

STOCKHOLM JUNE 17-19

EUROCON 2011



PRIS
20kr

EUROCON **2011** **STOCKHOLM**

Welcome to Stockholm and Eurocon,

Two years ago a group of Swedish fans went to Fiuggi, Italy, to bid for the Eurocon in 2011. We thought that the time had come for Stockholm to run a Eurocon. Swedish fandom has organized many conventions during the years; the largest one is usually the annual national convention, Swecon, with 90–200 members. We wanted something bigger and more international than that. Eurocon was the obvious choice.

Our vision is an international science fiction convention with something for everyone, but with a focus on literature. The program is mostly in English but with a few program items in Swedish as well. We have taken the opportunity to invite as many writers from Sweden and the other Nordic countries as we could, and we are happy that so many could come. It is also a great delight to be able to welcome so many guests and program participants from other parts of Europe.

I hope that you all will have a good convention. Do not forget to see Stockholm while you are here!

Carolina

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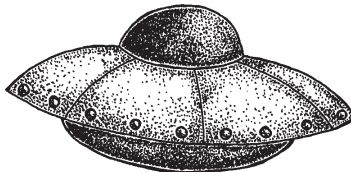
Eurocon 2011 is arranged with funding from Stockholm City Council's Culture Committee, the Swedish Arts Council and the Nordic Culture Fund. Eurocon 2011 has received financial support from Science Fiction-Bokhandeln and Skandinavisk Förening för Science Fiction.



norden

Nordisk Kulturfond

Eurocon 2011 was held in Kungliga Tekniska Högskolans kårhus Nymble, Stockholm, on 17–19 June 2011.



ESFS AND THE EUROCON

INTRODUCTION BY ANNA DAVOUR

This is the 33rd Eurocon, and the first one held in Sweden. Europe is an interesting part of the world, very densely populated, but fractured by language barriers. It makes for a lot of diversity that we are sometimes blind to. Eurocon is an excellent occasion to meet neighbours you hardly knew you had.

Next year will mark the 40th anniversary of the first Eurocon, held in Trieste, Italy (see *The first time—Eurocon 1*, page 39). It is quite fascinating to think about how much has happened in the years in between. The changing map of Europe has affected the circumstances of the conventions as well, of course. When Eurocon next year returns to Zagreb, where it was also held in 1986, it is in another country—in Croatia, no longer Yugoslavia. Zagreb would also have hosted the Eurocon in 1992, but it turned out to be impossible because of the political situation and a late decision was taken to move it to German Freudenstadt instead. Twenty years later things have changed.

The site for Eurocon is decided two years in advance, selected from bids placed by groups interested in arranging the convention. The continuity is ensured by the organisation behind it ever since 1972, the European Science Fiction Society. This is, in the words of the ESFS website, “an international organisation of SF professionals and fans who are committed to promoting Science Fiction in Europe and European Science Fiction worldwide”. ESFS also administers the European SF Awards.

The current chairman of ESFS is David Lally, well known to us in Sweden as a participant of local conventions (he was also the fan guest of honour at Swecon 2004). He has attended no less than fourteen Eurocons, and kindly shared a few short personal memories and anecdotes from some of them:

1997: The Euro–Octocon (Dublin) was a major Irish SF event—especially since it was one week before the World Fantasy Convention in London. Replacement Guest of Honour Harry Harrison (Robert Jordan let the convention down at the last minute) managed to get Joe Haldeman and (the now late) Locus editor Charlie Brown along—they were going on to London anyway.

2003: The Eurocon/Fincon X coincided with the Tall Ships Race in Turku. I spoke Irish on the quays opposite the “Asgard” (an Irish sailing training ship) and—surprised to hear *An Gaeilge* spoken there—the crew invited me aboard for a drink! It was in Turku that Worldcon 2005 also became the Eurocon for 2005.

2005: The Glasgow Worldcon/Eurocon saw Denmark win over an Irish bid for Eurocon 2007. It was then that I was elected ESFS Chair.

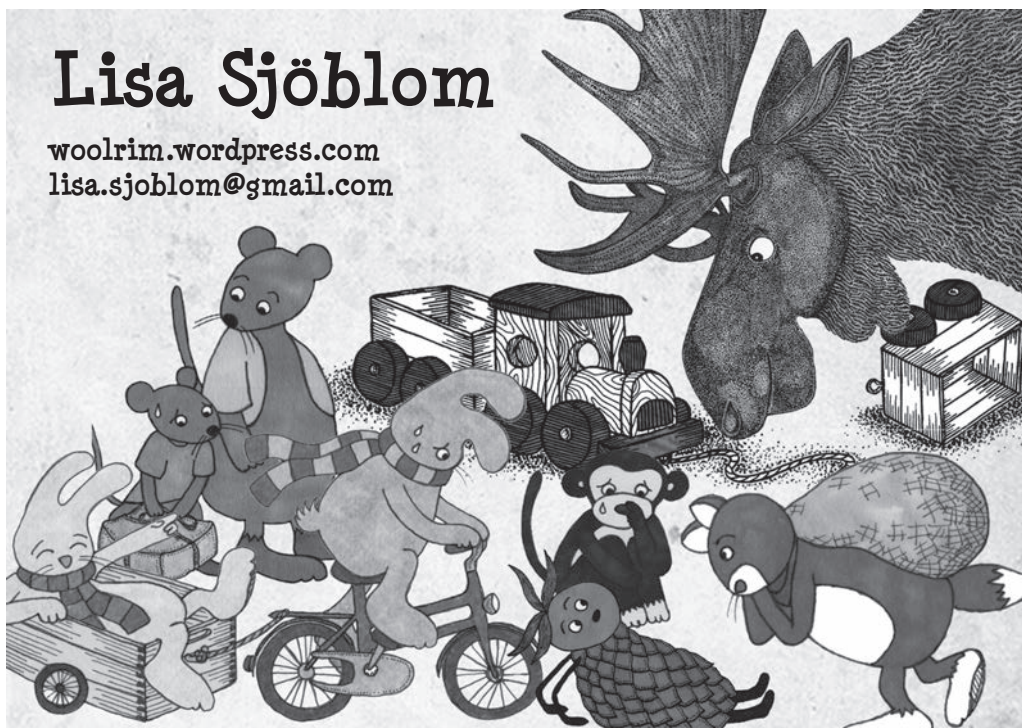
2007: Copenhagen saw the combined Fantasticon/Eurocon. The new ESFS flag was unveiled beside the oldest flag of them all: Denmark’s Dannebrog. Italy won the bid for 2009 over Finland (the first time Eurocon had gone to southern Europe for ages).

A LIST OF ALL EUROCONS TO DATE

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1972 Trieste, Italy | 1995 Glasgow, Scotland |
| 1974 Grenoble, France | 1996 Vilnius, Lithuania |
| 1976 Poznan, Poland | 1997 Dublin, Ireland |
| 1978 Bruxelles, Belgium | 1999 Dortmund, Germany |
| 1980 Stresa, Italy | 2000 Gdansk, Poland |
| 1982 Mönchengladbach, West Germany | 2001 Capidava, Romania |
| 1983 Ljubljana, Yugoslavia | 2002 Chotebor, Czech Republic |
| 1984 Brighton, United Kingdom | 2003 Turku, Finland |
| 1986 Zagreb, Yugoslavia | 2004 Plovdiv, Bulgaria |
| 1987 Montpellier, France | 2005 Glasgow, Scotland |
| 1988 Budapest, Hungary | 2006 Kiev, Ukraine |
| 1989 San Marino | 2007 Copenhagen, Denmark |
| 1990 Fayence, France | 2008 Moscow, Russia |
| 1991 Krakow, Poland | 2009 Fiuggi, Italy |
| 1992 Freudenstadt, Germany | 2010 Cieszyn and Český Tešín,
Czech Republic & Poland |
| 1993 Saint Helier, Jersey | 2011 Stockholm, Sweden |
| 1994 Timisoara, Romania | |

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ELIZABETH BEAR

A PRESENTATION BY KARIN WALLER

Elizabeth Bear seems to be able to turn her creative hand to just about anything.

She puts an ancient, world-weary vampire on a Zeppelin and sends him off to New Amsterdam, the jewel of colonial British North America in an alternate 1899, there to meet a lady with a scandalous past who now uses her sorcerous skills in service to the King as Crown Investigator. Eventually, the conflict between loyalty and truth makes them enemies of the Crown, and among other places takes them to Paris to encounter ghost wolves and Nikola Tesla.



Photo by S. Shipman

She upgrades post-apocalypse to post-Ragnarok in one of the last surviving cities in a ruined world, where old mythic magic still lives among brass-cogged technomancy and engineered beings. There, the few valkyrie and einharjar who reluctantly survived the end of the world last time—and those of them who have returned, but without the memories—see the end approaching again, and take a desperate stand.

Then she takes a step thousands of years back, to the build-up to the previous Ragnarok (one among many), when the Children of the Light—the angels who once made the world anew—took up arms against the darkness and were turned against each other, torn apart, betrayed and defeated in the snow.

She forces a changeling and a New York magus to choose sides in a long ongoing standoff: between human wizards who bind and tame magic with iron, and the wild and dangerous magic of Faerie. And into this tale she also weaves Merlin reborn as a

woman, fallen and unfallen angels, Scottish werewolves, living trees and cities, a dragon, and the vagaries of metatextual polycreationism. Among other things.

Then she takes a step 400 years back to let Will Shakespeare and Kit Marlowe fight for the two Glorianas—Queen Elizabeth and the Faerie Queen—with ink and steel, in our world and in several of the other ones.

She sent a colonization ship out into space and then hit it with technical failure and internal conflict, leaving it in the doldrums next to a dying binary star threatening to go nova. Civil War is brewing between the nobles of Rule and the winged Engineers, but the fragmented remnants of the ship’s AI—among them the Angel of Memory and the Angel of Life-Support Services—mean to have something to say about the outcome. In the end though, it might come down to the actions and bravery of two young women.

She sends a pair of spies from a patriarchal, strictly regulated society to a matriarchal, strictly regulated society on a planet with alien secrets. Intrigues and power play ensue in which everyone has hidden agendas behind their hidden agendas, and different limits on what they are willing to give up to reach their goals. All through this are woven questions of what kind of society we should have, and what kind of society we can have.

And that’s just scraping the surface. There is of course a lot more to all of these books (from the top: *New Amsterdam*; the first two books of *The Edda of Burdens*; the four books of *The Promethean Age*; *Dust*; and *Carnival*) than I have tried to summarize or exemplify here; and there are many more books. And several short stories—bearing such inviting titles as “Shoggoths in Bloom” (Hugo Award for Best Novelette 2009), “Tideline” (Hugo Award for Best Short Story 2008), “The Horrid Glory of Its Wings”, “One-Eyed Jack and the Suicide King”, “When you Visit the Magoebaskloof Hotel, Be Certain not to Miss the Samango Monkeys”, “Schrodinger’s Cat Chases the Super String”, “ee ‘doc’ cummings”, and “Tiger! Tiger!”

There is also *Shadow Unit*—a multi-author interactive online hyperfiction adventure narrative about a group of unrealistically sexy FBI agents struggling to protect humanity from the worst monsters imaginable—of which *Bear* is one of the producers and collaborators, together with Emma Bull, Sarah Monette, Will Shetterly and Amanda Downum.

Elizabeth Bear’s debut novel was *Hammered*, 2005, which won her the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer and a Locus Award for Best First Novel. Among her plans for the future is a high fantasy trilogy named *Eternal Sky*, “spanning the cultures and empires of something not entirely unlike our own Central Asian Silk Road,” and which may have horse-peoples, djinni, a tiger, archery, chain mail and umbrellas. Also vast, empty spaces and sky-hung mountains. We’re looking forward to the first book, *Range of Ghosts*, hopefully in 2011.

Bear has also mentioned epic plans for the world of the *Promethean Age*-books. These plans would amount to thirteen titles, including the ones already published, and would range from Stephen Bathory and Matthias Corvinus in 15th century Hungary, to Bangalore, the US and possibly Tanzania in the modern day. As yet though, the further *Promethean* novels have no publisher. They should. They really really should. Make it so.

As you can see, there is a lot of variation, diversity, invention, creativity and imagination. But me listing heaps of awesome narrative ingredients actually only gives a

very incomplete picture, because what makes Bear so compulsively readable is the storytelling.

And when I say ‘compulsively readable’, I mean it literally. When I’m in the middle of an Elizabeth Bear novel, I tend to get a bit distracted while I have to do everyday things ... like work. I keep counting down to the next break, when I can go and read some more. It’s not just the actual plot line or the occasional cliffhangers—it’s the whole ‘verse of the book I want to get back to: the language, the world-building, the truly captivating characters.

The language changes and varies, of course, to suit the world and the characters it makes and is made for. But whether invoking Norse, noir, Elizabethan or outer space, Bear is one of those authors who, when it’s needed, will work on one sentence until it is just right. I know this because I read her blog (matociquala.livejournal.com), where she sometimes shows the evolution of sentences from first draft to final version—and not because the sentences, even the complex ones, ever seem laboured. They do, in fact, turn out just right.

Language and world-building are, as always, closely related, and attention to detail in both is as important for the story as the big, galactic or ontological, settings. And (yeah, you know what I’m about to say), Elizabeth Bear does both. She takes on the questions of heaven and hell, love and truth, what it is to be human, and does it as if she does stuff like that every day—but she takes just as much care to make sure that the world in which this is set is believable.

This can entail, for example, the difference between addressing someone as “thou” or “you” in 17th century England, or the polite form of address to a man in a society which has no polite forms of address to men. (It’s “Miss”.) Or, the fact that in space, a Tarot deck has six suites (because in space, there are six directions); or, that the name of the British ministry of magic is The Enchancery. I could give many more examples, but suffice it to say that when Elizabeth Bear creates a world or an alternate history, all the moss trolls are very carefully made to answer for themselves.

But still, it might be the characters that are the best thing. They are complex and they have grey areas and histories and doubts and scars; they are not predictable or run-of-the-mill. Our heroes will fight for their heroism when they most need it, and they will need it, and the price will be high. We get to know them not least through the fine dialogues, which serve not only as exposition of characters and characters’ relationships—they are also full of the energy of what is not said, and can contain both weapons and caresses.

I don’t mind admitting I get quite emotionally involved in Bear’s characters. You grow to care about them, and that is a mark of really skilled character writing. The finale of one book in particular left me a wreck the day I finished it. And even when it doesn’t go quite that far, there is a lot of nail biting and ‘Oh god he’s really going to do it, isn’t he?!’ and ‘Oh god she cannot be planning that, can she?!’ and ‘Yay, they finally told each other!!’ Also, this won’t make much sense taken out of context, so you’ll simply have to believe me when I tell you that “They’re yours. ... I have perhaps been cowardly.” is one of the best declarations of love ever written.

Ah, yes, love. To quote Bear from an interview, “love and relationships seem to be an overriding concern of my art. ... I cannot abide traditional romances, because so many of them seem to me unutterably false, and concerned with the least interesting part of the whole process. Anybody can fall in love—but maintaining close relation-

ships over years? THAT interests me in a way that limerence cannot.” As if that isn’t hard enough in and of itself, in the all-but-everyday situations Bear’s characters tend to find themselves they will have to struggle for those relationships . . . and so they do. Because they know, or learn, that love is worth it. And now and again, they learn that it far from guarantees a happy ending.

They also know (or learn) that when it comes to love, it doesn’t much matter if you are opposite genders or the same one (or any of the other options). You don’t have to be the same colour, or the same species, or only two people, or even compatible life forms. Love is love. One more interview-quote, if you’ll permit me: “One thing I flat-out love about my generation of SFF writers is that we’re the diversity bubble. We’re black, gay, Asian, Hispanic, queer, transgendered, women, third culture kids, non-Christian—and we’re here to stay, because science fiction is the literature of alienation, and boy have we have some stuff to talk about.”

Another thing this generation knows: that the labels ‘genre’ and ‘literary’ are in no way mutually exclusive. But surely, no one who is reading this thought so. It’s only the muggles who get that wrong. We don’t need to be told that science fiction and fantasy is literature. And we love it every time an author proves it as well as Elizabeth Bear does.

“All stories are true.”

“I’ve heard stories that differ.” ...

“Then they must be true.”

Mystiska saker händer i Uppsala!

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Beställ direkt från <http://1000-ogon.blogspot.com>

IAN McDONALD

AN INTRODUCTION BY JOHAN ANGLEMARK

Ian McDonald is a Northern Irish writer living in Belfast, the author of thirteen novels, one graphic novel and a number of short stories. He has been nominated for several of the most prestigious awards and has won a few of them, including a Hugo and the BSFA award. He is married to Enid and when he's not writing fiction, he works with television; with programming development and script editing.



Photo by Jesse Wild

He has previously worked for the children’s TV company SixteenSouth, producing “Sesame Tree”, a Northern Irish version of Sesame Street for BBC Northern Ireland. Currently, he works for the production company Widdell Media two days a week. The TV work pays the bills—writing fiction doesn’t pay very well, not even if you’re an award-winning author (unless your name is Stephen King or Neil Gaiman); in fact, it pays less than it used to only ten or fifteen years ago. However, he values the TV work also because it gets him out of the house a couple of days a week and it lets him meet people and do interesting stuff, and keeps him in touch with the latest trends in society. And it gives him impulses for new books.

McDonald was born in England in 1960, in Manchester. His mother was a physiotherapist, born in Northern Ireland, and his father—a Scotsman from Stirling—worked in an accounts office. If his parents had stayed there his writing career would probably have taken a different direction but when he was five, the family moved to Northern Ireland after an incident that McDonald calls “the family’s dark secret”, not anything really bad but the shame attached meant that McDonald wasn’t told what had happened until just before the last of his parents died.

Moving from Manchester to a part of the UK that is deeply divided between two ethnicities meant in many ways a different life, but Bangor, where the McDonalds settled, is a safe middle-class satellite town to Belfast where the tension and ethnic conflict in Northern Ireland wasn’t as obvious as in other parts of the province.

After school, McDonald went to university to study psychology and geography—more because he didn’t know what to do with his life than anything else—but left without a degree.

McDonald has several times stated that he shares the view that Northern Ireland today essentially is a post-colonial society. For centuries, Britain ruled Ireland with a heavy hand, importing its own citizens to govern and manage the important functions in society and reducing the original inhabitants to second-class citizens. Gradually since World War I, power was handed over to the (Protestant) part of the population that considers itself to be British, and up until the last decades of the previous century, discrimination of the Irish (Catholic) part of the population could be blatant, although of course there were Catholic families that had climbed the career ladder and succeeded in society. What McDonald has pointed out is that this is by and large the same situation that exists in most third-world countries after the colonial powers have withdrawn. As one of the consequences of growing up in this post-colonial environment, with its mixed traditions, he became interested in exploring what this means and what goes on in such societies.

Of course, this background does not mean that you become a science fiction writer, although it could be argued that the medium of science fiction is in fact suited to exploring these issues. But more specifically, McDonald has said that it was watching TV as a child that hooked him on science fiction—the sixties and early seventies were a period with some rather good British SF television, for example *The Prisoner*, *Doctor Who*, *Clangers*, and *Thunderbirds*. Some influences of this early appreciation of visual media science fiction can definitely be seen in McDonald’s work.

McDonald sold his first story, “The Island of the Dead”, to a local Belfast magazine when he was 22, and writing has been his main source of income since 1987. After his first works, which were clearly science fiction, came a couple of novels that drew more on myths, one set in Ireland and the other in an imaginary but clearly allegorical coun-

try. Then in the mid and late 1990s came a series of novels set in developing countries, most notably the “Chaga saga”, with the African AIDS epidemic featuring prominently. After a 2001 return to the planet of Mars, he has received much acclaim for three novels set in the near future of three countries characterised by being poised between the developing world and the developed world: India, Brasil, and Turkey. These three, in particular *River of Gods* and *The Dervish House*, are widely considered his best works to date.

Some themes reoccur in McDonald’s books: Cultural remixes, nanotechnology, myths, smart drugs and human enhancement. Stylistically, his prose is characterised by verbal cascades; he uses the language to pound on the reader in a fascinating and marvellously effective way, piling word on word, subclause on subclause onto a crescendo.

Setting his works in our world, relatively close in the future, in other cultures than his own, McDonald is very aware of the importance of research. To get the feel for the location right, he has been spending months in India, Brasil, and Turkey: on the streets, learning a bit of the language, trying to talk to ordinary people. It shows.

Currently he is working on a series of children’s books, a project that’s he is very enthusiastic about. The first of them is set to be published in early 2012.

WORKS

Desolation Road (1988)

Empire Dreams (short stories, 1988)

Out on Blue Six (1989)

King of Morning, Queen of Day (1991)

Hearts, Hands and Voices (1992)

Speaking in Tongues (short stories, 1992)

Kling Klang Klatch (graphic novel, 1992)

Scissors Cut Paper Wrap Stone (1994)

Necroville (1994)

Chaga (1995)

Sacrifice of Fools (1996)

Kirinya (1997)

Tendeléo’s Story (novella, 2000)

Ares Express (2001)

River of Gods (2004)

Brasyl (2007)

Cyberabad Days (short stories, 2009)

The Dervish House (2010)

AWARDS

1989—*Desolation Road* won the Locus Award for best first novel

1991—*King of Morning, Queen of Day* won the Philip K. Dick Award

2001—*Tendeléo’s Story* won the Theodore Sturgeon Award

2005—*River of Gods* won the British Science Fiction Association Award for best novel

2007—”The Djinn’s Wife” won the Hugo Award for best novelette

2008—*Brasyl* won the British Science Fiction Association Award for best novel

2011—*River of Gods* won Prix Bob-Morane for best novel translated into French

2011—*The Dervish House* won the British Science Fiction Association Award for best novel

OUTLINES OF A COUPLE OF HIS NOVELS

DESOLATION ROAD (1988)

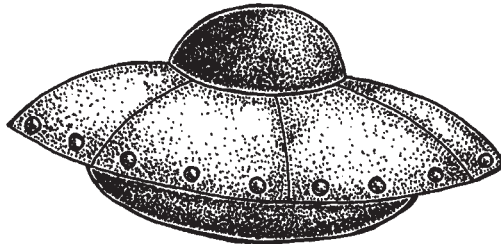
Set on a future Mars that has been adapted to mankind so as to be habitable, although it’s still very much Mars—mostly just a red desert. A scientist is travelling over this desert, hunting for a mysterious man or creature. During his hunt, he comes across an oasis in the desert, close to a railway line, and after losing his vehicle he stays there, waiting to be rescued. Together with other lost travellers and adventurers, he founds a town: Desolation Road.

RIVER OF GODS (2004)

The novel is set in 2047, 100 years after India’s independence. India is divided into a number of sovereign states. Artificial intelligence, genetic enhancements and media obsessions dominate the setting. There is a war threatening over water shortage. A complex novel with many characters and subplots, in a very realistically depicted India.

BRASYL (2007)

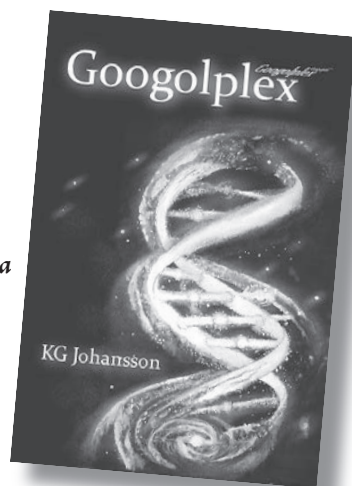
Brasyl consists of three parallel stories, in different time lines: One in 1732, one in the author’s present time, and one in 2032. In 1732, Jesuit Father Louis Quinn, in 2006, the TV producer Marcelina in Rio de Janeiro, and in 2032 Edson, a talent impresario in São Paulo all get tangled up in their timelines with people travelling across time and the universes.



GOOGOLPLEX

SF-roman av KG Johansson

Jack ingår i en grupp kolonister som reser till den avlägsna planeten Shylock för att bygga en ny värld. Jacks förmåga att manipulera DNA är en av gruppens största tillgångar. Kanske kan de också få hjälp av de märkliga varelserna som säger sig komma från andra universa – trots att ingen vet om varelserna talar sanning. Men en dag kommer Jack att hinna ifatt sitt förflutna.



En existentiell roman i science fiction-dräkt

I en djärvt hisnande berättelse om en avlägsen framtid där mänsklig-heten tagit DNA i sin tjänst har KG Johansson skapat en roman om grundläggande existentiella livsval.

KG Johansson var tidigare professor i rockmusik vid Musikhögskolan i Piteå men är sedan flera år frilansande skrivare på heltid. Han har tidigare översatt den stora sf-litteraturen samt författat en mängd musiklektörböcker.

Wela Förlag har av KG Johansson tidigare utgivit framtidsdystopin *Frukost i skymningen* 2009 samt den kritikerrosade trilogin *Glastornen* (*Glastornen 2005, Det sista kriget 2007, Kråkmästaren 2008*).

Våren 2011 kommer KGs nästa roman *Feedback* om en framtid som präglas av högteknologisk övervakning och etniska gänguppörelser.

Mediaröster om *Googolplex*:

"Det som ser ut som ett relativt vanligt rymdäventyr utvecklar sig till en filosofisk och intressant resa där läsaren får möta människans innersta drivkrafter och där frågor om vår fria vilja ställs på sin spets."

Clas Svahn, Bibliotekstjänst

"Googolplex är science fiction i världsklass."

Peter Öberg, Spektakulär

Mediaröster om *Frukost i skymningen*:

"... vem hade kunnat tro att science fiction i Luleå skulle bli så lyckat? Varma rekommendationer alltså, för ett av vårens mest intressanta svenska boksläpp."

Daniel Lehto, Biblioteket i Fokus

"KG är en grym författare."

André Loutchko, DAST

Mediaröster om *Glastornen-trilogin*:

"... en rik litterär resa som blir mer och mer intressant."

Tommy Norin, Piteå-tidningen

"Som helhet är denna trilogi en väl sammanhållen, läs-värd och personlig turnering av två genrens traditionella stoff." Elvira Birgitta Holm, Dalademokraten

"Johansson har ett levande och trovärdigt språk som håller handlingen flytande. ... 'Kråkmästaren' bjuder på välskrivna dialoger, mångbottnade karaktärer och väl avvägda miljöbeskrivningar."

Magnus Borg, Piteå-tidningen

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JUKKA HALME

AN INTRODUCTION BY JOHANNA VAINIKAINEN-UUSITALO

Congrats, Eurocon! You've managed to get hold of one of our national treasures: Jukka Halme. Please treat him well. It's a loan only and we in Finland expect to get him back in mint condition.

Editor-critic Jukka Halme, also known as Jukkahoo, has been a prominent figure in Finnish SF fandom since the late eighties. So, what has that jolly good fellow done? Pretty much everything from founding societies to conrunning to producing fanzines and books—you name it, Jukka has been doing it. He writes, draws, interviews, performs, blogs and conspires. His insanely tricky quiz shows are legendary. As a person he is friendly and nice, everyone knows him and he knows everyone. And without him the last two decades of Finndom would definitely have been less fun for the rest of us.

Once upon a time he was voted Supreme Ruler of Universe. His Stalin impersonation was quite convincing, complete with a Russian interpreter and a bunch of scary flunkies in black sunglasses! He's been Alexander the Great, too. *A singing* Alexander the Great to be exact, in a mini opera about Diogenes. Not to mention Isaac Asimov, or that venerable gentleman named Kaskelotti in several movies made in Finndom.



Photo by Johan Anglemark

Jukka has this amazing knack for getting people to co-operate and *do things*. Things like founding the fantasy zine *Legolas* which led to founding the Finnish Tolkien Society which led to founding the rebel smial Hautakero (The Barrow-Down) that always raises the toast to the East and has produced some excellent and fun zines too. Or, like getting a big bunch of Finns to pour buttermilk (surmjölk or piimä) simultaneously onto their heads... That one happened in Sweden, by the way, at a grand Tolkien convention back in the nineties.

One of the countless fanzines he has produced, *Kalaksikukko*, was at least partly a practical joke aimed at Yours Truly (then-editor of *Legolas*, known to be a country girl from remote Eastern Finland) and I totally fell for it, hook, line, and sinker, but that's a story too long to tell here.

Jukka started his fandom career by founding the Mundane collective in Helsinki years before Geoff Ryman wrote his *Mundane Manifesto*—they started to produce a

fanzine every two weeks, for the Helsinki mafia meetings (Um. Dear foreign folks, there is no reason to get alarmed—"mafia" is what we in Finnish fandom call our regular pub gatherings). The zine had a humorous tone, there were bits of fannish news, short stories from mysterious pseudonymous authors, letters from readers, sometimes heated discussions. It was fannish subculture at its best.

These days he writes and edits books too. He has coined the term "Uuskumma" for New Weird in Finnish, edited an anthology of that name and even translated one of the stories in it. He has co-written several reference books in Finnish: *Foreign Fantasy Writers 2*, *Foreign Horror Writers*, and *Masters of the Historical Novel 1–2*.

He has been a guest blogger for Jeff VanderMeer's blog Ecstatic Days, together with Tero Ykspätäjä. Just recently Jukka and Tero agreed to co-edit *It Came From the North: A Finnish Fantasy Sampler* for Cheeky Frawg. The first volume of this planned series will debut in November. Quote from Jeff VanderMeer: "Other (potentially exciting) developments involving cross-cultural exchange and further translations are too nascent to talk about at this time."

Jukka is an excellent host who makes a truly mean salsa—he's been known to possess a chili spray that requires a license to carry. (It's because of his day job). He loves his wife Sari, winter sports, and tiny dogs.

He is also a cancer survivor and quite open about it. Back in 2003 when he was fighting it, more than 40 members of Finndom co-operated in knitting, crocheting and sewing him a get well present, a magnificent bedspread with the text "Live long and prosper". So lots of people love Jukka a lot.

Don't be shy to approach him; he won't bite. Buy him a beer, and proceed to chat with him. But if you see him carrying a container of buttermilk, you'd better be careful.



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JOHN-HENRI HOLMBERG

A PRESENTATION BY MATS DANNEWITZ LINDER

John-Henri Holmberg must be the consummate Swedish fan if there ever was one. He produced his first fanzine (type-written, one copy) at the age of 12; two years and several fanzine issues later, he was elected editor of *Science Fiction Forum*, published by Skandinavisk Förening för Science Fiction, SFSF (the Scandinavian Science Fiction Society), which he continued to edit, off and on, for many years. He has been prominently involved in the organization of six sf conventions and participated in innumerable others, usually contributing as a speaker or panelist. Professionally, he has written about half a dozen books on sf and fantasy, and countless articles in professional publications, participated many times in radio and TV discussions on science fiction—plus, of course, in his functions as editor and publisher arranged for the publication, in Swedish, of a very large number of science fiction books, including several anthologies edited by himself. As a translator, he has also contributed to the publication of many sf works.

That's the brief version. Now comes the extended one.



Photo by SR P4

It began when, as a young boy, John-Henri (born in 1949) was almost chronically ill. That gave him lots of time to read, and thus he discovered science fiction at an early age. The first book to make a lasting impression was a Swedish boys' book, *Rymdpirater* (Space Pirates) by Georg Eliasson; today all but forgotten. Then, at eight or nine, he discovered the magazines: *Häpna!* and (the Swedish edition of) *Galaxy*. Some years later he realised that books and magazines in English offered an almost unlimited access to this type of literature and began struggling with texts which gradually became more and more accessible. The ball was rolling.

Through the years he has published innumerable pages of sf fanzines. Apart from the already mentioned *SF Forum*, most notably *Fanac* (the Swedish edition of the famous American fanzine), *Gafiac*, *DNQ* (together with a handful of close friends), and many oneshots. *Fanac* was special not only by its very long lifetime (1963–1981; it was eventually edited by a string of other prominent fans, of which probably the most famous names today are Stieg Larsson and his companion Eva Gabriellsson) and its at

times very tight schedule (fortnightly), but also by the fact that its first issue introduced the Swedish "version" of the US pseudonymous fan Carl Brandon, whose Swedish incarnation was Carl J. Brandon, Jr. This double identity was hidden for rather a long time, aided by the fact that John-Henri's home was at a crossroads, which made it possible for him to use two entirely different addresses.

John-Henri's fanzines came to be characterized not only by his own proficient and profuse writings but also by gradually being very skilfully and tastefully laid-out (among other things he became very adept at transferring illustrations to stencils; a nowadays sadly forgotten art). And, of course, by the almost superhuman energy with which he sometimes for years on end published a stream of fanzine after fanzine. (Later that energy came to be used in more professional science fiction publishing contexts; still, however, the same enthusiastic drive may be discerned as a far more potent drive than any commercial goals.)

His accomplishments as a fanzine editor were in fact an important ingredient in his career as professional editor and publisher, starting with the student magazines *Komplex* (1970) and *Gaudeamus* (1972-73). He then went on to succeed Sam Lundwall as science fiction editor at Askild & Kärnekull (1974-75). He was also associated with the publishing houses Lindfors, Kindbergs and Bokád before he, together with a few close fan friends, started Laissez Faire Produktion, or LFP. Between 1982 and 1986 LFP published a large number of important sf novels in paperback format at low prices, and a quarterly magazine, *Nova Science Fiction*.

After the demise of LFP (for financial reasons), John-Henri in 1988 became editorial director for fiction at the very large publishing house Bra Böcker, where he published a string of important sf novels and collections. In 1993, however, disagreements between him and the management made it impossible for him to stay on. Soon afterwards he started his own publishing and book production company, Replik, which is also the home of the resurrected *Nova* magazine, started in 2004 and so far published with 20 issues. It is a very ambitious and high-quality product which in 2009 received the European SF Society's award to the best European sf magazine. It is also completely a labour of love; apart from the authors nobody is getting paid, and John-Henri finances the whole thing out of his own pocket. In that sense, we are back in the 1960s fanzine publishing world, only at a much higher level—financially as well as qualitatively.

But of course "just" publishing is not enough for a fan of John-Henri's calibre. As early as 1965 he was co-arranger of the Stockon 5 convention, followed by Stockon 6 (1968), Fancon 70, SF 72, Fancon 2, Scancon 76. This was a steady progression in size, ending with what so far is the biggest Swedish sf convention, with some 475 participants. John-Henri was also a driving force in SFSF (see above), not only as an editor of its fanzines but also as sometime chairman and event organiser. And together with a few others, he was instrumental in laying the foundations for SFSF's book selling activities, which later became the famously successful *SF-bokhandeln*.

The step from amateur fan writing to professional writing about science fiction was of course natural. Apart from contributing to such works as *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* and *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, the Swedish *Nationalencyclopedia* and numerous other publications, he has written a number of books on sf and fantasy (see the Bibliography), the most important of which is the two-part sf history *Inre landskap och yttre rymd*, an impressive mastodon of almost 1100 pages.

In part, science fiction is also the reason for John-Henri's political endeavours. In his early teens, he stumbled upon Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* (because of their science fictional content), which eventually made him a libertarian. As such, he has contributed to many journals (he once was the editor of one, *Nyliberalen*, of which he was also the co-founder), written one book and generally tried to influence the Swedish political life as well as promote Ayn Rand, her works and ideology. Never one to go with the crowd, however, he has not to my knowledge joined any political party.

(There was one other, rather unfortunate, outcome of his encounter with Ms. Rand: In one of the novels, there is an evidently very striking image of the protagonist holding at his fingertips a glowing cigarette; an image which so impressed the 14-year old John-Henri that he, with characteristic purposefulness and energy, determined to start smoking. He has never stopped since.)

Thus even his political interest has its roots in sf. And so, probably, does his interest in films and perhaps also his interest in crime fiction (a prolific reviewer, he is also, since 2008, a member of the Swedish Crime Fiction Academy—ask him about it!). In fact, as far as I can remember, there is only one major area in his life which is not one way or the other rooted in science fiction (including, of course, sf fandom): his family life. He is a father of five, but none of the mothers—three—nor, I believe, his children has shown any particular interest in sf. But then of course it is a well known fact that the science fiction gene is not hereditary.

Lately, through a strange and somewhat bizarre twist of fate, John-Henri's sf-related activities have taken an unexpected turn: his long-time friendship with science fiction fan, later world famous crime writer, Stieg Larsson has made him an authority on Stieg, leading to numerous interviews by people from all over the world, and also to a recently published book on “the enigma of Stieg Larsson”), written together with two Americans.

Seriously, though, it is a fact that only a minor part of John-Henri's professional work has taken place within “the science fiction field” (whatever that may be). However, I do believe it is likewise true that his “mundane” careers have their roots in the fertile soil of his fandom activities in his youth.

And that may be the reason for his recent statement that:

”There's one thing that I feel totally sincerely: if I could wake up tomorrow and be 15 or 20 again, I would do a lot of things differently, but my engagement in fandom I would choose to retain.”

(Private email, November, 2010)

Spoken like a true fan. And very nice to hear.

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NÅGRA AV VoF:S FOLKBILDARE

Anna Bäsén (*medicinjournalist*)

P. C. Jersild (*författare*)

Åsa Vilbäck (*programledare*)

Marie Rådbo (*astronom*)

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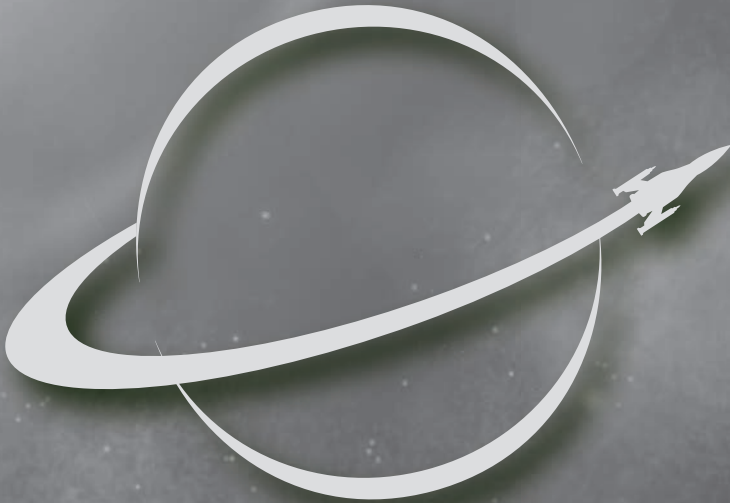


ae-ther

[ee-ther]

-noun

1. the medium
supposed by the ancients
to fill the upper regions of space

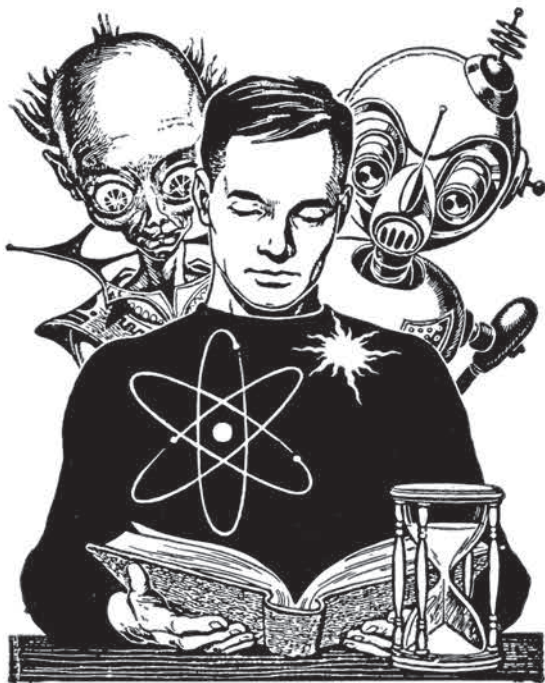


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SOUNDING

A SHORT STORY BY ELIZABETH BEAR

Cully sees the fin whales as he's leaving Nantucket Harbor. Mother and calf; seventy-foot whale, and a forty-foot boat. She's gray as Wellington rubber, lined with long parallel lines. She rolls on her side to show him an eye big as his hand, dark and sweet. Dreaming.

Looking back at him. Her breath mists his face like a benediction.

"Put in a word for us, would you?" Cully says. "I'll pay you back somehow." He watches her a minute before turning away. The sun's half over the eastern horizon, gold ripples flat on green water, rolling along the rim of the world like a great golden wheel. The Brant Point light's gone dark with morning.

It's the quiet before the work. Morgan is drinking coffee in the galley. There's nothing between them and the Atlantic but an arrow-straight line.

Cully doesn't tell Morgan about the whales.

* * *

Pen owns the *Sweet Katrina*—most of the *Sweet Katrina*—and stays on shore. Minority business owner, fifty-one percent. The government gives them a little boost, because of that, as if *Pen Cullen* was somehow different from *Allan Cullen*. As if she were somehow separate, not the same, flesh of one flesh. More worthy, somehow, than her husband.

Allan thinks she is. Fifteen years, three children, hard times, and hurricanes. Pen keeps her own counsel about who the worthy one is. She works nights at Nantucket Cottage Hospital. That gives them another little boost. Just enough, maybe, to stay afloat. So far.

They'll have to sell the house come winter, if the catch doesn't improve. Sell the house, or sell the boat.

There's really no option.

Pen shades her eyes with one hand, her gardening glove leaving a smudge over her eyebrows, and waves with her shears in the other. The children don't notice; they're pushing and giggling up the steps of a fat yellow schoolbus. The bus's doors close; the bus's wheels turn. She watches them out of sight, the way she never watches Allan anymore. She knows that if it's in his power, he is always coming home. Besides, there's no widow's walk on a little Cape Cod style cottage, and it wouldn't matter anyway.

It's a short sandy path down to the narrow, rocky beach, through bramble rose and salt scrub. She's never away from the sound of the sea.

* * *

Cully's at the wheel, and the sun is high. Salt air scours his face; he's grateful for the shade of the wheelhouse. Morgan is checking the lines, checking the gear, making ready. Cully will go out and help him in a minute, as soon as he gets his hat.

Everything on a boat is oil and paint and elbow grease and constant maintenance. The sea eats ships; it's an acid, an etchant. They sail through it, and it takes them apart, molecule by molecule.

They're cruising through the Sound, headed for deeper waters, cleaner waters, where the big fish swim. Time was, a man could fish the Sound, could fish the Bay, hell. Time was a man could take all he needed in Wellfleet Harbor. Time was a man could make a living—even make a fortune—on the sea.

Time was, Nantucket was a whaling island, and the fin whale cruising beside them—vanishing, returning, playing with the wake of a boat half her size—would have been rightful prey.

Times are not what they were. Stripers are closed and the cod you bring in are half the size they should be, babies too young to breed. It wasn't like this fifty years ago; Cully knows his father's stories of sixteen, twenty cod to a hundred hooks. Hell, even twenty years ago it was better than this.

He'll have no luck in the shoals of the Sound. He knows it in his bones, like he knows the rise and fall of the sea, the sound of Pen's breathing in the dark, the smell of his children's hair. He's going for bluefish; the quota's still wide open. Bluefish. Or maybe bluefin tuna. If he can find them.

He'll go as far as he has to, to find them.

* * *

Pen grooms the early-autumn roses, cleans the house, naps for a few hours before the children come home. Allan's mother Cindy lives with them. She comes home from work at five and distracts the kids while Pen cooks dinner and gets things ready.

Pen doesn't know what they'll do when they have to sell the house. Rent something, maybe. They could leave the island, sell the boat. Save the lives of a few gulls, the ones who try to steal the bait and get caught on the hooks when the long lines go down.

She doesn't want to move the kids to Boston, to Fall River. She wants the path with the damasked roses, the sharp clean tang of the ocean air. She wants the sea for a back yard.

She doesn't want to watch Allan grow old in a factory. And then there's the kids, the money for college—only six years off for Allan Junior, only ten years off for John, and Mike in the middle. The *Sweet Katrina's* every breath of a future they've got.

She naps again, while Cindy goes over bills and fishing permits on the corner of the dining room table, and a little before eleven she leaves for work. The old Volvo station wagon is a masterwork of rust and clashing gears, as much a victim of the sea as everything else on Nantucket, but the wheels still crunch gravel, the old thing still goes. She doesn't think about the insurance on the boat, the life insurance Allan insists they keep paid up, the money for diesel, the money for lines. She wishes she'd stayed in school, got her nursing degree.

She could support her family, then.

* * *

Cully sleeps more soundly on the sea. The *Sweet Katrina* rocks him, the way Pen used to, when Pen didn't have to work nights. It's almost like not sleeping alone.

Morgan wakes him a little before sun-up, a tap on the door. There's burned coffee. Morgan can't cook, not even a little.

"How's it looking?" Cully asks. He holds the coffee under his nose and thinks about round hooks and half-round hooks and synthetic bait. He thinks about pulleys and propellers and watching things spin. Maybe he can turn the *Sweet Katrina* into a sport fishing boat, cater to the summer people. Maybe stars will grow on rosebushes, too.

The sky's silver off east; zodiacal light. Nothing between here and Europe but a hell of a lot of water, the competition—factory trawlers, he means—and all those sly, mysterious fish. And maybe a few dozen nuclear submarines. Like the fish, though, and the independent boats, there's fewer of them than there used to be.

"Looks clear," Morgan says, with a shrug. September weather. Love it while you've got it. He's cleaning the rifle Cully keeps for sharks, or maybe pirates. Sometimes they *do* get sharks on the lines; maybe even the sharks are going hungry these days. He's never gotten a pirate. "Think we'll make our money back this trip?"

"Who the hell knows?" He hasn't seen a summer this bad since they closed George's Bank. Get a swordfish boycott, tuna boycott, women not supposed to eat fish because the mercury poisons their babies. Get people planning offshore windmill farms in the shoals, or dredging the sand for beach replenishment; summer people's McMansions are no good without a broad white-sand beach. Get fisheries closed to let the stock regenerate; they never needed closing before the factory fleets.

But there's always the chance, the one good trip that pays for three bad ones. He'll take hagfish if it's what he can get, it sells just fine to Korea.

But bluefin's worth its weight in ambergris.

The fin whale shows him her flukes, dead ahead, about a half a mile. He wonders if she's following or she's leading him, or they just happen to be going the same way. "All the way," he mutters. "As far as it takes."

Cully drinks his burned coffee as the sun comes up. He's got a good feeling in his bones.

* * *

Pen comes home in time to get breakfast on the table and see her kids off again. Mike's sprained his thumb or something, he says gym class but Pen knows it was rough-housing. Boys will be boys. She pulls her gloves on over long fingers and picks up her shears. If Allan were home, he'd stop her before she got the second glove on, stop her and kiss her fingers and say, "At least one of us has soft hands."

Pen's roses grow in profusion around the little gray house. There's all sorts of things that won't grow on Nantucket; they don't like the sun and the sand and the harsh, salt air. They don't like the storms.

Roses grow fine, and the marigolds she plants in drifts around their bases to keep away the bugs. Gold and burgundy and brown, like a clown's button pompoms. She turns the dirt over and over with her trowel, working in the fertilizer—fish meal and bone—working the sand into the loam.

* * *

Moonlight and they're getting in some fish, the winches spinning as they take up line. Dogfish, maybe five per hundred hooks, not bad but not enough. Cully wants bluefin. Bluefin pay for diesel. They switch bait and go looking.

They've picked up a pod of minke whales somewhere, and that fin whale's still playing off the starboard bow. Her calf can catch some pretty good air, comes down hard, *wham*, belly-flop. Cully thinks maybe there's a humpback out there too; he keeps catching glimpses of a blow in the moonlight, and it's not where the fin whales seem to be. He can't remember the last time he saw this many whales on one trip. Maybe he could charter whale-watches, make a living that way.

But he'd need a bigger boat.

The deck's all over slime, mica-flecked, scales sparking like sun on the ocean. Sunrise catches them still looking; they haven't broken even yet. There's no land in sight, and there's no goddamned tuna anywhere.

Maybe south of the Vinyard there'll be something. He thinks about heading that way, and shrugs. The whale's still headed east, and he's got a mind to follow her, trailing opportunistic gulls like a screaming banner. If he's gonna go broke, he might as well go broke chasing a sleek gray shadow.

The minke whales have lit out for wetter pastures, but the fin whale's still sticking with the boat—within a mile or two, anyway—when the first glittering back breaks the water off to port. Bluefin come out of the sea like wheels, turning on a perfect arc, a circle marked out with a compass. They race through the water like churning steel, and it's a school like Cully's never seen. He's heard legends, but this is the real deal—three-hundred-pound fish, and there are thousands of them. It's the most amazing thing ever, a sea alive with bluefin fifty miles from anywhere they *should* be, and he and Morgan stare at each other for a precious, unbelieving thirty seconds before they run out the lines, the bird-scare streamers snake-writhing as they uncoil into the water.

The fish in the refrigerated hold gleam like bars of silver. The whales sound, showing Cully their flukes side by side like a sentimental sculpture before slipping beneath the chop.

Cully can feel it like hitting a sandbar when the line snags. The *Sweet Katrina* lurches, skipping under his feet, and there's an unholy groan and a thin stream of white smoke as a big winch jams. Cully grabs the rail, and Morgan grabs Cully, and neither one of them quite goes off the boat, though it's a near thing and a couple of bruises.

“Shit,” Morgan says, and leaps for the winch. The *Sweet Katrina*'s listing, pulling, dragging herself around. Half a second and the other line's going to get pulled into the jammed one. Cully scrambles for the wheelhouse, swings down the steps, hands slipping on the railings, slaps at the cutoff.

Morgan curses. There's a four-foot bluefin flopping under Morgan's feet. Morgan's standing on the damned fish to get to the winch.

He's not going to be fast enough. Cully can hear the tick of stressed fibers parting, nylon line *click click clicking* into oblivion one strand at a time. Cully charges from the wheelhouse, tackles his first mate, gets half a grip on him and swings him around, nails imprinting Morgan's wrist, and lands them both sprawling to the deck as the line fails—all for one, and one for all—snapped end like a scourge, a flail that could blind a man or flense him, flesh from bone.

A hundred thousand dollars in tuna and equipment goes gliding down into the Atlantic, wasted work and wasted death. Morgan sits up, still cursing. “What did we snag, a submarine?”

“Fuck,” Cully answers. “And this was turning out to be such a nice day.”

The whales rise beside the boat and wait there, breathing. Morgan struggles to his feet, wiping his hands on his coverall. All it does is spread the slime around. “Fucking whale,” Morgan says. He stomps toward the wheelhouse, yanks open a locker, and pulls the rifle out. “Fucking thing could have killed us.”

“Morgan,” Cully says, “what the hell do you think you're doing?”

* * *

Pen does the grocery shopping on the way home from work, on Saturday. She loads up the back of the Volvo and notices the right rear tire is going flat. The gas station attendant finds a screw in it; he fixes it fast and charges her eight dollars, and she hurries home, worried that the milk is going bad. Cindy is fixing breakfast. The kids are watching cartoons on videotape and arguing over *Shrek* and *Finding Nemo*. Pen remembers when the cartoons were broadcast, and you watched whatever was on.

She shrugs and puts the milk away; Cindy takes it right back out of the little fridge and grins at her, pouring a dollop into a bowl of scrambled eggs. "This smells a little off," she says.

"Bad?"

"No, just off."

Pen shrugs. "It got left in the car for a bit. We'll just drink it fast."

Cindy points at the coffee pot. Pen fixes herself a cup and takes it outside to drink on the porch swing, smelling the sea air, looking at the roses. The leaves are turning. Allan should be home any day. *Wherever you go, I will follow.*

Winter will be coming soon.

* * *

Morgan raises the rifle and points it at the fin whale. "It won't but sting her a little—"

Cully steps between, and puts his hand on the barrel of the gun. "Morgan," he says, so calmly, "would you look at yourself?"

Morgan pauses, gulls whirling behind him. Cully takes a deep breath; the whole world smells like rotting fish. And slowly, Morgan lowers the gun. "Fuck," he says. "I guess she didn't mean anything by it."

"I'm not sure it was the whale," Cully says.

"What the hell else could it have been?"

Cully shrugs and points over the railing. Another whale breaches in the distance—one, two, a pod of humpbacks. They're everywhere, now that Cully's looking for them. Gray whales slipping along the surface not so different from dappled wave-tops themselves. The great pleased grin of a blue whale as it lifts its head from the ocean, blowing plumes of vapor into the perfect sky. Dolphins leaping among the tuna, a softer shade of steel. "You see any hook-marks on her hide? Besides, it's a god-damned endangered species. Do *you* wanna pay the fine?"

"They can take it out of the tuna she ate," Morgan says, folding his arms over the rail, and Cully doesn't point out that fin whales don't eat tuna. "Besides, you want to talk about a goddamned endangered species? What the hell are we?"

Cully opens his mouth to answer. The tuna turn like steel wheels in the sunlight, iterations from hull to horizon. The hold is two-thirds full, the gleaming fish packed in like bullion. The trip is paid for, the diesel is bought.

If every trip could be like this—

He looks at the whale, who has rolled on her side again, her baby nosing along her belly, looking for the teat. She gazes at him with that wide, alert eye, her flipper up-raised, gleaming wet in the sun. She cups it like a woman cupping a hand. She beckons.

She's listening.

“I reckon you’re right,” Cully says, and boosts himself over the rail. He crouches down, one foot in front of the other, dangling off the side as if trying to scoop something out of the water. The whale rolls, and her flipper brushes Cully’s fingers. Cully laughs in wonder and cranes his head to look at Morgan, silhouetted by the sun. “Where do you think they go?” he asks.

“They?”

“When they go extinct. Or nearly so.” He gestures at the whale, at the tuna, at himself.

“What, when they die?”

“Do they?” Cully asks. He pulls his hand back in, but stays squatting on the wrong side of the rail. “What do you think? Maybe they get to go home.”

There’s the hold full of tuna. There’s Pen and the kids, and there’s this place he and Morgan found, where there’s tuna for the taking. Pen owns the boat. Most of the boat. And then there’s the insurance money, and then there’s those fish in the hold, and all the ones out there, where a factory fleet won’t ever find them. The factory boats just aren’t a dying breed.

The whale rolls again, water beading, streaming off her hide. She looks at him. Waiting. *Where do they go?*

“Hey Morgan, you think you can find this place again?”

“We charted it, didn’t we?”

“Yeah,” Cully says. He stands, hand on the rail for balance. He promised he would pay, and he’ll never find his way back here if he doesn’t settle his debt. “I guess we did. I guess you’ll find it no problem. Christ, it’s beautiful here.”

He wants to pull off his wife’s glove, and kiss her long brown hand. He wants to smell the roses on her skin, the salt sea in her hair. More than anything, he wants to go home.

The whale squirms, a long slick convulsion, and rights herself. She glides away from the *Sweet Katrina*, her breath and her baby’s breath trailing behind them. She’s done waiting for him to figure it out.

There’s fish here for the taking, and Morgan knows how to find them, and Pen will keep him on. There’ll be money for the boys for college, money for Pen and Cindy to retire on. They won’t have to leave the island. They’ll sell the boat to Morgan, eventually, and Cully’s sons won’t be fishers. They’ll get city jobs. He won’t see it, but they’ll grow up fine, they’ll be okay. On land.

He weighs it in his hand and hates it, while the whales turn like wheels in the ocean. *On land.*

“Cully—” Morgan says.

The whales are sounding. They show their flukes, monuments against a perfect sky. They’re diving now.

Cully lets go of the rail. Paid in full. He goes under.

He goes on.

Previously published on www.strangehorizons.com on September 18, 2006

TONIGHT WE FLY

A SHORT STORY BY IAN McDONALD

It's the particular metallic rattle of the football slamming the garage door that is like a nail driven into Chester Barnes forehead. Slap badoom, slap badoom: that he can cope with. His hearing has adjusted to that long habituation the rhythm of to foot to ball to wall. Slap baclang. With a resonating twang of internal springs in the door mechanism. Slap baclang buzz. Behind his head where he can't see it. But the biggest torment is that he never knows when it is going to happen. A rhythm, a regular beat, you can adjust to that: the random slam of ball kicked hard into garage door is always a surprise, a jolt you can never prepare for.

The bang of ball against door is so loud it rattles the bay window. Chester Barnes throws down his paper and is on his feet, standing tip-toe in his slippers to try to catch sight of the perpetrators through the overgrown privet. Another rattling bang, the loudest yet. A ragged cheer from the street. Chester is out the front door in a thought.

'Right you little buggers, I had enough of that. You've been told umpteen times; look at that garage door, the bottom's all bowed in, the paint's flaking off, you're nothing but vandals. I know your parents, though what kind of parents they are letting you play on the street like urchins I don't know. This is a residential area!'

The oldest boy cradles the football in his arm. The other boys stand red faced and embarrassed. The girl is about to cry.

'I know you!' Chester Barnes shouts and slams the door.

'Chester, they're nine years old,' the woman's voice call from the kitchen. 'And the wee one, she's only six.'

'I don't care.' Back in the living room again, Chester Barnes watches the five children slink shamefacedly down the street and around the corner. The little girl is in tears. 'This is a quiet street for quiet people.' He settles in his chair and picks up his paper.

Doreen has balanced the tea tray on the top of her walker and pushes the whole pandrum into the living room. Chester leaps to assist, sweeping up the precarious tray and setting it down on the old brass Benares tables.

'Now you know I don't want you doing that, it could fall as easily as anything, you could get scalded.'

'Well, then you'd just have to save me, wouldn't you?'

There is tea, and a fondant fancy and a German biscuit.

'Those chocolate things are nice,' Chester says. 'Where did you get them?'

'Lidl,' Doreen says. 'They've a lot of good stuff. Very good for jam. You never think of Germans having a penchant for jam. Is it in again?'

'What?'

'You know. The ad. I can see the paper, you've left it open at the classifieds.'

'It's in again.'

'What does it say this time?'

'Dr Midnight to Captain Miracle.'

‘And?’

‘That’s all.’

‘Are you going to reply?’

‘With what? It’s nothing. I’ll bet you it’s not even him. It’s kids, something like that. Or fans. Stick on the telly, we’re missing *Countdown*.’

‘Oh, I don’t know, I don’t like that new girl. It hasn’t been the same since Carol left.’

‘It hasn’t been the same since Richard Whitely died,’ Chester says. They watch *Countdown*. Chester’s longest word score is a seven. Doreen has two eights, and gets the numbers games and today’s Countdown Conundrum. Doreen gets up to go and read in the back yard as she doesn’t like *Deal or No Deal*. ‘It’s just a glorified guessing game,’ she says. **Not for me it’s not**, Chester Barnes says. As she advances her walking frame through the living room door she calls back to Chester, ‘Oh, I almost forgot. Head like a sieve. The community nurse is coming round tomorrow.’

‘Again?’

‘Again.’

‘Well, I hope it’s after *Deal or No Deal*.’

Doreen closes the door after her. When the creak of her walking frame has disappeared down the hall, Chester Barnes picks up he newspaper again. *Dr Nightshade to Captain Miracle*. A rising racket on the screen distracts him. Noel Edmonds is whipping the audience up into a frenzy behind a contestant reluctant to choose between the sealed prize boxes.

‘Twenty-seven, pick number twenty-seven you blithering idiot!’ he shouts at the screen. ‘It’s got the ten pounds in it! Are you blind? No, not box twelve! That’s got the fifty thousand! Oh for God’s sake woman!’

Nurse Aine is short and plump and has very glossy black hair and very caked make-up. She can’t be more than twenty-two. She radiates the rude self-confidence of the medical.

‘You’re not Nurse Morag,’ Chester Barnes says.

‘No flies on you, Chester.’

‘Nurse Morag calls me Mr Barnes. Where is she anyway?’

‘Nurse Morag has moved on to Sydenham, Belmont and Glenmachan. I’ll be your district nurse from now on. Now, how are we Mr Barnes? Fair enough fettle? Are you taking your half aspirin?’

‘And my glass of red wine. Sometimes more than a glass.’

‘Bit of a secret binge drinker, are we Mr. Barnes?’

‘Miss, I have many secrets, but alcohol dependency is not one of them.’

Nurse Aine is busy in her bag pulling on gloves, unwrapping a syringe, fitting a needle. She readies a dosing bottle, pierces the seal.

‘If you’d just roll your wee sleeve up there Ches... Mr Barnes.’

‘What’s this about?’ Chester says suspiciously.

‘Nasty wee summer flu going around.’

‘I don’t want it. I don’t get the flu.’

‘Well, with a dose of this you certainly won’t.’

‘Wait, Miss, you don’t understand.’

Plump Nurse Aine’s latex hands are quick and strong. She has Chester’s arm in a grip, and the needle coming down. She checks.

‘Oh. I’m having a wee bit of a problem finding a vein. Chester, you’ve obviously no career as a heroin addict.’

‘Miss, I don’t...’

Nurse Aine comes in again, determination set on her red lips. ‘Let’s try it again. You may feel a little prick.’

‘Miss, I won’t...’

‘Oh. Wow.’ Nurse Aine sits back.

‘What is it?’ Chester asks.

She holds up the syringe. The needle is bent into a horseshoe.

‘I’ve heard of hard arteries... I can honestly say I’ve never seen anything like this before. Mr. Barnes...’

The living room door opens. The walker’s rubber toes enter first, then Doreen’s low slippers.

‘Suppositories,’ Doreen says. ‘My husband gets all his medication by suppository.’

‘It’s not in my case notes,’ Nurse Aine protests.

‘My husband is a special case.’

The rattle of the letter box disturbs Nurse Aine’s departure.

‘There’s you paper Chester.’ She hands him the Telegraph as the paperboy nonchalantly swings his leg over the fence to Number 27 next door. Chester waves it after her as she goes down the path—daintily for her size, Chester thinks—to her small green Peugeot 305.

‘Mr. Barnes!’ he calls. But the kids are hovering around the garage door again, casting glances at him, trying to block the football from his view with their bodies.

In the living room Doreen sits on the unused seat beside Chester’s big armchair in the window bay rather than her wing-back chair with the booster cushion by the door.

‘Yes?’

‘Nothing.’

‘You’re hovering.’

‘I am not hovering, I’m perching. So is it in?’

‘Is what in?’

‘Don’t come that with me Chester Barnes. Turn to the small ads right now.’

They flip through the pages together. Their fingers race each other down the columns and sections, stop simultaneously on bold print.

Dr Nightshade to Captain Miracle. Ormeau Park.

‘Ormeau Park. He’s close. Where do you think he is?’

‘I heard Spain, on the Costa, with the rest of them.’

‘What do you think he wants?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Chester, I’m concerned.’

‘I’ll look after you, don’t you ever worry. Nothing will ever harm you.’

Doreen lays her hand on her husband’s.

‘If only you could do that.’

Then with a slap baclang! like a steel avalanche descending into Haypark Avenue, the first goal hits the metal garage door,

Old men wake easily in the night. A bulge of the bladder, the creak of something that might be an intruder, the gurgle of water in the pipes, a night plane, the lumber of a big slow truck making deliveries to Tesco, the sudden start of a dream, or a nightmare, or that edge-of-sleep-plummet into nothingness that is much too much like death. Anything at all, and they’re awake and staring at the ceiling. And no amount of lying and turning and punching up the pillow to try to make it comfortable or flicking the blankets in under your feet will send you off again. Doreen sleeps sound as a child, her mouth open, her eyes crinkled up in a private, slumbering smile. Every insomniac knows the rule that a partner steals the sleep from you.

Chester waddles out to the toilet and pisses and long and appreciatively. Still a good pressure there. On the landing he looks up through the skylight. He never puts the main light one because if anything is guaranteed to banish all hope of sleep it is harsh centralised lighting. Beyond the yellow city glow stand the brighter stars. A constellation of fast lights crosses the rectangle of night. Chester Barnes holds his breath, thrilled by a wonder he feared he had forgotten.

‘Away, avault!’ he breathes. ‘Plays gip with City Airport Air Traffic Control, my arse. They always were bloody jealous dogs.’ Then he hears the high rumble of jets. A lesser wonder.

A wave of warmth and laundry-fresh fabric conditioner spills over him as he opens the hot-press. Socks, shirts—Doreen still irons his underwear. Chester thinks that one of the greatest tokens of love anyone can show. Sheets, towels. To the top shelf, where everything is piled along the front because Doreen can’t reach any higher. Chester takes down the shoe box. Inside are the press clippings, yellowed and redolent of age and laundry, and the comics. Chester lifts the comic out, then sets it back, replaces the lid. A confidential, matey tap.

The Bushmills bottle is at the back of the kitchen cabinet for the same reason that the top shelf laundry is at the front. Not that Doreen would object; it’s that it would be too easy, over Deal or No Deal, or the documentaries he likes on the History Channel. Chester Barnes still has an image, still has pride. When he opens the mock leather lid of the Dansette record player the smell of old vinyls and glues and plastics whirls him back through years and decades. It’s a dreadful tinny box and he can’t find a decent replacement for the stylus, but it’s like valve sound. The 45s only sound right on it. He takes them out of the shelf of the old radiogram, stacks them up on the long spindle, settles back in to his chair with the Bush and the comic. Always the dread, as the latch moves in, that more than one disc will fall at once. The Dansette doesn’t fail him tonight. Billy Holliday. *God Bless the Child*. Except the ones who bang that bloody ball off the bloody garage door. No. God bless the child and God bless you Lady Day. He opens the comic. *Captain Miracle, issue 17*.

The set up is rubbish; the writer never was any good. It’s the one with Dr Nightshade’s Malevolent Meteor Machine, and the usual superhero dilemma; save the girl or save the city from destruction. The true hero must do both, in a way that surprises

but is consistent, different enough from last month's installment, and returns all the balls in play to their original triangle on the table. Nothing must change in the world of comic book superheroes, unlike real superheroes.

So Captain Miracle, decide. The woman you love, or two million people in Belfast.

Cobblers. There weren't even that many people in the whole of the North. Chester Barnes smiles. Good panels of Captain Miracle flying into the meteor storm plunging down through the upper atmosphere haloed in plasma. Kick two into each other, send a third into the Irish Sea just off Dublin where it swamps Blackrock (*It's PR*, the Northern Ireland Office management team had said), fry one with laser vision, swing one by its tail, get underneath the big one bearing down on the city (the artist was an American, no idea about what Belfast looked like: a shipyard and the City Hall surrounded by miles of thatched cottages) and struggle and strain until the people in the streets were pointing and staring, before heaving it on his shoulders back up into orbit again. And of course, leaving one last, unseen straggler to bear down on innocent Belfast, before grabbing it and booting it back into orbit as sweet as any drop goal at Ravenhill.

'I'd've been good at rugby,' Chester Barnes says. 'Ach, too good. It would've been no game at all.'

Then screaming fast-forward back down to Dr Nightshade's Castle of Evil, which was based on the real Tandragee Castle where they made the potato crisps, which Chester Barnes always found stranger than any Northern Ireland Superhero comic. Intercepting the deadly grav-beam, with which Dr Nightshade had hauled the meteors from the sky and with which, on full intensity, he would collapse his hapless prisoner into a black hole. Pushing the ray back, back, with both his hands, until grav-beam projector, power unit, control room and the abominable Dr Nightshade himself all collapsed into eternal oblivion. Until he extricated himself in the next episode.

I've got you Doreen. Soaring up from the singularity, his love in his arms.

'Away, avant,' Chester Barnes whispers. Dean Martin now; good old Dino,

They're PR material, the NIO Department for Nonconventional Individuals had insisted. He has every issue of Captain Miracle, from Number One in 1972 to the final issue in 1979.

It's not really making any difference, is it Chester? But it couldn't, that was always understood. Now Chester lifts out the press cuttings. Robbers thwarted. Passengers rescued from sinking car ferries. Fires put out. Car bombs lifted and hurled into Belfast Lough. It was always impressive when they exploded in mid-air, until people started putting claims in about damage to roofs. Freed hostages. Masked villain apprehended: *SuperVillain for our Superhero?* Here he could make a difference. Here were things a hero could do. Against politics, against sectarianism, against murders and no warning bombs and incendiaries slipped into pockets of clothes on racks, there is nothing super to be done.

It's four thirty. The stack of singles has played out. The bottle of Bush is half-empty. Chester Barnes refills the shoe box and climbs the stairs. Beyond the skylight there's a glimmer of dawn.

Together they paw over the *Belfast Telegraph*, so eager they tear the sheets. Forefingers race each other down the small ads.

'What's it under?' Doreen asks.

‘Prayers and novenas,’ Chester Barnes says.

Their digits arrive simultaneously on the message. In bold: **Dr Nightshade to Captain Miracle. Ormeau Park. Tonight...**

‘Does that dot dot dot mean there’s something more?’ Doreen asks. ‘Maybe the rest of it’s in the late edition.’

‘Him pay for two small ads?’ Chester Barnes says. ‘That wouldn’t be like him.’

‘Tonight, then.’

‘Yes.’

‘Are you going to go?’

‘Of course not.’

There’s a pounding all along the right side of Chester Barnes’s head, from behind his eye to just above his ear, a steady pulsing beat, a painful throb. A headache. He never gets headaches, unless they’re tension headaches. Then he realises that his brain is thumping in time to the thudding of the ball, that ball, that bloody ball off the garage door. Slap baclang. He had been so intent on the message from his former nemesis that he hadn’t noticed the little voices outside, the cries, the ringing smack of football on the pavement.

‘Bloody kids!’ Chester Barnes shouts, sitting bolt upright trying to scrub the hammering out of his head. ‘Will they never, ever, never go away and do something else and leave me in peace?’

And now Doreen is saying that she’s worried, what’s it all about, why has he come back and what does he want with Chester, are they safe? But all Chester can hear is the slap baclang of the ball and then a different noise, a change in tone of the voices, alarm, fear. He rises from his seat and turns round as the football comes looping in through the front window in a smash and shower of shards, great spears hanging from the frame, fangs of glass poking up from the sash, splinters flying around him and Doreen as he covers her. No flying glass, from a window or a blast, could ever harm him. Chester seizes the ball and storms out on to the street where the children still stand, frozen in horror. They are very small. But months and years of the rage and frustration of a man able to do anything but allowed to do nothing bursts inside him like a boil.

‘You little bastards, you could have hurt my wife, all that flying glass, do you ever think of anyone but yourselves? Of course not, it’s the way your parents bring you up; you’re all selfish bastards, no sense of gratitude for anything, it’s all me me me.’ The children stand shaking with fear. Chester Barnes throws the ball into the air. He throws it far and hard. It loops so high it is almost out of sight, but as it drops down he looks at it, looks at it long hard, like he looks at the boxes on *Deal or No Deal*, looks with all his power. The football explodes in a deafening boom. Scraps of vinyl rain down but the children are already running and every door on Haypark Avenue is open and the people staring.

‘Selfish, the lot of you!’ Chester Barnes shouts. ‘None of you ever said thanks, not one. Ever.’

Then he slams the door and goes in to sit on his glass strewn chair and pretends to watch *Countdown*.

Officer Ruth Delargy is very fresh and smart and every inch the majesty of the law in her crisp white shirt and cap that shades her eyes and makes her remote, authoritative,

just. She is the community officer from Ballynafeigh PSNI Station. She sits in the living room of Number 27 in Doreen's chair but Chester thinks it better not to complain. The glass has been swept up, the window patched with cardboard and parcel tape. The glazer can't make it until the end of the week. Three of his Poles have suddenly announced they've had enough of Northern Ireland and are going home.

'The situation, Mr Barnes, is that where children are concerned, we have no option but to investigate. It's a statutory duty. Now, from what I've heard this isn't the first time you've had issues with the McAusland children.'

'Is that what they're called? McAusland?'

'Yes, Mr Barnes. Do you not know your neighbours?'

'Did they bring the complaint?'

'I can't tell you that Mr Barnes under the Data Protection Act. It is the sort of thing we would try to resolve at a community level through a mediated meeting between yourself and the McAuslands and we wouldn't want to invoke anything as heavy handed as an Anti Social Behaviour Order...'

'An ASBO? You'd try and give me an ASBO?'

'Like I said Mr Barnes, we wouldn't want to be that heavy-handed. That would be using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Now, I'm prepared to overlook the criminal damage to the football, but I do think it would be good if I arranged a series of meetings with the McAuslands: I've seen this kind of thing before and you'll be amazed how much better relationships are when people get to know each other.'

Chester Barnes sits back in his chair.

'Do you think they can get to know me?'

Officer Ruth frowns.

'I don't know what you mean.'

'It's just that some people, well, you think you know them but you don't know anything at all. It's just that some people, well, they're not like you know. They're different. They have their own rules. You see, it so happens that I know you. We've met before. It was a long time ago, you were very small, maybe four, five. It was Christmas. Now, they always say that Christmases blur into each other, but you might remember this one. You were in town with your parents, they took you to the Santa's grotto, it was a good one, in the old Robb's department store. It's not there any more, it was destroyed by incendiaries, back when they were doing a lot of that sort of thing. But they always had a very good Christmas grotto. You went on a ride first: Santa's Super Sleigh. It didn't actually go anywhere, it was a set of seats that went up and down while the walls rolled past, and there were stuffed reindeer in the front bobbing up and down so you felt you were on a journey. You were on it when the firebombs went off. Do you remember? I'm sure you don't remember all the details, you were very small and it must have been a terrible trauma for you. You got separated from the rest of your family, somehow, you slipped in under the mechanism and got trapped there. There was smoke everywhere, the fire had really caught. Then someone came through the fore. Someone pulled out from burning reindeer, someone took you in his arms and flew you out through the flames, down the stairwell. Someone flew you to safety, Officer Delargy. There was a hero there for you. And maybe I'm wrong, maybe it's just vanity, but I like to think that because someone did right that day, that's the reason you're doing right today. And that's more than I could hope, because we don't have children, me

and Doreen, it's part of the whole super thing, apparently, but if someone does right because right was done to them, that's as much children as I can hope for. So, I appreciate that there are rules, there have to be, but maybe you also appreciate now that the rules are different for some people.'

He watches her drive off when she has finished with her notes. The police are in Skodas now. They used to be in Rovers but that was when Rovers were good cars and Skodas were joke cars. **These claims, well, they're so outlandish I don't think anyone could really believe them,** Community Officer Delargy had said before closing her electronic notebook. It will be quiet again. He can carry on in his life of everyday unsuperiness.

'That was a bit naughty,' Doreen says, entering now that her rightful chair is hers again. A Tesco bag swings from the handles of her walker.

'What?'

'Pulling rank like that.'

'I did remember her. It was real, it happened. And I think at the end she may have remembered me.'

'Chester, it was over thirty years ago.'

'What's in the bag?'

'A present.'

'For me?'

'Who else would it be for? Not that you deserve it; that was a horrid thing to do, you bad old goat. Here you are anyway.'

In the bag is a brown paper parcel tied with string. The rule with Doreen's presents has always been no peeping. Chester does not break it now but it does smell of fabric conditioner, and the package is soft, springy to his touch. He tears open a corner. Crimson and gold spill out.

'I thought I'd thrown this out years ago.'

'You did. I threw it back in. Oh I know I was so very afraid, every time you went out, and I know that's why you got rid of it, but I couldn't. I couldn't. It needed a damn good wash, and I'm afraid some of the stretch has gone. Go on. You have to go. You have to find out.'

Chester Barnes holds the paper parcel in his hands.

'I won't leave you, Dor. I won't ever do that.'

He thinks he may have strained something scrambling over the wall. A twinge in the lower back. Stupid stupid stupid, with just a thought he could have been over it, quicker and less conspicuously than climbing up the moss-smooth faced stone. Chester Barnes pauses, stretches, one side then the other. Even superheroes need to warm up. He's only a stone throw from the main road, the yellow street light glows through the tree branches and the traffic is a constant rumble, but the Ormeau Park seems far away from the concerns of Haypark Avenue. The night is warm and the flowering shrubs release a tremendous sweetness. Shaking out the muscle cramp, stepping out boldly along the deserted path, he feels hugely alive. Every breath empowers. Here is a secret heart in the city and tonight he is connected to it as he

hasn't felt in years. With the merest flicker of his powers, he can steer clear of the dog shite as well.

'So Captain Miracle!' a voice booms from a rhododendron clump. Chester Barnes stops dead. For all his powers, he's a little shocked.

'You know I can see right into that rhododendron,' he says.

'You know, would you ever, once, let me finish?' says a peevisish, cigarette-thick voice from inside the shrubbery. 'Just let me say it. So, Captain Miracle! Tonight!'

'Tonight what, old enemy?'

'Tonight... we fly!'

Dr Nightshade, evil genius, Pasha of Crime, Tsar of Wrongdoing, steps from the rhododendron. He wears his purple cape and leotard; the Facility Belt has been let out at the waist and the mask sags over one eye. Chester doesn't remember him so short.

'So you made it then, Chester.'

'Well, Sean, you made it hard to refuse.'

'Good to see you anyway,' says Dr Nightshade. He extends a gloved hand. Chester Barnes takes and shakes it warily. 'I don't want to seem an ingrate, but I did kind of make an effort.' He indicates his costume. Chester Barnes steps back. With his two hands he takes his cardigan and tears it open. Golden yellow on scarlet shines forth: a glowing letter M.

'Give me two minutes.' Chester Barnes steps into the bushes. Dr Nightshade averts his gaze. In less than the advertised time he steps back, a hero in scarlet and gold, creased at knee and elbow, loose across the chest and tight across the belly. Chester tugs at the cape.

'I could never get this bloody thing to sit right.'

'I never bothered,' Dr Nightshade says. 'Pain in the hoop, capes. Shall we, er?' He nods down the empty path. They walk together, hero and villain.

'It feels rather odd,' Chester says, tugging decorously at his crotch. 'What if someone sees us?'

'I don't know, it feels kind of free to me,' says Dr Nightshade. 'A bit mad and wild. And there's much worse goes on in this park after dark.'

They stroll through the trees to the high point overlooking the football pitches. The grounds are closed up, someone has left a light on in the pavilion. Beyond the dark circle of the Ormeau Park, Belfast shines. Aircraft lights pass overhead.

'There's no one else understands, you know,' Dr Nightshade says.

'What about all those alumnus groups, the online forums, Heroes Reunited, all that?'

'Ach, who could be arsed with that? It's all bloody talk, and a few wankers like to hog the forum. And anyway, it's our thing, you know? A Belfast thing.'

'No heroes or villains here,' Chester says. 'Only politics. I thought you went to Spain after you got out?'

'It was good until everyone started moving there and, well, to be honest, it's expensive now. The pound's weak as piss against the euro and I'll let you into a wee super-villain secret; I was never that well off, thanks to you. Those Criminal Asset Recovery Boys; that's a real superpower. It's just, well, in the end, you understand more than anyone else.'

Traffic curves along the Ormeau Embankment. The river smells strongly tonight. The night smells merely strong. Chester Barnes looks up to the few stars bold enough to challenge Belfast's amber airglow.

'Do you ever?' Chester asks. 'Have you ever?'

'Oh no. It doesn't seem right. You?'

'No never. But tonight...'

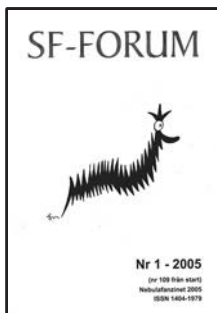
'Let's see if we still can. One last time,' says Dr Nightshade, suddenly fierce and passionate. 'Just to show we bloody can!'

'Because we bloody can, yes!' shouts Chester Barnes. 'Who's like us? Who can do what we can do? They're all too busy on their ipods to look up when they hear something go over their heads, too bloody busy texting to look up when they see a flash of light up there in the sun. Come on, we'll not get another chance.' He punches a fist at the stars, then runs after it, down the hill, pell mell, headlong, in golden boots over the dew-wet grass.

'Hey, wait for me you bastard!' cries Dr Nightshade and runs after his enemy, the only one who can ever understand him, but Captain Miracle is ahead and drawing away and Dr Nightshade is panting, heaving, the breath shuddering in his chest. He stops on the centre of spot of the football pitch, leaning on his thighs, fighting down nausea. Captain Miracle is far ahead, almost at the Ravenhill Road gates. Then he hears a strange cry and a peal of laughter, ringing out over the traffic and looks up to see a streak of gold and crimson arc up into the sky. The curve of light bends back over him, dips with a supersonic roar, then turns and climbs toward the lower stars with a faint, half-heard shout: 'Away Avaunt!'

Previously published in Lou Anders' Masked anthology of superhero stories.

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THE FIRST TIME—EUROCON 1

JOHN-HENRI HOLMBERG REMEMBERS

A lifetime ago I arrived late in the afternoon to the train station in Trieste in northeastern Italy, a small city of then around 150,000 inhabitants on a narrow strip of land between the Adriatic and the Slovenian border. Dusk was falling, it was July 11, 1972, and the next day the first Eurocon was to open.

So I managed to find my hotel, checked in, put my bag in the room and walked out into the deepening dusk, and was lost in the lingering heat of the summer day, in the humid air and winding cobblestone streets. I remember a weird discussion in some bar where I was warned not to speak German to anyone; everyone in Trieste knew German, I was told, since the town had been heavily garrisoned during the war, and in 1972 World War Two was only 27 years past, still devastating in memory. People hated the Germans and would refuse to admit to understanding the language, but they might also behave badly to someone who spoke it, I was told. Was that true at the time? I have no idea. Still later the same night, another heated discussion with other Italians in another bar. They told me that I was welcome to their town, as were all visitors who behaved well. But if I tried anything with any of their women they would beat me up and throw me in the sea, they added, just as a friendly warning. A strange place, but these were not fans.



Photo by Lars-Olov Strandberg

It took me a long time to find my hotel again. I had lost my way, but the walk was exhilarating: strange smells, strange whisperings in the wind, strange waves lapping a strange shore.

The convention was set to start with a reception where wine and snacks were to be served and the Mayor of Trieste would give an address and formally welcome the "delegates" to his city. But outside the building was a round, open space, in the middle of

it a fountain, and by the fountain was Forry Ackerman who began showing me slides of his vast collection on a hand viewer. How strange to be looking at Lon Chaney's Dracula cape and a copy of the Metropolis robot on a square in Trieste. And how bizarre. Let me admit it: this was one of the many times I thought unkindly thoughts about a fellow fan. What was wrong with Forry to travel halfway around the world but spend his time in a new country and a new city thinking and talking about and looking at images of the collection he had amassed at home. Wasn't science fiction about change?

Somehow the convention started. John Brunner was guest of honor and gave his talk early on the very first day; it didn't endear him to the continental Europeans present, since he spent much of it talking about the rotten translations often given to science fiction, misrepresenting the authors and cheating the readers. I had met Brunner a little over two months earlier, when he was guest of honor at that year's Swedish convention in Stockholm; in Trieste, he stayed in a hotel suite with his wife Marjorie and with a beautiful black stripper who was his current mistress. This made for weird situations, and at different times Marjorie spent hours talking to me about not really minding the open marriage she had with John, but very much minding his way of ignoring her while flaunting the other woman. On the other hand the other woman was funny, and carried around a book of poems that she showed me; inside it, she had glued nude photos of herself to the pages. John was not much amused when he saw me laughing and talking with her.

During the convention, you were expected to carry around things looking like transistor radios with earpieces; the program was translated into a number of languages and by dialing a language you understood you could get some inkling of what speakers were saying. I gave this up very quickly. The translators had no notion of science fiction; all titles of books and stories were translated literally and so impossible to identify; names were garbled and on the whole the experience of listening to the running translations was very funny, but only for a short while; an absurdist version of a meaningless, half-recognizable endless mumbling about nothing.

At the official party at the Castello di San Giusto the Mayor of Trieste was very Mayorial, in his dress of office with a heavy chain around his neck. Did he speak in very bad English or was his speech interpreted? I can't remember; I do remember vividly that he obviously had no idea of what this conference he was officially welcoming and inaugurating was really about. A French radio team with a producer, an interviewer and sound technicians was wandering the convention with a list of authors and other notables from several countries whom they wanted to interview; none of them knew a word of any other language than French. They were saved from disaster by Swedish fan and linguist Kristina Hallind, who interpreted for them, but perhaps the absurdity of it all would have come off better if she had declined.

I have no memories of the convention program, which I probably mostly didn't attend anyway since most of it turned out to be incomprehensible and anyway it quickly fell to pieces as no times were kept, and individual announced items were changed, cancelled, replaced with others or moved to different rooms. The convention was put on much too lavishly, with a hefty program book printed in full color and expensive advertising; in order not to go broke it was combined with an international sf and fantasy art show and a similarly international sf and fantasy film festival, both of highly dubious quality but with a decent number of paying attendees, while the Eurocon itself was fairly small although spread out among numerous buildings and hotels.

To further international understanding and appreciation, Eurocon awards were handed out in enormous numbers, the major ones consisting of gigantic and very ugly statues; some were voted on by those present, most with no conception of what they were about; other winners had been selected beforehand by dramatically different means in their home countries. A few authors—generally not the more famous ones whose possible defection would have been noticed—had been allowed to attend from a number of Communist countries and were easily recognized by being followed around by KGB guards and interpreters in dark suits; in the daytime, the authors were allowed to talk only in their native languages and via the political officers, but at night, they sneaked out to attend parties, drank heavily and talked directly to people in English and German. I watched one of the movies shown, the French “Le dernier homme” from 1969, directed by Charles L. Bitsch and starring my cousin Kerstin under her semi-assumed name Sofia Torkeli (a second given name she never used and her mother’s family name); she had gone off to France in 1963 to make her name as a model and actress, but ended up marrying the director and having no career. She is still bitter about it. But of course, why not see your cousin’s only leading role at a chaotic sf convention in Italy? Most people couldn’t talk to each other but milled around, trying gestures and smiles; everyone stayed up too late; we all drank too much, smoked too much, understood nothing of what was going on. On the final day, everyone had left, John and Marjorie Brunner and the beautiful stripper with her book of poetry went off, we all went off and I dragged my bag back to the train station and went somewhere else in that long, hot summer in Europe when the Berlin Wall still stood, Richard Nixon was campaigning and would soon win his second Presidential election while Watergate had just begun haunting him, *The Godfather* was the American movie of the year, Apollo 16 and 17 went to the moon, Jane Fonda toured North Vietnam, Northern Ireland exploded on Bloody Friday, eleven Israeli athletes at the Munich Summer Olympics were murdered by Black September terrorists, the last executions by guillotine were performed in France, Isaac Asimov won the best novel Nebula, Philip José Farmer the best novel Hugo and Heinrich Böll the Nobel in literature. It was a long time ago, in another world, in another fandom, while we all still believed that the future would be very different from what it became.

But no regrets. It was fun.

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Åldersgräns för medlemskap är 16 år. Yngre fantaster är givetvis välkomna på våra öppna aktiviteter i målsmans sällskap.



EUROCON 2010

A CON REPORT BY STEN THANING

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says: “All the longest journeys start with but a single step”.

The Chinese were wrong. All my long journeys start in exactly the same way that this one did—an annoyed THUD sound and an unsynchronized flapping of arms when I try to turn off my alarm clock way, way too early in the morning. All journeys start too early in the morning. That is a fact. Probably a natural law or something. Oh well, as we had to get to Cieszyn, Poland for Tricon (Eurocon 2010), we had to start early. At least, that was the brilliant plan. Now, at 4:30 in the morning, the plan suddenly didn't seem all that brilliant.

The hours passed in a rather foggy state, until I suddenly sat up, discovered that I was in a bus, looked out of the window and enthusiastically told Dessy that we were in Prague! Yay! Dessy rolled her eyes but agreed with me.

The other part of the brilliant plan was to realize that if we wanted to go to a Polish city, the best solution was to go to the Czech Republic. Namely, Prague. The disadvantage of Prague is that it's in the wrong country. The advantage of the city is that it is Prague. That is, of course, always a good thing.

After we had checked in to the hotel and were out on the sunny streets before noon, it felt as if almost made up for the start of the day. So ... what to do here? Lunch seemed to be a good idea. We found a small restaurant and ordered something that seemed appropriately Czech. It looked tasty, but as Dessy started to eat her mushroom soup, she suddenly stopped with an “uh-oh, we are not in Sweden anymore” look on her face.

“My soup is sweet. There is sugar. In the soup. They have put sugar in my soup.” I didn't see the problem, but apparently not everyone considers extra sugar to be a good thing.

In the evening I ordered something my dictionary claimed was “pig's neck”. The dictionary was in this case correct—I was indeed served a pig's neck. With skin and bones and bristles and everything. On a spit. It must have been almost one kilo of meat on it. Of course, I had forgotten to order any potatoes or vegetables or any of these things normal people usually eat together with meat. Czech food is fun. I like it.

On the way from Prague to Cieszyn we stopped in Kutna Hora to see the bone church, which was everything I had expected it to be and restored a big part of my faith in humanity. If you have a plague in your city and lots of people die, most people would feel kind of depressed and consider it exclusively a tragedy, right? Not these guys. “Well, at least we have bones from 40,000 people to play with—let's make some cool interior design pieces for the church!” Like the chandelier in the centre, which on a plaque next to it was calmly described as “contains all the bones in the human body”. When they used this church as a setting for the movie *Dungeons and Dragons*, one of the (numerous) criticisms of that movie was that even for an evil lair in a fantasy world, it looked way over-the-top evil and completely unbelievable. Hm.

Finally we arrived at Cieszyn, or as the city was called at the Czech side of the border, Český Tešín. However, we made our way over to the Polish side and our hotel. At

this hour, it was too late to do anything other than explore the immediate surroundings. That, however, led to results: a few meters from the hotel we discovered a milk vending machine. A *big*, blue, milk vending machine, about the size of an ice-cream truck filled with cows. You were apparently supposed to bring your own bottles, put them in the machine and press a button, and they would fill up with cold and fresh milk. Cool.

In the hotel we met Tomas, and later Mårten joined the convention, so in total we were four Swedes there. Not bad, for a far-away Eurocon.

Next day it was finally time to try and find said Eurocon. I forgot my GPS unit in the hotel, but the advantage of walking in the general direction towards an sf convention is that at any given time, dozens of obvious other members are doing the same thing, so it's easy to verify that you are on the right track. Plus, we had maps. I was still annoyed that I didn't have my GPS, but Dessy muttered something about how I should forget that and instead be annoyed that I didn't have my umbrella, as it rained heavily. Oh well. When we arrived I found out the main perk of being on the program: not only did I get a cute little stripe to put on my badge so everyone could see how Important I was, I also got the secret password to the Wi-Fi network. Wo-hoo! There was a convention around me, I had Internet access and the rain had stopped. Does life get better than this?

My immediate impression of Tricon was that the convention was a lot larger than I had expected. There were 13 separate program tracks and five gaming tracks, plus things going on in half a dozen other locations. Something like 300 program items in total, not counting the gaming items. (Unfortunately, with several participants for each item, my status as Important for taking part in the program kind of disappeared in the crowd.) The reason for the location in one (or, technically, two) cities right at the border was that was a collaboration of the Czech/Slovak and the Polish national convention. This meant that a lot of the program, naturally, was in a language I sadly didn't understand. These 300 program items rapidly dwindled down to about a tenth of the number. Still, that's about the same amount as in a normal Swedish con, so I shouldn't complain.

In addition to the English-language program items, there were a number of items who were bi-lingual, with translators. That never works. It didn't this time either. I tried to listen to Orson Scott Card's speech twice—one time with a Czech interpreter, the other time with a Polish interpreter. He would speak a sentence, then the interpreter would translate it, then he would go on to the next sentence and so on. That way, a 20 minute speech dragged on for an hour, and all natural rhythm was stripped out. That's a shame, because Card is actually a very funny guy. I might not agree with all his political opinions, but thankfully he left them out during this convention, and he *is* surprisingly interesting to listen to. Sadly, I only managed for about 20 minutes both times.

In my opinion, the convention had two big problems, apart from the "people kept speaking in languages I didn't understand" part, which I had kind of anticipated. First of all, the toilets were hidden and lacked signs pointing to them. When you finally found a bathroom door it was not at all obvious if it was the ladies or the gents kind of door. "Does an upside-down triangle mean a man or a woman?" is one of these logical problems that are much, much easier to solve when you are not in urgent need of being on the other side of the door. And they weren't next to each other either, so if you were wrong you had to go hunt for a more appropriate symbol.

The other problem was that the main part of the convention was in a university building a fair distance from the closest restaurant. The best hot-food alternative for the major part of the convention was the canteen. That is not necessarily a large issue, but ... um ... my first contact with said canteen was when I ordered a portion of lasagna. What they neglected to tell me was that the filling in the lasagna consisted of boiled (and chopped) liver. Admittedly, it wasn't the worst meal I ever had, but I do believe it was the worst meal I have ever paid for.

Apart from these nitpickings it was a rather well organized convention, and the few English language program items I visited were interesting and well executed. I didn't have much time to attend the program since I spent the major part of the convention sitting at a table in a rather fruitless attempt to sell memberships of Eurocon 2011 to random passers-by. Once again I realized that I am completely and utterly useless as a salesman. I actually think I scared away a person who had been thinking of buying a membership, but changed her mind when she heard my description of Swedish conventions.

Even if the lunches were not all that perfect it didn't really matter, because the program ended early enough in the evening that it felt natural to go to the town center and eat dinner. Cieszyn had some rather good restaurants. On a couple of occasions I confused the rest of my company by using the opportunity to grab some geocaches on the way. That is a hobby whose charm is harder than you would think to explain to outsiders.

"Hang on a second, I will just run off for 87 meters in that direction."

After a few minutes, when I have triumphantly returned:

"Are you finished?"

"Of course! I found a small film canister which was affixed on the inside of a false mailbox with a magnet."

"Who put it there?"

"I have absolutely no idea."

"Oh. So what did you do with it?"

"I wrote my name on a little note and put the canister back where I found it."

"I see. That sounds ... exciting. Really. Say, doesn't that look like a splendid restaurant over there?"

The Eurocon for the year 2012 will be held in Croatia (Zagreb, April 26-29, <http://zagreb-eurocon2012.com/>). Croatia might be a small country, but they have a surprisingly active fandom, and judging from the delegation in Tricon they are all really nice people. There was apparently a Eurocon planned in Zagreb for 1992, but due to the political climate at the time the decision was taken to move the convention to Germany instead. In hindsight, this was probably a good idea. Let's hope this attempt works better.

Since I was involved with Eurocon 2011 and also An International Person I visited a number of the ESFS program items. ESFS is an organization which at times takes its bureaucracy very, very seriously. I am not sure I can do the meetings justice in a believable way, so I can only recommend my readers to go there to see for yourselves. You might find it interesting.

Most of the time, the convention area was full of costumed people. There wasn't any organized masquerade; instead all members were given a bunch of voting stickers

which they were encouraged to give to people with good costumes. For some mysterious reason, the young women with very little clothing seemed to accumulate most of these stickers. However, one of the most sticker-covered people was not dressed up at all; I got a long and complicated reason for this, the gist of which seemed to be that it was a meta-competitor to show that you don't have to put yourself in a costume to be costumed, and competing is silly anyway, or something like that. If I recall correctly, he came in at second place.

Once in the corridor I met a running man in full Stormtrooper outfit. He asked me for the way to the bathroom. At least I think that was what he asked me about. I hope he wasn't in too much of a hurry, getting out of that suit looked like a rather intricate task.

The gaming program felt like a separate convention. They had their own location (in a separate country, even), their own section in the program book and from what I could find out seemed perfectly happy to play games and didn't mix a lot with the rest of the convention. I am sure they had a lot of fun.

On the lawn outside I once found a group of people in the process of getting dressed in medieval armor. Either they were competing for the costume prize or they were about to have some kind of tournament. I considered staying for a while, since I had lots and lots of comments like "The Czech is in the mail" (yes, it *is* funny. Almost as original as going to convention goes and ask them if they are North Poles or South Poles, or asking them to hold on to a magnet.), but it started to rain yet again, so I never found out whether the world now is ready for my sense of humor. Probably not.

There was no way to get a glass of beer during the day, but a couple of pubs opened in the convention area at night, which made it a lot more efficient to meet new and friendly people. Or maybe "more intensive" is the word I'm looking for. Or something. Except when it came to meeting people who wanted to go to sleep early.

On Saturday evening, the ESFS awards for best author and things like that were handed out in a very impressive manner in a sports area some distance away from the university. There was a TV team there and everything. We four attending Swedes were all at some point called to the stage to receive Spirit of Dedication prizes on some winning Swedes' behalf, or to accept the Eurocon flag which I had to promise not to mislay during the year. After the ceremony it—yet again—started to rain heavily, and Dessy and Tomas went back to the hotel while I, Mårten and Dave Lally shared a taxi to the convention pub. The pub was filled with beer and nice people, and the hours quickly disappeared. As they do. On the way home, even though I had a GPS, I somehow managed to get on the wrong side of both a railway track and a river. They certainly didn't use to be there. Mysterious.

The next day started with me talking about Swedish fandom in a panel, but I suspect I didn't say a lot of making-sense-stuff.

Because of reasons we had to be in Stockholm on Monday morning, so we were forced to leave the convention just before the final program item. Again, I had a brilliant plan for the journey—we wouldn't have to go all the way to Prague, only to the airport outside Ostrava, just 50 kilometers or so west of Cieszyn. My original plan had been to take a taxi directly from the convention, but after discussions with some natives and Tricon's information central I found out that it was a much better idea to get to Ostrava by train and then go to the airport from there.

Sure. Why not? As a bonus, we would get to see another city.

So we walked over to the Czech side of the border (of course it rained. That we had accepted at the natural state of things at this point), were confused by the ticket counter and missed the train by less than a minute. Not to worry, there was another train 20 minutes later, even though it was an old train which persisted in stopping in every single little village on the way. Not to worry, we still had lots and lots of time.

Upon arrival in Ostrava we quickly found an information office where they told us that the buses to the airport didn't go from there but from the bus station. "Don't worry, it's really easy to get there. Just take a local bus for a couple of stops and then a tram. It's quick. I can sell you ticket and exchange your Polish money while I'm at it."

Well, when we had got this far we could as well use this option, our budget was running out anyway. So we caught the bus, and after a couple of stops we got off it since the world outside didn't agree with our description. I fired up my trusty GPS and after a while and some minor adventures we were at the bus station. Not a minute too soon, the flight's departure time was getting closer at an alarming rate.

Here we found out a detail neither Tricon's nor Ostrava's tourist information office had mentioned. It was Sunday. This, combined with the helpful note stating that the regular airport shuttle wouldn't start until September, meant that during the next few hours there were absolutely no buses to the airport. At all. Neither from bus stop A, B, C, D, E nor F. I checked.

The bus station was kind of deserted, but there was a taxi parked some distance away, so I went there to negotiate. Um, what? He wanted *how much* to go to the airport? Hold it, there had to be a better way. The Ostrava airport is in the small village of Mošnov. Due to my earlier inspection of every single timetable in the area, I knew that there was a bus to Mošnov in ten minutes. Sadly, all information was in Czech, but there were a couple of nice-looking people waiting for the bus, and as luck would have it they spoke English. Yes, the bus usually went past the airport. No, it didn't actually stop there. But surely it would be possible to ask the driver nicely, they thought. They even offered to help with the persuasion.

15 minutes later the bus arrived and we started haggling with the driver. "No, no" he laughed. The bus would never go closer to the airport than three kilometers away. He could stop at that point, but then we would have to walk for three kilometers, he said while looking meaningfully on our heavy luggage. Dessy looked at her wristwatch, even more meaningfully.

Sigh. I admitted defeat, went to an ATM and then to the taxi. Twenty minutes later we were at the airport. We invested our last Czech money in a cup of coffee each in the café next to the entrance. This means that we were perfectly placed to see the bus (the shuttle that didn't run on Sundays) slowly and without any fuss roll in to the bus stop next to the café window two minutes later. Mffg.

I have to close this report with a quote from Roberto Quaglia in a panel about writing: "Life can be so difficult for an illiterate writer".



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A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM IN SWEDEN

JOHAN ANGLEMARK SKETCHES

OVERVIEW

Books that most of us today would label science fiction have been published in Sweden since the 19th century, but a fandom didn't appear until the middle of the 20th century. As in the USA, it was the science fiction magazines that were the direct cause.

The definition of "fandom" is rather narrow in Sweden, more so than in the USA and England from whence fandom comes, and more than in countries with a younger fandom. In the English-speaking world, all kinds of subfandoms, like roleplayers, trekkers, costumers, Tolkien, and anime, have generally branched from fandom and are part of fandom. In the younger fandoms, principally in Finland and the former East Bloc, most or all of these movements arose in parallel among the same people and so these fractions are more or less one single, multi-faceted movement, I have been led to understand. However, Sweden imported fandom at a time when it was just about books and science fiction, before the subfandoms arose. The people who are really into Star Trek, Tolkien, roleplaying, and anime started their clubs and conventions separately, mostly, and the various subfandoms have not really found each other yet. For that reason, this history is mostly about the fandom of written science fiction. For histories of roleplayers, trekkers, anime fans, and their conventions, you will have to turn elsewhere. The Tolkien movement will be mentioned briefly, however, because it partly did spring from fandom.

I will mention very few names in this history for the simple reason that the full list of people who have made significant contributions to Swedish fandom would easily run to more than a hundred.

In terms of activity, Swedish fandom had a good start in the 1950s, a disappointing 1960s, a spectacular 1970s, decent 1980s, a very weak 1990s and a healthy, stable 2000s. Fandom in Sweden can be said to have had three stretches: A first, enthusiastic burst came between 1954 and 1963-64 after which came a period of apathy, when SF publishing fell away and activity went down. The next stretch was longer, it started about 1969 and went on until approximately 1991-92. It was more mature, with more focus on literary criticism, and fans turned professional helped to turn out massive amounts of (mostly translated) SF. It petered out around 1990 because of massive internal fighting during the second half of the 1980s and the collapse of SF publishing. The third stretch started in about 1996-97, and is characterised by the Internet revolution, less turmoil, some greying, and fanzines dying off. However, this time there has been no revival in SF publishing to talk of.

BEGINNINGS: MAGAZINES AND PEOPLE

The first "real" SF magazine was Jules Verne Magasinet (JVM)—although it printed a lot of non-SF adventure stories too—, published between 1941 and 1947. Despite the fact that most of the early fans devoured it when they were younger, it never created a fandom directly. However, it created a number of "proto fans" who started to

coalesce in the early 1950s. In Stockholm, they formed the club Futura under the ægis of the poet, journalist, and author Sture Lönnerstrand—by some called the father of Swedish fandom. Futura started as a book discussion group, but eventually began publishing fanzines and organising conventions after the magazine Håpna! (“Be amazed!”) was launched in 1954.

Håpna! was the creation of publishers Kurt and KG Kindberg in cooperation with Lönnerstrand. It was in general circulation, sold at newsagents. It actively promoted the founding of SF clubs and published letters where readers could come into contact with other readers—much like *Amazing Stories* in its day in the USA. And it had the same effect: this was the real reason a Swedish fandom grew strong.

Jules Verne Magasinet was revived, a little hesitantly, in the years around 1970. In 1972 Sam Lundwall took it over and turned it into one of Europe’s best SF magazines, with a lively letter column and eventually a fandom section, which recruited scores, if not hundreds, of new fans in the 1970s and 1980s. It was the focal point of Swedish fandom for over a decade, from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s.

In 1982, Jules Verne Magasinet saw a competing magazine appear, *Nova Science Fiction*, published by John-Henri Holmberg and Per Insulander. The magazine lasted around five years but was later revived in the 2000s. In its revived form, it has published some of the best SF short stories to appear in Swedish, but because of the current cultural climate and the impossibility of small magazines to reach out affordably, its print run has been much smaller than it deserves and it has not had any impact outside fandom.

Sam Lundwall (1941–) who turned pro in the late 1960s/early 1970s might be Sweden’s finest SF author so far and the best-known outside of Sweden. He published some of the most interesting fanzines in the 50s/60s and he took over the recently revived Jules Verne Magasinet in 1972. He also co-founded and edited Sweden’s most famous SF publishing company, Delta Science Fiction, for many years, publishing several hundred SF books in characteristic yellow covers. JVM is still being published in a way; Lundwall has announced that he will do a series of CDs/DVDs with text and audio during 2011 before folding JVM for good. Lundwall is probably the most important SF fan to have emerged in Sweden, and the one with the best claim to being Sweden’s Mr. Science Fiction. He also did ground breaking work as a critic and a bibliographer.

John-Henri Holmberg (1949–) is, together with Lars-Olov Strandberg, Sweden’s most persistent fan. He published his first fanzines in 1963 and has been a very active fan and SF professional (as an editor, translator, critic, and publisher) since then—awarded E. E. Evans Big Heart Award at the 2005 Worldcon. He has published several histories of science fiction and the magazine *Nova Science Fiction*. As a Guest of Honour at this convention, he is given a fuller introduction on page 17.

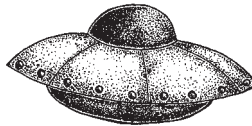
CLUBS AND MORE PEOPLE

I have already mentioned Futura. Two other pioneering SF clubs were Club Meteor in Malmö, which was dominated by the superfan and later professional author Dénis Lindbohm, and Club Cosmos in Gothenburg, which is still going strong. Club Cosmos was formed as a direct consequence of Håpna!’s exhortations to form clubs. The late 1950s was also a time of forming federations of sf clubs, or as they were termed, “unions”, with names as SF-Union Göteborg, SF-Union Stockholm, Luncon-Unionen,

Stockon-Unionen, and SF-Union Skandinavien. The purpose was to gather all lovers of science fiction in Sweden (or Scandinavia in a couple of cases) into one humongously large society to goad them on to great collective efforts. All of these wacky schemes failed dismally, sometimes almost immediately. The only one to survive was Skandinavisk Förening för Science Fiction (SFSF) which was proposed as a more modest version. SFSF is still around and actually one of the sponsors of this Eurocon.

Lars-Olov Strandberg (1929–) has been more of an eminence grise, a member of the board in several fandom organisations, a constant member of convention committees into his 70s, and a reliable and even-tempered rock in times of turmoil in Swedish fandom. He became active in fandom in 1956, when he attended Luncon, the first Swedish convention, and he is a founding member of both SFSF and the Stockholm Tolkien Society Forodrim. He was also the chair of the Alvar Appeltofft Memorial Foundation from the start until the late 90s.

Regionally, in the 1950s, fandom was concentrated to Malmö/Lund in the south, Gothenburg in the west and to Stockholm. In the 1960s Stockholm became even more prominent and went on to completely dominate the 1970s. In the 1980s, Gothenburg saw a revival and in the 1990s new fan groups were making noise in Linköping and Uppsala while Gothenburg and Malmö/Lund more or less disappeared from the map. Malmö/Lund has remained off the map into the present day, but Gothenburg has made a strong come back, led by new enthusiastic fans. That's where today's fans are concentrated in Sweden: Gothenburg, Linköping, Stockholm, and Uppsala.



In Uppsala, a loose confederation of fans refused to organise formally but ran three cons between 1985 and 1990, and then again five cons between 1996 and 2000. In addition to running cons, they have mostly met at the pub to drink beer and chat. In Linköping, the Linköping Science Fiction Association, LSFF, was founded in the late 80s, and has organised a number of conventions from 1991 onwards. They also meet to watch TV, talk books and drink beer. A third group, Sigma Terra Corps in a suburb to Stockholm, started as a Swedish branch of Germany's Perry Rhodan club Terra Corps. They arranged a string of relaxed, small cons throughout the 80s.

Tolkien fandom, largely (but not entirely) separate from science fiction fandom, had an early start in Sweden. The Tolkien Society of Sweden was Europe's first Tolkien club, founded in 1968, before the Tolkien Society in England. They made a decision in the 1970s not to recruit new members, and today they are mostly a very small circle of old friends meeting once a year. In 1972, Forodrim was founded here in Stockholm, and in 1973 a Tolkien club started in Uppsala. Both the older groups, but not the Uppsala club, were started by science fiction fans.

South Sweden's most famous fan was Dénis Lindbohm (1927–2005). He was a photography technician with a sophisticated sense of humour who became a highly original fanzine publisher, an amateur filmmaker, an occultist, and a published author.

He was the driving force in Malmö's Club Meteor and remained in fandom until his death.

Skandinavisk förening för science fiction (SFSF) started in 1960 and has been Sweden's largest SF club. It counted a couple of dozen members in the early 60s but grew to 200 in the mid 70s. After fusing with a defunct book club, the number of members rose to 800 before falling off again, but the size of SFSF in the late 70s enabled it to have its own clubhouse with activities almost every day in the week and to import books on a large scale, an activity which eventually, several years later led to what is today Science Fiction-bokhandeln, perhaps Europe's largest SF speciality bookstore. It was also out of SFSF that the Alvar Appeltofft Foundation grew.

Most Swedish fans of renown, at least in the 1960s and 1970s, have been active in SFSF. This includes famous people like Stieg Larsson (of *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* fame) and big names like Lars-Olov Strandberg, Bo Stenfors, John-Henri Holmberg, Jörgen Peterzén, and Mats Linder.

Alvar Appeltofft (1942–1976) was an incredibly active teenage fan in the 1950s, intent on spreading the holy gospel of fandom and science fiction to everyone in Sweden. He was so obsessed with fandom and science fiction that he failed exams in school whereupon his parents forbade him to have anything to do with fandom and sold off his book collection. He suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalised for years to come. His mental health remained frail and he died in 1976, probably from suicide (the cause of death was never made official). His aged parents wanted to honour his memory and donated the money used to launch the Alvar Appeltofft Memorial Foundation.

The Alvar Appeltofft Memorial Foundation has been giving out grants to SF fans since 1978. The most important grant, and for a long time the only one awarded, is the Alvar Memorial Prize. The list of Alvar winners comprises a handy Who's Who of prominent Swedish fans of the last 35 years. (However, it is not an award for long and faithful service, so many big names like Sam Lundwall and John-Henri Holmberg have never received it.) Today, the Foundation is popular in fandom also because it accepts used SF books as donations from fans and then travels to conventions selling them, thus eking out its capital.

FANZINES AND CONVENTIONS

Fanzines were always, until the Internet revolution, a central part of Swedish fandom. As mentioned elsewhere, SF-Forum from SFSF has been published for over 50 years. In the late 1970s, a co-distribution organisation was founded to distribute fanzines to Swedish fans. You simply subscribed to six distributions at a time, and any fanzine editor could send their fanzine to the Official Editor to have it distributed for free. This organisation, SFF (Sveriges fanzineförening), still exists, although the last half decade there have not been more than one or two packages of fanzines per year. Today, there are virtually no fanzines being published any longer, except the SFF Bulletin and one or two more. For a while in the 1980s, SFF's board members lived in Gothenburg and enthusiastically took the ferry to Denmark every time it was time to mail fanzines because both the beer and the postage was cheaper there.

In the 1950s, there were one or two SF conventions a year in Sweden. During the 1960s, this dropped to less than one con a year. In the 1970s, it rose once more to on an average two cons a year going up to about three a year during the 1980s—but many

of these were quite small. The number dropped again to about two a year in the 1990s and has remained there since then. Most of the activity in Swedish fandom during the 1990s was concentrated to the second half of the decade—as mentioned elsewhere, there was a revival in Swedish fandom in 1996-97. Since 1998, there has also been a national convention, the Swecon, voted on yearly. Before the Swecon was institutionalised, the convention scene had been fractured with several small cons but no clear focus; no convention you could attend and hope to meet most of the active fans. The Swecon has taken care of that.

As for the size of the conventions, the pattern follows the general trends of fandom activity, of course. In the 1950s and 60s, conventions were rather small with an average of 50 members. In the 1970s, they became much larger, averaging at 200. In the 1980s they dropped to 90-100, but this average obscures the gap that developed between small relaxacons with 50–60 members and a couple of large cons with 200+ members. In the 1990s the size remained at just under 100 members, but much more evenly distributed. The previous decade saw figures rise to around 110 members on an average, again with a widening gap between cons with 70–80 members and cons with around 200 members. The largest convention up to the time of writing, was Scancon '76 at the same premises as this Eurocon—around 600 registered members, of which about 450 actually attended the convention. (It was a collapsed Worldcon bid, and had many early supporters who never showed up when it did not become a Worldcon.)

TODAY

Science Fiction-Bokhandeln, the SF bookshop in Stockholm, deserves a special mention. It is one of the most impressive offsprings of Swedish fandom. It started in the late 1970s as the collective book importing service run by the SFSF, for the members of the SFSF. Then SFSF got itself a small shop and sold books to the public. After a few years, four of the people who spent most of their time selling SFSF's books decided they would like to take it a step further, but only if they could do it as their own business; they were tired of putting in all that time as almost unpaid volunteers. If not, they wanted to quit. The members of SFSF said yes to letting them buy the stock for a symbolic sum and the new owners formed a company. That was over twenty years ago, and the business has been growing ever since. Today they have three shops, the Stockholm shop is one of the world's largest SF speciality shops and they have been one of the most profitable bookstores in Sweden for several years running.

Today, Swedish fandom stands on three legs. There's the Swecon, held annually. Then there are the mailing lists, principally the Fanac list. And then there are the monthly pub meetings in Stockholm, Uppsala, Gothenburg, and Linköping. The number of people involved is several hundred, in all ages between 18 and 81.

SOURCES

Unpublished texts by John-Henri Holmberg

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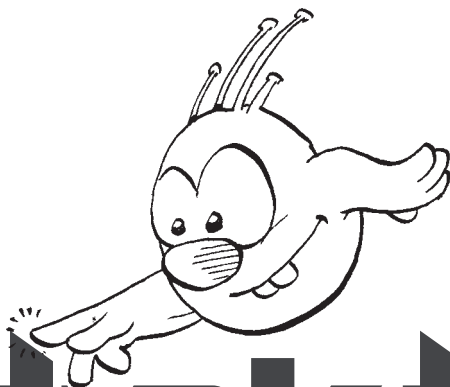
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Eurocon 2012 & 34th Sferakon

Guests of Honour:

Tim Powers

Darko Macan



Kontakt

26-29 April 2012

Zagreb, Croatia

www.zagreb-eurocon2012.com

CROATIAN FANDOM

A GEEKY NATION

For such a tiny country, with a population of just over 4.3 million, Croatia has a huge fandom. One convention—SFeraKon—gets around one thousand visitors, and three others—Istrakon, Rikon, and Liburnicon—easily get near or over 500 members. There are several smaller conventions as well. The other important feature is a rather young fandom—the average age is probably under 30.

Most Croatian conventions have an “all-around” programme, to fit all tastes: lectures and panels on literature, science and fan stuff, but also gaming and movies. There are no specialized conventions, and manga fans, for example, gather at SFeraKon. Also, there are no LARP conventions, even though lately, there has been a revival of the LARP scene.

We have rather good connections with fandom in Bosnia, Serbia, and Slovenia, but we have had very little contact with the rest of Europe. We hope that Kontakt—the Eurocon 2012 & 34th SFeraKon, to be held in Zagreb on 26th to 29th April 2012—will change that.

More at <http://zagreb-eurocon2012.com>.

SFERAKON

- Where: Zagreb
- When: last full weekend in April
- Organised by: SFera
- Typical attendance: 900+

www.sfera.hr, www.sferakon.org

The oldest and biggest Croatian convention, organized by the Zagreb SF club SFera since 1979. In 1986, SFera hosted Eurocon with Sam Lundwall as a Guest of Honour. Today, SFeraKon hosts distinguished foreign GoHs and the programme is varied, with a strong emphasis on popular science and literature. However, there are also quizzes and games for those with a more relaxed approach to SF. In addition, SFeraKon visitors also get an annual collection of Croatian SF stories included in their membership fee.

ISTRAKON

- Where: Pazin, Istria
- When: late-March
- Organised by: Albus
- Typical attendance: 500+

www.istrakon.hr

If Zagreb has the strongest convention, the Istrian one is the most beloved. The first Istrakon was held in 2000 as a part of “Jules Verne days”. Today it is a self-standing convention whose popularity among the Croatian fans is immense. Although there are many lectures and panels about SF and fantasy, Istrakon’s team of organizers also likes

to keep the attendees entertained by an abundance of games, shows, quizzes and concerts.

RIKON

- Where: Rijeka
- When: early October
- Organised by: 3. Zmaj
- Typical attendance: 300+

www.3zmaj.hr

The most important autumn destination for Croatian fans. In the last couple of years, RiKon established itself firmly as the third most important convention in Croatia. The convention has a diverse programme with a bit of everything—from popular science over literature to games.

LIBURNICON

- Where: Opatija
- When: late July
- Organised by: Kulturni Front
- Typical attendance: 500+

www.kulturnifront.hr

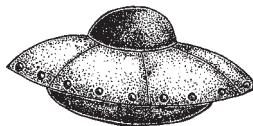
The youngest and a very enthusiastic convention, in one of the top coastal Croatian destinations, started in 2006 ago as “Abbacon”, with just the right mix of entertainment, literary events and science, so their attendance passed the 500 mark last year.

FESTIVAL FANTASTICNE KNJIZEVNOSTI

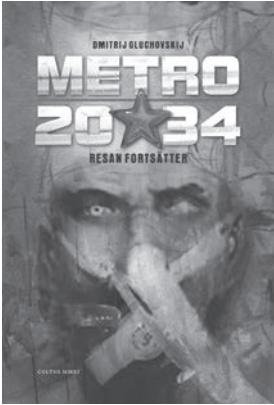
- Where: Pazin
- When: August
- Organised by: Albus
- Typical attendance: 100+

bookaleta.blog.hr/

This is a small but cosy literature festival for bookishly inclined fans, and a favourite destination for SF&F writers from Croatia and neighbouring countries. The programme is very relaxed—just the right thing for the Mediterranean summer.



Sommarnyheter!



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Se www.coltso.se för mer information.

»Jag är normalt ganska sval inför framtidsscenarier med sf-inslag, men Gluchovskij bryter ner mitt motstånd mot genren och drar mig med på en svindlande, omtumlande färd genom Moskvas underjordiska tunnelsystem. «

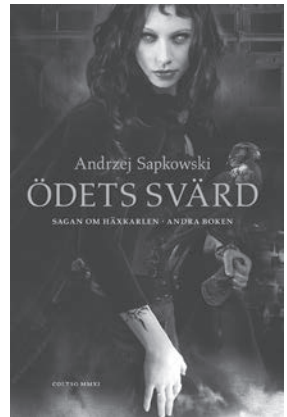
Nils Schwartz, Expressen



MAX FREI
Resan till Kettari



PC JERSILD
Efter floden



ANDRZEJ SAPKOWSKI
Försynens svärd



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STEAMPUNK IN SWEDEN

ANNA DAVOUR SURVEYS THE LAND

A couple of years ago, steampunk seemed to turn mainstream. What can you say about an aesthetic movement that gets big in scrapbooking and home decor? English-speaking media picked it up, playing on the visual appeal, and brought the concept of steampunk to a wider audience. This, inevitably, led to a commodification of the iconic props, with results from the really exclusive to the outright tacky.

What got big was the pictures, with emphasis on the neo-victorian reimagining of contemporary technology and perhaps people in top hats or bustle skirts. Look deeper, and you find more: a whole sprawling culture. Or is it several?

My definition of steampunk goes something like this: *new interpretations of the aspects of the Victorian culture that catch your fancy*. Imperfect, like most definitions, but it contains two important aspects. The first is that it has to be a new take on something, you need to add your own interpretation, otherwise it will not be steampunk but only neo-victorian. The other is that steampunk is very varied, and different people emphasise very different aspects of the age they take their inspiration from.

Steampunk is actually just a label (which itself was originally more or less a joke). An interesting label, that tickles the imagination. Apply this label to things, and suddenly you bring them together under the umbrella of a common name. That's where really interesting things start to happen. People find each other, are inspired by each others creations, and go on to create new things. Quite a few say things like: "This is something I have always been interested in, I just didn't have a name for it." But now there is all the interbreeding of DIY (do it yourself), costuming, music, roleplaying, japanese pop culture, technology history, and actually also the angry young people wanting to change the world.

There might be some disagreement about how much interplay there is between literature and the rest of the steampunk expressions, in this day and age where it's so easy to find just the people with your own very narrow interest. Still, things happen because of improbable meetings under this common label, and there are enough people with a broad interest in several expressions of steampunk to bridge some of the gaps. Authors are inspired by the tactile and visual, and costumers and makers are inspired by stories.

By now, steampunk is well established in the world of the fantastic, and in many countries it has been very visible at conventions. What about steampunk in Sweden: does it exist, and what is it like?

SWEDEN

For a couple of years now, I have been trying to investigate the steampunk scene in Sweden. Outside the world of LARPs (live-action roleplaying), Swedish steampunk consists of scattered enthusiasts, often not knowing about each other and sometimes meeting only on the international discussion boards (notably Brass Goggles). Some people are building things, doing steampunk mods of, for example, computers or bicycles. There are a couple of authors writing steampunk stories, but as far as I know no major work has yet been published since steampunk became an established subgenre. There are also people just generally inspired by the steampunk look, who apply it to their jewelry or crafts projects.

LARP is fairly big in Sweden. LARPer already have the DIY mindset, and so perhaps it is not surprising that this is one of the areas where steampunk has got a hold in our country. In a LARP you can create a world, and tell a story together in a way that involves clothes, props and surroundings in a complete experience.

For a while, there was a LARP society in Gothenburg (Göteborg) called Eximia Navigatio, attempting to become a general interest steampunk society. The Facebook group attracted hundreds of members, but very few of those were active in any way (as things go, you know what it's like). This society died and vanished, with no official explanation to the members. Now, there are other steampunk LARPs being planned, and people are throwing out ideas for other kinds of meetings for interested people.

With the help of the internet, all kinds of gatherings can be arranged; perhaps this will happen more. There is an annual "turn of the century picnic" in Gothenburg, and some people in Västerås are inviting those interested to a steampunk tea party. There's even been talk about a steampunk convention; the future will show how that turns out.

Early last year I published a steampunk fanzine, followed by a blog where I try to cover what there is of steampunk interest, mostly within our borders.

Since steampunk is very peripheral and Sweden is fairly small, the media coverage has been almost negligible. An exception was a special issue of the magazine *Voltaire* last year, with a broad coverage of things steampunk and with a fairly deep analysis of some aspects.

All in all, it looks like steampunk is growing in Sweden. Time will tell what kind of expressions it will take.



CARRIE RYAN
DE VASSA
TÄNDERNAS
SKOG

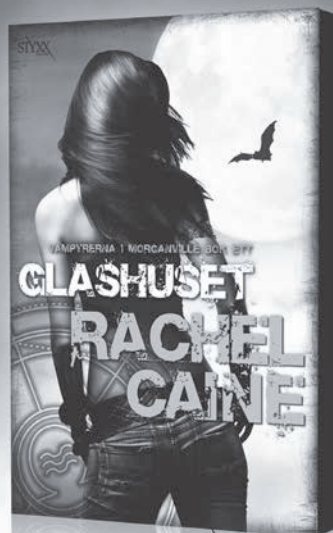
*"Så fångslande att man
vågar påstå att zombier
kanske är de nya
vampyrerna."*

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GLASHUSET

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men med mer bett."*

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AT THE TIME OF PRINTING, 30 MAY 2011—483 members

Elizabeth Bear, GoH, USA

Ian McDonald, GoH, UK

Jukka Halme, fan GoH, FI

John-Henri Holmberg, GoH, SE

The membership list has been omitted for reasons of privacy.

BECOME INVOLVED!

There are active groups of science fiction fans in at least Uppsala, Stockholm, Linköping, Gothenburg; and there are several online fora where we meet and talk. If you are new to all this and want to get involved in Swedish fandom, or if you have been out of touch and want to return, this is where you find us:

www.fandom.se

use the tabs to find the discussion forum and the listing of pub meetings

www.alvarfonden.org

see the tab **Länkar** for links to mailing lists and club pages.

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