

ALEXIAD

(ΑΛΕΞΙΑΣ)

\$2.00

It is December 10 and the Weather Channel promises a bumpy ride that night. I sit up until I feel reasonably safe that I will not get a one way trip to Oz that night. Just before I lie down to sleep I hear word that Graves County took the bullet that night. I go tense and lie awake a few minutes, for I have kin there. I spent many happy hours there when I was growing up. The late hour means not much news from there gets out. It is the next morning that the reports begin to come in. I wake up to news that Mayfield, the county seat of Graves County, has suffered catastrophic damage. The town I spent those happy hours in is gone. I quickly learn that none of my kin are among the dead or injured. Many others are not nearly as lucky as my family.

— Lisa

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Reviewer's Notes

My health is perhaps improving, though there are other setbacks that have much inconvenienced me. There are many fans who are not as fortunate as me, and I regret their incapacitation. The old fans are fading away and no new fans are rising up to replace them.

There are many misgivings, and little rejoicing, over the win of the Chengdu Worldcon bid. They issued a listing of department heads; far too many of which were "to be filled". And they were asking (begging?) for experienced Western fans to join in.

There have been enough complaints about Worldcons lacking some desired activity. So far the complainers have been people seemingly unaware of the concept of "volunteering".

Even some of the pros seem to be out of touch. Whether it was the group which submitted a protest to the "Worldcon control board" asking that the Saudi bid be turned down, two days before the end of mail-in site voting, or the litigious author who wanted to be named diversity officer as part of the settlement of his lawsuit, there is a certain lack of comprehension. The WSFS, Inc., the closest approach to an organized governing body, was dissolved in 1959 after getting All Fandom At War.

But increasingly Worldcon runners themselves seem cut off from the history of the organization. Millennium Philcon had a substantial and informative fandom program track. Two years later, at Torcon III, the fandom track was shunted off to odd hours and distant parts of the venue.

There was a living symbol of that decline. At Millennium Philcon, Forrest J Ackerman was a lively and entertaining participant. (I remember his re-enactment of the "animation" scene of the *Frankenstein* movie which demonstrated that, no matter how much they changed the details, the movie got the *spirit* of the book down exquisitely.) At Torcon, he was a debilitated, wheelchair-bound, old fan and tired, very tired. (The Roy Ferry scandal may have contributed to that.)

Anyone remember squeecore? There was a flurry of tweets and bloggings about this dominant form of science fiction. Then it vanished. It reminds me of R. A. Lafferty's "Slow Tuesday Night" (*Galaxy*, April 1965), where billions were made and lost in the space of an hour, marriages lasted out the honeymoon, and perhaps to the point, bold philosophical ideas were promulgated, became dominant, and were refuted and disappeared, all in a few minutes.

Lafferty was more predictive than he had intended to be. So much satire has become reality.

— Joe

RANDOM JOTTINGS

by Joe



Buy my books. (All available on Amazon.com for quite reasonable prices, except the Hugo-nominated *Heinlein's Children*, which can be bought from Advent Publishers, or from ReAnimus Press in electronic format.)

<https://www.AdventPub.com/1531>

Advent Publishers
P.O. Box 16143
Golden, CO 80402-6003

<https://reanimus.com/store>

— Advt.

H. P. Lovecraft has stunned the world by announcing that this summer will see the end of his regular advice videos, “Ask Lovecraft”, on YouTube. How blasphemously rugose and squamous! Iä! Iä!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQ4ug0J4E2A>

James Nicholl has proposed that he be nominated for a Hugo. How mephitic! How utterly mephitic!

(Leeman Kessler, the real voice of Ask Lovecraft, has a second child and regular responsibilities as Mayor of Gambier, Ohio. After ten years, this additional activity has become more than he can handle. We will miss Ask Lovecraft.)

The *Agulhas II* will set out in February to attempt again to find the wreck of the *Endurance*. The underwater probes are designed specifically for the Antarctic, so should work better. Follow the expedition on their website:

<https://endurance22.org/>

The Agra Treasurers of Dayton are pleased to announce the 2022 Holmes, Doyle, and Friends, the presentation of papers and comments on Sherlock Holmes and his creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The symposium will take place **March 11-12, 2022** at the Airport Clation Inn in Dayton. Registration is \$60

with a luncheon at \$60 and a banquet at \$20. Elementary.

<http://www.agratreasurers.net/>

Archive of Our Own, the Hugo-winning fan fiction website, contains a truly remarkable item: *At the Edge of Lasg'len*, a **five million word** (so far) excursion in Arda. It features a woman named Earlene who travels to Middle-earth and has adventures among the Free Peoples. It was reported on at Tor.com.

Looks like Nick Perumov and Kirill Eskov have competition.

<http://www.hermit.org/Eclipse>

<http://www.eclipse.org.uk/>

PRINCIPLES OF ESPIONAGE

Note by Joe

Graf Eduard von Bork, chief of the *Nachrichten-abteilung* station in Britain, wants to find out the details of this new British Uboot, the “Bruce-Partington”. How does he go about it? He will have to find someone with access to the plans. If he can get even a general sketch of them, the High Seas Fleet can derive countermeasures, or apply the improvements to their own boats.

What methods can he employ? As he says to his courier, Freiherr von Herling, „The English have a simple description of these methods, which they label by the acronym ‘MICE’.”

M is for Money. Researcher James Wilder is brilliant at identifying which horse will place at the races. Unfortunately, he bets them to win. His plans to father and train a superior child will never come to pass if he cannot pay off his debts to his betting commissioner, and then build up a financial reserve so he could carry out the plan. Therefore, a sum of 50£ with the possibility of more should he bring copies of the plans might settle his affairs.

I is for Ideology. Mr Grant Munro, disturbed by his wife's previous marriage, in reaction has become an avid follower of Halford Mackinder and a supporter of the power of the World Island. Anything that will build up the power of the Reich, as opposed to the offshore islands and outlying islands, will be a benefit to humanity. Therefore, giving the Bruce-Partington plans to the power that will dominate the World Island is to place them in the hands of those who have a proper use for them.

C is for Compromise. It seemed that a certain Hugh Boone, a beggar who had an interesting line of discourse, was making a few additional shillings by collecting boys for very interested older men. Rather than having his real source of income from those days in disguise revealed, Neville St. Clair might be persuaded to get a job where he could get access to the plans.

E is for Ego. James Windibank knows he is smarter than those dumb cops. He managed to keep control of his stepdaughter's trust fund even after his scheme to keep her pining for her lost love fell through. Why a man that clever could beat the Special Branch and the Admiralty alike, and nab those plans they thought were kept so secret.

HOLIDAY THOUGHTS

by Lisa

This is our last day of vacation and I have the dead dog feeling. It has been a good Christmas for me, not so for all my kin. I have begun readying to leave our temporary home

OBITS

We regret to report the death of **Roger Sims**, con maven, faned, and general good person, on **January 23, 2022**. Born **June 8, 1930**, he discovered Fandom at the age of 19 and made his mark, being a member of various clubs including the Cincinnati Fantasy Group. He was co-chair of Detention, the 17th Worldcon, and ConChair Emeritus of Detcon 1, the 2014 NASFiC, along with many other more local or specialized cons, having hosted Corflu 4, Ditto 10 and 17, and FanHistoriCon 9. His great claim to fame was hosting the famous party in Room 770 at the NoLaCon hotel in 1951. He was a pleasant and welcoming fan, and his death leaves us all the lesser.

MONARCHICAL NEWS

We now have Dame Purdey . . . that is, **Dame Joanna Lumley, DBE**, announced in the New Year's Honours List.

And **Daniel Craig** is now CMG — as was James Bond!

John Boorman, CBE, producer of *Zardoz*, is now Sir John.

YOU'RE SO VAIN

by Joe

There will be two solar eclipses in 2022. The first will be a partial eclipse on **April 30, 2022**, visible in Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay with the maximum eclipse being visible at 62° 6' S. 71° 30' W., off the Antarctic Peninsula. The eclipse is part of Saros 119, which began on May 15, 850 and will end on June 24, 2112.

The second will be a partial eclipse on **October 25, 2022** visible through Europe and and the Middle East, and past the Urals into Western Asia, with the maximum eclipse being at 61° 36' N. 77° 24' E. near Nizhnevartorsk, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, Russia. The eclipse is part of Saros 124, which began on March 6, 1049 and will end May 11, 2347.

NASA Eclipse website:
<https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse.html>

Other useful eclipse websites:

but now I am taking a break and enjoying the last coffee I will fix in temporary home. What I will wear today is ready and waiting for my clean body. It has been an unusually warm Christmas this year. I have actually seen bees out and about berry bushes. It has been good traveling weather here but carries with it the risk of severe weather far worse than an average snowstorm. With most snowstorms our homes provide adequate protection. It is not so with tornadoes. Anyone living in Tornado Alley knows that what happened in Mayfield could be them next time. Every region has its physical problems. Even the island paradise of Hawaii can have its perfection spoiled by hurricanes.

IMPRISONED WITH THE PHAROHS

Review by Joseph T Major of
THE RETURN OF THE PHARAOH:
From the Reminiscences of John H. Watson, M.D.

“Edited by” Nicholas Meyer
(2021; Minotaur Books;
ISBN 978-1250788207; \$25.99;
Minotaur Books (Kindle); \$13.99)

Now if they had found the crook and flail last held by Djanet *The Singer from Memphis* (by Gary Corby; 2018 (reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 16 #2)) that would have been very interesting. As it is, we have a story of Egyptology, deduction, noble scandals, and Howard Carter. What more can one ask for?

In semi-retirement, Sherlock Holmes is hired by a noble lady to find out why her husband seemed to have disappeared in Egypt. Through various contrivances, Dr. Watson goes along to report the story, provide backup, and so on.

The noble lord was a man of regularity; always had the same room at the hotel, for example. But, it seemed, he had encountered one of the more exotic features of contemporary Egypt; a lush and exotic belidi. Though she too has disappeared, much to the annoyance of her employer, where she was a major draw.

The clues lead to a pharonic tomb in the Valley of the Kings. They have local help, the above-mentioned Howard Carter, who as you know will become more interested. And when they get trapped in a tomb, having solved the original question, it gets interesting . . .

Meyer has the character down, no question about it. If he is falling into the trend of the Universal movies, which featured Basil Rathbone in a typical adventure plot, that may be an issue for the reader and for the future.

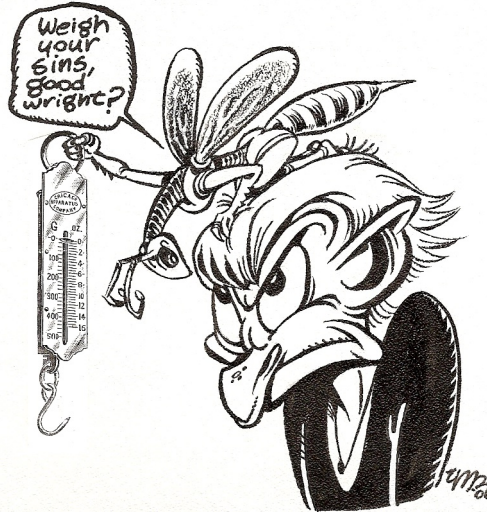
EVEN PARANOIDS HAVE ENEMIES

Review by Joseph T Major of
AGENT SNIPER:
The Cold War Superagent and the Ruthless Head of the CIA
by Tim Tate
(2021; St. Martin’s Press;

ISBN 978-1250274663; \$29.99;
St. Martin’s Press (Kindle); \$14.99)

“Madness is the emergency exit . . . you can just step outside, and close the door on all those dreadful things that happened. You can lock them away . . . forever.”

— *The Killing Joke*



On April 2, 1958, Henry J. Taylor, the American Ambassador to Switzerland, got a letter. The letter contained a second letter, to be delivered to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, and the cover letter explained that it contained information regarding Soviet spies in the upper departments of Western security and intelligence services. It was only to go to the FBI. And it was signed “Heckenschutze” — German for “Sniper”.

In spite of the plea, Taylor gave the letter to the CIA station chief, Tennes “Pete” Bagley. Bagley and the other CIA officer who read it, the notorious Ted Shackley, were somewhat confused by the letter, which contained hints but no clear statements. Sniper was being cagey.

The hints were very intriguing. They began communicating with Sniper, placing advertisements with the code word that his letter had been received. He sent regular letters, hinting at a vast network of spies pervading every government apparatus in the west except the FBI.

Some of the hints panned out. They led to the surveillance of Harry Houghton and Elizabeth “Bunty” Gee, to Konon Troifimoich Molody alias Gordon Lonsdale, to Morris and Lona Cohen alias Peter and Helen Kroger, and to George Blake né George Behar (see *Dead Doubles* by Trevor Barnes (2020; reviewed in *Alexiad* V. 20 #6).

Then Sniper said he had to defect. Reluctantly, they greeted him. Berlin had no wall in January 1961, understand. His name, he said, was Michal Golenewski. He showed up with a

German woman, his mistress and, he said, fiancée.

However, he had been beaten out. Which led to a problem. Angleton didn’t trust him. His pet defector, Anatoli Golitsyn, had persuaded Angleton that all the defectors from now on would be false defectors, including of course Golenewski.

And Golenewski had to be snuck into the U.S. He went through several pseudonyms over the next few years. He married his mistress. And he was debriefed. The Portland Spy Ring and Blake were all arrested.

But he couldn’t get financial support from the CIA. Someone didn’t trust him.

He grew more and more disturbed. They had not made him an American citizen. The Polish government had sentenced him to death for treason.

Finally, on the advice of higher officials, he was let go. At least he wasn’t interrogated the way Yuri Nosenko was (and Tate specifically cites that).

Then he let go. In April of 1964 he revealed his great secret: he was really Tsarevich Alexei!

He spun a story of how the Imperial family had been rescued from Yekaterinburg (not by *Fall Elfenbeinkuste*, see *The Romanov Rescue* (reviewed lastish)) and had gone to live in Poland. As for how he looked to be in his forties instead of his sixties, he spun a tale about how his health had prolonged his youth. (He found an Anastasia, but not “Anna Anderson” [Franziska Schanzkowska].)

Gradually he alienated everyone who had believed him. He turned on Guy Richards, author of *The Hunt for the Czar* (1970), for example, claiming he was really Reinhard Heydrich(!). Or that the ferociously anti-Communist Senator Thomas Dodd (D-CT) was actually Stalin’s son Yakov Dzugashvili. Or that one of his CIA handlers was, not metaphorically, but actually Nikolai Yezhov the NKVD chief.

Then he died. Such was his abstraction from the world that his death date is only vaguely known; sometime in June 1993. Yet he lived long enough to see Poland free again, and the Soviet system brought down in ruins.

Then the rest of the truth could come out. Like, for example, the wife and family he had abandoned in Poland, and never mentioned to the Americans. It was possible to find people there who remembered the Golenewskis, and could make it clear that his father was not Nicholas II.

What’s the point of it all? Sun Tzu said:

One who confronts his enemy for many years in order to struggle for victory in a decisive battle yet who, because begrudges rank, honors, and a few hundred pieces of gold, remains ignorant of his enemy’s situation, is completely devoid of humanity.

Sun Tzu described Golenewski: “Inside

agents are enemy officials whom we employ.” The CIA begrudged paying Golenewski, apparently because Golitsyn persuaded Angleton that Golenewski was an expendable agent: “Expendable agents are those of our own spies who are deliberately given false information.” Small wonder that distrusted, betrayed, and demeaned, he should take the Joker’s “emergency exit”.

THE GREENE GRASS OF HOME

Review by Joseph T Major of
THE QUIET AMERICANS:
Four CIA Spies at the Dawn of the Cold War — a Tragedy in Three Acts
by Scott Anderson
(2021; Picador;
ISBN 978-1529042474; \$29.45;
Anchor (Kindle); \$14.99)

The Cold War lasted forty years. For the record, the West won it. But not without cost. This book is for those who spent so much of their lives in the shadowed places. Those were the days, my friends.

— Frederick Forsyth, *The Deceiver*

The Greatest Generation had great ambitions. Having destroyed the Nazi tyranny and the Japanese militarist oligarchy, they hoped to remake the world in the model of America. It was the American Century, after all.

Much to their dismay, they discovered that their great ally, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, had *lied* to them. It was not a democracy and not against imperialism.

Fortunately, they had a model of how to turn the tide. The Organization of Strategic Services had gathered the best and the brightest, welding them into a powerful weapon which had crippled the Nazis. What had been done before could be done again.

This is the story of four of the men who set about this mighty task, and how their efforts came to ruin. They were different, in backgrounds, in experience, and in methods.

There was Michael Burke, who had gone from the football field to the secret war; Frank Wisner, an oh-so-social man from the South; Peter Sichel, who fled the death camps and turned to fighting his oppressors; and Edward Lansdale, a man who gave up his gray flannel suit of advertising for Air Force Blue. These four men were exemplars and leaders in the long twilight struggle.

Wisner was the chief of the blandly-named Office of Policy Coordination, the “Mighty Wurlitzer” which coordinated covert action across the globe. Lansdale was the All-American Boy Guerilla Fighter, who displayed his blend of ruthlessness and innocence across Southeast Asia. Burke and Sichel were less important, but they did their part.

Anderson recites a litany of failure and betrayal. In his view, the CIA became content with backing third-world right-wing oligarchs over actual democracy, selling out American

values for a transitory end.

As their efforts failed, the “quiet Americans” became burned out and disillusioned, retiring in failure. And so ends the ignominious story of the men who took the world and shook the world into tyranny.

Was it all worth it?

The “progressive democratic” alternative that is put forward as the victim of the CIA’s empowerment of tyrants didn’t exist, or at best was a handful of coffee-house debaters. The examples Anderson advances, the overthrow of Arbenz in Guatemala and of Mossadegh in Iran, have other considerations. Arbenz was supported mainly by the Guatemalan communists — why else would his government fall to a enemy that had a Piper Cub dropping hand grenades on the presidential palace? Mossadegh was associated with the Nasserists, though obviously he would not be an *Arab* nationalist. And when he was overthrown it was to rejoicing; the Iranians saw the U.S. as the “strong horse” then.

And what was the alternative?

The hammer banged reveille on the rail outside camp HQ at five o’clock as always. The ragged noise was muffled by ice two fingers thick on the windows and soon died away. Too cold for the warder to go on hammering.

The jangling stopped. Outside, it was still as dark as when Shukov had gotten up in the night to use the latrine bucket — pitch black, except for three yellow lights visible from the window, two in the perimeter, one inside the camp.

— Один день Ивана Денисовича
[*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*]

BEEN THERE DONE THAT

Review by Joseph T Major of
SHACKLETON
by Ranulph Fiennes
(2022; Pegasus Books;
ISBN 978-1643138794; \$29.95;
Pegasus Books (Kindle); \$20.99)

In 1957 biographers Margery and James Fisher put out a thorough biography, *Shackleton*. Journalist Roland Huntford followed in 1985 (rev. 1998) with *Shackleton*, where he continued his career of questioning Robert F. Scott. In 2014 biographer Michael Smith did his view, *Shackleton: By Endurance We Conquer*.

Now we have a life and experiences of the Boss by someone who literally went there and did that, Sir Ranulph Twisleton-Wykeham-Fiennes, Bt. OBE. Some readers may find his constant references to his own experiences to be annoying, but he brings useful insights to many points of Shackleton’s career. His heart trouble, for example. (Shackleton died of a heart attack and Fiennes had one himself caused by the strain of his exploring, for example.)

While this is not as comprehensive as the

earlier works, it gains from the author’s perspective. He knows what the Boss had to do because he had had to do it too.

FLECKER

Commentary by Joseph T Major on
THE LAST BLUE MOUNTAIN:
The Great Karakoram Climbing Tragedy
by Ralph Barker (1959; 2000)

The SAS memorial at Hartford Lines has with the names of those from the Regiment who died on duty a poetic quote:

We are the Pilgrims, master; we shall
go
Always a little further: it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred
with snow
Across that angry or that glimmering
sea...

Tom Reamy didn’t know who the author was (George Elroy Flecker: it’s a quote from his “The Golden Journey to Samarkand”). His review of Agatha Christie’s *Postern of Fate* (1973) in *Nickleodeon* #1 (1975) has his puzzlement at who is this poet that everyone in the little town where Tommy and Tuppence have retired to quotes at the drop of a hat.

But Ralph Barker knew. And he chose it for this agonizing story of mountain climbing.

Bernard Jillott was a member of the University mountaineering club at Oxford. It was the fifties, the thrilling era when the 8000-meter peaks were being climbed. His ambitions were a little less extreme.

Haramosh is a peak in the Karakoram Mountains in Pakistan. It is 7409 metres (24,308 feet) in altitude.

Not being a bloody fool, he looked around for someone to actually lead the expedition, someone who had climbed at high altitudes and knew what to take and what to do. No Binder here (from *The Ascent of Rum Doodle* (1956)). The man he found was Tony Streater, Captain Harry Reginald Anthony Streater, Gloucestershire Regiment, climber in the 1955 British Kanchenjunga Expedition. (Strictly speaking, Kanchenjunga has never been climbed. Out of respect for the sacred nature of the mountain, expeditions halt six meters or so from the peak. Kanchenjunga is 8566 meters (28,169 feet) in altitude; the third highest mountain in the world.) Streater had been on the second summit party, which as said stopped just before reaching the summit.

Haramosh had never been climbed and Streater was willing to give it a go. They got three other climbers from the Oxford mountaineering club. They would need someone capable of providing medical care, and medical student John Emery was eager to climb. Rae Culbert from New Zealand was along, as was American Scott Hamilton of Little Rock. This was a tight-knit group in keeping with the ethos put forward by Sir Chris Bonington. They set out in July of 1957.

Haramosh could be quickly reached but the actual ascent was a dire contrast. Barker describes the ascent in detail, the extreme beauty of the heights and the agonizing difficulty of the ascent.

They established a chain of camps on almost-flat stretches of the mountain, going higher against immense difficulty. There were frequent avalanches, which did not inspire confidence.

It soon became clear that the main peak could not be directly climbed, so they shifted their aim to the lesser peak, Haramosh II. The weather failed to cooperate, with cloudy and foggy days, often with snow. Rations began to run short. At least their cook was good. (The cook in *The Ascent of Rum Doodle*, remember, was immensely skilled at turning anything into an inedible mess.)

They would have to leave by mid-September, which constrained their choices. They climbed until they reached a stretch which would require more effort than they could spare. But such a beautiful, astonishing view it had!

Then they turned back. And Jillott and Emery were caught in an avalanche. They survived; but they had lost too much gear and Emery had dislocated a hip. Streather and Culbert climbed down and brought them aid, but they still had to get out.

They could not get back to a camp and in addition had lost their last ice axe. Emery must have reset his hip for he and Jillott now took the lead. Then Streather and Culbert fell.

Jillott and Emery set out to get help, but Emery fell behind. When he finally got back to camp he discovered to his horror that Jillott had walked over a ridge and fallen to his death. He got into a tent and discovered that his fingers and toes were badly frostbitten.

Culbert could barely move and Streather had to leave him while he tried to get out of the site they had fallen into. It didn't help that he had almost nothing. He managed to get back to a camp, where he found Emery.

The mental agony that Streather went through realizing that they could not save Culbert, that Streather had left him to die on the mountain, had to leave him, is painful to read.

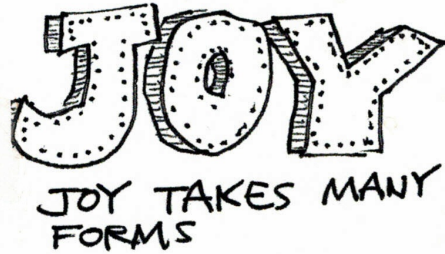
Streather and Emery descended, somehow, and met Hamilton. He did the best he could and got down the mountain, again somehow.

As well as the beauty and wonder of the great mountain, the errors and accidents of the expedition are described in moving if not agonizing detail. Those who push out the envelope often pay with their lives.

Haramosh was climbed in 1958, by an Italian expedition. Emery finished his medical school and went into practice, maimed though he was. Streather stayed in the army, rising to Lieutenant-Colonel. He led the 1976 British and Nepalese Army expedition to Everest, which put on the summit British soldiers Michael Patrick "Bronco" Lane and John Henry "Brummie" Stokes — both of the SAS.

The Joy of High Tech

by Rodford Edmiston



Being the occasionally interesting ramblings of a major-league technophile.

Please note that while I am an engineer (BSCE) and do my research, I am not a professional in this field. Do not take anything here as gospel; check the facts I give. If you find a mistake, please let me know about it.

Time Travelers Must Do Research!

Trying to bargain with an ancient Egyptian official by offering to reveal the nearby location of rich iron ore deposits would at best be met with confused indifference. They knew how to make copper from ore, and how to use zinc and tin either by themselves or alloyed with copper to produce bronze and brass. The ancient Egyptians definitely knew how to mine and refine gold. Other metals were also familiar to them. Until towards the 6th Century BCE, though, iron was considered a gift from the gods which fell from the sky. (Tutankhamen had among his funerary items a meteoric iron dagger.) It was even called "the metal of heaven." The idea of *making* iron, like you would make copper by heating ore, was nonsense. It might even be considered heresy.

On the other hand, a set of good-quality drinking tumblers — assuming our time traveler could avoid breakage and theft before the items could be traded — would set them up well for quite a while. The ancient Egyptians had glass, but good quality glass was so hit or miss (far more often miss) in the early days that it was reserved for nobility. Clear glass, especially in bright colors, was considered a precious material, valued only slightly less than silver.

Glass has been around a long time, at least in Egypt. Examples over five thousand years old have been found there. However, it became much more available and therefore less expensive in the Late Bronze Age, starting about 1600 Before Current Era. This happened over a wide area, including Egypt. This was partly due to figuring out that adding the ash of certain desert plants lowered the melting point of the quartz pebbles used for glassmaking in that era. Today we know that the ingredients responsible are sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate, as

well as calcium oxide (aka lime). This last substance made the resulting glass more stable. Other ingredients were used to impart strong colors.

Glass is not eternal. It is brittle even when new, and wet conditions can leach away stabilizing materials, leaving shards, flakes and even powder. That makes identifying ancient glass very difficult in most parts of the world, since there may not be much left to recognize. Since so much of Egypt is very dry, some of the glass found there is older than that found almost anywhere else. This doesn't mean the ancient Egyptians were the inventors of glassmaking, though they were certainly early adopters of the material. Where glassmaking was invented is still unknown. Mesopotamia is one likely candidate, but it may have been developed independently in multiple places at separate times. However, the ancient Egyptians definitely valued it. As did just about everyone else who knew of it.

Even before glass was made deliberately, volcanic glass (usually obsidian) and meteoritic glass were known. The latter was mostly in small spheroids, which sometimes were used to make beads.

For thousands of years glass was a valuable trade item, throughout much of the ancient world. It was made locally and also imported from many areas, some of them far away. This was partly due to different glassmakers being good at particular colors. The fact that glass was traded over a wide region has been verified by modern isotopic analysis. The good stuff was even shipped in ingots, for local working. Pieces have been found in Egypt with trace elements from all around the Near and Middle East and into Greece.

This brings up a matter most people don't consider about that era: There was a lot of trade. Regular trade routes existed across much of the Mediterranean, and caravans followed already-ancient paths on land. A set of ancient Egyptian statues has inscriptions on their bases describing a circuit of trade through much of the Mediterranean. Goods would be taken from port to port and traded with what was available locally, until the ship returned to Egypt with a load of desirable goods for that nation. As well, Kings were also constantly sending gifts to each other. Copper was one of the primary raw materials traded. Partly because it could be used to make bronze weapons, the best thing available at that time for warfare.

Speaking of copper, there is a rich source of ore in what is now southern Israel, in the Timna region. That this resource was mined by both the ancient Egyptians (they even built at least one temple in the area) and the Roman Empire is undisputed. What has only recently been acknowledged is that between those uses — about three thousand years ago, when Rome was still a village, but Egypt had withdrawn from the locale — it was one of the likely sources of the ostentation King Solomon presented to demonstrate his wealth. (His palace was described as covered in gold and copper.) Yet

it was almost certainly *not* mined by Israelites. Instead, the most likely miners and refiners were their southern neighbors, the Edomites. (In Semitic languages such as Hebrew the word “edom” means “red”. We don’t know what they called themselves.) They were apparently a nomadic people at least some of whom spent part of the year mining copper ore and refining it in small furnaces. They didn’t leave much trace of their civilization otherwise, except in the records of other people. They may not have had any native form of writing. Note that the information in this paragraph is very generalized. Boundaries were uncertain even then, often changing according to who described them. Some areas were claimed by many groups but occupied by none. As well, what area some group actually lived in changed through the millennia. Copper production at Timna went on for a *long* time.

The last known unambiguous reference to Edom as a nation is an Assyrian inscription dated 667 BCE. We don’t know today when, how and why Edom ceased to exist as a state. We only know in general what happened to the people of Edom.

In the early Twentieth Century the copper mines in this region were identified with King Solomon’s Mines (a phrase actually created by H. Rider Haggard as the title and Maguffin of one of his adventure novels) this interpretation fell by the wayside in the Fifties and Sixties. Largely in reaction to the “biblical” interpretation of what was found at ancient sites which had been made earlier. Only to be revived as more digs were made and dates for this other era of use became known. Yes, archeologists are as subject to fads as the general population. Today, we know from analysis of trace elements in copper and bronze objects that copper from this region was used in ancient Egypt, the Roman Empire, and, yes, in ancient Israel. As well as items from many other widely separated times and places.

If our time traveler has to live off the land, so to speak, they should probably bring silver for spending money. This would be the best choice through through most of history and beyond into the past, in Ancient Egypt and, in fact, most places. Gold might attract too much attention; glass is too fragile; copper too bulky. One exception could be ancient China. Which was at times so silver hungry that metal was valued very highly, and having a large amount could make someone a target.

Knowledge would be difficult to trade, since most people in the past wouldn’t have enough background to value anything from the future and might be suspicious of current information about their enemies unless it was carefully presented. For the same reason, our time traveler must be careful about what tools are brought along. An ordinary Swiss Army knife could attract unwanted attention.

Attempting to view a specific event in the long history of Egypt would likely require

scouting missions. Especially for earlier in the history. Pharaohs would order people, events or even entire reigns they didn’t like removed from the official record. There are actually lists of pharaohs which contain mention of the nation’s rulers who are permanently removed from the record two or three administrations later. This was often retroactive, with later rulers ordering mention of the offensive person or event literally hacked off walls and pillars. However, as thorough as these efforts were, they sometimes missed things. That’s how we know about some of the “officially revoked” bits.

Egyptologists say they have accounted for all the “erased” rulers, and that their timeline is accurate. However, even among their own ranks there is dissent as to how complete their calendar is. As just one example of how modern technology is causing (reluctant) revisions of the traditional history, from carbon dating material found embedded in the original mortar of the Great Pyramid we know it is 200 to 500 years older than the traditional age.

Note that while the limestone casing blocks on the exteriors of many of the pyramids were very carefully fitted, the sandstone blocks which make up the bodies of the structures of most had a much looser fit. In some places there are substantial gaps. These were often filled with a mixture of rubble and mortar. However, carbon dating any wood found embedded in the mortar is not a way to get a reliable date. Wood was so precious in ancient Egypt that a single piece could be reused multiple times. The toothpick found in a tomb may have been part of a log from a tree cut down centuries before. However, if a worker high on the pyramid decided to dispose of the chicken bones from his lunch by adding them to the mortar and stones being used to fill a gap, rather than carrying them all the way back down...

One final bit about ancient Egypt. The pharaonic era was actually around longer than it’s been gone. Maybe we’re just in an unusually long interdynastic era. :-)

So what if our time traveler wants to witness the birth of Christ? Well, there are multiple problems with that. To begin with, modern tradition has the wrong time of year. The season was probably Spring, based on the biblical accounts. (Shepherds were out watching their flocks by night, etc.) The year was probably 2 BCE, 5 BCE or 7 BCE, based on the events given in some accounts. (The guy who originally calculated the year for the Church — centuries after the events — made some sums errors.) During those years there were conjunctions of planets which would have likely have escaped the notice of most people, but which the Wise Men (or Magi, who were probably astrologers, at least in part) would have been expecting and which they would have considered hugely important. Chinese astronomers also recorded a long-lasting “broom star” or comet in 5 BCE. So the “star in the east” was likely a real event, but one which only learned people would have noted. (That is, not only noticed but written about.)

Again, scouting missions would likely be required. Also again, care must be taken in what the time traveler lets the locals see.

Perhaps our time traveler wants to visit the Trojan War. The first question to be answered before such an attempt is “Which Trojan War?” Even Heinrich Schliemann (the man who first excavated Troy) noted that there were multiple eras of habitation, several of which had apparently violent ends. The *Iliad* (named after *Ilios*, an alternate name for Troy) actually mentions people — both fictional and actual — from different centuries. Homer likely — and perhaps knowingly — combined stories of several different attacks on the city-state to create his tale. Since any of these battles would attract attention — in the form of distant on-lookers — a time traveler would likely not stand out. As long as they didn’t try to get too close. Or let someone see their telescope or camera and zoom lens.

So much has been lost from history. Where is the Land of Punt? The ancient Egyptians knew. (Okay, so that wasn’t the last bit about ancient Egypt.) They traded with it for gold, aromatic resins, blackwood, ebony, ivory and wild animals. It may be the same nation mentioned in the Bible as Put. It might be Havilah. But where was it?! What modern land is in that location?! We don’t know. Several candidates have been suggested. Some of them are in widely different locations.

We don’t know what the inhabitants of ancient Crete called themselves. Though we know what others called them in antiquity. We can’t even read their early writing, in Linear A. This was arguably the first well-developed civilization of Greece, perhaps even all of Europe. Their works have been dated to at least 3500 BCE. By 2000 BCE they had massive urban centers, with four-story palaces and indoor plumbing. However, we don’t know exactly what the various large buildings were for. Labels such as “palaces” are guesswork, applied much later by archeologists. As is what we call them. “Minoan” is a name given the civilization by an early Nineteenth Century German historian, after the mythical King Minos, who supposedly ruled that land. The Minotaur is also named after him. The Minoans were definitely on the major trade routes, often as a source for artistic works, but also for raw materials, such as ingots of copper.

However, we still don’t have such basic information about them as what they called themselves! Maybe if we eventually decipher their original written language we can learn this. A time traveler trying to investigate the society would have to work slowly and carefully, perhaps through working on a trade ship.

Let’s say the time traveler decides to avoid the complexities of history and human interaction completely. So, they try a bit further back. Perhaps they want to see what later became New York city, but as it was before humans showed up. They need to be very careful they don’t overshoot, or they might end up under a lot of ice. During the peak of the last ice age,

around 20,000 years ago, the Laurentide ice sheet covered what is now New York City to a depth of about 300 meters. Actually, estimates of how thick the ice might have been vary with the period involved and who is doing the estimate. Two million years ago the ice in that area might have been as much as 5 kilometers thick!

Also, in any of these times there are some rather formidable creatures which have never encountered two-legged mammals before. They haven't learned to be wary of humans. A time traveler who is not careful might wind up as lunch for some hungry predator.

Okay, so our time traveler has the sense to appear high in the air above the site in some sort of flying device. Now they have a good view of a huge expanse of largely featureless ice. That does not make for a fun or interesting travelogue.

If the time traveler wants to visit the actual ice age (Again, which one?) and is willing to start from a location clear of ice and move overland, and is properly wary of the local fauna, a good location for arrival would be the Appalachian mountains. This area has served as a lifeboat of sorts for plants and animals through several ice ages. So, the visitor can start there and move onwards as desired.

Some geological processes are quick; some are slow. Visiting the Grand Canyon forty thousand years ago would reveal some differences in details (as features present then have since eroded away, and features now present hadn't eroded into their current shapes by then) but overall it would look pretty much the same. After all, it took many millions of years to form. The overall appearance wouldn't change much in such a short time as forty millennia.

Not far away, though, what we know as Yellowstone would be almost unrecognizable to someone familiar with its current appearance. Hydrothermal features have been known to change notably over a single human lifespan. Oh, the hot spring and geyser basins are probably all in about the same areas - since they are where the hot water comes to the surface through cracks and fissures which are unlikely to change much in such a short time - but the continual deposition and erosion of minerals constantly changes things. However, there's a lot more at work, here, than just hot water moving things around. Even the mountains will have changed some, due to the large earthquakes the area is prone to. Plus something else.

Much of the Yellowstone area was also covered by glaciers during the ice ages. (Yes, them, again.) The scouring this caused greatly changed the surface of at least the valleys and basins. In fact, when modeling the hydrothermal and hydrological processes which have taken place in Yellowstone, you must start no earlier than 15,000 years ago, when the last of the glacial ice retreated from the region. Each advance of the ice sheets is like turning an Etch A Sketch upside down and shaking it.

The scouring effect of the ice reset everything each time, except what was deep underground. Even the shallow portions of what lies underground were affected, by the weight of the ice if nothing else.

So, our time traveler decides to go for the big one, and see a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Keep in mind that there were lots of species grouped into that genus. They came in various sizes, with many of the species overlapping in time and range. At least some likely had feathers, though probably only on their backs or the tops of their heads.

The various species of T. Rex were present during the Late Cretaceous, about 100 to 66 million years ago. Our time traveler would have to be careful to avoid the Extinction Level Event at the end of the span, but otherwise has a bit of latitude. There is also the problem that dinosaurs were on the Earth for over a hundred sixty-five million years, and spread over large areas. (Like the empire of ancient Egypt, they were around far longer than they've been gone. I just can't quit mentioning them, can I?) So if someone wants to see some of the other popular dinosaurs, they might have to do some more traveling. Physical, chronological or a combination.

During this long period — even just considering the span of T. Rex — species came and went. Few lasted more than a million years. Many of the fictional battles between a T. Rex and some other famous types of dinosaurs could not have taken place. Not only were the different species separated by time, but by distance. Tectonic plate movements were breaking up continents and forming new ones during this long period.

So, yeah. Casual time travelers would likely be frustrated, and perhaps fatally inconvenienced. Do your research!

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WORLDCON, CHINESE COMMUNIST STYLE

Commentary by Taras Wolansky

DisCon III, the Washington, D.C. Worldcon, had the traditional “meet the worldcon bids” session on a Thursday evening in December. Unlike similar sessions I've attended at previous worldcons, we were permitted to submit questions only on index cards. I immediately suspected that the moderator was intending to censor or suppress any controversial questions, and that proved to be the case.

It's amusing to reflect that, where once we thought interacting with China would make them more like us, instead we are becoming more like them.

The Chengdu representative's English was heavily accented. He struggled to answer questions, and often fell back on his interpreter. Who appeared to be just as knowledgeable — or lacking in knowledge — as the official representative but, perhaps, was not judged suffi-

ciently politically reliable by the Communist Party to act on his own. On most questions, basically what they had to offer was vague assurances that somehow everything would work out OK. In particular, a few pointed questions relating to LGBTQ issues left them baffled. (China doesn't do LGBTQ!) Questions about handicapped access didn't do much better.

By contrast, the Winnipeg representative was able to boast of a committee with enormous con-running experience.

I wrote down a few of the questions, addressed to Chengdu, that passed the censor.

Q: Will attendees be able to discuss alternate history on panels even if it disagrees with Chinese Communist ideology?

A: Yes, but “press will decide whether to publish”.

The Chengdu representatives used that formula several times. I took it to mean that the Chinese press will censor any news coming from the convention. (I can already see the headline: “World Science Fiction Convention Unanimously Praises Chairman Xi and Condemns America”.)

Q: Will attendees encounter the same censored internet as the Chinese people do?

A: The Internet will be uncensored at the convention center and the convention hotels. (I'm not sure this is even technically possible.)

Q: Will attendees be able to criticize Chairman Xi?

A: Vague assurances.

Q: Will the Chinese government install spyware on phones, as the BBC has reported?

A: No answer. (The U.S. Olympic Committee recently advised all athletes going to China for the Winter Olympics to get burner phones, and leave their regular phones at home.)

As the session was drawing to a close a guy in back — I never saw him, but his accent sounded Chinese — bitterly complained that the panel moderator had censored his question. As he fled the room, he shouted: “Censorship is illegal!!!” (While I admired his sentiment, as the recent history of Facebook and Twitter and Google and Wikipedia has shown, censorship by “private” entities is legal, alas.)

I think it was at about this point, too, that a woman who was acting as a kind of compliance officer for the Winnipeg bid made a statement expressing her disapproval of the proceedings, and stalked out of the room.

“You also didn't read my question,” I said loudly. The harried moderator invited me to look for my card but, I explained, I had written

down my question, and proceeded to read it out loud:

“Will people who have criticized Chinese policies toward Tibet and the Uighurs be permitted to attend a Worldcon in Chengdu?”

Once again the Chengdu representatives had no answer.

But the session was all moot anyway, at least as far as the site selection vote was concerned. The Chengdu government — or local Communist Party — had simply bought 2000 supporting memberships and cast 2000 ballots, totally swamping the 800-odd votes for Winnipeg from actual SF fans. Or so I was given to understand by a very knowledgeable observer.

GODZILLA'S HOME ID'D by Japan Coast Guard, UN, and Toho

Commentary by Lloyd Daub

<https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14521947>



**LI'L MISS 'ZILLA
VISITS DUBUQUE**

Godzilla will soon have a home as an undersea province off Okinotorishima, a tiny island that is Japan's southernmost point.

A proposal to name the area "Godzilla Megamullion" was approved at a January meeting of the Sub-Committee on Undersea Features Names (SCUFN). The committee

was jointly set up by the International Hydrographic Organization and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO.

The name will be used in nautical charts and research papers.

The megamullion is 125 kilometers in length and 55 km in width, about three times larger than Tokyo. Its shape does not bear a resemblance to Godzilla, but researchers thought the monster's name would be fitting because it is believed to be one of the largest on Earth. According to Japan Coast Guard's Hydrographic and Oceanographic Department, a megamullion is a dome-shaped rise created by the exposure of mantle beneath the Earth's crust, typically caused by a large-scale dip-slip.

The megamullion in question is on the ocean floor in the Pacific, about 600 kilometers southeast of Okinotorishima island. It was discovered during a demarcation survey of the continental shelf conducted by the Japanese government in 2001. The area has many ridges, about 1,000 to 2,500 meters high.

The Godzilla film series first debuted in 1954. Since then, the monster has appeared in more than 30 films, both domestic and foreign. In the first film of the series, the prehistoric sea creature was believed to have been hiding in a submarine cave. Godzilla in the first film was 50 meters in length. But in "Shin Godzilla" released in 2016, it measured 118.5 meters in length.

Members of a research group, consisting of the Japan Coast Guard and others, have informally called the area, Godzilla Megamullion. But it was required to have a globally shared name to become a marine science research object. The Japan Coast Guard played a role in the proposal to name the area after Godzilla. It had reached an agreement on the use of the name with Toho Co., which owns the Godzilla trademark.

Keiji Ota, chief Godzilla officer of Toho, said in a statement, "I am truly honored that (the megamullion) bears Godzilla's name, the Earth's most powerful monster." He said the creature and ocean are "inseparable" and believes that Godzilla "has gracefully swum above the gigantic Godzilla Megamullion province."

WORLDCON BIDS

2024
Glasgow
August 8-12, 2024
<http://glasgow2024.org/>

2025
Seattle
Mid-August 2025

2026
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
<https://jeddicon.com/>

Los Angeles

Nice, France
August 12-16, 2026
<http://nice2023.com/en/home/>

2027
Tel Aviv
August 2027

2028
Brisbane, Australia
Mid-August 2028
<https://australia2025.com/>

2029
Dublin
<http://dublin2029.ie>

2031
Texas
<https://alamo-sf.org/>

NASFiC BIDS

2023
Orlando
<https://orlandoin2023.org/>

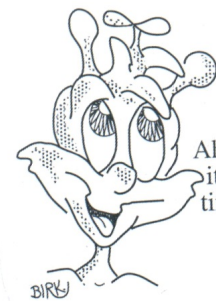
Winnipeg

WORLDCON

2022
Chicon 8
Chicago
September 1-5, 2022
<http://www.chicon.org>

2023
Chengdu
Year of the Water Rabbit
August 16-20, 2023
<http://www.worldconinchina.com/index-e.html>

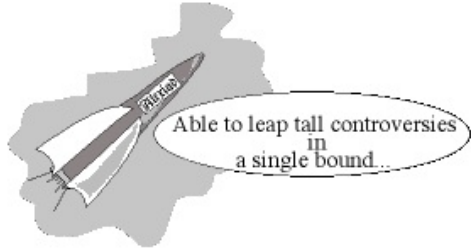
HUGO NOMINATIONS BEGIN



Ah...
it's Hugo nominating
time in fandom!!

Chicon 8 has opened Hugo Nominations and nominations for the Lodestar Award for Best Young Adult Book and the Astounding ~~Un~~person Award for Best New Writer. All Members of Chicon and Supporting Members of Discon III are eligible to nominate. Nominations can be sent in until 11:59 Pacific Daylight Time on March 15, 2022.

Letters, we get letters



From: **Cathy Palmer-Lister** Dec. 20, 2021
 Ste-Julie, Quebec, CANADA
cathyp@sympatico.ca

I'm sorry to hear that you are again plagued with health problems. I read a quote for somebody or other along the lines of "the aches and pains we suffer as we age are signs that we are still living in spite of our age." I suppose there is some truth to that, but I could do with a respite from the pain now and then.

This province is well into the next wave of the pandemic, just as we had begun to hope we were getting a grip on it. I don't know if I'll be able to have family with me for Christmas again this year.

It's been awhile since I could say I recognized the books nominated for the Hugos. There is a huge disconnect between what people are actually buying and what makes it to the nominations.

So China won the bid. I can't afford the trip, and my back couldn't possibly take sitting cramped in a plane that distance but I wouldn't go to China if it were next door, not after what happened to Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. I told the bid committee at Dublin WC that China was holding Canadian Citizens in jail without charges being laid, and they looked totally blank. They either had no idea or couldn't comprehend that anyone would care.

Their defenders say that China has this huge fan community, and they should have a chance to put on Worldcon, and don't blame what their government does on them.

— JTM

I hope I can go to Chicago, but between the gun violence and Covid, travelling to the States is also problematic. For some reason, gun violence is rising in Montreal and Toronto also. I'm beginning to sound like my parents: The world is going to Hell in a hand basket!

And on that note,

Here's hoping for a better year 2022!

From: **Nic Farey** Dec. 21, 2021
fareynic@gmail.com

Thanks as always Joe; I've been having at the Frantic Fanac in getting out *BEAM* 16 (done!) and now, with some actual time off work, finishing up *This Here...* #48 for year's end and hopefully even catching up on a bit of locking (and actual reading of actual fanzines received) as well as roughing out *The Incomplete Register* 2021...

Hope you're all feeling better over there, I've copped a persistent sore throat meself which doesn't seem to want to go away — home Covid tests showed negative, thankfully, after we had a known exposure separate from the unknown exposures I get every day at work.

I found a meme with the four stages of Covid denial:

1. It's a hoax.
2. Don't be a sheep.
3. Prayers needed.
4. Visit our GoFundMe.

— JTM

Best to you all...
 Good arrers!

From: **Tom Feller** Dec. 21, 2021
Tomfeller@aol.com

Thanks for e-mailing the zine.

With the extra long period between the announcement of the Hugo finalists and the voting deadline, I not only had enough time to read all 24 of the fiction finalists but also at least one story in all six of the Best Series finalists.

Your mention of the "Dave Kyle says you can't sit there" fannish legend reminded me of something that occurred during the height of the pandemic. Anita and I live in a retirement community called McKendree Village, which has a movie room. It had signs on alternate seats saying, if I remember correctly, "The Mayor of Nashville says you can't sit there" because of the social distancing requirement.

Anita and I just received our booster shots. All three of them were the Moderna.

My niece's spouse, a doctor, had an observation from experience. Patients were having to defer necessary care because hospitals were full of people with Covid and most of them were unvaccinated.

—JTM

From: **Steve Johnson** January 13, 2022
stevezoo@gmail.com

In a past issue of *Alexiad*, Joseph mentioned that he reviewed espionage related books so often because he found them more interesting than much contemporary sf. One reason I habitually download and read *Alexiad* is that I enjoy so much the comments and reviews on espionage related fiction and non-fiction and the worldly context of such activities.

This note I was inspired to write by your mention of Theodore Hall's ultimately disclosed identity as MLAD, who provided atomic secrets as a spy for the Soviet Union. There is a marginal fannish connection to that history. In 1944, MLAD's courier, Saville Sax, code name OLDSTER, contributed articles and poems to issues two and three of Chan Davis's *Blitherings*. Those two issues of *Blitherings* are now posted on fanac.org. In one of the articles, Sax responded to an article by Norman Stanley in an issue of *Fan-Tods*, suggesting that Sax had access to FAPA or VAPA mailings in addition to atomic secrets. I thought this angle sufficiently bizarre to write a brief entry for Sax in *Fancylopedia*.

I look forward to future issues of *Alexiad* and also to reading your book *Heinlein's Children*.

https://fancylopedia.org/Saville_Sax

Chan went to jail for six months for refusing to answer questions for HUAC about an organization he was with at Harvard. Also, it seems he's still alive.

—JTM

From: **Lloyd Penney** January 17, 2022
 1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke, ON
 M9C 2B2 CANADA
penneys@bell.net
<http://lloydpenney.livejournal.com/>

Yvonne and I are safe and warm inside as we deal with a huge snowstorm/blizzard that has literally stopped the beginning of this work week, kept the highways covered in snow, and is the lead story in the local news. We might set an all-time record for one-day snowfall here. The current record is 40 centimeters, or about 14 inches, so we are watching our weather channel with some interest. Staying side means I can get some fanzines done while the plows outside clear most of this mess away. Here comes some comments on *Alexiad* 120.

Health is so precious, especially in this time of pandemic. We are all trying to look after ourselves, and results are mixed. We are both fully vaccinated against current variants of COVID-19, plus our flu shot, and we hope you both are, too. True, I know few of the names on the Hugo ballot, even in the fan categories. We've stood still while the genre has carried on without us.

I suspect it's become an entirely new way of operating, and the one we knew has been replaced.

Books... I spent a good portion of December editing an e-book, 488 pages of classic space opera, and I have been paid handsomely for it, so I guess I have turned pro. It's a little grueling, but it has been an interesting read. I have added that book to all the books and magazines

I worked on with *Amazing Stories*, and it's been a productive and filling 3.5 years, and I am hoping for much more. My paying client is quite happy to have me work on his next book, too.

The letter column... My COVID shots were three different brands, Astra-Zeneca (not authorized for use in the US, I believe), Moderna, and a Pfizer booster. The pharmacist who gave me my third shot said she thinks there will be a fourth shot, and we may need one to deal with the Omicron variant. I hope this shot is handed out before COVID-19 can mutate yet again, and make another variant, one that might be the worst of all.



My own letter... If only we were still in the fall. The blizzard that started last night is still going, and there is probably a foot of snow on the ground as I type. Ad Astra has officially cancelled itself again, and hope to start up again in 2023. We had a very good time at the little anime convention market, saw some old friends, and did a nice bit of business. A shame about the Winnipeg Worldcon... I suspect the Chengdu Worldcon will be nearly all Chinese in attendance. As soon as Omicron eases up a little, I may have more employment opportunities, and another book to edit.

I hope we don't end up like "Moskva 1995: Igor's Campaign", with Worldcon somehow becoming perpetually Chinese.

—JTM

A very nice essay on the history of Batman finishes the issue. Not being a comic book reader, I had heard about various changes to the Batman saga, and I got a quick education on it. The Batman family album as it were. Thank you for all of this, and we hope health improves very soon.

From: **George W. Price** January 17, 2022
4418 N. Monitor Avenue, Chicago, IL
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price4418@comcast.net

December *Alexiad*:

Joe's commentary on Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* refers to "The Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest" giving awards for "the opening sentence of the worst of all possible novels." Joe says the book under review usually eschews "It was a dark and stormy night" prose.

This puzzles me. For years I have seen allusions to "It was a dark and stormy night" as if it epitomizes bad writing. Is this only because it was the opening sentence of a very badly written book?

Maybe I just lack literary good taste, but I do not see anything particularly bad, or even banal, about the sentence itself. There is some redundancy between "dark" and "night" – if it was night, of course it was dark. But that could also mean it was not a calm and moonlit night.

Or is this sentence infamous not in itself but only because it opens a book that is mostly very badly written? What am I missing? Pray enlighten me.

Richard A. Dengrove says David M. Shea "points out that, in Cherry's *Chanur*, both gold and jewels are used as currency. However, not silver. I had wondered whether gold, silver and gems had been used as currency. At least, gold and gems have been – if only in a fantasy place."

I am old enough to easily remember when silver was used as currency in the United States. (Gold was also U.S. currency until we went off the gold standard during the Great Depression, a terrible mistake which I won't argue about here.) Starting in 1965 the U.S. moved to also abandon the use of silver coins – dollars, half dollars, quarters, and dimes – because the rising price of silver was making the coins worth more as metal than their face value as money. The government introduced the copper-based "sandwich" coins that we now use. Banks were required to take out of circulation and return to the government all silver coins they received.

As soon as the conversion was announced I started saving every silver coin I received as change. It was about two years before I saw no more silver coins in circulation.

I still have these coins – several pounds of them – in my safe-deposit box. This will be a pleasant surprise for my stepdaughter in the not too distant future when she inherits my estate, since silver coins are now worth as metal twenty-odd times their face value as money. This is a good illustration of Gresham's Law that "bad money drives out good."

I remember that, too. It goes on; nowadays it costs more than 1¢ to mint a penny, and it's illegal to hoard them to melt down for the copper content.

Taras Wolansky disputes my assertion that nation-building "just plain does not work in a place . . . like Afghanistan." He argues that "Our brain-dead pullout . . . has left the country more unified than ever before. Unified under the Taliban, to be sure."

He's right; I should have specified "nation-building of a democracy." Tyrannies are easier to build, as long as they have a strong and loyal army, a good supply of headsmen and sharp swords, and no qualms about killing dissenters.

How much of "A Proposal" is actually true to the backstory of "Batman" as it has been set out over the years?

As a child I saw my first Batman comic book story around 1939. I remember it as a rather dark tale of Batman fighting a vampirish character. Robin was not in it. A year or two later my brother and I took up reading "Batman" comic books regularly. By then Robin had appeared and the stories seemed lighter and merrier, with lots of wisecracking. We also followed "Superman," but I preferred Batman as being more realistic – since he had no super-powers, he could lose and get hurt. (That's why kryptonite had to be invented to make Superman not quite so invulnerable.)

By the time we entered high school we had transferred our affections to Milton Caniff's "Terry and the Pirates" newspaper continuity strip. We even went to the extreme of going to libraries and looking up back-number papers to read all the strips from its beginning in 1934. Now that is being a real fan!

When the "Terry" strips were reprinted as books many years later I bought them as fast as they appeared, partly from nostalgia and partly because I still found them fun to reread.

Looking back, I suspect that a good part of the attraction was that "Terry and the Pirates" was definitely sexier than "Batman" or "Superman" – and my brother and I were undergoing adolescence.

And then, in 1947, my senior year in high school, I got hooked on science fiction. And that was that for the rest of my long life.

I took bits from various Batman stories. For example, the bit about Selina seeing the Waynes' murder is from *Gotham*; the bit about Bruce breaking down and telling her he loves her while she lies in bed recovering from her heart reimplant surgery and is supposedly asleep is from *Hush*. The family is from various stories.

—JTM

I have a modest proposal for quickly resolving the immigration crisis on our southern border. Send a corps of progressive activists,

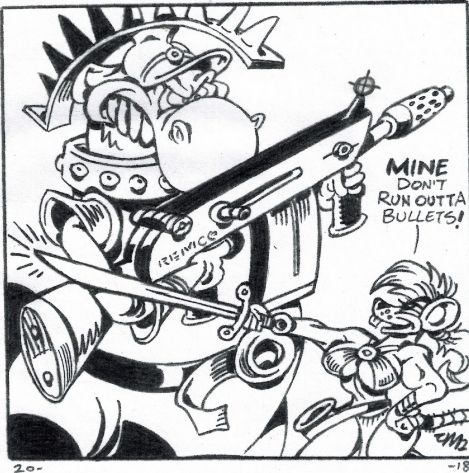
with ample translators, to lecture would-be immigrants on Critical Race Theory. When they learn what a horrible, disgusting, racism-soaked society we are, not at all the land of opportunity of their dreams, they will shudder, tremble, and then turn around and flee back to their homelands. Problem solved!

From: **Taras Wolansky** February 1, 2022
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Thanks for the December *Alexiad*.

DisCon III was an interesting experience, even if I developed either the flu or the Omega-tron [;)] variant as soon as I got home. (See the article about the Chinese representatives at the “meet the Worldcon bids” session, elsewhere in this issue.)

At a club dinner, I mentioned something about the “disaster in Afghanistan”, and a progressive fan from Canada asked, “What disaster?” Evidently the media he trusts had dropped Afghanistan down the memory hole. (A literary reference that, I suspect, younger progressives will not recognize.)



A little bemused, I reminded him about 16 million women and girls currently being degraded, and tens of thousands of allies who had the choice of letting the Taliban murder them, or join ISIS.

The discussion continued with topics like, which administration was objectively tough on Russia, and which administration talks tough but then turns around and gives Putin everything he wants. We both got a little hot under the collar as we went on, but I think I enjoyed myself more than my interlocutor did.

Just remember that in Quebec, Putin is french fries and cheese curds with brown gravy. (The French transliteration of “Путин” is «Poutine».)

Hugo Results: The novel winner, *Network Effect* by Martha Wells, is pretty harmless, a routine installment in the “Murderbot” series. I never finished it. My pick in this category, Mary Robinette Kowal’s *The Relentless Moon*, is in the “Lady Astronaut” series itself, but an outstanding installment. Shifting the focus to a different “lady astronaut”, I think, freed up the author’s creativity.

Maria Dahvana Headley’s new translation of *Beowulf* was enjoyable and, for once, a sensible winner in the “Related Works” category.

David M. Shea: I think of the Covid vaccines as the equivalent of seat belts. They don’t necessarily prevent illness, and they don’t necessarily prevent infecting somebody; but they improve your odds. The fact that, intentionally or unintentionally, public health authorities oversold the effectiveness of the vaccines has undermined public trust in those authorities for a long time to come. Fool me once, etc.

I have memes making the comparison between the vaccines and seatbelts. “70% car crash survival rate but hey live in fear sheep.”

Why these particular vaccines don’t work as well as the vaccines we have known for years I don’t know.

AL du Pisani: They have voter IDs in South Africa? Don’t they know those are racist?

George W. Price: Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Uncle Tom” is purchased by Simon Legree because Legree wants somebody intelligent and honest to — wait for it — run his plantation for him, so that he can go down the river to New Orleans and spend his time playing the gentleman. At first, the only disagreement between the two men is that Legree believes that regular flogging improves slave efficiency and Tom, a serious Christian, does not agree. But then Tom hides two slave women that Legree is sexually exploiting, and Legree orders slave “trusties” to whip Tom until he gives up the women. He never does.

In other words, “The beatings will continue until morale improves.”? If he’s trying Japanese corporate methods, he could have the slaves sing the plantation song every morning before work.

— JTM

WAHF:

Martin Morse Wooster, with various items of interest.
Jerry Kaufman, Guy H. Lillian III, Lee Muncy, with thanks.
Robert Lichtman, with concern.
Trinlay Khadro, with a Lunar New Year postcard.

NOT QUITE CLEAR ON THE CONCEPT

Non-Fungible Tokens (NFT) are the hot thing in the art world. What the purchaser of a NFT gets is a computer record showing he owns an image. Not the image itself. If the company whose server has the NFT record goes out of business, too bad.

A group called Spice DAO (anonymous, and if I were involved I’m not sure I’d want people to know I was in this sort of thing anyway) is breaking new fields in NFT. Recently, a copy of Alexander Jodorowsky’s concept book of *Dune* came up for sale.

Jodorowsky wasn’t thinking small, back in 1974 when he made his original proposal. His movie would be fourteen (14) hours long. The Padishah Emperor would be portrayed by Salvador Dali, who would receive \$100,000 per minute of screen time. (Now *that’s* Dada; perhaps he could then persuade Jodorowsky to bring out *Giraffes on Horseback Salad*.)

For some reason the project fell through due to lack of money. Jodorowsky had produced a concept art book, however, with striking images of the settings. One trembles at what he might have done with *Star Wars*.

There were only about twenty or so copies made, and the last one sold for \$25,000 at auction. Then one came up for auction at Christie’s, for an anticipated price of \$40,000.

It went for €2,660,000. (About \$3 million.)

The purchasers, Spice DAO (a DAO is a “Decentralized Autonomous Organization”, whatever that means), announced ambitious plans. They would make the book public domain. They would produce an original animated series for streaming. (Would it be 14 hours long?)

As the capper, they would issue a collection of NFTs “that are technically innovative and culturally disruptive”. These would be scans of every page of the book with NFTs for sale of each scan. Once they had those available, they would produce a video of the burning of the book.

And you were dubious about Brian Herbert’s works.

Objections were raised from several quarters. Nevertheless they persisted, though the rights issues promised to unleash a storm. There was the Herbert estate, Jodorowsky, the artists involved . . .

To make it clear, buying the concept book **does not** give Spice DAO or anyone else any derivative rights. It gives them ownership of the book. But nowadays in this age of fan fiction, such concepts seem to have less purchase.

<https://dune.foundation/>

(Currently “under construction”.)

ALVIN ON CALVIN

Arthur Stuart said, "You have mentioned your brother Calvin from time to time, but never in any detail. It makes me curious to learn what sort of a person he is."

Alvin said, "He was a right ornery sort. When he turned six, he started a-buildin' figgers out of snow. Consarned weird they was. You'd go out the door and see a feller a-holdin' his own head, or one with a mighty big hole blown in his middle by a cannonball. When he done built a gang of them protestin' some affair, and it blocked the door so's Pa couldn't get out, he got right uppity."

Peggy added, "He was right fractious in school. Teacher asked him to explain our Constitution in his own words. He writ up some astoundin' nonsense, words he had done gone and made up himself. When the teacher called him on it, he said, 'I love loopholes.'

"He'd pretend to be all sorts of strange folks. He'd be a-sittin' at his desk, lookin' sleepy, and then he'd bust out that he was Seaman Spiff, sailin' in some boat as didn't got no sails but was a-goin' of itself."

"He had his little red wagon and fer when it snowed, his sledge," Alvin said. "He'd go a-ridin' down the hill and have the worst crack-ups, but somehow he'd allus come out all right."

"An independent, but not particularly obedient sort of boy," Arthur said. "He would seem to have his own sort of knack, indiscipled but powerful."

"He didn't get along with Susie Lamp-lighter, the girl down the road," Alvin said. He'd throw snowballs at her but she'd be right smarter than him and go throwin' more back. And now I'm a-hearin' that they done got themselves hitched, and have them a little girl they named 'Bacon', like she was a side of meat."

Then Alvin got serious. "But he had him a poppet, he did, brought over the seas by a trader from old India. He seen it and made a fuss till Pa bought it for him. 'Twas a big cat, what they call a 'tygar'.

"Calvin right took to it. He'd carry it round with him everywheres. Talked to it and claimed it talked back right smart. He called it after some feller from old England, by the name of 'Hobbes' . . ."

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Art: What we are mainly looking for is small fillos. Your fillo will probably be scanned in and may be reused, unless you object to its reuse.

Contributions: This is not a fictionzine. It is intended to be our fanzine, so be interesting.

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