

# looking askance at Europe



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ROTTERDAM

PRAGUE BALKBRUG  
ST. OCKPORT AMSTERDAM



Edited & published by John Purcell, 3744 Marielene Circle, College Station, TX 77845-3926 USA

Proof reading on this issue courtesy of our cats Inga, Eyegore, and Froderick. If there are typos anywhere in this issue, these are the responsible parties. Good help is so hard to find these days.

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## Plunk your magic twanger, Froggie!

Nostalgia is a wonderful thing. You tend to remember stuff that gives you warm fuzzy feelings inside your tummy as you remember this and that from your college years, grade school, high school marching band in the rain (okay, not so fuzzy warm: just glad you graduated and got the hell out of there), playing little league baseball on warm summer days, ice skating in the dead of winter, looking up at a cold, cloudless, night-time winter sky, watching a meteor streak across the heavens, or remembering the craziest things at the oddest times.

Memories – come to think of it – are just as bad, perhaps crazier. Just the other day I wandered out into the living room where Valerie was deeply involved with lesson preparation for her 10<sup>th</sup> grade English classes at Bryan High School (yes, she started a full-time job there this past August), and I blurted out, for no earthly reason whatsoever, “Plunk your magic twanger, Froggie!” and kept walking towards the kitchen in search of ice cream.

Valerie stared at me. “What?” she deadpanned.

“I said,” I said, “plunk your magic twanger, Froggie!” That’s what Andy Devine used to say whenever it was time for Froggie to appear and banter with Andy.” I don’t think my explanation resonated with her, judging by the vacant look on Valerie’s face.

“And this concerns me how?”

“Well... I guess it doesn’t,” I conceded, then added, “It’s from a kid’s show way back when. You know: in the 1950’s.”

“Oh, yeah. Before I was born. You were probably married to your first wife then.”

“Har-dee-har-har,” I said in my best Jackie Gleason impersonation. “You’re a laugh riot, that’s what you are.” Wagging my finger like Ralph Kramden did a prior lifetime ago, I continued, “One of these days: Bang! Zoom!”

Valerie sadly wagged her head. “Oh, shut up!”

I never knew she had ever watched *The Honeymooners*. Alice Kramden would have been proud of that line’s perfect delivery.



## TAFFish Thoughts

We can't help keep talking about our trip last year to Europe. Being inveterate (as opposed to invertebrate, which physically describes us, but that's not important right now) news watchers on our satellite dish television service, we catch ourselves pointing at the screen and saying, "We were there" when we recognize a building or scenery on the program. It really is quite amazing to think that Valerie and I traipsed around a good chunk of Europe, stressful situations and all, and survived to tell the tale. It really was an incredible experience, and I recommend any and all science fiction fans to stand for a fan fund in any direction. Next year's Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund destination is Dublin, Ireland, for the 77<sup>th</sup> World Science Fiction Convention. In 2020 the Worldcon will be in New Zealand, so that's the Down Under Fan Fund Destination. Both years are Get Up and over Fan Fund objectives. These are fantastic places to go and meet friends from around the world, but don't forget to plan in a few extra weeks of travel time to see the sights and enjoy yourselves. It is definitely worth the effort.

Speaking of TAFF, the official nomination period began on October 1<sup>st</sup>, so if anybody reading this is planning on standing for this particular race to Dublin, get your name in by November 22, 2018 to either me or Johan Anglemark, the new European TAFF Administrator, along with the names of your five nominators (three from North America, two from Europe). Each nominator must likewise contact either one of us stating that they are behind your candidacy, and the candidate himself or herself must submit a 101-word platform statement and send that to either Johan or I, along with a \$20 USD or £20 Sterling bond payment as a sign of your intent to make the trip should you win. Full information regarding the procedure is at <https://taff.org.uk/>, so don't be shy: stand for TAFF in 2019. Hie thee to Dublin Towne to hobnob and gather with thine fine fannish friends over a pint of bitters, and kiss the Blarney Stone.

But avoid kissing the porcelain throne. I doth not recommend that!

## Holy Sasquatch, Batman!

Well here I am, at the start of the 45<sup>th</sup> issue of this fanzine, and realizing that I am starting to stare down the barrel of a 50<sup>th</sup> issue arriving at the end of calendar year 2019. Whenever that fact pops into my head I begin to wonder if I should stop pubbing *Askance* at that juncture or keep it going. Whatever I decide, this has definitely been a fun ride, and so for now I am going to concentrate on getting the next five issues completed – I really want to get the 46<sup>th</sup> issue out as close to the next New Year's opening salvo as possible – so that I don't have to worry about what to do for when the Big 5-0 hits.

In light of the theme of the 46<sup>th</sup> iteration of *Askance* – Steampunk in its various guises, meaning books, movies, music, costuming, and artwork – one thought that has crossed my mind is to morph *Askance* into a dominantly Steampunk fanzine, or just end it at 50 and start up a new zine devoted to the Steampunk genre. This is a very tempting thought. I most certainly enjoy fanzines – this is probably my favorite aspect of the science fiction community – so cogitating on a specific sub-genre zine is attractive.

But like I said, I really don't plan on doing this immediately, yet the idea has begun nibbling in the deepest recesses of my brain.

I am surprised the idea hasn't died from malnutrition.

## **Who's in this issue**

Some new faces are involved this time around, and this is a wonderful thing. Allow me to introduce this issue's cast of characters.

### **Teddy Harvia**

Seriously: I really should not have to introduce this multi-Hugo winning fan artist and all around nice guy. Sometimes I consider Teddy – and his alter ego David Thayer – a Texas landmark, much like the Sul Ross statue on the Texas A&M University campus, but fortunately Teddy is not a target for pigeons and other birds that strafe the Sul Ross statue. Teddy has graciously provided yet another installment of “Chat: the 4<sup>th</sup> Fannish Ghod” for this fanzine.

### **Sam Long**

Getting a collection of song and poem parodies from Sam was a special treat. Over the course of the next few issues I will be publishing some of these in future issues. A bit of literary background will probably aid in your enjoyment of these.

### **Ian Millsted**

While the train Valerie and I were on was passing Bristol, England, we waved in the general direction of that city because that is where Ian lives. He was kind enough to share some thoughts about Cambridge University for *Askance* after I asked, and I didn't have to break out the new set of thumbscrews I ordered from Amazon.

### **Karl-Johan Norén**

This was an unexpected yet delightful contribution that Karl-Johan posted on Facebook this past August in honour of 2018 TAFF Delegate Johan Anglemark visiting Texas as part of this year's sojourn out to the San Jose Worldcon. If you go to the Internet it is easy enough to find an audio rendition of the song upon which this filk song “Anglemark at TAFF” is based. The subject matter of this song actually sang the original tune for me so I could match up the words to the melody.

### **Kevin Still**

This is one of my colleagues at Blinn College here in Bryan, Texas. Kevin is a big fan of horror literature and movies, with additional interests in the local music scene, particularly the hard-rock, grunge indie bands that play in the area. Along with Kelly Minnit, Kevin also puts out the monthly fanzine *Represent979* which not only promotes the local artistic scene, but also offers opinion pieces, movie, book, and beer reviews. This book review first appeared in a recent edition of Kevin's zine.



# ARMADILLOCON 40: BOOKS, BEERS, AND SQUIRREL NUTS

BY JOHN PURCELL



Granted, ArmadilloCon 40 was held well over three months ago – the weekend of August 3 – 5, 2018 in Austin , Texas – and with the chilly breath of mid-November breathing down the back of my neck, it is definitely time to put pixelated words on virtual paper and get this convention report done once and for all.

Aa part of the deal of our hosting 2018 Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund winner Johan Anglemark on his whirlwind trek across North America during the summer of this year, I arranged for all of us to attend ArmadilloCon 40 over in Austin, Texas. Frankly, I am surprised that I have never attended this convention before since Austin is barely a two-hour drive west of College Station, making it practically a short Texas day trip. (Valerie and I live slightly off-center in a metropolitan triangle formed by the cities of Houston, San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas/Forth Worth. Draw a straight line down from DFW to



Houston and the city of Waco is included as well.) Besides procuring his membership, Johan was set up in the convention hotel, the Omni Southpark (no Kyle, Kenny, or other foul-mouthed animated children were there; just foul-mouthed, non-animated adults) while my room (Valerie could not attend because she was preparing for her newly acquired teaching position) was a short block away at the Quality Suites. In fact, only one large office building with its adjacent parking garage and lot stood in the way, so getting from place to place was only a few minutes' walk. No

problem.

Overall, ArmadilloCon 40 was a very pleasant surprise for me, and Johan seemed to enjoy himself immensely. He marveled at the dead armadillo on the side of the road (see photo above right), which I assured him was that animal's natural state in Texas, and enjoyed meeting a lot of old fannish friends and making a whole bunch more. I was astonished to see Carolina Gomez Lagerlof at ArmadilloCon: she is a prominent Swedish fan, the recipient of the Big Heart Award at Worldcon 75 the previous year in Helsinki. That was a heck of a beginning to what would turn out to be a good weekend for meeting fans and writers. As it turned out, there were many people at this convention that I last saw in Helsinki. Who knew? This just shows to Goya how intertwined the sf community is, geography be damned, and all that.



The focus of ArmadilloCon has always been literary. Over the years it has earned a reputation as being a solid traditionally fan-run science fiction convention, and now that I have had a few months to digest the experience, I can see why. The overall attendance was in the 350-375 range, which is a nice moderate sized convention in my book. That gave Johan and I a very good chance at meeting a lot of people and wandering around the dealer's room, which had a lot of books. Yes, Virginia: real, paper-product, hold-it-in-your-hand books! Nearly every single dealer had them for sale. Even Brad and Cindy Foster (here on the right) had his art books on display.



Surprisingly enough, I did not buy a lot of books, although the temptation was extraordinarily strong.

I only purchased two that served the purpose of filling holes in my collection, so that made me happy. Joe Lansdale – one of my favorite authors these days – signed and donated a first edition copy of his book *A Fine Dark Line* for TAFF auctioning. **[Unabashed Sales Plug:** If anybody reading this issue is interested in making a bid on that book, the minimum bid is \$20 (cover price): email me if you are.] William Ledbetter was likewise in attendance, and he thanked me for being one of his beta readers for his Nebula Award winning novelette “The Long Fall Up.” He chuckled at my suggestion of scratching my name into the award base before saying, “That is highly doubtful.” Bill’s a good guy.



Other people I was surprised to see in Austin were Randall Shepard, Ben Yalow, and Robert Sawyer, and very surprised that Pat Virzi was not in attendance. Bummer. I was really hoping she would be there so that we could talk about the possibility of bringing Corflu back to Texas in a few years.

As for programming, I was able to get to quite a few items, notably the memorial panel on prominent Texas fan Bill Crider, legendary author and rapsclion Harlan

Ellison, and others. The readings by Lansdale and Ledbetter were very enjoyable, however the convention suite was not the center of attention after hours as I anticipated. The lobby bar in the Omni Hotel certainly was, featuring a wide assortment of local beers. Johan and I ran a very successful TAFF Auction on Saturday afternoon, and my noon Sunday “Busking for TAFF” concert (very loose definition there) garnered even more dollars and donated items, which included three Steampunk watch bands. [Any takers?] The overall amount raised for the TAFF coffers was \$247,



which was way more than I expected. The generosity of fans – and the ArmadilloCon 40 committee, which likewise donated to the cause – is astonishing, and we thank everyone for making our effort so successful.



Randall Shepard and Ben Yalow chatting away at the Dublin in 2019 table in the dealer's room.

A few words about “Busking for TAFF” are needed. My original plan was to give a concert of a dozen original and cover songs that I have developed over the past few years of performing at open mic nights at the Village Inn in Bryan, Texas. It was scheduled for Sunday at noon in an auditorium-style large conference room, but nobody showed up except Johan and I. So we went outside the room and set up in the hallway, seeding the TAFF pot with a bit of loose change and a dollar bill. A couple fans walking by plunked in some money, but since we were a bit off the beaten track, I had the bright idea of just walking around the venue while playing my guitar, Johan beside me, carrying the coffee can while clapping along. He’s quite talented, you see. Up and down the main hallway outside the meeting rooms we went, gathering money along

the way. Then we entered the dealer’s room and enjoyed much success. I kept playing old rock and roll songs, some blues, some jazz, and a bit of country-rock while walking around. This was so much fun and successful that I decided then and there to do this “Busking for TAFF” thing at other conventions I attend between now and the Dublin Worldcon. Hey, if it works...

Later that Sunday afternoon, a group of 21 people went out to the County Line BBQ restaurant, roughly a 15 minute drive from the Omni Hotel, for an all-you-can-eat meal of – you guessed it – barbecued beef, pork, sausage, and chicken, with all the sides you care to jam into your belly. It was a lot of food, and nobody left hungry. For most of the meal I was involved in a conversation group with Carolina Gomez Lagerlof, Ben Yalow, Robert Sawyer, and David Pomerico, which was mostly an enlightening discussion of the publishing industry, with a few side topics tossed in for additional flavor.

The next day Johan and I returned to College Station, briefly stopping at a family run gift shop and pecan store just east of Austin. You can’t miss it. Just look for the 20-foot tall wooden squirrel sculpture on the north side of Texas Highway 70.

Yep. ArmadilloCon 40 was a success. Johan and I both enjoyed the company, the food, and the local IPA beers. Sounds like a return trip next year is required.



Joe Lansdale and I. How can such a nice guy write such whacked out, gory fiction?



# Anglemark at TAFF (to the tune of “Rosa på Bal”)

**By Karl-Johan Norén**

Think doing fanac with John Purcell,  
Little me, little me, with John Purcell,  
Think being together with such a  
popular trufan!  
See all the wonderful fanzines you’ve made,  
Tell me how it’s being TAFF delegate?  
Letters, Askance, and fanac to prep  
Can I now follow your steps?

Sure you will do Johan Anglemark  
Here is a bucket for you!  
Showing the road on Jophan’s arc  
Soon all the fanac you’ll do.  
You are a trufan from Sweden’s shores,  
O tallish Swede now taking your tours  
Your tables of books of uncertain worth  
Can bring us around the earth!

Think to inspire mister John Purcell,  
Little me, inspire mister John Purcell,  
Maybe you’ll teach me inspiring fen  
With a nice stroke from your pen?  
A fannish essay or a new song to sing  
Or just perhaps a new bucket to bring?  
When is it finished, mister Purcell tell  
The journey you know so well?

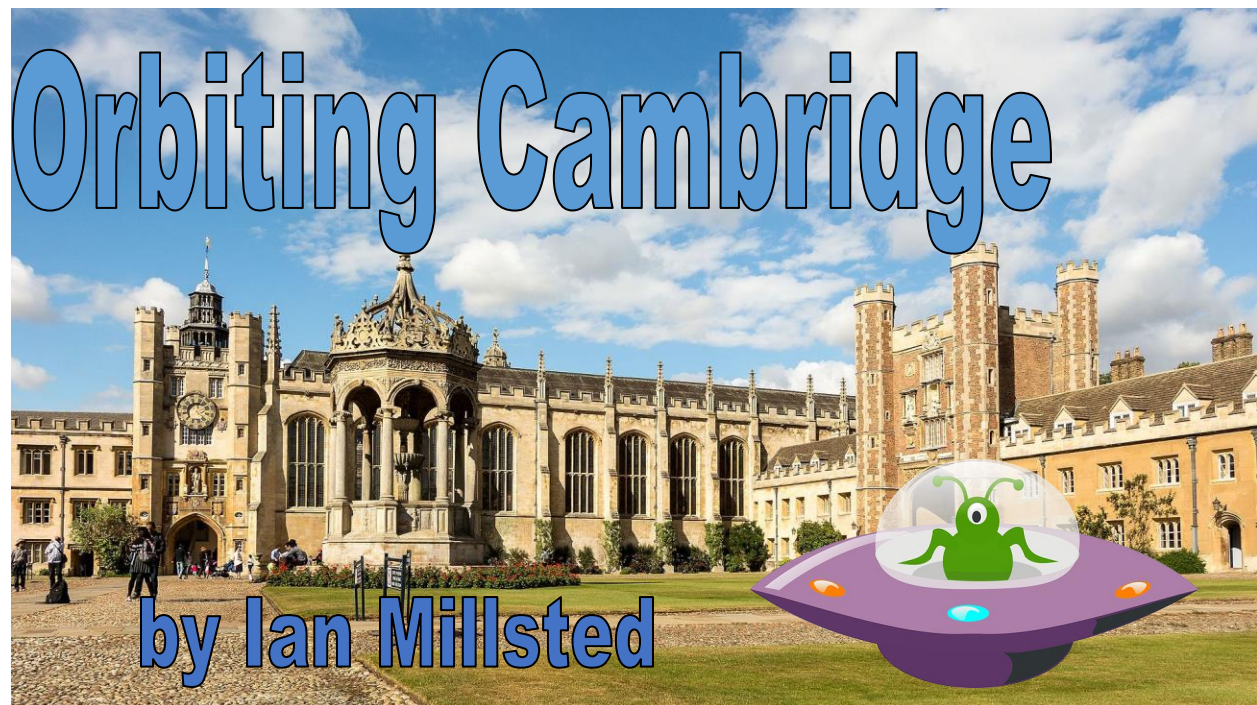
Your journey Johan Anglemark  
Soon reaches its level up,  
At San Jose you’ll jump the shark  
And drink from the fannish cup!  
When you return as my fannish brother,  
Pay it forward and find me another!  
Sell your books at the best possible rate,  
Now you’re the TAFF delegate!



Johan Anglemark and friend.

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**Overheard in the Hallways of Academia Dept. #1:**  
**“A person can only sit on a gallon of milk for so long.”**



I won't go into a list of science fiction connections relating to Cambridge I wrote in a previous letter column. John invited at least a mention of Douglas Adams. Somewhere between the two lies the following. I don't have an exhaustive list of sf/f folk from Cambridge and it would probably be out of date as soon as this is printed anyway.

I was in Cambridge earlier this summer for a family wedding at a hotel on the bank of the river that runs through it. Over the years, despite not being a Cambridge man, I do seem to have skirted the atmosphere a fair few times. One of my sisters lived there in the 1990s when her husband was studying for the Anglican ministry at Ridley College (and completing his PhD). He was attached to one of the churches, which was visited on several occasions by Stephen Hawking who, despite being an atheist, was interested in some of the concepts being talked about, or so I was told. Later my other sister lived near Cambridge and taught in the town. Her children all had part of their education there as well (for their years 16 to 18). One nephew worked for a legal company there for a while (hence the recent wedding). For myself, I did a five-week stint as a Teacher Fellow at Corpus Christi College, which I mentioned in that previous LoC.

Corpus Christi is probably a good place to start as the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe studied there. Among his friends was Robert Greene (at St John's College). Both Marlowe and Greene were happy to include the fantastical in their works and some name Greene as one of the first professional writers in England. Greene also obtained qualifications at Oxford University.

The famous rivalry between the two ancient universities of England might apply to the realm of sf as well. If so, it is reasonable to suggest that Oxford University has the greater tradition of science fiction and fantasy writers, from Tolkien and the Inklings in the 30s to the clutch of writers who studied there in the 70s (Dave Langford, Mike Scott Rohan, etc). However, Cambridge has not been without its champions.

John was quite right to mention Douglas Adams, who was very definitely a Cambridge man. Adams was at St John's College from 1971 to 1974 during which time he was himself more in the tradition of performers, especially comedy performers, for which Cambridge has a strong lineage. The university certainly seems to have left a strong impression on Adams who used the place as a setting for two of his works, the *Doctor Who* story 'Shada' and the novel *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*. 'Shada' was, famously, never finished due to industrial action. It would have been broadcast in 1980 if it had been completed. What was filmed were the location scenes comprising most of the parts of the story set in Cambridge. As filmed, and presumably as scripted, they are almost a love letter to the place of Adam's studies. There are lots of shots of Tom Baker and Lalla Ward punting along the river, of Baker cycling through the streets past notable landmarks and of undergraduates singing on street corners. One of the main guest characters is an eccentric professor who is also an alien Time Lord and possibly based on Adams view of his lecturers from undergraduate days. Given that for many years it seemed unlikely that the unfinished parts of 'Shada' would ever be generally seen Adams must have felt safe, and justified, in re-using much of the plot for his *Dirk Gently* novel.

Adams wasn't the only *Doctor Who* writer to have studied at Cambridge. Terrance Dicks was at Downing College in the 1950s. Dicks was a script editor on *Doctor Who* from 1969 to 1974 and also wrote a number of individual stories up to 1983. However, for a couple of generations of British children he is best known for writing about sixty *Doctor Who* novelisations.

Not everyone seems to have flourished at the university. J.G. Ballard dropped out in 1951 after completing just two years, but having just sold his first short story. For others, Cambridge University could be a place where they might live nearly a whole professional life. The noted ghost story writer, M.R. James, went from being an undergraduate to academic staff member to Provost, all at King's College before finally moving on in 1918. C.S. Lewis, remembered for having a similar career at Oxford, actually lectured at Cambridge from 1954 to 1963. Someone who served a shorter period as a lecturer was Michael Crichton who worked there for some months in 1965, teaching anthropology. He had probably left before a young Salman Rushdie arrived as an undergraduate in the same year (Rushdie's first novel counts as sf by most standards).

Of current sf/f writers mention should be given to Richard Morgan who studied history at Queen's College in the mid-1980s and Susannah Clarke who worked for a publishing company based in Cambridge for a number of years.

Friends of mine are in contact with sf fandom in Cambridge but I have no direct knowledge of any groups there myself. During those few weeks at Corpus Christi I did consider trying to make contact but never found the time.

As I write this a number of students at the school where I teach have just got their exam results confirming places for some of them to go to Cambridge. I don't know if any will go on to write science fiction but I wish them all well anyway.

- Ian Millsted







# COLD IN JULY

by Joe R. Lansdale

**Reviewed by Kevin Still**

One of the most unnerving qualities about Texas writer Joe R. Lansdale is how, in most photos, he's smiling as wide as a tinsel-toothed child counting Halloween candy. That wholesome, unabashed grin feels odd when one considers that Lansdale has made a career writing the kinds of stories - breathing life into the kinds of characters - readers need Pentecostal church and scalding showers to exorcise. How can such a twisted mind wear such a gleeful visage?

Then again, perhaps Lansdale appears so giddy because, after penning enough titles to make Stephen King look slothful, he's still winning over readers . . . and winning back some of those (ahem, right here) who've sworn him off but just can't seem to stay

away. He's too good to stay away. As a friend and fellow fan recently said, "If you're picking up a Lansdale you're bound to have fun." True, and it's the question of what else Lansdale binds to the mind that makes that Cheshire grin of his so peculiar.

With the talent and confidence to write (masterfully) across more genres than most chain booksellers have labels, Lansdale, a native Texan now residing in Nacogoches, presents an image of the Lone Star State any local Chamber of Commerce would quickly disavow. In Lansdale's Texas, monsters become heroes, cowboys can also be samurais, Drive-In theaters consume their patrons, VHS snuff films are as common as dollar matinees, dead nuns still get horny, and John F. Kennedy just might join Elvis Presley in a trailer park to pitch war against an Egyptian mummy. Sure, why not? It's the kind of Texas where the heat molds the air into something so thick even the birds lose their inspiration:

"It was a hot Sunday with a hot wind blowing through the pines like a diseased cough, carrying a hint of dead fish from Lake LaBorde. The birds were making small talk in the trees like it was more of an obligation than a desire; they sounded like they needed air-conditioning" (From *Cold In July*).

But Lansdale's Texas is also the kind of place where serendipity is bound to happen. It's a tepid place full of raw and ill-tempered people hellbent on either expiring quickly or finding a reason to grasp endurance. All that deep need for relief from the elements, from one another, often leaves characters in a Lansdale story ready for adventure, which can just as often lead to redemption as to being chained to the bumper of a El Camino that's being tossed off a cliff.

*Cold In July* (1989) is a Lansdale novel that straddles the adventure fence. While the story pops like a frightened pistol on page one, it works towards a redemption that is both satisfying and authentic. Of course, redemption is never possible without sacrifice, and a redemption that is both satisfying and authentic requires a sacrifice bordering the divine. This is precisely how Lansdale manages to win back readers who've sworn him off after one too many snuff film scenes.

Then again, the climax in *Cold In July* hinges on a snuff film, as well. More snuff and the author's still has the audacity to grin like Arthur Miller snagging Marilyn Monroe in the bio pic.

The story here is simple: Richard Dane kills an intruder who cops congratulate him for nabbing. Dane took down a terrifically terrible bad guy. High fives all around and don't worry none about even seeing a court date, Mr. Dane. It all seems a little too tidy. Until the father of the terrifically terrible bad guy steps out of a Huntsville prison and learns that his son, who he hasn't seen in 20 years, has just been killed by Richard Dane. Well, in that case, there's only one thing to do when a man kills your son, and that's kill the man - and hopefully his son to boot. If any of this sounds especially unredemptive, just remember that we're still in the first third of the novel and we're also talking about an East Texas town where the run-of-the-mill religion looks something like that displayed at the intruder's funeral:

"When they had the coffin in the hole they waved the preacher over, and the preacher stood by the grave and cracked his Bible and started reading. When he finished, he said a few words, and damn few at that, and wrapped it up with an 'amen'. The whole thing had all the conviction of a hooker's lovemaking. The preacher checked his watch and made for the Buick, cranked it, and he was out of there. Probably had a late free lunch somewhere" (from *Cold In July*).

But Lansdale does not seem interested in the act-right-fire-insurance of old timey religion, which is evident in his description of the preacher above. Instead, he's after something much more divine. In *Cold In July*, Lansdale is about restoring the fathers to the sons, even if it means one father helping another father sacrifice his son for the better of the world. And, in this case, it is.

That's the beauty of *Cold In July*: on the surface of these grand themes of redemption, Lansdale presents a page-burning sweaty Texas crime noir with enough nastiness and snuff to make the novel difficult to recommend around the office water-cooler. Richard Dane has killed the son of Ben Russell, until they discover that maybe he didn't. So where is Russell's son? And why are the police glad to misidentify the man Dane killed in own living room? To help answer these questions and find his son, Russell hires PI Jim Bob Luke, a big-mouth, big-hat, big-car, big-appetite Texan that at first feels a bit cartoony, until one realizes all that swagger-swinging is a front Luke uses to hide his Boba Fett bounty-hunting skills. In a scene between Richard Dane and Jim Bob Luke, Luke reveals his reasons for joining the current mission, that perhaps it's not about the money after all:

"You're a lucky man, Dane. Got a family. Someone to care about you. I got what I do and the Red Bitch - and she's got a dent in it."

"You got pigs."

"Yeah, but every now and then I eat them, so it's hard to form any kind of relationship. I don't think they trust me." (from *Cold In July*)

These notions of trust and of nobility, of exalting the family above all else, of reckoning with what one has brought into the world - perhaps with what one is also called to take out of it - makes *Cold In July*