



July 2008

Askance

Edited and published by John Purcell, 3744 Marielene Circle, College Station, TX 77845

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In case anybody has noticed, this is another Mythical Publication. Copies of this fine, bimonthly fanzine can be had for The Usual, which means expressed interest, submission and eventual inclusion of articles and artwork, letters of comment, expressed interest, and if you really want to get mercenary about it, cold hard cash in the amount of \$2.00 USD. Money is always helpful, don'tcha know.

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Artwork:

Cover – Taral Wayne

Bill Rotsler – 3, 43; James Bacon- 5; image googled “Blood and Shadows” – 6; image googled “Jonah Hex” – 7; image googled “Bubba Ho-tep” – 8; image googled “Joe Lansdale”- 9; image googled “drive-in” – 11; Steve Stiles - 15; image googled “Black Hole” - 17; image googled “Mount Wilson Observatory” – 19; picture from Greg Benford’s website – 20, 22; image googled “Galactic Odyssey” – 21; photos by John Purcell – 23, 37; Taral Wayne – 24, 25; image googled “Indiana” – 27; Alan White – 29; image googled “hinterlands” - 32; Stephane Bourzeix - 42; Trinlay Khadro – 39, 45; Ditmar – back cover.

Good gravy, look what's going on...

This particular issue is like one of those sea horse farms once advertised on Saturday morning cartoon shows or back in the ads of old comic books. You know what I mean: put these colored blobs into water and watch them grow into sea horses right before your very eyes! That is basically what has happened with this issue of Askance: right before my very eyes, it has kept growing and growing and growing to the point of being over fifty pages long. Another first.

Really large issues are not my forte, but I have been planning to do this special Joseph R. Lansdale issue for quite a while now, and so here 'tis. In the meantime, I acquired various other goodies along the way. Some of them will be in future issues: Chris Garcia sent an article that will be in the September issue, as will be part two of Lee Anne Lavell's "Bumpy Byways"; part three will be in the 11th issue (November). Also in the September issue will be a wonderful article from Eric Mayer called "Fielding Practice", which is perfect timing just before the baseball playoffs begin.

Not only written stuff is already stashed away for future issues. I have covers lined up from Steve Stiles (September), Marc Schirmeister (November), and Dan Steffan (January, '09). All of these promise to be delightful – I have already seen the preliminary work-up of Schirm's cover, and it's something else even in the drafting stage – and I can't wait to get these issues out. Unfortunately, I can't speed up time, so wait I must. Patience is a virtue, I hear.

All in all, this is a fun problem to have. Material on hand makes fan-editing much easier and less writing for me. Speaking of which...

No, I am NOT another James Bacon...

The month of July, 2008 has been one of those productive months for me, or so it seems if you've been perusing the postings to www.efanzines.com. Since the beginning of the year I have written five articles, four of which have just been pubbed in assorted zines:

"Olympic Trials at the Purcell Petting Zoo" *Challenger* #28
"Snake-Wrangler Penny" *Drink Tank* #174
"By the Numbers" *Time and Again* #4
"Percolations: fanzine review column" *VFW* #108

The fifth article, "When Moonflowers Last on the Mailbox Bloom'd", will appear in the next *Knarley Knews*, which Henry Welch informs me will most likely be September, '08 once he is all done passing the California bar exams and has moved into his new abode out there.

With all of those promised articles out of the way, I can finally concentrate on finishing thisish and getting back on the dissertation track. Summertime is always a bit more relaxed in terms of doctoral work, unless you're doing research. Which, in truth, I am, but on an unofficial level. I may have to write something up someday about it for this or somebody else's zine. Just not right now.

Who did what and why in this issue...

There is a whole raft of characters floating around in this issue, so this is going to be quite an extensive listing. Take a deep breath, and let's see who these folks are:

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James Bacon

When I announced last year that I wanted to produce a Joe Lansdale issue, James jumped at the chance to crank out a couple articles, even going so far as to give some wonderful questions to include in my e-mail interview with Joe. Then this productive, recently-married wordsmith sent in a review of Joe Lansdale's Atomic Chili. How could I possibly refuse?

Gregory Benford, PhD

Getting this article from Greg was an unexpected joy and has an interesting story behind it. Last fall – or early this year; something like that - Steve Stiles sent me an illo he had drawn for the “now defunct” fanzine Blat! Seeking to know the story behind the illo, I forwarded a copy of the illo to Greg Benford, who immediately recognized its source, then within a couple days I had the article “An Odyssey Galactic” in my hot little editorial hands. It is indeed an honor and a privilege to welcome Greg to these pages. With luck – and falling gas prices, to say nothing of having a roommate to help cut costs – I will be seeing him again up in Dallas for FenCon V over the October 3-5, 2008 weekend, where he will be the pro Guest of Honor.

Rich Coad

Here is another big fan of Joe Lansdale's fiction who also produces the superb fanzine Sense of Wonder Stories. Rich is a long-time fanzine fan living it up in California, and his presence is yet another wonderful addition to Askance. When I asked Rich to write something about Joe Lansdale, he asked if anybody had done up the Drive-In books. “Nope,” I replied, and so that is what Rich covered. I have only read The Drive-In 2, and thoroughly enjoyed it; completely gonzo stuff, but fun, fun, fun. This review might direct some of you to local bookstores for the series.

Bill Fischer

Once again, Bill double-dips with the final segment of the “I, Roomba” series of Figby cartoons – or is it? – plus the latest Wikiphilia entry from his fertile and admittedly demented mind, this one being about the order of Croutonic Knights. One of these years I am going to have to collect all of the Figby's and Wikiphilia entries into respective volumes. Think they'd sell?

Lee Anne Lavell

Here she comes again with another marvelous segment of her fannish memoirs. This is Part One of Three in a series of reminiscences Lee calls “Traveling the Bumpy Byways.” I have to agree; going down the fannish road definitely is full of bumps, to say nothing of deep ruts and even deeper chuck-holes that can swallow fans whole and spit out the gore-stained, indigestible bones of unwary travelers. (Egad, now I'm beginning to write like Joe Lansdale...Or maybe Robert E. Howard in a Lovecraftian mood.)

Lloyd Penney

Actually, Lloyd's not here, man. This time it's me again, your humble editor, taking over the fanzine review task while Lloyd begins a second part-time job up in Toronto. Even right now, writing this tiny paragraph, I still haven't decided which zines to cover. Oh, well. I will figure it out by tomorrow morning.

Taral Wayne

Since Lloyd couldn't write something for this issue, it was a complete surprise – and, yes, also wonderful – to receive Taral's article inspired by James Bacon's review (in *Askance* #7) of *Invasion* by Hendrik Willem Van Loon, an alternative history novel from the 1930s of what America would be like if Nazi Germany had invaded and taken over our country. Taral's essay is not only excellent, but he also sent along some illustrations for the article, which I am only too happy to include. By doing so I maintain the distinct Canadian flavour in this zine since Lloyd couldn't send in his fanzine reviews. The things I do for continuity...

Enjoy the issue, folks!



Lansdale: What else can you say?

by James Bacon

Sometime in the early nineties, I was handed a Joe R. Lansdale book while standing in Dandelion Books, a fine second hand bookshop on the south side of Dublin's City Centre, with the best selection at the time of SF in the country.

I am pretty sure that it was Mucho Mojo, the second in the Hap Collins and Leonard Pine series. I had never heard about Joe R. and to be honest I was working my way through a lot of interesting fiction as well as SF and I would never really have counted myself as a crime reader which the book implied was its genre.

Well, to be honest, I am not sure what genre Lansdale writes in; he gets a lot of interesting tags. Splatterpunk is one that sounds great, but is too vague. Lansdale is a great American writer, and he has the uniqueness that I have found with other writers, such as Wolfe and Thompson, and is nearly in a genre all of his own. I was finding these writers suddenly, and interspersing genres as my friends and piers rushed to press good reads upon me. I have to be honest, these early recommendations - Rankin, White, Lansdale, Dick, Thompson and Newman - have somehow always been with me since.

I loved Hap and Leonard, they were such a great pair of friends. East Texas seemed to be alien enough from the America I know from TV and also normal enough to an Irish boy that it is a place I still yearn to visit. To soak in sweat as I sup a cold beer and eat good burgers. The Hap and Leonard books have a particular magic, which is generated by the incredible friendship that these two men have. Leonard is a very tough gay black man who doesn't shirk responsibility, served in Nam, and is a hard-working man with certain morals, and well able to handle himself. His friend Hap is a white romantic man, always falling in love with trouble, a man who wouldn't go to Vietnam because of his principles, and possesses a sharp-mouth that gets him into strife at times. They are the ebony and ivory of these stories that just adds a level of depth and texture to gripping mysteries.

It makes the reader wish that they could meet these two characters on a hot day and shoot cans off a log. The situations that they end up in stem from things that could happen to anyone, in a way, and this, as well as the beautifully vivid descriptions of east Texas, gets mixed with the fantastic dialogue, forming a quick, humorous, dangerous, and vitriolic language. The profanity is just brilliant and it takes the reader from rip-roaring laughing highs to absolute lows as we follow these characters through their tales of ordinary life, with a few interesting ups and downs.

There are a total of seven novels and a collection of shorts and excerpts starring Hap Collins and Leonard Pine, and they are marketed as mysteries, and you know that's what they are, as well as everything else, too. It's great reading and I fell in love with them

To be honest, though, the moment I knew I felt that Joe R Lansdale was a god was when I read the first

chapter of *Bad Chili*. I had personally met Lansdale by this stage, so I have never had the opportunity to thank him for the amazing opening chapter that is everything Lansdale.

But those first four pages of *Bad Chili*. . . gosh wow. I used to just wander around with the book in hand at UK fun-type conventions and force it upon people; four pages read very quickly, and everyone would laugh and enjoy it, and I hope I created some fans. At one stage I even read the first four pages out at a convention as an example of fine literature that I would encourage others to read. Now, though, dear reader, you can read it for yourself. Amazon allows you to read the first bit, including the four pages of the first chapter, here:

http://www.amazon.com/gp/reader/0446606022/ref=sib_dp_pt#reader-link

The last Hap and Leonard book was released in 2001, and I am hoping that one does come out in the next decade, as Lansdale has stated will happen.

Veils' *Visit the Hap and Leonard* collection of shorts and excerpts includes an eponymous story by Lansdale and crime writer Andrew Vachss is available to read for free online on Mr. Vachss website here: http://www.vachss.com/av_books/short_stories/veils_visit2.html

This is indeed an interesting take on the characters, and Vachss and Joe R., known not only to be friends, but mutual admirers. This is something about Lansdale that comes across; he appreciates other writers and writing, but is not a sycophant. His take on Tarzan or Conan are examples of how he takes something he adores himself and really puts a lot of effort into it and brings about an excellent version of a character.

So I met the man.

I was encouraged to go to the World Fantasy Con in London. By this stage, I had just opened a bookshop and was no longer running Octocon. (Well, not that year anyhow.) It was the Eurocon debacle which I had extracted myself from previously; you see, I don't run a con, but I open a bookshop instead.

Anyhow, Maura McHugh and a bunch of Dublin fans were going to World Fantasy Con, and I thought that sounded good. It was expensive - about £75 English pounds, and this at a time when the likes of Eastercon were £28 and Trincon 2 in Dublin was £15. So this was expensive indeed, but the up side was that it was billed as a professional event. It was indeed. There were about 300 professionals out of the 600 or so attendees. It was more like a conference than a convention. There were panels and a dealer's room and talks, but the mass signing was mental - and there was Joe R. Lansdale, at a round table, all on his own.

The body twitched and, like an AC/DC song, I made for my target. He was so cool. We chatted for a long time about his books, comics, and generally Texas. He has an amazing accent, strong and deep, and he was happy to curse, which is something to hear. I explained how I was a fan, but also a bookshop owner, and we talked books. He was interested in Irish literature, so I said I would send him some stuff, and he gave me his address.

I sent him the likes of Flann O'Brien (a very strange author), Brian O'Nolan, who all SF readers should at least indulge in once to see what an Irish satirist and surrealist of the fifties was like. I sent him the *Third Policeman*, I think amongst a selection of others, it was a good parcel. In return, he sent me a proof of a comic and a hard back collection - *Weird Business* and *Atomic Chili* (more elsewhere), a dream of a parcel for me. I still have the envelope. He was truly a wonderful gent; very Texan, I think. But I never got



to speak to him about Beebo the squirrel, which is a shame. I have a special spot for Beebo.

The rest of the convention was a blur; BIG kudos go to Steve Jones and Jo Fletcher. It was mammoth. I got so much free stuff, so much free booze at book launches, and generally it was a real blinder of a weekend. Even when authors were off to get schmoozed, a book launch would be on with free canapés or something. It was like nothing I had ever been to before or since. It was great. I had a ball. I met the man. I also met Christopher Lee. Joe was still the man!

Comics, of course, have always featured highly on the reading list, since I was, er, four or something. Although it's pretty good that I didn't get to read Lansdale comics at that age, six would have been better, I expect.

Lansdale, naturally, held the torch for Western Comics in the nineties. There wasn't much about, to be honest, and since I was already reading the madness of Garth Ennis and now a fan of the written word of our man Joe R., Jonah Hex was a natural choice.

The character has a shorter history than most comic characters, appearing in *All-Star Western #10* in 1972. This changed to *Weird Western Tales* where Jonah Hex could be found up to 1977, when he got his own eponymous title, which ran for 92 issues up to 1985. There was an unfortunate HEX series which lasted a short while and then nothing. So when Lansdale came along in 1993 with artist Tim Truman, who

has a particular appreciation in that fan favourite way in western comics, it was a real return to glory.



Lansdale's stories had the right mix of grit, violence, and that pinch of weirdness that is just right in a western setting. He had three miniseries with Hex and also had a miniseries called *Blood and Shadows* in 1996. I was getting my Lansdale comic fix for sure. The graphic novel, *Red Range* is one to look for, another favourite. More recently, although some of Lansdale's work has been adapted by others, it's not exactly to my liking, but it's out there.

Great thing about Hex is that he has appeared elsewhere, and Showdown was a Lansdale involved Animated Batman episode. I loved what Bruce Timm and Paul Dini did with *The Batman*: the style art, the imagery and darkness, the pulp 30's feeling. Showdown was written by Kevin Alitieri, Paul Dini and Bruce Timm, but Joe R. Lansdale did the teleplay.

Batman and Robin interrupt Ra's Al Ghul while he raids a retirement home. Ra's leaves the duo a tape explaining what he is about. We go back to 1883 and the western expansion. We see a big man, in what might be southern greys, enter a bar; he is deformed, and he is Jonah Hex after a man, Arkady Duvall. It's the dialogue that's great, as Hex says, it's 'Hotter than a coyote with a heat rash.'

The locals ARE of scared of a Sky Monster, strange lights at night, and the sheriff is not keen to look into it, but Hex is led to the top where the lights come from in search of Duvall. He comes across an airship hanger hidden in a mountain. Ra's al Ghul wants to preserve the west with a megalomaniac plan to bomb the railway and work east until he takes Washington and is declared leader of America.

Ironically, he berates Arkady, who is working for him, because of his brutal methods. The airship is steam

powered, a boat slung under two hydrogen balloons with a *USS Monitor*-style turret atop a *CSS Virginia*-styled superstructure and hull with cannon on either side of the sloping steel sides. A bit of a strange combination of both Civil War famous fighting ships.

Hex defeats Ra's and Arkady, capturing Arkady and destroying the airship. It a great, neat western story. The twist is in the end as we find ourselves back with the Dynamic Duo that Ra's explains that Arkady served 50 years and went mad, but he has returned 100 years later for him, as he is his son. A very ironic twist, indeed. The series is brilliant, but this is just one of those episodes that I love.

Hex's scars give him an odd look. Even when he is happy he is fearsome, even as a cartoon. More recently, I must admit that *Bumper Crop*, with the variety and quickness of tales, was impressive, although released in 2004, I only got it at LA Con. Lansdale's short stories really are something else, and this collection is so genre wide that there is definitely something for everyone, if not just an opportunity to read really excellent writing cross-genre in one go. Lansdale has had some seventeen short story collections, the most recent from last year, I have yet to get even. He is always working on something it seems, but his shorts are brilliant and frequently in demand; his appearance in such tomes as *The Giant Book of Zombies* proves his versatility.

Editing is something that Lansdale is really good at, he seems to be able to bring out the best in writers. I suspect that his direction, which he can be specific about helps, so Retro Pulp tales from subterranean press in 2006 is a fine example of how this acclaimed writer seems to have the ability to bring together some great stories, from writers, I personally had not heard of.

I think *Zeppelins West* and *Flaming London* are real gems. They are brilliantly written while crossing genres with such style. Lansdale plays with both fictional situations and real historic characters. I happened to read these while on holiday once, and I must pick up copies, but the key about them is that again they allow Lansdale to work his craft stupendously. We have Wild Bill, just a Head in a jar atop a robotic device, and Martian invasions courtesy of Mr. Wells. It's great stuff if a bit mental, but then that's no problem.

I haven't made much mention of Lansdale's Zombie comic set in the Wild West, *Dead in the West*, or the cult movie, *Bubba Ho-Tep*, which has a special liking amongst those who are involved with UK fun conventions to a cult degree. I was very happy that I could tell Elvis, Matt, Dominic, and Stef that a man I had been reading for years was initially responsible for that story. It's bizarre, but then anything with an Elvis impersonator who believes he really *is* Elvis, and the only other person in the home for the clapped-out who believes him is a black man who thinks he is JFK - who was saved, dyed black, and left there by LBJ - well, its' bound to be entertaining, and the movie stars Bruce Campbell as Elvis. It's just awesome stuff, and I haven't even mentioned the Egyptian mythology stuff. It's what you would expect from the makers of *Army of Darkness* and *Phantasm* mixed with the Lansdale magic.



Do you get the picture yet? Lansdale is the hero of many genres. He is more than a horror writer or a writer of splatterpunk, or a master of spaghetti; he is a true modern entertainer with a Texan accent, and I bet has a decent swagger in his step. Actually, that's wrong, too; apparently, he is a martial arts expert and even tutors people, so he is probably very swift and light footed.

Everything about the man is brilliant.

The “Real” Joe R. Lansdale

interview by John Purcell

Editor’s Note: Originally, this interview was to have been conducted in person at AggieCon 39 in College Station, Texas, this past March, but Mr. Lansdale was not present, which bummed me out. Fortunately, through the graces of this modern age, and James Bacon providing me with Joe’s e-mail address, I was able to conduct a brief interview through the aether.

ASK: When I first met you at AggieCon 38, you seemed like such a nice, unassuming, pleasant gentleman. Then I began reading some of your stories and novels, and the incongruity between the human being Joe R. Lansdale and the writer Joe R. Lansdale was so striking. Whatever accounts for this discrepancy? Is there an “Evil Joe” that the public is unaware of?

JL: I don’t know about an evil Joe, but there is certainly a Joe that likes to look at and imagine the bizarre. I’ve always been drawn to the outré, and in some ways, that has made my career, and in other ways, its held it back. It’s made me a cult writer who hits into the mainstream, and someone whose fiction is sometimes mainstream, but there’s the other Lansdale that’s a trouble maker. I like him best.



ASK: What does the term Splatterpunk mean to you, when it’s given to your work and how would you categorize your writing?

I hate the term. I think I wrote some stories that could fit into that, but I don’t think I wrote exclusively that, so why would I be that. I told a number of writers back then who were racing to embrace the term that they were screwing up, that they were boxing themselves up and tying themselves up with a ribbon. In most cases, that’s exactly what happened. From then on, they had to do that kind of stuff, or, they wore themselves out doing that kind of stuff, trying to fulfill a certain role they had created. I have written stories that fit, but I’ve written plenty that don’t, so you can’t just choose one and call it home when you live in a lot of places as a writer.

ASK: I’ve taken to calling some of your fiction Goth-Western. Is that an accurate assessment of this type of fiction, or is it a bit too much like pigeon-holing your work for your tastes?

It’s accurate for some of the fiction, I suppose, but again, it’s not a label I’d embrace as a whole. I’ve written stories and novels that fit in many places, but when collected, they fit in only one genre: LANSDALE, or LANSDALEIAN, for what that’s worth.

ASK: You write with what could be called a “determined realism”: graphic descriptions of gore, mayhem, and all sorts of fun stuff that populate nightmares. At what point in your writing career did you make the decision to write this kind of stuff? Or did your writing simply move in that direction on its own?

I don't know that I made the decision, it just happened. And again, I've written stories that aren't that way.

ASK: Do you have any particular influences for your style/subjects?

Writers like Mark Twain and Flannery O'Connor and to some extent Carson McCuller, have been big influences, as have John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, William F. Nolan, William Goldman, Rudyard Kipling, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert E. Howard and Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. But it's a long list. Richard Price, his novel, **THE WANDERERS** taught me a lot. Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and Philip Joe Farmer is a tremendous influence, primarily in his avant garde approach and willingness to try anything, to mix ideas and genre and much of the time, if not all, go at it with a literary sensibility. Comic books were my early love, that and old movies and television shows and low budget S.F., Horror and fantasy films. All those things molded me for better or worse.

*ASK: Some of your books which I have recently read – and enjoyed – are **Cold in July**, **Dead in the West**, **The Drive-In 2**, and **By Bizarre Hands**. Do you prefer to write in one genre more than another? (Mystery vs. fantasy vs. horror, for example.)*

I go through spells. The last few years I've been doing a lot of stories and small press books that touch on childhood loves, like Verne and Wells and Burroughs, and in the more mainstream books I've been influenced more and more by the "literary" and classic writers I love. It's not the best way to run a career, but it's the best way to run a life.

*ASK: There are some other topics of interest that my devoted readership may like to know about, especially since there is a definite cross-over between science fiction and comic book fans. Recently you have had some fun with Marvel's **The Thing** in a western story; how did that come about?*

I was asked by an editor at Marvel to do a couple of short Westerns, and then he asked if I wanted to do a Fantastic Four with one of the characters in the team being the main focus, and I chose **THE THING**. The Steam Rider is a character I made up for a previous comic based on a suggestion to do something steam powered. So, I did.

ASK: What do you think of the current run of Jonah Hex with DC? Have you read that at all?

I haven't read it. I'd love to do Hex again. I think I'd have been perfect for a film script about the character.

ASK: I understand you were not personally that keen on Bubba Ho-Tep as a story, but what did you make of the movie adaptation by Don Coscarrelli?

Actually, that's not exactly correct. I wasn't that keen on the story when I finished it. It took me some time to love it. I wrote it during a weird time in my life and I wasn't sure about it or anything I was doing. I was going through some transitions in style and method of attack, and trying to decide did I want to be a "bestseller" type writer, or write what I had been writing. I actually try to do both. But, when I had time to let the story settle, I liked it a lot and think it is one of my more original and imaginative pieces. I loved the film. Coscarrelli and Ossie Davis and Bruce Campbell, and everyone involved, did a marvelous job.

ASK: When will we see another Hap and Leonard story, and have you any ideas what it will be about?

According to my editor at KNOPF, it will come out next summer, and VINTAGE has bought the Hap and Leonard backlist. The covers for the first two look great. I plan for more Hap and Leonard books, and movies have almost been made a few times, but...alas.

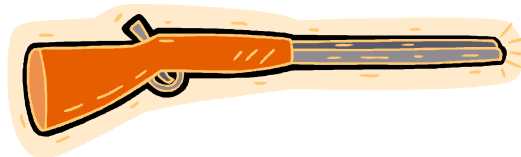
ASK: Finally, *Weird Business* was an incredible anthology of Horror Comics; would you edit such an edition again, perhaps for western comics?

I would love to edit another book like *WEIRD BUSINESS* with my co-editor and pal Rick Klaw. A Western anthology would be wonderful.

*ASK: Can you tell us a little about your next book, **Leather Maiden**?*

LEATHER MAIDEN is about Cason Statler, home from the Iraq war, and not too happy about it. He was nominated for a Pulitzer once, but, he couldn't stay away from the editor's wife at the paper where he worked, and to make it worse, he couldn't stay away from her daughter. The wife was much older than Cason, and the daughter was closer to his age, and...well, it was a mess. So he ends up at a small town East Texas paper, trying to shake his problems, trying to forget his weird and deadly friend Booger, only to come up something really weird; the disappearance of a knock-dead blonde, strange events in town that are unexplained, and may be connected to a series of strange events across the country, and finally, some villains that give villains a bad name. And Booger, his old friend and lover of combat, comes back into his life, along with a new love life. And did I mention that Cason is damn near a stalker for his ex-girl friend and obsessive compulsive. I think he's one of my best characters, and potentially a series character.

ASK: Thank you so very much for taking the time to answer these questions.



Like most of us, I am sure you have often wondered just what would happen if a large multi-lot drive-in movie theater showing an all night menu of 70s gore flicks were suddenly cut off from the remainder of the world and the fans of Herschell Gordon Lewis and Tom Savini had to create a civilization on their own. Thanks to Joe Lansdale, this particular bit of nagging speculation can be said to have been answered definitively in *THE DRIVE IN* and its sequels. Or, at the very least, Lansdale has answered the question better than anybody else has.

THE DRIVE IN, subtitled "A B-Movie with Blood and Popcorn, Made in Texas", tells the tale of three teenagers in Nacogdoches, Texas (an aside - if he has done nothing else in his career, Joe Lansdale has awakened in me an intense desire to visit Nacogdoches if only to see if it really is as he says) who are rather aimlessly drifting their way through the summer. They've graduated from high school and, not needing to work, they have little to do until Autumn comes around and they find themselves off to college. The three principal characters are Jack, the narrator, his cowboy buddy Bob, and Randy, described as a nebbishy black kid with an enormous technical knowledge of movie special effects. Joining the trio for the trip to the all-night horror movie fest at the Orbit Drive-In Theatre, is a slightly older youth named Willard who is also Randy's sometime protector. Much is made in the early portions of the novel about the envy the three friends feel over the physical abilities of their acquaintance, Willard, from the wrong side of the tracks. Willard is somebody who can kick ass while Jack, Bob, and Randy are the guys who get their asses kicked.

So the quartet makes it to a drive-in with a large sign that looks like Saturn to see five of the best titled horror movies of all time: "Night of the Living Dead", "The Evil Dead", "The Toolbox Murders", "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" and, wait for it, "I Dismember Mama". I can personally vouch that at least 60% of that bill are actually good movies. Now there they are, along with a few thousand of their peers, watching the gore drip off the 60 foot high screen and listening to tinny screams from speakers on poles (for this is a classic drive-in - not one of your effete FM stereo broadcasting weenies which might as well be indoors), when a hurtling comet heads straight for the Orbit, makes an abrupt last-minute turn sparing all from cosmic death, splits a grin, and leaves the drive-in perimeter swathed in dark matter which has a nasty tendency to dissolve anything that ventures into it.

It doesn't take long for the thin veneer of civilized behavior to be shed by several thousand gorehounds living on popcorn, raisinettes, and syrupy sodas. Too much sugar and not enough protein is making our narrator quite hypoglycemic. The world of the movies and the world at the movies begin to converge and, as other trapped viewers start to discover ways in which they can get some meat in their bellies, Jack looks about and finds it all somewhat amusing. Fortunately his cowboy chum, Bob, finally decides to share some of the beef jerky that's been keeping him sane and Jack recovers his wits just in time to see his former friends Randy and Willard get fused together by forces from beyond and emerge from the concession stand as The Popcorn King: a third-rate movie monster which wants to be worshipped and almost immediately is thanks to its invulnerability and ability to vomit prodigious quantities of popcorn and soda so long as his flock keeps a steady stream of dead bodies coming his way. About now, the book starts to get weird. And one thing Lansdale knows better than most is how to get weird. At the point where most authors are telling themselves, "I've gone too far, there, I'll have to remove that section.", Joe Lansdale is just getting started. Just in case readers had not yet got the idea that what we have here is a novel of satire, Joe has his narrator try to get religion, only to be nearly eaten by cannibal Christians (and wouldn't "Cannibal Christians" make a good movie title?), saved, assist in destroying the Popcorn King, only to be crucified and saved at the last minute by the return of the comet this time removing the flesh-eating dark matter. But the world uncovered is not the world they left as the T. Rex crossing the highway lets them know.

With an ending like that, you just know there is a sequel planned and, sure enough, a year after the first one in 1988, THE DRIVE IN 2 (NOT JUST ONE OF THEM SEQUELS) was published. With the demise of the actual Orbit Drive In, or at least its closure, a new entertainment threat is needed and Lansdale brings out the perfect foil - television. Well, television in the form of one Popalong Cassidy. Popalong, like the pair of Willard and Randy who became the Popcorn King, is even less well-adjusted than most of the rest of the characters in the drive in. One of life's perennial losers his only pleasures are flagellation and television. He dreams of becoming a celebrity by way of mass-killing which will get him his moment of fame on the TV. Even as he arrives at the Orbit, after a few freeway shootings, he's imaging himself as the principal in TARGETS, a great horror movie that's NOT being shown. So this fellow is quite pleased to find himself transformed into a walking, talking television set with acolytes and a wrecker, ready to spread harm wherever he can.

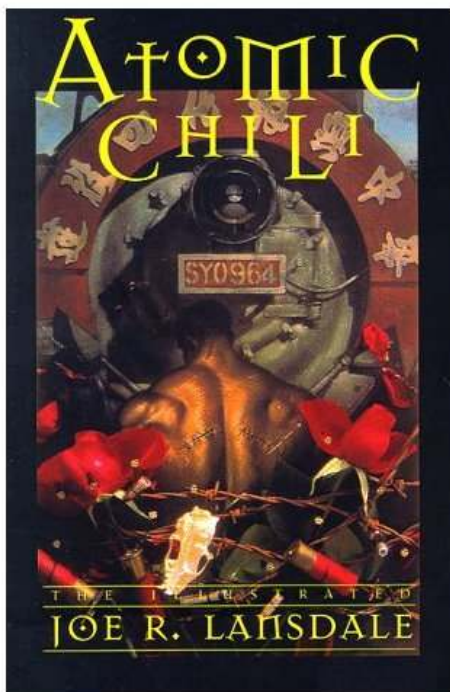
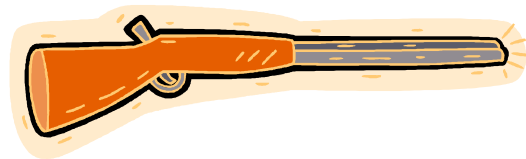
Our two remaining heroes from the first book first hear of Popalong second hand from Grace, a woman

who managed to escape from captivity only to end up driving into the lake beside which Bob and Jack are camped out. Jack rescues her and, before long, she has him ready to join in the dangerous task of returning to confront Popalong and rescue her dead boyfriend's young sister. How will they deal with the forest of film, film with razor edges that cut and bite as they bind you to the tree sprockets? Yes, Lansdale's imagination has not deserted him. All in all, though, *THE DRIVE IN 2* really IS just one of them sequels. Readers, and I'm sure there are plenty, who are just plain baffled by the over-the-top events of the first novel are not going to find subtle characterization and psychological depth and insight into the human condition in *THE DRIVE IN 2*. Nope. More of the same like what came before - if you like it, it's great that there's a second book of it.

So imagine my delight when, after a lapse of more than 15 years, Subterranean Press published *THE DRIVE-IN: THE BUS TOUR*. Unlike the first two books this is not a mass-market paperback but an expensive limited edition hardcover. It's pretty clear that while Lansdale may have some commercial success with his more restrained mysteries, his truly wild and wacky flights of fancy are destined to be cult favorites.

As the sub-title suggests this third, and probably final, volume set in this very malleable universe is a road-trip through the outlying regions of the area where once youngsters went to watch Leatherface ram his chainsaw into the stomach of an annoying paraplegic. Along the way our heroes encounter massive floods and even more massive catfish, bridges and towers, and old men and young boys. And they solve the secret of the world of *THE DRIVE-IN*.

As I said a bit earlier, these books aren't for everyone but if you like a tale that is left to run wild and free, to make twists and turns, and to be unafraid of appearing totally out of control, then to you, I commend these books.



Atomic Chili

reviewed by James Bacon

As a comic reader, occasionally one comes by a Graphic Novel that is perfectly self-contained. Sometimes it's a run from comics, such as Frank Millar's *Daredevil*. Sometimes it's a series of Graphic Novels like Garth Ennis' nine *Preacher* Graphic novels that tell an epic tale brilliantly, and sometimes its short stories collected together, such as *Batman Black and White*.

Atomic Chili is an altogether different collection. It collects, from what I can see, all of Lansdale's comic stories up to 1996, apart from *The Lone Ranger* and *Tonto* and *Jonah Hex*. It's a big, thick, lump of a book, and at over 300 pages, is a decent amount of material.

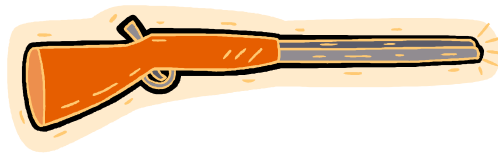
Therein, stories such as *Dead in the West* and "By Bizarre

Hands," which have previously been published by Dark Horse, are here collected. It's such a variety of stuff, though. There are a number of nasty shorts, which hadn't been published elsewhere, as well as some real treats that I had just never heard of and that had been published as parts of other collections.

From Zombie Western to modern Vietnam flashback-induced horror, it's got quite a few different genres inside fighting to get out. Lansdale's work is adapted in this collection, so major writers take his stories and adapt it, although I sometimes find this a difficult thing, as I know Lansdale does a fine job on his own, Jonah Hex being an example. This is still a damn fine collection, and is to the core what Lansdale is about.

Some of the pros are just names any comic fan would know, from Neal Barrett Jr. to Steve Bissett, and from George Pratt to Michael Zulli. It's a real variety of penmanship. It's all black and white, although the styles are as variable as the genres. The Dave Dorman cover truly, in its beauty and oddness, captures perhaps more about the comics than a more straightforward conservative approach would do.

Yep, this is one to find and it's out there. Rather than just tell you about it and then say it's impossible to find, I found it easily enough on ABEbooks, and costs from \$8 to \$80, and Amazon also has a bunch, but it might be the same bunch.



In memoriam: Jack Speer (1920 – 2008)

Only a fanzine fan who lives under a rock would not know that recently we lost one of the shining lights of First Fandom, Jack Speer. At Corflu Quire in Austin, Texas last year I finally had the chance to really meet and have a chance to talk with Jack and his wife, Ruth, which was a delightful experience. His passing leaves a massive void connecting us to our roots, where fandom began, and how Jack helped to shape fandom into what it is today. I will miss him, and I barely knew the man. Here is a small excerpt from one of the many memorials posted on the Internet about Jack Speer:

Jack was a giant in science fiction fandom, a founding member of N3F, FAPA, and the original historian of science fiction fandom. His 1944 Fancyclopedia has spawned many imitators over the years . . . and his 1939 book, Up To Now: A History of Science Fiction Fandom, is still used as a reference almost 70 years after first publication thanks to its recently resurrected electronic form on www.efanzines.com.

Fellow science fiction historian Harry Warner credited Jack Speer as "the first to stress [fandom's] subcultural aspects. Single-handedly, he made fandom's ayjays something entirely different from the mundane amateur journalism groups."

by David Speakman • June 29, 2008

God speed. Jack. – John Purcell



An Odyssey Galactic

by Gregory Benford

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I've written fiction about science, essays in national magazines, done newspaper interviews, talk radio...and television. Of them all, TV took the prize for roller coaster living.

In the late 1980s Japanese National Broadcasting (NHK) got in touch with me about a project they had in early planning stages. It was to be a big series show on modern science, stressing the astronomical connections.

I consulted for them, reviewed memos, went to innumerable dinners with passing squads of producers, directors, and scriptwriters. Eventually they asked me to help outline the show and I gave it a working title which stuck: *A Galactic Odyssey*.

They wanted to take a very different approach to the problem of popularizing -- using elements of drama alongside straight expositions, interviews, graphics and the like. What kind of frame could do that? Intriguing, I thought. I worked up a plan to shape the shows around the voyage of the starship Helios, on the first flight beyond our solar system.

Most of the air time would be in documentary format. In the sf frame, we would follow the adventures of the Helios crew of six as they visited sites in the Milky Way. The first 1.5-hour-long introductory segment was straight documentary. The next seven were hour-long shows, each with three dramatic scenes, at opening, middle and close, adding up to about twenty minutes.

Halfway into outlining the show, they asked me to write the fictional frames. I had my misgivings. A year before I had written a TV script which did get shot, but emerged mystifyingly different from my vision. This was standard for the business. Since I wanted to learn more about script writing, I took the job.

By now the show was behind schedule. I wasn't surprised, since NHK had spent a year and a half planning and fidgeting and re-planning. So when I received a visit about doing the scripts, they saved for last the fact that I had only a month in which to do them.

I learned something about writing under pressure. In TV writing, you must keep it simple, be direct, use sights instead of talk. I made the deadline, with two hours and twenty minutes of (estimated) drama screen time.

Writing such compact drama scripts was an education in brevity. I began to long for the elbow room of novels. There were compensations, though, in the freedom to let the audience see what you mean.

Using SF at all in the solemn format of upscale, top-ticket documentaries implies that science fictional devices are becoming commonplace vehicles. Still, I was somewhat surprised that NHK cheerfully accepted SF ideas; they saw that showing people visiting exotic sites was far more immediate than merely doing better computer graphics of them.

So I indulged myself. I stretched the physics a bit and had Helios fly by a star just as it goes supernova. Pretty unlikely, even though they had selected the star because it was close to that point. Great graphics, but how could they survive? I let them narrowly escape, using a trick: they used a Jovian-sized planet for a shield, speeding radially outward in its shadow.

This was a cheat, actually. The neutrino flux alone would have killed them, though, even with the Jovian trick. So I gave them a neutrino shield. Physics knows of nothing that can absorb neutrinos effectively, but there have been some theoretical speculations...so I yielded to temptation. A slight crack in my realism armor, perhaps, a step down the road that leads to the "wantum mechanics" of such shows as Star Trek - - you wantum, you gettum. Anything you want, boss, and consistency from show to show be damned. Drama, y'know.

Midway through the writing, NHK came visiting again. They had never decided how to handle the connecting up of all these elements. Perhaps it would be best to have an occasional on-camera commentator? Well, I said, that was one approach, sure. They looked pleased. And...would I please consider being this commentator?

This was much more than I had bargained for. My imagination was fixed on the blithe abstractions of writing. Actual work in front of a camera was a decidedly daunting prospect. Still...

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The starship Helios loomed large, a clean white sphere sprouting antennas. It glided away from a barren desert planet, heading into serene deep space...

DISSOLVE TO: Traffic. Horns. Gasoline stench. Gaudy neon.

Well, I thought, we wanted a jarring cut for the opener, and this certainly fit the bill.

I was a minute into the take when the bag lady came shuffling into my field of view. If she just moved across the camera angle and kept going, I thought, maybe things would be all right. I kept on talking

about alien life forms, a topic carefully selected for this location--a traffic island smack in the middle of Times Square.

"The sorts of aliens we could discover with our current approach bear a striking resemblance to the radio astronomers themselves--curious, devoted to the night sky, with lots of technology and energy. We--"

The bag lady swerved toward me and called jerkily, "Hey! Somebody's trying to start a war between us and Germany."

Well, maybe the mike wouldn't pick her up. I kept talking and got through the next sentence. If she would just keep moving—

"Don't you care? Somebody's trying to start a war between the United States and Germany!"

I shrugged. "Actually, lady, it's been done. Twice."

One of the cameramen came trotting across the traffic lanes. He waved the bag lady away, but since he spoke only Japanese, they got into a tangle of angry incomprehension.

After she had wandered off, and after a gang of Puerto Rican teenagers tried to persuade us to make them famous by letting them do their dance routine behind me, we did five more takes--seventeen in all. By that time I was feeling pretty alien myself.

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Location shooting, I learned, is fraught with weirdness and accident. I had to shoot about thirty locations in six months for the series, which was running further and further behind schedule.

This meant, for example, standing in the rotor wash of the camera helicopter as it lifted from the floor of Meteor Crater, Arizona, smiling numbly for five takes, as the sub-zero wind blew my hair around and turned my lips blue. I was clad in a sports jacket and light slacks, for the sake of clothes continuity with the preceding shot, which had been two months before and thirty degrees warmer.

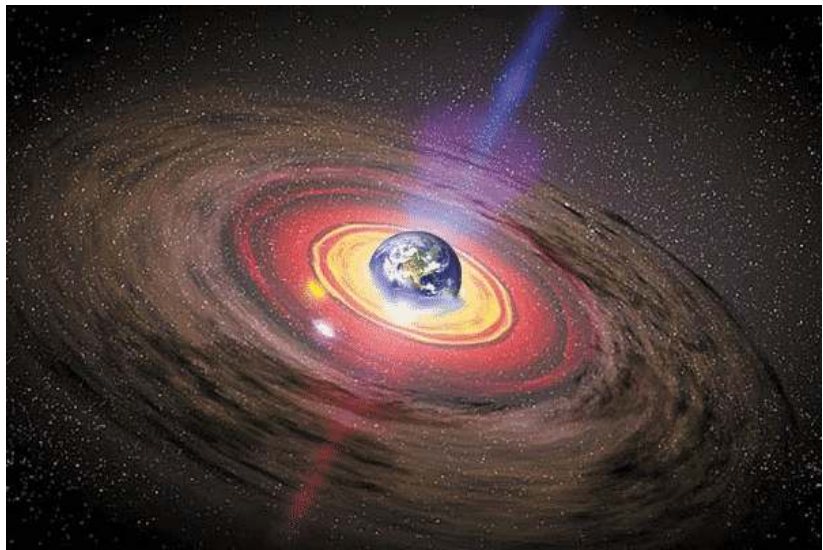
Location shooting also meant trying to keep the script straight in my head atop Mauna Kea, Hawaii, 13,700 feet. After a few hours of walking about, cold was the least of my problems. I found that oxygen deprivation kept snatching away bits of my memory. I would hit the end of a sentence and hang there, with no idea of what came next.

Oddly enough, it was fun.

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The NHK producers were quite happy to spend, say, \$300,000 creating a flyby of the black hole at the galactic center, complete with burnt-orange accretion disk and silvery jets. They even wanted me to talk about my own novels set there. Pulsars, neutron stars--anything astronomical was ok, fit for the computer graphics budget of several million dollars. This was big time TV, yes.

But aliens... Well, maybe Godzilla



had spooked them.

They wanted a whole hour about life in the galaxy, but refused to ever show aliens. My entire script about planets as potential life sites was rewritten by a scientifically naïve director, to treat only dead worlds. So the crew spent its time in Death Valley digging holes for the camera.

Why? I asked. Prospecting for life, the director said.

Any biologist could have told them that the atmosphere, observed by Helios from space, would reveal signs of life. Chemical cycles for any gas-breathing life are constrained to a fairly narrow range. This argument had been used by James Lovelock to predict that Mars would reveal no life, back in the early 1970s.

Such arguments got waved away. People could understand prospecting for life--it was just like digging for gold, see? I shook my head. Cultural mismatch.

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While there is no detail whatever about how Helios worked, I did get away with basing the last hour show, "The Anvil of Time," on relativity. No super-duper faster-than-light space drive for us hardnosed types--so we got some pretty special effects of Helios zooming by stars at near-light speed. The crew used Einstein's time dilation to span the galaxy, so they had to pay the price.

We spent months debating whether the crew, seeing that thousands of years had passed Earthside, would return. People took rather fierce positions, some holding that the Helios crew would fly ever onward, drawn by mysteries. I made them return; an Odyssey has to come home. But then the directors refused to show the Earth or solar system altered after millennia. No orbital colonies, no signs of humans visible from space. No changes in the air, despite greenhouse effects.

Why? I asked. They frowned.

Anti-ecological. Tampering with the natural solar system. Bad vibes. "Such changes are disturbing." An enigmatic smile. The cultural thing again.

The Japanese took an aesthetic approach to much traditional scientific material. We opened the series with a shot of leafy glades and the line, "We love natural beauty, but what does it imply?" -- then cut to a rocket, the planets, and stars.

NHK spent huge sums developing a new type of camera, capable of shooting in mere moonlight. It gave high quality, fully colored pictures, so that while I walked by an observatory in Chile, you could see my red tie and also make out the bright colors of stars overhead, including Alpha Centauri, the nearest star system.

In that shot the director laughed out loud at the Carl Sagan reference when I said, "There aren't merely billions and billions of stars in our galaxy; there are a good fraction of a trillion--and maybe more."

His laugh loused up the first take, which would've been perfect. On the other hand, on a later take they caught a meteor that flashed in startling yellow overhead as a punctuation, as I finished the last line.

It helped in dealing with the producers that I could switch from SF writer to scientist at the drop of a metaphor. I was scientific advisor, host, and drama script writer. When the drama director wrote in a scene in which the Helios engines failed, he didn't know that devising a wholly new kind of drive on the spot was both unlikely and a genre cliché.

Merely saying so didn't dissuade him, of course. So I pointed out that the big scene, in which they reach their difficult destination by withstanding 3-g acceleration for a full minute, would take Helios only a few

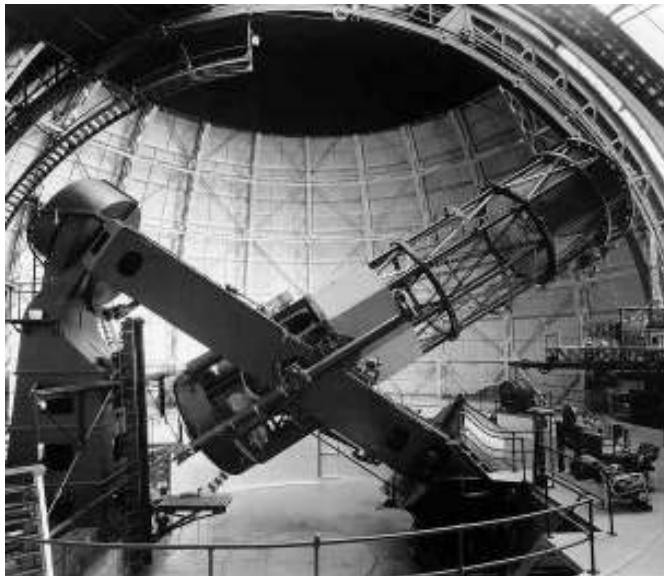
more kilometers.

Even a director could see that wasn't much on a galactic scale. So we tinkered, cut, made it not quite so askew.

The best thing about making a grueling show is the people you meet. I spent a day with Stephen Hawking, the first time I had seen him in years. He had prepared a long response to some questions I'd sent. We discussed on camera the philosophical implications of modern cosmology, and he remarked on the "argument from design" resurrected by Freeman Dyson and others of note. (They have used observations that the crucial numbers which govern natural laws, such as nuclear binding energies, seem extraordinarily finely tuned to the values which make life and intelligence possible. Maybe even suspiciously so.)

Hawking was skeptical. He remarked that this might provide solace for some, "but only for belief in a distant, cool, and indifferent God."

The working scientists were always a pleasure. The interminable delays for setup of lighting and cameras were great times to get caught up on shop talk. Astronomy and physics are now thoroughly worldwide activities, threaded through with sf fans. I found Aldiss and Anderson paperbacks stashed for a dull moment in the control room of the big telescope at Las Campanas, atop the Andes Mountains of Chile.



The woman director of the Mt. Wilson Observatory took me on a tour of the undergalleries of the 100 inch scope, where Hubble measured his plates and discovered the expansion of the universe. I got to do a shot sitting in the same rickety chair Hubble used for decades to discover the expansion of the universe. That was thrilling, as was the fifteen-foot plunge only inches away. Hubble had never fallen off; I came quite close twice in a single hour.

The director took all this for granted, of course. She then asked me if I knew Hal Clement or Joe Haldeman. What were they like?

We did a shot with me standing on the Bonneville Salt Flats, playing on the fact that in winter they look like a snow field. This was to

suggest the freezing out of our atmosphere if the Earth were a bit further from the sun. Then we switched to the opposite possibility, that a nearer sun would evaporate away our oceans, leaving meters-deep salt plains.

"Very fantastic," the director said happily.

A Park Ranger with us said skeptically, "Sounds like science fiction to me."

The director looked shocked and countered, "Oh, but it is! Of the very best kind--it is true!"

The most imaginative element NHK would allow in the documentary was a series of paintings by Bill Hartmann, the astronomer-artist at Kitt Peak Observatory, a most pleasant fellow.

We worked out a water-world sporting only minor islands, with sea life just beginning to discover simple technology. A gloomy city loomed in the background of his undersea painting. We shot a discussion between Bill and myself of the possibilities available in odd planets. A tide-locked world with a thin, life-supporting twilight zone. Twin inhabited planets--one with an oxygen atmosphere, the other still methane-

dominated. An inhabited moon. The documentary director wanted all these discussed, but the drama director would have no part of them in his show...

I learned a lot about how science and sf interact. The Los Angeles public television station, KCET, was producing a rival show, 'The Astronomers,' to air in fall 1990. I saw rushes from it, then the final show. While its desire to show the life of scientists was commendable, I was reminded that from the outside, watching us work is remarkably like a long, close scrutiny of paint drying. Still, the speculations of scientists are just as wild as anything we sf writers do; theirs are merely government-funded.

It's an unnerving experience, standing in a Los Angeles studio and watching actors play out scenes you've written, word for word. Quite solid and quite uncanny, like walking into one of your own dreams. It took far longer to shoot a script than it did to write one.

It's even stranger to turn from the set and look into the synthesizing eye of the monitors, where the set image was superimposed on the graphics, in real time. I could see beyond the Helios crew the swirling, technicolor disk of a monstrous black hole.

This ability to place frail human figures against the immensity of creation is powerful, and is only beginning to be dramatically realized. In counterpoint to all this techno-razzle-dazzle, I had to underline in the closing comments that our goal in understanding nature is in part to fathom ourselves, our uniquely human place in nature.

I found it doubly striking that the churn and dazzle of warped space-time is still an idea of ours -- a metaphor, if you will -- not yet truly confirmed by observation. Increasingly, the objects of high science are fictions toward which reason and inference lead us. They will remain unseen, glimpsed only with the lens of scrupulous deduction -- and with the telescope of our imaginations.

I ended the entire series with the only real indulgence the mass of producers and directors allowed. The NHK method was a sort of corporate mentality gone mad--each hour had a separate authority, with whom I negotiated the script. This is how I tried to sum it all up, with my own personal flavor:

I hope that the interwoven strands of the sciences can lead to a philosophy for our century which will be of one piece, reflecting the seamless connection we have to this world that came out of nothingness and into something so vast and various.

A great astronomer, Harold Shapley, once said, "we are the brothers of boulders, the companions of clouds." Astronomers know that we are also the sons of the stars.

Yet the stars are mortal, just as we. Our galaxy is the stage for a drama of worlds being born and dying, while even mighty galaxies collide, shatter, and merge. In grand diversity the action continues.

Biology teaches us that if somewhere along the way evolution had made a small change in the script, we humans would not be here. We are fragile--but so, in the long run, is the universe.

The galaxy is still young, only 10 billion years old. Within 20 billion more the stars which nurtured life will ebb, growing cooler, redder. The giant blue stars will be gone forever. The galaxy will dim as



black holes grow. There will be fewer warm spots for life. The milky way will witness the final act, a long twilight struggle, and if life remains anchored to planets, it is doomed.

I take a brighter view of the far future. Just as astrology once said that the stars rule the affairs of men, I believe, as Arthur Clarke put it, that the time will come when men rule the affairs of stars. Life's greatest challenge will be survival after the stars are gone. As Shakespeare said,

***Now entertain conjecture of a time
when creeping murmur and the poring dark
fills the wide vessel of the universe.***

Life -- that is, mind -- arose out of matter. The grandest philosophical question is, will all life's struggles come to naught? Can we survive the gathering cold and dark? Will the universe slow, contract, and collapse, reversing the big bang? Astronomer's quest for the shadowy dark matter will perhaps answer this question.

I believe that life will persist through the dimming of the galaxy, the growth of monstrous black holes, even through the eventual decay of matter itself into nothing more than electrons, their anti-particles, and light. I hope there will always be a role in the galaxy's evolution for beings capable of knowing joy. As the poet T.S. Eliot put it, "We are the music, while the music lasts."

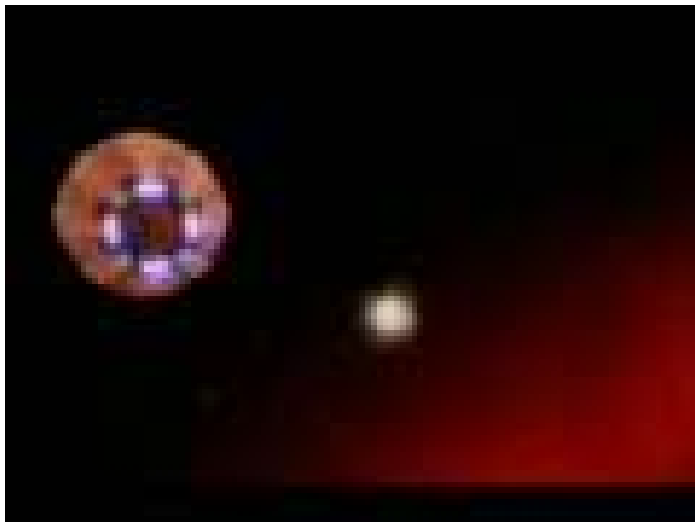
We shot all that, but when the final editing got done, only about half got through. Still, NHK wedged a lot into the series, and it aired repeatedly in Japan, its first venue, in 1990 through 1991.

It won the Japanese version of the Emmy for Best General Program. It showed in 1991 in Europe, in translation. NHK published a five-book series, full of gorgeous color photography, graphics, and with short introductions by myself. They sold well.

Then nothing happened. The show had ended up costing over \$6 million, the biggest budget overrun NHK had ever had, and they needed to sell it in the U.S. market.

But the NHK structure took nearly all support money away from the program as soon as the final cut came out. Negotiations with U.S. networks were cordial, but the program needed editing. The Japanese style is alternately leisurely, with long panning shots, and then jerky. But there was no money for reediting.

So the entire project fell into a corporate hole, one step short of the major market that could make the whole enterprise profitable. KCET's "The Astronomers" had fallen on its face in the market, with a less than ten percent of the audience that Sagan's "Cosmos" garnered a decade earlier. The word was out that astronomy shows didn't work.



This tendency of TV and films to ride on conventional wisdom about the market is notorious, and amusing. Once I saw a letter written on luxurious stationery by a studio maven, about buying an option on a novel of mine about Greek archeology, Artifact. "Nobody goes to movies about archeology," he said. "Too intellectual and dry." This was a year after release of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

And nothing kept on happening.

So *A Galactic Odyssey* never showed in the U.S. The Carnegie Institute did re-edit the

first episode for brief showings, but not the series. NHK broke up the entire team and the project is now solely in the hands of marketing, which means, no creative people involved. They have shown it around and it is reasonably well received, I hear. But it would need reworking for the more sophisticated American market, and there's nobody around any longer to do that delicate job.

People ask me about it, and I just shake my head. What did I learn from the fully three year involvement, finally?

First, novelists don't fit well in intensely committee-dominated projects. Decisions about showing aliens, or even categorizing civilizations by their energy consumption (somehow, not an ecologically virtuous point of view), were made by faceless executives--most of whom had no scientific training whatever. And don't think that's important.

Novelists think in larger chunks. Hard sf novelists probably don't make the best diplomats, either, about scientific facts. Or at least, this novelist didn't.

Second, don't let the scientific content get compromised for schedule or convenience. Realize that just about nobody has the same commitment to the material that scientists do--but apply pressure at the essential points.

Third, use a particular rhythm in presenting science, to draw out its human aspects. This rhythm runs,

philosophy-->science-->philosophy

Begin with a grand overview, posing certain human or social problems as they relate to science. Then go to the science, the technical true grit that can then lead back to those deep philosophical issues. Offer a response, maybe even a solution, on the basis of the scientific content just detailed.

This rhythm opens the sciences, imbuing large human issues with the flagrant excitement of the new, the fresh, the real. You can even yield to calls for a new vision or morality, speaking from the solidity of scientific pulpit.

In both visual and print media, this has been the style of the best broad scientific popularizations of the last few decades. Recall Steven Weinberg's *The First Three Minutes*, Douglas Hofstadter's *Godel, Escher, Bach*, Sagan's *Cosmos*, E.O. Wilson's *On Human Nature*, and many others.

Lastly, have some input in editing. Much of *A Galactic Odyssey* got rearranged, slanted and cut by people who knew little or nothing of the technical material. Such power is hard to get, but essential.

A minor point: never do location shooting without firm guidelines. Otherwise, you are the tool of the lighting, camera and sound crews. I waited atop Mt. Wilson from 9 P.M. until 2 A.M. for the crews to set up. It was a chilly January night and after rehearsing, there wasn't much to do. Then I had to do moving-and-speaking shots over precarious walkways outside the big dome of the observatory, while worn out. We finished at 4 A.M. I looked pretty awful on camera, too, and nearly went off a hundred foot drop; but the lighting was perfect...

Science is harder to popularize than most areas, because its material is arcane, dense, and for many,



But what's the alternative?

EDITORIAL NOTES:

Clair De Loon

by Taral Wayne

Hendrik Willem van Loon was a pretty odd character. For years I've described him as the Isaac Asimov of his day, except that he generally wrote about history and the arts rather than science. He wrote books on American History, European history, music, the arts, the history of the arts, the bible, on Peter Stuyvesant, on his school books, on himself especially, and on mankind's struggle for liberation. In light of certain remarks the author has made that I'll discuss later, the last is highly ironic.

My first exposure to the writer was many years ago, when Susan Wood wrote in *Energumen* about his odd collection of biographies. The book was named *Van Loon's Lives* (in memory of Plutarch I suppose). Susan awoke a desire to read the book, but at the time had no expectation of ever finding a copy. To my surprise, I did. In fact, over the years I've found two[i], and a sizable number of other titles by van Loon.[ii]

Many are very handsome productions. They were clearly prestige publications in their day, having elaborate dust wrappers in some cases that unfolded into maps or diagrams. Van Loon himself did the illustrations. His colour plates are amateurish to a degree, but also vibrant, bold, and have a virtuous simplicity that reinforces the basic message.

Most of van Loon's book are out of date, and were not very perceptive to begin with. They cannot be read for any other purpose than the enjoyment of their peculiar charm. You almost never overhear the name Hendrik van Loon at sophisticated martini parties, on fashionable websites, at Hollywood opening nights, nor during the drunken antics usually celebrated amid the strewn trash under traffic overpasses around Pasadena. Therefore it was much to my surprise to encounter Hendrik van Loon for a second time in a fanzine. (The issue before last of *Askance* to be precise.)

The book was *Invasion*. This is a strange work, even for van Loon. Published in 1940, supposedly written in 1960, it tells the wholly fictional account of the WWII invasion of New York City. To hear van Loon tell it, tracking down and liquidating van Loon himself was almost the paramount reason for the invasion. In fact, he was on a Nazi death list, along with many other European intellectuals, but one must wonder if he even made the top hundred. One senses a well developed ego in the author's belief in his nuisance value. He liked to make out that he had fled Europe to escape the threat of the Third Reich, but in fact he had left as early as 1909 to attend university in the United States, and was a permanent resident as well as citizen by 1919.

There is the expected volume of Nazi bashing in the book. They are justly denounced as thugs, oppressors, murderers and liars. The curious thing is not that van Loon places them firmly on the side of

FAN LOON'S LIVES



evil, but where the author stands himself. In opposing fascism he doesn't seem to have any understanding of just what it is that fascism stands for. By his own repeated admissions, he leans in the direction of many of the totalitarian practices he claims to deplore.

Van Loon states clearly that he favours the suspension of the constitution so that American Bundists and Nazi sympathizers can be rounded up without habeas corpus or rights to a fair trial. From page 41 of the Grosset & Dunlap first edition he express subtle disappointment that the freedom of speech is protected in the United States:

"All the work I had done to make the American people wake up had been just so much waste of time and energy. No matter what any of us said, no matter how convincing the proofs we placed directly underneath our neighbor's eyes, they invariably mumbled something about Democracy and the Bill of Rights and what Voltaire had once said about the other fellow's right to express his opinions (which Voltaire had never meant quite that way) and there-upon they returned to their bridge and their baseball."

But just did Voltaire mean, then? Unless van Loon feared people would mistake Voltaire to mean one did have the right freedom of speech, why bring it up? What sort of freedom of speech did van Loon believe in?

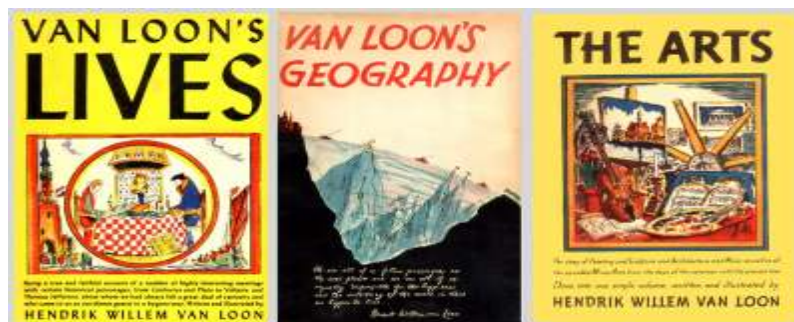
A few paragraphs later van Loon relates a news story about a Bundist claiming there was no difference between the action of the United States and fascist Italy, and correctly points out that it was not against any law to do so. The emphasis was unusual.

It sounded to me as though the author thought it too bad that making unfavorable comments comparing America to fascist Italy was not illegal.

Still, earlier on page 22, van Loon relates a brutal action by patriots:

"For when the Jersey State Militia had finally re-established order and had come upon a play-garden where more than thirty children lay dead (the work of a single bomb) they had promptly forgotten about all the beautiful constitutional guarantees which our citizens (even the Fifth Columnists) were supposed to enjoy. They had rounded up every man who had ever been known to deal with the Bund's headquarters in New York and had shot him at sight."

While literally correct, there is a subtle tone of sarcasm in phrases like "Beautiful constitutional guarantees" and "even the Fifth Columnists" that is more than a little ambivalent. One imagines a wistful author wishing it were not necessary to have such obstacles in the way of justice, and could still live in a democracy.



Back on page 37, we find van Loon making a number of slighting remarks about groups he apparently doesn't like:

"On the one side, endless cunning, careful planning, a complete lack of scruples and the twenty-four-hour day. At home, starry-eyed politicians, ditto sentimentalists, Youth Congress boys and girls having the run of the White House and booing the President of the United States, Nazis, Bolshies, evangelists, nudists,

teetotalers and labor union grafters, using this most welcome opportunity to help their dear friend Stalin. ... but we let communists hold high offices in all the departments of the government.” Doesn’t sound terribly tolerant. Rather, it sounds as though he wishes these people were not free to act and speak as they wished.

There is even a touch of mild anti-Semitism, as on page 44:

He said, “Jimmie is always claiming that all our pacifists and Bolsheviks are Jews. She ought to go and visit some of our New England colleges. Then she would know better. They are full of the best families, but red as hell! And whooping it up for some nice liberal idea hat will give them a free ride on the Treasury...” I can understand the Jews feeling that way. They have a pretty lousy time as it is, but those others are mostly too damn lazy to work.

It is sympathetic to American Jews, but I’m suspicious of the ideas it presumes to put into their head. Were not, in fact, many Jews also Bolsheviks and pacifists? Not just New England blue-bloods and college eggheads? To my mind, it is equally a cartoon to depict Jews as being all of one mind about political issues, especially when it flies in the face of historical facts as this does.

There is a disturbingly Nazi tone to the expression “Parlor Pinks”, just now found at random.

While I cannot site specific instances of more statements of this nature, the notes I made in the covers of *Invasion* make it clear that I had had been left with profound misgivings about the book after reading it. My final penciled note from the inside covers:

“Basically van Loon is little different from the Nazi Party in so far as his conception of liberty. He is a typical European Liberal, not a Libertarian in the sense of Jefferson.”

If I haven’t made a strong case for van Loon as a closet fascist – which is not my intention - at least there is a case that the author’s mindset is fundamentally illiberal. His was not a New World mind, but an Old World one, classically educated and brought intact from the ivy towers of his birthplace in Rotterdam. It would be well to remember it when reading any of his books, and re-evaluate any statement he might make on the meaning of the arts, history, or liberty.

■ Taral Wayne

[i] Since it was lacking one, I made a custom dust jacket for the second copy. Instead of illustrating the figures from European history that Van Loon wrote about having tea with, I drew various fictional characters from fandom. It matched a story I had written along the same lines.

[ii] Items in my collection

Van Loon’s Lives

Van Loon’s Geography

America

The Arts

The Story of Mankind (a mere paperback reprint)

Life and Times of Peter Stuyvesant

Report to Saint Peter

The Liberation of Mankind

Invasion

My School Books

Traveling the Bumpy Byways, Part One



by **Lee (Anne Tremper) Lavell**

Down First Avenue

My first meeting with fans occurred in the Fall of 1950, as I mentioned in a previously written article in *Askance*. The meeting was called by Ray Beam who was attempting to organize a local fandom. He had gotten himself on some radio show to advertise this; someone I knew heard it and told me, and so there I was, in this dingy church basement room meeting fans for the first time. I had gone with my friend, Caroline, who had a marginal interest in fantasy. The meeting was sparsely attended. The only ones I can really remember being there besides myself, Caroline, and Ray were Jay Crackel, and I think Jerry Hunter was also at that first meeting, or if not, he was there very early on. Soon meetings were held, I think on a bi-weekly basis, at our houses.

Ray wanted to get active right away with a fanzine which he called *ISFA*, the acronym for the name we had selected for our club: Indiana Science Fantasy Association. It was really a dreadful zine. For the first issue I had to write a story (a very bad story) around a cover that Caroline had drawn. Ray was very disappointed that I insisted on using my middle name (Anne) as part of my byline. He wanted to pull a "Lee Hoffman", thing but I would have none of it. I don't remember how many issues of *ISFA* were put out. I'm probably mercifully blanking it from my mind. I was also assigned to do the club newsletter which we called *ISFANEWS*. Innovative, weren't we? It was a one and a half page thing that was mostly meeting notice although I did manage to pick up a column in its later days. It was printed on an awful Sears mimeo with a defective roller which I had bought. (Sears had refused to repair it or exchange it, a decision that has probably cost them a lot of money over the long run as I have bought almost nothing from them since.)

So there we were, a very tiny club and we needed more members. Fortunately, at about this time *Other Worlds* magazine started running a free personals column so we let other fans in the area know about us

from that. Also, the Capitol book store allowed us to slip cards about the club into their s-f and fantasy books. As a result our membership began to grow. We picked up Juanita Wellons (Coulson), Bev Amers (DeWeese), Jim Lavell, Gene DeWeese, and a bit later, Buck Coulson. If nothing else, our club made matches! During this period we also picked up three teens from Broad Ripple High School, the most promising of whom was Ed McNulty, and a thirteen year old by the name of George Oshrey who once told me he would make me his mistress when he became dictator of the Earth.

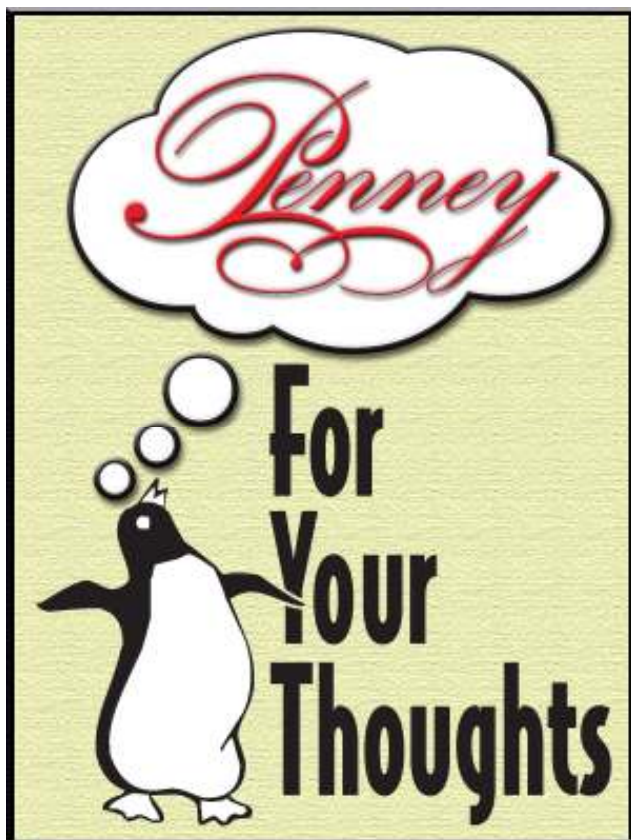
In 1952 I attended my first convention, the Chicon II. It was a bit overwhelming. In the first place, it was huge for its time – almost a thousand when most WorldCons had around 300 in attendance. I attended everything, met lots of people, and generally acted like a complete neofan, which of course I was. It was at this convention that Ray Beam decided to put in a bid for Indianapolis to have the next convention. It was supposed to be just a token bid, but a bunch of local neofans attending apparently thought it would be nice to have another WorldCon so close by and voted for us. Ray, evidently overcome by power, kept the bid through a couple more ballots while the rest of us Isfans were having heart attacks, knowing full well we had no ability, capability, or desire of putting on a con. Fortunately, Ray finally came to his senses and withdrew the bid.

The following Spring I went to my first Midwestcon (Yes, it was spelled that way then) which was still being held at Beastly's on the Lake (and later on in Bellefontaine before it moved to Cincinnati) then. It was there that Harlan Ellison wandered up to me and said "Take off your high heels and lets go dancing." I pointed down to my feet where I was wearing complete flats. I'm 5'9". That ended that conversation. I attended Midwestcons for many years straight, even when I went into gaffiation otherwise. A couple of things of note that I remember: I was at the Midwestcon in Bellfountain during the infamous "Door Incident". I recall staring at Harlan through the broken panel of the door as he was making his complaint to the police (who politely posed for my camera). Also, one year a woman I didn't know, but who had seen my name in one of the *Other Worlds* personals, gave me this huge stack of science fiction pulps that she was wanting to get rid of but wanted them to go to someone who liked s-f. It turned out that I had all but a couple of them already, so I took them to the Midwestcon to sell. My room at the North Plaza was just below Big Hearted Howard's [*DeVore – ed.*] and fans had to go past me to get to his room. I was selling the magazines very cheaply since I had no place to keep them at home at the time. The result was that nobody got to Howard's room and it drove him crazy! Lots of fans were buying from me, some even refusing to pay the low prices and giving me more. Ed Hamilton was buying a bunch of the magazines with his stories in them until Leigh Brackett noticed and insisted he put them back because he already had a dozen copies of each. One guy was buying a magazine, and I asked him why he wanted that title because it was probably one of the worst magazines on the market. He gave me this hurt look and said, "I have the lead novel in that issue." A few months later *Astounding* came out with a report on that Midwestcon in Sky Miller's column and he mentioned me. Was I thrilled! I was mentioned in *Astounding*. Wow!

Into a Cul de Sac and Back

During this period *Isfanews* started getting contributions and I changed the name to *Phobos*, a biweekly eight-pager that rather quickly got overwhelming, so on came another change to *Merlin*, which, while larger, came out only monthly. Somewhere around this time occurred The Great Schism. Ray, who was vice-president, wanted a club that was party hearty and also one that would do significant things, like put on conventions. The other officers (Jay, Jerry, and myself) got tired of this and just quit, leaving Ray in charge. He changed the name of the club to The Galloping Gleeclub something-or-other (we called them Gleeps) and soon an insurgency arose, led by the Broad Ripple Boys. Isfa was reformed and went into a publishing frenzy. (It reached the point where the prozine fanzine reviewers were writing "and here's another Indiana fanzine".) The Gleeps put out one cruddy fanzine and never put on any type of convention. Eventually, a lot of Isfans, including me, just plain burned out and gaffiated. And so we come to the end of the first journey.

- Lee Anne Lavell



By a guest fanzine reviewer,
a.k.a., your humble zine
editor,

John Purcell

Well, what can I say? Here I am again filling in for my good friend Lloyd Penney, who had to bow out due to a time crunch since he is now working two – count them, two – part-time jobs in the lovely Canadian village of Toronto to earn his keep. This is alright, I must confess, because the fanzine field is full of top-flight zines right now, and there are a couple that I would like to comment on, one of which I have talked about before.

MT Void #1502. Edited and published by Mark and Evelyn Leeper. Contact either Mark at mleeper@optonline.net or Evelyn at eleeper@optonline.net. To subscribe, send e-mail to: mtvoid-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Okay. So I've discussed this fanzine before. The only reason I am mentioning this fanzine again is that I want you folks to look at the issue number. Yes, that's right. *MT Void* has now passed the 1500-issue mark. I am unaware of any other zine approaching this figure, unless it is an apa-zine in a weekly apa like *Apa-L*. My mind is crogged at this accomplishment.

So if you do the math – like I just did with the calculator function on my computer – *MT Void* has been published on its regular weekly schedule for 28.9 years! Yeesh, but that's dedication. Congratulations Mark and Evelyn on reaching this fannish ~~millstone~~ milestone.

Quasi Quote #6. Edited and published by Sandra Bond.
40 Cleveland Park Avenue, London E17 7BS, UNITED KINGDOM.
e-mail contact: locs@ho-street.demon.co.uk

Sandra Bond is a long-time British fan, and here is the sixth issue of her zine *Quasi Quote* a mere five years after its last issue. That's not too many. At least Sandra's between issue gap is nowhere near as long as Rob Jackson's *Inca* #2 (17 years was it?) and others.

Quasi Quote #6 is a fine return for Sandra, and the contents are solid, leading off with an editorial in which she explains what caused her publishing gap (earning her law degree and the passing of both parents; I am very sorry to hear this). Sandra then spins the tale of her musical abilities – latent for lo, these many years – and the band that she is involved with, the Donutsh. The description of their particular brand of music sounds interesting: "quirkcore" is the term they've created for their songs, many of which

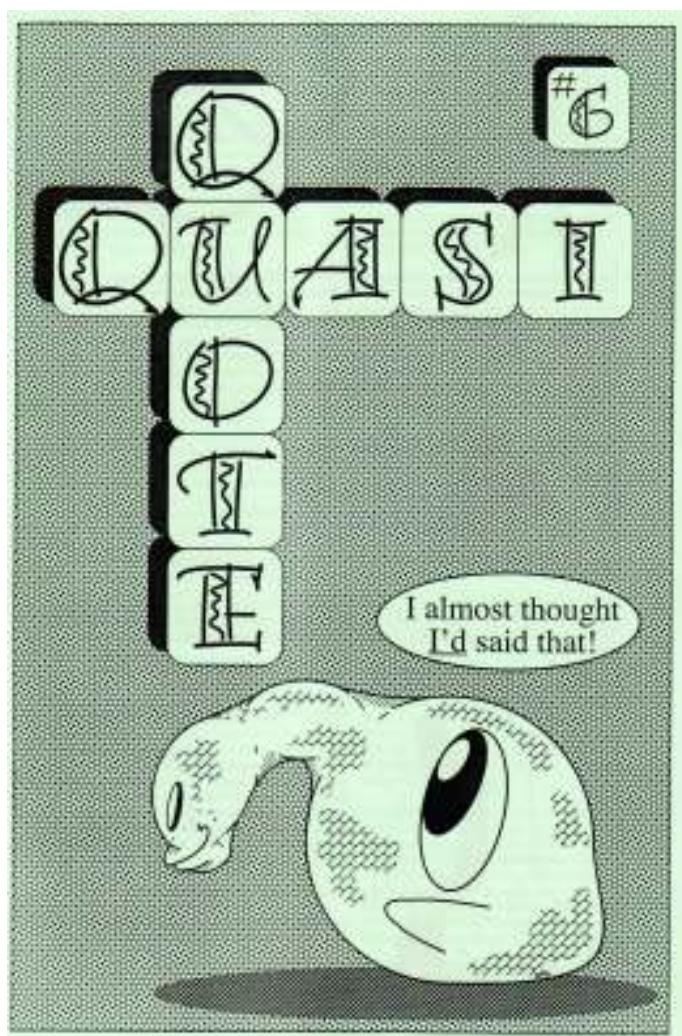
Sandra has written. It is a fun read, and I wish Sandra and her band-mates well. CD's are not yet available, which may be A Good Thing right now (just kidding, Sandra!).

Other articles are from Ron Bennett ("Lost in America"), which is truly a sad tale that many a fan should be able to relate to; "The Toilet Paper Affair" by Erika Maria Lacey, which is an even more radical solution to conservation than Sheryl Crow's infamous statement that only one square of TP is needed to get the job done; and Sandra's own Corflu Silver report. The con report is a bit disjointed – bouncing back and forth in an out-of-order-occurrence of events – but is still enjoyable, making me yet again wish I could have gone to Vegas. (I wish people would stop doing this to me...) A wonderful Sheryl Birkhead front cover (below) and a lovely bacover by Sue Mason wrap the zine, which has no lettercolumn, but Sandra explains the lack thereof in her editorial. Stale letters, she claimed, but that didn't stop Rob Jackson in *Inca* #2.

No matter what, *Quasi Quote* #6 is a good ish, and Sandra promises that the next one won't be so far into the future.

Fanzines received in one way, shape, or form:

Alexiad #39
Ansible #251-252
Banana Wings #34
BCSFazine #421-422
Beam (June, 2008)
Challenger #28
Chunga #14
Drink Tank #171-174
el #38
Einblatt! (June - July, '08)
Фантансмука у Фенмзү #31-32
File 770 #153
Flights from the Iron Moon
Hoaxzine
Interstellar Ramjet Scoop (June '08)
Motorway Dreamer #5
MT Void #1495-1502
NASFA Shuttle (July, '08)
Orange Soda
Orphan Scrivener #51
Prolapse #11
Science Fiction in San Francisco #67-70
Some Fantastic #15
Taboo Opinions #108-111
This Here #8
Time & Again #4
Vanamonde #748-757
Vegas Fandom Weekly #108
Virtual Tucker Hotel #6-12
Visions of Paradise #129-130
The Voices of Fandom #16 (podcast)
WCSFAzine #10-11
Whistlestar #7



FIGBY by Bill Fischer



FROM THE HINTERLANDS



Well, here we go again with yet another lettercolumn. There aren't as many respondents as I usually get, but this is my fault: I didn't get the word out as much as I normally do, mainly since I have been quite busy with school stuff. Oh, well. This was bound to happen sooner or later. So let's get on with it, complete with a new look, no less.



Dave Locke

chimera@flashmail.com

25 May 2008

I've never published a colophon indicating how sexual favors might possibly be a manner of obtaining my fanzine. Definitely this doesn't fit into "the usual", so it makes sense to itemize it separately. ***{At least you noticed it. I have always wondered how many people actually read colophons in fanzines.}***

Geez, I once logged investigation results, sort of like Valerie. This was back in teenage days when I lived in a small town which initially had a fellow who ran a gas station playing sheriff part-time, to having NY State Troopers patrol through there an increasing number of times on a regular basis, to having its own trooper barracks with seven full-time troopers. At one time they had a change in the Lieutenant in charge, and the new fellow kept making most of them rewrite their investigation paperwork because he considered it illiterate and unacceptable. Naturally I had a parent say "oh, my kid can take care of that for

you" to a couple of the troopers, and suddenly I had State Troopers stopping by the house all the time. Being a fast typist and rewriter, it would only take a few minutes to redo a write-up. There was no money in it, but it wasn't strictly a drawback. I'd get to read some interesting crap. Also, I never got arrested.

I see I'm in your WAHF listing, and this right here is the first time I've written you about *Askance*. You must be prescient. That's good in a science fiction fan. ***{Just planning ahead, that's all.}***

I have to agree with Eric Mayer's and Lee Lavell's comments on the notion of "Core Fandom". Basically, though, I just don't see a legitimate purpose to changing the name Fanzine Fandom. It seems like too much of a "here's what we want to be called today" kind of thing. There wouldn't appear to be any actual need to change what we're called, and if we're going to start calling ourselves something else just for the hell of it then I can certainly think of better labels than CoreFandom. Which, as a name, seems like the pits.

Eric notes that mostly he gave up SF in his early 20s. I was about 30. I read an occasional SF novel, but when it comes to that genre I'm usually into rereading old favorites. The only living SF author I follow is Joe Haldeman. A few years ago in desperation I laid out the *kind* of SF I've always liked, and listed the authors, and asked for recommendations. What a disappointment when absolutely none of them panned out. I've since had one recommendation which was decent but not quite enough to read any further novels by the author... So, I have to say I'm into mysteries. Lawrence Block, Michael Connelly, Don Westlake, James Lee Burke, Tom Perry, yada.

Dave Locke

{I still read the occasional SF novel. Most of my recent reading is school related, so when I do get a chance to read something different it will be a book that sounds interesting. My latest sfnal book to read is Murray Leinster's Quarantine Planet, and I just started reading it (3 July 2008). Like you, mysteries are my latest main reading for pleasure books, especially those with an historical bent. This is why Eric Mayer and Mary Reed's John the Eunuch books are on my "to be ordered" list.}

Speaking of which, guess whose loc is next?



Eric Mayer

maywrite2@epix.net

28 May 2008

A bit of a short LoC this time, not that I didn't enjoy Askance 8, but I've attached an article I did yesterday so I'm whipped. *{To be in Askance #10 (September). Thank you, Eric!}*

To be honest, I don't think I can write anything that would be of interest to most fans since I don't go to cons, or read sf, or know anything about fanhistory, and I don't even think my style suits faanish tastes. However, I know you like baseball and this is partly about baseball.

I would probably enjoy talking to Valerie, but I am only interested in murder mayhem from a

distance. I don't even like to have blood drawn. I have a law degree but I avoid court houses. I think she may be looking to get into a line of work a little too close to the reality for me!

I'm so out of it, I never heard of Carl Lundgren except as a guy who pitched for the Chicago Cubs prior to 1910.

Ah, where are those photos of the Rocky Horror costumes? *{I hadn't planned on staying that late and didn't have my camera to hand. Oh, well. There's always next year's AggieCon.}*

Lee Anne Lavell's suggestion that we call ourselves Retro-Fandom suits me. Rather than giving ourselves Hugos we could award retro-rockets.

I fear I would be as uncomfortable at a virtual con as at a real one. The few times I've ventured into chatrooms (years back when Mary and I were inveigled into doing some book chats) I felt the same confusion and panic I feel in real crowds. Also, thinking fast on one's feet is required, which is something that gives me a problem with real life group conversation. I can never think fast enough to say much, let alone say anything interesting, and a virtual chat would be worse yet because I'd be forced to chat with two fingers. In the unlikely event something clever accidentally popped into my brain, by the time I frantically typed it in by my hunt and peck method, the topic would've changed. Although people might still derive some amusement from my typos.

No doubt I have agonized at far too much length over the question "what is fandom?" but that is probably because I keep groping to understand why, out of all the activities I've been involved with, from mini-comics, to interactive text games, running and orienteering it is only in fandom where I have felt, for some reason, that I have never been accepted as a full member of the club. I figure it must be because I don't engage in the central activity and looked at that way it makes perfect sense.

It strike me that very often, people who attempt to define fandom begin with the assumption that fandom consists of their friends of those of whom they approve and then work backwards to find a definition that will justify that initial assumption.

But of course I very much enjoy the electronic publishing efforts of many fans who are enthusiastic about fanzines as I am whether they are involved in other fan activities or not.

Eric

{Well, the enthusiasm aspect is what drives fanzine fandom, no doubt about that. Without the energy the fun element would be missing, and I find that the enthusiasm level in fanzines, SF clubs, and cons is what makes them the most fun. But this only makes sense, of course.

{Defining fandom is one of those ergo propter, ergo hoc deals: because of that assumption, therefore this must be true. I forget who said it – Terry Carr? – but someone once made the point that fandom is whatever they are pointing to at the time. I'm paraphrasing here, but you get the idea: defining fandom is a personal matter, and that's all that needs be said.

{As for virtual conning, it's actually quite fun – especially when you don't have to sign in at the Virtual Fan Lounge unless you want to; thus, you can remain an anonymous virtual fly on the virtual wall, which can always be fun.}



Greg Benford

31 May 2008

Good issue! Bob Sabella is right, SF has pulled back somewhat from long perspectives. Aside from space opera, which has vision of a sort, and has vastly improved, we seem concerned more with the near future. I think we're worried--the 21st Century looks darker than the second half of the 20th did (and was brighter; contrast the first half!).

Gregory

{Thank you, kind sir. It is always good to hear from you, and let's get together in Dallas this coming October. I hear tell there's a fine convention going on up there the first weekend of that month.}

America's favorite TAFF delegate finally checks in after a many-issue gap. He must have been busy or something...



Chris Garcia

garcia@computerhistory.org

7 June 2008

OK, Ok, I get it! I'm a terrible, terrible fan for not having LoCed the last couple of *Askances*! I've no excuse save TAFF, and that's barely an excuse at all.

TAFF, by the way, is doing well as there is almost exactly as much money in the fund as when I won, which is a good thing. My personal goal is to bring it up to 20% above where I found it. I'll have lots of help with that project.

You get all the great Ditmar covers! This one is awesome, as they all are, but I think this one is the best I've seen from him in a while.

I gotta agree with ya that *Prolapse* is a fine zine and Pete's FAAn award well-deserved. It's one that I keep reading (and have failed to LoC for a while now). I gotta say that whenever Dan Steffan wins anything it's a good thing too. I keep waiting for him to show up on the Hugo Ballot. And John The Rock Coxon! I love that guy! He was the one I was most excited to meet on my TAFF trip. Linda just loved him too! He'll be visiting with his Family in July so we're gonna show them around, buy them some pie and make sure John gets into trouble...I mean...yeah, gets into trouble!

Hey! I remember that Stiles cartoon from an LACon Progress Report. Evelyn coloured on mine, and while it lost some of the mystique of the original, I do have to say she's got a good eye for colour. Aggiecon sounds like a good time. It's kinda like when I run into folks from High School who go to cons. There's Ralph, Bobby Toland and I who are on staff for BayCon and most other BArea cons, and then there are folks like Rebecca Newman who I never in a million years expected to wander into my Fanzine Lounge and sit down and chat for ten minutes. That happens every now and again. I love catching up with folks I haven't seen in ages, especially those who believe I've done far

more interesting things with my life than I've actually done. It gives me an air of mystery.

Don't like Matthew Pearl. Hated *The Poe Shadow*. So many words!

Love that graphic with the piece of my TAFF Report. And there's the theme of meeting people you haven't seen in ages with the part about running into Ben! It's like magic these things!

I still haven't been able to check out the Virtual ConSuite, but I'm gonna try!

Gotta run!

Chris

{Y'know, it's bad enough we have a real one of you to deal with. If there was also a virtual Chris Garcia I think fandom might just implode and form its own black hole, sucking All That We Know into nonexistence.}

Hey! The Canadian Connection is back in full bloom, and so here's our favorite northern letterhack with assorted comments on the last issue:



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

June 24, 2008

I think this is the third time I've started this loc. Something else comes up that needs my time, or I have to shut down because of near continuous thunderstorms we've had through this area. But now, it's sunny and relatively warm, and while it would be neat to be outside, I need to get caught up with lots of things. Here are some comments on *Askance* 8.

That's just more great art from Ditmar. I especially like the knots and other geometric shapes that pepper his art work. Bacover is great, too. They all look like they're a lot of work.

Corflu Silver was lots of fun, and I think you and your former roomie would have really enjoyed yourself. Most of the fun came from just yakking with people you haven't seen in ages, or have perhaps never met. The play was fun, the

auction has some interesting goodies, and one change I've seen is that there were few freebies other than the fanzines passed around, and there was no sales table. I guess with most fanzines being electronic, and photocopying extra copies being prohibitive, there may not be a need for a sales table any more.

Bill and Roxie Mills worked hard that weekend, too hard to really enjoy themselves, and the recognition of both the actual and virtual attendees really made up for it. I also like the fact that Peter Sullivan's *Virtual Tucker Hotel* acts as the fan *TV Guide* for this new channel of fanac. I have tried to take part more in it...dial-up just isn't sufficient to watch whatever programming is there, the chatline is fine fun, but only when I have the time or remember to tune in, which isn't often these days.

We did well in the FAAn Awards, we'll see how we do in Seattle. There's lots of voters in Las Vegas, so Arnie did well. I can't argue with eFanzines.com winning for Best Website, or Prolapse for Best Fanzine. It is good to see that new names arrive in our own little asylum every year; just wish there were more coming in and taking part. I keep hearing about the end times of fanzine fandom, but I'm too busy to pay that idea much attention.

Some conventions I've attended lately have wound up being reunions with people I haven't seen in years. Over the past couple of years, Polaris (formerly Toronto Trek) was a convention I'd see very little of...it's all media with some literary, and I haven't seen any SFTV since Babylon 5, so I have little idea of who the guests are. However, I will see people I haven't seen in years there, and now that we will be there for most of the weekend, we should enjoy ourselves with the familiar faces alone. (Polaris/Toronto Trek is finally realizing that they have history, with its 22nd incarnation coming up next month. A couple of friends on the committee surprised us by pushing through (with some considerable opposition) a lifetime membership to Yvonne as the founder and first chairman of the convention when it was originally Toronto Trek Celebration back in 1988. That's the main reason we're going.)

Bits and pieces of Chris' TAFF trip report have appeared here and there...I have fired off US\$20 for my own e-copy. Funny that even in London, Chris keeps running into old friends.

Man-hugs all around!

Setting up a camera at a convention as was done at Corflu sounds good, but I have to wonder as gasoline rises in price even further, and travel grinds to a halt, will cameras be the only way we'll meet?

The local...well, the Red Wings won the Stanley Cup, and the Celtics won in basketball. Now that those two sports are out of the way, it's officially summer! We are checking out the possibility of a new car, or given our finances, a good used car. Our dealership keeps pressuring us to buy; we plan to pressure them in return that if they want us to buy, they'd better cook up a good deal for us. My prediction that Dale Speirs was going to win an Aurora was derailed in the only way it could have happened...even though Dale was the only nominee in the category of Fan Achievement (Fanzine), No Award won. It may be time to either eliminate this award, or widen its scope to keep some pointy trophies for those who want to keep fannish communication going in Canada.

(Love Chris Garcia's Fred Flintstone shirt...somehow, so appropriate.) ***{If the foo shits...or something like that.}***

Got an e-mail from Rob Godwin, editor of Apogee Books...the book of condolences Yvonne started up is heading off to Sir Arthur's brother Fred. It will be interesting to find out what the Clarke family's reaction is to this book.

Caption for the illo on page 28... "Hey, watch where you're stepping! I just had that polished!" ***{Congratulations, Lloyd! Your caption was the winning entry in the "caption this illo" contest. Of course, yours was then only entry...Your prize is a lifetime subscription to Askance. Second prize is a lifetime subscription to Drink Tank...}***

I hope I'm producing a decent fanzine column...I'm not getting much feedback on it, so any comments on improving it are always welcome. I will be following your idea about reviewing some of the zines I picked up in Las Vegas; I just need to find the time to actually compose and write it up. Set me a deadline so I'll know when it's staring me in the face.

A great illustration of wooden robots on page 44. Some nifty handwork, and I'll bet they're fully

articulated.

Yours, **Lloyd Penney.**

{Wooden robots are cool. It would be really nifty to have a collection of these. Imagine it: a shelf in your humble abode populated by assorted hand-carved wooden robots, peering and leering down at you in the dark while you sleep. Doesn't this just make you feel all snug and cozy in bed?}

Yet another contributor writes in with good comments, even though she feels she has nothing to contribute to the conversation:



Lee Anne Lavell

leelavell@comcast.net

25 June 2008

First I want to apologize for no loc to *Askance* this time. Most of it was con report and I'm not terribly interested in cons, at least at this point in time. My eyes are not the greatest at present. I have been told to wait in order to get a new prescription until my eyes settle down from the cataract surgery. The waiting period should be up next month and hopefully my reading vision will be better when I get new glasses. Right now my eyes wear out pretty quickly when I am reading so I do it in short bursts and avoid reading things that I don't care much about. I'm in the midst of *Duma Key* by Stephen King and it is taking me forever to get through it. (It is a fairly long book. Some 600 pages.) After that I have two "Dexter" books waiting. Got hooked on that series by the Showtime TV series. (I can see better at a distance.)

I was reading in your blog about how you are now being inundated with submissions to *Askance*. Great for you. Not so good for me since you may not care for any more of my drivels. Strangely enough (and I never understood why) I never had problems getting submissions to my fanzines. In fact, I would start with a one or two page meeting notice and it would balloon into this Frankensteinean thing.

{Are you kidding me, Lee? Of COURSE I enjoy reading your drivels. Entertaining drivels is always welcome in my zine.}

You might want to consider in your editorial some indications of things you want to include in Askance. Topics, lengths and that sort of thing. *{Not a bad idea. I shall have to consider that as a real possibility.}*

Again, sorry about not sending a loc for the last issue.

Cheers, **Lee Lavell**

{Many thanks for this non-loc, Lee. In the meantime, here's hoping your eyes improve. This reminds me, I need to set up an

appointment for my annual eye exam. I wonder if there's a Cliff's Notes edition?}

000

And that wraps a short lettercolumn. Next time around there may be more, but that all depend on you readers. By all means, write, write, and then write some more! Or are you afraid of turning into another James Bacon? (Eww.. that is a scary thought!)

Ah, yes. Here are the infamous I Also Heard Froms:

If your name is included here, it is because you contacted me in one way, shape, or form either about Askance #8 or simply corresponding with me. I just thought you'd like to know.

Rich Coad, Mike Glycer. Arnie Katz, Earl Kemp, Guy H. Lillian III, Robert Sabella Steve Stiles, Venecian Todoroff, Taral Wayne.



Lloyd Penney and John Purcell secretly met in Dallas, Texas last year to plot their planet-wide domination of fanzine lettercolumns.

regional convention listing

There is one thing that I can always say about living in Texas: there are so many different conventions and activities going on within a day's drive. That is the over-riding criterion here – except for the biggie listings, like WorldCons – and if anyone learns of any new conventions in the Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico region, by all means let me know and I will happily include it in this listing. If you are viewing this online, you should be able to click on the name of the con – it's a hyperlink – and visit the homepage of that con.

[Conestoga 12](#)

Oklahoma's largest literary science fiction & fantasy con
July 25-27, 2008
Radisson Tulsa
10918 E. 41st Street
Tulsa, OK 74146

GOH: Diana Gabaldon
Artist GOH: Stephen Hickman
Fan GOH: Tim Miller
Toastmaster: Gordon Van Gelder

Featuring: Art Show, Panel Discussions, Writers Conference, Dealers Room, Short Film Contest, Gaming, Fangs Fur & Fey Mini-Con, Friday night concert, Gala Dinner with Diana Gabaldon, Filksinging, Author Readings, Masquerade, Charity Auction, Panels, Podcasts, and the inexplicably popular Penguin Playhouse Theatre! Of course, this is only some of the many activities and events we have planned.

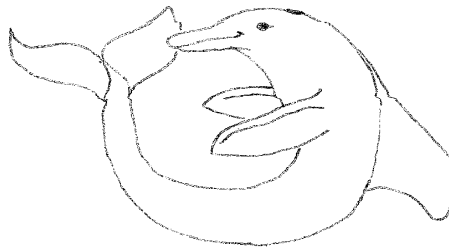
[MechaCon IV: Pushing the Sky](#)

Anime con
August 1-3, 2008
Hilton Lafayette
1521 West Pinhook Road
Lafayette, LA 70503-3158

Cosplay, Contests, Gaming, Video Rooms, Panels, Dealers Room, Artist Alley, formal/semi-formal dinner, and more!

Tokyo in Tulsa

Anime con
August 1-3, 2008
Crowne Plaza Hotel Tulsa
100 East Second Street
Tulsa, OK 74103



Con centered around Japanese Anime and Culture. We are also highlighting gaming (both video and tabletop), webcomics, writers, and popular culture. Otaku everywhere and of every persuasion will find something to do and be excited about! Tokyo In Tulsa is about coming together, having fun and celebrating our common interests. Will have AMV, cosplay, hall cosplay, etc.

Houston U-Con

Comic Books, Gaming, & Collectors one-day con.
August 2, 2008
Northwest Community Unitarian Universalist Church (NWCUUC)
5920 Hwy 6 North
Houston, TX 77084
(Bear Creek area / northwest Harris County)

The day long convention (admission \$3 for all day) offers a range of activities, including a dealers' room packed with local merchants who are there to buy, sell, and trade: comic books; games (RPG, card, and board); toys; collectibles; DVDs; and other fantasy and sci-fi related products.

Six dedicated game rooms will run individual RPG games including: Space Regatta, (Serenity RPG) ; Star Wars Pocket Models ; Bleach TCG ; Magic the Gathering; Munchkin; Munchkin "Classic" featuring the De-Range supplement; Super Munchkin Impossible Blended (two different Munchkin games plus the Munchkin Blender supplement); Frag!; and Ninja Burger with the Sumo Size Me Supplement along with live demos scheduled throughout the day.

Members of Men In Black from Steve Jackson Games, creator of GURPS will be on site as well as the creators of the Goth comic "Polyglot & Spleen" – artist Heather "Spleen" Stanley and writer Marc Moorash. Up-and-coming sci-fi writer, William Massey will be on hand to talk about his new book, "Legacy of the Panther" in addition to Kevin Brusky of Ape Games who created the popular "Order of the Stick" card game along with Trey Wickwire a staff member at Visionary Comics and creator of the comic "Mamluk," due early next year.

Denvention 3, the 66th World Science Fiction Convention

August 6-10, 2008
Colorado Convention Center
Denver, CO

GOH: Lois McMaster Bujold Artist GOH: Rick Sternbach Toastmaster: Wil McCarthy Fan GOH: Tom

Whitmore Ghost of Honor: Robert A. Heinlein

Five days of programming on hundreds of topics from books to media, from art to costuming, from movies to television to anime, from science fiction to science fact, as well as an art show, masquerades, the Hugo Awards ceremony, dealer's rooms, and much more!

[San Japan 1.5](#)

Japanese Anime and Culture Convention
August 8-10, 2008
San Antonio Municipal Auditorium
100 Auditorium Circle
San Antonio, TX
Holiday Inn El Tropicano Riverwalk
110 Lexington Avenue
San Antonio, TX

Dealer's Room, Multiple Panel Rooms, Video/Table Gaming, Artist Alley, 24 Hour Video Room. 2 viewing rooms, gaming (both live action and computer) industry panels, and more. Further, trying to emphasize as a cultural convention, we will be bringing you panels, performances, and demonstrations of Martial Arts, Tea Ceremonies, Kabuki, Traditional Japanese games, and more! Come see what it's really all about!

[Re/Max Ballunar Liftoff Festival](#)

(Presumably August 2008)
NASA Johnson Space Center
Houston, Texas
(Houston area)

Visit this exciting and educational family-oriented event at NASA/Johnson Space Center and enjoy hot air balloon competitions, evening balloon glows, skydiving exhibitions, commercial exhibits, concession booths, food from local restaurants, arts & crafts exhibits, entertainment and various aviation equipment displays.

Ballunar Liftoff Festival, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Its mission is to help the public learn about aviation and space exploration, and to sponsor and fund educational activities that encourage young people to learn about aviation and space and to study mathematics and the sciences.

“I'm so out of it, I never heard of Carl Lundgren except as a guy who pitched for the Chicago Cubs prior to 1910.”

Eric Mayer (from his loc)

ArmadilloCon 30

Literary Science Fiction
Convention.

August 15-17, 2008

Doubletree Hotel North 6505 N. IH-
35 Austin, TX 78752

Austin, Texas area

GOH: John Scalzi

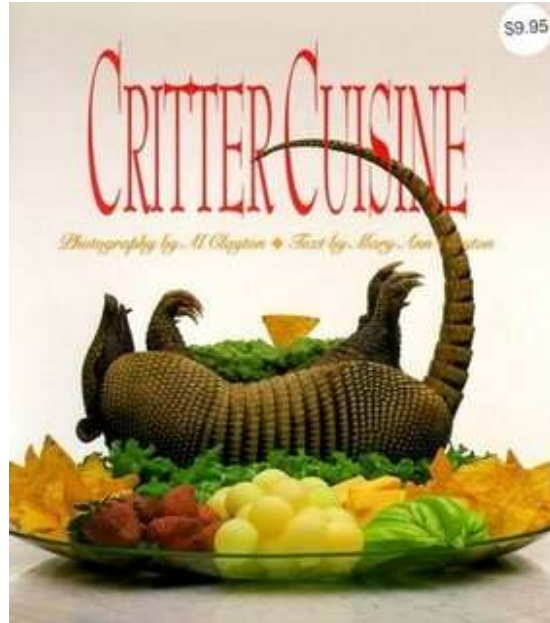
Artist GOH: David Lee Anderson

Fan GOH: Kelly Persons

Toastmaster: Bill Crider

Editor GOH: Sheila Williams

Special Guests: Joe & Gay Haldeman



Panels, Art Show, Gaming, Charity, Writer's
Workshop, Dealer's Room, and more!

ArmadilloCon is a literary science fiction

convention held annually in Austin, with several hundred attendees. The primary
focus of ArmadilloCon is literary science fiction, but that's not all we do -- we also pay attention to art,
animation, science, media, and gaming. Every year, dozens of professional writers, artists and editors
attend the convention. Sometimes they come to make deals, but more often they come to have fun!

For more information, write:

ArmadilloCon 30

PO Box 26442

Austin, TX 78729

Or [send email](#)

Sponsored by the Fandom Association of Central Texas, a 501(c)(3)nonprofit organization

Bubonicon 40

Science Fiction & Fantasy Convention

August 22-24, 2008

The Albuquerque Grand Airport Hotel
(formerly the Wyndham)

2910 Yale Blvd SE

Albuquerque, NM 87106

Albuquerque, New Mexico area

Panels, Art Show, Dealers Room, Gaming, Auctions, Film, Readings, Autographs, Filking, Science Talk,
Costume Contest, Green Slimes, Audience Participation Events, and more!

Each year, proceeds from Bubonicon go to worthy causes. In 2006, proceeds from Bubonicon 38
benefited the Roadrunner Food Bank, the Children's Hospital of New Mexico and the Williamson Science
Fiction Library at Eastern New Mexico University.

For more information write:

NMSF Conference

PO Box 37257

Albuquerque, NM 87176

Or [send email](#)

<http://www.animefest.org/>

Convention and Association for fans of Anime, Music, Manga, and Japanese Pop Culture

August 29-September 1, 2008

Hyatt Regency Dallas

300 Reunion Boulevard

Dallas, Texas, USA. 75207

(Dallas, Texas [downtown Dallas] area)

Japanese Guests, Voice Actors, Manga/Comic Artists,
Dealer Room, 24hr Video Theaters, J-Pop, Gaming, Art
Show & Auction, Panel Discussions, Autograph
Sessions, Film/Video Premieres

For more information write:

AnimeFest

1631 Dorchester Dr., Suite 110

Plano, TX 75075-6332

Or call 972-596-3561

Or fax 972-692-5996

Or [send email](#)

Realms Con



Media, anime, comics, & gaming con

September 5-7, 2008

Holiday Inn Emerald Beach

1102 South Shoreline

Corpus Christi, TX 78401

Anime Music Video Contest, Anime Karaoke
Contest, Anime Bikini Cosplay Contest, Cosplay
Contest,

Lisa Furukawa Ray Concert, Scavenger Hunt,
Lingerie, Swimwear, & Evening Gown Model
Walk, Rave,

Hall Cosplay, Vic Mignogna Presents
FULLMETAL FANTASY (A Realms Con
Exclusive), Dead Texas (A

Realms Con Exclusive), 24 Hour Game Rooms (With Your Favorite Tabletop Games, Video Games, and
Tournaments), 24 Hour Movie Rooms (Anime & Japanese Horror), Question And Answer Panels With
Anime Celebrities

For more information, write:

Realms Con

4730 Sea Island Drive

Corpus Christi, TX 78413

Or call 361-658-7446

Or [send email](#)

Starbase Houston Annual Chili & Dessert Cook-Off with Collectible Auction

One-day (1 PM-4 PM) annual fundraiser for Starbase Houston
(Presumably September 2008)
Houston, TX area

Cash Prizes and Awards for best Chili, Dessert, and Exotic Alien Dish. Original art by Bill Hughes donated for the auction. Starbase Houston's mission is to advance, promote, and sustain all the various facets of Star Trek, Star Trek Houston Fandom, and all things sci-fi. \$5 per person for food. There is no charge for entering the cook-off.

ProtoCon 10

Gaming con
September 12-14, 2008
Memorial Student Center
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas
Deep in the heart of SouthCentralEastern Texas

ProtoCon is an all-genre gaming convention run by gamers just like you. On top of all the games that everyone is familiar with and love to play, ProtoCon has an additional focus on independent publishers and prototype games. Our special events include the 2nd Annual Prototype Game Design Challenge, a Game Design Panel, and a live-action game design event (really, I kid you not). We have a Dealers Room and a Game Auction on top of all the great gaming! You can find the fun and familiar and the new and exciting all at ProtoCon!

G-Kon and Expo 3

A gaming, anime and science fiction and fantasy convention with a major focus on gaming of all kinds.
(Presumably September 2008)
Sheraton Arlington Hotel
1500 Convention Center Drive
Arlington, Texas 76011
(Dallas / Fort Worth, Metroplex area)

For more information, write:
G-Kon and Expo
3112 N. Jupiter-#315
Garland, TX 75044

Or [send email](#)

BroKon

Gaming convention offering Living Greyhawk RPGA Scenarios
(Presumably September 2008)
(in the greater Shreveport, LA area)

To sign up as a player or judge, please visit [Warhorn Sign-ups](#)

FenCon V

A Fan-Operated Science Fiction and Fantasy Literary and Filk Convention in the Dallas/Fort Worth Area
October 3-5, 2008
Crowne Plaza Hotel
North Dallas/Addison
14315 Midway Road
Addison, TX 75001
(Dallas / Fort Worth Metroplex area)

GOH: Gregory Benford
Music GOH: Three Weird Sisters
Artist GOH: Real Musgrave
Fen GOH: Gerald Burton
Special Guest: Jay Lake
ORAC Special Guest: Doris Egan
Plus many more guests

Writers, Filk, Panels, Videos, Lots of fun stuff. Writers Workshop, a Short Story Contest, and an Art Show and Auction. "Of the fen, by the fen, and for the fen...again!"

For more information, write:

FenCon
P. O. Box 701448
Dallas, TX 75370-1448
Or [send email](#)

FenCon is a production of the Dallas Future Society, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of science, literature, and music for the future of all mankind.

Shimakon

Rio Grande Valley's first Anime
Convention....We are run by fans for
fans.
October 3-5, 2008
Bahia Mar Resort
6300 Padre Blvd
South Padre Island, TX 78597
(South Padre Island, TX / South Texas area)

There's everything from gaming to Cosplay to brunches with special guests. Dealers Room, Guests, Video Rooms, Table Top GAMING, Video Game Room with Tournaments, Autographs, CosPlay Competition.

For more information, write:

63 Resaca Shores Dr. So.

Los Fresnos, TX 78566

Or [send email](#)

[Oni-Con 2008](#)

Houston's Original Anime Convention

October 19-21, 2008

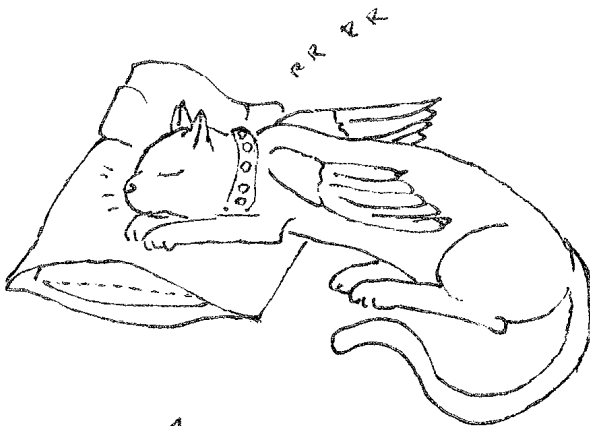
George R. Brown Convention Center

1001 Avenida de las Americas

Houston, TX 77010

Houston, TX area

3 Anime Rooms, Anime Music Video Contest, Arcade Gaming Room, Art Show/Auction, Artist Alley, Banquet, Concert (Sat 9:00 PM to Sun 12:00 AM), Console Gaming Room, Cosplay, Dance, Dance Dance Revolution, Dealers' Room, Gaming Tournaments, Hentai Fest, Karaoke, Live Action Room, Masquerade Ball, Model Contest, Opening Ceremonies, Panels, Scavenger Hunt, The Brunch Club Premiere



things to all people. The historical miniatures and board gaming events are hosted by [Lone Star Historical Miniatures](#). Our RPGA events are hosted by the [Austin RPGA](#).

To participate in the RPGA games, you must first register for the convention and pay the registration fee and also register for the RPGA events. This is two separate registrations. You must do both.

We're looking for all sorts: RPGs, Board Games, Card Games, and Miniatures.

Millennium has a particular need for classical historical periods (ACW, Napoleonics, Ancients, etc). Last year, there was more demand for these types than we could meet, and the slots filled up quickly.

[Millenniumcon XI](#)

Gaming con.

November 14-16, 2008

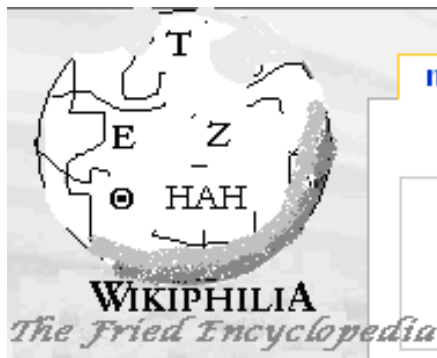
Wingate Inn & Conference Center

1209 North Interstate Highway 35

Round Rock, TX 78664

Round Rock / Central Texas area

Our convention caters to many different gaming tastes and styles. Unlike other conventions that support multiple genres, we don't have one group trying to be all

[main page](#)[discussion](#)[view source](#)[history](#)

Welcome to **Wikiphilia**,
the fried encyclopedia that [anyone can eat](#).
[1,689,481](#) articles in English

ORDER OF CROUTONIC KNIGHTS

wikiphilia article

(noun): "kroo-TAHN-ick"

DEFINITION, HISTORY, LEGACY"

DEFINITION

The Croutonic Knights are a religious, fraternal, quasimilitary order of Germanic Croutons from Northern Europe who trace their organizational roots back to the second Crusade. They aren't so military anymore as there has been a shortage of Germanic croutons since the [OPEC embargo](#) of 1974. The order began as an order of [penitents](#) in the late 12th century who were blessed by [Pope Celestine II](#) to engage in a [crusade](#) in Jerusalem in 1143. However, when they got there they found out that they were expected to be "Knights Hospitalers" meaning that they were supposed to work in the hospitals in Jerusalem. It was after this that they evolved into a military order.

HISTORY

The order began as a small group of Knights touring France who stopped to eat at a sidewalk cafe. They ordered the "special", not knowing what it was, and according to legend, were served French onion soup. The Knights were flabbergasted that anyone would put onions and cheese together but demanded something "crunchy". The waiter, being French, realized that he had some really old, stale bread crumbs in back and so brought those out. Scholars are not certain about the subsequent chain of events but according to tradition, the knights demanded to know what the stuff was. The clever waiter searched his Gallic brain for a story, finally saying that these were a "rare, French delicacy" called "croutons" (his pet word for what his poodle usually deposited on the neighbors' lawns). The Knights, who were Germanic, were suspicious, feeling that these things looked and smelled and tasted like really old, stale bread crumbs. The waiter nonetheless persevered in his explanation. Finally one Knight, Sir Wolfgang, found it amusing that it rhymed with "Teuton", something with which they were familiar. And so, in that early, medieval summer, they swore an oath of fealty to each other and called themselves the "Croutonic" Order. One knight wanted to get them to "pinky swear" but that hadn't been invented yet so they just high-fived each other.

In the late 12th century the knights were blessed by [Pope Celestine II](#) to engage in a [crusade](#) in Jerusalem in 1143. However, when they got there they experienced a strange sense of déjà-vu`. It was almost as if Pope Celestine II had sent them to engage in a crusade in a previous Wikiphilia paragraph.



[Fig. 1: A knight experiencing déjà vu`]

The Knights became restless as conditions in 12th century, Palestinian hospitals were terrible: They were seething hotbeds of black plague, typhus, cholera and even leprosy. The hygiene was terrible and patients were being charged over 7,000 [smegnicks](#) a night and that was without a bedpan. Healthcare in medieval Jerusalem was what one could expect given how cheap the HMO's were at the time.

After a number of petitions to the Pope to become a military order, they finally received orders to march against the Saracens. They organized themselves under a "[Grand Master](#)" of the order. One of the first Grand Masters was Hermann Salza, or as his homies knew him, "Grand Master H." He immediately got rid of the ball-gags, handcuffs, paddles and punishment panties (as they were no longer a penitent order), and got jiggy bustin' caps in the Saracens' asses.



[Fig. 2: Grand-Master H, or Salza Daddy]

After the loss of [Jerusalem](#) in 1187 the Pope permitted the order to establish a field hospital during the [siege of Acre](#). While treating the wounded crusaders, the madcap antics of the [Mobile Acre Surgical Hospitalers](#) kept everyone entertained. Especially madcap was the wry and dry humor of Sir Sigismund, "Hawkeye" the Pierced One. He and his loyal monk, Trappist John, constantly foiled such petty, anal and venal martinets as Lord Burns and Lady Margaret, the Hot-Lipped.

In 1211 the Croutonic Knights offered their services to "Defend the Faythe" to the Hungarian King, Andrew II. ("Defend the Faythe" is an early, ecclesiastical concept in Roman theology meaning: "If they don't convert, impale their babies on red-hot spits and boil their mothers' freshly flayed skins in goat's milk"). Andrew was quite impressed and offered to let them stay in that part of the Hungarian Empire called "Transylvania".

At first things were cordial between the ancient Hungarian court at [Esztergom](#) and the Order. They were charged with keeping a rival tribe, the [Cumans](#), out of Hungary. This worked well until they Knights swore fealty directly to Pope [Honorius III](#) rather than King Andrew II. Andrew, who had grown quite tired of all of Honorius' [Papal Bull](#) responded by expelling the order from Hungary. By then, the [Magyar](#) Monarch was confident that he didn't need Croutonic Knights to help anymore because there were some people newly arrived to the East of Hungary and Andrew was sure that he could depend on these "[Mongols](#)" as they called themselves, to step up to the plate and help.

As the order moved back into the Germanic areas of Europe they discovered the [Amber trade](#). This was a lucrative business having its roots in the forests of the Baltic areas and followed the "[Amber Road](#)" down through Poland and into Austria. The Poles were especially fond of the Road and held regular festivals where they danced local folk dances and celebrated amber. The Croutonic Order immediately set out controlling the famed Amber Road and it was rumored that if anyone knew how to do a Pole dance it was Amber. Amber was quite popular with all of the returning Crusaders and was even known to date a Marine or two. As a result, the order became very affluent.

In 1242 they attempted to lose the [Battle of the Ice](#) to Alexander Nevsky but another Germanic Order beat them to it. They still managed to win the toss and were permitted to travel a little further into Russia to engage the Mongols. Said the Grand Master at the time, "Mongols: how bad could they be?" Also, during this time (1226) a Polish Duke appealed to the Knights for their assistance in keeping the Prussians out of his country. The Prussians were still heathen at this time so the Croutonic Order rose to the challenge and went about doing battle with the Prussians, frequently attempting to convert them to Christianity with lots of Christian fellowship, outreach and atrocities. The war went on for 50 years and one Croutonic chronicler, [Robin the Alliterator](#), wrote that the Prussians would "roast captured brethren alive in their armour, like chestnuts, before the shrine of a local god"(Seward, p. 104). The Knights were horrified that anyone would treat a prisoner in this vile, savage and barbaric manner, preferring to merely parboil their own prisoners in the urine of leprous sewer rats after feeding their tongues through a wood chipper.

DECLINE

By the year 1407 the Order possessed a territory reaching from [Prussia](#) and [Pomereilia](#) to the [Baltic States](#) and even [Gotland](#) (Sweden). This would not last, however. Both Poland and Lithuania were growing in power and the Croutonic Knights were watching their numbers wane. [Waning numbers](#) are very difficult to deal with unless you know how to carry and borrow in your head on a moment's notice which is why most fast-food cashiers can't make change unless you put little pictures of the food on the buttons.

In 1410 the Knights lost to a Polish-Lithuanian coalition at the Battle of Greenfeldt. They were supposed to join a German coalition of their own at the field of Grunewald, but since batteries had not yet been developed, their GPS didn't work and being men, none of them thought to ask for directions. Actually, the "Polish-Lithuanian" coalition at Greenfeldt wasn't really a military force, but a "support our troops" rally of Polish and Lithuanian soccer moms headed to Grunewald to cheer their own men on. At Greenfeldt most of the higher-ranking Croutonic knights were killed. To this day, descendants of the Order have learned never to answer the question: "Do these shorts make me look fat?". This led to a steady losing streak on the battlefield and in one battle the Croutonic Knights were routed by Bohemian infantry. This was very embarrassing to professional soldiers like the Croutonic Knights because Bohemians had very little military training, preferring instead to sit in their coffee houses and garrets and drink espresso and crash with their old ladies and read really, bad poetry.



[Fig 3. A Bohemian about to read really, bad poetry]

The [Protestant reformation](#) took it's toll on the acquired holdings of the Order in Central Europe. In the 1500's many Northern countries went Protestant and seized the lands which the Order had been originally granted by the Holy Roman Emperors. At one point the Knights attempted to reconcile with the [Calvinists](#) in Switzerland but Calvin, being the party animal and all-around fun guy that he was, made them all chair "committees" and "task forces" and "study groups". This was too much for many a tough Knight and some perished under the pressure. The surviving Croutons then turned to Roman Catholic Europe to consolidate what holdings the order had left there.



[Fig 4. John Calvin moderating a study group on Outreach and Diversity]

By the 1800's [Napoleon Bonaparte](#) attempted to disband the Order but put it off, saying "I'll deal with those guys when I get back from Waterloo." The Order managed to stay solvent in Austria but at the end of the 19th century had come under the care of the [Hapsburgs](#). Marv and Betty Hapsburg were proud to be the only couple in the trailer park sponsoring a medieval, crusading order of knights. The knights, with their ancient knowledge of rare, French delicacies, were invaluable at potlucks and backyard barbecues well into the 1920's.

During the pre-WWII period the Nazis became fascinated with the whole "Croutonic" sense of race. There were some attempts on the part of Nazi propagandists to connect their own image with that of the historical order, but the Croutonic Grand Master who was in Miami at the time rebuffed this saying "I wouldn't be caught dead in one of those goofy, tiny mustaches!". The other Knights agreed saying that they had had enough of invading Poland and Lithuania and the Balkan countries. In fact, contemporary historians (since WWII) feel that the Croutonic Knights could have found a new home in Norway save for the fact that lutefisk made them gag.

LEGACY

Since the end of the Second World War the Knights have dispersed globally, although they still maintain a headquarters in Salzburg, Austria. There was a reported sighting of a marauding band of Croutonic Knights outside of Bleville, North Dakota in 1987 but this proved to just be some [shriners](#) out for a good time.

See Also

- [Teutonic](#)
- [Crusades](#)
- [Crusader](#)
- [Rabbit](#)
- [Pole Dance](#)

What's Next?

Thankfully, I haven't planned out a theme issue or a "special" tribute issue for September, so that leaves me lots of leeway to include good, solid, fannish material in the tenth issue of Askance as this zippy bimonthly fanzine finally hits double figures.

Already slated for inclusion are articles from Chris Garcia, Eric Mayer, and the second installment of Lee Anne Lavell's fannish memoirs, "Traveling the Bumpy Byways." Just by themselves, this is a solid core of material for any fanzine. Already I am looking forward to working on that issue.

The cover for the tenth issue will be by one of fanzine fandom's artistic giants, Steve Stiles, a multiple FAAn Award winner, and I hope y'all enjoy it.

Perhaps there will be a special treat in the September issue. There has been a lot of discussion in recent days on the Southern Fandom Classic Listserv (which I subscribe to) about the passing of Jack Speer. The discussion is about one of the sad things that survivors must do: sorting through the papers and belongings of the deceased. I remember eventually (in 1995) going through some of dad's stuff with mom and Valerie after he passed away in December of 1988, and one of the people helping Jack's widow Ruth with this task is Patricia Rogers. It is good that Patricia is there to help Ruth, especially when we remember that Jack Speer literally kept everything he acquired throughout his fannish career.

Specifically, Patricia has been regaling the SFC listserv with a running tale of her archeological dig through Jack's fannish accumulation over the decades - nearly 8 full decades worth, that is. Patricia has been calling it "Adventures in Speerology," so far providing the listserv with two installments. It is fascinating reading. One of the major discoveries so far is the fact that Jack acquired Roy Tackett's collection after Roy - a long-time Albuquerque fan and Bubonicon stalwart - died in 2003 at the age of 78. Patricia has also provided the occasional list of zines and pulps she's run across so far, and this is quite literally the tip of that proverbial fannish iceberg. From what she has said, it sounds like Jack's collection dwarfs Harry Warner, Jr.'s collection of zines, and I've seen the boxes and boxes of Harry's zines. Talk about your daunting task... My hat is doffed to Patricia Rogers for what she is doing.

So what has this to do with the September issue of Askance? Well, I am glad you asked. Since there are at least five active fanzines represented on the SFC listserv - besides mine, there are also Challenger, SFC Bulletin, Planetary Stories, and VFW - Warren Buff suggested that the faneditors involved share the wealth of Patricia's Tales of Discovery and publish articles and such in honor of Jack Speer's contribution to fandom. I like this idea, and welcome the opportunity to honor Jack's memory in what little way I can. Once we faneditors stop faunching, slobbering, and drooling over Patricia's postings, we'll figure out who will pub what, and then let the zines begin.

It sadly reminds me of what fans have written about Bob Tucker, Rich Brown, Bill Bowers, and the others who have recently made their way to that Great Convention in the Sky. While we will miss them all, there is no doubt that our lives have been made richer for their being here and making our fannish journeys such a joy.

So until next time, I am, and shall remain, your humble and obedient servant,

John Purcell

