


THE OBDURATE EYE NO. 6

JULY 2020

CELTIC ZODIAC SIGNS



Stag


December 24 — January 20
.....

POSITIVE TRAITS

NATURAL LEADERS
PERSISTENT
PATIENT

NEGATIVE TRAITS

PROUD
SOMBRE
WORKAHOLICS



SCOOPWHOOP™

THE OBDURATE EYE #6 (July 2020) is produced after more than a year's delay by Garth Spencer from 4240 Perry Street, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V5N 3X5. You can send complaints and kudos and rants to him by mail, or by email to garth.van.spencer@gmail.com.

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Blah Blah Blah

This issue had better start with a confession. I am going to have to give up on reviewing all the fanzines I received in the last year: whether for their ideas, as I had boasted I would do, or the usual individual way, as anyone else does. I just take too long to get around to it. Maybe cutting them down to this year's fanzines is enough.

In fact, maybe I should give up on the usual organization of contents. In my experience, fanzines included some kind of editorial, letters of comment, feature articles, humorous or serious commentaries on recent (fan) news, maybe a bit of fiction (depending on the fanzine), reviews of whatever the editor thinks is interesting – movies, TV series, fanzines received, even theatre productions – and whatever serves for a conclusion.

Has anyone done a stream-of-consciousness fanzine, or is that what vlogs are for? Has it been done to death already?

#

The other thing that really delayed me was a personal problem. Family, friends and readers of my previous zines are quite tired of the subject. I've said most of this before, more than once, and will not again.

I have finally concluded I had a perceptual or cognitive difficulty, maybe auditory processing disorder. I used to think I could understand anything, if only people told me what they wanted from me. Then, in the past year, I figured out I fail to understand some people even when they do talk to me. Some kinds of people and some kinds of speech just don't make sense to me.

Which makes nonsense of my fifty years of resentment against vague, allusive speech.

I have other theories, but you get the idea: all this may be very far from anyone else's interests and concerns.

#

Writing fiction has become a more prominent part of my life, however sporadic I am about it. This has had odd knock-on effects.

For one thing, by way of story research I have been reading up on the threat of earthquakes in the Pacific Northwest, the efforts to predict them or prepare for them, and the probable outcomes if the next major earthquake to affect the whole region is as bad as seismologists anticipate.

For another thing, I have been reviewing crank theories about lost civilizations for a fantasy novel; not that lost-civilization novels haven't been written before,

but maybe no one has written one that gets into the nuts and bolts of a civilization, or how survivors trying to pass on their legacy will fail.

I have other theories, but you get the idea: all this may be very far from anyone else's interests and concerns.



Life in Vancouver

The flavour of life in coastal B.C. has changed a good deal.

Racism vs Multiculturalism: In the early decades of the 20th century, it was normal for Canadian authorities to try to keep Canada white, despite that it was

basically usurped First Nations territory. (There was an infamous incident before the second World War in which a legally chartered ship, the *Komagata Maru*, was turned away from Vancouver because the passengers were mainly Sikhs hoping to settle in B.C.) When my father emigrated here, B.C. was largely about agriculture, fisheries, mining and logging.

Now, in the early decades of the 21st century, you can hardly go anywhere in Vancouver or on the southern coast without seeing signs in Hindi, Chinese or Korean script. Television stations – the English-language ones – are as likely to wish everyone a joyful Vaisakhi or Eid as a happy Easter, Passover, Christmas or Chanukkah. Which is good; now, Vancouver looks like the real world. I do wish I had learned some Chinese and Punjabi, though, rather than French.

Parenting: In retrospect I was a remarkably free-range child, allowed to spend a lot of time roaming out of the house alone without supervision. Of course, this was in the city of Victoria in the 1960s – which was a small city, a backwater even compared to Vancouver – but this still contrasts with the somewhat paranoid protectiveness I hear of parents today.

Climate: The Pacific Northwest is known – or was – for rather mild summers and winters, compared to the rest of North America. (That appears to go along with the excess of rain.) Of course, as in other regions, the climate here has changed.

In Victoria, we would get a real snowfall perhaps once in every seven or eight years. Predictably the city would get snow-plowing machines, they would be stored and disused and finally sold, and then *immediately* a major snowfall would bring the city to a halt. Howls of derisive laughter from the rest of the country followed. On the other hand, summer temperatures rarely reached 20° Celsius (call that 68° Fahrenheit, I think).

Now the pattern is different. We have had winters so warm that I have seen people wearing shorts. We have had infestations of pine beetles which survived the winter, instead of being killed off, with lamentable consequences for commercial logging. It is impossible for me to wear a suit in summer, when temperatures regularly go over 25 and even 30° Celsius. Also, Vancouver is more humid than my hometown. Sometimes I joke about moving north. Half-joking.

Towards a Design for Living

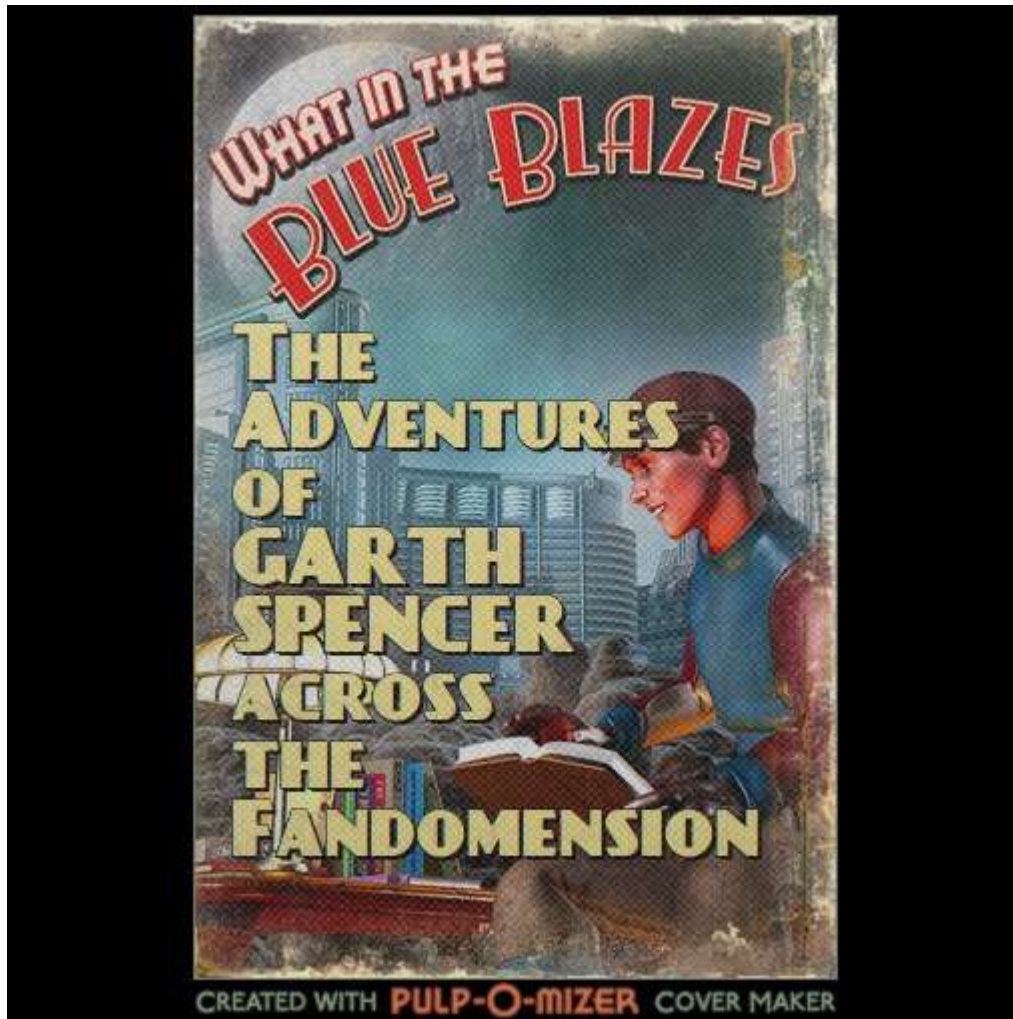
One of the false convictions I haven't quite shaken off (as you are wearisomely aware) is that there is a Standard Received Design for Living, even like unto Standard Received English yea verily, and that everyone but me knows everything about it. Maybe I need to say an affirmation every morning that my life is my own to design, and I pretty much have to come up with my own design given all the changes in the social environment since my parents' time.

There are just a few random notes in my file towards a practical design for contemporary living, but they tend to go like this:

- If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.
- No plan survives contact with ~~the enemy~~ reality, but you cannot begin a ~~campaign~~ project without a plan.
- Life is a set of simultaneous projects, such as earning money, keeping house, watering the pets and feeding the plants, maintaining relationships with family and friends, voting against the worst candidates, sweeping and mopping the underground lair, and writing the Great Canadian Novel. There is no guarantee that you have enough spoons to do All the Things.
- Nobody is obligated – or directed – to brief you about All the Things. So families can sort of forget to pass on little things like retirement planning, and financial management, and sexual hygiene. If there were a Standard Received Life Design, as perhaps many of us assume, it would be astounding to discover how much of it an average person doesn't know.
- Most of the essential projects of life require some basic knowledge and skills – for example, Basic English, basic arithmetic, probably some basic mechanical physics and basic chemical knowledge and basic biology. Of course the basics may be somewhat different in other countries and cultures.
- Most of our basic educational subjects require attention skills, memory skills, and self-expression or record-keeping skills, which are not taught.
- Most of us retain rather little of our high school education. Elected representatives are not unusually ignorant or inarticulate.
- North Americans don't usually realize they have any customs or social norms, unless they studied anthropology or sociology.
- There are few rational explanations for shoelaces, neckties, suburban lawns, or corner offices.
- How we use money, credit cards, bus passes, food, clothes, language, gestures and nonverbal tone, time, space and traffic lanes is not a matter of universal knowledge. But immigration and naturalization services, policemen and auto insurance adjusters are wearisomely aware of this.
- Most of us have a pretty narrow, specialized range of knowledge, attention, and expertise, compared to All the Things citizens have to do. Due to the Dunning-Kruger effect, or simple vanity, we really don't realize how narrow our competence is.
- Most of us “know” at least as much misinformation, ignorant guesses, pointless prejudices, outdated customs, and unique concocted delusions

as we know actual facts. This stuff is called “common sense” when it isn’t “company policy”, “cost-benefit analysis”, or “allocation of resources”.

You can expand on this according to your own observations. Please. I invite you to do so. The rising generations will need a guidebook ~~to laugh at~~.



Getting a Grip

The longer I put off the completion of projects, the more I wonder about their real value.

One of the things I wanted to add, in my updated website, was a whole Web site on regional fandom – upcoming conventions, where the current clubs are, who’s doing blogs and vlogs and podcasts, as well as the list of current APAs I put together, and what fanzines are being posted to eFanzines and fandom.org – and it dawns upon me that, apart from the APA list, I might just as well list

some Web links for each of these subjects. Especially as so many conventions were cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Similarly, the website showcases some articles I wrote, on topics that might interest writers or fans: how writers have created planets, or constructed languages; how a sort of social engineering has been imagined, by writers ranging from Asimov through Poul Anderson to Cherryh and Donald Kingsbury; or eccentric pursuits such as micronations and casting runes. But again, the articles I wrote can become dated, while links to the topical websites will, thereby, be links to updated websites.

It's a judgment call.

Amsbury Speaks

(to be a regular column of articles by Clifton Amsbury [- 2007], if I can get my scanner to work)

Note: Every so often I dig up again a file of articles given me by Clifton Amsbury, a fan and congoer who was also a historian, and a veteran of the Spanish Civil War. Very naturally he had ongoing concerns about the function and shape of society, and its dysfunctions.

*Being the forgetful procrastinator I am I kept mislaying and forgetting these pieces until after Dr. Amsbury died (in 2007, I discovered), and for a long time I did not figure out what to do with these written properties. Finally, I found out that his papers were archived at *, and I emailed them to find out whether I should turn them over, or return them to his family. They wrote back to say they weren't interested and I could use them as I saw fit. Therefore, I reprint the following for your delectation. -GS*

THE WORLD OF FIRST FANDOM

(presented at Westercon 1987)

Clifton Amsbury

(Footnotes by Garth Spencer)

Many of you have no doubt read various accounts of certain events of First Fandom times. As we here honor the founder of West Coast fandom¹, one of the founders of world fandom, I should like to tell you of some aspects of those times which have not been much mentioned, but which it is necessary to know in order to understand what has been described.

Regardless of what Fred Pohl wrote in *The Way the Future Was* about fandom not yet existing in March 1933, *un-organized* fandom was already nearly fifteen

¹ "founder of West Coast fandom": (Westercon 1987)

years old. Organized fandom began in the spring and summer of 1928 in Boston, Atlanta, Chicago and, perhaps first of all, in the Eastbay area of California. Ray Palmer united all of these into an International Scientific Association which lasted until 1934, but the brief flicker in Manhattan had indeed broken up before 1933; so for his world at that time, Pohl was correct. There and then, fandom consisted only of fans.

Many people, for instance Pamela Sargent in her introductions to her *Women of Wonder* books, and H. Bruce Franklin in his study of Heinlein's opus, have noted that science fiction reflects the world in which it is written. (One fan I know claims that in some magazines, many stories followed CIA pronouncements with a six-month lag.) Naturally, the relationship with the world at large is also true of fandom.

Out in California, we didn't let politics interfere with fandom. We had some members who were pretty radical and some who were rather conservative, but when we got together we talked science fiction. We did hear about the New York club, and reports that politics – specifically, people who called themselves socialists – had torn it apart. Well, we didn't have any members who called themselves socialists, but these reports – and experiences I had later, both as a person and as an anthropologist – have led me to collect information which bears on this.

In the Thirties, most of us became labor-oriented. Labor in the United States has had several streams of thought, each with its own attitudes and approaches to how to secure the interests of employees against the interests, greed and egos of employers. Some unions, most notably the Railroad Brotherhoods, started out as insurance lodges like the Elks and Eagles and Moose. They still often slip back into that frame of mind. Some, especially the older industrial unions like the United Mine Workers, survived the breakup of the Old Knights of Labor which perished under the joint attack of troops in the service of employers and organizers for the then-new American Federation of Labor.

The American Federation of Labor was oriented toward craft unionism of artisans who sometimes worked for others and sometimes set up small businesses of their own. Samuel Gompers, a cigar-maker who soon became head of the Federation, called it business unionism. Some industrial unions, some of them members of the Federation, got into big strikes, in the course of which the Federation officials helped employers break the organization.

There was another kind of industrial union within the AFL. As the garment industries grew in New York, Chicago and New Jersey, their Jewish, Italian and other foreign-born or first-generation workers organized into what they thought were industrial unions, but which were segregated into craft and sex-based locals. Most of these garment unions were composed of radical membership and led by people who called themselves socialists.

Another stream of industrial unionism was thoroughly American. It called itself the Industrial Workers of the World, or IWW. Members were known as

Wobblies. Some unions, like the Western Federation of Miners (now the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers) moved back and forth between the AFL, the IWW and independent status, but wound up in the AFL. Though founded by socialists, for much of its life the IWW was anarchist-oriented. I understand it now claims about 60,000 members².

Now let me change the subject again.

One of the things anthropologists found out about during the generation after World War II was patron-client social systems. Among the infinite variations of these, there are at least two distinct kinds. Our own modern society is a kind I have termed group patronage and group clientage. The other is dyadic, and usually peasant-based. Until modern times, all civilizations in history seem to have been dyadic patron-client systems.

Dyadic means “by twos.” In these societies, all human relationships are considered to be by pairs. The pairs may be of peers, but each member tries for more power than the other. When one is clearly of greater power, he is a patron; when clearly of lesser power, he is a client. Every person has at least one patron, which need not be human and is often supernatural. Almost everyone has at least one client, which may be a child.

Fascism is an attempt to restore the aristocratic structure and practices in a culture which has already made some progress toward democracy. Thus, they have the “leadership principle” in which an employer is the *leader*, or patron-boss of his employees, and customers are patrons to the salespeople, but clients to the store owner. And now, you know some of the meanings of clientage and patronage.

When the American Revolution took place, this system was just breaking down. Guilds never got established here³. The first unions were founded soon after we adopted our constitution; that is, before 1800 A.D. For two hundred years we have been engaged in establishing the right of employees as a group to a voice in their own living and working conditions.

As the great wave of immigration came from Europe to America – first from England, then mostly from Ireland, Germany, Italy, and from the ghettos of Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic lands – we must remember that more and more, these were people from patron-clientages. So, naturally, they thought in terms of dyadic relations and of having someone in patronage over them. This was the structure of the so-called machines of the city political bosses. This also was the structure of unions under so-called labor bosses.

This is also the mechanism, but not necessarily the structure, of the political phenomenon which the Soviets called the “cult of personality”. The leadership of

² “Now” in this article refers to 1987.

³ Guild:

Roosevelt, of the Kennedys, and now of Reagan are cults of personality: of a semi-supernatural dyadic-bonded patronate. A personal savior.

I remember in 1939 or 1940 being at a convention of Young Democrats in Stockton. A huge picture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt filled the wall behind the platform, and every time his name was mentioned the shouts and clapping and stomping threatened to bring down the hall. And there at the podium stood a speaker saying how much better off we were than “over in Russia” where Stalin’s picture was everywhere and everyone adulated the dictator.

Oh, well.

That was extreme, but that was the atmosphere in which we lived. Remember, these were your parents and grandparents. These were the founders, not of fandom, but of the society in which convention fandom, the fandom of today, grew up.

Let me go back to the 1920s and the garment unions. By this time, most of the leadership had been in office for at least a decade, and in some union offices, longer than that. They were patrons and the membership were clients. Patrons like to keep the clientele divided. Factions divide the opposition, and having many smaller craft locals also keeps down unity of the opposition. The left wing wanted true industrial unionism with united locals for strength in industrial organization.

The established officials also agreed with employers that the Bolsheviks in Russia were a great danger and should be wiped out. They would destroy collective bargaining by eliminating employers. So the office-holders expelled the left-wingers from the Socialist Party.

These left Socialists got together with most of the leadership of the IWW and organized the Communist Party of America. Then Communists were expelled from the Socialist-controlled unions, and spread out over America, organizing industrial unions.

Herbert Hoover said that all the people on each block should get together to help their own poor people. But what do you do when all the people on each block, for blocks and blocks, are poor? The only ones who took him seriously were the Communists. They organized block by block and sent block delegates to an Unemployment Council in each city. Then the Socialists set up their own rival unemployed organization.

This is the world in which New York fandom was reorganized in 1933.

Then the AFL proposed to divide up the industrial unions into crafts, and in self-defence the industrial unions in the AFL set up organizing committees to organize the millions of workers in the unorganized industries.

In 1936, they were expelled from the AFL, and the Congress of Industrial Organizations was born. The Communist industrial unions dissolved, and their

locals with their experienced organizers joined the CIO, and the greatest organizing drive in the history of American labor was off and running.

President Roosevelt hitched his political wagon to that star, and all good liberals were suddenly pro-labor. Most of us didn't distinguish one kind of union from another. Even old-line craft-labor bosses were good. That was a little uncritical.

Westbrook Pegler, a newspaper columnist who started in sports and worked up to social commentary, had a standard line. He would start with noting evidence that some AFL official was corrupt or mixed up with the rackets and by the end of the column, he is telling his readers, therefore, all CIO officials are Communists. A New York department store owner told a labor economist that yes, the officers of the AFL retail union were racketeers, but those of the CIO were Communists, and you could do business with the racketeers but the Communists were too honest.

That is the kind of world in which the 1939 Worldcon took place. I was in New York City in 1939 on other business. The day after the con I read about it in the papers. You all know the story now: Moskowitz, Asimov, Pohl, Knight and others have written of it. Some people, some of whom called themselves socialists, refused to allow certain others to attend, saying they were Communists. Sounds like the history I've been recounting, doesn't it?

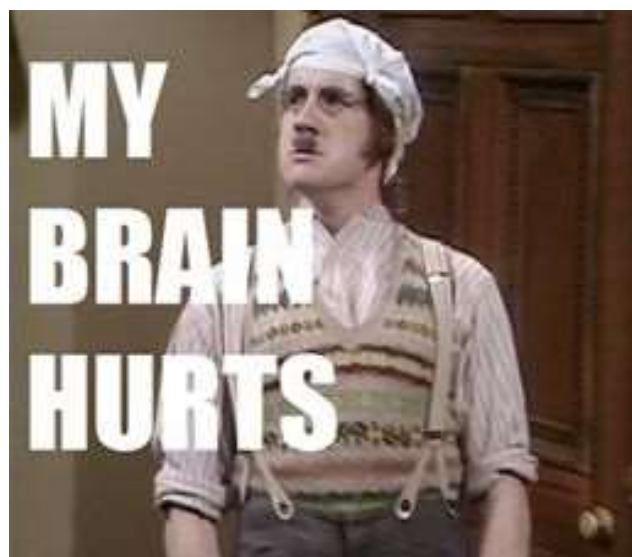
Well, that's the way their part of the world was in those days.

References

Franklin, H. Bruce. (A study of Heinlein)

Pohl, Frederik. *The Way the Future Was*

Sargent, Pamela *Women of Wonder* series



Letters

Graham Charnock <graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk>, **May 4, 2019**

You are right. You should stop reviewing fanzines.

Yes, I understand tattoos.

I have never been abducted. Neither have I ever met anyone who has been abducted. I have also never met any Aliens, regardless of whether or not they have been abducted. I don't think I am qualified to comment on this subject.

I didn't vote in the Sasquatch Vote. I never vote for anything, although I might vote for ice-cream if anyone floated the idea.

I once drew a gourd beast, but kept it to myself.

I've never been tempted to produce a fanzine in which I printed lists of my Facebook posts. I think I am fairly normal in that respect.

Yes, I agree you seem generally clueless.

The best thing about your fanzine is the letters column. I'm amazed people actually write you letters.

Lyn McConchie farside1946@yahoo.com, **May 4, 2019**

Many thanks, this came flapping in this morning (May 5th) and was read on the spot. Interesting as always. And also as usual, with something I wanted to comment upon.

I'm sorry to hear some of the membership are feeling old and jaded. I might myself except that I have no time. I started a new book at the beginning of the year, finished it March 15th. Ah yes, March 15th, that was also when I completed revision, decided to take a break before submitting the book, turned on the TV and discovered to my utter horror that we'd had a terrorist. Or rather that we'd had one, the police gathered him in less than half an hour after he struck, and saved a third venue from his attentions, but he'd hit two by that time and there were 50 dead (Now 51, another victim died this week)

I stared disbelievingly at the TV. A terrorist? HERE? We do not HAVE terrorists. I was a little comforted to find that this idiot was Australian and had come here as opposed to his original plan to go to the US. Sigh. The predominant theme after that was - raise money for the victims, show solidarity with the victims, do not mention the idiot by name and give him validity thereby, and a regular wail of "but kiwis aren't *like* that." (Quite true,) even the Muslim community said so.

Deciding to take a break in turn from all that, I submitted the new book around 5pm, read Patricia Briggs, *Burn Bright*, that had just arrived, went to bed, and on opening my email the next morning found that I'd achieved a record. A book offered for publication at 5pm the previous night, had been accepted by 7am

next day. Wow! I revelled in that for a few weeks while writing promised articles, short stories, and reviews, looking after my livestock, and making extra time for the Cat - who doesn't like me writing books, I have less time for him. And then started the next book which I hope to have done by the end of May. At which time I'm expecting an Australia friend to stay several nights.

Which brings me back to the original item. Yes, I am old, yes, I live alone in a rural area and some isolation. But I have no time to worry about any of that, to worry about the alterations fandom is undergoing, or indeed, to worry about almost anything at all. By the time I've written the next book, coped with the livestock, regularly reassured the cat I do love him and yes, I can find time for him, answered the door/phone/email to umpteen friends, thanked the stars we don't get terrorists out here in my rural fastness, and read the next *Obdurate Eye*, I can't find a spare minute to worry about getting old, being competent, having medical problems (I do, I just haven't time to worry over them) or the habits/customs/peculiarities of the younger generation. And all in all, I have no complaints. I'm busy, happy, involved with life, never bored, and I recommend that.

Michael McKenny honghsien@gmail.com, May 6, 2019

Many thanks, Garth, for letting me read *Obdurate Eye*. It was a pleasant and interesting read. Your reference to abducted aliens recalled to me a Russian work titled "A Martian Stranded on Earth". I guess while there are those who report being taken by aliens, there are others here who feel like this is the alien planet.

You ask whether satire or revolution. In my opinion, another option is responding to government (e.g. Ontario provincial) cuts by going ahead and continuing the service by alternate means. I don't know the details, and I thought I heard that in some cases Ontario is cutting funding to managers, boards, and instead of reducing the number of members or the salary of such boards, boards are choosing disturbing service cuts (e.g. inter-library loans). Whatever the facts are, I feel an appropriate response is to determine what is needed (e.g. inter-library loans) and organizing effective, safe accomplishment of that need (e.g. volunteers, non-government funding). I feel an essential point is to include responses that get needed things done.

Fan history sounds interesting, as history in general is. It's good to be aware of roots. As to fanac, in my opinion, there's even more activity in response to science fiction and fantasy now than a generation ago, though now so much of it is scattered around social media that one can be unaware of its extent. And, one's children or grand children, or others of their generation, can be a good source for info on books, etc. coming out these days. I'm reminded of a scene in *4400* (a TV series from not all that long ago, certainly from the point of view of one who watched original *Star Trek* and even the first season of *Dr Who*, when they first came out) in which one character, who's been out of it for 4 years,

complains he won't know current music and another compiles some fav recent songs for him.

I liked the quote from Kipling. I very much enjoyed Denny Marshall's poetic vision of "riding the universe forever." Here's to calendars that have no last date and the universe continuing to amaze us always. And, here's hoping there are no stone pillows ahead of us. Thanks for the list of APAs and future happenings. I'm now too old and busy to join APAs, and I really like the name Cuneiform APA. I hope others, especially some able to participate, appreciate your info on APAs and upcoming events.

Thanks again for sharing. Hats off to you and all who helped make your offering so interesting and enjoyable.

Lloyd Penney, July 3, 2019

I have never understood tattoos. Some say the skin is a canvas for us to decorate. I know of at least five people who have covered themselves with tattoos, from little ones to those that might cover an arm or their back. Yes, they are very pretty, but...we have learned that every tattoo is detrimental to your health, and makes it more difficult for your immune system to fight infection and disease. A couple of these friends have had serious health problems, but they refuse to see that the tattoos may have compromised their health. The others have had no health problems; at least, none they will speak about.

((Wearing tattoos, like campaigning against tobacco and expressing acceptance for marijuana or homosexuality, is one of the social changes I have witnessed with wonder but little understanding. I did not know that tattoos were detrimental to health, although I gathered that Canadian Blood Services will not accept donations from the recently tattooed, and that yakuza who wear whole "suits" of tattoos are liable to liver failure. For my part I am still contemplating what kind of tattoo I would wear, if I got one.))

I do not know of any connection between whiskey and pine tar, but pine tar helps keep the skin problems away. I had some serious psoriasis on my left foot a while back, and it took some very expensive cream medication to get rid of it, the use of pine tar soap in the mornings keeps it away. It also helps to soothe any itchy area you might have to deal with, especially good in the summertime with the heat we deal with.

((Guess you didn't get my joke; it expressed my lack of appreciation for whiskey. Or else you decided to do a poker-faced riff on it.))

Governments should be rated, indeed, but the worst ones are the ones who do not care about the people who elected them. I can think of several off the bat... And, respect is definitely earned, but sometimes, to get it means you have to give it. It's tit-for-tat, but someone has to start the process.

((Respect for self, I reason, means respect for others. That is individual life. Not knowing anything about the “life” of governments, I don’t know what they have in the place of respect, or merit.))

I see where fandom as a whole is dying across Canada. Communications between the cities was always poor, and people were usually too busy bitching about Toronto to do anything constructive. The fan Aurora Awards are usually won now by friends of the pros, or the pros doing something like running conventions for their fellow pros. Fandom, such as it is, seems to no longer qualify for its own awards. With this in mind, that’s one reason why Yvonne moved forward into other areas of fandom, including steampunk, to keep up with the level of participation we enjoy.

((Fandom is not so much dying as changing. If I can’t appreciate what goes under the name now – e.g. costuming, gaming of all sorts, filksongs that don’t emulate Weird Al, media fandoms, steampunk – I may have to found an Old Fart’s Fandom for people who still appreciate fanwriting and hot tubbing.))

My loc... While we were in England, I turned 60, so it’s now official. Chris and Martin seem to be firmly settled in Toronto again, and they found some place to live that is exorbitant, but on the outer edge of affordable.

((Glad to hear Christina and Martin are getting settled in. Give them my best wishes.))

I am having trouble seeing the screen in front of me...every since we got back from England, I have been sleeping well, mostly because every evening, I feel exhausted. I need to build up my stamina again, but with all the walking we did in London, I thought we’d done that. Anyway, that’s all my tired mind can dredge up, so I’m done. See you next issue.

We Also Heard From:

Cathy Palmer-Lister, Marc Gerin-LaJoie, Catherine Groves (*Christian New Age Quarterly*), Paula Johanson, Steve Fahnstalk, David Langford (*Ansible*)

Hawkshead

A poem by Graham Charnock
Evolution has made beautiful and harmless
Moths and butterflies
Appear terrifying to their predators
Thanks for that evolution
Masking beauty with repulsive ugliness

It's good to know evolution has our backs and is looking out for us
With survival of the ugliest
Now I know why people cross over to the other side of the road
when I approach
They are terrified by my good looks

Fanzines as a Literature of Ideas

January 2020

9th Fandom: John Thiel, one of the several people very active in a newly revitalized National Fantasy Fan Federation, has announced “9th Fandom” – which apparently means the following attitude:

let's have less talk of war and “man's final obliteration”. If the world were to be obliterated, why did it last as long as it did? Probably man was around even longer than we know about. But an unrecorded existence has its own ways of reasserting itself. You don't need to trample everything into the dust just because things seem to be about over. Does life look at what's happening around it and quit in disgust? Or is it an illusion that life comes to an end after having worked out a meager existence? A lot of things come to an end, but there is still the spirit to go on.

Let's make that our concept of our existence. And likewise with fandom⁴.

February

Watching All the Zines Go By: The Zine Dump from Guy Lillian appears come close to describing the state of current fanzine fandom, at least in the United States, or in the English language. More in-depth fanzine reviews appear in File770.com and in *Beam*; and fanzine archives such as eFanzines.com and fanac.org give another view of current fanzines. His capsule reviews give a good overview of the range of fanzines still appearing, as well as the range of our current preoccupations.

Apparently some people haven't quite observed this point. As Guy writes:

TZD's underlying purpose, which is to assure a fandom that has largely relegated the written fanzine to the status of the postcard – an obsolete manner of communication – that we dinosaurs are still out here, still publishing, and occasionally even have something germane to say. Depth in my reviews is generally not my purpose. If I can convey the flavor of a

⁴ John Thiel, *Event Horizon* #3, Jan. 2020.

zine, its point of view and purpose, in one of my three-line blurbs, then hooray for me; I've done it⁵.

Plus Ça Change: Nic Farey wrote in his February issue of *This Here* about several matters, mundane and fannish, and after several months most of the same issues are current. Mr. Farey writes about who are this year's Lords of Misrule, reflections on getting older, how the current fan funds and fanzine awards are going, natural disasters such as wildfires or floods, the fen of half of fandom damning half of fandom's eyes, etc., etc. ... Much of which I have seen in other personalzines, or apazines. Except for lacking comments on COVID-19 and the current protests of international racism, his February comments could have been written in June.

March

One of the first local activities to be suspended by social distancing was a writers' meetup group. It is aptly titled 'Shut Up and Write', because members meet up to ignore each other and write for most of half an hour, then take a five-minute break and talk. We were meeting on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, which helped get me off my duff and make some progress on several stories.

Of course my progress is stalled. Which doesn't mean anyone else has stalled.

#

The Interesting One: In March, R. Graeme (famous of Canada the fannish fan) Cameron resumed editorship of *BCSFazine*, a local newsletter/clubzine. I like what he's doing with it, and not just because I contribute the column "It Is What It Is." (If this sounds like an oblique reference to Taral Wayne's fannish column "Same As It Ever Was", that's because it is.) For one thing, he reproduced a classic 19th-century "scientific romance" cover for *BCSFazine*, which looks steampunk as hell. For another, Graeme has made a serious effort to turn *BCSFazine* into an interesting journal, ranging over science news and fannish news; and the March issue featured an Alan White art portfolio.

Subsequent issues featured contributions by people as well-known as the professional writer, Robert Sawyer.

News from Practically Nowhere: Back in the 2000s or so, seized by a fit of boyish enthusiasm, I went online and joined both the Universal Life Church and the Kingdom of Talossa. Talossa is an online micronation, which makes land claims in various scattered parts of the world. The founder, Ben Madison, had a longer fit of enthusiasm that produced a constructed Romance language – Talossan –

⁵ Guy Lillian, *The Zine Dump* #47, Feb. 2020.

and a fictitious history, somehow connected to the Berbers. Over the past few decades the members have had issues with their king, sometimes declaring themselves a republic, and have spent a great deal of time talking about constitutional and legal procedures. In the March 2020 edition of *La S'chinteia*, an interview with the Talossan “Justice Viteu Marcianüs” covers this issue and more. In fact, as editor Ian Plätschisch writes,

“Having found the offices of the Talossan Press Association abandoned for the past five years and having realized that organization has not given out any awards for fine journalism during that time, *La S'chinteia* is staging a hostile takeover.”⁶

We have now to see what writing and publications Talossa produces, including *La S'chinteia*. In the past few years it seemed that Talossans were mainly fans of behaving like an alternative-timeline legislature and national administration. I was more interested in things like Talossan poetry, puns, and satires and practical jokes, in Wisconsin and elsewhere.

April

One of the burrs under my saddle has been the number of times I saw relatively sensible people try to hold conventions, while clinging to weird and unworkable ideas. So I started collecting conrunning information, labouring under the handicap that I do not and will not run conventions. (I know my limits.) Much of the material I collected is dated now, of course, because this was another job just too big for me.

But I have finally put together a draft, which other people can pick apart and mark up and improve, and the file is posted now at the fannish Facebook group “The Society for the Perpetuation of Fannish Fandom.”

Of course this has been a pretty idle occupation, since many conventions have been suspended; and the hotel/convention industry is not going to be what it was, not for a good long time.

May

La S'chinteia this month featured the news in limericks, Star Wars trivia, and more Bayesian analysis of poker. I didn't know you could perform Bayesian analysis on poker. I looked at the paper and I know just as much as I did before. Maybe it's time to extend my education.

BCSFazine #540 this month featured an unfortunate cover from Graeme's well-loved genre of lowbrow SF and fantasy – a British reprint of Burroughs' *The Cave Girl*.

⁶ Ian Plätschisch, *La S'chinteia* IX, March 2020.

The content is somewhat better: informative articles, opinionated articles, art and letters. Graeme clarifies what he invites us to contribute. He also features interesting bits of astronomy and other science news, such as a British Columbia discovering “zombie” satellites that NASA forgot, and when bagpipes were first played in space. There is a portfolio of Taral Wayne’s artwork. (I maintain that if there were any justice in the world, Taral would be a well-known graphic artist with several graphic novel series to his name.) There is more serious news from Beth Meacham via Robert Sawyer, about the publishing supply chain breaking down, under current pandemic restrictions. Graeme reviews some Burroughs novels you never heard of, which mainly strike me as a good research source on the escape fantasies of urban men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

I was particularly interested an interesting contribution about generating plots, from the accomplished Lisa Smedman. I have yet to get a printout of the Deal-a-Plot generator on card stock, but I intend to.

Also, Robert Sawyer examines the several movies and TV episodes of *The Six Million Dollar Man*, which were deteriorating badly by the end of the series. He quotes Nichelle Nichols⁷, who said of the last producer of *Star Trek*, Fred Freiberger, that his efforts “were hampered by a reduced overall budget which was eaten into by increased actor salaries.” When Freiberger came to *The Six Million Dollar Man*, apparently he faced a similar situation, and the series could not be saved.

Michael Bertrand and Stan Hyde have enlightening articles on lowbrow film literacy in this issue. I didn’t realize there were so many life lessons to draw from Godzilla movies!

June

I owe John Purcell a huge apology, because it has taken until now for me to respond to the copies of *Askance* he has sent.

The concept here – like *Obdurate Eye*, and like many personalzines – is a genzine, full of interesting articles of fact and opinion, art and letters, plus a bit of personal journalism, and showcasing the editor/publisher’s grasp of format and layout.

As it works out, the beginning of this issue of *Askance* demonstrates how COVID-19 and its restrictions began to affect conventions, by chronicling Corflu 37 – which was held in March this year. Participant after participant called in sick and couldn’t show, Texas A&M University called off a tour of their SF collection, and so on and so on.

The convention worked anyway. Reading John Purcell, I credit that to the kinds of participatory games the congoers played. One, “The Fan Who Shot Liberty

⁷ in her biography, *Beyond Uhura*.

Campbell,” was the latest in a series of one-act plays based on actual plays or movies, peppered with fannish references. Another was a panel program, “Just a Minac”:

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

Is Potlatch or Foolscap doing anything similar?

And, of course, there were Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards and selecting the Past-President of the Fan Writers of America.

This leads to articles musing on the future of conventions, and the reduction of Aggiecon from a 3-day, “literary”, multitrack convention to a one-day gaming convention, alongside wide-ranging fanzine reviews and letters. I am strongly reminded by the Aggiecon story of the developing story of VCON, but that is a different story and we’re still in the middle of it. Perhaps all things will be made anew, in 2021.

Addresses

Askance #48, June 2020, John Purcell, 3744 Marielene Circle, College Station, TX 77845-3926 USA: askance73@gmail.com

BCSFazine, c/o the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com

Event Horizon #3, January 2020 (somehow labeled 2019), John Thiel, 30 N. 19th Street, Lafayette, Indiana 47904, kinethiel@mymetronet.net appearing only on the net.

La S’chinteia, “Talossa’s Magazine of Everything”, Ian Plätschisch Editor-in-Chief, email c/o Zane Placie zgp218@gmail.com

The Zine Dump #47, Guy H. Lillian III, 1390 Holly Ave Merritt Island FL 32952 GHLIII@yahoo.com

This Here #25, Nic Farey, 2657 Rungsted Street, Las Vegas NV 89142, or Email fareynic@gmail.com

