



Askew #27

December 2018

A paper-only fanzine from this fannish fellow:

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Okay. I might as well say something, too.

Yeah, this opening screed is over two-months out of date, but I believe that what I have to say – perhaps thanks to percolating inside my brain since early October – is still relevant and worth saying. Therefore, here are my thoughts about the recent Supreme Court confirmation hearings and the mid-term election results.

Probably the main take-away the world had from the Kavanaugh hearings is the blatant suppression of not only the voice of dissent, but also the cumulative voice of the people. Even worse, those hearings clearly revealed just how belligerent and indifferent to due cause and the proper process of judicial appointment the Republican Party is. They really don't care, and now with the results of the mid-term election rearing the specter of what the democratically-controlled House of Representatives might do starting in January 2019, the GOP will kick into full-tilt, jam-through-whatever-we-can mode before the lengthy end of the year break while they still control both chambers of congress. I fully expect to see more gridlock over the next two years as the Democrat controlled House and the Republican controlled Senate clash over policy, subpoenas, economic and climate-related bills, etc., ad infinitum. I am afraid there will be more of the same, especially as the Toddler-in-Chief wails endlessly about the "witch hunt" and spews even more ludicrous nonsense as a constant smoke screen to hide what his GOP toadies are doing to our American political system and way of life. That *l'enfant terrible* in the White House has done more damage to this nation in less than two years than the combined 140 years' worth of efforts by the Soviet Union and mainland China.

There is no doubt in my mind that Drumpf is hiding all sorts of shit in his financial and "political" background, and he is very, very scared. He should be. Just based on what we already know by watching him and reviewing what he has done in the last 21 months, he definitely must be removed from office. He appears to have no coherent view of reality, cannot talk in a complete sentence, wanders off topic in the middle of a thought, and basically says whatever pops into his head, which is usually irrelevant gobbledygook. In my estimation – and I am no psychologist or medical diagnostician (although my doctoral research is in educational psychology (how we learn)) – the Toddler-in-Chief does not possess the mental and emotional ability to discharge the duties of the Presidency. Thus, he should resign or be removed from office by the invocation of the fourth clause of the 25th Amendment.

Sadly, this will not happen by an act of Congress nor an act of God – I consider myself a studied agnostic, so I discount any chance of the latter act actually happening - so the voting public needs to keep the pressure on him and Congress - *both parties!* - to work together and then vote as many of these Trump-enablers out of office in 2020 along with the big baby and all of the dirty bath-water pouring out of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20500.

We can only hope.

FROM THE BEDSIDE BOOKSHELF

Okay, so my reading shelf is not exactly a bookshelf: it's one corner of my dresser. This is where I keep my current fiction reading stash. See, even with an overload class schedule and taking care of grandkids a few times a month, household maintenance, etcetera, ad infinitum, I always try to find room to read before calling it a night. Herewith then are reviews of two books that I managed to finish over the past few months. For the sake of time – I want to include the official 2019 TAFF ballot when mailing this issue – short comments are in order.

Dahlquist, Gordon. *The Dark Volume*. Bantam, 2009, 508 pp

Steampunk-Fantasy-Adventure. This is the fourth book in a series – The Glass Books (five titles in the series now) – which I found at the Texas Avenue Dollar Tree in College Station, and based on what *The Dark Volume* was like, I believe that I will be looking to acquire the other four titles. Coming into the series on its fourth title definitely leaves holes in understanding parts of the back story, although I still enjoyed reading this book and was able to figure out a good amount of what had gone before. *The Dark Volume* is still an entertaining story, and Dahlquist's narrative style is easy to understand. I don't want to recommend this as a stand-alone novel, though; I definitely need to know more from the first three books to piece together the full puzzle. For now I will say that this series shows potential. Maybe if I had started

Wolfe, Gene. *A Borrowed Man*. Tor, 2015, 297 pp.

Science Fiction/Mystery. I have always enjoyed anything by Gene Wolfe. He is definitely one of America's finest writers in any genre, so when I found this title at the Dollar Tree off Highway 6 in Bryan (next to a Target store) I was positively giddy. Then I read the back cover:

It is perhaps a hundred years in the future, our civilization is gone, and another is in place in North America, but it retains many familiar things and structures. Although the population is now small, there is advanced technology, there are robots, and there are clones.

E. A. Smithe is a borrowed person. He is a clone who lives on a third-tier shelf in a public library, and his personality is an uploaded recording of a deceased mystery writer. Smithe is a piece of property, not a legal human.

A wealthy patron, Colette Coldbrook, takes him from the library because he is the surviving personality of the author of *Murder on Mars*. A physical copy of that book

was in the possession of her murdered father, and it contains an important secret, the key to immense family wealth. It is lost, and Colette is afraid of the police. She borrows Smithe to help her find the book and to find out what the secret is. And then the plot gets complicated.

Actually, I would not call the plot “complicated.” Damned fun, yes. Wolfe never fails to provide a very interesting premise with solid, believable characters, telling his stories in a style befitting the narrative. In *A Borrowed Man* the style is not as dense or symbolic (Wolfe’s writing has been described as “allusive” by some critics) but is straightforward story-telling, which perfectly suits what is essentially a murder mystery. If you like science fiction mysteries, this is one of the best that I have ever read. Highly recommended.

Skewed Results

Methinks it's time for some letters of comment.

My comments in Calibri bold-italicized font after letter writers', um, letters in non-italicized, non-bolded Calibri. So there.

Nic Farey
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September 14, 2018

I believe you have the honor of being the *second* zine delivered directly to the new Farey domicile, having been edged out of the top spot by this year's WOOF, kindly bunged this way by GHL3. Forwarded from the old address (Ghod Bhless the USPS): Fred Lerner's and Arthur Hlavaty's ishes. The post-Corflu packet also made it.

I'm gratified to see discussion and interest in the FAAn awards. I was aware of Jerry "Killer" Kaufman's analysis, which was well-received, although I would have varied his proposal slightly, believing that a voter's #1 ranking choice ought to have a bit of a leg-up. Had I continued to administer the awards, my proposal would have been to increase the number of slots per category to four, with the first placed name getting 2 points and all or any others 1 each. This is, of course, the sort of continual tinkering with the mechanism which incurs derision from some quarters and, as pointed out by the Killer and dedicated psephologists such as Claire Brialey, actually has little to no effect on the result in terms of the actual winner, but is perhaps more "accurate" in the overall rankings. This does, however, rather create an impression that we might be taking it all far more seriously than any egoboo poll merits.

It'll be interesting to see the methodology used under incoming awards admin Curt Phillips, but I hope that suggestions (like Jerry's) will be considered.

Nic

I agree, Nic, that modifications will continue to take place as long as people are interested in contributing to the discussion. Vote tabulating methodologies are interesting topics to dicker over. Oh, you made me go running for my Merriam-Webster Dictionary to look up the meaning of “psephologist”: one who scientifically examines election results. I can’t wait to hear Claire’s reaction to the label you have pinned on her.

Richard Dengrove

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October 8, 2018

I received *Askew #26*. I am afraid I took a little time to respond. However, respond I shall.

My first response has to do with your wife Valerie, whom you discuss at the beginning of the zine. You say you have full confidence that Valerie will be able handle teenagers and do well as 10th grade English teacher. From my limited experience with Valerie, it looks like there’s little she can’t handle. She’s a smart woman with a sense of humor.

Then we will go from Valerie to Johan Anglemark, your TAFF visitor from Sweden. At one point, you while the hours away talking with him. I remember a lot of conversations like that. One point you make inspires other points in your fellow gasser. Who, in turn, makes points that inspire you. The only problem I have with that is that I forget everything I have said on nights like that. It would take another night to remind me.

Now we go from gassing to someone to reading a pulp novel or magazine. The problem with reading many of the old pulps is data dumps. Particularly among writers who were openly proselytizing for science. Philip Nowlan of Buck Rogers fame was bad, but, as far as I can tell, Hugo Gernsback was the worst. In “Ralph 124c41+,” sizable data dumps were followed by a few sentences of plot. I will confess when I read his *Forecast* magazine in the ‘60s and ‘70s, which my father received, it wasn’t so bad. He didn’t have to tell every single bloody fact That was true even though the articles were based on fact.

From your natter, we go to the letter column. Jerry Kaufman comments that he has no problem with movies that show monsters in stop motion or CGI, but he hates movies with men in rubber suits. That’s the normal opinion. However, many people have preferred the early Doctor Who because it contained so many rubber suits. They were rebelling against how expensive the typical monster movies had become. However, the new Doctor Who got around the rubber suit problem by using a lot of CGI, which, I gather, isn’t as expensive as the old special effects used to be. You probably need some original items and a backdrop. After that, you’ve got it made.

Richard

I have a soft spot for cheesy special effects in old skiffy movies, in particular the Godzilla suits that actors wore as they trampled mini-Tokyos under their feet. Movies with monsters in rubber suits are simply fun to heckle. The recent three-day Gojira marathon on the El Rey channel we receive on our Direct TV dish service was fun until the movies starting repeating. This actually sounds like it could be the topic of a fanzine article. I need to cogitate on this possibility.

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September 27, 2018

I am caught up, just a handful of zines to work on, and my last paperzine is *Askew 26*. Time to make some comments on the issue. I have to make it fast...we're off to the AGM for the Etobicoke Historical Association tonight, and parking is always tough.

So, you're now two teachers! Perhaps I should get Yvonne to teach me accounts payable, and maybe I will get some work again. Sounds like Johan found Texas life quite comfortable, especially with pets to cuddle with. The TAFFish life sounds quite adventurous, and I hope to read more reports as the years go on. Good to hear there's still a demand for trip reports.

I have been given a couple of books by friends, and I am going to try to write some book reviews. The first destination for them is the *Amazing Stories* website, but who knows after that. Both Shirley Meier and J.M. Frey are wonderful women, and I hope to do them some justice.

Johan's loc... I am sorry I didn't get to see you in Toronto. I gather the invitations to the event were haphazardly distributed, if at all, and I didn't find out about it until after it had happened. CUFF seems to be doing better, but time will tell if there is ever a CUFF vote, or if it will continue to go to whoever wants to make the trip...

I have not seen any episodes of *The Expanse*, nor am I likely to, but I can tell you that *ST:Discovery* is not the only SF series being shot in Toronto...so is *The Expanse*. I think it's filmed in the Pinewood Studios complex, same as *Discovery*.

The pictures on the back... No matter who's sitting in that chair, they are a damned sight better than the idiot who's occupying the real thing today. He's likely to tear up the NAFTA agreement, and then apply huge tariffs on anything we make. No wonder our present and past PMs have been making arrangements with other countries for free trade agreements. Our newscasts usually start these days with what the idiot has said now, and now that the United Nations has had a good laugh, let's see what he does to others.

Lloyd

I believe there will always be a demand for trip reports, whether published in print or online. For example, Paul Weimer (DUFF) and Donna Maree Hansen (GUFF) both "pubbed" their reports online, and are linked to PayPal donation portals. I'm more of a traditionalist, which is a good thing: I much prefer a handsomely produced hard copy to read and display on the shelf. (*) Johan and I had fun taking each other's pictures in the faux oval office at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum. "Damned sight better," eh? To quote Pat Paulsen's paraphrase of General Sherman's famous quote from 1868, "If nominated, I will not run; if elected, I will not serve."

Leigh Edmonds
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October 3, 2018

Your *Askew #26* sneaked into my letterbox in a whole pile of bills and other unwanted stuff and quite made my day. A real paper fnz, Goshwowboyohboy!

Congratulations to Valerie on getting her teaching qualifications. Valma was a teacher too and I did a lot of university teaching while and after I was doing my PhD, so what is the collective word for teachers? I have a great deal of regard for teachers and teaching, not that classroom teaching is anything that I could do, I don't like kids enough. I did enjoy university teaching which is a whole different thing, but also took up a lot of time and wasn't my 'thing'.

So what I'm doing at the moment is writing the history of a school, one of Melbourne's more elite schools. I wrote a history for them ten years ago but the school was going through very significant changes while I was writing that but which I was not allowed to write about and now they want me to write about that period of change too. The good thing about this project is that in the previous history the story was all about the top level of the school with it's Head Masters and what they did, though I did manage to get in a few of the student's experiences including a section on bullying that I'm rather pleased with (which doesn't seem to have existed at any of the 'elite' schools, to judge by their histories). In any event, this time around one of the things that I have insisted take a prominent place in the story is the changes that took place in teaching over that decade. I'm looking forward to it.

As an aside to that, I'm attaching for your edification, a picture of me talking to a group of students that was taken a couple of weeks back when I was at the school doing some research and I was asked to say a few words to this group which does work in the school's archive. It was rather enjoyable, and the kids seemed to enjoy it, but it's no temptation to do it as a full time job.



I liked your comment to Johan that new fans are discovering their own literary giants rather than the ones that we discovered and were giants for us. I think you are right that the field will continue to evolve and I recall reading somewhere on Facebook the comment that sf and fantasy is now more of a female than a male genre these days - though I expect that there is so much of it that it is possible to find stf in whatever forms suits an individual reader best. As for fandom evolving, that is certainly true. Jerry Kaufman notes that the latest DUFF winner is visiting Seattle (a trend that Valma and I started when FM and Elinore Busby persuaded us to visit when we met

them at a Bubonicon on my DUFF trip) but I have no idea who she is and wouldn't know her if I was stuck in a lift with her. My attendance at the two most recent Melbourne conventions made it clear to me that Australian fandom at the moment is all about writing fiction, and fan activities revolve around it. I don't see it personally, but it works for the current generation of fandom and I'm glad that they're enjoying themselves doing fannish things that way.

World Cup? What is this to which you refer to? Australians get excited about soccer once every four years when the Australian team makes it to the big event but soon loses interest when the team fails to progress to the knock-out rounds. Much more important to us are the Australian Football League and National Rugby League Grand Finals, played last weekend. They managed to fit over 100,000 into the Melbourne Cricket Ground for the AFL grand final which was one of the best finals to be played in years. Soccer comes a poor third or fourth in the list Australian priorities.

Anyhow, thanks for the paper. It's a real novelty to have your size of paper in our house.

Leigh

PS: Gosh, don't TAFF administrators life in lush accommodations? I was tempted to send you a picture of somebody sitting on a tree stump in the middle of the bush and claiming that was the environment that DUFF was administered in, but that would be unethical, wouldn't it?

It is always good to hear from you, Leigh. Thank you for that wonderful picture. It looks like those students hold you in reverence as you pontificate on your worldly knowledge. Either that, or they think you look like a crazy old scientist who just blew in from 1904. (*) Interesting that current Australian fandom is geared toward the writing aspect of science fiction and fantasy. Well, this could be just the latest interest swing of fans in the land Down Under and might come around to being fannish or faaannish again. Time will tell.

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September24, 2018

An apocalyptic sign: A paperzine in my postal box. Even with *Factsheet 5* long gone, the tradition lives on, but without the great number of hardcopy zines.

So you read less than 50% of "The Airlords of Han," an early Flash Gordon story. I find it easier to finish a short story that is so outdated and over-the-top that it holds your attention.

Somewhere around here I have a copy of *Amazing Stories* from circa 1928. I don't remember the title or the author's name but the gist of one short story in that issue has stayed with me. A fearless hero travels to another world with a propeller-driven craft. Propellers? Of course it's easy when flying

through the ether. No sightings of the ether bunny, but the hero lands on another world, discovering a socialistic utopia. I've read that some of the early SF writers used to belong to socialistic groups but dropped their association with them when the Red Scare reared its over-inflated ugly head. I wonder if any of these Socialism Is The Future stories caught the attention of HUAC.

Sometimes you can encounter an SF story so lame and unbelievable that it provides a ripping goodbad read. Take "The Day They H-Bombed Los Angeles," a novel by Robert Moore Williams from the paranoid days of the Cold War. Who's bombing LA? The US government! Why? Well there's a rogue protein molecule changing people into cannibalistic zombies. At night howling can be heard. An appropriate counterpoint to the reader howling with laughter. Somehow the hero and his friends survive -- count em' -- three H-bomb blasts. The government must have been using those low yield H-bombs. A recommended classick.

Ray

Hey, Brad Foster! How about drawing a rendition of the "Ether Bunny" Ray mentioned in his loc?

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September 11, 2018

Received *Askew #26* today, thanks for sending it along. Best of luck to your better half as she enters the endless dungeon of teaching High School English. Not only will she had to deal with surly, self-absorbed, cynically depressed, and obnoxious people in the midst of their most difficult emotional decade, but she has no doubt also learned that a considerable portion of her class groups have no interest at all in learning anything about the English language. "Hey dude, I speak it already" and "I don't write nothing—I text & tweet, Nuf Sde!" My impression is that high school English and Science teachers are the heaviest alcoholics in the entire educational caravan. I hope she manages to survive the experience. I have no doubt that even before the current school year finishes she will be giving serious consideration to other career possibilities. I understand there's a crying need for carnival geeks and also for rodeo clowns, work that would certainly be less stressful than teaching HS English.

I have to confess I have not read any of the *Expanse* novels by 'James Corey'. They aren't even in my massive pile of unread books that I have stacked up against the back wall. However, since the unread stack used to run almost up to the ceiling, and nowadays is mostly down below the four foot level, I suppose I could invest some emotional potential and order in the first volume at least. People have been gushing joyfully about the TV series based on the books, and you are not the only person who has spoken well of the novels themselves, so it may be time for me to take the plunge.

Sorry to read about your unpleasant experience with the original "Airlords of Han" by Phillip Nolan. This was a sequel to the very successful "Armageddon 2419 A.D." the first Buck Rogers story that appeared in the August 1928 issue of *Amazing Stories*. That tale reads a lot better than the sequel, but if you want the best versions of both you should seek out the 1978 Ace paperback edition that reprinted both stories in one paperback. The stories were adapted by Spider Robinson, who smoothed out a lot of the

clunky writing while keeping much of the unique phrasing, while producing a tighter story that avoided some of the obvious problems you point out in the sequel as it was originally printed. That 1978 Ace Books edition, titled "Armageddon 2419 A.D." stayed in print for quite a long time, and there are plenty of used copies around at affordable prices.

I read the ongoing comments about the FAAn awards, and I am sure Jerry Kaufman's suggestions have merit. The real problem is that not many people know about the FAAn awards, and many that do know about them don't seem to care. The key to getting any kind of reasonably realistic results out of the voting is to get more people to vote for the awards, and the key to that happening is to make more fans aware of the awards, what they are, and how the entire process works.

Toward that end I thot that Nic Farey did an excellent job with his trio of fanzines this year putting everything forward in a direct, intelligent order, including listing all the fanzines he could discover that might be voted on, and promoting the whole situation very well. I plugged the awards in *Tightbeam*, and urged the readers to vote for the awards this year. As I understand it, there were somewhat more votes this time round than usual, so publicity and intelligent presentation may have resulted in additional interest. Still, more could be done. I think Michael Dobson has made a very good start toward expanding on Nic's work for the upcoming awards, but more publicity is clearly necessary. I know I will hype the FAAns in my fanzines, and I hope you will plug the awards in your publications as well. More people need to know about the awards, and more people need to vote. I hope this coming year will see a significant increase in the number of votes cast.

Bob

Thank you for writing, Bob. As always, an interesting letter that covers a lot of ground. () It seems to me that the FAAn Awards are heading in the right direction, although they will never be hammered down to specific categories that shall remain immutable. As fanzine fandom – and sf fandom in general – evolves, so shall the FAAn Awards. However, I definitely agree with you on seeing a solid increase in the voting numbers next year.*

NEWS FROM FANDOM DEPT.

It saddens me to note **Lee Billings (1956-2018)** passed away in early December. I consider myself very fortunate to have met her quite a few times in recent years, and truly wish I knew her better. Even so, Lee was a delightful, fun person, and she did so much to preserve and popularize once again filking at conventions. A few years ago at ApolloCon in Houston, we had a good long chat about filk songs and their place in fandom, and Valerie and Lee hit it off due to their love of arts and crafts, to say nothing about cats. We miss Lee, and wish to express our condolences to her partner Russ Ault, her family and her many friends. Godspeed, Lee.

In other news, Paul Weimer, the 2017 Down Under Fan Fund delegate and current North American Administrator of DUFF, has announced that there will be no 2019 DUFF race, notably due to the 2020 World Science Fiction Convention to be held in New Zealand. This sounds like a wise decision, and I truly hope that the New Zealand Worldcon will generate a lot of interest in DUFF; recent years that fan fund has experienced very low voter numbers. I hope for DUFF to make a comeback in 2020.



That news item about DUFF presents a lovely segue into promoting the current Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund race that will send a North American fan to the Dublin, Ireland World Science Fiction Convention over August 15-19, 2019. Even though their names were announced over a month ago, the four – count ‘em, four – candidates vying for your votes are Teresa Cochran, Sara Gulde, Michael Lowrey, and Geri Sullivan. All are excellent candidates, and I am including a paper ballot in the envelope to accompany this issue of *Askew* around the globe. Read the official ballot for their platform statements to learn more about these fine folks and their reasons for standing for TAFF. Just like what I did in last year’s TAFF News, the publication I used to provide information for the 2018 TAFF race to the San Jose Worldcon, I will be sending this year’s candidates a short set of questions for each of them to answer. That seemed to work very well last, so I plan on doing it again.

The voting period for this year’s West to East TAFF race runs from 1 December 2018 until 22 April 2019. That coincides with the end of Easter weekend, which is a popular sf convention time.

Voting can be by mail – print out the attached official ballot and follow the instructions thereon – or online at <https://taff.org.uk/vote.php>

A minimum donation of \$4 USD or £3 GBP/ €3 Euro to TAFF should accompany your vote. Larger donations are gratefully accepted.

Addendum to my opening screed

As I finish this issue on the last day of 2018, the government of the United States of America is locked into the second week of a partial shut-down. So far nine federal departments have been shuttered until the Democratic and Republican parties can broker a deal that the Toddler-in-Chief, who claims he is a “great deal maker,” will sign and re-open the full government. This will most likely not happen until the second week of January. Three days from today Congress reconvenes, and the House of Representatives will have a Democratic majority for at least the next two years. Since the shut-down is essentially all about funding that toupéed fuck-trumpet’s “wall” along the Mexico-US border, this is going to be interesting in the sense that everybody should now be able to see how much of a ranting, temper-tantrum throwing toddler #45 really is. All I can say is, how can you release your inner child when you have never grown up? Honestly, I have never hated a president as much as this man. He is making Richard Nixon look like a saint.