



ASKEW #25

Junely 2018

This was supposed to be out in June, but morphed into July. Hence, the date. The way I look it, this works.

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The Swede is Coming!

In less than a month, 2018 TAFF winner Johan Anglemark will be arriving at George H. W. Bush International Airport in Houston, Texas; he will be visiting Valerie and I for a few days and attending ArmadilloCon 40 in Austin over the August 3-5, 2018 weekend. We are looking forward to seeing him, and are preparing his room for the days and nights while he is here. Johan arrives on August 2nd, and the next day we will drive over to Austin – a mere two hours away – and then return home on Monday, August 6th. He will then have a couple days to unwind and recover before we shove him onto the flight that will take him over to Seattle, Washington. Johan's itinerary runs like this:

- Depart Stockholm on July 25, land in Toronto that night
- In Toronto, Ontario, Canada staying with Catherine Crockett (July 26-28)
- July 29 – Travel Day
- In Minneapolis, MN staying with Joyce Scrivner (July 30-Aug 1) then off to
- College Station, TX staying with John & Valerie Purcell (Aug 2–8; @ **ArmadilloCon 40**)
- In Seattle, WA staying with ?? (Aug 9-11)
- Aug 12 – Travel Day
- In San Jose, CA staying with Sten and Evangeline Thaning (Aug 13-15)
- **At Worldcon 76, August 16-20, 2018**
- Stay with ?? or at hotel (Aug. 21)
- Leave San Jose, CA for Stockholm (Aug 22)
- Arrive back home in Stockholm (Aug 23)

Johan is going to have a grand time. Please note the two conventions that I have listed in boldface. Johan and I will be attending ArmadilloCon 40 in Austin, and items will be auctioned off or sold to benefit the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund. He has started up a blog for documenting his travels, www.taff2018.com: “Westward Hi!”, which currently shows his full itinerary which I have sort of shortened up above. As of now, Seattle, WA and post Worldcon stays are TBD.

Passages

In the past couple months the science fiction community has lost people who have meant a lot to the genre. First came the news that First Fandom member **Shelby Vick (1928-2018)** had passed away at the age of 89. I never met ShelVy (his fannish nickname) but he and I were in the Southern Nevada Amateur Press Society (SNAPS) for a few years (2006-2008) before that APA folded, and in 2007 he published my short story “Customer Service” in the 17th issue of his pulp era styled fiction zine *Planetary Stories*. Those closer to ShelVy have written far more eloquently about his life, but I truly enjoyed his contributions to SNAPS and reading *Planetary Stories*. Thank you, ShelVy.

Another long-time fan passed away last month, **Steve Sneyd (1941-2018)**, best known for his science fiction and fantasy poetry and his fanzine *Data Dump*, which ran for an astonishing 226 issues between November 1991 and November 2016. This zine started off as a hand-written bibliography of sf and fanzine poetry published in England, but eventually became a monthly newszine covering sf & f poetry worldwide. One thing I know is that it is not easy to write good science fiction and fantasy poetry because I have tried writing it, and Steve did it well. On the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* website (from where I found the above information) there is a listing of his volumes of poetry, nonfiction, and edited works. In recent years his poetry could usually be found in the pages of John Thiel’s *Pablo Lennis*. Steve was reclusive, preferring to maintain contact with the fannish realm through correspondence throughout the years. Still, his death was a shocker to many fans.

Then in late June came the word, rocking the science fiction universe that one of its brightest stars, **Harlan Ellison (1934-2018)** had died in his sleep. In his lifetime, Harlan was one of those writers who helped redefine the genre in the 1960s, wielding one of the sledgehammers that broke down the self-imposed walls that put science fiction into its own literary ghetto. Ellison was one of those writers whose work you either loved or hated. His personality was like that, too: often contentious, his brilliance as a writer was matched by his passion to protect a writer’s work. I know that I don’t need to list out his many accomplishments and awards; this fanzine’s reading audience should be very familiar with them. Unlike Shelby Vick and Steve Sneyd, I actually met Harlan Ellison at three conventions back in the 1970s – ByobCon V (1975), MidAmeriCon (1976), and IguanaCon II (1978) – and even though my exposure to him was brief each time, he was passionate, intelligent, and funny. To say that Ellison will be missed is the understatement of all understatements. His influence on the science fiction field is massive and will be felt for a long time.

To get off that subject, here are capsule reviews of some of the books and stories I have read since mid-May.

Books (and one old novelette)

I have been on a bit of a reading jag since the semester ended a month and a half ago. I think the following capsule will give you some kind of an idea of the kinds of things I enjoy reading. Sometimes readers share their thoughts on these books in their letters, so if you have something to say about any of these tomes, feel free to do so. In the meantime, here goes.

Barr, Jason. *The Kaiju Film*. McFarland & Co., 2016. 203 pp.

People who know me even just a little bit know how much I love silly monster movies. Jason Barr's book is an academic appraisal of this particular subgenre of science fiction movies, known as Kaiju. The word *kaiju* basically means "strange creature" in Japanese. Its English general meaning is "monster" or "giant monster," usually referring to creatures of a large size seen in movies from Asia, primarily Japan. Toho Studios is the dominant producer of kaiju films, starting with *Gojira* in 1954, and continues to this day. Barr argues that these kaiju films are more fantasy than science fiction, and started out as serious endeavours (witness the dark, foreboding original Godzilla movies (including the American release of 1955 with Raymond Burr). What I like most about this book is that it is pretty inclusive by not just discussing the Toho studio franchises of Godzilla, Mothra, Ghidora, Rodan, and the like, but also expands his argument to include the original *King Kong* (1933), moving into other early monster films like *Mighty Joe Young* (1938) and *The Lost World* (1925), including the Universal Studios 1930 horror movies. Barr even lumps Michael Bay's ridiculous *Pacific Rim* (2013) and its new 2018 addition, *Pacific Rim: Uprising* into the kaiju genre. This is a fun book to read for its serious approach to a specific cinematic genre. If you're a fan of monster movies like me, this is a book you might want to acquire.

Cameron, Kenneth. *The Frightened Man*. Minotaur Books, 2010; first published in 2008. 261 pp.

The mystery/detective genre fits in so perfectly with the Steampunk/Victorian era that it is not surprising that many authors blend these together (see the Cherie Priest book listed below). In this case, the year is 1900. Denton is a famous American mystery/horror writer living in London who awakens from a massive drunk one day, suffering yet another hangover from hell, only to be sought out by a short, frightened Irishman who claims he is being pursued by none other than Jack the Ripper, who has been gone for 15 years. Even when the mutilated body of a prostitute is found in London's East End, Scotland Yard is completely unhelpful – besides being completely unbelieving Denton's story – and eventually Denton is following a trail that connects him to a mysterious woman and deep into the bowels of London's lower rungs of society. Cameron's writing is dark and wonderfully descriptive, capturing the brooding malaise of impoverished London, and the climactic scene is one of the best I have read in a long time. Nothing supernatural here, but *The Frightened Man* is a splendid story. Denton surfaces again in *The Bohemian Girl* (2009).

Corey, James S. A. *Caliban's War*. Orbit Books, 2012. 595 pp. Book 2 of the Expanse series

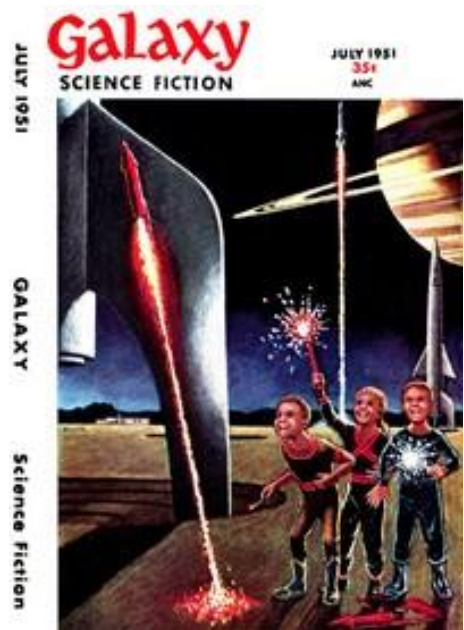
Corey, James S. A. *Abaddon's Gate*. Orbit Books, 2013, 547 pp. Book 3 of the Expanse series

The fun thing about reading these books while watching *The Expanse* television series is comparing the two. As much as I enjoy the program – dropped by SyFy Channel (for some stupid-assed reason) but picked up by Amazon – there is no question that I prefer the books. Even so, the TV series does a very good job of following the books at approximately one season per novel, and I am impressed by the visual presentation. But the book series is written so

damned well! The pacing is perfect and matches the writing very well, although my major complaint is that the portrayal of UN Undersecretary Avasarala as a crusty old woman who has been through decades of political warfare grates on my literary sensibilities a bit. If you have read any of these books, you know what I mean. Chrisjen Avasarala spews language that would make a space pirate blush. Practically every bit of dialog she has includes the word “fuck”, which I suppose is more realistic than the invective “frack” that *Battlestar Galactica* uses. Let’s hear it for the looser broadcast moral standards of cable TV. Anyway. Enjoy watching the television episodes, and I hope the production crew gets the chance to finish the entire eight book series. One of these years “James S. A. Corey” (the pen name of Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck) might just win a trifecta Hugo Award for Best Novel, Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form, and Best Series. That wouldn’t surprise me at all.

Leiber, Fritz. “Appointment in Tomorrow.” *Galaxy Magazine* (July 1951)

Here is another selection from my Nook, which I don’t use very often. I downloaded the story “Appointment in Tomorrow” a few years ago from Project Gutenberg. The science fiction and fantasy stories of Fritz Leiber have always been some of my favorite pulp era tales, but I have to say that this particular story is not one of his best. However, it does have merit for being rather prophetic as a warning against authoritarian rule over every aspect of a nation via a super-computer known as Maizie, control of which is fought over between Quackery and Science. Leiber sees this future American public as taken in completely by pseudoscience, supported by the Thinkers (I see Hubbard’s Dianetics represented by this side), and the scientists conspire against the government-sponsored Thinkers to seize control of Maizie. This all takes place in a post-nuclear world, which is not surprising because the post-World War II years of science fiction literature were inundated by apocalyptic-holocaust visions. I suppose given the times, such a story is to be expected from practically every sf writer. Again, this is not one of Leiber’s best, but still has an interesting idea that kept reminding me of America in the 21st century, especially during the Trump Administration. For this reason “Appointment in Tomorrow” is worth a quick read.



Priest, Cherie. *Maplecroft*. Roc Books, 2014. 435 pp.

It is my considered opinion that Cherie Priest cannot write a bad book. Seriously, I have read her Clockwork Universe series of books and the novel *Four and Twenty Blackbirds*, thoroughly enjoying them all. *Maplecroft* is the first book in the Borden Files series of books that are based on – you guessed it – the gruesome and famous Lizzie Borden murders. What Priest does this time is take the essential history of those murders, setting and all, and extrapolates a scenario

that blends the murder mystery and detective genres with a supernatural realm bordering on Lovecraft to create a story a reader simply will not be able to put down. I really would love to say more, but I fear that if I did I might give away too much of the plot and need to put in a spoiler alert. The second book in the series is *Chapelwood* (on my bookshelf), and I look forward to reading that one Real Soon Now.

From the Case Files of Dick Trickle. P.I.

The whiskey bottle was empty. So were the bottles of Gin, Vodka, Amaretto, and Dr. Pepper, plus an uncountable number of beer bottles. They lay scattered around the office like felled soldiers, bodies spent in a bitter battle against sobriety.

Dick Trickle, P.I., stared out the smoked pseudo-glass window at the stars. The moon hung its shocked face in the firmament, glaring brightly at the blue and white globe below, both spinning in the blackness of space. Spinning. Turning. Spinning again. Faster and faster the Earth and Moon spun... The last thing he remembered thinking was, *Oh, oh. Whirlies!*

Trickle passed out.

When he awoke, the assistant to the assistant station manager, Olaf Skänderssôn, was sitting in the swivel chair on the other side of Trickle's computer station. Trickle attempted to say something witty like "so look what the cat dragged in," but it sounded like "shook the addicted gun," then darkness again enveloped his brain.

An hour later, Skänderssôn was still sitting there, although this time the fog in the room had cleared out quite a bit. Trickle rubbed his eyes, noticed the fog was inside his head and not in the air. "Argh," he mumbled. "I really have to stop doing that."

"Drinking so much?" Skänderssôn calmly said.

"Naw. Mixing beer and whiskey after midnight."

The assistant to the assistant station manager sadly shook his head. "Do you even know what day this is?" he asked in a slightly sarcastic tone.

Trickle thought a moment, replied, "What year is it?"

"2133, the Year of Your Ass."

Trickle considered that a moment. "Wednesday," he concluded.

Skänderssôn chuckled. "Somewhere in this solar system it is. Look, Trickle, we have a problem on this station that's right up your alley," he said, his sober eyes locking in on Trickle's bleary orbs.

"Oh! So this is a business call. Very good. Can I get you a beer?"

"It's just after eight in the morning!" Skänderssôn shouted.

Trickle let that information sink in for a few seconds. "Scotch?"

The assistant to the, etc., calmly stood up, stared at the other man with an air of sorrowful authority. "There's been a murder in stores," Skänderssôn said. "Bergeron. Manager of Comestibles and Potables." The uncomprehending look on Trickle's face made him add, "Food and Drink Acquisitions."

"Oh, shit!" Trickle said in shock. "This is serious!"

"Can I count on your help?"

"Absolutely." Trickle stumbled to his feet, tottered while attempting the sloppiest salute since the end of the Korean Conflict. "Dick Trickle, P.I., at His Majesty's service."

Skänderssôn rolled his eyes, wrinkling his nose in disgust. “Oh, knock that crap off.” He picked up an ancient Marvin the Martian cooshy ball off Trickle’s desk, squeezed tightly, imagining it was the detective’s left testicle. “So you’re finally a licensed Private Investigator?” he asked.

“Nope,” came the quick reply. “I am Dick Trickle: the best Pissed Investigator in the solar system! Now if you will excuse me, I gotta take a leak.”

As Trickle wobbled out the irising door, Skänderssôn sighed, and said, “Here we go again.”

Skewed Results

Well, just like Askance #44 (June 2018), which was just posted to efanzines a couple weeks ago, this fanzine also received a handful letters of comment. My rejoinders will be in brown boldfaced font.

Ian Millsted
Bristol, England

June 7, 2018

Thanks for the copy of *Askew 24*. Delayed loc due to a week away in Spain. Now back to the world of education, which is perhaps relevant to your Cambridge based adventures.

A few years ago I did a 5 week ‘Teacher Fellowship’ at Corpus Christi College. That didn’t involve teaching anyone (my training is for 11 to 18 years old education) but was for the purpose of allowing me to do some research as well as make connections to help my students apply successfully (which did happen the following year). My room for that time was just next door to the Eagle where you visited. In fact my window overlooked the pub courtyard. Meanwhile I got to wear a gown and sit at the high table with the Fellows for dinner which was probably the closest to cosplaying as I’ve ever come, as my own academic background is much more humble.

There are quite a lot of sf writers over the years with Cambridge links but I won’t start a list here.

Ian

{When you wrote “Corpus Christi College,” the first thing I thought of was, “When were you in Texas?” Then I remembered that Cambridge, England has a Corpus Christi College, which made me feel a bit better. Yeah, I think that the Eagle is a pretty awesome place to have lunch, and to be sitting in there in full academic regalia must have been incredibly cool. I am envious that you attended a Teacher Fellowship there. That’s something that will look imposing on your Curriculum Vitae.

*Well, you *could* list some of the other known sf writers affiliated with Cambridge. If I recall correctly, Douglas Adams, author of the Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy series, was one of them.}*



Lloyd Penney
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June 15, 2018

The TAFFish cycle continues!... and I am glad it does. I was never able to meet any of the TAFF winners from Europe when they came over to Toronto, and I haven't heard anything of whether Johan Anglemark might be coming here. *{He is. See page one. – ed.}* I usually don't hear much, anyway. (Keeping with the theme of fan funds, it may now look like CUFF, the Canadian Unity Fan Fund, may finally be dead. There simply aren't enough people who may yet classify themselves as fans willing to take it on, and most conventions here have never heard of CUFF, and some are unwilling to participate. More news as it arrives.)

I had a wonderful time with the Skeltons while they were in Toronto for Corflu. Cas loves to chat, and we shared memories of Mike Glicksohn. I doubt I will ever get to another Corflu, but John, please get to the next one in the Washington area, and have yourself a good time.

The local...Bob Jennings is right, if you can assemble all your portions of trip report into one one-shot, there are places where you can submit it, and get a nice sum of money for donation to TAFF. I think Joe Siclari and the fanac.org group does not, not sure of the rest. After Yvonne and I took our CUFF trip, and published our trip report, we shopped it around and got some serious money for CUFF.

Hmmm...I do try to write to as many fanzines as I can to show that all fanzines are good enough for response. It does depend on what the fanzine might contain to pique my interest, but when I mix in some current affairs and personal journalism, the loc can be about much more than just the fanzine.

My loc...just had a good interview with a huge corporation, so hopes are high for that job. I am chatting with Chris about a steampunk fanzine, and I am thinking about it. We have had some meetings about our return to London, and if things work out, we will be leaving for London around this time next year. Some of that personal journalism...Yvonne has joined CAFTCAD, the Canadian Alliance of Film and Television Costume Arts and Design, and this is the professional organization of those who work in costume for the various TV shows and movies being shot in around the Toronto area, which are many. She's already taken some interesting courses through CAFTCAD, and this may lead to some work for her in the industry.

Lloyd

{As usual, thank you for writing, Lloyd. () There are indeed Fan Fund bounties paid by SciFi, Inc. and Fanac.org, both awarding \$500 if the TAFF or DUFF delegates complete and submit their trip reports within five years of completing their trips. After the five year period, the donation drops to \$250. I am pleased to say Jacq Monahan and Jim Mowatt both met the 5 year deadline. My deepest appreciation to Scifiinc.org and Fanac.org for supporting the fan funds.}*

Other folks who made contact – with me, that is, not aliens – are Bill Burns, Jim Mowatt, and Thomas Sadler. Thank you, gentlemen.

Announcement from File 770

Due to the unavailability of one of the main facilities, the New Zealand in 2020 Bid has changed its proposed Worldcon dates to Wednesday, July 19 through Sunday, August 2, 2020. The proposed location has not changed, and I sincerely doubt this will put a serious dent in anybody's travel plans being this far in advance. Still, good to know. Voting for the 2020 Worldcon site is being held this year at Worldcon 76 in San Jose, California, and New Zealand is running unopposed.

Some Thoughts about Some Words about Fanzines

In the two weeks since I finished and posted *Askance #44* on efanzines.com I have already received some interesting feedback. To recap my comments in *Askance #44*, after reviewing the voting numbers that Nic Farey published in *The Incomplete Register Results Issue: 2018 FAAn Awards* in May, I made the observation that quite a few fanzines associated with the National Fantasy Fan Foundation (the N3F, as it is commonly known) had surprisingly strong showings. I thought that was odd, and basically wondered out loud if there was a voting bloc from N3F members who voted in this year's FAAns to push that organization's fan publications. Then, like an idiot, I likened this to Puppygate (the voting bloc shenanigans of the Sad Puppies, Rabid Puppies, or the Pound Puppies, whatever they are called) from the past few years, and stuck my foot further into my mouth by saying maybe we should think about revamping the FAAn voting methodology.

That was obviously not the right thing to say. In fact, it was downright stupid. After going back and forth with not only Nic Farey but John Thiel, who is a prominent member of the N3F, especially in its fan publications, I realized that my musings were not, shall we say, well informed. In fact, I committed one of the logical fallacies I tell my ENGL 1301 students to avoid: avoid hasty generalizations by not jumping to conclusions without gathering sufficient evidence to support your statements. Mea culpa. If you actually consider the 2018 FAAn voting numbers carefully, there really were not that many votes cast for the N3F-affiliated fanzines *The National Fantasy Fan*, *Ionisphere*, and *Origins*, plus two zines that John Thiel produces, *Pablo Lennis* and *Surprising Stories*. Five or six votes received doth not a voting bloc make. In as small a survey as science fiction fanzine fandom, that could make a difference, but seriously, not by much. If anything, this input from N3F voters is a positive sign that more people around science fiction fandom might be more aware of the fanzine side of SF Fandom. This is probably A Good Thing.



The feedback I received from John and Nic was very helpful in making me think things through, and now I have a really good topic for the next issue of *Askance*, which I am hoping to publish before the end of September this year. The topic to be considered: wrongly perceived impressions about fanzines.

If *that* doesn't generate letters of comment, then I honestly don't know what will!