadly, but the quality is still there. It appears I need to start brow-beating contributors with multiple flagellations from my editorial whip until they whimper their consent to either write or draw something for this fanzine. It is obvious to me that after fifty issues I simply can no longer be A Nice Guy when it comes to gathering material for my zine. Heck, one month I ago was placed in Facebook Gaol for 24 hours just because I said something about Tucker Carlson and what he could do with that face mask he refuses to wear. I apparently violated the delicate sensibilities of Facebook’s algorithms. In any event, I did my time and the next day I was released back into the social media world a tainted man, one sporting a pixelated prison tattoo on his cybernetic tush. And no, I am NOT going to show you! Some things are best left unseen.

Anyway. Here are this issue’s contributory stalwarts:

Bill Fischer

Once again my ~~ancient~~ old college chum does the two-fer submission deal, for which I am grateful, especially for the ongoing “Figby” cartoon strip. In this particular episode, our favorite lab researchers complete their Peruvian quest for the elusive and legendary lost edifice of Apuhualcahuapta, which Bill tells me stands for “droppings from the great guinea pig god in the clouds.” At least that is the approximate translation. Next issue we shall see where our two heroes (?) meander off to in their constant quest for knowledge, insight, and last week’s laundry. The short-written contribution “History, Revisited” comes from Bill’s Facebook feed with his blessing and a hearty “Oy, gevalt!” Thank you, kind sir.

Wolf von Witting

A few messages between Wolf and I resulted in him sending a couple of short film reviews, and I must admit that they sound very interesting. As of this moment I have yet to click on the links, but now that the semester is over, I have a lot of extra time available and will likely watch these Real Soon Now. Since this fanzine appears online, the links embedded in those reviews do work, so it will be interesting to get reader feedback on these short films. By all means, folks: watch them and write up your reactions.



by John Purcell

In our last episode – if any of you can remember back to whenever the last installment was pubbed – our wayfaring wayfarers, John and Valerie Purcell had just returned to England from eastern Europe, in particular Czechia, where we had just spent four days in beautiful Prague and Kutna Hora. The long trip from College Station, Texas to Europe was heading into its last legs, and there was just one more major port of call before boarding our return flight to the colonies: Liverpool, England.

At this point in our European travels, Valerie and I had become seasoned globetrotters, so it was no problem to get ourselves from the apartment we rented in Prague out to the airport, where we had plenty of time to make our flight to London's Gatwick Airport. From there it was a snap to gather our luggage and board a train to West Croydon station, debark, then hop on a bus to alight less than a block from Croydon Central. We spent one last overnight stay with the Fishlifters, were reunited with our Bag of Doom and repacked our luggage. The following day, Friday August 18th, they helped us trundle it all off to the East Croydon train station to catch our connecting train to Euston Street Station. After

many hugs and fond farewells, we embarked on our run over to Euston Street Station to board the train up to Liverpool's Lime Street Station.



Taking trains from city to city – let alone country to country, or onto the European continent proper – definitely is the way to travel in England, and Valerie and I became advocates of rail travel in America. While that would be a grand article for a future fanzine article, in England it simply makes sense because trains are so much more relaxing than driving. We sat back in our seats and enjoyed the countryside roll by as we headed northwestward toward Liverpool. The ride was smooth and relaxing, so we chatted and dozed a bit,

checking our cell phones once in a while whenever we had a strong signal. A few hours later we rolled into Lime Street Station and, encumbered with our luggage, walked the few blocks to our hotel.

For me, this was the dream of a lifetime. Since the age of nine I have been a Beatles fan, so to be walking in Liverpool, England, the birthplace of the Fab Four, was an indescribable feeling. Plus, the weather was splendid all weekend. The “hotel” we were staying at for our overnight stay was essentially a converted apartment building nestled between a bar and some businesses just off the corner of Renshaw Street and Hanover Street. The room was small but clean – nice bed, a bathroom (sorry! A loo), with some framed black and white photos of the lads on the walls. That’s all we needed for our day and a half in Liverpool (noon Friday to early afternoon on Saturday). Thinking back, we should have stayed until Sunday morning, but our scheduled flight back to Houston was departing on Sunday afternoon, and the plan was to stay over on Saturday night with the Skeltons in St. Ockport and they would drag our butts back to the Manchester airport for our flight. More about that adventure later. In any event, we settled our stuff into the room, left enough space to move about, and headed out to wander the streets of Liverpool, eventually finding our way down to dockside to spend time in the Beatles Story Museum.

In retrospect, the real place to go was the rebuilt Cavern Club over on Mathew Street, which was also within walking distance, but we had bought tickets to see the Beatles Story, so after sightseeing a bit, we hopped onto one of the double-decker buses and rode that down to the dock area where the museum was located.

Built into a refurbished warehouse, the Beatles Story Museum not only contains a souvenir shop and a small restaurant with grill, but the museum itself is comprised of hallways and large rooms filled with copious amounts of photographs, posters, clothes, instruments, and assorted decorations that chronicle the lifetimes of John, Paul, George, and Ringo, but it provides a chronology of the development of this band from its beginnings as Johnny and the Moondogs all the way through their post-Beatles solo careers. It is a fascinating look at the four lads from Liverpool, and also generates a sense of melancholy along the way. Naturally, we took copious amounts of photos – this report includes a few – along the way. The problem Valerie and I faced was that we did not get there until shortly after 5 PM and the Beatles Story closed at 6 PM. The management was incredibly kind to us by recognizing that there was no way we Americans could get the full experience of their museum and said we could return the next day to continue our tour through Beatles history with no additional charge! We were very grateful for their graciousness and said that we would be back when they opened at 10 AM on Saturday.



Well, this gave us a bit of time to wander the dock area and enjoy the breeze off the water. We watched ships and ferries during a lengthy walk, lounging a bit here and there, and generally relaxed dockside. Eventually we meandered back to a bus stop (cue the Hollies hit song here) where we hopped back on the Hanover Street route then disembarked to have an inexpensive but delicious dinner in a pub. Then we walked off dinner by strolling down Hanover Street, turning right onto Church Street, one of the many parts of Liverpool that boasted multiple bars, often side by side by side, nearly all of which had live music of some sort playing. Valerie and I ventured into a few of them to listen to the music and people-watch, which was the most fun of all. This energetic scene was enhanced by larger than usual crowds because the next day the Liverpool Football Club – that’s soccer, for my American readership – was hosting a big game with Manchester United Saturday afternoon. The influx of people from Manchester, which is not really that far away (a mere 35 miles), swelled the usual Friday night crowds, creating a festive atmosphere. We had a grand time that Friday night, eventually wandering back towards our hotel room, stopping at Archie’s along the way, a 50’s/60’s era malt

shop, for a milkshake. We sat in a booth on the second level, overlooking the street. Watching the crowds on the Hanover Street sidewalks was entertaining as drunks staggered along arm in arm, weaving up and down the sidewalks, loudly talking, yelling, and signing. One very drunk man literally crawled along on hands and knees directly below us, and not a

single person stopped to hoist him up or help him. Valerie and I looked at each other and said at the same time, “It’s a *real* pub crawl!” After quaffing our shakes, we walked arm in arm, dodging the revelers, and made it back to our Inn on Renshaw Street and slept soundly, with photographs of John Lennon and Paul McCartney watching over us.

On Saturday morning of August 19, 2017, we ventured back to the Beatles Story, arriving there shortly after ten o’clock so that we would have plenty of time to meander the halls and displays of Beatles memorabilia, taking tons of pictures along the way. This time we were there over two hours, which was no surprise. Faithful recreations of the famed Cavern Club, Strawberry Fields, a Penny Lane street sign, and the Yellow Submarine were spread throughout the labyrinthine halls in this restored warehouse, the walls decorated with photographs, old posters from the early days of the band, displays of some of the instruments used in their recordings and concerts, plus countless photographs of the lads from their school days up to when the band began to form and coalesce into the classic John, Paul, George, and Ringo lineup. All this was educational and illuminating, and I simply do not have enough room here to share even a mere 5% of the photographs I took. I was wearing the Abbey Road t-shirt that I had bought at the gift shop the day before.

As if all this wasn’t enough, it all became much better when, once we had finished the chronological museum, we came out in that subterranean malt shop grill and met Joe Flannery, who was the booking and road manager for the Beatles from late 1961 to the end of 1962. For a man of 86, Flannery was full of energy and stories. He sat behind a table with his promotional manager, Rose, because Joe’s book *Waiting in the Wings*, his autobiography of growing up in Liverpool, had recently been published. Flannery was also a childhood friend of Brian Epstein, the famed and fated manager of the Beatles who eventually would bring the band to the attention of George Martin at Parlophone Records in London. Flannery was in his own right a popular singer during the post-war years in Liverpool and the general Mersey River region. Naturally, I bought the book and read practically the first third of it on the flight home. This was totally cool, meeting someone who personally knew the Beatles (when Pete Best was their drummer) and drove them from gig to gig throughout northwestern and northern England. (*Sad side note: Joe Flannery passed away in early 2019 at the age of 88.*)



By the time we emerged into daylight, it was a few minutes past noon, and we were quite hungry. Ergo, a short walk along the quay ended at the Rhythm de Cuba rum bar, where we enjoyed a delicious lunch while listening to a local band playing to the lunch crowd. Since we had already packed our bags before heading off for the day, we easily made it back to our room by 2 PM (otherwise known as halftime of the Liverpool vs. Manchester United game) to check out and walk back over to the Lime Street Station to catch our train over to Manchester, where the Skeltons picked us up at the station. Everything was going to plan. So far.

The plan was to stay with the Skeltons for only that Saturday night since our flight back to Houston, Texas, was scheduled to depart Sunday afternoon. A delightful reunion happened a couple hours later when Mike and Pat Meara arrived in St. Ockport to likewise bid farewell to the traveling American fans. Their arrival awoke Valerie and I from a much-needed nap. The rest of the evening was full of conversation and drink – some nibbling on food also occurred, I am sure – until we all called it a night.

The following morning, once the entire household was up and about, getting coffee and all, I checked on our flight information on the United Airlines site to ensure it was due to depart on time, and saw the word **DELAYED** on the screen.

“Oh, shit!” was my understandable reaction. “How much delayed, and why?” Valerie asked, as I typed a message to the airline to that effect. Five minutes later came the response: “Four to six hours.” We mulled that over and figured it could have been worse since it appeared we would still be leaving later that day. Our English hosts took it in stride and shifted plans accordingly.

Less than an hour later an email dinged on my phone: **FLIGHT CANCELLED.**

Okay, this was completely unacceptable. I immediately called United Airlines to get this all sorted out and started the lengthy process of over two hours of phone calls, being on hold, locating a proper no additional cost flight and time back to Houston, arguing for seating arrangements and gluten free food for Valerie, and so on. We were mad, and I was getting flustered and got testy on the phone with the people I was talking to since many times whoever I was talking to Simply Did Not Understand why I was angry. In retrospect, relocating to England might have been an acceptable solution – Scotland would be even better – but we had jobs back home. Hell, classes were beginning Monday, August 28th, and the longer we were stuck in England, I was screwed on course preparation for my classes because – guess what? – all my textbooks and necessary information were in my office on campus in Bryan, Texas! Fortunately, my boss emailed back to say “you’re okay if you get back on Tuesday. Just keep me informed.” That helped. Well, eventually United Airlines booked us on a flight departing Manchester late afternoon on Monday; it would arrive at Bush International in Houston early morning (~7:45 AM local time) on Tuesday, August 22nd. This would work. There was no extra cost to us – there had better not been or I would have been supremely pissed – and so with all this worked out, I went downstairs for something to eat and get more coffee. As if I had not been drinking enough of that already throughout this ordeal.

While I was dealing with this fiasco, Valerie had been going up and down the stairs in the Skelton’s home to keep me supplied with coffee and questions to ask. I had commandeered the bed, covering most of it with paperwork, files, and notepads, and she used part of the bed to do yet more repacking of stuff. At one point while on the phone I heard a “thump! Thumpity-thump-OOF!!-thump” coming from the stairwell. Valerie had slipped on the steps and butt-bumped down a few steps, but other than a sore rump and wounded pride she was okay. Sheesh! We sure as hell didn’t need an injury on top of all this airline idiocy. Fortunately, it all worked out, meaning we would have to figure out what to do with ourselves for the rest of Sunday, August 20th.

Aside: During my Trial by Phone, I learned that our original return flight had a mechanical flaw on one wing that needed actual physical repair. Uh...yeah. That would not have been good. Back to the story.

Over yet more coffee while sitting at the dining table with the Skeltons and Mearas, we figured out what do for the day. Well, actually Cas did. She knew exactly where to go for a lovely walk that afternoon. Shortly after noon everybody poured out the front door to see the Mearas off to their home (hug, kiss-kiss, handshakes, more hugs, take photos, hug, go away), then Valerie and I squeezed ourselves into the backseat of the Skelton’s car and the four of us drove off.



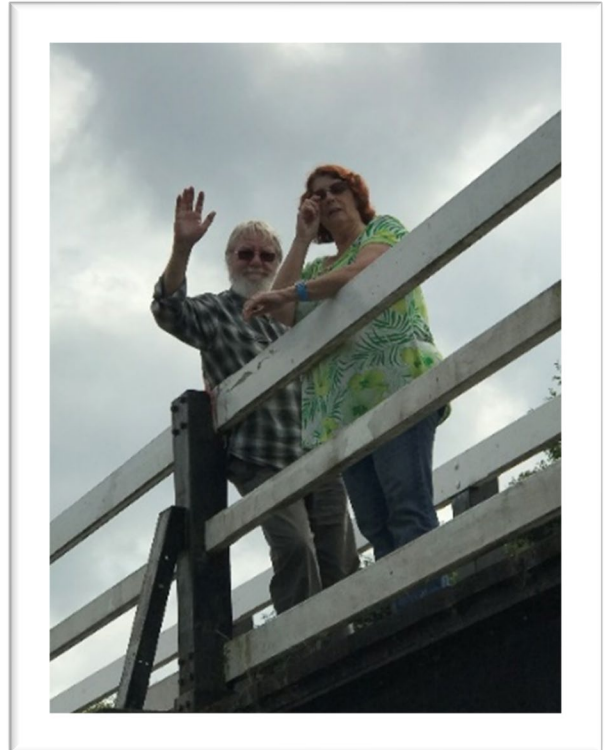
Our destination was the Bugsworth Canal Basin region. Despite the cloud cover, the drive was through really beautiful hilly, tree-covered countryside, accented with quaint English cottages and small villages, which Valerie and I oohed and aahed over at appropriate moments. When we got to our destination the clouds broke apart, bathing the entire scene with warm sunlight. The history buff side of me enjoyed reading all about this long-closed down transport hub (see the photo here) in the information building that used to be the business office, and there were boat-homes floating down the canals during the entire time of our visit. Beautiful scenery with lots of paths to walk. It was an entirely lovely time, and once again we took lots of photos. Well, it was my TAFF trip: what else was I to do?

Eventually we traipsed off, had an afternoon meal at the Old Hall Inn, returning to Stockport – oops! I apologize: St. Ockport – and spent Sunday evening chatting with Paul and Cas. Let me state here that I heartily recommend future

eastbound TAFF delegates to visit them. The Skeltons are a class act: they are gracious hosts who will keep you well fed and lubricated, making you feel right at home as if you were family. Matter of fact, fandom is one massive extended family, so I am not surprised. But Valerie and I totally loved being with them, and we encourage future traveling fans to contact them as a potential port of call during an eastbound trip.

Our last day in England was completely uneventful, thank Ghu. No last-minute complications with the airline, so with all of our bags loaded into the boot of their car, Paul drove us over to the Manchester airport – Cas again assuming her role as Sat Nag, harassing Siri's directions at every chance – arriving well in advance of our departure time, and bade us one final goodbye. At approximately 6:40 PM local time we left jolly old England, pledging to return some day. Or some year. We mean it.

The return flight was smooth sailing, no unnecessary layover in Newark, unlike the trip over to Manchester in mid-July, over a month before. Dang! Time literally flies by when you're having a good time – and when you're busy, too. We finally arrived in Houston at 8:55 AM CDT on Tuesday morning, August 22nd, where daughter Penny and her hubby Eric took us to their house where we were joyfully reunited with Duckie, our Labrador. The requisite transfer of luggage and large dog from their car to ours complete, we arrived home in College Station shortly after noon.



It had been a hell of a trip. At times traumatic, dramatic, and spastic, it had also been fun, joyful, amazing, and wonderful. We had been to places we have always dreamed of seeing and had great times with many old and new friends. Definitely a trip for the ages, one that filled us with memories we will enjoy for the rest of our lives.

Yet, we shall return. After all.... Glasgow in 2024!





History, Revisited

by Bill Fischer

There have been articles, recently, in my newsfeeds about the role of social media in attempting to moderate false information. This has been in part, a response to criticism that a lot of the wacko theories floating around out there are able to do so because companies like Facebook, Twitter, etc. don't do enough to monitor that (a "free speech" issue).

On the other hand, I notice that Zuckerberg, et.al. have attempted to mitigate some of the more -ahem- "creative" claims. I have actually seen a couple of things that have a disclaimer attached to them. It is, after all, a tension between free speech (the first amendment) and public well-being (yelling "fire" in a crowded theater).

I wonder just what will actually trigger a clampdown on a statement? And what will that clampdown look like? Is it what I've seen so far, a disclaimer, "this has not been verified by other sources..." etc., or a blanket "this post removed because the poster is an imbecile", etc.?

Let's look at the history of that. We all know that George Washington could never have defeated the Army of King Henry VIII if he hadn't had the strong backup of alliances with William "Braveheart" Wallace. Don't even get me started on the brilliant special ops missions that took out the English aviation capabilities. Such is history.

It is a complex kind of thing and we see it throughout our own national history. We didn't hang all those Communist SS Officers after WWII because we were happy about how they behaved at the Alamo. It was really, really bad stuff they did and that is why the Alamo stands out as one of the worst atrocities of the First World War.

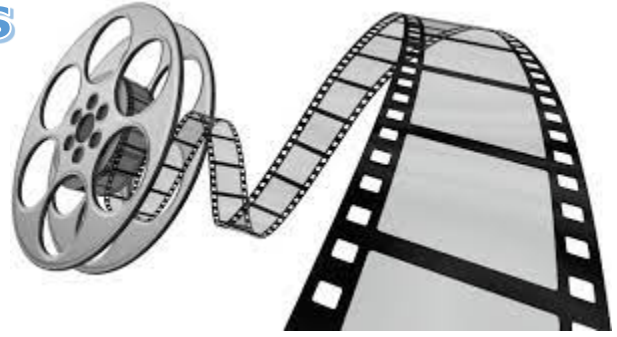
Even in modern times, we are the products of our own, recent history. When Benedict Arnold assassinated (allegedly) President Eisenhower, the country, as they say, "lost its innocence". It's the same way the country lost its innocence after Pearl Harbor, after WWI, and after Vietnam. As I've said before, in my lifetime alone, I've seen this country "lose its innocence" more times than a Baptist Preacher's daughter at a homecoming dance and hayride.

And speaking of Presidents, we probably wouldn't be in this pickle if it hadn't been for all of the socialistic policies of that raving Bolshevik, Calvin Coolidge. Look at the economic paradise he left when J. Edgar Hoover became president.

So, if you're going to post "facts" on social media, I'd advise you to check an encyclopedia first. Even Wikipedia.

Two Short Film Reviews

By Wolf von Witting



When you sift through hundreds of short films perhaps you will find, as I did, that most of them are not worth wasting time and breath on. My rating, influenced by the IMDb scale of 1 to 10, and I can't recall having given any short film a ten before. It's nothing short of amazing what these Croatian guys have accomplished in their garage in Zagreb. "The Slice of Life" directed by Luka Hrgovic and Dino Julius deserves top rating. It was released in 2019, after three years in the making. Meanwhile they shared all their work on YouTube in production diaries and other making-of-videos (such as creation of miniatures). Their intent was to create everything in 80's production style, which was void of CGI. Slice of Life is entirely shot with a few sets, miniatures, and green screen. A Making of-version that I recommend is; "SLICE OF LIFE - Filmmakers in Flying Cars Drinking Beer" which is 30 minutes long, but highly entertaining (5 minutes longer than the short film).

Slice of Life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uynOclCMKsM&t=8s>

Filmmakers in Flying Cars

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hl-lfdNgDzc&t=367s>

Another quite fantastic short film was made 2018 in the Netherlands by Ivan Hidayat and Jasper ten Hoor. *The Sandwich* is a horror comedy, which is more comedy than horror, but certainly qualifies as both. This 17 minutes short film is filled with barely any special effects at all, and rests entirely on the dynamics between the two lead characters and their dialogue. I'd rate this short film a solid nine for acting and script. So entertaining that I was not the least bothered by them doing it all in Dutch. Perhaps you wonder why I am so positive in all my reviews. It's very simple. To find these two gems of short film I had to watch more than a hundred mediocre and bad ones. You can just sit back, relax and enjoy these. I'd be very much surprised if you think I wasted an hour of your life.

The Sandwich

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8w3MA1WXC0>

Who said the Romans were uncivilized and boorish? From *More Latin for the Illiterati* (1999) by Jon R. Stone:

jus primate noctus = the right of the first night

(i.e., the right of the lord to "deflower" the new bride of one of his vassals)





FANZINE REVIEWS

a tribute to Dale Spiers and OPUNTIA

A few weeks ago I noticed on efanzines.com that the 500th issue of *Opuntia*, the long-running personalzine coming from Dale Spiers in Calgary, Alberta – that’s in Canada, for you geographically challenged readers – had been posted. Along with that issue was the notification that the *Opuntia* #1-#500 index was complete. To riff off something that Nic Farey has noted about me, whenever a fanzine reaches a significant issue number – such as a 50th, 100th, etc. – or has been published for x-number of years, I tend to notice things like that. Well, the way I look at these fanzine beasts, that kind of devotion to the cause is something to celebrate. Therefore, in that spirit here are my thoughts about *Opuntia* and why we science fiction fanzine fans are lucky to have been reading it for so many years.

OPUNTIA 500



As you can probably surmise from the cover image on the latest issue, Dale writes a lot about his hometown of Calgary and its environs. He also includes photographs. Lots and lots of photographs of events in and around Calgary, its architecture, the scenery surrounding the city, and so on. Topics Dale likes to cover include science, Sherlockiana, mysteries, science, current events, and assorted other personal interests. There is rarely a proper letter column, but occasionally Dale does run a letter of comment should Lloyd Penney write to him. The 500th issue does indeed have one of those.

Taking a look at this issue – and ignoring the 501st issue that was just posted this past week – Dale takes notice of this fannish historical marker, saying that the first issue appeared in March of

1991 and “has been plodding steadily forward ever since as a journal of record.” *Opuntia* started off as a paper fanzine, just like all other fanzines back in the day, and successfully transferred to electronic format thirteen years later when Canadian postage rates took a significant jump. Well, that makes sense; around the world fanzines have shifted to e-zine formats for that reason (a topic I have written about before), and in the process Dale’s fanzine has been a steady presence ever since.

The biggest chunk of the 500th issue (43 pages long) covers old-time radio programs, many I have heard of before, but some of these OTR programs reviewed here are new to me, like “Barrie Craig, Confidential Investigator,” “Casey, Crime Photographer,” “Rogue’s Gallery,” and “Let George Do It.” All of these share the criminal element and bringing these ne’er-do-wells to justice, and Dale’s plot summaries and comments are delightful and insightful.

Overall, this is one of those fanzines that is not flashy, does not sport a large roster of writers and artists; *Opuntia* is a personalzine with a distinct personality that is calm, pleasant, and reassuring. Dale is a mere wisp of a lad of 65, so I look forward to many more years of this fanzine. It is enjoyable and highly recommended. Available on efanzines.com.

From the Hinterlands



Once again, some brave souls wrote in regarding the contents of the 50th issue, which appeared just as the first year of the pandemic, 2020, came to an end. Yes, that was over five months ago, which really is not too many months gone by, so it should not be too much trouble to remember what was in that issue. For those of you with problems remembering that ish, it contained two plays: my pastiche “The Sound of Fanac,” Bill Fischer’s “Bleakly Celebrating My Bleakness” in its original Swedish and English translation; other contents were Joel Thingvall’s remembrance of Minnesota Comics Fandom icon David Mruz, a gallery of work by 2020 Rotsler Award fan artist winner Alan White, plus fanzine reviews, letters, and other blatherings from your editor.

Ray Palm

{Address print correspondence to him as follows:}

Boxholder

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24 March 2021

Spring has arrived and I still haven’t sent you a LOC on *Askance* #50 published back in December 2020.

Congrats on 50 issues. I agree with you that Bill Burns provides a great service to the ezine community. Like you the cost of putting out a paper edition became too much. Also I had a job involving a newsletter and I got really sick of addressing, stuffing, and affixing stamps to envelopes. I’ll take one button publishing anytime. The days of Factsheet 5 are long gone.

I used to have a dog as a kid, so I understand the attachment to your pets. But as an adult I could get a dog, but the veterinarian bills scare me. With my budget I don't have the money to give a pet proper care when and if it needed medical attention.

A story in both English and Swedish in an ezine. Never seen that before. Gee, is that a typo on page 25? *{Looks like the whole page is!}*

I wasn't familiar with David Murz but Joel Thingvall did a good job of bringing David to life and the times he lived in.

Enjoyed the Alan White portfolio. But that illustration on page 41: equality? Butt grabbing leads to lemon squeezing (reference to Led Zep who ripped off the basic song from Howlin' Wolf.)

I'm beat after finally solving the Case Of The Missing App & Passwords. I love it when Windows 10 just decides to delete an application. You gotta love technology.

Regards,

- Ray

PS: When you replied to my previous email you said the winter storm that hit Texas didn't knock out your power like the rest of the state. Were you in a safe part of the ERCOT system or are you off the grid? Rick Perry claimed Texans didn't mind suffering inhabitable conditions for more than three days to keep federal oversight – socialism -- at bay. The feds sent aid to the Texans that took the brunt, but isn't that federalism/socialism?



{The region where we live is off that grid. Our bill for February went up only 30-some dollars, which I expected due to using our furnace much more often than usual down here in SouthCentralEastern Texas. As for Rick Perry...well, he's an idiot. Don't even get me started on Ted Cruz and the Republican controlled state legislature.}

Rich Dengrove
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19 January 2021

A letter of comment for *Askance 50*. First, a general statement. A 56 page *Askance*? Isn't that impossible? Yes, in hard copy. Recently, you sent me a 56-page web *Askance* that was really great. Great shocks of color and mucho pages of print. All sent for free via email. *{Isn't modern technology grand?}*

Next, nothing to do with this ish, except you use a new style of zining, the internet; and refer to an old style of zining because the 'hero' of your play is named Gestetner. I was going to ask if you ever used a mimeo? I hear the process was very slow and really messy. You could tell fans by their black fingers. However, you don't look old enough for that. I would peg you as a photocopy baby, cutting your teeth via photocopiers. Tell us true: what tech did you start with? *{I actually did own and use a mimeograph for one of my earliest fanzines, Yenta Monad Memorial Journal, and after a few more aborted attempts on that machine, I sold it to Erik Biever, a St. Paul, Minnesota}*

fan, who knew how to operate a mimeo much better than I. Shortly afterwards I started up This House in summer 1976 as a xeroxed-zine when my brother became the chief printer at Apache Corporation in downtown Minneapolis.}

Next, I will comment on the two plays you published. In prefacing them, you mention a long and tedious production parodying Cordwainer Smith's "Sails of Moonlight." You say the parody was wretched. The problem here is, "Aren't nearly all fannish parodies wretched?" Rather than great wit, we are met by humor so forced the writer must have written it with a sledgehammer.

Finally, we get to the plays. We start with your "The Sound of Fanac." At least it contains no forced humor. On the other hand, I wonder about the names of the heroine and hero. Maria von Shtencil and Ron Gestetner? Shouldn't we name an up-to-date couple something like Don Layser and Jill Compewt? ...Maybe not.

So much for the word play. How about the plot? It has no relation to "The Sound of Music" (1965) except that the heroine is a nun. In fact, there is a world of difference between Ron Gestetner and Captain George von Trapp and between Maria von Shtencil and Maria. For one thing, von Trapp would never have made passes at either Maria. For another thing, the original Maria would never be proficient in the martial arts.

Maybe it's for the best that the main similarity is the titles. The real appeal of your play is not that it reminds one of the Sound of Music," but that it presents eruptions of real fannishness. *{Exactly my intent. I was just having fun with the song lyrics and devised a fannish "plot" to give the songs some kind of framework.}*

Next, we go to the "I Bleakly Celebrate My Bleakness." I bet it was hilarious whether in Swedish or in English. Unfortunately, I could only read it in English. Edvin experienced such a ridiculous existential quandary over nothing that it reminded me more of "Monte Python" than Heidegger. There are good reasons for not worrying about nonsense and getting on with your life.

Now we leave the plays. Instead, I will write about Joel Thingvall, who wrote one article for this *Askance*, the man who got me into amateur press fandom. He doesn't realize it, though and he doesn't know me from Adam. I read a column of his in Comic Buyer's Guide in 1984. It concerned APAs. I decided to join three of the APAs he mentioned. One has worked out very well, The Southern Fandom Press Association; and I'm still in it. Furthermore, I wish I had known David Mruz, whom the article was actually about.

To end my letter, I would like to comment on each of Lloyd's two letters. In responding to the first letter, I wish him good luck teaching himself copy editing. One thing he has to know is forget perfection. My friend, the agency copy editor, told me that eight people once proofed a draft; and there still remained a typo. In responding to the second letter, I picked out what he says about the Fannish sense of humor – that it is subjective. What I want to say is all of it is subjective, but some makes people laugh – or at least, smile.

- Rich

{I appreciate your writing, Rich. It is always good to hear from you, and I am glad you enjoyed the issue so much.}

Steve Jeffery
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30 December 2020

Hope you and Valerie are keeping well, and thanks for sending a copy of *Askance* 50.

Has efanzines really been going since 2003? *{That's when I discovered it.}* If so, I was really late in the game discovering this, since most of my locs in the last decade or so have still been to fanzines received either in the mail or via email and I've only used efanzines as a handy lookup or check on titles and dates or to download copies that I've either missed or misfiled.

There's something about receiving a fanzine directly (even if part of an email mailing list) that prods the conscience towards response of some kind, even if just a note of thanks and continued interest) that doesn't seem to click in if you just download it anonymously. After all, no one's keeping track and the editor will never know whether you downloaded it or even read it. Or perhaps, being old enough to remember those, I still get that little tickle in the back of the brain when fanzines used to include a little tick box telling you that if you don't response to the next issue or two than you will be deemed to have no interest and be dropped from the mailing list. Of course, with email distribution where it's as easy to mail an attachment to 100 people as it is 10 this no longer applies, but there are still a few fanzines I get in the mail, especially from overseas, where I look at the postage, wince with guilt (since I could always download a copy or read a pdf version if necessary) and feel an obligation to respond (sometimes at great and tedious length). But as I remarked to Nic in a reply to *This Here* (37), that's what editors are for. I may have said the same thing to Bruce Gillespie for *SF Commentary* 104, since both issues arrived in what seemed like a head over heels tumble of fanzine titles in the week before Xmas. Also, I'm a bit of a serial offender when it comes to making the same comments in locs to separate editors while the topic is still fresh in my head (although not to the point of actual cut and paste between different locs. That's probably a little beyond the pale).

But on to *Askance 50*. Another spectacular front and back cover by Ditmar, who really deserves a much higher placing in the fan art awards than he often gets. I suspect there's an argument there for having a separate category for digital illustration, but nowadays it I suspect would be hard to separate media and the use of digital tools, even in cartoon and line art, as clearly as in the days when a misplaced line would involve a lot of swearing and hunting for a bottle of Tippex.

So sorry to hear about Duckie. My condolences. And for the loss of your friend David Mruz.

My eyes snagged on the name Essjay a couple of lines under *Dramatis Personae Ridiculous* and I thought "that can't be me", especially since I was never at Minicon and didn't even discover fandom til the late 1980s but was using a shortened version of my own initials (as 'essjay' for artwork though most of the 90s). I didn't realize there were two of us although I think I began to suspect there might be another fan known by that nickname some time later on. I clicked on the name link to Fancyclopedia [which I've just realised can be read 'fancy clopedia'] by there's no entry for the name, so I'm none the wiser. *{The Essjay person from Minneapolis Fandom of the 1970s that I knew was Sally J. Voelker. I have no idea if she is still active in the group. Many thanks to Reed Waller for answering my query regarding the true identity of Essjay. Gee, that sounds like a superhero comic storyline.}*

I was going to remark that while I was grateful to receive this issue, I'm not a great fan of either fannish or musical spoofs (despite having committed at least a couple of my own back in the day) and consequently large checks of this issue might pass me by under spin of the scrollbar (another reason I still prefer reading on paper than screens. Ebooks and PDFs invite a bad tendency to quick attention deficit scrolling and swiping rather than settling down to read. And - despite a photo in *Inca* of Tommy Ferguson checking his iPad in the pool at Corflu Heatwave - paper fanzines and books are safer to read in the bath where the only danger is a somewhat wrinkled issue rather than a potentially expensive technology fail.

That said and admitting I'm not really the audience for this sort of thing (Andy Hooper's play at Corflu FIAWAOL rather passed over my head), plus a general tendency to avoid *The Sound the Music* since I first saw it on the big screen when I was about 10, I thought it was rather well done and, as the curate said of his egg, enjoyed it in parts. Though I'm beginning



to suspect I may shortly be seen as guilty as Floyd Pfennig at sending locs before the next issue has time to settle, or even arrive. This is more a consequence of yet another tightening of the Covid lockdown in UK and a two-week break from work over the holiday period where I have to use the remainder of my holiday allowance before the end of the year. I suspect it won't happen again until the same time next year, although I sincerely hope the Covid part of that equation doesn't persist until then.)

I wonder if I can use a side-by-side collation of Bill Fisher's "Jag Firar Min Dysterhet Dyster"/ "I Celebrate my Bleakness" to help with the subtitles of the several Scandi-noir series that Vikki and I have become addicted to since first watching several seasons of *The Killing* and *The Bridge*. Then again, I have somewhere a side-by-side translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and another of short stories in both English and German, and neither of those have done much to improve my facility with other languages, although we both now have a habit of saying 'ja' and 'tack' to each other instead of yes and thank you. (This all started after watching *Fargo*, when we could crack each other up by dropping a neatly timed 'oh ja' into random conversations.)

Had to chuckle at Ray Palm's anecdote. The Campbell Award (as was) was, of course, named after the soup.

And in deference to Lloyd's loc:

----- fold along dotted line -----

(I would attach a stamp, but my company, in their wisdom, have disabled my ability to insert or attach images to emails. Though I can still download attachments, fanzines and documents. Go figure.)

- Steve

*(I have a copy of **Hamlet** in Klingon – published by the Klingon Institute in 1996 – that I sometimes use in my Literature classes after discussing the famous “To be or not to be” soliloquy of Act III, scene 1. The students get a kick out of hearing it in its original Klingon on the YouTube link. This translation does indeed have the side-by-side layout with the Klingon text on the left page and the matching English text on the right page.)*

Joel Thingvall

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31 December 2020

Amazed at how many came together in those David Mruz days forming the first show and Comic City, and we are still alive and active in the hobby, although none of us kept anything of value but got countless hours of enjoyment from our love of comics.

And hard to remember that Minneapolis/St. Paul was a bus culture. You didn't drive to the UofM. The things didn't stop every block (although nice drivers would for those in need). An hour on the bus with a transfer or two was actually more relaxing than sitting in freeway traffic. Although standing on cold winter corners after just missing a bus wasn't fun...but hey, you could walk a few blocks and maybe catch another that would take you someplace close.

David and I always promised to get together and tape our combined memories, so we could offer corrections and additions



and other reflections (I plumb forgot about his Minnesotatoons in 1988 at Calhoun Square). But I tried to create an image of the guy as best I could, as our families did mingle over the decades for things beyond cartooning.

I actually missed a couple of the early cons (I was at one at the Curtis) because I was either out in Reading, PA working for Steranko in 1974 in the spring and summer, or off doing summer theater 1975-1978 which bit into late Spring or early fall at times. But as always there in spirit, and got Comic City to hire Chris Budel, who was just a snot-nosed high schooler, to take my place in the summer. Comic City, a regular payroll nut for five years plus the ability to do other things (see film screenings or do evening theatre). Bob, Humphries, Julian never seemed to love working the store, or opening the mornings.

- Joel

{You did a fantastic job in your tribute article, Joel. It brought back a lot of memories not just to me, but to other readers. I thank you for letting me run it last issue.}

Timothy Lane

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1 January 2021

I'd like to know what the front cover actually comes from. It looks like a photo, after all, though really good art can do that.

As it happens, MidAmeriCon was my second convention and first WorldCon. I don't remember the fan musical (you) saw, but I did see one in person (and at least partly on the closed circuit TV later) that was a Conan parody. It included the idea that a brainwashing tool didn't work on him because he didn't have a brain (a concept perhaps originated in *The Three Stooges Go Around the World in a Daze*. *{That was the Gonad the Barbarian thing, and was probably running simultaneously against other stuf I was attending. Multi-track programming does that.}*

I can understand the feelings the death of a long-time pet can generate. I think it was a year after I lost my pet cat Gregory that I came across the actual pet cemetery scene in King's *Pet Sematary*, with its epitaphs for the pets buried there. It was a very painful scene.

I've just gotten to your *Sound of Music* parody. I've never actually seen the movie (except for the beginning portion while I was selling plasma many years ago), but I believe it includes "Edelweiss", which isn't listed.

Having finished it (and it sure brings back a lot of old memories of what it was like for me at my first few conventions), I see that it does include "Edelweiss" even though it wasn't listed. At times this reminded me of the short *My Fair Lady* parody I once saw at the InConJunction masquerade, that included Eliza's arrival at Higgins's home as well as a fannish version of "Wouldn't It Be Lovely?" ("Someone's head resting on my knee. Who he is, baby, don't ask me.")

That's some interesting art by Alan White. We had some earlier fan art from him, but nothing like most of that.

Conadian in Winnipeg was my first Canadian worldcon, too. In fact, in my case it's the only Canadian convention I've ever attended, and in fact my only visit to Canada for any reason.

- Timothy

{I remember that when Montreal hosted the Worldcon I really wanted to go, but funding such a trip was beyond my means. () Yes, indeed, the songs of **The Sound of Music** lend themselves well to parody. I am still surprised that no-one had tried writing a fannish parody of it before I did. Go figure.}*

Lloyd Penney
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7 January 2021

Thank you so much for issue 50 of *Askance*, and congrats on 50 issues. That isn't often done. And thanks for sending me a copy. I have had about a week's vacation from fanzines after cleaning out my IN box in time for New Year's, it's had time to fill up a little bit, and I'd better get with it again.

With congratulations comes some condolences, and our condolences to all at the Purcell household over the loss of Duckie, and now, of Toulouse. Not fair to either of you to have pets you love suddenly leave you. Once you have processed these losses, I hope you will get another puppy and kitten to keep you happy and busy, and to let them grow up together so they have a little animal family, too.

(Other condolences...we watched history happening on CNN yesterday. The Congress and House have not been so invaded in over 200 years, but we all saw it happen. One commentator on another channel called an invasion of the stupid. I'd agree... only such idiots would follow Trump's orders so blindly and do what they did, thinking they were uber-patriots. We have been keeping track of the fallout from this invasion, and it seems to be nearly unanimous, the 25th amendment will get some exercise. Trump loses his social media, his position, his privilege, and soon, I hope his freedom. He's done some terrible things, and I hope he will be prosecuted to the fullest extent. Make his name a footnote of history, and a synonym for treasonous behavior.) *{Over in Askew, my perzine, I prefer to write about politics and such idiocy. More on these in the next Askew, come to think of it.}*



On to happier things. Again, congrats on fifty issues. Indeed, doing the electronic thing makes it less time-consuming, and much less expensive. It's even made it less expensive for me to respond to fanzines; I used to have to make sure I had enough envelopes at home, and I would buy them by the case of 500. I also needed to have the right postage for domestic, US and overseas letters, and even back then, it wasn't cheap. Then, I had to hope that the mail would get my loc to the fanned in time, and I know some of my locs were lost by the PO, probably down the side of a filing cabinet.

Good to see me listed under the contributors again. I hope you did get the further 8 or so Tales of the Convention, and that should make a total of 19. And, I do have a little something I can put together to make a full 20 Tales. And Floyd Pfennig??? Well, John, Google up that name, and you will see it's not the first time I've been called that. In fact, I think I was that name in one of the parody Mad 3 Party bidzines for Boston in '89/Noreascon 3. Yet...ah, egoboo in my own time. Take it, and run! (And blush like crazy in the meantime...this better not be performed at the next Corflu...and I won't be singing it...because I can't sing!) Thank you.

A pre-coffee stupor...hmm, someone's been to my place around 8 AM most mornings. Yvonne will agree, when it comes to coffee, we buy in bulk. Our coffee doesn't mock us, it's an accomplice...

I have seen Alan White flogging his fillos on Facebook, and I wondered, if there not a market for this madman with the fancy software? He did get the Rotsler Award this past year, and I hope there's a silver rocket with his name on it sometime in the future. Publish more White! *{Not a problem. See this issue's front cover.}*

...Paperzines are great, and they are becoming rare, but I am happy to see zines arrive, no matter the medium. The fewer paperzines I get, the fewer times I'll have to set up another Banker's Box. And yet, I have my copy of *OutWorlds 71/Afterworlds*, which now sits in a place of honour beside my copy of *Warhoon 28*. (I will loc OW71, but I will open up the .pdfs for it. I want to keep that paper copy of OW71 pristine.)

The loccol, and my loc on 48...The voicework has dried up, but the editorial work has carried on. I have now edited/copyedited/proofread six issues of *Amazing Stories*, and ten books, six of which are now in print, mostly print-on-demand from Amazon. The resume looks very good, but still, there are few nibbles. The events that were cancelled are staying that way, and those that have been postponed to a later day will probably be postponed again. Folding an e-mail? Down the dotted e-line, of course...

My loc on 49... I did find a place to see the newer Twilight Zone reboot episodes, but they are on very late at night past my bedtime. Once we've gotten a few taped, I think we sit down and enjoy them. No nibbles on the Rotslers, other than you, at least not yet. One Rotsler I have never printed, but is pinned to my corkboard, is a typical Rotsler character sitting in a cloud, saying, "I work in ways so mysterious, even I don't know what I'm doing." I want that on a t-shirt.

The public..."2020 was a dumpster fire of a year!" How does 2021 respond? "Hold my beer." I hope 2021 is a better year, and perhaps the historic events of yesterday are a sign that after that invasion, things will greatly improve, Orange Monster will be impeached/25th-amendment/shoved out the airlock, and some measure of sanity may return to the world. Or, as sane as it ever gets.

As a green dragon attacks a Federation shuttlecraft at the end, ta da, it's the end of the loc, and at over a page and a half, I can't complain, and neither should you. Thank you for a good zine, and a smile that should last a good long time. See you with number 51, and start working on the next 50 issues. (My next project? I plan to start a loc on *Outworlds 71/Afterworlds*, and keep plugging at it until it is done, and then find out who it's going to. Maybe see you there, too.

Yours,

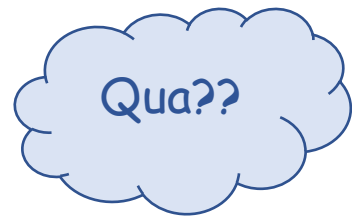
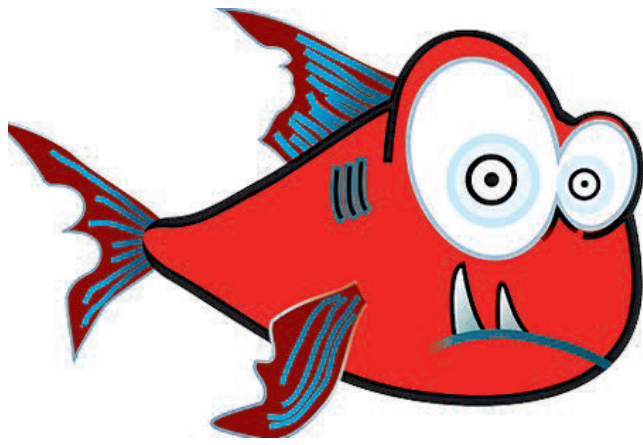
Floyd Pfennig.

Or Lloyd Penney, if you prefer.

{Once again, I thank you so much for the loc and the batch of "Tales from the Convention." According to my records, all have now been published in some fanzine or other over the years. Once we fans can start attending conventions in person again, I hope you can share more of your Steampunk event experiences here. They are always welcome.}

The essential I ALSO HEARD FROM listing:

Claire Brialey (responding to a question I had for her and Mark Plummer regarding the status of *Banana Wings*), Bill Fischer, Bruce Gillespie, Rob Jackson, Jerry Kaufman, Ulrika O'Brien, Jose Sanchez.



What's Next

Hard to believe, but since last issue came out the United States' Center for Disease Control has issued a bundle of statements in the past couple months that are carefully phrased rollbacks of mask mandates, established rules of social distancing, and other rules regarding large gatherings of people. This is largely due to the rates of vaccination and increased survival rates of Covid-19 infected individuals in the country despite a significant number of American citizens – mostly supporters of a recent former president, who shall remain nameless, but we know who I am referring to – refusing to be jabbed with any of the three vaccinations available to all citizens over the age of 16. The latest debate before researchers now is approving said vaccinations for children. Science marches on, but sadly, it often encounters massive walls of ignorance.

No matter what, this is incredible news and bodes well for the re-emergence of in-person science fiction conventions. In fact, Austin's annual literary convention, ArmadilloCon, has announced that this year's edition (#43) will be held in mid-October of 2021, and Valerie and I have even set that date aside on the chance we can attend. Here is the hyperlink to that convention: <https://armadillocon.org/d43/> As a result of these developments, expect to see the resumption of the Regional Convention Calendar that has long been a feature of *Askance*.

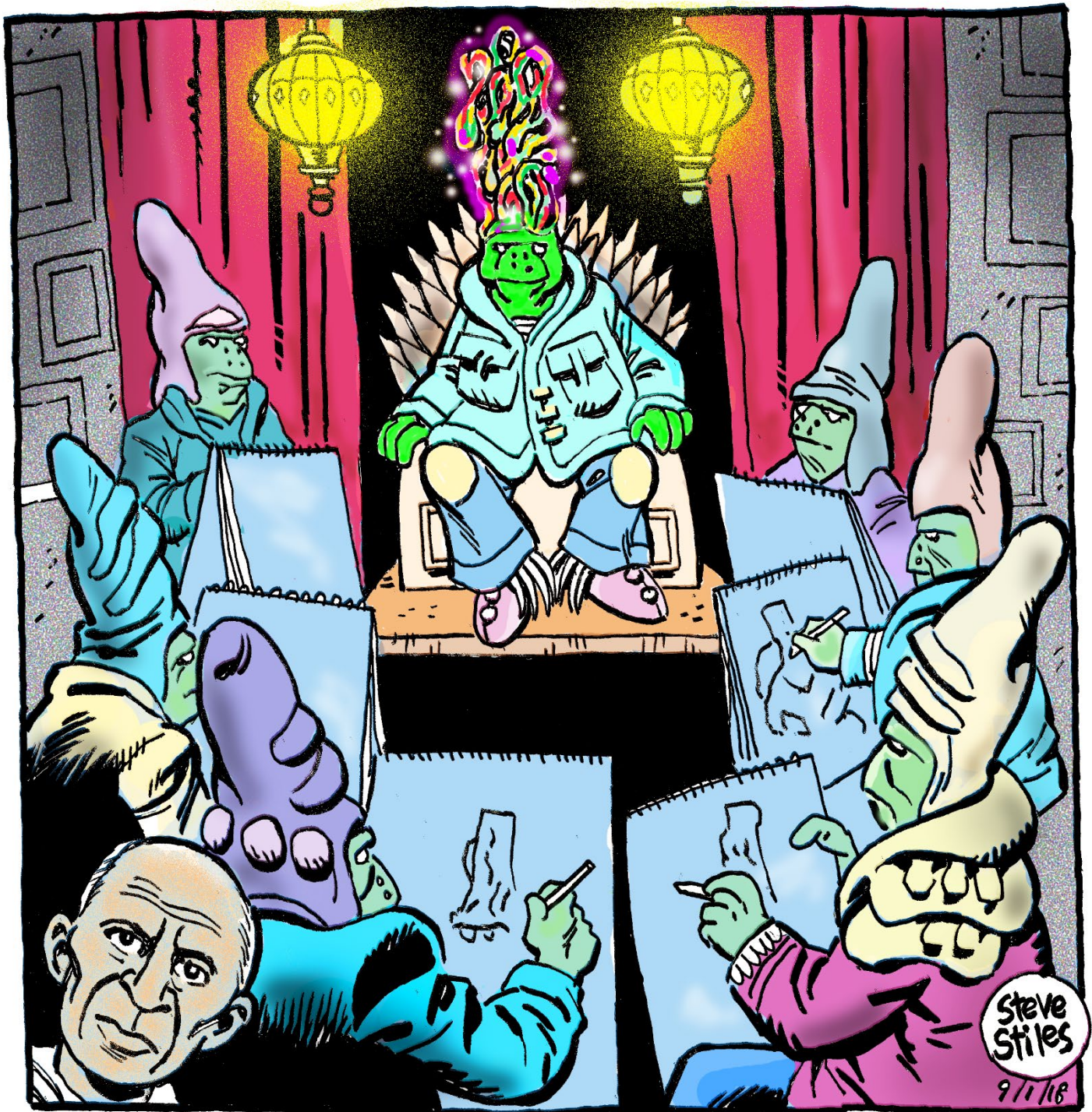
Since this fanzine has basically reverted to an “eh, whenever” publication schedule, I guess the 52nd issue will be appearing sometime in the coming fall. This means I need to apply my set of editorial thumbscrews – found them online and shipped via Amazon drone – to the artistic fingers of Sarah Felix who promised to do the cover art for that issue. Content-wise, it is open for any types of submissions you fine, literary-minded readers desire to submit. Some topics I would enjoy seeing are virtual con reports, book reviews, tentative forays into the post-pandemic fannish landscape, or something else that strikes your fancy. As long as it is interesting, informative, or even entertaining, I am interested.

This particular issue is being completed on the morning of Memorial Day Holiday here in the former colonies, so it seems quite fitting to put Jose Sanchez's artwork here of a saluting soldier on this page. In honor of my father, who served in the US Navy during World War II, and all others who have fought in prior wars defending America, I thank you all for your service, sacrifice, and devotion to a democracy worth defending and preserving.

Until next issue, take care, everyone.

John Purcell





Life Drawing Class