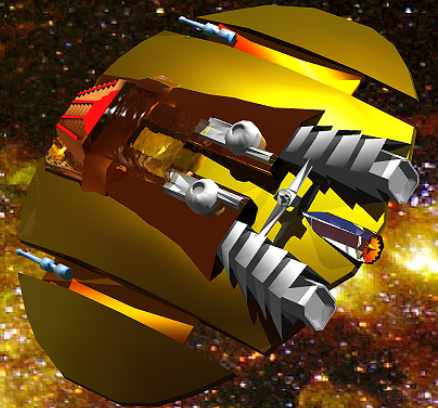


Askance 48

May 2020



Askance

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This is the genzine that Jack built. Build it, Jack! Build, build, build! You must type more words, Jack! Type, type, type! Oh-oh, you misspelled a word three lines ago, Jack. Swear, swear, swear!

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Editorial consultant for this issue: Toulouse. (see page 3)

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Still Alive!

Besides the Purcells, our cat Toulouse is very much alive and well, considering this crusty, old, Iowa farm cat is now pushing twenty-one years old. Here he is, watching over my shoulder as I begin composing this editorial section of the newest issue of *Askance*, the genzine that at times feels like it's ready for the grave, but then I get a burst of energy and start in on yet another issue, just like how this old friend of mine jumps up into the chair and perches on the arm to make sure that I am doing my best at making him look good. Or maybe it's the other way around? No matter. I'm glad one of us knows what he's doing!



Another one bites the dust

Spring semester, 2020 is now officially over – three days ago, as I start in on this sub-section – and I am sort of pleased that I am not teaching this summer. Usually I teach a freshman composition class in the first summer session (June), but this year, thanks to the coronavirus, that is not the case thanks to low enrollment. I will definitely miss the extra summer pay added onto my usual salary, but it's not a terrible financial blow. Valerie will be doing online tutoring from home for the Blinn College Writing Center, so that will add to our coffers. Plus with no conventions to attend on the horizon, so there are more savings. Speaking of the future, this all means I will have more time to prepare for fall semester's classes, which will be either face-to-face classes as usual or shall continue as online classes, much like this spring's classes all converted to in mid-March. The good news here is that this means I have the second half of fall semester already set up in online format, and if I need to convert the first half I know what to do. Piece of cake. Well, not really. The process can be a bugaboo and annoying, but it's only a one or two-course set up, and then I can import from my primary class format – the Sandbox Class, as it is called – into all the Freshman Composition sections in a matter of minutes. *That* is the real piece of cake part, and I do like cake, especially with a lot of frosting. If not that, I do loves me a yummy cheesecake with lots of berries and syrup all over it.

Egad, I'm writing like Chris Garcia again! My apologies.



Speaking of Writing...

With the extra time on my hands this summer – provided I can avoid the dreaded “Honey-Do” job jar as much as possible – I hope to do some serious writing, as in fiction, research articles, and songwriting. Now, many of the people reading this fanzine have

these same intentions from time to time, and many of you have actually succeeded in actually doing serious story writing and thus able to get your efforts professionally published. Bully for you! This has long been on my Bucket List – hidden on top of the cupboard behind a thick blanket of cobwebs and a mountain of dust – and it would be really keen to accomplish this Real Soon Now.

One of the stories on tap is a rewrite of “Sun Thunder” (published in *Askance* #46 last year). As much as I like that story already, there are spots that need a bit of work, such as the ending. My plan is to return to my original plans for the ending, which will require revisions here and there in the main storyline, but so be it. It is worth improving, and Andrew Hooper’s letter of comment in the 47th issue offered solid feedback with thoughtful ideas. These could help, so why not give them a try?

Then I hope to finish off three other short stories started over the past couple of years, and get onto a batch of songs I really would love to complete. The chord progressions are solid, but I need to develop lyrics to match the melodic lines running through my head. I really have to make those stop because they’re giving me a massive headache.

So that’s the plan for the summer. Wish me luck, and I wish the rest of you loads of luck while we are all still tucked away in our hidey holes, trying our best to not be infected with the coronavirus.

I got them old convention blues again there, mamma.

The contents page of this issue does not list the typical *Askance* feature of a regional convention calendar. The reason for that should not need explanation. This massive, COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the world beyond belief, and, in my estimation, it has progressed past of the point of blame. Sure, some of the Powers That Be (the stupid ones, and I am positive those are blatantly obvious to most reasonably intelligent people) are attempting to do just that, and all they are doing is making matters worse. Instead of focusing on cures or some kind of prevention, or finding solutions that just might work to possibly slow down the spread of this virus, these officious malignants feel like the best thing to do is pour more gasoline on a raging fire. Heck with ‘em! I’m gonna focus on taking care of my family and friends.

Oh, sometimes I do digress from what I wanted to say at the start of these editorial segments. The thing is, until further notice most of my fan activity is going to be done in isolation. It is going to be difficult at times, yet I am lucky to be hunkered down with the love of my life, my soulmate, Valerie. This coming August we were planning to attend ArmadilloCon 42 – don’t panic! – in Austin, which my long-time friend Matthew B. Tepper and his wife Debra Levin were likewise planning to attend, and, with many other fan friends, we were all going to enjoy that convention. Scheduled for the weekend of August 7 – 9, 2020, a quick check of that convention’s website shows no updates since early March of this year, so my guess is that ArmadilloCon 42 will be postponed a year. At least. Conventions are dropping like flies: Minicon 55 in Minneapolis (for which I have a membership and had reserved a room) was cancelled, as were EasterCon in England, AggieCon (the local student-run convention), NASFiC in Columbus, tons more, and this year’s World SF Convention in Wellington, New Zealand, has decided to go completely

online by trying to create a Virtual-Con. I have my doubts about that working, but if anybody on this planet knows how to make something like that become reality, it's science fiction fans.

While on the topic of conventions amidst this background, it appears that Corflu 37, which I had the distinct honor of chairing this year, may very well have been the last – if not one of the last – fan-run sf conventions of 2020. Considering how the pandemic has been progressing, there may be no conventions or large fannish gatherings of any kind until possibly mid-2021. That croggles the mind, but if it is to be, then so be it. I would much rather know that all of my friends are safe and sound. As much as I miss in-person fannish contact, everybody's lives mean more. Stay put, my friends; take care of yourselves, and be healthy.

This issue includes my perspective as chair of Corflu Heatwave, which is something that I have never attempted before in my life: chairing a science fiction convention. Sure, I've worked on many conventions over my nearly five decade long skiffy career, but never have I attempted to actually be in charge of such a beastie. Therefore, this convention report will be interesting to write.

Javajavajavajavajava....

Ever since Valerie and I were introduced to the wonders of cold-brewed coffee by the Fishlifters during my TAFF trip three years ago, we desired to start doing this ourselves. Last summer we finally got around to acquiring the necessary equipment to fulfill this quest, which was quite easy. A quick check on the Internet revealed that Target™ had a very affordable quality set up for cold-brewed coffee, and ever since we have enjoyed our morning cuppas this way. A nice side effect of this is discovering which whole bean coffee we like: current favorites are a Guatemalan blend and a morning French roast. Grinding the beans once a week fills the house with a lucious, fresh coffee aroma. Sweet bliss!

Who is in this issue.

Well...

Not many contributors this time around, but that's okay. While this is primarily a genzine, I really don't mind doing most of the writing for *Askance*. However, I did receive some fun contributions from folks herein, mostly artistic, but there was one written contribution from a good friend, **Bill Fischer**.

I have known Bill since January of 1977 when we met in Mrs. Prokopoff's winter semester Russian II class at the University of Minnesota. Gadzooks, that *is* a long time ago! Thankfully, it has also been a lot of fun knowing and working with Bill on Figby cartoons while we were students at the U of M, and in a folk trio with him and his buddy Michael Johnson. In addition to drawing Figby cartoons, Bill also likes to write stories from time to time, and he consented to letting me run one of his short stories in this issue. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.



Take me to the other side

Or,

What the hell was I thinking?



At absolutely no time in my entire fannish career have I ever entertained the desire to chair a science fiction convention. Never. Not even a small one day, or two day, or a full weekend relaxacon where all you really had to do was find a place large enough for where thirty to a hundred of your closest friends could gather to sit about and chat, eat, nibble, and nosh, drink a bit, maybe break out a guitar or three (or more), and in general, just kick back and enjoy the company.

When I first became an active fan back in the early and mid-1970s – a fact which I have mentioned a lot, and even chronicled a good bit of it in my short online perzine *...and Furthermore* for a number of issues between 2003 and 2006 – Minn-stf (the extremely active sf fan club in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area)

started holding fall relaxacons at small hotels or motels in the area. One of the first of these was called Anokon because it was held at a nice little motel in Anoka, Minnesota, a distant northern suburb of Minneapolis, in the fall of 1978. That was such a fun time the club decided to do it again the next year. Then the 1980 fall relaxacon was held elsewhere (I think it was held in Coon Rapids, a northern suburb of Mipple-Stipple, but I could be wrong) and was dubbed Not-Anokon for obvious reasons. Again, much fun was had by all, and so the pattern had been established. (You know: three times, it's a tradition.) Like I said earlier, there was little to no formal program involved; this was just a club-sanctioned excuse to have a fall party, nothing more. Sure, you had to register to attend, so fans had name badges, there was a small dealer's room and small art show, but no real scientific topics for panel discussions existed. At least, I don't remember any! The main thing to remember of these Minn-stf fall conventions was that they were mostly designed after the famed Midwestcons held in Cincinnati, Ohio, hosted by the late Lou Tabakow, which was a magnet for drawing in a lot of Midwest fans. Canadians, too, mostly from Toronto. Ergo, if you are going to model any relaxacon by any particular standard, look no further than Midwestcon.

Minimal effort was necessary to pull these Anokons and Not-Anokons off, or so I felt. During that same late 70s, early 80s time frame, I would happily volunteer for various aspects of helping to run Minn-stf's annual Easter Weekend shebang, Minicon, as a gopher, badge checker, helping out in the con suite, registration, the film committee (1978-1980), setting up this and that, even got involved as a sub-department head in Operations when Damon Knight and Kate Wilhelm were the professional Guests of

Honor (Minicon 21 in 1986). All that was a lot of fun, and a lot of work, but all this gave me a healthy education into how much is involved in running a major regional fannish science fiction convention. While I never aspired to run something like a Minicon, the idea of hosting a small relaxacon has long been simmering deep in the recesses of my brain ever since those early Anokons.

Fast forward to the spring of 2019, when Pablo Miguel Alberto Vazquez approached me about the idea of bringing Corflu back to Texas in 2020. The last time I attended Corflu was in 2007 when Pat Virzi brought it to Austin, not quite a two hour drive sort of south-westerly of College Station, and I had a grand time. I agreed with Pablo that it was long overdue for being here, and for many of the readers of this fanzine and its sister zine *Askew*, that story is well known. If you are not versed in this particular narrative, I refer you to the www.corflu.org webpage where all the history of Corflu, the “fanzine fan’s Worldcon,” is archived, and there you can read all the Corflu Heatwave progress reports for that most sordid tale. My rationale for agreeing to this effort was essentially the *Field of Dreams* tagline: “If you build it, they will come.” Since Corflu has been held in early May for many years now, I usually couldn’t attend since it always fell during Finals Week. No can do. So I figured the best bet was to move Corflu to mid-March when the weather is nowhere near as blistering hot as it is in May here – same reasoning behind Austin in 2007 (February for Corflu Quire) – and there are more hotel rooms available in the second week of March because that’s typically Spring Break, and 60,000 crazy college kids from Texas A&M University and Blinn College are out of town. To my thinking this was a win-win situation. And sure enough, they – as in fanzine fans - *did* come!

Now, most readers of this fanzine know that I am a full-time professor of English and ESL (English as a Second Language) at the Bryan campus of Blinn College, so I felt that I could handle the duties of organizing – with Pablo’s help and the advice of former Corflu chairs (notably Pat Virzi and Michael Dobson, with an able assist from Curt Phillips) – Corflu 37. I figured that “all” I had to do was basically find a location, set up a reasonable registration fee and time-frame, then Pablo and I could sketch out a small program schedule while I worked with the hotel on establishing a room block, rates, the Sunday buffet, and any other needs of the host site. Going with the major convention hotel in the city, the College Station Hilton, made the vast majority of this work much easier because that staff has years of experience working with not only hosting AggieCon multiple times, but also major Texas A&M University research symposiums and conventions, plus countless other professional and business events over the years. When in doubt, go with the experience.

Thus, getting the basics set up was a snap, meaning one of my other major concerns would be administrating the Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards (I wrote about that in *Askew* #29); Valerie helped out on registration matters, while she and Pat Virzi concentrated their main efforts on the hospitality suite. As it turned out, my primary weekend of choice was wide open for the Hilton because March 13-15, 2020 was the last weekend of Spring Break; establishing that by the end of July 2019 was a huge help. Lots of rooms were available, and Ben Walters, my Hilton marketing representative, was very helpful with everything: it was truly a pleasure to work with Ben, who kept me abreast of the number of room reservations coming in, among other matters, as the convention date approached.

What was not expected by anybody was the world coming to an end. Well, not exactly, but it sure felt that way.

World events began edging into the picture in January of 2020. By the time the FAAn Award voting period ended at the end of February, things were looking bleak. The coronavirus pandemic was on everybody's minds as the infection and death counts in America grew by the day. Major regional sf conventions began cancelling or postponing their dates, and I seriously worried about losing a lot of money over Corflu Heatwave. As of March 1st, membership stood at 62; three more attendees were added by March 7th, bringing the total supporting and attending membership up to 65. Subtracting out the supporting memberships and those non-attending full memberships brought the estimated live-body count down to 42. (A very stfnal number, and yes, by then I really was panicking.) This was doable, considering the working budget. Then starting on the Monday before the convention started, I began receiving emails and phone calls from people saying they could not come because either they or a family member might have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus. Now I *really* began hitting the panic button. Needless to say, Ben Walters and I were in constant contact during those days running up to the event's weekend. I was massively worried about missing the room-count cutoff point, plus other obligations in the event contract, and losing a lot of money in the process. Even if I had cancelled Corflu Heatwave by February 13th, one month before the con started, the penalty I would be liable for was close to \$3,000. Not only that, I had to consider all of the people who were now committed to airfare, car rentals, and other reservations they had made. Since there was no state or national lockdown order yet in place, I decided to keep the convention on target, all the while worrying that Corflu Heatwave would lose a pile of money. For his part, Ben assured me that even if a few of those who had committed to their rooms did not show, the event had already easily passed the cutoff point. In fact, Corflu Heatwave had already earned one free room night, per the contract. That helped me breath more easily, but I was still worried. The final count was 33 live bodies in attendance, and it looked like they all had a grand time.

On Tuesday afternoon, March 10th Rob Jackson and Tommy Ferguson, one of the two Corflu 50 recipients, arrived in town, followed on the next day by Pat Virzi, which made five of us at the Wednesday evening Fan Meet-Up at the World of Beer pub, a straight shot one mile down University Avenue from the Hilton. We relaxed and chatted for a few hours, then Valerie and I went home as Pat, Rob, and Tommy returned to the Hilton.



Thursday more fannish types arrived.

Valerie and I loaded up our cars and brought over the majority of the consuite goodies and convention supplies stashed at home; Pat had already unloaded her car's burden the day before, and we began setting up the consuite in earnest early that afternoon. The Corflu Heatwave consuite was operational



Dinner gang, table 1, L-R: Murray Moore, Sandra Bond, Rich Coad, Rob Jackson, Gary Mattingly, Mary Ellen Moore, Valerie Purcell.

by late afternoon – meaning before 5 PM – while plans were being made poolside for a big dinner group to go to BJ’s Brewhouse and Restaurant, which Valerie and I recommended for three reasons: they had an excellent menu with a wide variety of food, including many gluten free options; BJ’s house-brewed beers are very good; and they could easily accommodate our group of sixteen hungry fans. I called ahead to warn the establishment, reserved a Hilton courtesy van to transport ten people, and Pat Virzi and I drove the remaining six in our cars. We were all at the restaurant

in just over five minutes, and the dinner was delicious, made even better by great conversations.



Dinner gang, table 2, L-R: Pat Virzi, Alan Rosenthal, Nigel Rowe, Bill Burns, Mary Burns, Tommy Ferguson, Howard Waldrop, Jeanne Bowman.

Afterwards it was back to the Hilton for unwinding in the consuite, discovering even more fannish arrivals. Pat Virzi had set up a high table (the kind you find in bars) with cards, addressed envelopes, and colored fine-tipped Sharpies for attendees to write notes and sign for members who were not able to make it College Station. That was a great idea everybody got into: the following week those cards, along with name tags and program books, were sent off to Ted White, Pat and Graham Charnock, Dan and Lynn Steffan, Curt and Lizbeth Phillips, Robert Lichtman, the Fishlifters

(Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey), John D. Berry, Joe Siclari and Edie Stern, Michael Dobson, Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Tompkins, and Geri Sullivan. All were missed, but were able to virtually attend due to Rob Jackson’s live-streaming the event.

The technology side of running Corflu Heatwave was another concern of mine because some program items were PowerPoint presentations, and the Oakwood Ballroom that I had arranged for all of the weekend’s events was set up for such needs, plus the need for adequate audio for the panels. Thanks to reading Mike Dobson’s Corflu Fiawol post-mortem, to avoid poor volume for everything I brought along my gig bag and amplifier – in addition to my guitar for Friday night’s entertainment – which included two extra microphones. In addition, Pat Virzi brought along her portable sound system, so we had three extra microphones with amplifiers to supplement the Hilton’s wireless mic and audio system. Face it: we’re all getting older, and for many of us our hearing isn’t as sharp as it once was, and I wanted to make sure that everyone could hear. The Hilton’s technology crew – Tary Croskey (coordinator) and Israel Gaytan (weekend tech guru) – were extremely helpful in getting everything set up not only in time, but ensured that it all worked. Thank you, gentlemen, for being a major reason why this convention succeeded.

Unfortunately, real world issues started to seriously encroach on the serious fun. As mentioned earlier, some of the people with attending memberships had started calling in at the start of the week to inform

me that they could not make it due to possible exposure to the coronavirus. Hal Hall, the founder of the Texas A&M University's SF collection, let me know on Thursday afternoon that his daughters had put the kibosh on his coming over due to potential virus exposure. Joe Siclari and Edie Stern decided to cancel due to Joe having a vicious head cold; he told me that he seriously doubted airport security would let



him pass, even though he had written doctor's permission to fly. Mid-afternoon on Friday the 13th (eek!), Dr. Albert Jackson, who lives just down the road – well, 90 miles away – in Houston, called and said that he couldn't risk coming because his wife, who works at a Houston hospital, might have been exposed to the coronavirus, so he couldn't come. This hurt since he was due to be on Saturday's panel about the history of Texas fandom and

fanzines. Al did, though, whip up a quick slide presentation to email me so that I could show it on screen and read off the notes accompanying the slides. Perhaps the biggest blow happened Wednesday evening when Texas A&M University announced it was shutting down access to campus by non-university related groups. This really stung because Jeremy Brett, the curator of the TAMU SF & F collection, and I had arranged for weekend tours of the collection for Corflu members, and now all of those tours were cancelled. Fuck! Thursday evening I quickly added informational slides to the Opening Ceremonies presentation noting all the changes, realizing that I needed to be as flexible as possible to meet the rapidly changing needs of the convention.

All of these developments aggravated my growing worries about the financial health of Corflu 37. Yet I put on my game face, adjusted things as the weekend went on as sort-of planned, and plowed ahead.

Despite the news, Friday's programming went very well, I must say. During the day one group went to fossil hunt at a river bed west of town and brought back their finds to display, and another batch of fans took the Hilton shuttle bus up to Messina Hof winery for the two o'clock tour of the facilities and wine sampling. Items on tap for that evening were the Opening Ceremony, selecting our Guest of Honor (Bill Burns earned this distinction by having his name drawn out of the hat), the In Memoriam panel, then after a dinner break it was time for my mini-concert. Quite a few folks said the best part was the In Memoriam tribute to recent losses in the science fiction fanzine community: Steve Stiles, Frank Lunney, and Earl Kemp. Projected on the screen were photos of each of these gentlemen, plus pictures of their fanzines and artwork. This program item first began as a tribute to Steve Stiles, one of the greatest fanzine artists of all time, but while I was gathering images and contributions to the program book from Ted White, Mike Dobson, and Rich Lynch, Frank and Earl died in the two



Howard Waldrop tells a story during the Friday night Corflu entertainment hour, an item destined to become a Corflu staple.

weeks preceding the convention. People were very kind to send photos taken of these gentlemen over the years to supplement the few I had taken at Corflu Quire. Many people shared stories of these friends while the pictures were shown on screen.

My little concert – listed as “John Purcell vs. Audience” in the program book – was okay, even with a small audience of a dozen or so people, whom I regaled with an assortment of original songs as well as songs by John Prine, Peter, Paul & Mary, and others. At one point Howard Waldrop, the other Corflu 50 recipient, came up and told this marvelously funny Pope story, which you can see and hear – you need both to get the full effect – at Rob Jackson’s YouTube channel. Speaking of which, all of the Corflu Heatwave programming items are on that link for your enjoyment:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/robjackson60/videos?view=0...>

Saturday started bright and early (8 AM) for yours truly. First stop was the consuite to help Pat Virzi get it ready for the early birds, who did not materialize until nearly 9 AM, so the coffee was hot and fresh, and we were able to ease into the day’s events which began at 11 AM – practically the crack of noon – with the “Texas Fandom and Fanzine History” panel. I was joined by Howard Waldrop, Joe Pumilia, and John Moffitt, and with Al Jackson’s slides behind us on screen, it went very well indeed. It was too bad Hal Hall wasn’t in attendance: he would have added a wealth of information to that panel.

The other panels and events of Saturday, March 14th, were a panel discussion of using fan art in fanzines, which Sandra Bond, David Thayer, Rob Jackson, and I talked about, with numerous others joining in to make this panel close to what I was hoping for: a sharing of the minds and experiences of the many fan editors and fan artists present in the room. That was followed by Tommy Ferguson’s presentation on “The History of Northern Ireland Fandom,” then the two-hour long “Texas Beer Tasting and Create-a-Zine Playtime” event, during which the Corflu Heatwave one-shot *Pluglunk* was conceived and mostly executed – a proper term for this, I believe – and then it was time for the annual Corflu Auction.



Thanks to the brilliant organizational planning by my wife Valerie (pictured here), plus the added input of Mary Burns and head-auctioneer Andy Hooper (he and I rotated every six items), the auction went extremely well. Of the total of 66 lot items offered, only six were not sold. Even though the crowd was not very big, bidding was brisk and fun, and the Corflu 37 auction raised over \$660. Some items up for sale received serious attention, entertaining vigorous bidding, while others went for the minimum bid amounts. At one point I was quite befuddled by Rich Coad suddenly blurting out “\$49!” when a copy of Thomas Pynchon’s novel *The Crying of Lot 49* came up for bids. The minimum bid for it was \$10 and I hadn’t even stated that amount yet, and did not know that Rich was a Pynchon fan. Who knew? He thought it was funny, and by Godfrey, Rich paid \$49 for the book, despite our best efforts to knock him up to an even fifty bucks.

Some people’s children...

A few weeks before the convention, while perusing the stash of TAFF auction items I had at home, besides rifling through my fanzine collection for possible items to sell, I had the mad thought of auctioning off the temporary set of dentures I wore during my TAFF trip nearly three years ago. Figuring that nobody would be interested if they actually knew what the bid item was, I neatly sealed and boxed them up, labeling it as “Mystery Lot #12” with a minimum bid of \$2. They eventually went for a winning bid of \$20 to Andy Hooper, who was then finally shown what he had won. The look on his face was so worth the effort.

After the dinner break following the auction, it was time for the two Saturday evening programming items: “The Fan Who Shot Liberty Campbell,” the annual one-act dramatic play reading, written by Andrew Hooper, which was followed by Sandra Bond’s game panel, “Just a Minac.” First off, if you haven’t seen the John Ford classic 1962 Western movie *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, watch that first and then listen to our group’s reading of Andy’s play: it’s funnier not only because of all the assorted fannish references and puns in the play, but also for how closely it follows the plotline of the movie. Well done, Andrew! That was a lot of fun. The bad guy was played by Tommy Ferguson – I thought it would be funny to have the villain voiced by a man with a thick Irish brogue – and other participants were Nigel Rowe, David Thayer, Jeanne Bowman, Jeanne Gomoll, Mary Burns, Tom Becker, and myself. Good fun, and we quickly set up for “Just a Minac.”



“Just a Minac” contestants, L-R: Tommy Ferguson, Rich Coad, Sandra Bond (moderator), Rob Jackson, Keith Freeman.

This year’s contest was a brisk, silly, and hilarious hour of fannish discourse patterned after the BBC game show “Just a Minute,” in which contestants are challenged to expound upon random topics for up to a minute without hemming or hawing, repeating themselves, uttering “ums”, or other verbal ticks. Sandra Bond introduced this fannish version at last year’s Corflu in Rockville, Maryland, and it was a smash hit. Rich Coad won the initial contest, so this year he was defending his title against three worthy



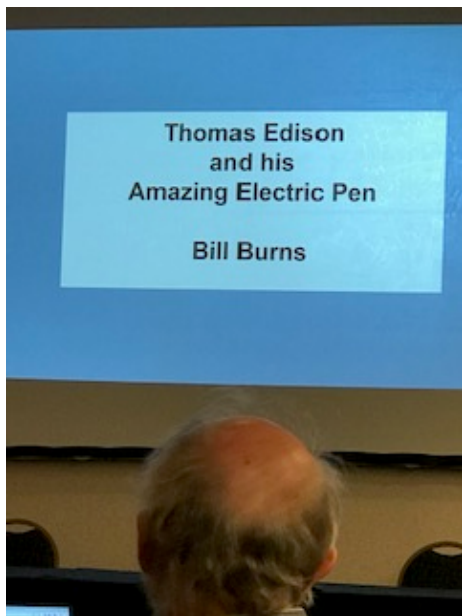
Keith Freeman celebrates his victory!

challengers, Tommy Ferguson, Rob Jackson, and Keith Freeman. Sandra does a marvelous job of moderating this game, introducing random fannish topics at the start of each round, and then turns on the stopwatch as one of the contestants begins their exposition on said topic. Naturally, a bit of drink is involved, which loosens the tongue and makes the mind slip up. That probably gave the eventual winner, Keith Freeman, the advantage since

of all the competitors and moderator, he was the only one not drinking beer during the game. Rob Jackson switched to water halfway through, but by then it was too late. Freeman defeated a tough opponent in Tommy Ferguson by a single point! Next year, should Corflu Concorde occur (everyone is hoping the pandemic has abated or is under control by then), Keith will defend his “Just a Minac” title in Bristol, England.

It is probably unnecessary to relate here that much frivolity commenced over in the consuite after this hotly contested contest, so I won’t say anything along those lines, even if it is true. Some things are probably best unsaid.

Sunday morning meant that it was the final day of Corflu 37, but it was definitely not the end of all the fun. The major events today were the banquet, guest of honor Bill Burns’ speech, and the FAAn Awards, then next year’s site selection. Since the banquet was budgeted for 40 people and there were 33 fans present, obviously nobody would be going away hungry. Pablo and I had chosen a mixture of the smokehouse buffet (sausage, brisket, chicken and all sorts of sides) and the vegetarian buffet (soups, salads, cheeses, and all sorts of sides), so there was a *lot* of food to choose from. Thanks to the quickly



changing coronavirus situation, the Hilton kitchen staff set up to serve as attendees went down the line, and the servers heaped sizeable amounts of the food items each person chose. Social distancing rules had not been devised yet – those would be announced over the following weekend – so fans sat down at the tables set up around the Oakwood Ballroom and chowed down. Valerie and I joined James Taylor and Teresa Cochran, then Jim Caughran sat down with us. The food was absolutely delicious and filling. I nearly had to roll myself down to the podium to introduce Bill Burns for his Guest of Honor speech and then emcee the FAAn Awards.

Bill’s topic was “Thomas Edison and his Amazing Electric Pen” – pictured here, along with “a fine study of the back of Rob Jackson’s head,” as Sandra Bond put it – and it was very interesting, complete with fascinating information and illustrations. Then it was time for presenting the Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards (the FAAns), the results of which were reported in real time to Facebook by Sandra Bond, and the Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Robert Lichtman. (The winners have long been known and discussed elsewhere, so I will not bother listing them here, two and a half months after the fact.) Then it was time to select the Past-President of the Fan Writers of America; that honor went to Rob Jackson, the chairman of next year’s Corflu to be held in Bristol, England, and will be known as Corflu Concorde; Rob settled on that nickname because the famed supersonic jetliner had strong British connections in the Bristol area. Makes sense to me. With all of this business out of the way, folks dispersed to relax and recharge their batteries for the Dead Dog party that evening. Valerie and I went home for a short rest, dumped some Corflu stuff off, but returned to the Hilton around three in the afternoon.

Quite a few people were staying overnight to leave at various times on Monday, March 16th, so the Dead Dog party was well-populated. Valerie had set up a big batch of chili slow-cooking at home all day Saturday, which we brought over to the consuite mid-Sunday afternoon and got that re-heating for evening consumption. It was apparently delicious. At one point Sandra Bond approached Valerie and complimented her on the chili, asking, “Who do I pay the \$6 to?” Valerie had no idea what Sandra was talking about, then realized it was the sticky note left by the crockpot: “Chili ready ~6:00.” “Oh, no,” Valerie told her. “That means the chili will be hot enough to eat by six o’clock.” Sandra thought that was a Texas way of indicating price. Oh, well. The chili was fully consumed in record time.



By the time the party started, I had a much better idea of how Corflu Heatwave had fared financially, and though I was feeling better, I was still wary of how the final figures would end. Thanks to spirited bidding during the auction and the t-shirt sales (how many conventions can boast their t-shirts were designed by two Hugo winning fan artists? Brad Foster and David Thayer created a fantastic image that reproduced very well), I knew that the convention had essentially broken even. After a handful of post-convention t-shirt sales came in over the next two weeks, Corflu Heatwave had turned a profit of a whopping \$151.46, which shall be forwarded on to Corflu Concorde in June 2020. (I am waiting to see if any more t-shirt orders come in before then. There are still plenty of these shirts on hand. A current inventory is on page 21 of this issue.)

By noon Monday, LobbyCon formed as the last fans gathered before heading homeward. I ferried Keith Freeman (at 8 AM) and Jim Caughran (at 1 PM) to the Ground Shuttle depot, where they departed for Bush International Airport in Houston to catch their flights. The last out-of-towners were Andy Hooper and Carrie Root, with whom we had a delicious dinner at Paolo’s Italian Restaurant, which was right across the Hilton parking lot. Andy and Carrie eventually left town Tuesday morning.



Dead Dog Corflu t-shirt phoot: only one duplicate in the bunch. L-R, Jim Caughran, Scott Custis, Pat Virzi, Sandra Bond, John Purcell (seated), Carrie Root, Andrew Hooper (behind Carrie), Alan Rosenthal, Tommy Ferguson, Murray Moore, Rich Coad. Ten different shirts displayed by eleven fans.

Corflu Heatwave is now two and half months in the past. It feels like a lifetime ago, but the memories are strong, and the distance has given me a chance to reflect on the event. The first question I asked myself obviously was, “Am I glad I decided to tackle this beastie?” The answer is an unequivocal yes. Despite the rapid development of the COVID-19 pandemic that affected attendance and shuttered restaurants, hotels, schools, shopping centers, and other public spaces, we managed to get in Corflu 37 just under the wire. Three days after the convention ended, Texas governor Greg Abbott declared a state of emergency and issued a state-wide lockdown until Easter, which was later extended to the end of April.

Across the country – heck, around the world – more and more lockdowns were announced, and dozens of science fiction, fantasy, comics, and other genre-related conventions were either cancelled or postponed. This year’s World Science Fiction Convention in New Zealand is being converted into a Virtual Con, and while I have my doubts how well this would work, I am sure that science fiction fans are probably the best equipped to make it happen. I wish them luck.

But if it does turn out, as it begins to appear to be, that Corflu Heatwave is the last fan-run, in person science fiction convention of 2020, it was one heck of a send-off. Everybody who was there had a good time enjoying each other’s company while the world came crashing down. Of the 33 fans who attended, none reported symptoms of the virus sweeping the globe, and everyone returned home safe and sound; a few of them had their trips delayed thanks to flight cancellations, but they figured it out and got home.

All in all, it appears that Corflu Heatwave was a success. My deepest thank yous go to Valerie Purcell, Pat Virzi, David Thayer, Brad Foster, and my cohort in crime, Pablo Miguel Alberto Vazquez, for making this all possible. Thank you all and I hope to see many of these same attendees at Corflu Concorde next year in Bristol, England – Ghu willing, of course!

TWO MORE CORFLU HEATEAVE PHOTOS



Setting up the Texas Beer Tasting samples on Saturday afternoon in the Oakwood Ballroom. All convention programming events were held in the Oakwood.



A Saturday night giggle fest in the consuite shared by Pat Virzi, Rich Coad, and Jeanne Bowman. Pablo Vazquez does his best to ignore the frivolity.

AggieCon Retrospective

John Purcell's musings on the fate of the local sf convention

Hmm. What to say? This year's AggieCon went from a full weekend convention last year for its 50th Anniversary convention at the Hilton Hotel in town to a single day gaming event on campus this year. To me, this is beginning to sound like AggieCon, as a viable science fiction convention, is on its last legs, which would be sad. This announcement on the right is what was posted to the AggieCon and Cepheid Variable websites in late February this year.

There are a couple obvious things that can be concluded based on this poster. Number one is the fact this is a one-day gaming event. That does not surprise me because AggieCon 50 in March of 2019, held at the Hilton Hotel and Convention Center here in town, lost money on the deal, which surprised me because it appeared to be well attended (I was on three panels that weekend) and everybody seemed to be enjoying it a great deal. So going from a three-day, proper weekend convention to a one-day on campus event didn't surprise me when I heard that the student club had lost a good chunk of money on what was called the Golden Con (well, it was the 50th anniversary of the first AggieCon held in 1969, so that makes sense). Still, that hurt.



The second obvious thing is the content of this year's "convention": gaming. Well, mostly. Again, this does not surprise me because of the 11 AggieCons I have attended since 2006, there has been a clear shift away from its literary science fiction roots to an almost completely media-oriented sf convention. If you look at the list of AggieCon's Guests of Honor over the years, it reads like a Who's Who of science fiction literary greats for almost its entire run. Here's a copy/paste off Wikipedia's latest listing (which I have updated):

1. Science Fiction Week (retroactively AggieCon I) – April 21–24, 1969; GoH: Harlan Ellison.
2. Cepheid Comics and Trade Convention (retroactively AggieCon II) – Spring 1970; no GoH
3. AggieCon III – April 7–9, 1972; The first convention to officially use the name AggieCon,^[6] no GoH
4. AggieCon IV – March 2–4, 1973; GoH: Jack Williamson, Chad Oliver, Robert E. Vardeman, Joe Pumilia
5. AggieCon V – April 12–14, 1974; GoH: Harlan Ellison, Keith Laumer, Howard Waldrop

6. AggieCon VI – March 28–30, 1975; Larry Niven, Fan GoH: "Fuzzy Pink" Niven
7. AggieCon VII – March 26–28, 1976; Anne McCaffrey
8. AggieCon VIII – March 24–27, 1977; Fred Pohl
9. AggieCon IX – March 30 – April 2, 1978; GoH: Damon Knight, Wilson "Bob" Tucker, Alan Dean Foster, Geo. W. Proctor, Bob Vardeman
10. AggieCon X – March 29 – April 1, 1979; GoH: Theodore Sturgeon, Boris Vallejo, Wilson "Bob" Tucker
11. AggieCon XI – March 27–30, 1980; GoH: Poul Anderson, Jack Williamson, Katherine Kurtz, Frank Kelly Freas
12. AggieCon XII – March 26–29, 1981; GoH: Joe Haldeman, Alicia Austin, C. J. Cherryh
13. AggieCon XIII – March 25–28, 1982; GoH: Roger Zelazny, Artist GoH: Vincent Di Fate, Special GoH: Fred Saberhagen
14. AggieCon XIV – March 24–27, 1983; GoH: Harry Harrison, Michael Whelan, Stephen R. Donaldson, Chad Oliver
15. AggieCon XV – March 29 – April 1, 1984; GoH: L. Sprague de Camp, Catherine Crook de Camp, Don Maitz, Wilson "Bob" Tucker, James P. Hogan
16. AggieCon XVI – March 21–24, 1985; GoH: John Varley, James Christensen, Ed Bryant, Patricia McKillip
17. AggieCon XVII – April 3–6, 1986; GoH: George R. R. Martin, Frank Kelly Freas, Orson Scott Card, Howard Waldrop, Kerry O'Quinn. Convention Chairman was Martha Wells
18. AggieCon XVIII – April 2–5, 1987; GoH: Ben Bova, Christopher Stasheff, Rowena Morrill, Steve Gould, Kerry O'Quinn
19. AggieCon XIX – March 24–27, 1988; Joe Haldeman, Katherine Kurtz, Bob Eggleton, Kerry O'Quinn
20. AggieCon XX – March 30 - April 2, 1989; GoH: George R.R. Martin, Octavia Butler
21. AggieCon XXI – March 29 – April 1, 1990; GoH: Walter Koenig, Spider Robinson, Jeanne Robinson, Richard Pini
22. AggieCon XXII – March 21–24, 1991; GoH: Fred Saberhagen, Keith Parkinson, Larry Elmore, Marv Wolfman, Elizabeth Ann Scarborough
23. AggieCon XXIII – March 26–29, 1992; GoH: David Drake, Barbara Hambly, Julius Schwartz, Real Musgrave, Kerry O'Quinn^[7]
24. AggieCon XXIV – March 25–28, 1993; GoH: Peter David, Michael Moorcock, Wendy Pini, Charles N. Brown
25. AggieCon XXV – March 24–27, 1994; GoH: Greg Bear, Lois McMaster Bujold, Charles de Lint, Julius Schwartz, Frank Kelly Freas, Laura Brodian Kelly-Freas
26. AggieCon XXVI – March 23–26, 1995; GoH: Jim Baen, John Byrne
27. AggieCon XXVII – March 21–24, 1996; GoH: Bernie Wrightson, Nancy Collins, Joe Christ, Dave Wolverton, Kerry O'Quinn, Richard Biggs, Kevin J. Anderson, Rebecca Moesta, Gwar
28. AggieCon XXVIII – March 20–23, 1997; GoH: Brian Stelfreeze
29. AggieCon XXIX – March 26–29, 1998; GoH: Robert Asprin, Joe R. Lansdale, Tad Williams, Phil & Kaja Foglio, Garth Ennis, John McCrea
30. AggieCon XXX – March 25–28, 1999; GoH: Bruce Sterling, Larry Elmore, Nigel Bennett, Ted Raimi
31. AggieCon XXXI – March 23–26, 2000; GoH: Harlan Ellison, Terry Pratchett, Tim Bradstreet
32. AggieCon XXXII – March 22–25, 2001; GoH: Charles de Lint, Melanie Rawn, Martha Wells, Julie Caitlin Brown. Convention director was Yaru Liu.
33. AggieCon XXXIII – March 21–24, 2002; GoH was Neil Gaiman, Artist GoH was Charles Keegan, and other notable guests included Joe R. Lansdale, John Lucas, Brian Stelfreeze, and Karen Lansdale.^[8] Convention director was Yaru Liu.^[9]

34. AggieCon XXXIV – March 20–23, 2003; GoH: Virginia Hey, Lani Tupu, Ruth Thompson, Peter David^[10]
35. AggieCon XXXV – March 25–28, 2004; GoH: Jacqueline Carey, Todd McCaffrey^[11]
36. AggieCon XXXVI – April 21–24, 2005; GoH: Michael Moorcock, Elizabeth Moon, Red vs. Blue
37. AggieCon XXXVII – March 23–26, 2006; GoH: Steven Brust, James Charles Leary, Peter Mayhew, Brian Stelfreeze^[12]
38. AggieCon XXXVIII – March 22–25, 2007; GoH: Gene Wolfe (Wolfe cancelled at the last minute and did not attend), James O'Barr, Richard Hatch, Ruth Thompson^[13]
39. AggieCon XXXIX – March 27–30, 2008; GoH: Ellen Muth
40. AggieCon XL – March 26–29, 2009; GoH: Todd McCaffrey, Kristen Perry, Jennifer Rhodes
41. AggieCon XLI (held at the College Station Hilton Hotel) – February 5–7, 2010; GoH: Steven Gould, AGoH: David Lee Anderson, SG: Martha Wells, Editor GoH: Ellen Datlow, Toastmaster: Selina Rosen, Media GoH: Marv Wolfman, SG: Noel Wolfman
42. AggieCon XLII (held at the College Station Hilton Hotel) – 2011
43. AggieCon XLIII (held at the College Station Hilton Hotel) – March 23–25, 2012
44. AggieCon XLIV (held at the College Station Hilton Hotel) – March 22–24, 2013; GOH: George R. R. Martin,^[14] Ernest Cline, Sam De La Rosa, Dante Shepherd, Barbara Ann Wright, Erin Ewer, Holden Shearer, David Liss, Keri Bean, and Area of Defect
45. AggieCon XLV (Held at the College Station Hilton Hotel) - April 4–6, 2014 GOH: Jeffrey Cranor, Aaron Dismuke, Airship Nikolai, Ed Wettermann, and Marc Gunn.
46. AggieCon XLVI (Held at the College Station Hilton Hotel) - March 27–29, 2015 GOH: Mark Stefanowicz, Ed Wettermann, Lewis "Linkara" Lovhaug, Kathryn Friesen, Kimberley Hix Trant.
47. AggieCon XLVII (Brazos County Expo Center) April 1-3, 2016
48. AggieCon XLVIII (Brazos County Expo Center) March 24-26, 2017 Aaron Dismuke, Dr. Nerdlove, Martin Whitmore
49. AggieCon XLIX (Student Center on campus) March, 2018 A relabeled gaming event, not a true AggieCon
50. AggieCon L (College Station Hilton Hotel) March 22-24, 2019 Aaron Dismuke, Christopher Wehkamp



As is readily seen, since 2008 the vast majority of the Guests of Honor have been media, comics, or gaming stars; the exceptions are Todd McCaffrey, Martha Wells, Ellen Datlow, and George R.R. Martin. This last fellow was a lucky break because the Texas A&M University Science Fiction and Fanzine Collection, housed in the Cushing Library Building, had just acquired Martin's manuscripts and such, and hosted a major Open House event with George R.R. Martin present to officially announce the acquisition. Also in attendance were Michael Moorcock and Elizabeth Moon. I was at that afternoon event myself, and was surprised when Michael and Linda Moorcock said hello and chatted with me (I first met them at Corflu Quire in Austin, Texas, in 2007, but I digress a tad).

I am sure you get my point. At least I hope you do. One could even argue that by 2013 George R.R. Martin was vastly better known as the creator of the *Game of Thrones* television phenomenon than as the writer of the books that spawned the show. Sure, they became best-sellers again thanks to the program, but Martin was gracious enough to hang around for the rest of the weekend following the Cushing Library Open House – I understand AggieCon had to shell out a sizeable chunk of change and provide suitable accommodations as well for the entire convention – and AggieCon 44's attendance swelled as a result.

Sadly, even a major bump like that didn't help for long because the shift in the club's focus was now a decisive move into the gaming and media direction, which reflected the interests of the club's members. That sea change is what has, in my mind, been the deciding factor in reducing AggieCon's reputation as a long-time important regional science fiction convention. Frankly, I do not see AggieCon surviving for much longer. If it does, it will be solely as a one or two day gaming tournament with a side of media tossed in to satisfy the cosplayers and comics fans. The two years it moved off-campus and out of town, up to the sizeable but way the heck out of the way Brazos Expo Center on the north side of Bryan, was a crushing blow; at least, I believe so. The Expo Center, while offering a lot more room for the convention, was simply A Bad Idea. There were no motels, fast food joints, or whatever out there. The Expo Center was designed for horse shows and cattle auctions in one building, and the other building contained multiple rooms of various sizes that could host special gatherings, wedding receptions, and the like. There is likewise no public transit system in place for students or anybody else to get out to the Expo Center without a car. As I stated in a response to the *File: 770* announcement at that time, I feared that AggieCon was in its death spirals.

This is all a very sad ending for what has historically been a good convention. In the short time I have attended – since 2006 – I have had some very good times at AggieCons. I will never forget the look on Steve Brust's face when he finally recognized me (it had been 14 years since we were last together at Minicon in 1992) during his Guest of Honor stint at AggieCon 37. That was priceless and worth the cost of admission. Later cons had their own special memories, too: George R. R. Martin's look of astonishment when I showed him the May 1946 issue of *Astounding Stories* I had found in the dealer's room Saturday afternoon; listening to Bland Lemon and the Lemon Aides in 2011; meeting Peter Mayhew (may he Rest in Peace) in 2006; and other fun conversations, panels, and such over the years.

Will AggieCon be able to resurrect itself? I sincerely doubt it. Pity, too. But hey – it's had one hell of a run, hasn't it?





A GOTCHA QUESTION

A Short Story By Bill Fischer



Donald sat with the right side of his face crushed to numbness in his balled fist. He sighed listlessly over the great desk as the morning sun began to warm the back of his neck. He wished for anything to be back out on the links in Florida, but damn it! He still had to do this job! He hated press conferences.

For some reason he dreaded the 'open-air' Q&A sessions on the South lawn more than the briefing room conferences. Perhaps this was because it always seemed that there were more people in the outside gatherings (there weren't because they were the same people with the same press passes).

It would be the same mob of mostly, Fake News reporters with a few Fox buddies sprinkled in for his comfort. They (the Fake News reporters) always looked so smug and sure of themselves. "Hah!" he reflected, *but who's the one in the White House? Who's the stable genius? They are all underfunded, sniveling little pissants too stupid to appreciate my natural greatness!*

He straightened the fat, seemingly endless, red tie as a makeup artist patted the last few layers of orange "suntan" to his weathered face. With his posse, they clomped across the polished, ancient, wooden floors to the portico.

The chorus of raised hands and cacophony began immediately: "Mr. President!", "Over here!", "Hey, can Eric read yet?", etc. The chorus continued. He wearily nodded or pointed his granting of this audience to the unwashed mass at his feet. He was careful to select a couple of loyal reporters first. "Mr. President, Sir, the best one we've had since, like, the Middle Ages, how brilliantly is your trade talk going with Beijing?" The President nodded approvingly and gave a pursed smile. "Yes, that is a bigly important question and you should know that we had a beautiful talk with the Chinese guy. China is a really, big country and very, very ancient. Most people don't know that. "

The questions kept coming: Was the existential threat posed to American democracy by the Haitian fish market under control? Yes, that was going swimmingly. Was the new, beautiful wall keeping the hordes of Islamic Mexicans out of North Dakota? Yes, that was a beautiful, spectacular success too. Was the first class of Space Force Officer Candidates becoming fluent in Klingon and Romulan? Had any of the European Economic Community Leadership conceded the native brilliance of Jared? And so this went for about ten minutes.

The time had come. He knew he had to make it look good and allow some questions from those Fake News reporters from failing CNN, MSNBC, BBC, and other failing news sources. This was part of the job and he despised it!

He swallowed a tiny bit of vomit in his mouth, gulped, licked his lips and then nodded to the reporter from CNN. She narrowed her eyes in what seemed to him a predatory manner. "Mister President, Sir,

could you explain something for our listeners?" He rolled his eyes. God, what a bitch! He folded his arms, exhaled noisily through his nose and scowled at her.

She continued: "Sir, just one question: Who is the protagonist in the novel, *All Quiet On The Western Front*?"

He sniffed audibly (again) and furrowed his brow. "Yes, a favorite book of mine as I've said many times. It's a really great book too. A lot of people don't know that. A really, really, great western. I like westerns! And it's important to know about protagonists. I was already brilliantly aware of the dangers of radical, fanatic protagonism! I was one of the first people to see that danger!" He folded his arms tighter, to the threshold of pain and waited for the response. She smiled quietly and sat back down.

Another reporter, this time from the BBC raised his hand. "Sir?" he asked, "just one follow up question to that...". Donald furrowed his brow and pursed his lips even more. His instincts told him a trend was evolving among the Fake News pool. His brain fired on all cylinders now, trying to form an exit strategy. *Get them off of this subject, fast!*

The BBC fellow smiled politely and carefully (and almost compassionately, it seemed) introduced the question:

"Sir, can you tell us what a 'protagonist' is?"

The End.

Bill Fischer

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There are still quite a few Corflu 37 t-shirts available for purchase. If you want one let me know at askance73@gmail.com, specifying color and size. The cost, including shipping, is \$20, via PayPal (same email address as above). Here is the current inventory:

6 smalls: two each in white, gray, and blue
9 mediums: 3 white, 4 gray, 2 blue
15 larges: 6 white, 3 gray, 6 blue
10 X-Large: 6 white, 3 gray, 1 blue
1 XX-Large: white
1 XXX-Large: white

fanzine reviews

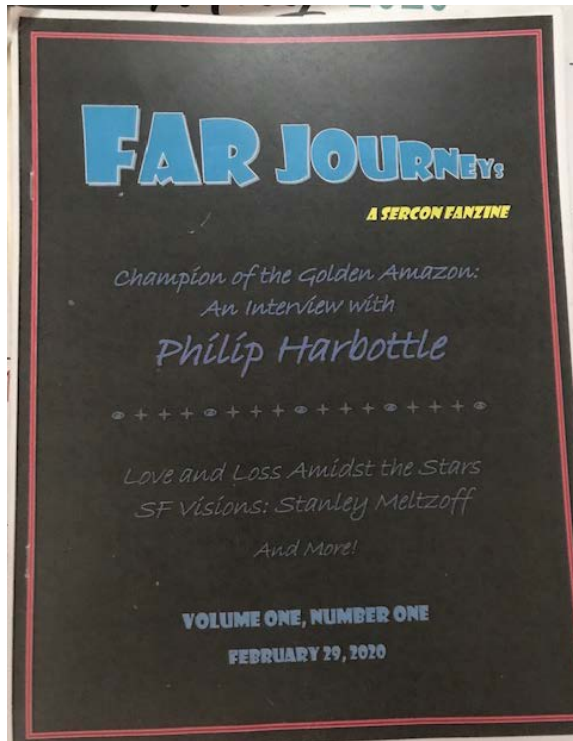
Since this is a fanzine, it is only fair that it should talk about fanzines within its pages. Way back when I started pubbing my ish, as the saying goes, the main way I built up my mailing list was to go through other fanzines and write down the names and addresses of their points of origin, with the names and addresses of letter writers, artists, writers, and other zines listed in these issues.

These days, the same principle applies, although it has migrated from street addresses to URLs, websites, social media, and email addresses. There are some Luddites among us – John Hertz is a notable one, but he’s a good guy so I’m not going to complain (he sends a small batch of his APA-L fanzine *Vanamonde* every so often) – and one of the fanzines to be reviewed here is from another such person: Justin E. A. Busch, a long-time fan from St. Paul, Minnesota. Justin mailed the first issue of *Far Journey: a sercon fanzine* to me in late March, which was a wonderful surprise. The third fanzine reviewed here was handed to me in person at Corflu Heatwave by Andrew Hooper, the 22nd issue of his personal-zine *Flag*. This last method of fanzine distribution is practically dead these days: unless you are attending a Corflu, it is unlikely somebody will personally deliver a fanzine at a con. When I gave Greg Benford a copy of *Askance* at FenCon VI (Dallas, TX) back in 2009, his surprised reaction was, “Oh, wow! Getting a real science fiction fanzine handed to me at a science fiction convention. How novel!”

That is how I received *Flag* #22 from Andrew Hooper at Corflu Heatwave a few months ago: less than a minute after saying hello to Andy and Carrie Root in the consuite, I held the latest issue of his personalzine in my hands. This is a stellar example of what a personalzine – a.k.a., perzine – is: chock full of information about Andy’s fan history interests in old fanzines, conventions, writers and fans, literature, Ray Palmer and the Shaver Mystery, and then segues into the genesis and composition of the play he wrote for Corflu Heatwave, “The Fan Who Shot Liberty Campbell” (see the YouTube channel link on page 10). Andy gives some very helpful background into this play, obviously based on the 1962 classic John Ford western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. If you have never seen that movie before, I strongly recommend doing so before watching/listening to “The Fan Who Shot Liberty Campbell.” It will not only be funnier because of all the fannish and stfnal references, but also because of how well it follows the plotline of that movie. A lengthy and fascinating lettercolumn follows, with lots of correspondents, and this is always a major highlight of *Flag*. Andy then closes up with a fanzine countdown of the top 20 recent fanzines he has read. The back cover cartoon by the late, great Steve Stiles wraps up this fine issue. I strongly recommend getting this zine.

ADDRESS: *Flag* #22 - Andrew Hooper, 11032 0 39th Ave. NW, Seattle, WA 98125

If you don’t get a fanzine handed to you at a convention, the old-fashioned way is to find one lurking inside your mailbox. That is how *Far Journey* #1 came my way, and it was very unexpected, especially when I saw the return address on the envelope: “St. Paul? I don’t know a fan named Busch in St. Paul, Minnesota,” I said to myself that day. According to the brief note accompanying the zine, Justin E. A. Busch had asked at a Minn-stf meeting earlier this year if anybody knew my mailing address. Someone provided that to him, and *voila!* his fanzine is sent. Well, that’s exactly how it works, my friends.



Whoever gave Justin my snail mail address, I thank you: my suspicions fall on Jeanne Mealy, a longtime Minneapolis fan friend of mine who once coedited the Minn-stf clubzine *Rune* with the late Dave Romm. From what I understand, Justin is getting back into fanzine publishing - he used to do this a long time ago, according to my ~~spies~~ friends in the club - and started up this new fanzine.

I am glad that he did. The subtitle of *Far Journey* states that is “a sercon fanzine.” If you are unfamiliar with that term, it is a portmanteau of “serious” and “constructive”; it means that this fanzine will discuss science fiction topics seriously and in a constructive, rhetorical fashion. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. In the ninety year history of sf fanzines there have been tons of such fanzines, and some of the best zines ever produced. One of the current top-tier fanzines is Bruce Gillespie’s *Science Fiction*

Commentary, which just celebrated its 100th issue, and it’s a phenomenal achievement, too. So Justin joined this august company with this issue published on February 29, 2020. This debut ish features a lengthy interview with fan and writer Philip Harbottle, who has basically championed preserving the work of John Russell Fearn (1908-1960), and it’s a fascinating look into how Harbottle did this, while also chronicling his own writing career. The other two articles cover how love and loss were treated in the various incarnations of *Star Trek*, and an appreciation of the book cover artwork of Stanley Meltzoff (1917-2006). A fine debut fanzine.

ADDRESS: ***Far Journeys* #1 - Justin E. A. Busch, 308 Prince Street, #422, St. Paul, MN 55101**

I mentioned John Hertz back in the second paragraph, so here is a plug for his weekly apa-zine (apa = Amateur Press Association), *Vanamonde*, which has now appeared for over 26 and a half years. Considering that APA-L, which emanates from Los Angeles, now numbers 2860+ issues (meaning this weekly apa has been running for at least an astonishing 55 years!), this is incredible devotion to the cause, and every single two-page contribution from John Hertz is filled with his intelligent commentary on topics ranging from SF to Regency Dancing, history, legal matters, science, theater, museums, and what-ever. John is an extremely well-read individual, and a charming conversationalist. Valerie and I thoroughly enjoyed his company in San Antonio during LoneStarCon III, the 2013 WorldCon. Granted, the mailing comments John makes to other APA-L members in his zine may be a bit confusing and obscure, but if you continue following these print conversation threads - much like an asynchronous online Discussion Forum - from issue to issue, they begin to make sense. The added benefit of getting *Vanamonde* in the mail, which John occasionally sends out in batches of four, is that I can vicariously see what other fans whom I know are thinking or reading or doing these days.

ADDRESS: ***Vanamonde* #1382- #1385: John Hertz, 236 S. Coronado St., No. 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057**

FIGBY

By BILL Fischer

Universidad de San Carlos, Guatemala....

Ponder if you will, Figby: The rich, cultural imagination of the pre-Columbian MesoAmerican cultures. Imagine a magical world of interfaces between physical reality and a spirit world, between magic and everyday experience. We are privileged to be left with this ancient codex...



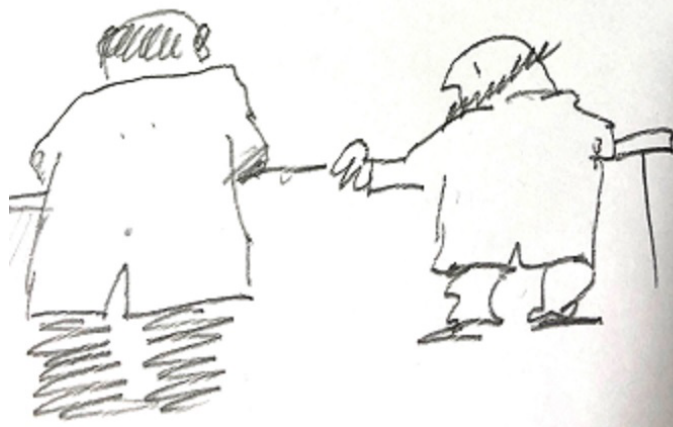
It would appear that in some contexts, the word "Nagual" can be interchangeable with "Shaman" or "Jaguar". This is of course a powerful image in Meso-American life.



The Nagual, or Jaguar, was one of their most powerful images of nature. A shaman or medicine man could transform himself into a nagual, a monkey, a snake...

Think of it Figby! A world where "reality" mingles magic with physics. Mixes the netherworld with nature. Where shape-shifting is viewed as naturally as you or I view an electric bill or a Volkswagen!

And yet these seemingly primitive, indigenous cultures developed calendars and alphabets and number systems as sophisticated as anything Isaac Newton could have envisioned...



But, enough of flights of fancy. Time to get back to the modern grind and tedium of serious science!



FROM THE HINTERLANDS

Letters from readers

*{Slowly I turn and spy a few letters of comment on the previous issue. This is good. So let's hop right to it and see what some people thought about **Askance #47**: contents therein were the Prague, Czechia, stopover of my 2017 TAFF trip that included a day trip out to Sedlec Ossuary in Kutna Hora, a short ArmadilloCon 41 report, Taral Wayne writing about the Canadian Expo and negotiating a nearly successful fanzine sale with Robert Silverberg, book and fanzine reviews, a Figby cartoon, and letters. As usual, correspondents' writings are in normal font with my responses in this funny looking, colored font.}*

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January 12, 2020

I've just got to reading your description of your visit to the Sedlec Ossuary and the story of the half blind monk tasked with exhuming and arranging the bones of the interred in the chapel in the 16th century and it reminded me of Andrew Miller's novel *Pure*, which I read last year and reviewed below for the Prophecy apa.

Andrew Miller - *Pure* (Sceptre)

[In *Pure*,] the 2011 Costa Book winner, Jean-Baptiste Baratte, a young man with dreams of becoming an engineer is given his first official commission in Paris 1785, which turns out to be something of poisoned

chalice, when he is given the task of excavating, clearing the grounds of the church of Les Innocents, whose overflowing graveyard is poisoning the air and water of the neighbouring village. Baratte starts off something as a naïve innocent himself, gulled into always paying the tab for meals and drinks and into buying an extravagant and ridiculous pistachio green suit, completely unsuited to the work he is about to become engaged on, but his attitude hardens as the work progresses and the disinterred corpses pile up in walls of bodies and bones before being shipped off to a new place of interment some miles away, and fires burn day and night to try and clear the air of the noxious rotting stench of exhumed corpses. And that hardening becomes necessary when he realises that the man he has selected as foreman, an old friend from the mines, reveals himself as a weak man and a drunk who finally breaks and commits an outrage that cannot go overlooked or unpunished.

This is an extraordinary novel of a gradual and inevitable loss of innocence which moves between comedy - even farce - and tragedy, madness, and violence, leading up to a brilliant set piece in a burning church. Definitely recommended.

{And then Steve wrote later that same day:}

Any Hooper's loc reminds me that Michael Moorcock's 'Oswald Bastable' novels could be considered as steampunk (though possibly not quite *avant le lettre*: I'd have to check on publication dates. To my mind Victorian steampunk rightly started with Blaylock's *The Digging Leviathan* but that might be my personal reading experience.) Similarly, you could put in a nod for Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* novels. That was a good loc from Andy, with a lot of comments and observations to think about.

While we're dishing praise, I should mention Taral, both for his article and also his MIB cover and Ditmar for the back cover. It's odd, but pleasing, to see a Ditmar cover outside *SF Commentary*.

(I'm typing this while half listening to BBC Radio 6 and my ears just pricked at a mention of *The Dreaming Jewels* and Theodore Sturgeon. Turns out jazz musician Greg Foat, who is being interviewed by Cerys Matthews, is a big sf fan, and his latest album is named after Sturgeon's novel, while others have titles like *The Door into Summer*. This is the sort of sf/music crossover that makes me sad I can no longer send to Steve Sneyd.)

Steve

*{Thank you for sharing that review of **Pure**, Steve. It sounds like an interesting novel that I would enjoy. (*) I agree with you about Andy Hooper's loc; lots of thoughtful information and ideas shared, which not only gets me to thinking, but also anybody else reading that letter. In fact, I already mentioned that some of Andy's comments about my "Sun Thunder" short story meshed with some of my thoughts about the story, which, as mentioned on page 4, I plan on revising this summer.*



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February 25, 2020

Once again, it's been crazy time, and another issue of *Amazing* has reached the proofing stage. Some work is finally coming through the Web, and time should get scarce soon, At least there's some pay connected with all this! In the meantime, *Askance 47* is here, and some comments are on their way to you. As soon as I write them...

A great Taral cover... Ghu knows there enough scum around. But then, would I want to belong to a club who would have someone like me as a member? Guess I'm a Marxist. Groucho Marxist...

I look forward to seeing Corflu reports, and who won the little certificates. I hope all have a splendid time! I must see if there are any other stories from my old "Tales from the Convention" series that you have yet to publish. *{By all means, my friends. Seek and send!}*

I read so many stories about going to the Canadian National Exhibition every year. I freely admit that is probably more than 25 years since Yvonne and I have gone to the Ex, and we do not miss the crowds, the high prices or the programming, which has failed to attract us just about every year.

I agree that the writing of a fanzine is the most important, and not whether it is published with paper or electrons. I always thought that the mimeo vs. zero war was a little silly. I admit that I did not vote in this year's FAAn Awards...I simply couldn't think of much when it came to individual zines or individual contributors, and I usually catch grief for any opinions I might have. We shall see who wins.

My loc... John, still want to do that steampunk zine? I can bring you up to date on one thing...I am involved in helping to get Professor Elemental to central Ontario for this year's Coldwater Steampunk Festival. My job hunt is still futile, but I am attempting to reinvent myself as a book editor. I have now worked on three books, and my current assignment (as of this morning!) is to proof and edit a fifth issue of *Amazing Stories* magazine.

Your convention list reminds me of something we did two years ago, couldn't do last year, but easily did this year...get one of the highly-sought-after vendor's tables in the Crafters' Corner area of the huge annual anime convention in our area, Anime North. It's on your Memorial Day weekend, and we live literally down the highway from the convention centre and hotels where it is held, and it is our best weekend guaranteed, with 35,000 people attending.

All done, and I can barely keep my eyes open. So much to do, and I wish for a day of complete sloth. Thanks for this issue, and I will try to be timely the next time around.

Lloyd

{Sad to say that attending conventions or arts and craft fairs are out of the question these days, although Texas and other states are trying to push the bubble and open up for business again. I fear there will be a second wave of confirmed cases as the COVID-19 death toll continues to rise in America; this has now broken the 100,000 mark (as of May 28th).

Enjoy your sloth time. This is something that I need to try this summer. Take care, Lloyd!}

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January 29, 2020

I have mixed feelings about Taral Wayne's article about his attempt to sell a collector's item fanzine to Robert Silverberg. Yes, \$1200 is a lot of money. But as Taral indicated, maybe Silverberg doesn't have the money to buy a copy at top dollar. If that is truly the case, I would've gone along with one of the first edition books in exchange. I would've "lost" money but made someone else happy. I know if someone was selling the first issue of my zine I would be interested, but not for \$1200, not with my budget.

I liked your article about your Prague visit but in one way it was depressing. I've never been over 30 miles from Plattsburgh for the last 20 years. Outside of a trip by car to Florida decades ago and a few visits to Canada, my traveling has been really limited. Good to hear you had a pleasant stay in Prague.

Great illustration by Jose Sanchez. I like his "flat" abstract style.

Ray

{To be honest, the odds of our getting to Europe would have been nonexistent if I had not won the TAFF race in 2017. Valerie and I have done a good amount of travel around the USA, even ducking into Northern Mexico in 1998, on camping and vacation trips, so we've seen some good things on our own over the years. () Jose Sanchez has a distinctive style, no question. I shall have to ask him for another cover one of these days.*

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Nobody, really. Mostly bills in the mail, and campaign emails. These are things I could easily do without. **sigh**

CORFLU HEATWAVE DEAD DOG PARTY

This photo to the right was taken at something like 9:45 PM Sunday in the consulate. Pictured in conversation are Jeanne Gomoll, Andrew Hooper, Keith Freeman, and the feet belong to Mark Olson. Sandra Bond is in the distant background, tip-tapping away on her tablet.

Hope to see you folks next year!



Well, another issue winds down. I don't like to have such a big gap between issues – the previous issue of this fine, feathered fanzine came out last December – because it's hard to maintain any kind of real continuity. Then again, I have had multiple and perfectly valid reasons for such a publishing schedule.

Which raises a good question: what is considered the “ideal” fanzine publication schedule? Is it a monthly, quarterly, thrice or twice yearly, annually, or biannual, or what? Lee Hoffman devised the legendary fanzine *Science Fiction Five Yearly*, starting in 1951 which saw a total of 12 issues during its run: the last issue was published in 2006, and won the 2007 FAAn Award and the Best Fanzine Hugo award that same year.

Over the years most fanzines have aspired to a regular quarterly schedule, allowing for an easy segue into a thrice-yearly rate when needed; that seems about right for zines produced on paper (also called ‘dead-tree’ fanzines) and electronically. These days the online environment makes it easier and more cost-effective to publish much more frequently, so the rise of monthly and bimonthly fanzines is now more common. Back in the days of mimeographs and spirit duplicators (ditto machines), even hectographs, some enterprising fans even attempted weekly and biweekly fanzines, but in that endeavor lies madness. Then there are fanzines with gaps spanning years or decades between issues, often acting as if the last issue appeared less than a month ago. Well, we do time-bind a lot, I admit.

So where am I going with this? Well, I would love to produce two more issues of *Askance* this year. The 49th issue is tentatively scheduled for the Labor Day Weekend (call it the first week of September), and then the 50th issue will be posted/mailed in late December of 2020. I already have a cover for the 49th issue on hand, provided by Al Sirois, and Ulrika O'Brien has agreed to do the 50th issue's cover art. I can't wait to see what she does, but I know it will be lovely.

That 50th issue will definitely include my long-time fannish writing project, the fan-musical *The Sound of Fanac*, complete with song lyrics. Getting that fershlugginer fannish musical completed for the 50th issue of my fanzine sounds like a natural deadline, so there's another writing project for this year. Well, it's good to be busy during the Year of the Lockdown.

As usual, I encourage any and all fan writers and artists to contribute something for these upcoming issues: convention reports, fannish gatherings, reviews, and items of general sf interest are appreciated.



what's
next

Help Celebrate Bob Madle's 100th Birthday!

Just as I was applying the finishing touches to this issue, Curt Phillips started posting this message all over the known fannish universe to various listservs and Facebook. Even though I have never met him, in recognition of his importance to the science fiction community, I am sending my birthday card to Bob Madle this afternoon (May 26th, 2020). With Curt's permission, here is the message to all and sundry:

Bob Madle will celebrate his 100th birthday on June 2, 2020. Originally there was to be a fairly lavish birthday party at Bob's home in Rockville, MD, but now for obvious reasons that can't happen. So I have a favor to ask of every Fan reading this message, no matter where you are. Would you please join me in sending Bob Madle a birthday card?

Bob was one of the original members of the fandom we're all part of today, and is almost the last living link we have with our earliest history. He was an original member of the Philadelphia SF Society and the Science Fiction League. He was at the 1936 Philadelphia SF Conference, and was at the first Worldcon in 1939. He served in WWII, came home, and became a specialty SF book dealer and still operates that business. He wrote the column INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION for the Columbia pulps in the 50's, was the TAFF delegate in 1957, and was for many years a fixture in convention dealer's rooms everywhere. He's a very knowledgeable and passionate science fiction fan and nearly all of his contemporaries are gone now. Please join me in sending Bob a birthday card for his 100th birthday, just to let him know that Fandom remembers and appreciates his lifetime of devotion to science fiction. Bob is a good friend whom I last saw about a year ago when I visited him in Rockville, and I deeply wish that I could be there in person to wish him a happy birthday this year. I would love it if the Post Office delivers a sack full of birthday cards to his home this year, and that's why I'm asking your help. Please take a moment to find a birthday card, or write a note, and drop it in the mail to:

Robert A. Madle
4406 Bestor Drive
Rockville, MD 20853-2137

Bob doesn't have an email address, and doesn't use a computer so an old fashioned birthday card is the way to go. It will be very easy for each of you to let this request slip by, but I'm asking you to help make Bob's 100th birthday a little happier by sending that card or note.

And please help spread the word to every fan and fannish group you know. No matter what your fannish interests are, no matter what area of fandom you might inhabit, comics fan, Star Trek fan, gamer, filker, cosplayer, fanzine fan, convention fan, or a

book & magazine collector; it all traces back to the fandom of the 1930's and Bob Madle is right at the heart of it. He was there in the beginning and he's still here with us. This may be your only chance to ever tell him "thanks" for helping to get Fandom going and for helping to keep it alive for all of us today.

Please copy this request to any fans or fannish groups you can think of. Convention mailing lists, clubs, what have you. This is a once in a lifetime event that we all can share in. If you live outside the US and don't think you can get a card in the mail in time, you can also email me your greetings for Bob which I'll print out and promptly mail to him.

My personal thanks to all who help celebrate the 100th birthday of our friend, Bob Madle.

Best,

Curt Phillips

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Happy 100th birthday, Bob Madle!

Photo taken by Jay Kay Klein; from fanac.org website

