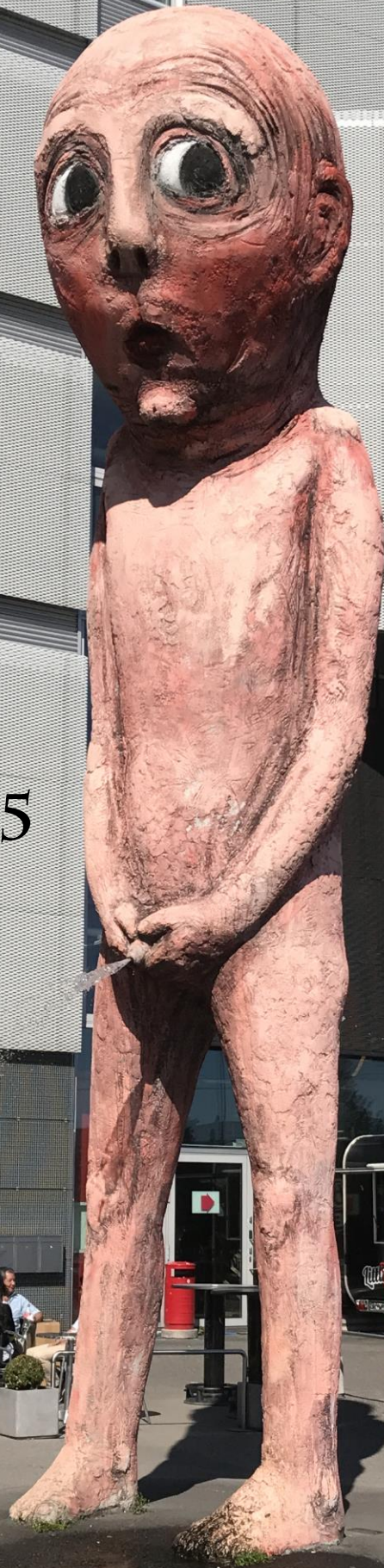


PISS ON IT.

ANOTHER  
WORLDCON 75  
REPORT



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Starring John & Valerie Purcell

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What you are about to read is what shall pass as my official Worldcon 75 report. All photographs herein, unless otherwise noted below, I took during my 2017 TAFF Trip to attend the 75<sup>th</sup> World Science Fiction Convention, held in Helsinki, Finland, in August 2017. It was an incredible trip, full of fun, great people, lots of good food, drink, and conversations, but also contained its fair share of drama. I hope you enjoy reading this one-off publication. Other chapters of this trip report have been appearing in various fanzines over the last six months, and more are yet to come. Eventually all these chapters shall be compiled into a single volume, hopefully in time for the 77<sup>th</sup> World Science Fiction Convention in Dublin, Ireland, next year.

#### **Picture credits**

Cover photo of pissing alien fountain in Helsinki West Harbor taken by John Purcell

Clip art – 3; nicked from Internet – 4

España Sheriff – 24 (TAFF winners group photo)

Baron David Romm – 8, 11, 19, 22

Henry Söderlund – 24 (Hugo Awards ceremony photo)

John Purcell – 5, 6, 13, 15, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

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“When you are at a Worldcon, practical matters are rarely observed.”

## What Iron Curtain?

Once again, Valerie and I awoke in a foreign country. Considering that by now we had been in Europe for three weeks, we should not have been surprised, but this time we were in Riga, Latvia. Visiting this city was a planned stop out of necessity: our airplane reservation had a 22-hour layover in Riga before our eventual Air Baltic flight took us up and over the Baltic Sea to Helsinki. What can you do?

After the travails of the night before - wandering aimlessly but determinedly in the darkness of late night Riga searching for the Knights Court Hotel – the morning sun shining into



our room was pleasantly warm. Surprisingly, we actually had a solid good night's sleep and discovered the hotel's breakfast buffet was quite extensive and delicious. Score a big win for the hotel. Once again I talked to members of the hotel staff in Russian, albeit a bit haltingly, but the serving woman and man in the restaurant were very patient and complimented my pronunciation. "You have good accent," Vasili said as he refilled our coffee cups. "Where did you learn Russian?"

"At Iowa State University," I replied between mouthfuls of a delicious vegetable-filled omelet. "My professor, Mrs. Prokopoff, was from St. Petersburg. That was a long time ago, and it's good to know I can still speak and understand Russian." Indeed, it had been decades: my Russian language classes were during my 1972-1975 school terms, to be precise. Hard to believe how quickly the years add up.

"*Xopouo,*" he said, then circulated around the room, refilling coffee cups as needed. Valerie and I relaxed as we ate, then filled up our travel mugs with coffee to take back to the room, where we made sure all of our stuff was packed and ready to go.

Since we had some time before we needed to get to the airport for our afternoon connecting flight to Helsinki, we relaxed a bit walking by through the area surrounding the hotel. We were not surprised by all the Soviet era architecture - modular and blocky - but there were a good number of older buildings. City Hall was exceptional: built in the 1870s, it had a classic Greek columned entrance with a good-sized dome atop. There were a few parks along the way, but these were rather small and unremarkable. The general feel of that part of Riga was depressing due to the general impoverished nature of the streets. Many storefront windows revealed empty interiors, if they were not boarded up or had iron bars, as if keeping out the criminal element. There was traffic, but not a lot of it. After an hour or so of walking about, we returned to the hotel, retrieved our luggage, and checked out to take the bus to the airport.

Once again, there was hardly a line at the airline counter. No trouble with our checked luggage, and we were off to the Customs check for our carry-on bags.

Okay, I have to say here that so far on our journey from North America we had not run into any problems with our carry-ons. Not a single question in England, France, Netherlands...

nowhere. We always emptied them out into tubs, sending everything but the kitchen sink through x-ray machines and metal detectors, and not once was there any problem.

But this was Riga. Apparently, these Customs officials thought the Cold War was still in full swing. It took much too long for us this time because three uniformed men stolidly stood and stared as we unpacked and repacked our two carryon bags, closely examining every single toiletry item they saw: shampoo, face cream, hand lotion, shaving cream, after-shave lotion, toothpaste tubes... seriously, everything. They said things like “слишком много” (“too much”) or “нет, вы не можете принести это на борт” (“You cannot bring this onboard”). My unvoiced opinion was that they were shopping, deciding which Western items were unavailable in Latvia so they could take those things home to dazzle their wives, girlfriends, mistresses, and children.

“Look! Had good haul at spoiled American tourist expense, dah? For you, babushka: Oil of Olay. Mishka, here: American-style toothbrush. Soft bristles! See this? Now I Old Spice man like television commercial.” Valerie was getting visibly upset seeing all of her hypo-allergenic creams tossed into a bin while I kept glancing at my watch. We were getting dangerously close to not making our plane to Helsinki.

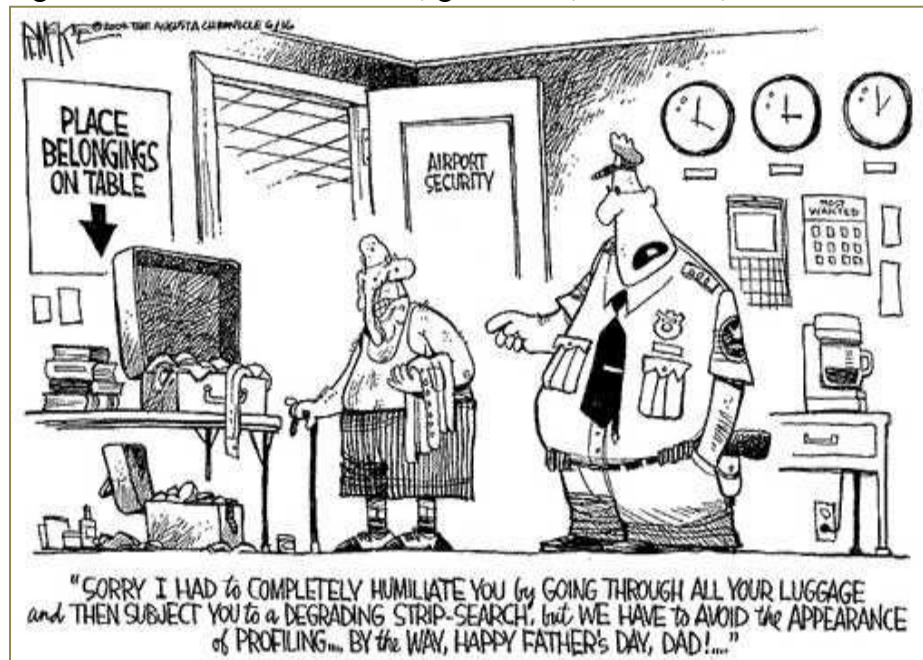
Eventually we made it through twelve minutes before takeoff, no thanks to these Cossacks. I made a mental note to restock Valerie’s needs in Helsinki at our first opportunity to wander into the city.

Somehow the Fannish Ghods took pity on us. Our plane was delayed – oh, joy! More time in a post-Cold War country! My favorite! – for refueling, giving us another half hour plus change, which we sorely needed to calm down. We took turns in search of restrooms, and then I trotted down the concourse to a kiosk for soft drinks and snacks. Upon my return Valerie said that she had seen a young lady wearing a EuroCon t-shirt. “I wonder if she’s on our plane going to the Worldcon,” she said.

“Could be,” I answered. “It would make sense for this flight.” Then two busses drove up to our terminal, and in the crowd barging its way out the doors I saw a slender, dark-haired young lady in a light blue t-shirt with the words “EuroCon 2015 Dortmund, Germany” across the front in large white letters. Positioning myself near her on the shuttle, I struck up a hopeful conversation.

“Are you a science fiction fan?” I asked in a pleasant voice.

“Yah,” she shyly said, in a voice flavoured with a Germanic lilt.



I gestured at my wife, saying, “So are we. I guess you are going to the World Convention in Helsinki, right?”

She smiled. “Yah.”

A minute or so passed as I waited for her to say something else, but she looked hesitant, fearful of me, I guess. Well, I would be careful too, talking to an American stranger on a bus in a foreign country. “Where are you from?” I finally asked, hoping to learn who she was, although I had a very good idea by now because my memory banks were beginning to function again. This young lady did look familiar.

“Austria. I live in Lindt, Austria.”

*Ah-hah!* My brain wasn’t totally addled by our Customs trauma. “Really? I know someone from there. I have never met her, but maybe you do: her name is Nina Horvath.”

Her eyes went wide with astonishment. “That is my name!” she practically shouted. That’s when I held out my right hand in greeting, smiled, and said, “Hi, I’m John Purcell. This is my wife, Valerie. Val, this is Nina Horvath. She was the TAFF delegate to the Worldcon in Tacoma two years ago.”

The tension gone, the three of us started talking as if we had known each other for years and didn’t stop until we split up at the Helsinki airport to go to different hotels. The typical world science fiction convention magic had kicked in: we were already making new friends.

□

So there we were, finally in Helsinki, Finland, late afternoon of Tuesday, August 8, 2017. The 75<sup>th</sup> annual World Science Fiction Convention was to begin the following morning, and we would not have to drag luggage hither and yon all over Europe for a week. We had “down time,” which is a complete misnomer if there ever was one. Perhaps the most important aspect of taking a TAFF Trip – or any overseas vacation, for that matter – is to plan in some time to actually stop, rest, and breathe. Regenerate your body’s batteries. Eat. Keep hydrated. Sleep, dagnabbit! Unfortunately, when you are at a Worldcon, practical matters are rarely observed.

Well, we did take it easy on our first day in Helsinki. But first, we had to get to the Holiday Inn-Messukeskus. Getting through Customs and baggage claim at the Helsinki airport was nowhere near the hassle it was in Riga, but it still took a little time. It definitely took much longer to find our way out of the Helsinki-Vantaa airport, though. I swear, that airport covers more territory than the state of Rhode Island. Okay, maybe it’s not that big, but it assuredly dwarfs Newark International



Descending to Helsinki-Vantaa airport.

Airport and is a hundred-fold times newer and cleaner. Helsinki-Vantaa airport – the fourth busiest airport in the Nordic countries, we were informed – impressed the heck out of us by its size, cleanliness, efficiency, and how easy it was to navigate. Every sign was multi-lingual: besides Finnish, directions were written in English, German, Russian, Norwegian, Swedish, French, and Chinese, of all things. Those people really are *everywhere*! Eventually, after riding up what must be the longest escalator in the world, Valerie and I took a shuttle bus to the train station, whereupon we DAMNT<sup>TM</sup>ed our way onto a train that went directly to Pasila Station, which is a short walk – four blocks – from the Messukeskus Convention Center.

Getting off, we ended up going out the southeastern exit of Pasila, which lengthened our walk – dragging our luggage – two blocks because we had to go around a big honking warehouse abutted to the tracks. The weather was nice, but it was still tiring because our luggage encumbered walking. Fortunately, the Holiday Inn Hotel we were staying at is adjacent to the convention center, so the location could not have been better. As we approached, we saw tram tracks in the street, and those trams would serve us well during our stay. Checking in was a snap, and up we went to our room on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor. We had a lovely window view of the convention center, which is gigantic. The Messukeskus covers approximately a two-square block area under one roof, but at least we had a window view of that part of the city. How little did we know of what else was in store for us during our stay in that Holiday Inn. But that was in the near future. For now, though, we unpacked, and relaxed in the room. Valerie’s back was hurting from the strain of walking and dragging luggage, even though her bag was on wheels. While she stretched out on the firm king-sized bed, I went down to the convention center to not only scout out the lay of the land, but also, because it was still before 8 PM, I wanted to get our registration packets so we would not have to bother with the crush of the crowd Wednesday morning. Many years ago I learned that trick – actually, this lesson was learned four decades ago, but who’s counting? – and knew the value of easing into a convention.



From what I could see of the Messukeskus Convention Center, it looked about as organized as the night before a world science fiction convention could be. Staff and volunteers were scurrying about, putting tables and dividers up, making sure there were enough wheelchairs and scooters available, batteries plugged in and charging, and so on. The squall before the storm is an apt analogy to describe the scene. Even so, I was impressed. It looked large enough to handle a sizeable crowd, and the facility was destined to be texted to the max.

My reconnoitering done, I went back up to our room, where we ordered in a dinner from the restaurant, and got a good night’s sleep.

Tomorrow the Worldcon would begin!

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“Egad, but that’s undrinkable!”

On Wednesday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, the official first day of WorldCon 75, everything kicked into gear. I have to admit, the con-committee really did a great job of getting the programme (I shall be using the European spelling of things hereafter, just to warn my provincial American readership) onto the internet, creating an app for mobile devices, and anything else as technical support for the membership they could think of, besides the obligatory print copy of *everything* they could think of. Putting on a world science fiction convention is no small task, and Jukka Halme, the chair of the con-committee, shouldered the burden stoically and heroically. By now, nine months later, he may have recovered a small shred of sanity. At any rate, I was involved in a grand total of eight events and panels.

Here is my full convention schedule:

### **Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> August**

Opening Ceremonies, 3:00 – 4:00 PM, 101 A&B  
Fandom as Collaborative Culture Panel, 6:00 – 7:00 PM, 205

### **Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> August**

GUFF, TAFF, NOFF – WTF? Panel, 1:00 – 2:00 PM, 203a  
Liar's Panel, 3 – 4 PM, 204

### **Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> August**

Hugo Award rehearsal: 1:30 – 3:00 PM, 101 A&B  
Hugo Award reception: 6:00 – 7:00 PM, 101A&B  
Hugo Award ceremony: 7:00 - 9:30 PM, 101 A&B<sup>1</sup>

### **Saturday, 12<sup>th</sup> August**

WOOF collation, 1:00 – 3:00 PM, Fanzine Lounge  
Fan Fund Auction, 4:00 – 6:00 PM, 102

### **Sunday, 13<sup>th</sup> August**

Closing Ceremonies, 5:00 – 6:00 PM, 101 A&B

That is definitely a full schedule. I was doing something every single day of the convention. In contrast, Valerie was on one panel at 2 PM Saturday, “Fannish Crafts,” which she said actually went pretty well despite not really hearing anything ahead of time from any of the other participants. It was a given that I would be running hither and yon, but the good news was that we didn't have to worry about displaying Valerie's work in the art show this time, unlike LoneStarCon III four years earlier.

Before Opening Ceremonies, the first thing we had to do was have the hotel tell us how to open our window and what we could do to cool off our room. Naturally, the summer of 2017 in Helsinki was hotter than usual, and since most of Europe has yet to discover the wonders of air conditioning, our room was definitely too warm. A portable humidifier/cooler was delivered and set up by a desk clerk. We thanked him, and went down to wander through the dealer's area, eye-balling shiny, sparkly things (we are always on the lookout for jewelry and doodads for our Steampunk costumes), books, and so on. We were gobsmacked by the size of the venue, and the crowds were getting larger by the minute. This would eventually become a major problem for the convention over the rest of the weekend, requiring a lot of improvising on the part of Jukka

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<sup>1</sup> I count the Hugo Awards rehearsal, reception, and ceremony all as one event

Halme, the concommittee, and venue. By early Wednesday afternoon it was very apparent that this was going to be An Issue To Deal With. I felt bad for the members of the concom and think that they did the best they could under the circumstances. First things first, though, I had to get to the Green Room (the preparatory location people met in before their function began) for my instructions for Opening Ceremonies. It was a snap: just wait backstage to be introduced and walk out, get your gift from Santa (yes, you read that right), and stand in line until all the official guests of honour were done doing their thing. The Green Room was where I met GUFF delegate Donna Maree Hanson from Australia. We briefly chatted, and took our position backstage, not knowing that we were supposed to be sitting with the other guests in the front row. Oops! All went well, though, despite our walking in from back stage left when Karen Lord, the toastmistress of Worldcon 75, introduced us. Our unexpected entry from the wrong direction made Santa do a spinning double-take, but he recovered. Donna and I assumed our positions and waited until the microphone was handed down the line of dignitaries. The primary Guests of Honour were authors Johanna Sinsalo, Nalo Hopkinson, and Walter Jon Williams, plus John-Henri Holmberg (fan) and the absent Claire Wendling (artist) due to illness; also, astronaut Kjell N. Lindgren was a special guest. I was mortified to see how well everybody on stage was dressed compared to my being in short pants, sneakers, and wearing my “TAFF 2017” t-shirt. Everyone started talking about his or her first world science fiction convention, which made me relax. I could handle talking that about in front of the jam-packed auditorium crowd. When American writer GoH Walter Jon Williams, whom I knew from a Mark Twain panel we were on in San Antonio at LoneStarCon III in 2013, was describing his first Worldcon in Phoenix “back in 1976,” I couldn’t help but correct him. “Excuse me, sir,” I said, leaning forward to address him, “the Phoenix Worldcon was in ’78. Kansas City was ’76.” He smiled, shrugged, and good-naturedly said, “Thank you.” “You’re welcome,” I said, and stepped back in line to a slight smattering of laughter and applause.

Eventually the microphone was passed down to me at the end of the line, and after noting that I was wearing “Texas formal summer wear,” I dutifully recounted that my first Worldcon



was Big Mac in 1976. It was interesting to note that of everyone on stage, only John-Henri Holmberg had attended a Worldcon before me. Obviously that was an indication of how long I have been involved in science fiction fandom. Once all these introductions were done, everybody left the stage together, but since Donna and I were not seated beforehand, neither one of us had a place to sit. She eventually found an open seat while I stood off to one side to watch the rest of Opening Ceremonies.

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“See this? Now I Old Spice man like television commercial.”



I briefly returned to my room to catch up with Valerie and see what she had in mind to fill the time before and after my 6 PM panel – in other words, figuring out what to do for dinner – and in short order I was off again, heading over to the Green Room, to meet the members of the “Fandom as Collaborative Culture” panel. There I was joined by Alicia Freeborn, Anna Raftery, and John Coxon, and we trooped over to room 205. Surprisingly there were a good number of people in the audience, but it was not full, unlike practically every other panel that weekend. No, I take that back. The Fan Funds panel I was on Thursday afternoon only had a couple dozen people in the audience, most of whom I knew. My guess is that fan-related panel discussions were low in attendance because it is such a niche market; most attendees are there to see their favorite authors and artists, browse the dealer’s room, and so on. In any event, Alicia, Anna, John C., and I talked about how we each view fannish culture, notably focusing on how it brings people of diverse interests together. The hour went by quickly, and we had a good time relating our experiences in clubs, apas, working on conventions, producing fanzines, and so forth. It ended as most convention panel discussions do: a concommittee member runs into the room near the end holding up a sign that reads **FIVE MORE MINUTES** in big, bold letters.

Leaving room 205, we walked into a wall of people. The entire hallway was jammed with people, making the convention center look more like rush hour on the Paris Metro or Times Square in New York City on New Year’s Eve. It was hard to move in the direction you desired, so you either literally went with the flow or head in the opposite direction, which is what I did. Thanks to my previous night’s reconnaissance, I knew how to move through the hallways to reach my destination – namely my hotel.

Eventually I made it back to the room, where Valerie was just about ready to head out. “How’d your panel go?” she asked.

“Swimmingly,” I answered, adding, “which is how you have to move through the hallways in the convention center. It’s fricking crowded down there!”

“That bad already?”

“Yep. I say we wait a few minutes so that the herd can shuffle into its assorted pens and the halls will be clear.”

Valerie nodded. “Sounds good to me. How do I look?” She gave me a twirl in her flowing teal blouse and matching shorts.

“Lovely, as always,” I said. “Let’s go catch a trolley to do some shopping for you.”

Arm in arm, we left to catch one of the trams that ran directly in from of our hotel. Thanks to the wonder of modern technology, she had located what appeared to be a small Finnish version of a K-Mart – called K-Market, which was amusing - and a nearby grocery store that were only a few minutes away by tram. We did a bit of sightseeing, walking around the area before doing our actual shopping, passing the Pasila Kirjasto (Pasila Library), an interesting looking restaurant we never tried, the Mero-Himal Nepalese Restaurant, and even a game store that was identical to a Game Stop in America. Fortunately we were able to find the majority of Valerie’s hypo-allergenic needs in the K-Market, and some gluten free bread and other foodstuffs in that corner grocery store the next block over. Then we hopped back onto the tram that took us directly back to the Holiday Inn-Messukeskus.

After eating dinner in our room, we wandered down to the New Zealand in 2020 bidding party, which was going full blast in the Winter Court of the hotel. It had a full bar with a long line waiting to shell exorbitant prices for beers, mixed drinks, and even soft drinks. I got a cola for five euros, and Valerie’s bottle of water was also five euros. Well, bar prices are like that

where-ever you go, I guess. Thankfully seeing some of our English friends again helped make the crowd bearable. It was wonderful chatting with Jim and Carrie Mowatt, Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer again. We also saw James Bacon, whom Valerie first met at the Fannish Meet-Up in London two weeks earlier. Tobes Valois was with James, and those two gents had the right idea: each had a flask of Irish whiskey in their pockets, so they were able to avoid the ridiculous bar prices. Craig Glassner then joined the group. Craig is in charge of the Fan Lounge at the San Jose Worldcon, so he and I started talking about how to set up the lounge there, brainstorm on the fan fund auction, and the like. Unfortunately, Valerie's back had been giving her a lot of grief during the evening – too much walking without her cane does this – so she went back up to the room while I hung out in the New Zealand party, at one point talking with the Mowatts for a bit in as quiet an area as possible so we could hear each other. Jim told me exactly where the Croatian Fandom party was being held - about a block south of the convention center - so after circulating through the crowd I decided to wander down and check out that gathering.

The Croatian Fandom party was in what used to be a railroad depot over one hundred years ago. The city had done a marvelous job restoring the wooden structure, maintaining its original function as a railway station while adding on an exterior porch to augment the platform where trains would have stopped. I could just imagine the rumble and clatter of the trains, the bustle of passengers clambering into and out of the cars, the babel of languages, the blast of steam engines – everything. It was somewhat like stepping into one of the Steampunk novels I enjoy reading, although the science fiction fans yammering away dampened my imagination and brought me back into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Somehow I was not surprised to see James and Tobes again, plus numerous other fans I have long known by name but never met in person. In due time I ran into the following people at that party: Jim de Liscard, Kylie Ding, Paul Treadway, Craig Glassner again, also Spike and Tom Becker, both of whom I knew from many a convention back in my first serious run-through in convention fandom during the 1970s and 1980s. The last time I had seen them was at Corflu Quire in 2007, the year it was held in Austin, Texas. We found it odd that even though all three of us were in San Antonio for LoneStarCon III, we never saw each other then. Well, such is the nature of Worldcon crowds.

Another fan I finally met was Martin Taylor (no relation to the Taylor Guitar Company, of which I am very familiar with), and he Paul Treadaway were involved in a spirited discussion on African colonies of Germany and England during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was a topic of which I knew a bit, but these gents were obviously well-read and highly opinionated on this matter, so I sat back, drank my Coke (no Pepsi available, drat it), and enjoyed their debate. After about half an hour listening to their vociferations, I decided to wander back and get some sleep. It was a lovely evening for strolling down the tree-lined walkway, stars blinking through the leaves of branches interlaced above my head, making me wish that Valerie could have joined me. I knew she would have enjoyed such a short excursion to that old station and the gathered company. I passed a few groups of fans heading toward the station party, directing one such cluster when they asked me, in English heavily flavoured with a German accent, where exactly the station was located. Of course I did, but did not warn them of Martin and Paul's colonial debate. Chances were that those two were onto another topic by now, hopefully something as non-confrontational as wire-stapling scientifiction magazines together.

It was shortly after midnight when I quietly slipped into the hotel room, doing my best to not disturb Valerie. I had nothing to worry about. She was in such a deep sleep that Martin and

Paul could have continued their discussion in our room and she would have slept right through it. Thankfully my first panel on day two started at 1300 hours – the programme book listed all events in military time – so I was grateful to get a very good night’s sleep.

Being a TAFF Delegate is exhausting.

Day Two of the 75<sup>th</sup> World Science Fiction Convention started in the usual way: coffee in the room, check out the programme for the day while having breakfast, then shower, dress, and eventually leave for whatever events we desired attending. For myself, there were two early afternoon panels I was on, leaving Valerie free to roam. She decided to roam the dealer’s area and art show, maybe even spend some time in the crafting area. That last idea turned out to be a brilliant decision because our Steampunk outfits always need a bit of fixing or fine-tuning, and Valerie figured she might have need of a sewing machine or some other craft tool.

My first panel was titled “GUFF, TAFF, NOFF – WTF?” with the purpose of discussing the assorted Fan Funds available, their histories, and their *raison d’être*. The moderator was Ben Roimola, who was involved with the Nordic Fan Fund (the NOFF in the panel title), and other participants besides myself were the current GUFF delegate, Donna Maree Hanson, former TAFF winners John Coxon and Nina Horvath, and the current DUFF winner, Paul Weimer. That’s six people, which raised the spectre of the panelists talking too much so that the audience would have little opportunity to ask questions. Everyone agreed to keep our talks to a minimum so that there would be plenty of time for a Q&A session.



Fan Funds Panel people L-R: John Coxon, Ben Roimola, myself, Nina Horvath, Paul Weimar, Donna Maree Hanson.

Like the previous day’s fan-related panel, there was not a big audience, perhaps a couple dozen people, and I knew quite a few of them personally. It was a real surprise to meet John and Eve Harvey finally (they had taken their time traveling up from their home in France), and others present were Jim and Carrie Mowatt, Claire Brialey, Mark Plummer, Tobes Valois (a previous TAFF winner), Helena McCallum, David and Sarah Haddock, David Romm, Janice Gelb, and Fia Karlsson, who was passing around yet another bag of dill chips. After the panel I met Johan Anglemark, which meant that all three of the eventual 2018 TAFF Race candidates were present. In retrospect, that’s cool because it means we didn’t scare them away.

Overall the panel went well, but it was not as much fun as it should have been. Sure, we provided the necessary background information about fan funds and how they work, but it could have been a lot more fun if we had diverged from the “ghosh-whow, it’s so much fun” aspect of it. Yes, that is very true, but the fan funds are much more than just having fun and promoting camaraderie between fandoms across the globe. There is work needed regarding their survival.

“It’s fricking crowded down there!”

For one, I think we should have spent some time discussing the serious problems facing the Down Under Fan Fund (DUFF), paramount of which is a dwindling lack of interest in it. Personally, my belief is that the New Zealand in 2020 Worldcon bid will be a booster shot in the arm for DUFF because of the *Lord of the Rings* movie franchise and its proximity to Australia, plus it is just an incredibly beautiful country frequently mentioned as a vacation destination everybody and their dog should visit. Another topic the panel never approached was the ever-popular Hoax Fund, such as MAFF (Mid-Atlantic Fan Fund), and my proposed HAFF (Half-Assed Fan Fund) for the United States, which basically riffs off the Canadian Unity Fan Fund (CUFF). [*An explanation of HAFF will be in Askance #45, scheduled to appear in September of 2018.*] In addition to these missed topics, no mention was ever made of the infamous TAFF War of the mid-1980s, or any of the other brouhahas that have cropped up over the decades regarding the fan funds. There is a rich history here that simply is rarely discussed, probably because so many people hurt by the things that happened are still alive and kicking, but we could certainly learn from the stupid mistakes that were made. Finally there is the concept of promoting the fan funds, broadening them beyond the traditional borders of Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, to push for more European and Asian fannish contacts. No mention was made of the Brazilian Fan Fund of which I have heard rumours, and that might have led into a discussion of South American fandom, an area that is largely ignored. Yeah, this panel could have been more interesting. Consider these thoughts for next time.

After an hour break, I went to the Green Room to prepare for the Liar's Panel at 4 PM, for which I had no idea what to say. The blurb in the programme book sounded fun – panelists had to improvise outrageous answers to equally outrageous questions from the audience – but I did not know any of my co-panelists. Effie Seiberg, Laura Pearlman, and J. Robert Tupasela obviously all had known each other for years, and Laura advised me to simply relax and play off what they were saying. The problem was, those three had devised a pre-game strategy (namely, divert away from the question asked and onto a specific topic they knew well) that worked wonders for them, but I was definitely in over my head. To put myself in the proper frame of mind, I wrote a new name for myself on the ID card enclosed in my participant package. I explained to the packed room that since Janice Gelb once said I looked like Kim Stanley Robinson and a fan in the dealer's area mistook me for Robert Silverberg yesterday, I announced that for the next hour I would be Kim Stanley Silverberg.

I would like to say that that panel was a lot of fun, and there were times when it was, but for the most part I was completely out of my league. Effie, Laura, and Robert were zinging each other at a pace that I simply could not match; although, there were a few times I got in a couple of funny answers that made the audience laugh. The other three, however, would get on a roll and leave me in their dust. I truly felt like a fifth wheel, and was very happy when that panel was over. I thanked my co-panelists and took off as fast as I could through the crowded Messukeskus hallways to get back to the room where Valerie and I quickly got ready for dinner, arranged by Farah Mendelsohn, at a nice restaurant. Like Valerie, Farah is gluten-free, and the restaurant she had located had a wide selection of GF food on the menu.

By tram, the Kaanai Baati & Kaitio restaurant was roughly fifteen minutes away. The nearest stop was up the block and across the street from it, so a few minutes later we walked into this upscale Finnish restaurant. Farah waved us over to the big table where she sat with her

husband. We were joined by Thoraiya Dyer, Cat Sparks, Rob Hood, Juliet Mariler, and Edward Jones. A couple bottles of wine had already been ordered and cracked into, but since Valerie and



I don't drink wine, we opted for lemonade-type drinks. The menu truly was extensive and pricey, making us very happy that this was our only real "out and about" big dollar dinner. It really was very good, though. Valerie had Atlantic Salmon and I enjoyed my first Elk burger, served on flat bread.

We enjoyed our dinner, even though the prices were an issue, but it was a lovely evening. Once we returned to our hotel, we accepted the fact that we were doing some of the things that fans like to do at a Worldcon: get out and discover the local area. As we entered the Holiday Inn Messukeskus, straight ahead of us was the Winter Court, which tonight was hosting the Dublin in 2019 bidding party. Naturally, we went right on in, and immediately ran into all sorts of people we knew. I grabbed a couple soft drinks for Valerie and myself, and while chatting with James Bacon and Tobes Valois

(are those guys joined at the hip, or what? I never saw one without the other nearby the entire weekend), Helena McCallum (a.k.a, Adela Terrell) and her husband Wag joined us. Then a Mystery Man – who shall be named Tim in this narrative – joined our group. Tim had a flask that contained a home-brewed concoction that he called Spiced Whisky, and recommended that we take very small sips. Well, leave it to James; he had to give it a try. "Whoa!" he gasped. "Bloody hell, that's *hot!*" Tobes tried it next, and passed the flask to me after his eyes retreated back into his skull, then re-emerged so he could see straight. This had me worried. Those two blokes were road-tested, serious Irish whisky drinkers, so I carefully took a very, very small sip.

My lips felt like they were on fire. Then the burn spread to my palate and down the throat. "Yeeowch!" I yelped. "What the blazes is in this?"

"A bit of ghost pepper extract," Tim explained. The ghost pepper, for readers who have never heard of it, is a hybrid chili pepper cultivated in Northeastern India, and in 2007 the Guinness Book of World Records certified that the ghost pepper was the world's hottest; approximately 400 times hotter than Tabasco sauce, on the Scoville scale the ghost pepper clocks in at an astonishing 1,041,427 SHU (Scoville Heat Units). It has since been superseded by three others – the Infinity chili, the Trinidad moruga scorpion pepper, and the Carolina Reaper. Yes, I researched this, coming to the conclusion that these military grade "spices" should be deemed inhumane treatment by the Geneva Convention since they are probably hotter than the interior of our Sun.

"Egad, but that's undrinkable!" I exclaimed.

"I do admit that it is an acquired taste," Tim said, taking a healthy draught from the flask. Obviously the man no longer had taste buds on his tongue. Tim then continued circulating through the crowd, looking for other victims to accost with that literal fire water, leaving James,

"For the rest of that night and weekend my name was Jeff Purcell."

Tobes, and I standing there with sweat running down our faces, eyes glazed, and in search of some means to quench the burn. Eventually it did fade away – ten minutes later!

This entire escapade had Valerie laughing, admonishing us, “You men. Always have to prove your manliness somehow. Put a drink in your hands, and down it goes. Serves you all right!” Since the three of us were in no condition to argue, we nodded in agreement.

The remainder of the Dublin bid party was much less painful as Valerie and I chatted with all sorts of people. At one point Valerie met another lovely long-haired redheaded woman, one Emma England, and when we looked at the picture I took, yet another long-haired redheaded woman was sitting at a table in the background. Well, it was an Irish Worldcon bid party, so this made perfect sense to us. Eventually the crowd swelled to the point of immobility. By that point Valerie and I were seated at a table chatting with Adela, Wag, Craig Glassner (again), and others who came and went as they could. All in all, I declared the entire day a winner because the next day – Friday – was Hugo Award day. Therefore, we called it a night at 1:30 in the morning.

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Friday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, was the major event of the World Convention, the bestowing of the annual Hugo Awards for outstanding achievement in the field of Science Fiction. Well, fantasy, too, but the quibble between the two genres is not my intent to discuss here. As the TAFF delegate, one of my WorldCon duties was to present the Best Fanzine Hugo Award with GUFF delegate Donna Maree Hanson. Our registration packets included the script we were to follow, plus instructions for what to do onstage, our name badge ribbons for program participant and Hugo Awards, and the invitation to the pre-Award reception for nominees and presenters.

Before the rehearsal time set for our part of the program, I killed time by checking out the dealer's area (I didn't buy a single book all week!) and the art show (pretty sparse, but there were some really nice pieces displayed), then relaxed in our hotel room before heading down to Hall 1 for the rehearsal. Donna and I went over the script for the second time making notes and corrections, especially one glaring mistake. For some unknown reason, my first name was correct on the first page, but halfway down page two it morphed into Jeff Purcell. So we corrected those spots on our copies, told Joshua Beatty, who was in charge of the ceremony, and carried on. Easy enough for us. Joshua, though, was suitably worried to a frazzle, but seemed to be in control - I think. He must have been because the actual ceremony went off very well, even though it started 20 minutes late (a.k.a., right on Fannish time).

At the reception everybody was duded out in their finery, enjoying a light meal and drinks (not me: I went down at 6:45 since Val wasn't quite ready yet) and chatting away. My formal attire was a dark pin-striped suit finished off with a top hat with goggles that lit up, and the white tuxedo shirt was set off with a black and white silk vest, suspenders and bow tie decorated with black mustaches, and so did my socks. James Bacon, resplendent in his suit with a shiny red vest, complimented my look, and I returned the favour. Again, I circulated, agog at the company I was in. At one point I was in a small conversation group with Robert Silverberg and his wife Karen Haber Silverberg when we were joined by George R. R. Martin and retinue. After that group broke up, I talked with Andrew Trembley, Andy Roche, James Bacon (Tobesless), Jukka Halme, Donna Maree Hanson and her daughter, plus numerous others. It ran over

due to the audience needing time to get seated, and just as we started heading towards Hall 1 for the ceremony, Valerie arrived, looking simply stunning in her Tardis blue off-shoulder evening gown, accessorized with a Dalek necklace, matching Tardis earrings, and a wide glittering bracelet.

Once we dignitaries were seated, the show began with a nod to Star Wars as toastmistress and ceremony host Karen Lord was introduced. Sadly, the live stream on the Hugo website was not working (as I found out after the ceremony), but the entire event was recorded. The Best Fanzine Award happened about an hour in, and it started off just fine. Donna did a fantastic job, but I made one small verbal stumble, but quickly corrected and was fine for the rest of it. After we sat back down on the stage couch again, Karen Lord did a brief interview with all the international presenters, eventually getting to her scripted questions for Donna and I.

She called me Jeff Purcell. No one had made the name correction in her script. I didn't catch it at first, but the running transcription on the large stage screen had that name in plain view for all the world to see as she said "Jeff" two more times. I let it slide, but for the rest of that night and weekend my name was Jeff Purcell.



The post-award Hugo Losers party was at Steam Helsinki, so Valerie and I went back to our room to quickly change into our Steampunk outfits and took the provided free shuttle out to the party.

The party was a blast. All drinks and food were free, courtesy of George R.R. Martin and his publisher, and much to our surprise, nearly all of the bar food was gluten free, which thrilled Valerie. The DJ didn't play steampunk music, which was too bad, yet it was still a nice background to the merriment. I sampled two of Steam Helsinki's dark lagers on tap, which were delicious, and Valerie introduced the bartender to a variant of the sloe gin fizz. It was odd that this woman bartender had never heard of that, so Valerie walked her through it, but changing some of the ingredients along the way: besides a healthy dose of gin, Val directed the barkeep to add some lemon-lime soft drink, grapefruit juice, a splash of grenadine, and then stuck cherries on either side of a pineapple piece on a skewer, then stir. It really was a delicious mix, and Valerie dubbed the drink the Submersible because the impaled cherries and pineapple chunk were, well, submersed at the bottom of the glass. The food kept coming out, the fans kept drinking, the music kept playing –disco, of all things – and then the gin ran out.

Yep. Steam Helsinki had plenty of beer on tap, whisky, rum, and whatever, but the crowd drank all of the gin. Never in my life have I ever heard of this happening in a professional drinking establishment. It must have been good gin. Hats off to George R.R. Martin for hosting these Hugo Losers Parties over the years. It is greatly appreciated, sir, and we thank you profusely.

Well, the party ran well past three in the morning, which meant a large number of people were there past the last of the shuttles running between Messukeskus and Steam Helsinki, so we

took a cab back to the hotel with - guess who? – Craig Glassner. Back at the Holiday Inn, Valerie, Craig, and I chatted for a while in the lobby. I think Valerie and I were in our room by 4:30 AM, but does that really matter?

It had been one heckuva great day and night.

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Saturday's events of the Helsinki WorldCon were mostly taken up by preparing for and conducting the WOOF 42 collation. (The letters stand for Worldcon Order Of Faneditors, and this tradition was begun by Los Angeles fan, Bruce Pelz, who was instrumental in creating many world convention innovations many years ago.) Simo Suntala, a Helsinki fanzine, and I co-edited the distribution, which had 17 contributions from 16 people (Guy Lillian sent two submissions). Simo and I compiled a listing, which I then started typing up, but Murray Moore volunteered to finish that task so that I could complete preparing the collation piles. The total length of WOOF 42 was 63 pages, with a breakdown of nine Finnish writers, five Americans, nine British, one Canadian, and one Australian. The cover banner was drawn by Simo's friend Arren Zherbin. It was a healthy sized collection of zines, and all that was needed were bodies to collate and assemble. Simo, Murray, and I were joined by Jim and Carrie Mowatt, and my longtime friend from Minneapolis fandom Baron David Romm was there to photograph the event. One of the other WOOF contributors, Alan Stewart, wandered in when we were about halfway through performing collatio, pitching in to finish the job. Simo and I had set the copy count at 50, so this part of the process did not take very long at all, although there were some contributions containing some blank sheets or had the occasionally misprinted page or two mixed in, so the actual final tally was something like 44 complete sets. That was definitely more than enough for each contributor's copy, then Simo and I split up the remaining copies to mail to anybody interested in acquiring one.

The only big problem that always plagues larger fanzines is stapling the bugger together. It turned out that the staplers we had for this task were fine, big, sturdy ones; unfortunately, the staples themselves were too short, so they did not go all the way through. What to do?

Carrie Mowatt rose to the occasion by disappearing for a few minutes, returning to the fan lounge with a unique solution: a two-hole punch and a bag of large zip ties. I sat down and started punching holes a few pages at a time, setting aside each holed-out set, then Carrie ran a zip tie through the holes, lock-tightened the tie, then cut off the excess tie with a scissors. This may have looked odd, but hey, it worked! Fans are an incredibly resourceful lot. It was definitely a unique binding.

Shortly after WOOF was completed, it was time to set up the Fan Fund Auction, slated to start at 4:00 PM over in meeting room 102, which wasn't far, but that meant fighting the crowd to get there. Just as we were about to leave the Fan Lounge with boxes of auction items, Mark Plummer came running in with the news that the venue for the auction had been changed. Now it was in the Dance Hall at 4:00 PM, which was physically closer, but how could we get the word out to the masses about the change with less than 40 minutes to go before the auction began?

Never fear, fans are here! I have never seen fans mobilize so quickly and efficiently before. I tell you, it made me proud to be their TAFF delegate. Everybody grabbed something,



and off we went around the corner into the section of the convention center designated as the Dance Hall. We set up and organized the auction goods in record time. Seriously, it is a time like this that makes you bust a button.



Fan Fund Auction Action: selling the stuffed toy polar bear.

The auction itself was conducted differently from other convention auctions I have attended. Instead of utilizing just one or two auctioneers, it turned into an "after you, Alphonse" methodology where John Coxon, Jukka Halme, Donna Maree Hanson, 2017 DUFF winner Paul Weimer (a North American fan who traveled to Australia and New Zealand earlier in the year), and myself would grab items that we thought would sell and then step up and auction it off ourselves! We had no designated runners to display an item up for bid, and Flick settled in to keep track of sales and take in the money. A patterned order of auctioneers eventually did settle in, and I would say maybe 80% of all the displayed items were sold. Total sales were € 2100, which I think is a respectable amount. This was split up between the three primary fan funds – TAFF, GUFF, and DUFF – so that each fund received a nice chunk. I did a quick check

on the monetary conversion app on my cellphone to see what this Euro figure converted to in American dollars and Pounds Sterling, which are \$2475.54 and £1836.07. Like I said, those are respectable amounts. We considered the auction a success, albeit a bit disorganized, and called it done.

The rest of Saturday was the usual whirlwind of connecting with fans for dinner expeditions, having great conversations, meeting still more fans from other countries, and the night was capped off with another large party in the Winter Garden. Valerie and I decided to eat dinner in our room, working off our stash of gluten free food, and eventually called it a night shortly after midnight. This happened because Worldcon 75 did not have an official party hotel, which American and British fans found frustrating, but I kind of liked it. The lack of running around actually felt more relaxed, and gave me the chance to unwind and simply enjoy the company of whoever I was with at the time. After all, that's what these science fiction conventions mean the most to us: the people. Sure, there are lots of things to do, see, buy, and what-have-you, but the longer I stay active in fandom, the more I prefer to hang out with the people. The way I look at it, that's the heart and soul of being a fan.

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Sunday, August 13<sup>th</sup> was the last official day of Worldcon 75. As a result, the entire day felt anti-climactic, especially since the Hugo Awards were two days removed instead of the usual hung-over morning after, but it was still yet another day of conventioning.

I was scheduled to be a part of Closing Ceremonies, but as I was heading off to the major Convention Center room 101 A&B, I ran into Liam Proven in the lobby of the Holiday Inn, and without thinking, I corralled him and brought him back up to our room because Valerie had a gift

for Liam. See, we were to hook up with him in Prague where we would be going next, so I completely missed closing ceremonies. Oh, well. Things happen. I probably didn't miss much anyway. The three of us had a good time chatting and such for a couple hours, before Liam left for something or other, and Valerie and I finished repacking our Bag of Doom and decided to rest a bit before going off to dinner at the Dead Dog Party.

Before that, though, I did go downstairs with that Bag of Doom in tow to see who was still knocking about, wandering over to the fan lounge where a whole bunch of folks were, well, lounging about. This is where most convention reports slide into a massive listing of names, kind of like the We Also Heard From section at the end of a fanzine's letter column. Far be it for me expected because they were going to transport the Purcell Bag of Doom back to Croydon, where we would once again retrieve it for our final trip home. Mark hefted it, proclaiming, "Oh, that's much lighter now!" Well, that was expected due to the simple fact that a lot of TAFF Auction items were no longer in our possession thanks to the previous day's winning bidders. Those sales lessened the load in the Bag of Doom by probably seven pounds.

Other fans I saw here for the first time during the con: Christina Lake, recovered enough from an illness that had confined her to bed for most of the convention; Colin Hines and Catherine Crockett, hosts of Corflu 35 in Toronto, Canada; Rich Coad, who was going on to St. Petersburg the next day, the lucky dog (I've always wanted to go there); Alison Scott; and others whose names I forget. The picture on the right here is just a small sampling of the folks who floated in and out of the fan lounge on the last afternoon of the Helsinki Worldcon.



One couch occupied by Christina Lake, who was no longer contagious, and surrounded by concerned fans on Sunday afternoon in the fan lounge.

Afterwards I was walking out of the convention center, watching some of the tear-down of the dealer's area, the art show, craft area, and so on, and once again I came across my old friend Dave Romm. Honestly, I had not expected to see any Minneapolis fans that I knew in Helsinki, so it was a huge surprise to not only see Dave, but also long-time fan friends Karen Schaefer, Sharon Kahn and Richard Tatge at Worldcon 75. Of course, I spent time talking with each of them, and it sure made me feel homesick for Minn-stf and Minicons.

It was great to see Dave again after so many years, so naturally we spent a good deal of time in Helsinki catching up on things that had occurred over the intervening years. As usual, Dave was his usual ebullient self; his sense of humour was as sharp as ever, and we shared a lot of information during the conversations we had that week. For example, I finally learned why he was called Baron David Romm. In 2007, he was granted the title by the monarchy of the republic of Ladonia, a small and rather eccentric "independent" nation on an island in southwestern

Sweden. I believe he probably paid for the title with a “donation to the cause.” It turns out that the entire concept of Ladonia is very fannish in nature, and since David is partly of Swedish descent – as many Minnesotans are – it is not surprising that his frivolous, fun-loving soul wanted to become a part of this “nation.” I made a mental note to Google “Ladonia” in the near future.

Like I said, during the course of the Worldcon, Dave and I ran into each other from time to time, and he always had his camera ready to capture moments and key people. For example, on Friday while he and I were walking towards the main entrance of the convention center, Joe and Gay Haldeman, whom we had known for well over forty years, were walking toward us, and seizing the moment, Dave had an unsuspecting nearby fan take a photograph of the four of us. I eventually learned that he also snapped pictures at opening ceremonies and various other panel discussions that I was on, in addition to countless other photos around the con and the city of Helsinki. As usual, we had great conversations, and he was looking forward to the next two weeks as he finished his Baltic tour: visits to St. Petersburg, Russia, Tallinn, Estonia, Vilnius, Lithuania, and – guess where? – Riga, Latvia, were all on his agenda before returning home to Minneapolis, Minnesota. I told him to beware of the customs officials at the Riga airport. As usual, he chronicled this trip on Facebook with hundreds of photos.

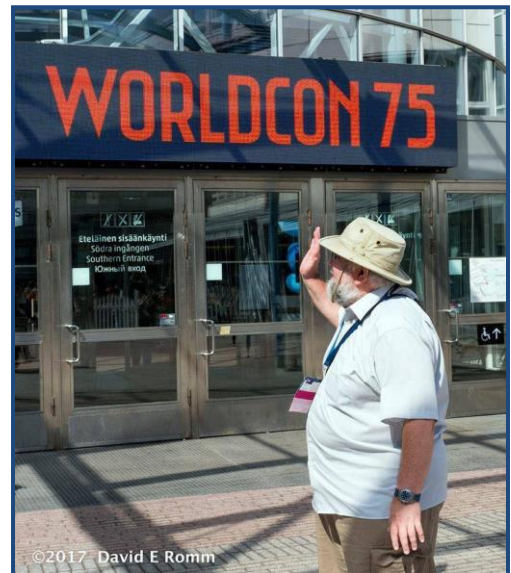
So I was not surprised to see Dave yet again that Sunday afternoon as I was leaving the convention center on my way back to my room. We started nattering away, and walked outside the main entrance. He suddenly stopped and smiled that funny hobbit-like smile of his. “John,” he said, “will you do me a favour?”

“Sure thing,” I said. “What’s that?”

“Well, after every world convention I attend I always have a picture taken of me waving goodbye to the Worldcon. I have quite the collection of those now. Would you do that for me?”

“I would be happy to. Just show me how to use your camera,” which was an expensive Nikon Digital camera with a zoom lens and other electronic doodads. I did not want to break it or touch the wrong thing. Dave showed me how to focus the image and which button to push, and a few minutes later I had taken the required shot. It turned out great, and he shared the image not only on his own Facebook page, but sent it to me, as well, along with other pictures he had taken of me in action during the course of Worldcon. That is just the kind of person he was.

That Sunday afternoon photograph turned out to be sadly prophetic. A little over two weeks later, Dave Romm died of an apparent heart attack in his Minneapolis townhome on September 3, 2017. He was 62 years old.



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“I truly felt like a fifth wheel, and was very happy when that panel was over.”

On that Sunday night, August 13<sup>th</sup>, the "final" event of Worldcon 75 was held at Hotel Sokos, the Dead Dog party. (There was an unofficial Dead Dog party a long tram ride away at a harbour hotel, but let's stick to the one closest to Messukeskus, the WorldCon site.) This official Dead Dog was a cramped, hot, and sort of lively affair that eventually progressed into a proper fan party where people came and went to mingle with friends one last time, but it was held in a hotel restaurant and advertised in the Sunday WorldCon newsletter. This announcement noted that a Tex-Mex dinner buffet costing 5 euros per person would be served between 6:00 and 10:00 PM.

Big mistake! People were turned away or got fed up with the immense queue so they immediately left because the restaurant was filled to capacity. We got there right at 7 pm: Val and I were joined by Liam Proven, Nina Horvath, her friend Malgorzata Wilk, and the Hotel Sokos restaurant was packed. The line moved steadily, so we were able to get our food despite having to wait occasionally for more taco meat and other items to be refilled. Sadly, due to the massive turnout, which should have been expected, the food was obliterated in record time. The meal was scheduled to last from 6 to 10 PM, but by 7:30 it was gone. I asked one of the restaurant staff if they had been warned, and she said that they were told to expect 250 people eating. Nope. "Too low," I informed her. "You're dealing with science fiction fans after a five day major convention: they're tired, hungry, and low on funds, so a deal like this is like throwing fresh meat into a school of sharks. Whatever number you're told, double that at least and plan accordingly." As near as the Sokos staff figured, nearly four hundred people showed up during the first hour and a half, so those who came late to the party left disgusted, angry, and hungry. Yeah. That's what will happen. A hard lesson learned by a novice WorldCon committee is often a warning for future concons.

There were a lot of other folks who joined us at our table, or whom we met during the course of the evening after migrating over to the bar side: Dave Lally, Jo Walton ("the one without boobs"), Lisa Konrad, Barbara Jane, Caroline Mullan, Kylie Ding, Hope Leibowitz, Charles Levi, Craig Glassner, and many, many others came and went. At midnight a young Swedish male fan got up and sang "It's a Long Way to the Con Suite," with everyone joining in on the chorus, which I thought was funny since there *was* no con suite at this WorldCon. In fact, I learned that most European sf conventions have no concept of this crucial element of American and British cons, so it rarely materializes.

Eventually - as in well after midnight - the party started to wind down, so Valerie and I accompanied Kylie Ding back to the Holiday Inn Messukeskus, although Kylie veered off to stop at a fan gathering in that restored railroad station, to get some needed sleep.

The Dead Dog was a nice way to wrap up the convention, as always a bittersweet parting between friends, yet we all knew we would do this again Real Soon Now, possibly even as soon as next summer in San Jose. Who knows?

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"Oh, that's much lighter now!"

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Monday morning dawned. Well, yeah. That happens. There are some things you just can't do a damned thing about.

The WorldCon is over, but the TAFF trip isn't. Not by a long shot. So there we were, with enough time to spend a few hours seeing more of the city of Helsinki - finally! – before heading to the airport for our flight to Prague. After checking out, Valerie and I bade goodbye to Fan Guest of Honour John-Henri Holmberg, did the same following the breakfast buffet to Lucy Huntzinger and Charles Levi, Walter Jon Williams, and Craig Glassner yet again! Sheesh, every time we turned around, there was Craig. It was a mite disturbing.

Those goodbyes and conversations over, Valerie and I stowed our luggage in the Holiday Inn's luggage storage area and took a tram ride down to the West Harbor area of Helsinki where some interesting sculptures were located. This was also our only real outing into the city to see the sights during our six day stay. Well, that's what happens when one is involved with a bunch of program items.

Helsinki is an interesting city and nothing at all like the other European cities we have encountered. There is no unified architecture like Paris, although there are old churches and other significant buildings, but these are not as old as structures in London, Stamford, Cardiff, Paris, Dordrecht, or Prague. Even so, Helsinki has its own style, what I would call functional Art Deco: while a bit plain, but some buildings - like the main train station in the city center - were really cool.

The tram ride to the West Harbor required one easily made transfer, and we disembarked to walk around the dock area to admire and photograph some of the fun walrus and another crazy fountain sculpture. We had been informed to be on the lookout for the famous “pissing alien structure” by fans who had ventured out during Worldcon week to see some of the local sights, and by crikey, there it was. You really can't avoid this creation. It stands 18-feet tall, and this bald, pink, crinkly-skinned figure looks quite surprised that he has been caught taking a pee. As if that wasn't funny enough, it is located next to a dockside side-walk café, where people casually drank their coffee, ate lunch, texting on their cellphones – just generally going about their daily business as if nothing unusual was happening. What big pissing alien statue/fountain? Eh. Seen it before, so what? I have to check my emails...

We wandered on, taking even more pictures. Lots of large ferries were in dock, and I was struck by the lack of sea birds like the gulls and terns that swarmed around Cardiff and Portsmouth. I attributed this to the latitude and climate, although it was definitely warm enough (~70 F) and not as windy as I expected. After almost an hour's worth of soaking up the harbor sights, sounds, and smells, we took the tram back to the hotel, grabbed our gear, then walked to Pasila train station and went to the airport to start the next leg of our journey in Prague.

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“Being a TAFF delegate is exhausting.”

# A WORLDCON 75 PHOTO GALLERY



Above left – a young man rocks the David Tennant Dr. Who look in the registration area

Above center – the logo on the TAFF t-shirts Valerie designed for our trip hosts

Above right – a young Steampunk fan with her owl familiar.

Right – Baron David Romm, myself, Gay and Joe Haldeman



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Above: Karen Schaefer, a former Minneapolis fan I did not expect to see in Helsinki

Top right: a masquerade group wandering through the dealer's area



Above: The roof of the Messukeskus Convention Center as seen from our 7<sup>th</sup> floor hotel room

Left: Steampunk metalsmiths display their wares outside the convention center's main entrance





Top left – a Steampunk family

Top right – Richard Tatge, Sharon Kahn, and an unknown fan relaxing at a table near the craft area

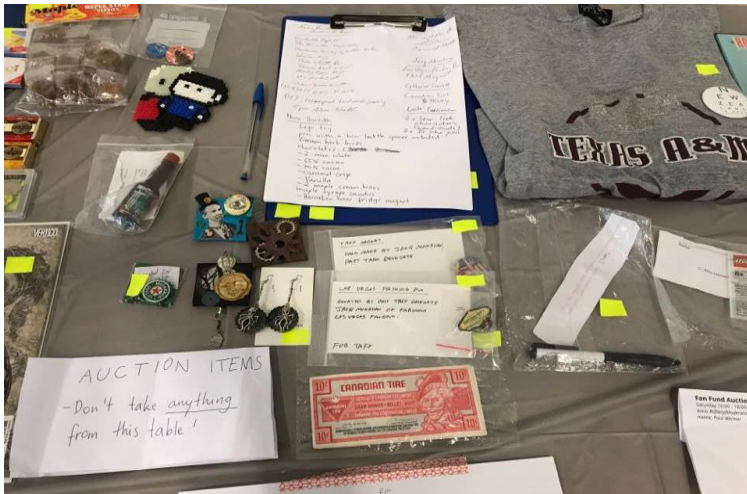
Right – Donna Maree Hanson, 2017 GUFF delegate, and myself being interviewed during the Hugo presentation ceremony

Below left – TAFF winners group shot

Bottom right – Nina Horvath and Malgorzata Wilk at the Dead Dog Dinner.







Top left – a dour (or tired) group of fans in the fanzine lounge on Sunday, 13 August 2017

Top right – Carrie Mowatt models the Dr. Who Tardis robe sold at the fan fund auction.

Left – just a small sampling of Fan Fund Auction items up for grabs

Bottom left – the WOOF 42 Team

Bottom right – one of the tables at the Hugo Losers Party at Steam Helsinki





Top - main entrance to the convention center

Middle left - craft table

Middle right - Valerie and John blow kisses at the Steam Helsinki Hugo Losers Party

Bottom right - the fan fund auction crowd