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It is what it is. The Welcome Back to the Real World issue of *Askew*, the paper-only personalzine produced by John A. Purcell, 3744 Marielene Circle, College Station, TX 77845  
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Photo credits:  
John Purcell – 1, 4, 5  
Baron Dave Romm – 2, 6

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This was supposed to be the ~~September 2017~~ issue of *Askew*. Now it is the **October 2017**

Issue of *Askew*.

Oh, well...

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## While I was gone...

The mail piled up in a box during our 2017 Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) trip to the 75<sup>th</sup> World Science Fiction Convention in Helsinki, Finland. The fact that Valerie and I spent 38 days away from home did contribute to this accumulation, but at least there were a half dozen fanzines buried among the advertisements, bills, magazines, and junk mail. Sorting through all this was nowhere near as daunting a task as sorting through the 5682 pictures I took during our 38-day sojourn through Europe. We survived this massive trek, and apparently so did our hosts. Now begins the even bigger task looming before me: begin work on my TAFF Trip Report. Heaven help me...

In the latest issue of *Banana Wings* - #67, which just arrived on September 28<sup>th</sup>, which was yesterday because I am typing this on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September so I can get this danged issue done and out in the mail Really Soon Now - one of our hosts, none other than the feminine Fishlifter herself, Claire Brialey, slyly mentioned the trials of fine-tuning the travel side of such a trip, even for a veteran hostess of foreign fannish travelers. She was right. It is practically inevitable that problems will arise along the way. For Claire, it was coordinating the near constant ins and outs of fans staying at Fishlifter Central before and after the Worldcon while preparing for the same Worldcon for herself and the male Fishlifter, Mark Plummer. For us, the biggest obstacles to overcome were technical (Valerie's new iPhone 7+, purchased the day before we left) and transportational (dealing with Eurail, specifically). Both of these issues were resolved and shall be revealed in greater detail in their appropriate chapters – yes, chapters! – in my eventual Trip Report, and the lesson learned from these experiences is that despite all the planning one can make ahead of time, there will be Moments that must be dealt with as they arise. One truly needs to be Flexible when traveling abroad.

For what it's worth, Valerie and I left Houston, Texas, on the afternoon of July 13<sup>th</sup>, and finally arrived (after numerous delays in Newark) in Manchester, England, at 10:36 AM on July 14<sup>th</sup>. Our travels took us from Manchester/Stockport, to Cambridge via Stamford, to London, to Cardiff via Bath, then to Salisbury and Portsmouth, back up to London, off to Paris, then up to Rotterdam, Balkbrug, and Amsterdam (all in Netherlands), then an overnight stay in Riga, Latvia, and finally arriving in Helsinki, Finland, for Worldcon 75 on August 8<sup>th</sup>. The day after the convention ended (August 14<sup>th</sup>), we

flew down to Prague and spent a few days in Czechia (including a day trip off to Kutná Hora, where Valerie's ancestors are from), then flew back to London, trained up to Liverpool for two days, then finished off our trip by staying once again in Stockport with Paul and Cas Skelton, before flying back to Houston, Texas, a day later than expected, getting home on the evening of August 21<sup>st</sup>.

Does that sound tiring? It certainly wore us out! But, man, it was really worth the trip. I did my best to try and keep up a running diary on my Facebook page, with selected photographs, along the way. All in all, our five and half week European vacation was an incredible experience.

And get this: Donna Maree Hansen, the 2017 GUFF delegate to Worldcon 75, finally returned home to Australia just last week! Sheesh. This must have been the year for mammoth fan fund trips.



### **Baron David Romm (1955-2017)**

Perhaps the biggest unexpected surprise of attending the Worldcon in Helsinki was running into some long-time friends, and by that I mean people I met back in the early and mid-1970s in Crazy Minneapolis Fandom: Karen Schaeffer, Richard Tatge, Sharon Kahn, and David Romm. To me, this is always the biggest draw of attending these conventions: seeing friends again, hanging out and chatting away, enjoying each other's company. All appeared hale and hearty, and having a wonderful time in Helsinki. Because of that, it was a monstrous surprise to read on Facebook late in the evening of September 15, 2017, that Dave Romm had died. At the Minn-stf meeting on Saturday afternoon, September 16<sup>th</sup>, it was reported that his body had been found by neighbors – he lived alone in a condo - on September 14<sup>th</sup>, and the preliminary medical examiner's report was that he had died of a heart attack on September 4<sup>th</sup>. Dave Romm was 62 years old.

To say this was a shock is an unparalleled understatement. After Worldcon 75 ended, Dave spent another two weeks traveling to St. Petersburg, Russia, and the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). He told me that would be returning home to Minneapolis by September 2<sup>nd</sup>. In fact, his last postings to Facebook were done on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, so to learn of his death naturally stunned everybody. As the word spread, the tributes and memories of Baron Dave (in 2001, a true SF year, he had become a baron of the micro-country of Ladonia, located on a peninsula in southern Sweden) began pouring in. The dominant comment about him was how David always made new people in fandom feel welcome and appreciated. He loved meeting people, finding connections with them, chatting about practically anything. In my mind, Dave Romm exemplified the openness and welcoming spirit of science fiction fandom. In short, he was a truly nice guy who simply loved life and those around him.

Dave constantly took photographs. He has a portal on the internet ([www.romm.org](http://www.romm.org)) anyone can visit and view a wealth of pictures chronicling his travels, including all the conventions and Minn-stf club meetings and events he has been to since the Seventies. Above is a "selfie" he took with "Mickey" in Havana, Cuba, in 2015. I think it perfectly exemplifies

his fun spirit. Dave and I spent a good bit of time together wandering about the Messukeskus convention center in Helsinki: talking, reflecting, laughing, and so on. It was fun to be with him again, and I will cherish these memories and pictures over and over. One of the original members of the League of Super-Davids, Baron Dave struck me as one of those people who was just glad to be in the moment: you are here in the now for a reason, and he reveled in that. There is a life lesson to be learned there, and all I can say now, in this moment, is that I miss him, but so happy that Baron David Romm was part of my life. We are all richer because of him. Now it is our turn to share that wealth.

## Books

**Carriger, Gail. *Waistcoats and Weaponry*. Hatchette Book Group, 2014. 430 pp. EBOOK**

This is another of Carriger's series of Steampunk novels in the Finishing School series (aimed at the Young Adult market) in which the main characters are children of characters readers first met in Carriger's Parasol Protectorate series. The nice thing about this set of teenaged girls (and boys, naturally; when the central characters are 15 and 16 year old girls, having boys of the same age is a natural conflict generator to make the narrative more interesting) is that a reader can easily identify with the characters, whose back-stories and relationships continue to be delightfully developed through each of these stories. Set on Mademoiselle Geraldine's Floating School, the intrepid heroine of this series, Sophronia, discovers and attempts to thwart a plot that could throw all of London – and England, for that matter – into complete disarray. Like all of her novels, Gail Carriger tells a very entertaining story. It is easy to see why this particular entry into the series was a "New York Times bestseller, long list nominee for the Teen Choice Book award (2014), nominated for a Locus award (2015), was one of Amazon's "most anticipated" Fall Release in Science Fiction & Fantasy (2015), received a top honor on the YALSA Amazing Audiobooks List (2016), and won the Steampunk Chronicle's Reader's Choice Award (2015) " (qtd. From gailcarriger.com). I have said it before, but why not again? Anything by Gail Carriger is a guaranteed fun romp through her imaginative Steampunk world. Go visit. The airship departs just before teatime.

**Corey, James S. A. *Leviathan Wakes*. Orbit Books, 2011. 582 pp. TRADE PB**

This is the first book in the Expanse series of novels, upon which the SyFy Channel's television series "The Expanse" is based. As much as I have been enjoying watching the show, with the third season due to start in 2018, I definitely enjoyed reading this book a lot. Even though the writer is not a real person – it is the shared *nom de plume* of David Abraham and Ty Franck - the writing style is brisk and readable. Set only two to three hundred years ahead (so something like the 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup> century), it is the time of mankind finally being a multi-planet entity, even attaining a solar system wide presence. The primary conflict in this story is between Earth, Mars, and the mining colonies of the asteroid belt. Suffice to say that there are economic, socio-political points of contention between these entities, as Mars has become self-sufficient, the Belters want their own autonomy, and a giant Earth-based corporation with system wide control on its mind is attempting to subvert these three factions for its own gain. Toss in a grisly murder mystery, make the protagonist a futuristic *cine noir* homicide detective, and *Leviathan Wakes* takes off nicely. Yes, the fate of humanity is at stake, too. If you like Space Opera with a gritty flavor, this book is for you.

**Flannery, Joe. *Waiting in the Wings: The Beatles, Brian Epstein, and Me*. History Press, 2013. 278 pp. HC**

This book was purchased in Liverpool, England, while I was on my 2017 TAFF Trip; in fact, this happened on the last leg of that trip when Valerie and I were in Liverpool for two days before ducking back over to Stockport, near Manchester Airport, for our return flight home to Houston, Texas. I did not mean to buy this book because we were in the Beatles Story museum, a wonderful historical recreation of the band's legendary career replete with donated items such as original posters from their Cavern days, rare demo discs, clothing, and so on. Valerie and I were admiring the café at the

end of the museum, and met Joe Flannery there: he was signing copies of his autobiography, which was only £18! As you can probably guess, Joe was a childhood friend of Brian Epstein's, and eventually came into the Beatles' fold as their booking manager during their meteoric arc through the 1960s. The book traces Flannery's childhood in Liverpool, his career as a singer there in the 1950s, and culminates with his involvement with the most influential rock band in history. *Waiting in the Wings* definitely is worth reading for more than the Beatles' connection. It is also an eye-opening look into the pre- and post-World War II years of Liverpool society, its politics and economical status, the burgeoning music scene there, and most importantly what it was like growing up as a homosexual in a strong patriarchal social world. The insights learned about Brian Epstein and his family are remarkable, and reveal much about both Epstein and Flannery and their families. Thoroughly enjoyable and recommended.

**Gaiman, Neil. *Neverwhere*. Avon Books, 1998. 388 pp. PB**

My exposure to Neil Gaiman's fiction has been extremely limited: while aware of his work on the Sandman graphic novel and Good Omens with the late Sir Terry Pratchett, the only story of Gaiman's I have ever read was "Chivalry" in a collection of modern fantasy stories edited by Patrick Nielsen Hayden, *New Magics* (2004). *Neverwhere* is Gaiman's first novel, and I freely admit that I now can understand why he has so many fans: this guy can write really well! In fact, there are spots in *Neverwhere* that are quite evocative, nearly poetic in their descriptiveness that almost rival the mature work of Ray Bradbury. Gaiman presents the world of Lower London: more than just the underground subway lines and tunnels, he has created a society that lives, breathes, and thrives in its own, mysterious realm of dreariness, gloom, and magic. The story revolves around Richard Mayhew, a bright upwardly mobile young executive, engaged to a beautiful woman, and he has all this massive promise ahead of him, which is all shunted aside when Mayhew literally stumbles into Lower London. If you have not read anything by Gaiman before, *Neverwhere* is definitely a great introductory novel. It really is damned good story-telling that kept me up way too late at night only because I could not put this book down. That does not happen very often to me. Sounds like another recommendation, doesn't it?

## Skewed Results

*Letters from readers. Actually, one reader. Not surprisingly, it is from Lloyd Penney. Next issue will hopefully have more responses. Don't be shy, folks. I don't bite. Well, I could, but that would mean I'd have to put my dentures back in place. Oh, sorry. Too much information?*

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August 9, 2017

While you and Valerie are dealing with a number of obstacles set up by various European countries (especially Latvia) as you do your TAFFish duties, and eventually getting to Helsinki for the Finnish Worldcon (started today), Yvonne and I are at home, but going out regularly to enjoy a very enjoyable steampunk summer. First, it was Motor City Steam Con in Romulus, Michigan in July, and then the Steampunk Invasion in Mississauga, Ontario two weeks after, and now this



coming weekend is the Coldwater Steampunk Festival in the village of Coldwater, Ontario. Yvonne will portray Queen Victoria in a special ceremony, and I will introduce her as the Queen while I will be in full costume. In between all this steamy fun, I actually get to write locs!, and while I have both your zines with me, I thought I would start with *Askew 20*.

All the plans you list here have happened, although I am sure you will eventually tell us what worked, and what didn't. I hope all your projected hosts have been gracious, and all the fans you've met along the way friendly. That's what TAFF is all about. I am glad I nominated you, and with a single-vote win, I am glad I voted!

The local...I am glad there is still fandom, and with this coming December, I can mark 40 years of involvement. (I think Yvonne's hit her 40 years about now!) I keep hoping that some people will come forward to join the fandom we all like, but I figure that if we want them to show some interest in our fandom, we have to show some interest in theirs.

My loc...well, the job hunt is STILL going on. I think there is some measure of ageism there, as recently I had second interviews for three jobs, and didn't get any of them. *{editor's note: Lloyd has a new job now!}* The last CUFF winner was Paul Carreau, and I gather he is connected with Klingon fandom somewhere in Canada. After that, I cannot think of what's going on, or whether he took his trip, or raising funds, or holding an election for the next winner, or keeping track of the fan fund's bank account. A Brazilian fan fund...BOFF? Brazilian Overseas Fan Fund? If you win, you've been BOFFed?

All for now...I want to save something for my loc on the newest *Askance*. Take care, enjoy your wonderful TAFFish trip, and the trip report should be something special. I will look forward to reading about and seeing what happened through pictures. Enjoy your days there, and talk to you when you get back home.

Yours,

Lloyd Penney



*Well, we are back – obviously! – and begun sorting the thousands of photos and videos we took on the TAFF trip. I already have a Plan to begin working on the actual trip report itself, the first installment of which will be appearing in **Askance #42**, which is, as noted earlier, under construction. A basic plan of attack will be presented in that issue.*

*Good to hear that you and Yvonne have been having more fun with the Steampunk events and the Traveling Penney Steampunk Emporium is doing well. I would love to see a picture of your charming wife as Queen Victoria; I bet people loved it, too.*

*For what it's worth, the photos accompanying your letter here were taken in a museum in Paris called **The Chocolate Story**. It is exactly as advertised: a visual, tactile trek through the history and development of chocolate, the world's most delectable currency. The images here are of deities whom Mayan priests and citizens appeased with sacrificial urns and drinks of assorted chocolate concoctions. This museum also featured a demonstration theatre and kitchen where visitors can actually help create and sample chocolate. Wait until you see the pictures of the chocolate dresses and two tons of dark chocolate sculpted into a massive model of the Arc de Triomphe. Truly inspiring - and mouthwatering, too. Folks, this is a museum where you can literally eat the art. Heck, visitors are encouraged to do so. We loved it.*

## So where do I go from here?

Obviously, I will be writing a trip report. As the new North American Administrator of TAFF, my duties include raising funds through auctions, donations, and sales of TAFF-related doo-dads, plus promote this fan fund – and the others, naturally – through my fanzines, attending conventions, and getting that fershlugginer report done. As noted in previous issues of *Askew*, should a trip report be completed within five years of the end of a TAFF or DUFF trip, the FANAC group will make a donation of \$500 to that specific fan fund. Therefore, my goal is to try and get my report done by the end of my term as Administrator. I think I will need a lot of chocolate and coffee to meet this deadline.

Before I begin, though, I really need to thank some very special people. As expected, all of our fannish hosts around Europe were wonderful and gracious and greatly appreciated. They were, one and all, the best tour guides anybody could have, plus were massively helpful in negotiating local transit systems and deciphering a bewildering array of train, tube, tram, and bus schedules. Valerie and I could not have done it with these people. Well, we probably could have muddled through, but the aid of Paul and Cas Skelton (Manchester & Stockport), Jim and Carrie Mowatt (Cambridge), Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer (London), Rob and Coral Jackson (Salisbury and Portsmouth), Kees and Angelique Van Toorn (Rotterdam), Erik and Marjike Bennink (Balkbrug and Amsterdam), and Liam Proven (Prague and Czech Republic) was above and beyond helpfulness. They were all fantastic, and we love them all. Without this gang of misfits, this year's TAFF trip would have been damned near impossible.

I also wish to thank Curt Phillips, the out-going North American TAFF Administrator, for all of his help and guidance, plus Anna Raftery, the current European TAFF Administrator, for being a huge help while we were in Helsinki. Could not have done this without you two, either. More thank yous go to these previous TAFF recipients for additional advice: Chris Garcia, James Bacon, John Coxon, Nina Horvath, Patrick and Theresa Nielsen Hayden, Dave Langford, Randy Byers, and Ulrika O'Brien. What a great bunch of people to lean on.

But my biggest thank you goes to my wife, Valerie. She did the vast majority of the research and planning for the trip, which consumed mammoth amounts of time and energy. Bless her heart, this was not an easy task considering there were less than four months from finding out I won the TAFF vote (April 18<sup>th</sup>) to the start of Worldcon 75 (August 9<sup>th</sup>). Considering that we left for Houston on July 12<sup>th</sup>, she did the impossible in less than three months. No doubt in my mind, Valerie is a remarkable woman, and what she accomplished reminds me why I married her and love her so much. This trip would not have been possible without her. She makes me look good!

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A few words about this picture on the right.

Late in the afternoon of Worldcon 75's last day (Sunday, August 13<sup>th</sup>), Dave Romm and I walked out of the Messukeskus after touring the after-effects of yet another convention, and he asked me to take his traditional "waving goodbye to the Worldcon" photograph. He showed me how to use his camera - an expensive one, of course – and so I snapped a few shots. Somehow this picture seems sadly appropriate right here. Goodbye, Dave. Thank you for helping to make Helsinki a great experience.

