



Askew #23

January 2018

The personalzine, returning now to its stated intention of being a paper-only fanzine, of one John Purcell. The mailing address to use when sending fanzines in trade is as follows:

3744 Marielene Circle, College Station, Texas 77845 USA

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Since I've Been Gone

Not surprisingly, many things have transpired during the interim between issues 22 and 23. One of these has been producing three issues of *TAFF News*, the so-called monthly newsletter of the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, of which I am the North American Administrator for the next 19 months, and tabulating votes in the 2018 TAFF Race as said votes come in. So far that is going very well. To refresh your memories, there are three delightful candidates vying for the right to travel to North America from their European shores to attend the 76th World Science Fiction Convention in San Jose, California this coming August 16th to 20th. In *TAFF News #3* – available at www.efanzines.com and on the TAFF website www.taff.org.uk – there is extensive biographical information of each candidate (Johan Anglemark, Fia Karlsson, and Helena McCallum) along with a picture. Feel free to read and peruse in order to cast an informed vote. Voting is open until midnight of April 3, 2018. The official paper ballot is available with each issue of *TAFF News* (except #3) and on the TAFF website. Feel free to download the ballot, then complete it and send it to the appropriate administrator for your side of the Atlantic. A minimum donation of \$4 USD or £3 British Sterling or €3 Euro is required for your vote to count. Just follow the instructions on the paper ballot or online ballot (<http://taff.org.uk/vote.php>). It is all rather quite simple. Join the fun and help support this worthy fannish cause. I am including the paper ballot with this issue just because I'm that kind of nice guy.

Also on the fannish front, two segments of my 2017 TAFF Trip Report have appeared in fanzines other than my own: *Vibrator #46* (edited by Graham Charnock) came out last November and contains "Riding on the Metro," which is one part of our experiences in Paris, France; and the current issue of *Exhibition Hall* (from Chris Garcia and James Bacon) has "I'd Like to Buy a Vowel," which covers Bath, England, and Cardiff, Wales, where the Doctor Who Experience was located. Yeah: was. It closed in early September

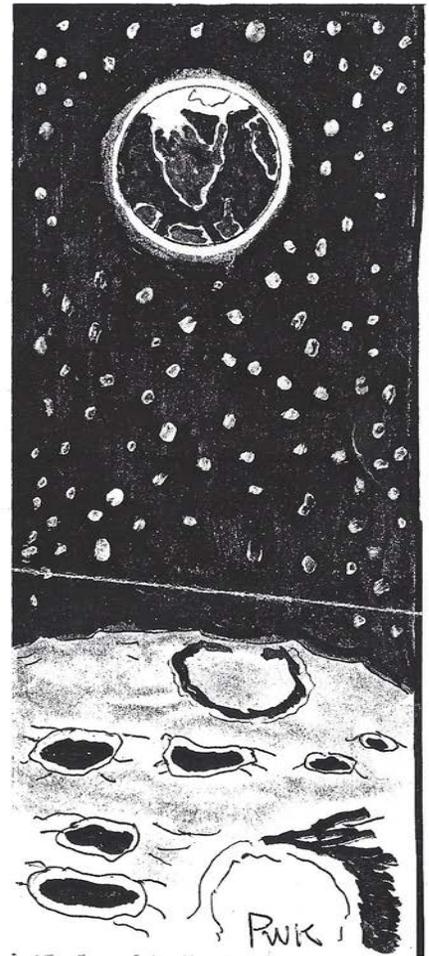
last year, but may reopen elsewhere in the near future. Nothing has been decided yet. Stay tuned, Whovian fans. The upcoming March issue of *Beam* will contain “Skeltons in the Closet,” the first weekend that Valerie and I spent in England last July. I am also finishing up (this week) “I See London, Part One: the Arrival” for *Banana Wings* (Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer) and “Down to the Sea to See Ships” for *Inca* (Rob Jackson). Yes, I have been a busy boy.

And finally, last week – on January 26th to be exact – another member of the Minnesota Science Fiction Society (Minn-stf) passed away. Rob Ihinger (1955-2018) was a mainstay in the club for at least thirty-five years, working on Minicon, the club’s main spring convention, in all sorts of capacities in that time. For the last two years Rob battled leukemia, and it looked like he was going to kick its ass, but suffered setbacks over the second half of last year. I really liked him, and miss him very much. He was a very smart, funny man, and leaves behind his wife Peg and three daughters. Rob was 62 years old – the same age of Baron David Romm when he died last summer, whom I wrote about in *Askew* #21.

Offal Thoughts

Here we are, folks: one year into the Trumpocalypse. Normally I don’t wax political in these pages, but sometimes I do. Herewith are some thoughts politic for your consideration.

I originally wanted to title this section “Awful Thoughts,” but then the homonym “offal” popped into my head, and that word sounded much more appropriate for this topic, that being the one year anniversary of the beginning of the Trumpocalypse. One thing I cannot say is that it has been boring. Far from it. One year of this man in the White House has produced more conflict, more shenanigans, more accusations, more stupidity, and more insulting, childish behavior than any other presidency in the history of the United States of America. One major reason the Toddler-in-Chief is still residing at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NE, Washington, DC 22205 is because the Republican Party – a.k.a., the Grand Obstructionist Party – has a majority in both chambers of Congress and a simple majority in the Supreme Court. Now, keep in mind that whenever an elected official takes the oath of office, that individual swears on the religious tome of their choice – usually their personal edition of the Bible - to defend the Constitution of the United States, so help him/her God. By not lifting a finger to actually do something about the Toddler-in-Chief – such as censuring him, begin impeachment procedures, invoke the 4th clause of the 25th Amendment, or whatever – Congress is not doing its duty. They haven’t even *tried* to reprimand him, which would be essentially a slap on the wrist and sending him to bed without supper. The least Congress should do is take away his cell phone and television watching privileges.



This is not to say that all of Congress is at fault. Nope. It is the Republican Party – remember? They have a simple majority in the Senate and a 35-seat advantage in the House of Representatives – that is holding the democratic process hostage. Heck, the GOP has some serious internal divisions of their own that threaten to rupture resulting in the party's implosion. Instead, they go about their business of whatever, or rather, they do not appear to care about the future of America except for how it should be run according to their warped vision of reality. This naturally flies in the face of what the Democratic Party – the so-called party of the people – wants to do for the nation in terms of *their* vision. The end result is a political stalemate where basically very little, if that, gets done in the Federal Legislature. You know, the US government makes World Science Fiction Society Worldcon meetings look majestically efficient!



And then there is the Toddler-in-Chief, who just last night gave his first State of the Union speech, and I did not watch it. Instead, I again opted (this is what I have been doing for the past twenty years) to wait until the next day when I can read a text transcript of the speech. Needless to say, I am not impressed. Per usual, Herr Trumpenführer spoke in generalities (arguably a common theme year in and year out, no matter who's president), claimed credit for progress that the previous administration put into effect, spoke divisively, and fairly often used a limited vocabulary (words like "incredible, wonderful, great," and such), besides revealing his insidious bigoted mindset. He claims to be non-racist and unbigoted, but everything he does or says shows otherwise. Some psychiatrists have tentatively diagnosed him as a malignant narcissist. Look it up: the description fits him like a \$500 clown suit.

So I have come to the conclusion that #45 – I just can't call him by his given name; I'm sorry, I just can't – that in his mind, he believes that he *isn't* these things, but the reality is that his political naiveté and general ignorance of the greater world reveals his true nature: he is mentally and emotionally unfit to be president. Of anything. I wouldn't even elect him class president, although I would vote for him as class clown. I believe our current American president is emotionally and intellectually incompetent, and therefore must be removed from office. However, as I said, the Republican Party won't do it. They don't care what happens to America as long as it becomes *what their* vision of America is, and forget what happens to the citizens. The 1% is taking care of itself, and that's their vision. To hell with everybody else: we gotta take care of our own. The rest of you...eh. Whatever.

True confession time: going back to Europe and teaching ESL in Prague sounds really good to me right now.

Books

In honor of two authors who are near and dear to fans of science fiction and fantasy, here are the books – just a couple so far, although two other books are currently being read – I finished reading in the month of January this year. As is my custom, I am including some brief thoughts about each.

Asimov, Isaac. *Foundation*. Avon. (1972 edition), 200 pages.

In honor of Science Fiction Day (January 2nd), which is celebrated on the birthday of Isaac Asimov (1920-1992), I figured that would be a good reason to reread this novel, which I first read in my junior year in high school, mumble-dy-mumble years ago. While I still enjoyed reading it as an entertaining story, a couple of things struck me. The first is that there is a total lack of female characters in this first book of the *Foundation* Trilogy. When I consider this fact with the accusations of Asimov's behavior towards women at conventions over the years, this definitely raises questions about the Good Doctor's sexism. I think this is quite the knock against a brilliant man who could tell a damn good story. This is the second thing about *Foundation*: even though it has been 47 years since I first read the book (sheesh, that's a long time!), it is still fun to read, and I do like the intriguing concept of Hari Seldon's psychohistory that drives the story-line.

This raises a somewhat interesting question: Should the *Foundation* Trilogy not be read due to Asimov's perceived sexism? My personal answer is "no" because this series of books is one of the landmarks of the field. In 1966 it was awarded a special Hugo Award for the Best Science Fiction Series of all time. These days that conclusion is debatable, but consider when that award was bestowed: Asimov was 46 years old and still writing excellent SF, besides tons of other books. I think any science fiction fan worth his weight in salt should read the *Foundation* Trilogy. Sexism aside, this is grand space opera.

LeGuin, Ursula K. *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Bantam Books (1975 edition), 183 pages.

It was a real shocker to get home from work on January 22nd and read the notices that Ursula K. LeGuin had passed away at the age of 88. Her *Earthsea* novels form another of those book series' that are considered must-reads for fans of science fiction and fantasy, in addition to LeGuin's masterworks *The Left-Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974). I also recommend reading her story collection *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (1975) and practically anything she ever wrote. In 2014 she was bestowed with the National Book Award, and Ms. LeGuin was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1997. I was at last year's World SF Convention in Helsinki, Finland, when her essay collection *Words Are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books (2000-2016)* won the Hugo for Best Related Work, which beat out the book I voted for (*Traveler of Worlds: Conversations with Robert Silverberg*, by Silverberg and Alvaro Zinos-Amaro). Let me just stop there and say, "Read anything by Ursula K. LeGuin. You won't regret it."

So about *A Wizard of Earthsea*. This is an extraordinary adventure that I believe any teenager, male or female, would enjoy reading. The central character is Ged, who is born into wizardry – he is an innate – and develops his skill at a sorcerer's school. Naturally, there are personality conflicts with other students, and this causes Ged to do something very foolish, which becomes a driving force for the rest of his life. The premise of *A Wizard of Earthsea* sounds a lot like J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, but predates the *Potter* series by decades. I admit that I have not read all of the *Earthsea* books – there are a total of five novels and other shorter works in this canon – and I definitely plan to rectify this oversight.

LeGuin's writing style is very easy to get into, and recommend this book as an introduction to young adult fantasy. For that matter, the Harry Potter books are likewise well-written, but in my mind, the LeGuin books are much better in terms of literacy and characterization. Start your young readers off with the best.

The other novels in the Earthsea saga are *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971), *The Farthest Shore* (1972), *Tehanu* (1990), and *The Other Wind* (2001). Based on what I have read in the first book, I will definitely be reading the rest.

skewered results

letters from readers



Well, I received a few missives from some readers. Contents of letters are in non-italic Calibri size 11 font, while my rejoinders shall be italicized in bold-faced Times New Roman, size 11 font. Onward! Into the breach we go!

John D. Berry
john@johndberry.com
December 23, 2017

I'm surprised at Paul Skelton's remark that small, frequent fanzines are too small and frequent for him to respond to. It's always been my experience, and that of many other fan editors I've known, that it was the small, fast-moving fanzines that got the most response, while the big issues that you might labor over seemed to get little response at all. It's almost comforting to hear a counter-example.

I haven't been a regular reader of *Askance*; I'm sure this isn't my first exposure to your fan-editing ways, but I feel like I'm coming to it with a fresh perspective. What immediately strikes me is that you seem to

be printing the entirety of each letter you get instead of editing them. I've always been an adherent of the Boyd Raeburn theory of lettercolumn editing: print only the good stuff. If that's one line, print one line; if it's ten pages, print ten pages. There's no point to including salutations and comments on the mechanics of how the letter writer got the issue (unless the letter writer is Paul Skelton, who can weave a wonderful fabric from the most ephemeral and unpromising material).

My other comment is the one you'd expect from me: a typographic gripe. The most important factor in making readable paragraphs is the line length, in number of characters per line. Yours are pretty long; longer than is really comfortable or easy to read. Not impossibly so, and at least you leave a reasonable bit of space between the lines, but the pages would be more inviting if you lopped off an inch or more of the length of all the lines. Of course, you could achieve the same effect by making the type size larger. Your choice of typeface is good: Calibri is a very readable text face. But give it a little help!

John Berry

I appreciate the critical eye you have, John. My hope is that the layout of this issue is much more eye appealing than previous efforts. As we age, the visual appeal of text helps a lot. Grammatically speaking, I try to vary the lengths of sentences. Their length, in my mind, is determined by what the writer wants to say. () As far as the salutations and such for the letters, sometimes I use them, sometimes I don't. If I received more letters, I will probably not run an entire letter. Again, it all depends on editorial decision at the time. If I need to make page count work out evenly, I will most likely include an entire letter. For example in this issue, I am running practically entire letters. Oh, well. If more people would write, I would simply use the most interesting parts of their letters and put them in a coherent order – or something like that. As I said, it all depends. Letter columns are a tricky creature to tame.*

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

December 28, 2017

I am sorry for not being better in touch. There's so much to do at home, and so much that needs to be done now that Yvonne is retired and at home. I have a huge stack of fanzines to respond to, but little time to do it in. I have two issues of *Askew*, 21 and 22, which came out the other day, so this is a fine time to catch up a little.

21...Your TAFF trip sounded like the best trip ever. I doubt I could ever do a trip like that. You've been the perfect TAFF candidate because you're retired and in good health, and willing to be away from home for an extended period of time. A shame about Dave Romm...I only met him once at a Chicago Worldcon, I think 1991.

My loc...yup, I have hit 40 years in fandom, and with the odd occasion, it has hit back. The job I have, I have been there for just over three weeks, but it is a part-time job. Some \$\$ coming in means I can continue to look for better work, and I can't think of a better time than to go for interviews at the

beginning of the fiscal year. I need to find some pictures of Yvonne, but a friend of ours from Montreal provided me with a great photomontage of Yvonne as Queen Victoria at the time of her birthday. Have a look at my Facebook page to see her.

I look forward to the trip report. The van Toorns are great folks, and we got to know them way back in the late 80s when we volunteered to be the Canadian agents for the Holland in '90 Worldcon bid. We did get to go, and it was our only trip to Europe.

22...Indeed, losing Randy Byers was a major loss for us all. May we all be remembered as such when it is our time to leave. Sorry I didn't get anything into this local, but better late than never. Ah, egoboo is mine, saith Rich Dengrove, and I thank him. I was surprised as anyone to realize how long I've been involved, and there are many who have been involved longer, but 40 is a pretty good number. Where's my gold watch, dammit? I don't especially like the word cosplay, but it is the term being used these days. Thanks for all the feelgood from this issue, it's been a while.

I need to see how many issues of *Vibrator* I am behind, but once I do that, here it comes, Graham. I will catch up, famous last words. True, I do blather on about steampunk here and there, but I find I need fanac that is participatory. Steampunk events let me do that. Modern-day litcons seem now to demand that you buy the books, and shut up for the readings. There has to be more for me to do than simply be a part of someone else's audience.

I am on holiday layoff from my job, with a lack of work, so my Christmas present from my boss is to greatly reduce my paycheque, but at least I have a little time to write. Our next big event is our 35th wedding anniversary in May, and we are planning something interesting for that time. Thanks for these issues, and I have an *Askance* to comment on. See you then.

Lloyd Penney

Actually, Lloyd, I am not retired, and probably won't be for at least five years: I have student loans to finish paying off, you see. Besides, I really love what I do for a living. I envy Yvonne being retired now, and hope that someday you two kids can make another journey down to Texas so we can all get together and have a good time. Lots of Steampunk events here! () The TAFF Trip Report is growing by leaps and bounds. Sometimes I feel like screaming "It's alive!" and run headlong into the gloaming night. This reminds me - I really need to get this issue done and in the mail so I can finish the segments to Banana Wings and Inca. Then I'll finish off what I'm putting into the next Askance. A fan writer's work is never done.*

I ALSO HEARD FROM

Mike Glycer – for whom I wrote an appreciation for the 40th anniversary of *File 770*

Robert Lichtman – acknowledging receipt of zine



Last Page Thoughts

Well, it appears I have some room to fill here to make the page count come out even. *sigh* Hate it when this happens.



The best way to deal with this is include yet another plug for the 2018 East to West Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund race. Included in the envelope carrying this sterling example of verbosity and blatherings to make page count come out Just Right so I don't have to worry too terribly much about finding something to write, plus I can piss off John D. Berry (see above) at the same time, is the official ballot for said TAFF race. If you have voted already, I thank you profusely. If not, there is plenty of time. As I finish off this issue, the date is February 1, 2018, and paper copies will be plopped into the mailbox starting tomorrow, February 2nd. That means there are exactly two more months for people to vote. See page one of this issue for the online voting link if

you would rather do it that way. I did. Very easy to do, and so easy for us Administrators (Anna Raftery is the current European TAFF Administrator) to tally up votes and keep track of donations. We thank everybody for contributing and making this effort so worthwhile. Can't do it without you! So hugs all around!

Fanzine Thoughts

How would you like a couple fanzine reviews? If Andrew Hooper can do this in *Flag*, why not here? Fanzines feed off each other. (That thought puts an image in my mind of a Steve Stiles illo doing a fannish version of the worm Ouroborous. Let's see if he picks up on this mention. Shh! Say nothing. Act casual.) NOTE: These zines are available at www.efanzines.com for your downloading pleasure.

***Ionosphere #8.* (December 2017) editor: John Thiel (kinethiel@comcast.net).**

This is another publication of the National Fantasy Fan Federation organization (N3F) under the sub-heading of "Fan-Pro Coordinating Bureau." Sounds good. Each issue, like this one, has interviews with authors, discusses their work, and provides readers with some interesting authorial insights. It's not earth-shattering material, but can be worthwhile if you like the writers being interviewed. The 8th issue features Arlan Andrews and Jeffrey Redmond.

***CyberCozen Vol. XXIX, No. 12* (December 2017) editor: Leybl Botwinik (leybl.botwinik@yahoo.com)**

The monthly publication of the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy. This is always an interesting fanzine to read. Very scientifically and serious-constructive (sercon) in focus, but good reading, nonetheless.