

# The Stf Amateur 8



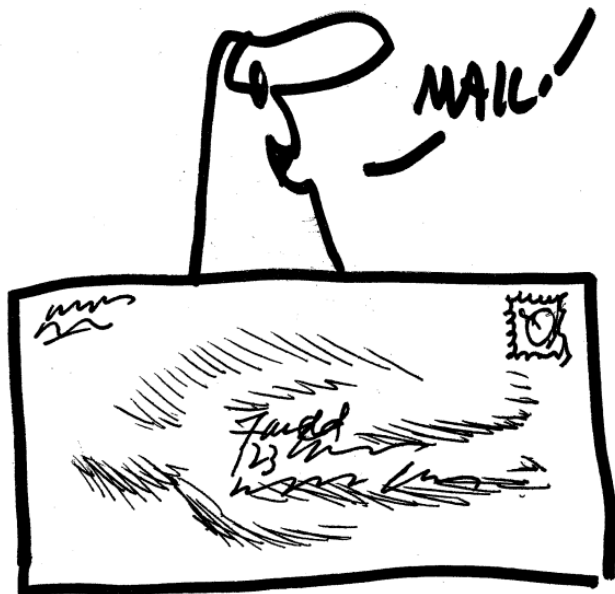
## ***The Stf Amateur* 8**

May 2024

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You can learn more about cover artist Pete Prodoehl at <http://peteprodoehl.com>.

*The Stf Amateur* (Or: *Amateur Stf*) is a bundlezine published by Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA; [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com); 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for members of the United Fanzine Organization and select others, available via *eFanzines* (<https://efanzines.com>) and Fanac.org (<https://fanac.org>), as well as for the Usual. Letters of comment, cover art, and spot illustrations are welcome and desired—as are other contributions. A member of the Fan Writers of America. This is a Karma Lapel publication.



—William Rotsler

Thanks, Heath [for *The Stf Amateur* #7]. That's an impressive looking, if slightly weird cover.

Your note in your editorial/loc response—“The best fanzines are fanzines that would be published even if no one read them.”—... fits my view of fanzines as well. I like and value the response my fanzines receive, but I don't live for it. I've got other reasons for producing the things, and they tend to keep me going.

Some of that has to do with an attempt by me to get some memories down on paper before I drop off the twig. About 10 years or so before my father died, he committed a lot of his memories to paper and produced a 70-page document, which I have now read through a couple of times and enjoyed greatly. I was able to use some of it in the speech I gave at his wake; it filled in a lot of gaps in my knowledge of him. Maybe my fanzines will do the same for my kids. I can only hope they find the pieces I write informative.

—Perry Middlemiss

I appreciate you sharing your thoughts and comments, Perry. I am especially pleased by the healthy nature of this issue's letter column. (It's kind of a surprise!) I've not really thought about my fanzine activity as writing for posterity, though I suppose it is regardless. The zines I used to publish in my pre-fandom publishing days—*Karma Lapel*, *Hedge Trimmings*, and the like—were sometimes much more autobiographical.

[*The Stf Amateur* #7 is] a huge file. I'm surprised my server accepted it. I must look to see if Bill Burns cuts

down the file size when he posts it [to *eFanzines*].

What's the best cheap PDF creator program to use other than Adobe Acrobat, which costs a fortune and can only be installed from the cloud, which I refuse to do for any program?

—Bruce Gillespie

I'd never even considered compressing the *Amateur* PDFs generally until I received your email. Thank you for the idea, and apologies for any hassle or inconvenience! Bill Burns does indeed compress the files before posting them to *eFanzines*. The March 2024 edition of *The Stf Amateur*, for example, was 20.2MB in its original form—and 5.2MB compressed on *eFanzines*. The April issue, comparatively, was 28.7MB and 7.8MB after compressing. I have just recently begun to compress files for recipients whose mail servers reject files because they're too large, but I should probably compress as a matter of course. Thanks again for the inspiration.

I use Adobe Acrobat Pro, but not on the cloud. There is a subscription fee, but I prioritized being able to combine and apply optical character recognition to files for our LASFAPA scanning project (which I've been neglecting in recent weeks), as well as OCR'ing APA-L back issue scans, over finding a more ideal—read: free—solution. Perhaps other readers can offer recommendations!

This is the third letter of comment I've ever written (and the last time I'll use this excuse, I promise), so please forgive any mistakes in protocol. I'm a 25-year-old from the punk music side of zines.

I'm writing in response to the theme from *Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #106 about [electromagnetic pulse] surges. I think about EMPs (and specifically solar flares) all the time! Space photography is so amazing; it makes me so happy whenever a new picture of the sun comes out.

The New Age-y magazines that get left around my neighborhood have advertisements warning of the health dangers of electromagnetic fields. One “what if” I keep coming back to for creative inspiration is: What if those health dangers were real? What if we really were at risk if an EMP hit us, or another Carrington Event? In real life, a lot of us already depend on medical devices to keep us alive. How would we adapt if electric fields themselves caused us health issues? I'd like to think it would be a setting where people are careful about others and willing to help where they can.

Thank you for the recommendations for the [C.R.] Myers and [Angela] Booth books about how to write

serial fiction. I am enjoying reading all the zines in *The Stf Amateur*.

—Adrian K.

Your mention of electromagnetic hypersensitivity made me think of Michael McKean's character Chuck McGill in the television show *Better Call Saul*. If you haven't watched that program, you might find it interesting. Movies such as *Safe* have addressed environmental sensitivity, but I haven't read or seen much about electromagnetic hypersensitivity.

What New Age-y magazines are left around your neighborhood? I forget where I first saw electromagnetic field protection pendants, necklaces, and other items first advertised, but purveyors such as Harmoni (<https://www.harmonipendant.com>) and EMF Harmony (<https://emf-harmony.eu>) sell such goods. Do items made of shungite, hematite, or orgonite actually do anything?

Perhaps you could explore that further for *The Stf Amateur*—and report back by way of a brief article (or another LOC)! I'd be curious to see what you're able to learn. I might just need to research the topic myself, as well!

Generally, I think *The Sft Amateur* would be improved if it was not just a bundle but was more integrated together, especially if the articles were separated from the mailing comments. Certainly, when you write in terms of response, the "comment hooks" would be more apparent. Also, if someone is printing out the zine and reading it, or even scrolling through and reading it online, that would eliminate the white space. (Think of all the precious cyberspace you'd be saving!)

In terms of my own article on "Children and World War II," [*The Stf Amateur* #7] I should have added more about my interest in young adult fiction. I really thought my interest in it as an adult was unusual, when I picked up *The House in Norham Gardens* by Penelope Lively at my friend's dealer's table at Wiscon back in the 1980s. It led me not just to bookstores but to the children's section of the library, where I felt peculiar bending down to the pint-sized shelves. Buying books as presents for my nieces later made it all seem justifiable. ("It's just research, Cy, that's all, research!") But when I just read Peter Nicholls's excellent book *Genre Fiction: The Roaring Years*, he lumped it all together: science fiction, fantasy, horror, and young adult fiction. It all came together; it was all part of the same phenomena. And that made sense. I read the "young adult" Andre Norton, [Robert A.] Heinlein, and [Ursula K.] Le Guin that had been published as adult sf paperbacks.

Although I often go to Worldcons when they are held in North America, I often neglect to nominate and vote. It is difficult for me to find really worthwhile fiction from the current year. I've never accessed a Hugo voting packet because reading an extensive piece of fiction online would be difficult to enjoy.

Interesting review of *Questar*; I'd never heard of the magazine either. I do have a copy of George Zebrowski's *The Macroscope* sitting on my to-be-read shelf for years, waiting for the "right time" to be read. [*Chauvin might be conflating Zebrowski's Macrolife with any number of works titled Macroscope.*] He did write some years ago an article about another book, *Dark Universe* by Daniel F. Galouye, which I read because of his recommendation, and it is an excellent book. It was nominated for a Hugo award in 1962 and came in second to *Stranger in a Strange Land*!

—Cy Chauvin

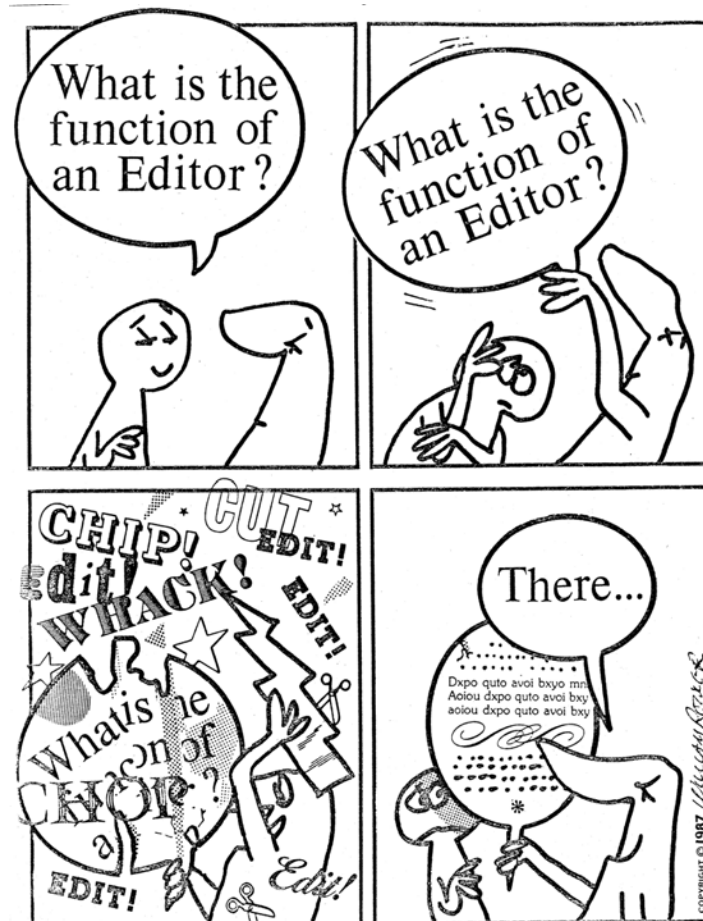
P.S.: In your review of *New Maps of Hell* by Kingsley Amis, you mention that he did not write any sf. True, but he did write a novel of alternate history: *The Alteration* (1976). I read it years ago, but don't remember it. The copy blurb says it is about "the faultless boy soprano voice of Hubert Anvil. It is a once in a century talent. Although he cannot know it, today's performance before a brilliant international congregation—including two emissaries of the Holy Office—will alter his destiny but save his voice if certain of his elders have their way. In the world-as-we-know it the last such castrato died in 1922." If I wasn't so burned out from alternate history, I might attempt to reread it.

Thank you for your feedback on the format and structure of *The Stf Amateur*. My approach to pubbing might be somewhat unconventional, but I doubt I'd be able to produce 60-plus pages monthly—or even half that—were there not weekly and other apa deadlines over the course of the month. But I can understand the potential confusion caused by the combination of original editorial content and mailing comments.

The question then becomes: How much time do I spend repackaging the apazines into a perzine or genzine proper? Right now I'm erring on the side of moving on to the next fanzine, but the allure of a more unified fanzine is strong, and faneds such as Henry Grynnsen publish for both an apa and general readership—primarily by expurgating mailing comments. I'd like to avoid doing so.

Astute call on Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration*. He wrote an sf (or sf-adjacent) book 16 years after *New Maps of Hell*. Finally got around to it, I guess.

# Call for Submissions



—William Rotsler

Do you write or draw? As *The Stf Amateur* continues to evolve from an interconnected assortment of standalone apazines to its current bundlezine format, it's only natural that it eventually becomes a proper genzine. Effective immediately, *The Stf Amateur* is open to submissions of all kinds.

*The Stf Amateur* is hereby requesting the following:

- sf, fantasy, and horror news
- fanart, illos, and fillos
- cover art
- poetry
- filk songs and lyrics
- short fiction
- articles and essays
- fanzine, book, movie, television, and other reviews
- con reports
- jokes
- letters of comment
- ... and other material

If selected for publication, material will initially be included in one of my apazines, as well as a monthly issue of *The Stf Amateur*. Cover art will be considered solely for *The Stf Amateur*. Contributors will receive the issue in which their material appears.

Send your contributions to Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230; [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com); or via fax to 323-916-0367.



circumventing some sort of clothesline and another giant flower, entering the castle, and establishing roots before pegasi and a ghostly Horseman plants a seedling.



Los Angeles Times, March 29, 1957

It doesn't make a ton of sense—it's very dreamlike and surreal—but Johnson's artwork and coloring are absolutely beautiful. Stunning,

even. *Horseman* offers a singular vision. As in #5, Johnson incorporates recurring visual elements such as vertebrae-like organic shapes—this time encompassing rune-like icons—Jupiter, eyeballs, and winged flower blossoms.

Johnson's introductory remarks contextualize the issue in terms of its theme of plant reproduction and the overarching Horseman project, and the issue ends with reader feedback, a blend of letters of comment and United Fanzine Organization (<https://unitedfanzineorganization.weebly.com>) reviews drawn from member publications. Johnson's editorial responses to correspondents and reviewers contribute additional color commentary.

Available for \$6.50 ppd. from Larry Johnson, 31 Greenbrook Road, Hyde Park, MA 02136; [LewBrown1@verizon.net](mailto:LewBrown1@verizon.net); <https://sites.google.com/view/larryjohnsoncomics>.

**Tetragrammaton Fragments #274** (February 2024)

The UFO is a cooperative of small-press publishers who exchange their materials—largely self-published comic books and fanzines like those reviewed herein—much like an amateur press association. *Tetragrammaton Fragments* is the co-op's newsletter, available to members as well as subscribers who don't necessarily participate in the publication exchange.

Each issue, members contribute columns as part of their minimum activity requirements, offering a blend of reviews—largely of other member publications—personal news, and comments on their productivity and current projects. This issue, which features a photo collage featuring current members, is relatively representative of the average issue.

Steve Keeter's "Quotations from Chairman Loathly" offers news from the UFO, offering a state of the union of sorts. He comments on Rob Imes's editing the previous issue (*T&T* #98), the outcome of the UFO Awards, the return of former chairman Jim Main, and other inside baseball.

Imes's "Noz Notes" updates members on his *Capfan* #1 (*T&T* #99) before reviewing other member publications such as *Om*, *Fanzine*, *Heroes Now*, *Strange Times*, *Smorgasbord*, and others, including my own *The Stf Amateur*. I'll

spare you the results of my scanning for egoboo throughout this issue of *T-Frags*, but, Mr. Imes, you can rest assured that I don't use generative AI to write any of my fanzines. I appreciated his remarks on reading *Worlds of If* (*The Stf Amateur*, November 2023), as well as his consideration of the adjacency of sf and comics fandom, perhaps with prozines sitting somewhere in the middle.

In "Main Lines Revived," Main reviewed several member publications, also commenting on the connections between sf and comics fandom. I hope to work with him to introduce some new fanartists and comics artists to my pages. Kurt Erichsen updated readers on his publication plans and efforts digitizing his LGBTQ work for a local library, an archival project I applaud.

Ian Shires discussed his current projects, including his recent social network *Indyfest* (<https://indyfestusa.com>), which is currently in beta testing. Larry Johnson's (see above) "Tales of the UFO" reviews member publications, discussing reading *Worlds of If* and other prozines, including *Galaxy Science Fiction*. Johnson's new book *1960s Comics: An Appreciation* might be of interest to readers. (<https://amzn.to/3U1QnDc>)

Joe Ely Carrales III offers advice on crafting intriguing stories by applying Kurt Vonnegut's writing guidelines to sequential art. Carrales goes through Vonnegut's eight points, applying them to his own work. As much as I enjoy *T-Frags'* comics and fanzine reviews, I especially enjoy members' commentary about their creative processes, writing, and approaches to art. Vonnegut's pointers could easily be applied to sf writing.

John Muller, Verl Holt Bond, and Keeter also comment on member publications, with Muller offering some PayPal advice. Bond also expresses appreciation for sf prozines, recommending the band Hawkwind to fellow sf fen. And I offer an essay, not published elsewhere, about the results of cataloging my comic book collection: no longer buying comics.

Available for \$3.50 from Steve Keeter, 10118 Mason Dixon Circle, Orlando, FL 32821; [stevekeeter@gmail.com](mailto:stevekeeter@gmail.com).



*Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1957

#### *The Triumvirate* Vol. 4

I reviewed the previous issue of this journal of fantasy, science fiction, and horror edited by David Oliver Kling in *T&T* #102. The square-bound, 117-page fiction-oriented fanzine is printed on demand, and my copy smelled quite strongly upon arrival. The entire day's mail smelled as though cologne had been spilled on it. Perhaps it was the ink from the darkly fantastic cover artwork, which blends military sf and supernatural horror—entirely appropriate for this fiction-oriented fanzine.

This is my current favorite such fanzine. As editor, Kling's collections of short stories combine dark fantasy, horror, and science fiction, usually military sf with an element of supernatural horror, similar to the fiction of Weston Ochse (*T&T* #104). Given Kling's work and involvement in organized religion, stories occasionally include an aspect of the spiritual, though this fanzine is less evangelical than Wesley Kawata's *Nova Science Fiction*.

Seven short stories are included in this issue, along with two short poems. The artwork throughout seems to have been created using generative AI, and I was unable to find any artist credits throughout, even for the cover. That's my only quibble with the fanzine. Even reprinted artwork or less professional artwork would be preferred, though the writing in *The Triumvirate* is generally excellent.

David O'Mahony's "Ghost of a Chance" tells the tale of a young man whose father recently died, perhaps the result of foul play. His father's ghost returns, directing the young man to become involved with several people who wronged his father during his life. That doesn't end well for



anyone, and the ending features one of the more macabre scenes I've encountered in recent reading. One thing I didn't find convincing was that the dead father had been a pastor, though I suppose even pastors occasionally experience the desire to kill or take revenge.



Los Angeles Times, April 12, 1957

“My Own Private Earth” by Lawrence Dagstine offers an interesting dual storyline, interweaving a narrative about Jewish refugees during wartime with one about children in the future who buy marble-sized replica planets and moons to play with as toys. The character name used in each plot line suggests that the threads are connected; perhaps the miniature planets are still inhabited? It’s an interesting idea perhaps worth exploring further.

Nicholas Hurst’s “The Purpose of a Military” is a shorter piece, encapsulating the first meeting between the leader of the Solarian Navy and the Moltarian Military Command. The description of the alien race is compelling, and the conversation

—discussing the title of the story—is lively.

Admiral Tylar Northe offers an interesting character who might be worth returning to, and I enjoyed the discussion of the relative merits of old and new species, in terms of FTL capability.

“Ambrosial’s Gargoyle Woes” by Mark Mackey is more straightforward fantasy, concentrating on the misadventures of an aspiring dragon slayer. The generative AI art accompanying this story proved most disruptive because illustrations portray dragons rather than the gargoyles of the story, but perhaps they’re one and the same. Mackey incorporated good humor in the piece. The spousal disagreement and the prolonged meal preparation scene were delightful.

Robert Henry’s “The Boy in the Wood” is also a fantasy, practically appropriate for children. Children who wander into the woods near a local park recover from their inability to walk, speak, or see—and befriend some talking dogs. “Hanging Around” by Anna Ross concentrates on a psychic and shop keeper whose days run into each other.

And “Whispers from the Abyss” by editor Kling is the standout of the issue. Aply balancing military sf and supernatural horror, the story explores a remote outpost investigating communication signals sent from the surface of a planet. Lovecraftian in nature, the story considers the imprisonment of Zyloxathar and the translation of R’lyehian. The flashback-punctuated scene in which Dr. Miranda Kane translates the communication is excellent, though its effect on her is less so.

The issue ends with two poems by Joy Yin, an editorial by Kling focusing on the nostalgia of roleplaying and video games, and contributor notes. I found the story synopses in the front of the issue over long and unnecessary. *The Triumvirate* is the best fiction-focused fanzine I’m aware of. You’d be well served checking it out if any of the above stories interest you. Consider submitting stories!

Inquire via David Oliver Kling, 1714 Connecticut Ave. SE, Massillon, OH 44646; [david.oliver.kling@gmail.com](mailto:david.oliver.kling@gmail.com). Or order via Amazon for \$2.99 (ebook) or \$7 (paperback), <https://amzn.to/4cFVUqo>.

## From the Reading Pile: Prozine Reviews *Worlds of If* #177 (February 2024)

Given the discussion of *Worlds of If* in the above fanzines inspired by my short history of the magazine (<https://tinyurl.com/If-history>) in *The Stf Amateur*, it's past high time I review the relaunch issue of the historic prozine. One of the editors sent me an advanced reading copy of the new issue in late February, and I read it immediately that evening. Now that I've obtained a print copy, I can revisit that experience physically. I recommend *Worlds of If* wholeheartedly.

Without going story by story like I did for *The Triumvirate* above, I'll consider the relaunch in broader strokes, at a higher level. The reintroduction of *Worlds of If* offers a good mix of reprints—Robert Silverberg, Renan Bernardo, Zdraka Evtimova, Tara Campbell (though retitled), David Brin, and Charles Platt—as well as new, original work—Ai Jiang, Pedro Iniguez, and others—even if reprints aren't credited as such. It might behoove the editors to focus more on newer work, though I can understand the appeal of reprints for a free relaunch issue. If reprints continue to a lesser extent, I think they should be identified as such, including previous publication credits. The straight line to history is strong. It's part of the relaunch's appeal.

The black-and-white artwork by Paulo Sayeg and Bruce Pennington was absolutely wonderful. The other artwork in the issue was more incidental than illustrative—largely unrelated to the piece in which they appeared—and a few pieces made me wonder whether they were created using generative AI.

Regardless of whether material was reprinted, the story selection is tremendously solid and offered a compelling focus on biological sf, which I appreciated. The assortment stopped shy of body horror, but I enjoyed the concentration on healthcare, medicine, evolution, and similar topics. I also enjoyed how AI was addressed. It's an au courant topic and rich ground for storytelling. The advertising aspect of Bernardo's "Premium Resurrection Pack—\$99" was delightful. My favorite stories otherwise included Silverberg's "The Pain Peddlers," Campbell's "I Hope I Call You Back," Brin's brilliant

"Chrysalis," and A.J. Dalton's "Biochecker."

The Book Feature courtesy of Leslie Kean confused me, however. Is it a sponsored review or a description? It's not an excerpt, and it felt awkward given the "courtesy" credit. A review would have been credited differently—and been wholly appropriate—and a sponsored review feels strange. I'd discourage sponsored content. An excerpt might have felt more natural—and might offer more value to readers in terms of promotion.



Los Angeles Times, April 19, 1957

Finally, the nonfiction pieces, though welcome, were mixed. Science Editor Dr. Daniel Pomarede's cosmography article was excellent, while Kwame Cavil's personal essay on the relationship between sf and sports—while well written—didn't go as far as it might have to draw parallels between the fandoms. I did like that Cavil addressed the topic, however. My expectation is that many sf readers don't see sports in similar light, although they're both fandoms.

Overall, an extremely impressive first issue for a long-awaited relaunch. Kudos to all involved, and I cannot wait to see subsequent issues. Available for free via <https://tinyurl.com/Worlds->

of-If-177 or for \$9.99 in print via <https://tinyurl.com/World-of-If-177-print>. Visit the magazine's Web site at <https://worldsofifmagazine.com>.

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Los Angeles Times, April 5, 1957

## Comments on SAPS #306

Guilty of Bad Form, I should have two fanzines in this mailing. While I fully intended to respond

to the January mailing upon arriving it, sending my previous contribution late led me to waiting until now. I should still make the deadline, because I intend to mail this in early April before we depart to Portugal for a month.

In *Gyllene* #9, **Burnett Toskey** mentioned Franz Werfel's *Star of the Unborn*. The recommendation inspired me to start a spreadsheet of books I am interested in: Books to Read. That book was the first item. I've not been keeping track of suggestions made in fanzines. One can hardly act on them if they don't remember them, now, can they? I condole with you on the death of Paul Stanbery. Tom Digby also recently died, and the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society membership recognized his passing at a meeting last week.

I never met or corresponded with Digby, but we were both on the Well, and I appreciated his writing, including the collection *Along Fantasy Way*. (<https://conchord.org/xeno/digby/digby.html>) From all accounts, he was a true original. I'm still young enough—51—that my friends are not yet dying, but my parents' friends are, as are the people I hang out with in recent years. Even as a child, I aspired to spend time with older, more experienced, more creative people. That lasted through my young adulthood and seems to have continued into middle age. All of you, please keep having reasons for continuing life. There's so much more to learn!

SAPS' Pillar Poll is the first apa-oriented awards program I've ever heard about. I can understand that it'd be challenging to support multiple categories as apae evolve toward mailing comments. I generally try to do more than mailing comments—except for eAPA, in which *The Explosion Containment Umbrella* is primarily a commentzine in order to contain my monthly commitments. But I'm curious: Do we think the natural inclination of apae is to migrate from a collection of perzines to a circular correspondence? That might be the case as participants become more long running, and more friends than fellow fen.

Your Bach recommendation inspired me to change the spreadsheet to Media Recommendations. There are now tabs for books and music, and I can keep a running list of

movies, as well. I'm impressed by how many fanzine fen appreciate classical music. I listen to it and enjoy it, but you are among several who seem to really know a lot about it. I shall become a cultured gentleman yet! In the opposite direction, I've never seen a peep show, except for an antique nickelodeon machine with what have been Mutoscope cards. She squirmed, too, but it was relatively chaste. I was recently reading about the last pornographic movie theater in Los Angeles, the Tiki Theater. (<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-12-05/last-porn-movie-theater-los-angeles-tiki>) I've also never been to such a place, or to a strip club. I have gone to porn shops, but otherwise, the closest I've come is Hooters, which is primarily a bad restaurant. Part of me wants to experience such things at least once, but I'm sure the experience would be anticlimactic.

Are late mailings to the Evil Old Official Editor considered postmailings? Perhaps what I sent you won't be in this mailing. Harrumph, but lesson learned. At least I included it in *The Stf Amateur*. I might not understand what postmailing are; perhaps they're standalone mailings to individual participants rather than the EOOE, like the films flier.

When I was in school band, we often had an annual magazine subscription sale as a fundraiser. The Scout troop sold 50-pound bags of potatoes. When my son was younger, his Scout troop sold popcorn, and there were occasional school fundraisers. We went door to door in the neighborhood several times, but there seemed to be less of a culture of door-to-door sales. Now, the only salesmen who come to our door are trying to get us to switch Internet service providers or offering to paint our street number on the curb.

I read and enjoyed your book reviews—I'm glad the magnification allows you to read!—especially the Agatha Christie novel. My wife and I often watch *Poirot*. Afterward, I read the short story on which the episode was based. In recent weeks, I read "Yellow Iris" and "The Case of the Missing Will" from *The Regatta Mystery and Other Stories* and *Poirot Investigates*, respectively. I enjoy reading the original text and identifying comparisons and contrasts in the

television adaptation. And, Christie is good reading. Last night, a friend, my wife, and I watched the 1973 movie *The Laughing Policeman*. It's a wonderful police procedural set in San Francisco. It's also based on a 1968 novel by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo, translated from the Swedish in 1970. Last night, I read the first fifth of the novel, and it's excellent. Set in Sweden instead of San Francisco, it's following similar lines so far, and I look forward to seeing what develops.



Los Angeles Times, May 17, 1957

Leigh Edmonds's *One of Those Weeks* #2 shared some personal news before his trip to the United States for Corflu and to visit the University of California, Riverside. I didn't get a chance to see him during his time in California, but I enjoyed reading about his time in Riverside and among the archives on Facebook. On the topic of handing out fanzines on street corners, I'm curious about SAPSans' experiences handing out fanzines at conventions. When we've hosted the Fanzine Corner at Loscon, I've been surprised by how few people are interested in fanzines, and how incredibly interested those who are, are. We often put out a box of APA-L back issues for the taking. Very few take them, and two years ago, one fellow took almost half the box. He didn't end up reaching out to us to get involved, so I'm not entirely sure what that was about.

I've recently been corresponding with William Breiding about the gift aspect of fanzines. Some people enjoy receiving them unsolicited, and some are irritated. That's intriguing to me, because I'd personally be flattered that someone wanted me to have or read their fanzine. How do people respond on street corners? At cons?

Your description of yabbies remind me of smelt, and smelt fry in southern Wisconsin. They didn't taste muddy, per se, but they are very small fish, and I never understood the seasonal appeal. I was intrigued by your statement, "My only trouble with young writers is that they often want to talk about writing, as though it was more than a byproduct of living." What do you mean?

The beginning of baseball snuck up on me this year, much like St. Patrick's Day and Easter. I decided to follow the Milwaukee Brewers this year, my home state team from when I was growing up. Their first three games gave them a 3-0 record, and I listened to the ninth inning of their fourth game yesterday, which they also won. (They don't play today or tomorrow.) Most years, I try to follow baseball from the beginning of the season, but I almost always drift away relatively quickly. Regardless, spring has now officially sprung.

Word is that *The Last Dangerous Visions* is now available. Ostensibly edited by Harlan Ellison, it includes more than 30 stories, essays, and poems, including work by David Brin, Cory Doctorow, Ellison, A.E. van Vogt, Robert Sheckley, and others. Gossip during a recent LASFS meeting suggests that this isn't the book Ellison might have intended, but that J. Michael Straczynski took a strong hand in the editing. It'll be interesting to see how dangerous it is. Regardless, I'm sure it's worth reading, and one can always return to the first two.

I enjoyed your response to Rocky Willson about retirement planning. My wife and I are starting to think along those lines, now thinking we'll stop working in a few years rather than five to 10. The United States doesn't have much of a social safety net, so we'll have to build a bridge to Social Security and Medicaid. That's one of the reasons we're exploring Portugal for those in-between years. We've not yet lined up all the pieces, but we'll likely live between the Midwest to be closer to our parents and siblings, perhaps Wisconsin, and Portugal until we're less able to travel. Financially, I think we'll be able to swing it. Neither of us has a pension, but our investments are doing well, and I was lucky to work somewhere that offered stock units that have performed well. The primary concerns now



Los Angeles Times, June 21, 1957

are cutting back on possessions over time, while for so much of my life I've somehow focused on acquiring them, and working the logistics of relocating.

While I haven't read much about your travel logistics traveling to and from the United States for Corflu, I hope you felt safe, and that all of your travel connections—airplane, train, or bus—all worked smoothly. In the LASFS, while we've recently gotten at least one new member who's a writer, the focus seems to be more on fandom than writing. It wasn't always that way. In the past, the club held an annual Fanquet—later the LASFS Showcase—to recognize first sales and new pros. I don't think we've had one of those since the late 1970s. I would welcome more of a writing focus, were there more such members, but I wouldn't necessarily participate.

Your conrep on Conflux 17 was wonderful. That you were able to pursue so many interests—libraries, memorials and museums, friends, and the con itself—while in Canberra is awesome. Was the panel on the state of fanzines recorded? Thinking about you and Perry Middlemiss in the same place at the same time made me happy.

As we prepare to leave for Portugal, I realized I didn't remember—and couldn't find—my PIN for the Portugal eSIM on my phone. I exhausted the number of attempts I could make to log in, and we'll have to stop by a Nos store to get that active again.

In *Be Bop* #128, **Gordon Eklund** shared memories of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The closest I come to an experience like that is the shooting of President Ronald Reagan in March 1981, the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster in 1986, and the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001. Watergate occurred before I was born, though I remember reading *All the President's Men* as a child. I also enjoyed your mail delivery stories.

Your movie reviews thish were glorious! Now that baseball has returned, we probably can't hope for such a bounty until later this year. I added several items to my new Media Recommendations spreadsheet, and my wife and I also enjoyed *The Holdovers*. The National Fantasy Fan Federation's apa N'APA is indeed still going. I'm a participant, and the most recent

emailing—it's now PDF only—was #269 in mid-March. Current participants include Ahrvid Engholm, John Thiel, Jefferson P. Swycaffer, Mark Nelson, Garth Spencer, Samuel Lubell, George Phillies, and myself.

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<b>S. LOS ANGELES FLORAL</b> DRIVE-IN 10144 E. of Broadway AM 2:45 PM	<b>SAN VAL</b> DRIVE-IN San Fernando at 17th St. DN 2:30 PM DN 6:15 PM	<b>TORRANCE</b> DRIVE-IN Torrance at Hawthorne DN 2:45 PM
<b>SOUTH ANGELES EDWARDS</b> DRIVE-IN 11111 E. of Pacific St. DN 2:15 PM	<b>VINELAND</b> DRIVE-IN Highway 6 & Carver Blvd. 10:30 PM DN 6:30 PM	<b>SOUTH ANGELES EDWARDS</b> DRIVE-IN 11111 E. of Pacific St. DN 2:15 PM

**AT 7 PACIFIC DRIVE-INS**

Los Angeles Times, June 28, 1957

Spencer and I are working on a 2024 edition of *Blue Moon Special*, my long-defunct apae directory. (<https://efanzines.com/ActiveAPAs>) We plan to publish midyear, and we're about to start sending out the entries for proofing. I emailed Toskey the form but will contribute our listing based on official organs and my own participation. I just checked the N3F's online archives, and no editions of N'APA have been scanned before 2016, but *Fanac* lists many, without offering scans. ([https://fanac.org/fanzines/APA\\_Mailings/N'APA/index.html](https://fanac.org/fanzines/APA_Mailings/N'APA/index.html)) I'd like to see some of those old mailings! I'll share your regards with Don Fitch in the pages of APA-L in the weeks to come.

**Andy Hooper's** *Henchman* #18 commented on the then-upcoming Corflu in Las Vegas. In our working notes for the upcoming *Blue Moon Special*, it saddened me to annotate SNAPS's previous entry "Yet to contact—Joyce Katz dead, Arnie in nursing home; did it continue?" Corflu members reportedly visited Arnie Katz during the con. Does anyone know whether someone else picked up SNAPS? I haven't emailed Katz yet; I will now! Perhaps he's still online. Your discussion of Corflus past was fascinating.

I've not yet sought further to return to FAPA, even though I've recently been in touch with Ken Forman while compiling the forthcoming *Blue Moon Special*. Ulrika O'Brien and I made a deal that if she joined SAPS, I'd join the Turbo-Charged Party Animal APA, and given my ties to Wisconsin, that will likely be my next apa—or MilwAPA—if I stretch myself too thin again. A friend is active in FAPA, however, so perhaps I can impose on him for a recent mailing—and ask whether the Egoboo Poll continues. Email sent.

In *Lucubrations* #147, **Rocky Willson** also discussed Alma Mahler, who was also married to Walter Gropius and Franz Werfel. I love learning stuff like that. She must have been a fascinating woman. Your discussion of the weather in Seattle made me think about our return to Portugal. Last fall, we went there during the rainy season in the north of the country. This spring, while we missed the festival in the closest town last month, we were hoping to experience different weather. It's been an incredibly rainy spring. Rain is forecast

through mid-April, but it'll be warmer at least: into the 80s. That's something, at least.

And **John D. Berry's** *Pilcrow* discussed punctuation, typography, travel, and cataract surgery. Steve Swartz's piece about being laid off from Microsoft and his time working there struck a chord with me. His consideration of the costs of retirement and the abandonment of the social contract resonated. One reason I can consider stopping work—willingly or unwillingly—is because of my tenure at my employer and that my compensation included stock units. I didn't manage all of them well, but we're in a different situation than many of our friends. I'm glad that Swartz's time—"busy being unbusy"—includes reading sf. His remarks on the transition to retired life will be helpful as I move toward such myself.

My assertion that Roger Corman's *Attack of the Giant Leeches* wasn't just a monster movie but science fiction might not have been necessary in SAPS. In some circles of fandom, what is or is not science fiction can be relatively precise. Not all sf or fantasy fan like monster movies, for example. (Like you, I consider them relevant.) While I do like them, very much so even now, I sometimes try to point out where a movie someone might disregard otherwise—perhaps because they don't like rubber-suit movies or largely consider monster movies fantasy—still contains interesting science fictional ideas.

I am curious whether "rock 'n' roll" is correct. That's how I'd style it.



*Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1957

## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #109

April 4, 2024

*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* is an apazine published by Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230; [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com); 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to APA-L, members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, and select others. A recent copy can be requested for the Usual. A member of the Fan Writers of America. This is a Karma Lapel publication.

### Last Week's Senryu

Some days, poetry  
doesn't come that easily.  
Even such short squibs.

### Natter: OC, on the Road

This weekend, on Sunday, my wife and I leave for another month in Portugal. We'll be there from April 7 to May 6, 2024, which means that I'll be collating and emailing APA-L overseas during that time. I'll be able to mail this week's distribution before we depart, and the next mailed distribution will occur May 9.

Those of you who occasionally mail me hard copy submissions, please email or fax them to me during that time. Anything mailed physically won't be received personally until my return.

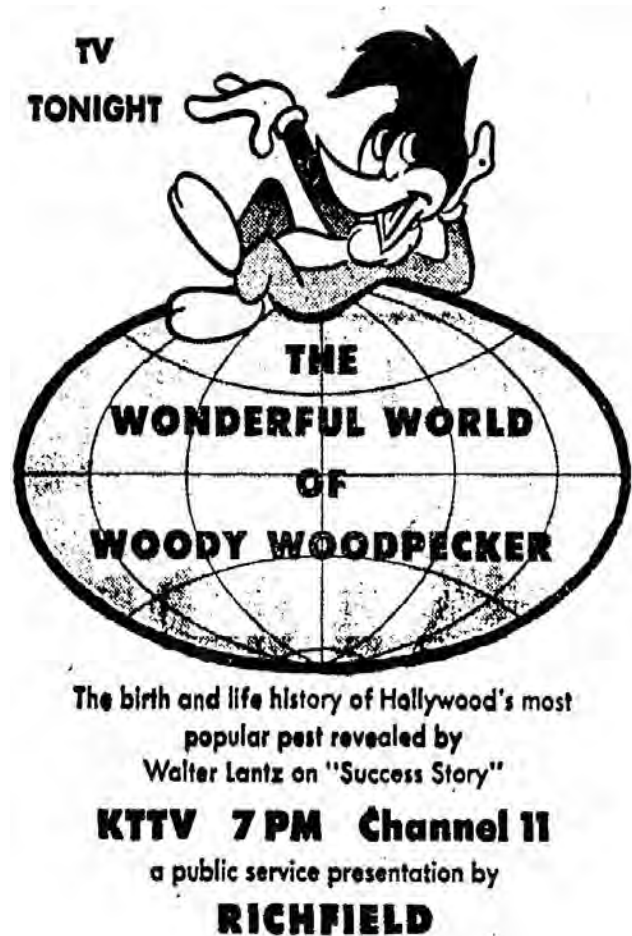
### Ignorable Theme: Fanart

The Ignorable Theme this week suggested the following questions: "What role does fanart play in fandom? Do you have any favorite fanartists? What do you consider good fanart?"

I have a couple of ways that I look at this: As a faned and as a fan. As a fan first and foremost, fanart is merely—and I don't really mean "merely"—artwork produced by fen. It is avocational artwork done along the lines of the themes and topics that inspire our genres of interest: sf, fantasy, and horror. Fanart is amateur but not necessarily amateurish artwork that might be similar to fanfiction, but more often not. It doesn't have to represent or reflect known characters from literature, film, or television, but it can. It is sometimes explicitly about sf or fantasy and fandom, but not always.

As such, it takes place in venues frequented by fen: in fanzines, at conventions, and online. At cons, it often shows up in the Art Show, where the line between avocational and vocational fanart can blur given the commercial aspect of such shows. In recent years, it primarily occurs online, on Web sites such as *DeviantArt* and *ArtStation*, as well as on social media such as *Pinterest*, *Tumblr*, *Instagram*, and elsewhere.

On the Facebook, fanartists occasionally post their artwork in art- or fandom-related groups. In adjacent fandoms such as comic book and furry fandom, fanart can be even more prevalent. For some of the best examples of current fanartists, check out those nominated for—and who won—recent Hugo or Faan awards for Best Fan Artist. (*T&T* #108)



*Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1957

As a faned, however, I primarily consider fanart through an editorial lens. While I'm aware and appreciative of fanart as a fan, I'm more interested in it because I publish fanzines. As a faned, fanart is useful to me as a tool.

In APA-L, the primary role fanart plays is that of our cover artwork. Since I became the apa's official collator, I've reached out again to fanartists in order to return to original artwork for our covers, rather than artwork found online. Some of that artwork is reprinted work, but some might be first publication, even if it wasn't created specifically for APA-L.

Similarly, I solicit cover artwork from fanartists—and some artists who might not consider themselves fanartists—for my monthly *The Stf Amateur*. Some of





Treebeard or Beorn—all stand out as elements that remain worthy of exploration.

At times, the narrative is relatively linear, similar to *The Hobbit*, but when the group of people en route to Tar Valon becomes separated, the novel becomes more like George R.R. Martin's series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, utilizing multiple narrative threads. My only complaint about the novel is that its climax happens in a bit of a rush, jamming quite a bit into fewer pages than the novel's more leisurely pace prepared me for. Jordan introduces a couple new characters, representing the Forsaken, of whom there are more. And several meaningful artifacts are revealed, paving the way for the second novel. It's not quite as brisk as Tolkien's *Battle of Five Armies*, but it could have breathed a little more.

Regardless, Jordan's approach to epic fantasy is his own, and this first novel bodes well for the series that follows. I look forward to reading *The Great Hunt*.

***The Purple Sapphire*** by John Taine (E.P. Dutton, 1924)

Inspired by my recent awareness of Eric Temple Bell, aka John Taine (*The Explosion Containment Umbrella* #18), a California Institute of Technology mathematics professor who wrote popular science books and early sf dating back to the 1920s, I recently read an ebook of his first novel, *The Purple Sapphire*. Originally published as a self-contained novel in 1924, the story was later reprinted in the August 1948 issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*.

Reminding me at times of the writing of George MacDonald Fraser (*T&T* #88) and H. Rider Haggard (*T&T* #98), the book includes politically incorrect portrayals of Indian and Tibetan people but is otherwise a relatively interesting lost world story. The gist of the plot is that a group of people venture into the mountains of Tibet in search of a young woman who was kidnapped when she was a girl—as well as large, luminous sapphires.

Along the way, they encounter 30-foot-high statues of people holding arcane technological equipment far beyond the understanding of modern-day scientists, a tunnel running underneath the mountains, and the remnants of a once scientifically advanced society. That society had largely been destroyed when their mysterious technology ran afoul, destroying much of their history and knowledge. The priestly class, formerly the keepers of the technology, no longer know how to use it.

The science portrayed includes devices that control beams of light that affect the area's underlying magma, but that comes off mostly as science fantasy. More interesting scientific aspects involve luminous

sand in the desert, radioactive rocks that require lead shielding—incribed with text in lost languages—and geologic vapors that impart madness.

The novel is enjoyable, though there are some relatively lengthy sections in which the back story is narrated via exposition, and I felt as though the story could have been told more economically. Regardless, Bell, writing as Taine, was one of the first publicly known sf authors in Los Angeles, and he remained a favorite of LASFS members into the 1940s. With most of his works out of print other than *Armchair Fiction* reprints a handful of years ago, this early LA author might deserve rediscovery. I shall read more.



—William Rotsler

## Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

### *Jules*

This 2023 sf comedy-drama is a wonderfully slow and gentle movie that couches science fictional elements in a lowkey movie that meditates on aging, mental acuity, and friendship. Starring Ben Kingsley, Jane

Curtin, and Harriet Sansom Harris, with whom I was less familiar, it's a quiet approach to first contact that reminded me slightly of *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, as well as *Cocoon*.



Los Angeles Times, May 3, 1957

Kingsley portrays an older man whose memory is starting to fail. He attends city council meetings regularly to express concerns about the town's motto, the need for a pedestrian signal at a particularly challenging intersection, and—eventually—an alien spacecraft that crashed in his flowerbeds.

That leads to several intertwining storylines: his daughter's increasing concern about his mental wellbeing as he ages, his encounter with an alien lifeform, and his developing friendship with the alien, as well as a couple of other women in town. Harris is delightful as the more optimistic and active artist, and Curtin portrays a delightfully bitter woman whose suspicion and skepticism softens over time. Her realization that her elderly, largely immobile cat isn't her only friend is heartwarming.

The three team up to keep their new otherworldly friend a secret—and to help the alien repair its spacecraft to return home. That involves cats in an inexplicable but fantastic manner. In the end, the movie is really about the value of developing new friendships as one ages, and the importance of family. The ending could have swung toward that of *Cocoon* but did not. Highly recommended.

### Stigmata

Last week, a friend and I watched this 1999 supernatural horror film on video tape. I'd originally seen it when it was first released and enjoyed returning to it. The cast includes Patricia Arquette as a

young woman whose receiving of a rosary belonging to a dead, defrocked priest leads to a possession of sorts, presenting the stigmata, spontaneous physical representations of the wounds of Jesus Christ. Gabriel Byrne plays a priest who investigates such occurrences on behalf of the church, traveling from Brazil to Pittsburgh to look into news reports about an incident on a train. Jonathan Pryce portrays a cardinal tasked with keeping such situations under wraps because of their connection to apocryphal texts that could undermine the authority of the church. And Portia de Rossi plays the role of one of Arquette's character's friends, a fellow hairdresser.

Featuring a soundtrack including a slew of alternative, electronica, and borderline grunge or punk songs—including one by Chumbawamba—the movie mostly walks through the sequence of stigmata, as well as Byrne's character's investigation of it. Apparently, the situation doesn't fall under church responsibility because Arquette's character isn't Catholic. Usually, the stigmata are experienced by particularly devout people, though she clearly needs help. Even her friends don't understand.

The supernatural aspects of the movie, including *The Exorcist*-like vocalizations and eroticism, are largely offered in somewhat messy editing, but the movie's references to the Gospel of Thomas inspired that evening's reading. Initially about the stigmata, the movie also focuses on church suppression of historical documents and their translation. The May-September romance involving the priest is clumsy and wholly unnecessary.

After watching the movie, I read half of John Dart and Ray Riegert's *The Gospel of Thomas: Discovering the Lost Words of Jesus* (Seastone, 2000), which I first read in 2004. The book includes purportedly secret teachings of Jesus that offer an alternative interpretation of the prophet outside of traditional organized religion. Found among other apocryphal texts at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945, the Gospel of Thomas is considered theology that diverges from canonical gospel in the New Testament. Among its teachings is the idea that Christ is everywhere: "Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there." It also suggests that the kingdom isn't necessarily an afterlife, but available in this life: "[T]he kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it." John Dominic Crossan's introduction deems that "Eden against Apocalypse," proposing that the teachings challenge seeing Jesus as an apocalyptic messiah.

While the theology in the movie is as messy as its editing—and while some pooh-pooh the Apocrypha—as exemplified by Roger Ebert's review at the time,

*Stigmata* is still a fun flick, shades of *The Da Vinci Code* and *National Treasure*. There's a lot going on in the movie—gnostic conspiracy, possession, and an attempt to commercialize late-1990s alternative culture—but any movie that inspires reading the Apocrypha is alright in my book.

### Juvenalia: “The Important Things”

*The following piece was written for school when I was in fourth grade, so I was perhaps 9 years old. It was written in loose cursive using pencil, and the looseleaf notebook paper is labeled with my student number that year: 416. There are no grading or editing marks, and its published form varies slightly from the handwritten original.*

The important thing about comic books is that they are fun to read. The stories and art are good. The characters are exciting. Also, they are fun to collect. But the important thing about comic books is that they are fun to read.

The important thing about computers is that they're fun to work with. You can play video games on them. You can also do your homework on them. But the important thing about computers is that they're fun to work with.

The important thing about school is that you learn there. You can play games during recess. You can talk to your friends at lunch time. But the important thing about school is that you learn there.

*While much shorter than other juvenalia I've published, and more personal writing, I found this item enlightening: I remain interested in all three of these things—comic books, technology, and learning. The focus on comic books suggests that my reading concentration hadn't yet shifted to books.*

*The Apple IIe first came out in 1983, when I was 10, so my comments about computers must have been inspired by my early work with the TRS-80, which was released in 1977, and the TI-99/4A, released in 1981. The last paragraph might be brown nosing.*

### Comments on APA-L #3063

In *Vanamonde* #1585, **John Hertz** recognized Women's History Month, focusing on Wilma Mankiller—a wonderful last name! I appreciated the structure of your introductory sentences: “We oughtn't need a [insert item here]. ... But remedies can be called for.” Some of the challenges we currently face in the United States might come down to whether citizens agree on the diagnosis of a problem that might require remedies. It's difficult to pursue remedies when people don't agree on the diagnoses.

Your remarks on Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith* intrigued me. His statement about literary merit vs. Good Form was interesting. I wonder how many authors have turned down such literary awards. I wonder how many have done so secure and confident in their abilities and standing, no longer needing the credential or recognition to further their careers. I recognize the moral stance taken—and I agree with it—but also the potential price for taking it. Perhaps the cost was small in Lewis's case. Theodore Sturgeon's assertion that “Science Fiction is knowledge fiction,” is also worth considering.



*Los Angeles Times, July 12, 1957*

Friends who gathered with Tom Digby before his death in home hospice prepared a playlist of music to sing as he mouthed the words along with them. You can see the music compiled at <https://tinyurl.com/Digby-playlist>. I will share your feedback with cover artist Joe Pearson. I shall give thought to incorporating playing cards into my birthday next year. I have 10 months to think about it.

**Lee Gold's** *Leeway* dated for March 28, 2024, briefly addressed the Ignorable Theme. The Faan Awards are voted on by “anyone with an interest,” according to *Fancylopedia 3*. You can read about their history at <https://corflu.org/history/faan.html>, and *The Incomplete Register* (<https://efanzines.com/TIR>) documents the qualifying items and voting process. If you enjoy reading fanzines, it's a worthwhile

experience.

I will share your feedback with cover artist Jose Sanchez. I appreciated your youthful understanding that women can be authoritative. An important lesson! Your comments on the relative scale of “enormous” made me chuckle. “Bigger than I am” seems insufficient. I used to teach knife use and fire building to youth as an adult Scout leader. The Totin’ Chip—the driver’s license for knives—and the Firem’n Chit—its corollary for fire building and axe and saw usage—are valued credentials for young Scouts, and sometimes rites of passage.



*Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 2, 1957

Thank you for recommending Elizabeth Moon’s *Familias Regnant* series, also known as *The Serrano Legacy*. I don’t have any books by her cataloged in my library but have added the series to my list of books to explore. You offered *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*’s definition of “technology” in a subsequent issue of *Leeway*. In the context of the Ignorable Theme, the most relevant definition is “electronic or digital products and systems considered as a group.” I appreciated ellers’ broader consideration of technology beyond electronics.

In *Vanamonde* #1587, **John Hertz** offered an acrostic poem before focusing on Purim. Your comments on “freedom from” and freedom to,” as well as “I’ll do it because I want to, but not because you tell me to” were thought provoking. I’ve found that people do better when they want to do what they’re doing. It also brought to mind Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street,” and “I would prefer not to.” Much preferred: “I would prefer to.”

I hadn’t considered literature as a conversation between an author and readers that also included the culture of the editor and publisher—that’s an intriguing wrinkle! Clearly, the cultural forces influencing a publisher or editor would affect books and stories selected for publication—perhaps to satisfy commercial trends—as well as the editing of a work itself. We even see this in the growing trend toward

cultural sensitivity in editing older works for reprint, as well as in the emergence of subgenres and developments such as the focus on Young Adult fiction. I will share your feedback with cover artists Marc Schirmeister and Megan Giles.

**Matthew Mitchell**’s *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #51 heralded the coming of spring. The two court cases you outlined made me shiver. Having worked with multiple family law attorneys throughout our shared custody and custody evaluation case, I experienced such shenanigans myself. It makes the process more difficult and is rarely in the interest of the child. I condole with you and yours on the death of Tailchaser. Why was he named that? Let me know if you continue seeing him out of the corner of your eye. When we’re away from Spooner, I remain careful entering the front door and often see him as though he were there. We get used to their presence.

I will share your feedback with cover artist Jose Sanchez. Your mention of the Mojave winds also gave me the shivers. What did you do when you arrived late to the taping of the *Red Dwarf* pilot? I love that you can hear Jim Terry Jr.’s laughter from the audience. (I’m presuming you mean <https://www.facebook.com/captserrek>.) Terry and I never met, though we found each other on the Facebook, and I always enjoyed his presence in my feed. I never heard him laugh, but I will listen for him.

And in **Joe Zeff**’s *Toony Loons* #754, he described the circuitous route of a prescription shipment. Perhaps it was delivered by a New York City taxi driver looking to run up the fare! Your description of recent snow reminded me of the snow in Wisconsin this week. I’m sorry to hear that the mortgage and loan won’t work out. Does that mean you’ll have to move, or can you still stay there? You might be able to afford another home, I suppose. You and Marcia leave for the eclipse on the same day we head to Portugal. Safe travels, and quality eclipse watching!

Your comments about the tardy cleaning person made me think about mobile and electronic communication more generally. Text messaging, voicemail, and email work relatively well most of the time. Yet some people still claim that they didn’t receive a communication. In postal mail, the solution is sending certified and registered mail for proof of mailing and delivery. Electronic communication offers no parallel. Sharing custody, we moved to using *OurFamilyWizard* so no one could claim something hadn’t been sent or received. But otherwise, it can be challenging to respond to such claims without seeming untrusting or judgmental.

## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #110

April 11, 2024

*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* is an apazine published by Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230; [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com); 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to APA-L, members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, and select others. A recent copy can be requested for the Usual. A member of the Fan Writers of America. This is a Karma Lapel publication.

### Last Week's Senryu

Cloudy skies, graying,  
release droplets to sidewalk,  
spot reading copy.

The rain last Thursday didn't affect my APA-L printing and collation efforts until later in the evening, once the mailing had been prepared. While returning to my home office with the reading copies, printout sorting folders, and mailing addresses before the LASFS meeting, light rain—a drizzle, really—speckled the top reading copy.

I brought that copy to Portugal so I could write mailing comments while here, and I can just barely make out two areas where the speckling water affected the cover's paper. Regardless, it's still water damaged, though such damage was as light as the rain.

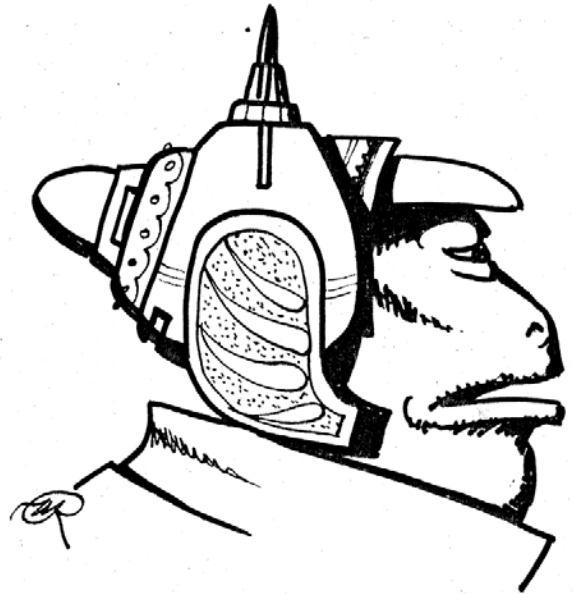
### Trip Report: Portugal

Caitlin and I spent Saturday last weekend packing and preparing for a month in Portugal. We'll be here until early May, working part of the time and on holiday part of the time. Though I took Monday off given our arrival, this week is a work week.

While we usually tend to book flights early in the morning, last Sunday's flight was scheduled at a more reasonable hour. Departing at 11:30 a.m. for Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey meant that we only needed to be at Los Angeles International Airport by 9:30—which in turn meant that we didn't have to leave home until about 8:45 a.m. That made for a pretty leisurely travel morning. That's not common; usually when we travel, we have to get up at oh dark thirty.

Sunday and Monday's travel legs were largely uneventful. Even though I brought a book and puzzle magazine with me to divert myself while in transit (see below), a 15th anniversary edition of Stephen King's short story collection *Just After Sunset* drew my attention, so I spent some time before and after boarding reading (also see below). I also watched several movies while in transit—two on the leg to

Newark, and one while en route to Francisco Sá Carneiro Airport in Porto (see below, as well).



—William Rotsler

The most notable experiences during our travel day related to food, oddly enough. While at Newark, we bought dinner because we weren't sure what the meal situation would be on our 9:50 p.m. flight to Porto. On our first leg from Los Angeles to Newark, I bought a snack box that was pretty decent, but Caitlin was disappointed by the heaviness of the burger she'd bought. That's actually why we ate dinner in Newark; the lack of meal service on the first seven-hour flight made us wonder what might occur during the next seven-hour flight.

Our arrival and departure gate were one and the same, so we had an almost two-hour layover without any need to hustle or hurry to the next leg. In the past, we've traveled internationally before the shorter leg within Europe—flying to Madrid, for example, before continuing to Porto—rather than connecting via Newark. Connecting in Newark meant we didn't have to go through customs during our connection, and that proved relaxing, as well. Historically, I haven't much liked Newark as an airport. It turns out that that impression might have been driven by the transportation to or from Newark rather than the airport itself. When you don't have to go to Newark by bus, car, or train, it's actually quite nice!

In any event, while our dinner itself was quite good, the ordering experience was confusing. Newark features place-based mobile ordering using OTG's flo.io system. (<https://www.otgexp.com> and <https://flo.io>.) Table seating by the gates includes

chair-specific QR codes travelers can use to order food from a number of food sellers nearby. Your order is then delivered to you. Theoretically, it worked pretty slick. You choose from a number of restaurant and food stand vendors without having to walk to all of them in order to review their menus. And the system tells you when your order is prepared, on its way to you, and delivered.

Unfortunately, that latter aspect was highly inaccurate. My order was marked as delivered even though it hadn't been. When we went to find the restaurant from which I'd ordered, the meal was ready but hadn't been picked up by a delivery person yet. That delivery person had marked the order complete even though they'd never even seen it. In my wife's case, her order was never updated to indicate it had been prepared or delivered—but was at least delivered. In any event, while intriguing, the technological hoo-hah didn't seem to accomplish what it set out to do. Would I ever have gotten my food had we not gone in search of it? What if my wife had ordered another meal once it looked like her order might not be prepared or delivered? Yes, flo.io is an order taking system; its customer expectation management and service aspects left a little to be desired. I even sought customer service indicating "immediate assistance" was required. I've yet to hear from them, several days later.

In any event, my meal—a ham and butter baguette from Melange, along with potato chips and a chocolate chip cookie (also from Melange, though I didn't make the connection given the restaurant-agnostic ordering experience until after the sandwich arrived)—was excellent. The sushi roll Caitlin ordered was reportedly as good as airport sushi can be expected to be.

During the leg from Newark to Porto, we were surprised by the amount of food offered, as well as how much we didn't enjoy it. Caitlin didn't eat the proffered dinner during our final leg, but I did, eating only the pasta and sauce dish and the roll. She ate the greens from the grain salad for my dinner. And breakfast consisted of a hot egg and cheese on a roll. Both of us opted for the one without sausage, and it wasn't very good. That might have been because of the consistency of the cheese or the unexpected presence of sweet onions. I quite like sauteed onions; it was interesting how perplexing they can be when you're not expecting them and can't immediately identify the flavor.

So we arrived in Portugal mid-morning, overstuffed, having slept little, and logy. After making our way through customs—a longer process given all the non-European Union citizens traveling from

Newark; when we connect through elsewhere in Europe, non-EU citizens are more of a minority—we caught a shuttle bus to the car rental, to which we didn't feel like walking. We were soon in the rental car and on the road to the house in Taide, near Povoa de Lanhoso. It was lightly raining, like it had been back home—and as it had for most of the time we visited late last year.



Los Angeles Times, July 19, 1957

## Puzzling Evidence

This section has nothing to do with the Talking Heads





the 2006 edition of *Best American Short Stories* in part to swim in the sea of modern short fiction in order to determine whether he could still hack it. These stories were the result.

The 13 stories collected herein appeared in a number of different periodicals, including *Esquire*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *McSweeney's*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Playboy*, and *Postscripts*. Additional stories were published by Borderlands Press and Tor Books, further solidifying King's connection to sf and fantasy.

While traveling, I read six of the shorter stories in the collection, pieces ranging between 10 and 26 pages in length. "Harvey's Dream" appeared in *The New Yorker* in June 2003 (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/06/30/harveys-dream>). The borderline fantastic story focuses on a husband describing a dream to his wife, the dream already aligning horribly with other experiences that morning. In the piece, King refers to Wallace Stephens's poem "The Emperor of Ice-Cream."

"Rest Stop," from the December 2003 *Esquire*, was King's first story for that magazine. (<https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/books/a39328127/rest-stop-stephen-king>) A writer of hard-boiled thrillers encounters spousal abuse at a highway rest stop and decides to intervene. The story addresses the use of pen names—King and Richard Bachman, Evan Hunter and Ed McBain, Donald E. Westlake and Richard Stark—and the assumptions we make about the limits of our abilities.

Initially appearing in *Postscripts* #10, a World Horror Con special issue, "Graduation Afternoon" is an absolutely wonderful portrayal of a nuclear apocalypse. Imagine John Cheever, J.D. Salinger, or F. Scott Fitzgerald at the end of the world. The story was later adapted as a short film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgyJWt3w-8g>.

"The Cat from Hell" is the one story that wasn't written more recently. King contributed the first 500 words in the March 1977 issue of *Cavalier* to promote a writing competition. The winning entry—and King's complete story—appeared in the June issue. It also later appeared in the December 1977 issue of *Gent*. King's assistant regularly encouraged him to print the piece somewhere, and it finally ended up in this collection. It also features in the 1990 comedy horror anthology *Tales from the Darkside: The Movie*. As a short story, it's solidly fantastic.

That "*The New York Times* at Special Bargain Rates" first saw print in *F&SF* impressed me. That King continues to support prozines as well as paperback publishers such as Hard Case Crime is important. A fantastic tale along the lines of "Harvey's

Dream," the story considers a sort of purgatory and the afterlife, as well as the role of mobile phones.

And "Ayana" was included in the Fall 2007 edition of *The Paris Review*. (<https://www.theparisreview.org/fiction/5795/ayana-stephen-king>) Another solid fantastic tale, the story concentrates on the absorption of illness and paying debts forward. Though I've only read half of the stories, they're all pretty strong, and King can do a lot in a short story. Sometimes that can have more impact than a longer novel. I'm glad he returned to the form—as a reader as well as as a writer.



—William Rotsler

### Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews *Ex Machina*

This 2014 film was the second movie I watched during the flight leg from Los Angeles to Newark, N.J. I'm not sure I was even aware of it when it was first released, but it's a very good movie, and it might be even more relevant today as generative artificial

intelligence is progressively more in the foreground. Featuring a relatively small cast—perhaps a handful of people— and a limited environment—the movie was filmed at the Juvet Landskapshotell in Norway— what might have been a small movie contains some relatively large ideas.

The leader of a software development company called Blue Book—described as the maker of a search engine—performed by Oscar Isaac (who adequately captures the occasionally characteristic slovenly hubris of founders such as Jack Dorsey) invites an employee to his home. The purpose of the visit is for a person—the employee, a programmer—to determine whether the Turing test can be applied to a new AI-powered android. Is the AI good enough? Is the android convincing enough?

Similar to the 2013 voice assistant-driven movie *Her*, the programmer develops a relationship with the android—presented using absolutely wonderful special effects, including sound design—which complicates his ability to assist his employer’s decision whether the android—and her AI—is “good enough.” If she’s not good enough, the result is akin to death. The movie raises many questions about AI and robotics, including aspects of identity, intelligence, emotions, memory, intent, and other ideas.

While it’s pretty clear that the programmer can’t necessarily trust his employer, can he trust the android? Or is he—their supposed friendship—merely a means to an end? While the fate that awaited earlier versions of the android isn’t one to be envied, the android’s attempts to escape her confinement are shocking. A very interesting movie.

### **The Flash**

I watched this movie during the travel leg from Newark, N.J., to Porto, Portugal when I couldn’t sleep during the flight. The 2023 DC superhero movie features Ezra Miller as Barry Allen and the Flash. I can’t stand Miller as the Flash. I find his portrayal of the character to be too youthful, immature, and pretty irritating. And if you read about the personal life and behavior of the actor, you might find them irritating, as well. Miller seems kind of problematic.

In any event, while this movie is titled *The Flash*, it’s more of a time travel movie about multiversal incarnations of the Flash, as well as a movie about Superman—Supergirl, really—and Batman. Because when Barry Allen goes back in time to save his mother’s life, he ends up in a different timeline. That leads to Allen meeting himself—before gaining his powers from the Speed Force—Superman not existing, Allen finding an imprisoned Supergirl, and multiple Batmans (or Batmen, perhaps).



*Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1957

Batman is, in fact, the highlight of the movie. The movie starts off with the Ben Affleck Batman—in an awkward Justice League team up of sorts with Wonder Woman—before we return to the Michael Keaton Batman... and eventually the George Clooney Batman. The Affleck and Clooney roles are uncredited, and it was a joy to behold Keaton’s portrayal of Batman again. He even uses dry pasta to explain what happened when the Flash traveled back in time.

Allen’s inspiration to go back in time is valid and understandable, and even though the Flash doesn’t seem to take steps to not affect that timeline or his own future, he at least tries to repair the damage he’s done—which mostly leads to more time travel tampering. Supergirl and General Zod play strong roles in the film, and the implosion of the multiverse was visually impressive—perhaps the highlight of the movie.

Nicolas Cage shows up as an alternate Superman, and you can also see representations of Christopher Reeve and George Reeves as Superman, Adam West’s Batman, Cesar Romero and Jack Nicholson as the Joker, Eartha Kitt as Catwoman—even a portrayal of

the Jay Garrick incarnation of the Flash.

Does that make the movie worthwhile? Maybe. I don't need to ever see Miller as the Flash again, but I enjoyed the multiversal aspects of this flick—and thoroughly appreciated the return of the Keaton Batman. Regardless, I'd rather read comic books. We'll see how the current runs of *The Flash* and *Jay Garrick: The Flash* are.



Los Angeles Times, Aug. 2, 1957

### **I.S.S.**

While on the flight from Los Angeles to Newark, N.J., this was the first movie I watched. I'd seen the trailer, perhaps before a Saturn Awards screening, and was curious enough to be interested. The basic idea of this 2023 movie is that a joint Russo-American crew of the International Space Station is aboard when a nuclear war occurs on Earth below—and each team is ordered to take control of the space station “by any means necessary.”

Initially, that leads to a relatively straightforward, by-the-numbers attempted murder spree, but the alliances aren't as clearly drawn as they might have been. There's a Russo-American love affair already underway, attempts to collaborate or collude are perhaps misinterpreted, not all crew members are as aggressive as others, and it becomes clear that assertiveness or nation state allegiances won't necessarily rule the day.

While the movie ably communicates themes of scarcity—few people, few resources, few rooms, few options—the larger themes of the “overview effect” that can be experienced when seeing Earth from outer space and the need for cooperation on the space station regardless of what's going on down below are worth considering and exploring.

The scenes of the bombs dropping—as seen from the space station—and the resulting destruction visible from outer space are visually interesting, but this movie doesn't rely on special effects. It's more about human nature, interpersonal relationships, and survival.

### **Ignorable Theme: Television Shows**

I'm not going to write about my favorite sf or fantasy TV show, but I am going to share my appreciation of select programming in Portugal. Upon arrival, during our first visit to the local grocery store, Continente Bom Dia, before going to the house, I picked up two TV-related magazines.

The April 4-10, 2024, edition of *TV Guia*—#2359—(<https://www.tvguia.pt>) reminded me that I much prefer another magazine's listings, but still featured some genre fare. The “Streaming Destaques da Semana” (Highlights of the Week) feature included *Star Trek: Discovery* on SkyShowtime and *I Woke Up a Vampire* on Netflix. Additionally, Amazing Améziante's graphic novel *Quentin por Tarantino* (Edições Asa, 2024) was featured in the “Livros Agenda” section. That book is also available in English as *Quentin by Tarantino* (Titan, 2024).

The magazine I prefer is *TV 7 Dias*. (<https://www.tv7dias.pt>) Not only does the April 11, 2024, edition—#1934—offer two pages of listings per day, to *TV*

*Guia*'s single page per day, the periodical is celebrating its 37th anniversary this year. The Cable TV section highlights Historia's UFO-related *Ficheiros Alienigenas Reabertos* (*Alien Files: Reopened*), *Star Trek: Discovery* on SkyShowtime, and *Fallout* on Prime Video. *Doctor Who*'s May 11 return to Disney+ also earns a mention. And the "Lazer Livros" column features Lauren Roberts's fantasy novel *Powerless* (Singular, 2024). That book is also available in English, published by Simon & Schuster in 2023.

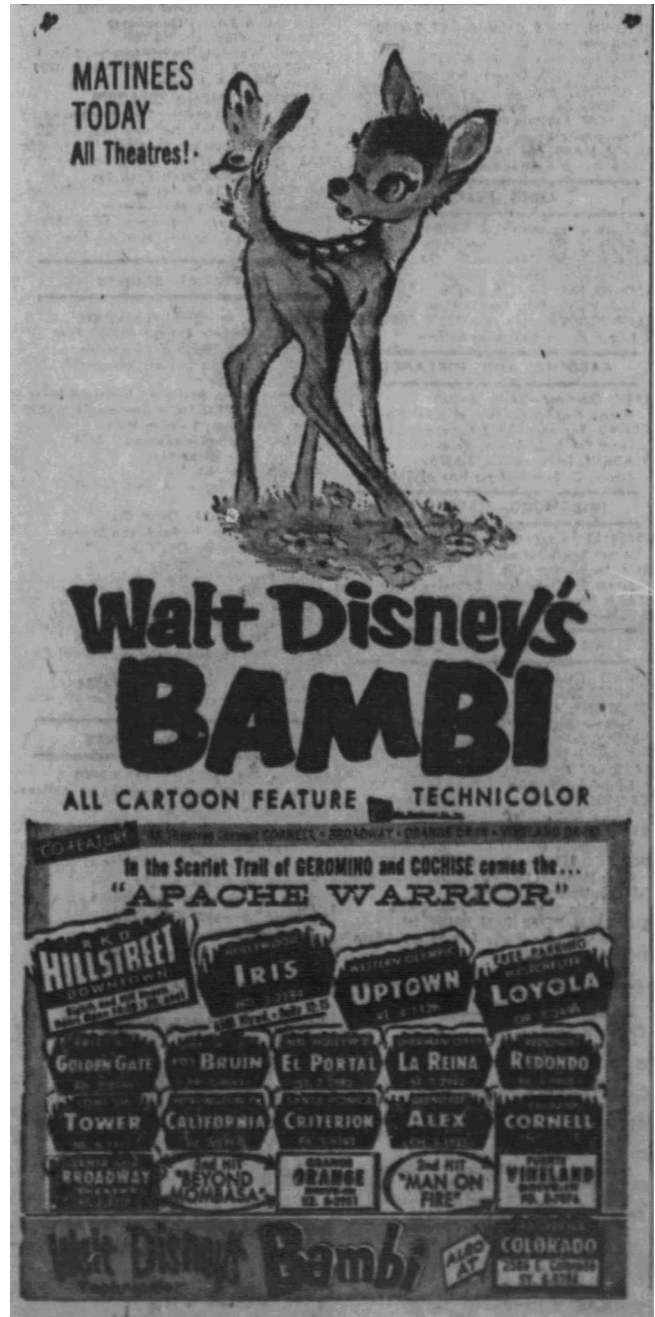
But the TV show I want to celebrate this week is hidden in the Quinta-feira listings for RTP Memoria on April 11: "23:30 *Alfred Hitchcock Apresenta*." Yes, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* is still airing late nights with Portuguese subtitles. Since SIC Radical ended its run of *Espaço: 1999—Space: 1999—Alfred Hitchcock Presents* might be the strongest genre or genre-adjacent fare currently airing. I'm thankful it's still on.

When I was unable to sleep at about 2 a.m. midweek, I watched two episodes of *Alfred Hitchcock Apresenta* that I'd recorded last fall. The first episode was "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole" (S2E32), which originally aired May 5, 1957, and was based on a 1929 short story by Thomas Burke first published in *The Story-Teller* (February 1929). Largely not aligned with our genres of interest, there is an aspect of the fantastic available in one interpretation. Near the end of the episode, after the strangler has been identified, a character comments that the killer's hands sometimes got ideas. Another character responds, paraphrased, "That's insane!" Just imagine: What if different parts of your body had minds of their own? What if they got ideas on which they then acted?

I also watched "A Man Greatly Beloved" (S2E33), which originally aired May 12, 1957. The program was based on a short story by A.A. Milne, "Greatly Beloved," which was published in the February 1950 issue of *Good Housekeeping*. The story was retitled "A Man Greatly Beloved" in the Milne collection *A Table Nearby the Band* (E.P. Dutton, 1950). While spiritualism plays a role in the story—a character is studying (via home correspondence course!) to become a medium, reads *The Spiritualist*, and participates in a seance—there's not much of the fantastic in this episode. It's primarily a case of mistaken identity, friendship, deciding to live one's best life, and the legacies we choose to leave behind.

Regardless, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* is excellent television. Hitchcock's opening and closing sequences are stellar examples of hosted scripted television, and every single episode I've seen has offered a moody, intelligent, suspenseful tale. The tone and pacing is generally perfect, and the show might be for mystery

what *The Twilight Zone* is for the more explicitly fantastic. Because many of the episodes adapt short fiction, there's a literary aspect to the program, as well, and one could easily seek out the source material for reading. I'm curious whether current readers of Livros dos Brasil's Coleção Vampiro novels (<https://tinyurl.com/Colecao-Vampiro>) also watch this program assiduously. Because they ~~should~~ could.



*Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 16, 1957

This morning, I also watched the first episode of *Espaço: 1999*. The Portuguese translation of *Space: 1999* was the second ever sf television show to reach Portugal in 1976. It was preceded by *The Tomorrow*

*People* in 1975. *Star Trek* didn't reach Portugal until 1978, after *Star Maidens*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, and a German series titled *Raumpatrouille—Die phantastischen Abenteuer des Raumschiffes Orion*. *Espaço: 1999* remains popular enough that it's rebroadcast every five to 10 years or so. SIC Radical broadcast it in 2006 and 2023—the run I recorded—and RTP Memoria (now home to Alfred Hitchcock!) aired it in 2011.

Between *Alfred Hitchcock Apresenta* and *Espaço: 1999*, I'll be in fine fannish fettle.

### Comments on APA-L #3064

In *Leeway* dated for April 4, 2024, **Lee Gold** informed others of the deaths of Stephen Goldin and Tom Digby. While Lee and Barry Gold's participation in a recent LASFS meeting was welcome and appreciated—it was good to see you!—the purpose of their visit was sad news indeed.

I will share your feedback with cover artist Taral Wayne. While it rained a little after our arrival in Portugal, it's now sunny, clear, and warmer than it's ever been during previous visits. The house in which we're staying is cooler than outside, which is a nice change. We haven't used the fireplaces yet, though we have turned on the heat at night.

Thank you for clarifying that you've never read Terry Goodkind. I brought Robert Jordan's second *Wheel of Time* novel with me and am now curious how nasty his villains get. All others should always mention books they think are wonderful.

**John Hertz's** *Vanamonde* #1588 described pulling off the road to listen to the Tallis Scholars' recording of Thomas Tallis's "Spem in alium." A recording is available online. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT-ZAAi4UOQ>) It is absolutely beautiful. I will share your feedback with cover artist Jose Sanchez.

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #52, **Matthew Mitchell** reaches a first annual milestone—52 contributions to APA-L! It is good, indeed, to have you here, sir. Your discussion of the recent Falcon 9 launch—and its landing on the *Of Course I Still Love You* dronship—reminded me of Iain M. Banks's novel *Excession* and its spaceship names. (*Snow Poster Township* #10)

Which books have you picked up because the cover illustration made you go "Ook ook!?" According to *Fancylopedia 3*, the phrase "Ook ook slobber drool" originated... right here in the pages of APA-L. "'Ook ook slobber drool' came into fannish use sometime around 1970, when Ed Buchman used it in APA-L, meaning, according to Elizabeth Fox, 'my brain's pleasure sensors have been diddled,'" saith the *Fancy 3*. As I continue to OCR APA-L distributions, I'll look

for a first reference. Mr. Buchman, any stories to share?

I will share your feedback with cover artist Taral Wayne. "Some of the pathways are not well paved" is a wonderful sentence. When we're in Los Angeles, my wife's home office is in the house, adjacent to the TV room. My home office is in the old game room, in a finished addition to the garage, which is detached from the house. We are perhaps 20 feet away from each other, but in different buildings with a small yard and lemon tree in between.

**Derek LaPorte's** serialized fiction returned in *The Winnower* #2. I went outside to read that in the warmth of the sun. Either this portion is less abstruse than the previous outing was, or I'm getting used to your approach to the story and the internal logic of the narrative and its world. It definitely felt less daunting than my first exposure to the piece. I quite like the occasional sentence just ending mid

The introduction of the repopulants and the status afforded them, as well as the tension that opportunity introduced to the relationship between our protagonist—Tilt?—and Grady, now a Birther, is intriguing. I enjoyed the aspect of spirituality introduced by the strange white discoloration underneath the discovered corpse. Was it efflorescence?

I now think that the names granted by the Company are quite long and perhaps randomized constructions similar to passwords—like *IPassword's* recommended orthoepy-spaniard-obelisk-fishy only capitalized and without hyphens. Those names are then shortened by a letter each layer a survivor goes down? Indicating survival and experience, or growing closeness to death? The availability of the Winnower role to those with one-letter names—those with little left to lose?—seems to suggest that, but I'm not sure whether shorter names signify stature or lack thereof.

And the Company geologist! A neat new character to introduce. After this installment, I'll definitely keep reading—additional layers upon layers are being revealed!

I'll share your feedback with cover artist Taral Wayne. Once I make my way through what juvenalia remains upon my return next month, I'll revisit the ending of "The Gem of Power." It's a dangerous question, however. Given that it's juvenalia, a more mature writer should want to change *all sorts of things* about the writing. The fun is reading such work as it is, without the benefit of adjustment.

## Faculae & Filigree #30

April 12, 2024

*Faculae & Filigree* is an apazine published by Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA; kalel@well.com; 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to LASFAPA, members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, and select others. (Previously, it was prepared for Slanapa.) A recent copy can be requested for the Usual. A member of the Fan Writers of America. This is a Karma Lapel publication.

### Trip Report: Portugal (cont.)

My wife and I are in Portugal working this week, our first here for the month. After arriving early in the week, we've gone into town several times to run errands in Póvoa de Lanhoso: a couple of trips to the grocery store, Continente Bom Dia; to Worten to pick up an alarm clock; to the bank; and while there—to the local bookstore next door.

Lipóvoa Livraria Papelaria (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #89) is a wonderful little bookstore and stationery shop. They stock science fiction—shelving Saida de Emergencia (<http://www.saidadeemergencia.com>) titles in the same area—as well as other related items. Among this week's finds were Helen McCarthy's *Uma Breve Historia da Manga* (Platano Editora, 2016)—available in English as *A Brief History of Manga* (Ilex, 2014)—and two selections from Porto Editora's promising #Classicos line: Jonathan Swift's *As Viagens de Gulliver* (adapted by John Lang) and Julio Verne's *Viagem ao Centro da Terra*.

Those latter two items target younger readers ages 9-12 and up, and I look forward to learning how to read Portuguese using them and other books. YA adaptations of classic sf novels might suit me well as I get started reading the language. I've also been reading *Jornal de Noticias* roughly every other day. (<https://www.jn.pt>) I can generally understand the broad strokes of news articles at this point, but not the details. Inspired by Caitlin, I also picked up Raymond Chandler's *A Janela Alta* (*The High Window* in English) from Livros do Brasil's Coleção Vampiro line. Hands down, the best paperback series in the country currently. If only there were a classics of sf and fantasy range similar to this collection!

Instead of utilizing special orders at Lipóvoa immediately, I also placed an order with Grupo Editorial Divêrgencia (<https://divergencia.pt>) for delivery while we're here. In addition to single-author works, Divêrgencia's speculative publishing tends to focus on anthologies showcasing Portuguese authors. I look forward to exploring the anthologies I ordered focusing on space opera, cyberpunk, horror,

steampunk, hope punk, and "winepunk," as well as the imprint's 10th anniversary anthology.



Los Angeles Times, Aug. 16, 1957

I've also learned about a couple of online booksellers that seem popular in Portugal: Leya Online (<https://www.leyaonline.com/pt>) and Wook (<https://www.wook.pt>). After corresponding with Octávio dos Santos late last year, I've also ordered a couple of his books: *Espíritos Das Luzes* and the anthology *Mensageiros Das Estrelas*.

This week hasn't all been book scouting, however. Several days this week, before our work days began, Caitlin and I walked around the neighborhood, roughly two miles up the hill to Cidade N'Aldeia (what I call the Everything Store, where I buy the newspaper), through the park and down the stairs to the Terreiro das Músicas and Santuário de Nossa Senhora do Porto de Ave. The stairs connect eight chapels depicting scenes from the life of Mary, including the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth of Jesus, the Adoration of the Magi, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the Flight to Egypt, and Jesus

among the Doctors of the Law. It's similar to Bom Jesus Do Monte (*T&T* #50) but less developed and trafficked. (<https://www.jthr.es/index.php/journal/article/view/253>)

### Juvenalia: "Saving Superman"

*I wrote the following story when I was in fourth grade, so I was perhaps 9 years old. The piece is written in loose cursive, in pencil, on spiral-bound notebook paper. My student number that year, 416, is included under my name in the upper righthand corner. The story is ungraded, and there are no comments or editing marks. Its published form varies slightly from the handwritten original.*

Yesterday, my mother went shopping. She bought me a comic book. When she got home, she handed it to me. I yelled, "Thanks, Mom!"

I ran upstairs as she said, "Darn! I forgot a few things. I'll have to go get them. Bye!"

I read the comic book for about five minutes. Then I heard a person's voice. "Hi there, young man," he said. "I see you're marveling over my latest exploits. Pretty exciting, huh?"

I replied, "Yes, they are, Mr. ... ah... ah... Mr. ... ah... Superhero!"

"The name's Superman," he replied.

"Wow!" I said. "In the same room with Sup—"

He interrupted me. "What's that weird noise I hear?" he said. "Heath, go over and look out the window."

I did. A second later, Superman asked, "What's it look like?"

"It looks like Lex Luthor's weapon in *Action Comics* #247," I answered.

"Darn!" he said. "He almost beat me in that issue."

"Well, it looks like he's coming over this way," I said.

"You stay here while I go fight him," Superman said. "Up, up, up, and away!"

A few minutes later, I heard a series of sounds: *Zzzzzzzzzt!* and *Crash!* Then, the wall where the window is collapsed inward.

The next thing I knew, I was in a cell lined with Marvolium. Marvolium is an unbreakable metal that can't be bent.

Meanwhile, Superman revives and says, "Where is Heath?" A second later, he looks at the collapsed wall. "Not here!" Then, he takes off.

A few hours later, I heard an intercom start to buzz. Then, in a crackly voice: "Superman breaking in the east sector!"

I heard a familiar voice. "Here you are, Heath!" After a brief drilling sound, Superman was in the cell

with me. Suddenly, kryptonite fumes come through the ventilation system. I took off my jacket and pressed it against the vent. In a few seconds, Superman and I were out of the trap.

"Heath, I think we better go home now," he said.

"Will you come back?" I asked.

He answered: "Maybe."

In a little while, I heard my mother's voice calling upstairs. "Heath! I'm home! I got you a few comic books."

"Come upstairs, Mom!" I said. "I want to show you something."

After she got upstairs, I said, "Mom, where's that hole in the wall?"

"What hole in the wall?" she replied.

"Never mind," I said.

After she left, the Superman on the cover of the comic book I had been reading winked at me.

*I thought the comic book identified in the story would help date the writing of the story—though the student number is indicative—but Action Comics #247 was published in December 1958 and doesn't feature Lex Luthor. Chances are slim that I owned that issue when I was in fourth grade. (I don't even own it now.)*

*Similarly, Superman #247 was published in January 1972. There is a cameo appearance of Lex Luthor in that issue, in "Muto—Monarch of Menace!" reprinted from Action Comics #338 (June 1966). And he has a weapon.*



*Superman* #247 (January 1972)

*It's slightly more likely that I had that issue, but I don't remember reading it. (The main story's migrant workers in central California seem vaguely familiar and resonate more strongly now that I live in southern*







—William Rotsler

## Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

### *The Invasion*

Luckily, all of the TV programs and movies I'd recorded on the Nos DVR were still available on our return to Portugal, so there's quite an accumulation of science fictional and fantastic cinema and TV that had been broadcast with Portuguese subtitles last fall and winter. This 2007 remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, adapted from Jack Finney's 1955 novel, is titled *A Invasão* in Portuguese.

While not a straightforward remake, it is still very much in line with the original book, movie, and subsequent remakes. The primary adjustment to the film is that the alien infection that leads to a more subtle form of encasement before one's body is entirely snatched is transmitted physically via bodily fluids. Basically, those transformed into aliens cough, sneeze, spit, or purposefully vomit into the faces and mouths of potential victims in order to infect them with the virus or bacteria.

That biological transmission medium is then activated when the host falls asleep—so for much of the movie, the characters portrayed by Daniel Craig, Nicole Kidman, and others do everything they can to stay awake, lest they awake possessed by the alien invaders. While the traditional pods or cocoons aren't present in this version, those infected are briefly encased in a light webbing of sorts before they're fully possessed.

Once possessed, human beings are able to participate in the overmind or hive intelligence of the alien invaders. The result—as posited by the aliens—is a world devoid of disagreement, strife, violence, poverty, or war... the result of extreme homogeneity or sameness. Are disagreement, strife, violence, poverty, or war an overarching aspect of human nature?

I particularly enjoyed the resulting paranoia. The scenes in which a character—or the viewer—wasn't sure whether someone was who they ought to be, and in which characters said things like “That's not my husband!” were quite effective. Not as explicitly anti-communist as previous outings, *The Invasion* combines fear and distrust of the other with an aspect of biological horror post-AIDS but pre-COVID-19.

It's not the best adaptation of Finney's novel, but it's enjoyable—and not as bad as its initial reception might suggest. (Craig in a supporting role? Preposterous!) Regardless, start with its predecessors. The 1956 and 1978 versions are particularly good.

### *Robot Overlords*

Titled *A Supremacia dos Robots* in Portuguese, this 2014 British independent movie starring Gillian Anderson and Ben Kingsley was kind of a disaster. Made for \$21 million, the movie brought in less than \$1 million—not a good return on that investment. At the time of its release, it was heralded as similar to *Doctor Who* and the Quatermass series. Perhaps because it was British; there's little similarity otherwise. There were plans for a TV series that didn't come together, but a video game and novelization were also released.

The movie reminded me a little of *The Tripods* and *V.* (Newsprint issues of *2000 AD* are featured in one scene.) Aliens are invading Earth—intending to study humanity for unknown reasons—and have sent robot emissaries. Some robots are burly bruisers. Some are more lithe drones. And one—the Mediator—got stuck while crossing the uncanny valley in order to more successfully serve as an ambassador with the humans.

Humans have been outfitted with an electronic monitoring device that plugs into one's neck. If you stray too far from home—there's an indefinite curfew

in effect—you're blown up. The aliens can read your memories via the implant, which leads to some scenes suggestive of torture. Some humans have aligned with the robot overlords, including Kingsley's character, dubbed Collaborators (which resonates with *V*'s Friends of the Visitors). Others have withdrawn to a remote location, creating their own parallel society but no longer rebelling against the invaders.

A group of teenagers and children learn how to deactivate the overlords' monitoring devices, embarking on a candy feeding frenzy (echoes of Nicole Kidman's convenience store pairing of Mountain Dew with prescription medication pill popping in *The Invasion* above) before going in search of the protagonist's father, a fighter pilot who appears to have worn his flight suit for more than 1,000 days despite his newfound pacifism. The protagonist realizes that he can interface with the robot invaders, and the invasion plans unravel from there.

The special effects are not as bad as they could have been, and the Mediator, while creepy and diminutive, is fun to watch. A slightly quiet sf movie that made me wonder what the aliens were hoping to learn. Did they learn it? Would they actually leave when they did? The music video for Mat Zo's "Robots Never Lie," music included during the end titles ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJbjWH\\_GLb0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJbjWH_GLb0)), might tell you more than you need to know. It's worthwhile for the Mediator's exposition and beats per minute shout out.

### **Starship Troopers**

Retitled *Soldiers of the Universe*, or *Soldados do Universo* in Portuguese, this movie is the 1997 adaptation of Robert A. Heinlein's novel, originally serialized (as *Starship Soldier*) in the October and November 1959 issues of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. I've seen the movie and read the book previously, but it was interesting seeing it a second time. The flick hasn't improved over time, but I noticed different things this time, allowing me to recontextualize the film in my estimation slightly. It also inspired me to reread Heinlein's novel.

Yes, Heinlein's writing is reduced to gunfights and fisticuffs as the youthful soldier recruits struggle to stave off the alien invasion. Those soldiers are more physical entities—knee-jerk reactionaries—than thinking men and women, though there is room for more thoughtful members of the military: pilots and intelligence officers. I had forgotten that Neil Patrick Harris appeared in the movie, and Dina Meyer had just recently appeared in *Johnny Mnemonic*.

The cast reminds me more of YA-oriented TV programs such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and

*Riverdale* than an adult sf movie or Heinlein novel. While there is some debate about whether *Starship Troopers* should be considered one of Heinlein's juveniles, I'd suggest that the filmmakers definitely read it as such. The movie adaptation lands much more palatably if you consider it a juvenile, a film targeting children rather than adults.



*Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 23, 1957

It also resonated strongly with the film version of *Ender's Game* (which starred Ben Kingsley, who was in *Robot Overlords* above). I'm curious whether the two movies' focus on youth in training and anti-alien militarism would carry over to a parallel read of the two books; there might be fewer similarities than the movies suggest.

Additionally, I appreciated the portrayal of generational differences in the film. In one case, the protagonist's parents disagree with his choice to enlist in the military, perhaps representing a class- or merit-based bias against such civic service. In other cases, an educator also serves as a gung-ho squad leader and trainer. And a recruiting agent represents the potential physical costs of military service.

Overall, this is a kids movie about kids. Well, teenagers. They're energetic. They're horny. And they're impulsive. Does that make them perfect soldiers? I don't know. But I do know that—while the aliens, too, utilize energetic, violent soldiers, as well—they're also backed by somewhat chubby, larger,

slower aliens that can suck the brains out of human soldiers to become smarter and better learn our ways. That ability to learn might end up more important than the skirmishes on the front lines.

### Comments on LASFAPA #566

Kay McCutcheon's cover is delightful, even in black and white. Was the piece of art originally in color?

In *Fool's Mate* #569, **David Schlosser** tried to remember what challenge I faced when emailing him my contribution. If I remember, it was me sending an attached file in an email, but he'd receive the email—and not the attachment. I then tried sending it from my Gmail account rather than my Well account within Gmail; I'm not sure we determined what worked or didn't, but the issue hasn't come up again.

My wife and I have yet to see *Poor Things*, but a friend spoke highly of the movie recently, and Caitlin enjoyed the novel by Alasdair Gray on which it's based. I've never read any of the Raymond Abrashkin and Jay Williams series of Danny Dunn books. Schlosser's now up to scanning LASFAPA #83 and I'm OCR'ing #76 as I write. One thing I haven't been doing is compressing the files, so they can be quite large. I'll consider doing that, too.

I've never been a panelist or speaker at a con—you wouldn't know that—so when I say participating in, I mean attending or serving on staff, I guess. For ConZealand in 2020, I was an online member, along with everyone else that pandemic year, and checked out some of the programming. I don't seem to have written about it in a fanzine. So far, the in-person, hybrid LASFS meetings have been working well in terms of Internet access. I've been doing my scribe duties from home. Isn't *Wheel of Fortune* or *Jeopardy!* heroin for old people?

The memory test you mentioned was featured in the movie *Jules*. (T&T #109) How old are that they've started testing you for mental acuity? You sure showed her. Congratulations to Mari on her residency match!

**Nick Smith's** *Labyrinthine Lines* dated for March 2024 mentioned the recent election as well as rain. Luckily, it didn't rain before we left for Portugal—ist was relatively sunny and clear, though I did see clouds—but it sure was windy. I'm sorry to hear about your misadventures with FlixBus. Did you see Larry Niven while you were both there? Thank you for donating books to the Big Auction at the LASFS meeting. I do believe I bid on and won at least one of them.

As always, I read and enjoyed your book reviews. Perhaps I'll bid on the Gordon Dickson in the future! (Just kidding.) I, too, watched some of the first episode of *Halo*, but didn't continue watching. Lately

I've been enjoying *The Wheel of Time* on Prime Video, as I reread Robert Jordan. (T&T #107 and 109) I'm more likely to continue watching that. Your description of *Halo* piqued my interest, however. I've never played the video game, but I did play *Metroid*. There have been a couple of short *Metroid* films and a TV miniseries titled *Metroid: Machinima*, but despite 2019 reports that a movie was in the offing, nothing seems to have entered production.

In *That Flagon Last Night* #256, **Alva Svoboda** mentioned the slow coming of spring in the Bay Area. May the weather warm soon! I appreciated your recent reading notes on cli-fi, as well as Michael Mann's books. I've recently been corresponding with William Breiding; his emails have been a delight to receive. Your experience at Johnston's anniversary renewal sounds meaningful. Your four pillars of decarbonization—public support, government action, adequate funding, and energy use—seem sound.

**Janice Morningstar's** *The Title Goes Here* dated March 9, 2024, discussed welcoming new cats into their home. Your consideration of the thought process and approach to finding suitable cats—as well as the state of veterinarianism as a profession—was really interesting. I no longer check out *Nextdoor*, but your positioning it as a diverse view of the community is compelling. I was put off by the racism and paranoid home protectionism in our area. Dude and Mila sound like good additions to your family. I've also found that cats don't seem to recognize or respect the utility of objects when they're in use. Especially books! An excellent issue.

And in *Stomping on a Dream* dated March 8, 2024, **Alan Winston** described recent attention challenges and dance activity. I continue to be impressed by your travel schedule. Your reviews of recent performances were intriguing (*Big Data*), as well as amusing (*Legally Blonde*). In F&F #28's "Look at Me, I'm Sir John Dee," Chris Braiotta wrote the first stanza, and Dave McMahon the second. They'll get a kick out of you commenting on it.

I particularly enjoyed two of your sentences: "[P]eople who are uncomfortable with their partners having other partners shouldn't try to be poly," and "[M]ay you be no less healthy than you are now." Both are worthy sentiments!

### Addendum

This morning, we walked to the Igreja de Taíde and along the country lanes between homes and fields. We saw several pigs—one female was curious and approached us—as well as wool-laden sheep in the distance. They were clearly sticking to the shade.

## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #111

April 18, 2024

*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* is an apazine published by Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230; [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com); 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to APA-L, members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, and select others. A recent copy can be requested for the Usual. A member of the Fan Writers of America. This is a Karma Lapel publication.

### Last Week's Senryu

10 p.m. right here,

2 p.m. where I started.

Traveling back in time.

Last week's senryu was pretty similar to that in *T&T* #89 in November 2023. Working during my first week in Portugal this spring, I was mindful of time zones: It's five hours earlier in New York City, six hours earlier in Wisconsin, and eight hours earlier in LA.

Now that I'm on vacation this week, I thought I'd be less aware of time zones. Between calling my parents and my son—eight hours ahead in Tokyo!—it's still necessary math. There might be something to the 24-hour clock rather than my usual 12-hour sense of time. It's interesting to think about Europe being in the future while the United States is in the past.

### Trip Report: Portugal (cont.)

Last weekend, Caitlin went on our first planned hike in Portugal during our visit this spring. We explored the Trilho dos Moinhos do Pontido, a 2.5-mile out and back in Póvoa de Lanhoso. The trailhead was at the end of a park with which we're familiar—Parque do Pontido—and we'd previously parked not far from where we parked Sunday to visit the local weekly market last fall. We enjoyed seeing more of the park as we walked from the car to the trailhead.

For the most part, the trail follows the course of the Ribeira de Pontido, along which were situated a series of nine castor mills that date back to at least 1758. The brook was used to irrigate nearby fields, as well as to power millstones used to grind grain. Along some stretches, the sides of the brook were reinforced with impressive granite walls to protect against flooding, as well as to channel the water with adequate force for milling. That fitted stonework was awesome.

Reportedly, the mills fell out of use as recently as 1972, by which time such mills were entirely replaced by electric and combustion engines, as well as hydraulic systems. Given such late abandonment, the advanced stage of deterioration is somewhat

surprising, but perhaps not because of the age of the structures. As my wife pointed out, the hike combined several of our interests: the isolation of nature, abandoned infrastructure, history, and technological change.



Remnants of a castor mill's interior mechanism

The trail connects to a path to Castelo de Lanhoso (*T&T* #92), but we saved that—and the elevation gain—for a future hike. We enjoyed the largely wooded and shaded nature of the trail along the brook, as well as its thinning out and opening up to residential and agricultural land to the north.



One of the abandoned castor mills

Instead, we continued along the trail up and out of the valley, along a portion of the seven-mile Maria da Fonte Pedestrian Route, as well as on a brief section of Via Romana XVII, a route dating back to Roman times. At the end of our planned hike, we were surprised and delighted by Carvalho de Calvos.

A relatively sizable park containing an interpretative center, a mountain bicycle facility and public restroom, and playground, it also features the

Calvo Oak (aka Carvalha Grossa and Carvalha da Fondou), documented as the oldest oak tree in the Iberian peninsula and the second oldest oak tree in Europe. More than 500 years old, the tree stands 30 meters tall. We didn't actually realize that we'd seen the tree until we got home because our attention was drawn by something else even more impressive.

Just beyond the edge of the park is the Mamoá do Madorro, a tumulus construction marking the site of a burial mound dating back to a Neolithic community in the 5th or 4th millennium BC. The burial mound is still visible, with a diameter of 28 meters and height of two meters. A depression at the top of the mound indicates people's excavation of the mound for artifacts and remains over the years.



Mamoá do Madorro



The top of the mound

There are multiple examples of Neolithic habitation in the Povoá de Lanhoso area, but this is the largest tumulus. You can learn more about the trail overall at <https://tinyurl.com/Moinhos-pdf>, and about the burial mound at <https://tinyurl.com/mamoá-do-madorro>. Not

bad for a first hike just 12 minutes away from the house in which we're staying.

### **Space Cadet and Buck Rogers Comic Strips**

While researching early mentions of science fictional television in *The Los Angeles Times*—*Captain Video and His Video Rangers*; *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*; and *Space Patrol*—I came across a short article promoting the debut of the *Space Cadet* comic strip in the *Times*:

#### **SPACE CADET TO START IN TOMORROW'S TIMES**

Experimental rockets today are attaining speeds up to 4100 m.p.h., rising 135 miles in less than five minutes. Interplanetary travel, in the opinion of scientists, soon may be an accomplished fact.

Beginning tomorrow, *The Times* will present an adventure feature titled *Space Cadet*, an absorbing picture-story of the conquest of space, to be published in the Comics Section daily and Sunday. Artist Ray Bailey draws *Space Cadet* with the technical advice of Willy Ley, a world-famous authority on rockets and space travel.

See this exciting preview of the world of tomorrow starting tomorrow exclusively in the daily and Sunday *Times*.

*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 9, 1951

The next day, the promotional drumbeat continued:

#### **SPACE CADET BOWS IN ON COMIC PAGE TODAY**

*Space Cadet*, a new picture-story of interplanetary travel, makes its debut today on the comic page. *Space Cadet* will be published every day on the comic page of *The Times*, with Sunday installments printed in color.

The comic strip *Napoleon* has been moved into the main news section, where it will appear daily. Today *Napoleon* appears on Page 8, Part 1.

*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 10, 1951

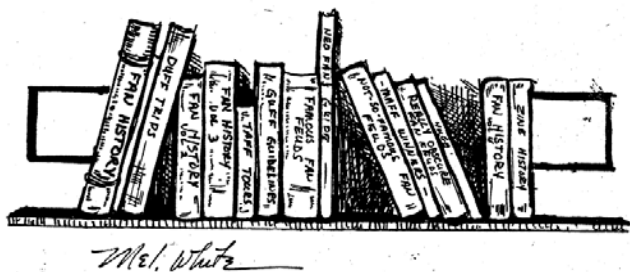
At the end of this issue of *T&T*, I'll include two pages of *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* comic strips—the first week's run of the strip in the *Times*. The *Buck Rogers* comic strip was also running Sundays at the time of *Space Cadet*'s 1951 debut in the *Times*. *Buck Rogers* first ran in the *Times* on Sept. 29, 1935. I'll include that strip at the end of this issue, as well.

**Buck Rogers — 25th Century A. D.**

The most adventurous comics character of all—the inimitable, the daring, the intrepid BUCK ROGERS — next Sunday joins the stellar cast of more than fifty players who entertain you in the Sunday Times 16-page Comics Section. Follow his perilous battles through inter-stellar space! See the war weapons of the future! Watch the treacherous plans of hawk-like villains on far away planets! Live centuries hence with a race of super-men! Read BUCK ROGERS!

*Los Angeles Times* ad detail, Sept. 27, 1935

While the first *Flash Gordon* comic strip was published Jan. 7, 1934, it doesn't seem to have run in the *Times* that early. I'll continue looking for its first appearance—if any—in the *Times*.



### From the Reading Pile: Book Reviews

*The Dissentizens* by Bruno G. Condray (Tit-Bits, 1954)

Inspired by a Facebook post by Paul Di Filippo, I read this “generally undistinguished” slim paperback published by C. Arthur Pearson in England. The 68-page edition of the Tit-Bits Science-Fiction Library was attributed to a pen name of Leslie George Humphrys, who wrote a handful of such chapbooks and novels for Tit-Bits and Gannet Press in the early to mid-1950s. Inexpensively printed and quite reasonably priced, it seems to be a budget item, perhaps a novelette or novella.

The chapbook resonates lightly with and in opposition to Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (below) because the Dissentizens are trying to “shake... the dirt of the Earth Control Board off our boots” and establish a new, independent colony. Crash landing on an uncharted planetoid, the crew of 10—all that remains after a purge by the Security Corps, which controls every aspect of life—encounters alien life (though not native), as well as other human beings, on the planetoid.

Condray's portrayal of a spacefaring humankind does not mirror the romanticized societal control of Heinlein:

**All this was the result of Man's conquest of space. The initial efforts had been made in the cause of expansion and freedom. But early on it had been seen that freedom in space could be dangerous. Any group who could build and equip a space ship was a potential enemy. They could rove in space or settle on a planetoid; either way they were capable of causing trouble by launching long-range projectiles on established bases. Man had conquered space, but in doing so had added to the fetters around his legs. The only way to prevent disaster was by absolute control of Man himself. And so the citizens of Earth were gradually subjugated, scientists working hand in glove with the politicians to produce the citizen, who by devious methods, could be controlled into doing as he was told.**

The Dissentizens' spacecraft, *Starchaser*, is damaged while landing, but the other ship seems operational, even if it doesn't have a working radio. The *Starchaser* has a functioning radio, though the

rebels are worried about being located if they use it. The crew attempts to persuade the other spacefarers to help them, though the Dissentizens aren't able to unify efforts with the Martians also rebelling against the Mars Control Board, the Martian equivalent of the Earth Control Board.

But like so many other utopian experiments relying on human reproduction to increase a population, the Dissentizens' efforts crumble as the result of an uneven male-female ratio and conflicts among the men seeking the affection of the solitary woman among their ranks.

There is some borderline science among the fiction: “space dust” that makes approaching the planetoid dangerous; Martians that range from “midgets” to “giants,” speed-curve computers, atmospheric tests, deposits of white pluronium that suggest the planet would make for rich mining, prehistoric diplodocus, and a universal interplanetary language called Lingaplan.

Despite the budget nature of the item, it was a fun, brief read—and I can see the appeal of such slim volumes. What would a Tit-Bits-like series of novelette- or novella-length ebooks look like, perhaps for reading on one's mobile phone? Might it look something like *Nunslinger*, if serialized? (*T&T* #69).

I can see the appeal of testing ideas, characters, and series concepts in more frequent chunks of 7,500-19,000 words. Not everything would graduate to the level of Doc Savage or Perry Rhodan. *Smashwords* lets users sort by genre as well as word count (<https://www.smashwords.com/shelves/home/1213/any/short>, for example). But how do you sift through the vanity press and AI-written drek? How might a publisher rather than a platform approach this?

*Starship Troopers* by Robert A. Heinlein (G.P. Putnam's, 1959)

Having recently watched the 1997 movie adaptation upon arriving in Portugal (*Faculae & Filigree* #30), I was inspired to return to the novel, which I'd previously read. This time, I read the two-part serialization as originally published in the October and November 1959 issues of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* under the title “Starship Soldier.”

While the film primarily focuses on the relationships—such as they are—between the starship troopers, and their conflict with the Bugs in high action movie style, the book spends more time exploring the moral and political philosophy underlying the future human society portrayed in the book. Heinlein offers some interesting ideas—more so for discussion and consideration than for application

—such as only military veterans being able to vote, the true purpose of war (shades of Nicholas Hurst’s “The Purpose of a Military” in *The Triumvirate* Vol. 4 [*The Brass Hat Mind* #7]), the source of community spirit and civic virtue, and the cause of juvenile delinquency.

Rereading the book affirmed my sense that the movie might have been a stronger adaptation than I thought the first time I saw it several decades ago. I was also intrigued by the gender, race, and age diversity portrayed in the novel. The protagonist is Filipino. His mother dies in an alien attack on Buenos Aires, Argentina. Men and women alike can serve in the military. And middle-aged people can also enlist as new recruits. That suggests that racial and ethnic divisions among humans might be softened or erased over time or once we encounter alien life—unifying the human race in the face of even greater diversity off planet.

In addition to the political ideas raised by the text—regardless of whether they were espoused by Heinlein personally—a couple of other debates about the novel might merit consideration. Is the novel hard sf? Perhaps, though I find that question less interesting than another debate.

Is *Starship Troopers* one of Heinlein’s juveniles? While the story is a coming-of-age tale, the book doesn’t resonate that strongly with other Heinlein juveniles I’ve read—and it seems an odd place for Heinlein to end the sequence of juveniles. (I’d suggest that *Starship Troopers* is a less compelling coming-of-age story than those written by David Feintuch [*T&T* #101] or Lois McMaster Bujold [*T&T* #107].) Some readers only consider the novels published by Scribner’s as the true juveniles. Regardless, *Starship Troopers* was submitted as an entry in the series but was rejected.

### From the Reading Pile: Manga Reviews

**Gyo** Deluxe Edition by Junji Ito (Viz Media, 2015) While I’ve been familiar with the manga work of Junji Ito for some time (*T&T* #89)—call it a passing acquaintance—this was the first longer work of his that I’ve read. Originally serialized in *Big Comic Spirits* in 2001-2002, it is a grotesque doozy of a tale. Initially Lovecraftian in scope—decaying sea life emerges from the water equipped with spider-like legs, encroaching on areas inhabited by people—it turns out to be a science fictional tale about military technology gone horribly awry.

Perhaps commenting on the inevitability of technological progression, mindless militarization—or just offering a really cool, weird idea—*Gyo* in the end seems to be a self-contained system itself. The

biomechanical legs are powered by the gasses released by organic bodies as they decay after death. The legs, if built to accommodate larger life forms—sharks or whales, when limited to sea creatures (elephants otherwise!)—eventually seek entire *piles* of human corpses rather than singular dead bodies as the death count grows.

The legs latch on to the corpse, regardless of genus or species, and pipes insert themselves into appropriate orifices in order to harness the gasses that enable “the death-stench creeps.” But why? To what end? Do the legs have a mind or motivation of their own? If so, it seems to be merely the intent to kill other living creatures—and then to harness the death stench of such creatures for a futile mobility. Such mindless yet malevolent intent is indeed frightening.

Idea aside, Ito’s visuals are well crafted, though occasionally repellent or repulsive in a slightly cartoony manner. The manga is replete with decaying aquatic bodies, bacteria-caused sores and lesions on the humans who encounter them, and ever more plump, bloated corpses as the gasses gather and grow. Perhaps most disturbing however, is the noxious exhalation of infected people, and the idea that death gasses contain or might be the luminescent ghosts of the dead. (The fate of the protagonist’s girlfriend, though largely unlikeable, is particularly upsetting.)

The pacing of the story is also artful. The story’s what and how emerges over time—even if the why is neglected—and I was pleasantly surprised by the slow unfolding of what turned out to be a relatively internally consistent narrative. Several times, I inhaled the scent of the book’s paper. Could I detect a faint trace of the death stench? Would the book itself grow legs and skitter away? (Don’t worry. It’s still just a book. I gave it to a friend; he’ll have to inform us whether it grows legs in the future.)

The manga was included in the “L’Ignoble Bibliothèque du Dr. Maddox” series of capsule reviews in *Metal Hurlant* #7.

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“Behind most every tech billionaire is a sci-fi novel they read as a teenager. For Bill Gates it was *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the 1960s epic detailing the culture clashes that arise when a Martian visits Earth. Google’s Sergey Brin has said it was Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash*, the cyberpunk classic about hackers and computer viruses set in an Orwellian Los Angeles. Jeff Bezos cites Iain M. Banks’ Culture series, which unreel in an utopian society of humanoids and artificial intelligences, often orchestrated by “Minds,” a powerful AI. Elon Musk named three of SpaceX’s landing drones after starships from Banks’ books, a tribute to the role they played in turning his eyes to the stars.”—*Nautilus*, April 5, 2024



—William Rotsler

## Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

### *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*

Titled *Diário Secreto de um Caçador de Vampiros* in Portuguese, this movie—produced by Tim Burton—is an adaptation of Seth Grahame-Smith’s novel. In the spirit of lightly fantastic alternate history pastiches (or mashup novels) such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, also by Grahame-Smith, it’s a bit of a one-trick pony. But what a ride that pony provides.

There are vampires during the Civil War era. Slavery is largely a source of food for vampires living in the south. Abraham Lincoln hunts and kills said vampires. He does so using a silver ax. Visually, it’s quite cool—Lincoln as a buff midwestern woodsman—along the lines of the Web comic *Axe Cop* or the movie *Hobo with a Shotgun*. I’m not sure how the concept works in novel form.

Once Lincoln learns about the existence of vampires, he teams up with a mentor to learn how to hunt and kill them. One of his friends, a shopkeeper

and his employer, is based on a real-life friend of Lincoln’s, Joshua Fry Speed. I found Lincoln’s relationship with his wife-to-be Mary Todd a highlight of the movie, especially their courtship and the scene in which he admits his hunting of vampires to her—and she thinks he’s joking, not being honest. Her other suitor, Stephen A. Douglas—a real-world political rival of Lincoln’s—is portrayed by Alan Tudyk of *Resident Alien*.

While investigating the presence of vampires in the south, Lincoln encounters Harriet Tubman. (Unrelated to the movie, there’s a comic book titled *Harriet Tubman Demon Slayer*.) And the ending sequence of scenes involving the train, the burning bridge, and the ostensible smuggling of silver ammunition—vampire soldiers serving the Confederacy in the Civil War!—is very well done. Has anyone read Grahame-Smith’s book?

### *Alita: Battle Angel*

I’ve now come full circle with this 2019 live-action movie—titled *Alita: Anjo de Combate* in Portuguese. Having seen the movie previously, I turned to the anime and manga (*T&T* #29) and have now returned to the movie to refresh my memory of the movie, as well as to compare adaptations. (Besides, I DVR’d it at the house we stay in near Póvoa de Lanhoso, so it was in the queue.) The movie stands alone very well on its own regardless of its source material.

A military android is cast off, its memory largely deleted. Once found by a tinkerer of sorts who seems to have lost his spouse and daughter, she’s repaired and seeks to regain her memory, befriending a young man. Both the tinkerer and young man work on the side as bounty hunters, perhaps also trafficking in “found” body parts. There’s also a competitive sport called motorball that draws attention as a side hustle. Its athletes are heavily augmented.

Meanwhile, there’s a floating city high above, with the ability to travel up above often offered as compelling motivation—though the primary person we learn about up above seems to be an omniscient criminal, and most of the traffic between the two locations is illicit body parts.

As Alita’s memory returns in bits and pieces, aspects of the movie resonate with *I, Robot*, which I’m watching now, as well as *Starship Troopers* (above and *F&F* #30). But visually, the movie is wonderful. The cyberpunk futuristic setting of Iron City is deep and rich, regardless of the unclear allure of Zalem above. I found motorball boring and unnecessary, though the clan aspects of the Hunter-Warriors—shades of *Star Wars*’ bounty hunters—the trade in cybernetic parts, the cyborg serial killer, and the



undercity inhabited by the brutish Grewishka to be intriguing. Alita's befriending of a small dog—and the canine-oriented Hunter-Killer McTeague (and his cybernetic dogs!)—was also a highlight.

But overall, I might like this movie so much because I found Rosa Salazar absolutely adorable in her big-eyed anime-styled portrayal of Alita. She was also in other movies such as *The Divergent Series: Insurgent* and at least two *Maze Runner* movies—and the TV series *American Horror Story: Murder House*. The first *Divergent* movie (*Divergent*, natch) is also in the DVR queue, so perhaps I'll watch that after *I, Robot*. Has anyone read the *Divergent* novels by Veronica Roth?



Los Angeles Times, Aug. 30, 1957

## Ignorable Theme: Literary and Media Fandom

The theme for this week asks, “Do you consider yourself a literary fan or a media fan? Does it even matter?” To which I answer: Yes. And no; not any more.

I think a boundary between literary fandom and media fandom did at one time exist—when some longer-running literary fen felt like fandom was being assailed and encroached on by media fen because of the mainstream emergence and popularity of *Star Trek* and later *Star Wars*. Such boundaries or conscious delineations within fandom are no longer meaningful or useful, however, in my opinion.

That’s not to say that people don’t like what they like. Some folks might read more than others. Some might prefer new books over older books. Others might watch more movies or TV than they read. And some sf and fantasy fen might enjoy comic books, video games, and other adjacent expressions of fandom and fanac. People will even have preferences, perhaps hanging out or developing friendships with similar fen.

But the idea that someone being primarily a literary or media fan is a meaningful distinction—in terms of whether someone is more or less of a fan—isn’t true any more. If it ever was. There’s enough room in sf and fantasy fandom—One Big Fandom—for everyone, regardless of what form(s) you like.

I’m much more interested in omnifandom: embracing all the things, perhaps exploring every expression related to our topics, themes, or genres of interest. Science fiction and fantasy are genres. Literature, movies, TV, comic books, and video games—artwork, cosplay, and other aspects—are forms those genres can embody, or which can encompass the genre.

I am an omnifan. When I say that, I don’t mean in the sense suggested by Super Fanicom in “Neutrality and the Unheard Woes of the Omnifan”: “In the omnifan’s case, he or she is an entity that exists to accept every plausible idea, every possible context, and every single opinion.” That is not what I mean by omnifan, and I’d suggest that that’s not the general definition over time, even if omnifandom isn’t always front and center.

*Hello K Pop* comes a little closer to the idea I have in mind in its 2012 post “Confessions of an Omni Fan.” Deciding not to participate in the debate about “true” fans and “fake” fans, the editor writes:

I am an omni fan. What is an omni fan? Omni means “all,” so an omni fan listens to all kinds of K-pop. As an omni fan, I’m the opposite of those

... who ... usually focus on just one group, their fandom.

I listen to all genres and acts from all entertainment agencies. ... I'll listen to anything, but I won't like everything. But I'm not obligated to. ... I listen to as wide an array of K-pop as possible and give everybody a fair shot. ...

Being an omni fan doesn't make me a better fan. But it does make me a well-rounded fan. It keeps me open to new things. It also keeps me in touch with K-pop's past. ... I think it's important to know where K-pop came from to understand where it's going.

... But as the argument over the "true" fan shows, focusing too much on ... loyalty can also produce unnecessary divisions among fans. It can prevent us from venturing out to listen to new things and expanding our horizons. K-pop also needs omni fans who are willing to go beyond what is easily accessible, cross genres and defy the expected. By respecting others and focusing on our common love of K-pop, omni fans can act as bridges and share the love.

In *The National Fantasy Fan* Vol. 22 #1 (January 1963), Ron Ellik is described as an omnifan:

Ron Ellik is an "omnifan." He has done everything in the field of science fiction fandom. He published *Fanac*, Hugo award winning fan newszine with Terry Carr, and now edits *Starspinkle*. He was elected TAFF representative in 1962 and went to England for the Harrogate convention. He has been LASFS Director, an officer of FAPA (name one), GGFS Officer, etc. Attends all conventions, writes ("Squirrel Cage"), collects books and fanzines, publishes—what else? He was active as publicity director of N3F, devotes much time to N3F publications, refuting claims that established fanzine fans do nothing for N3F. This is the same Ron Ellik who was drafted into N3F as a joke—seems a long time ago.

While that doesn't necessarily address all the current forms fanac can take, it embraces most of what was likely in the early 1960s: fanzines, cons, clubs, and apae.

*YHOS* #45 (November 1988) expands on a more formal definition in a footnote reference, indicating that "omnifan" is "Ted White's term for fen who don't limit themselves to just one aspect of fandom as if that were all there is. I consider myself one, in that I'm keenly interested in movies, have been known to filk a little, & did 'costumes' (Giles Habibula and Granny from *Slan*) long bfor SCA was ever heard of."

*File 770* described Bruce Pelz as an omnifan "who did clubs, collecting, cons, costuming, fanhistory, fanzines, filking, gaming, and, as the saying goes,

much much more." And Christopher Garcia described himself as an omnifan in *Fanstuff* #20: "I ... usually describe myself as an omnifan, largely because I tend to like doin' stuff."

I, too, consider myself an omnifan, though I'm not Ellik, Pelz, or Garcia. I like books. I like prozines. I like fanzines. I like watching movies and TV. I like comic books. I like most expressions of sf and fantasy, and I try to gather where other fen gather, though I'm not as active online as one might be. I feel more at home in clubs, at cons, and within the pages of fanzines.

Incidentally, in the 1970s, David Anthony Kraft and D. Jon Zimmerman published a fanzine titled *Omnifan*. Have any others read it?



Los Angeles Times, Sept. 6, 1957

### Comments on APA-L #3065

Alan White tells me that his cover for APA-L was based on the short story "Appointment in Samarra" as told by Boris Karloff in the 1968 movie *Targets*. A recording is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxsffEHvZbo>, and W. Somerset Maugham retold the ancient Mesopotamian tale in 1933.

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #53,

**Matthew Mitchell** included the succulent phrase, “I’d be buttering my bagels in Beijing.” Choice words, good sir. Well done. I, too, missed the eclipse. My wife and I were flying to Portugal when it occurred, and visibility wasn’t as good in Europe as it was in parts of the United States. I was glad to know people who were able to experience it more personally.



*Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 18, 1957

The cover design for Keith R.A. DeCandido’s *Articles of the Federation* made me think it might have been fan-published, but it was in fact a 2005 Pocket Book. The *Memory Alpha* writeup of the novel at [https://memory-alpha.fandom.com/wiki/Articles\\_of\\_the\\_Federation\\_\(novel\)](https://memory-alpha.fandom.com/wiki/Articles_of_the_Federation_(novel)) is interesting, particularly the Background Information. Not only was the initial premise for the book “a *Star Trek* version of *The West Wing*,” the book takes place over the course of a year—which means that parts of *nine* other tie-in novels occur at the same fictional time. That’s pretty cool. I wonder what other ideas like that could work: a *Star Trek* version of... Fill in the blanks!

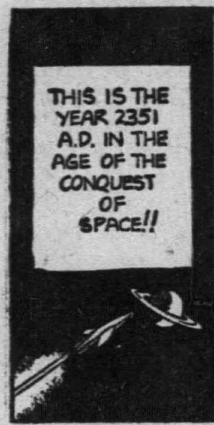
Your mention of Sergio Mendes & Brasil ’66 made me grin. Brasil ’66 made me think about the comic book *Batman* ’66. My parents had several Herb Alpert & the Tijuana Brass record albums; when I first moved to Los Angeles, I enjoyed learning about how important Alpert was to local music educators and students. I’ll add the musicians to my recommended media list and continue listening to Andrew Cyrille, Elliott Sharp, and Richard Teitelbaum’s *Evocation* as I write these distribution comments. I obtained a small CD player this week in order to listen to several CDs procured at the Elliott Sharp concert we went to in Guimarães last November.

I appreciated learning that you sometimes write your APA-L fanzines while riding home from work on the bus. I almost always—okeh, always—compose mine on the laptop. The weather in Portugal has been lovely since the initial rain upon our arrival. It’s been sunny, clear, and warm, with temperatures in the upper 70s and lower 80s, which is different from our previous experience. The house in which we stay has been keeping nice and cool during the days, and when we’re home working, we’re able to open all the windows to let the air in. We often leave the house wearing layers appropriate for inside the house, but not outside the house. The house is delightfully cool. I shall add Tad Williams’s *Tailchaser’s Song* to my reading list!

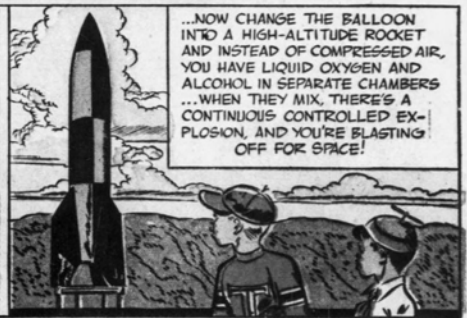
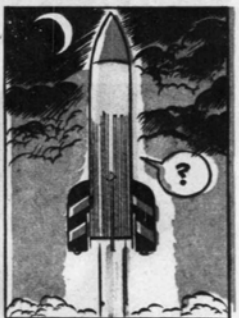
**Joe Zeff’s** *Toony Loons* #755 shared stories about his travels to witness the eclipse. Sounds like a wonderful trip, complete with historical markers, a Waffle House, and sightings of Jupiter and Venus. I had never heard of the TV show *Passions* before your mention of it. It sounds well worth exploring, though I still need to watch all of *Dark Shadows*, including the episodes that preceded Barnabas Collins. Soap DVDs sells seasons of *Passions*, and apparently there was also a 2001 HarperEntertainment novel by Alice Alfonsi titled *Hidden Passions: Secrets from the Diaries of Tabitha Lenox*.

And in *Vanamonde* #1589, **John Hertz** offered a couple of examples of his riddles at the Renaissance Pleasure Faire. While I am pleased to be in Portugal, I am aware that I am missing much of the fair this year. Luckily, it runs through May 19, so perhaps I can still sneak in a visit after our return in early May. There are a number of medieval fairs and historical events throughout Portugal (<https://oladaniela.com/medieval-events-portugal>) annually. We arrived just after the one nearby—Feira Medieval de Castelo Mendo—and will return home before most of the others occur. At some point, I plan to check out several of these. It’ll be interesting to see how they compare to American Renaissance fairs—and whether their background and developmental history ran along similar lines. (One online article suggests, “They began to spread across the country in the 1990s,” which surprised me.)

Kudos for identifying the source of Taral Wayne’s cover art! I’ll share your feedback with him. Looking up *State of the Art*, I was pleased to find November 2009’s *The Incomplete Taral Wayne Cover Gallery* (<https://efanzines.com/Taral/Incomplete-Taral-Wayne-Cover-Gallery.pdf>), a decidedly useful resource! A number of back issues of *State of the Art* are available at [https://fanac.org/fanzines/State\\_of\\_the\\_Art](https://fanac.org/fanzines/State_of_the_Art).



This page: Space Cadet comic strips from The Los Angeles Times, Sept. 10-13, 1951  
 Next page: Space Cadet, Los Angeles Times, Sept. 14-16, 1951



# BUCK ROGERS

25TH CENTURY - A.D.

**B**UDDY AND ALURA JOINED CAPTAIN DATTRO, OF THE NEDTUNIAN SEA PATROL, IN AN EFFORT TO RESCUE QUEEN VERNA OF DONDARIS FROM THE MASKED PIRATES - BUT BUDDY AND ALURA THEMSELVES WERE CAPTURED - ALURA WAS SUBJECTED TO THE MEMORY SUPPRESSOR, SO THAT SHE COULD NOT REVEAL THE LOCATION OF THE PIRATES' STRONGHOLD, AND WAS SET DOWN NEAR DONDARIS WITH A MESSAGE -

*Buck Rogers*

AN OFFICIAL READ THE MESSAGE.

A RANSOM NOTE FROM THE MASKED PIRATES!

SHE PRETENDS INNOCENCE! BUT WE'LL MAKE HER TALK! TO THE ELECTRIC TOWER WITH HER!

RANSOM NOTE? MASKED PIRATES? WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS?



ALURA WAS TURNED OVER TO SEVERAL UNIFORMED GIRLS - SHE FOUGHT WILDLY -

I WON'T GO IN THERE! I WON'T BE TORTURED!

WON'T YOU NOW? WELL, THAT DEPENDS! BUT IN YOU GO - ANYHOW!



SHE FOUND HERSELF IN A KIND OF LABORATORY -

I WON'T BE TORTURED! YOU - YOU C-CAN'T -

WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT TORTURE? WE'RE SIMPLY GOING TO GET THE TRUTH OUT OF YOU - WITH THE HYPNO-MEMORISCOPE!



THEY LED HER TO A STRANGE LOOKING CHAIR -

IT ISN'T GOING TO HURT YOU - STOP FIGHTING!

ALL RIGHT THEN - B-BUT IF YOU DO FIND I HAVE MEMORIES OF ANYTHING - I - I WISH YOU'D TELL ME!

HUH! CLEVER ACTING! BUT YOU'LL FIND THAT YOU CAN'T FOOL THIS MACHINE!



ALURA SANK INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS -

THERE! THE RAY IS FOCUSED - AND CONTROL ESTABLISHED - NOW, MY GIRL - THINK OF MASKED PIRATES!

THAT'S STRANGE! THE VIEWPLATE IS BLANK! SHE MUST HAVE BEEN TELLING THE TRUTH! NO SUCH THOUGHT-RECORD IS IN HER BRAIN!



BUT WHEN THE CONTROLS WERE READJUSTED -

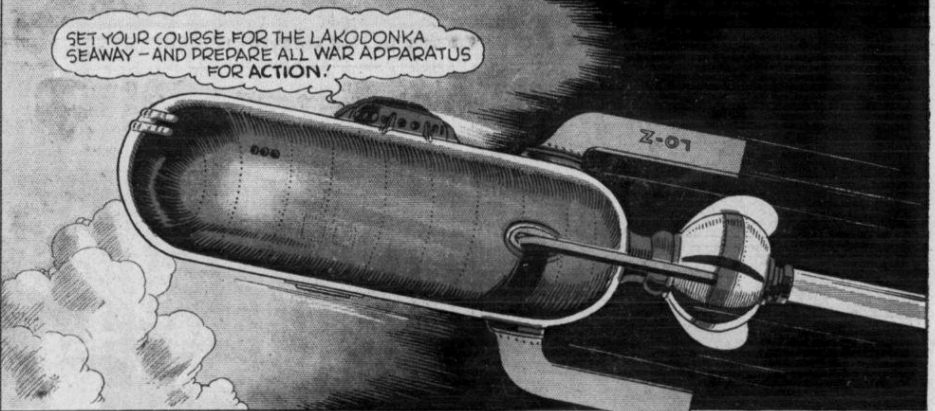
THAT'S IT! THEY MUST HAVE PUT HER UNDER THE MEMORY SUPPRESSOR! I'VE GOT HER IN THE SUB-CONSCIOUS PHASE NOW! ANY RECORD?

YES! YES! IT'S ALL HERE! SHE IS INNOCENT! BUT WE'VE GOT THE LOCATION OF THE MASKED PIRATES' STRONGHOLD! SOUND THE ALARM!



SOON AFTERWARD - A MIGHTY WARSHIP SOARED AWAY FROM DONDARIS -

SET YOUR COURSE FOR THE LAKODONKA SEAWAY - AND PREPARE ALL WAR APPARATUS FOR ACTION!



MEANWHILE - AT THE STRONGHOLD OF THE MASKED PIRATES - WHEN THE GAS HAD CLEARED AWAY - VERNA, BUDDY AND DATTRO REMOVED THEIR HELMETS -

THOSE PIRATES ARE ONLY UNCONSCIOUS - BUT THEY'LL STAY THAT WAY FOR DAYS!

THEN WE CAN -

WE'LL CAPTURE THE WHOLE BUNCH - ALIVE! AND TAKE THEM TO KONOLARIS FOR TRIAL!



BUT - AT THIS MOMENT - A STRANGE-LOOKING SHIP STREAKED ACROSS THE SKY - TOWARD THEM!

LOOK!

THE PIRATE SHIP!

IF WE GO DOWN INTO THE STRONGHOLD THEY'LL FIND US! AND IF WE STAY HERE - THEY'LL SEE US!



## Emulators & Engines #13

April 21, 2024

*Emulators & Engines* is an apazine published by Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230; [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com); 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to *Alarums & Excursions* and select others. A recent copy can be requested for the Usual. A member of the Fan Writers of America. This is a Karma Lapel publication.

### Trip Report: Portugal (cont.)

My wife and I have been in Portugal since early this month, and we return home in early May. It's a combination of working, as well as vacation; this week has largely been time off. So far the weather has been glorious: sunny, clear, and warm—much less rainy and cold than we've been used to here.

I haven't made it to a game store yet on this visit, but I have been exploring some Portuguese solo play options—see the game report below—as well as some new (to me) online resources. Last fall (*E&E* #9-10), I went to one game store in Porto, Arena Porto (<https://arenaporto.pt>), which offers a decent combination of board games, roleplaying games, collectible trading card games, graphic novels, and manga, as well as ample playing space downstairs. When my wife and I stopped by just after dark on a weeknight, there was a group of young women playing a game at a table downstairs, and photographs I've seen indicate that the play space—the arena, perhaps?—can get quite crowded.

Scanning the shelves, I didn't find too much new or different, or specific to Portugal, so I bought a set of dice and a dice bag to keep in the house where we stay. Additional shops I intend to check out include Drawstep in Braga (<https://www.facebook.com/Drawstep>), Shop4Nerds in Porto (<https://shop4nerds.pt>), and Infinite Roll (<https://www.infiniteroll.club>) in Caldas da Rainha. In Lisbon, where we plan to go for the first time near the end of the month, there's also Kult Games (<https://www.kultgames.pt/en>).

So most of my exploration—in terms of games—has been online. I've joined the RPG Portugal Discord server, which features general and more focused discussion of roleplaying games, online game opportunities, and channels in which you can find other players who live nearby. The channels concentrating on *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Savage Worlds*, and *Warhammer* seem to be the most active. Participants also share industry news and related memes and humor.

I've been spending some time in the Roleplaying

Games—Portugal group on the Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/rpportugal>), which has proven welcoming. Posts so far this month have included announcements of new games and scenarios—including a game written by a contributor, *Dawnfall: Aitechnocene* (<https://preview.drivethrurpg.com/en/product/474228/Dawnfall-Aitechnocene>), and a *Call of Cthulhu* scenario, *Kane's Tone*, written by a participant (<https://preview.drivethrurpg.com/en/product/476571/Kanes-Tone>)—local game events, the Spanish horror RPG *Ragnarok*, and related material and tools, even from Brazil. One post featuring a YouTube video on solo roleplaying recommends oracles in Portuguese (<https://lucaspeixoto.github.io/oraculos.html>) and the Portuguese OSR game *Espadas & Punhais* (<https://tinyurl.com/EnP-RPG>), which includes a section on solo play.

But most of my time has been spent in the Odyssey Publicações (<https://odysseypub.com.br>) WhatsApp group, which exclusively focuses on *Savage Worlds*. I'm relatively new to WhatsApp, but it's a lively, active, mobile-messaging outlet, and the Portuguese *Savage Worlds* community continues to impress and inspire me. There, I learned about a Brazilian Portuguese game available in English that I've been concentrating on for my solo play while traveling: *Press Start to Power-Up!!* (<https://guimasmoraes.itch.io/press-start> and <https://preview.drivethrurpg.com/en/product/477217/Press-Start-to-PowerUp-PLAYTEST>).

I'll turn my attention to that below.



### Solo Game Report: *Contra-Indications*

*Press Start to Power-Up!!*, written by Guilherme Moraes, is a rules-light roleplaying game inspired by 1980s video games and shonen anime and manga. Moraes is currently seeking play testers, so the

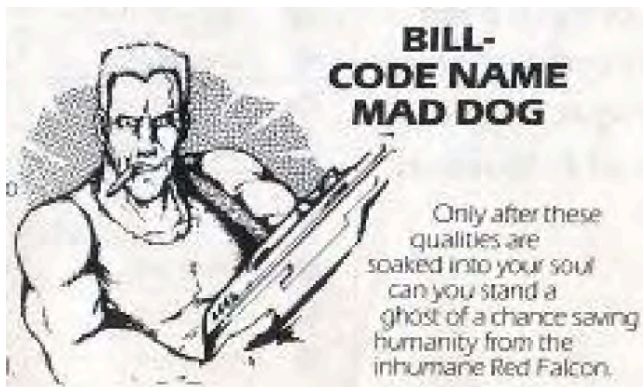
63-page document is a work in progress—and the artwork is currently limited to generative AI-created material.

With that as the rubric for my recent solo play while in Portugal, I'm also using Cezar Capacle's *Random Realities* (<https://capacle.itch.io/random-realities>) as a generative resource. And given the video game I chose to focus on, I've turned to a number of *Contra*-related materials—and adjacent media—as suggestive resources.

I don't remember playing Konami's coin-operated arcade game *Contra* in the mid-1980s, but I spent quite a bit of time playing the 1988 Nintendo Entertainment System cartridge at home. It's a largely linear run-and-gun shooter game that I decided to adapt as a scenario for *Press Start* solo. It was either that or *Rygar*. I think either would have worked just about as well.

While I didn't remember any of the backstory for *Contra*, it turns out that there's a good amount—there are two characters in the game, an organization to which they belong, an alien invasion and colonizing force, and about a dozen sequels over the years—*Contra: Operation Galuga* was released just this year—some of which added additional backstory and lore to the game's narrative. The game series' Wikipedia entry's Storyline and Protagonists section gets relatively convoluted, suggesting ample opportunity for roleplaying and filling in the gaps.

But the clincher for me in terms of choosing which game to adapt was that there was a 1988 280-page Japanese Choose Your Own Adventure-style game book titled *Konami Gēmu Bukku Shirīzu Kontora* set in the *Contra* universe. My agents in Japan are seeing if we can track down a copy to translate. In any event, for the last week, I've been exploring *Contra* by way of *Press Start*.



To begin, I drafted some notes to identify opportunities for character development and roleplaying despite the game's run-and-gun nature. I

drew on the 1987 *How to Play Contra* booklet that came with the Nintendo cartridge, as well as descriptions of the gamebook, to develop a scenario outline of sorts.

Bill Rizer wakes alone in the jungle. He has no idea who he is or how he got there, and there's a sharp pain in his head. Attacked by enemy soldiers—members of the Red Falcon alien incursion force—he realizes that his fighting ability exceeds that of many, shades of *Alita: Battle Angel* (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #111) or when Neo learns kung fu in *The Matrix*. Who is he? Where is he? Where is he going? Why? Why are others attacking him?

In the game's lore, it turns out that in 1957, a large object from outer space crashed into the Earth in the Amazon basin, near the ruins of the Mayan civilization. 30 years later—prompting the video game's timeline—the Pentagon hears rumors of a hideous being leading an alien army. That creature, Red Falcon, is the cruelest life form in the galaxy.

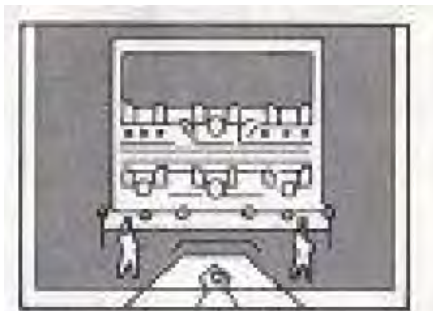
That's enough to go on, and the game could echo the Rambo series and *First Blood*, *Predator*, *Alien*, Indiana Jones, even Stephen King's *The Tommyknockers*—Mack Bolan-style soldier of fortune adventure involving an alien invasion and ancient architecture. I outlined the following to play solo, but the adversaries could be adjusted in each phase to accommodate a larger group of characters. The memory loss aspect might not work as well with a group, but that's also easily adjusted.

The video game's linear playthrough basically mapped out the phases of the scenario, though I cut a couple to make more sense in terms of a roleplaying game and its geography. (I mean: a snow field?) *Press Start* suggests the use of consistent elements for each phase of a scenario, so I fleshed them out more fully.





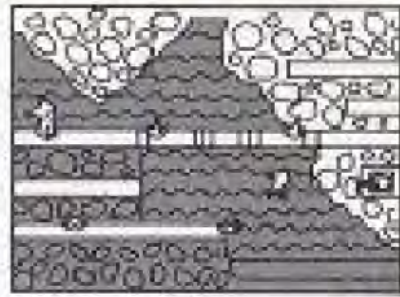
**Phase One:** Welcome to the Jungle. Location: Amazon basin, near Mayan ruins. Adversaries: Three level one Henchmen. (That later proved problematic, which I'll address during the playthrough report.) Information: Mayan artwork suggests similar decorations seen on Galuga Island during an archeological dig, representing ancient astronaut contact with the Mayans and some sort of starcraft or view of the heavens. Development: An opportunity for character Rizer to sneak, hide, crawl, and evade enemies—as well as recognize and realize his forgotten combat abilities. He doesn't know who he is, but learns what he knows how to do—via combat. Objectives: Survive the phase, one Victory Point (VP). Defeat the adversaries, one VP per Henchman.



### Base 1

Weave through an underground maze, destroying sensors while avoiding attacks from the Royal Guard. Remember – Beware the Energy Fields. And pray to make it past the evil core at the center of Base 1.

**Phase Two:** Temple of the Son. Location: Inside the Mayan temple, marked by unexcavated and unexplored maze-like passages. Adversaries: None. Phase is marked by traps and puzzles (puzzle to be determined). Information: Interior artwork offers additional detail about the arrival of ancient astronauts, their veneration by the Mayans, impact on technology and culture, and the nearby presence of technology remnants and artifacts. Development: Character needs to piece together information, complete puzzles, evade traps, perhaps search the corpse of a previous explorer (Wendy Miller's father or grandfather?)—to secure a map, new weapon, diary, etc. Objectives: Survive the phase, one VP. Evade traps, one VP per trap. Find directions to or location of the end goal, one VP.



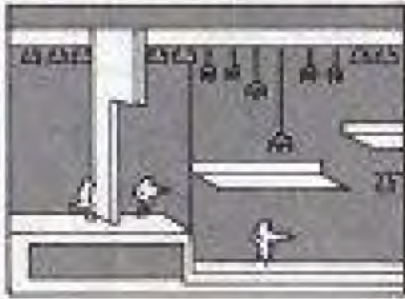
### Waterfall

It's just a hop, skip and a jump upward until you reach Base 2. Naturally, aliens surround your every move, but you must reach the diamond shaped detection sensor and blow it up to inch closer toward Red Falcon.

**Phase Three:** Waterfall Down. Location: The underground catacombs of the temple take you to the far side of the mountains or ridge line—revealing a waterfall approach to another Mayan structure higher up. Adversaries: Three to five Henchmen guarding the approach to the structure. Information: A combination of skill and combat is required—climb, balance, jump. If the character doesn't kill all the enemies, potential to learn about a prisoner inside the base—Lance Bean, fellow Contra agent and a second character if rescued. Rizer will have some sense of their connection and comradeship. Development: Opportunity to acquire additional weaponry. (The video game featured multiple weapons, including a machine gun, laser, fireball, rapid fire, spread gun, force field, and mass destruction weapon.) Character could decide to seek out Bean. A mention or photograph of Millers from Galuga Island could untap additional memories. Objectives: Survive the phase, one VP. Defeat enemies, one VP a piece. Learn about Bean's presence in prison, one VP.

**Phase Four:** Energy Zone. Location: At the top of the waterfall, there's a Red Falcon base adjacent to a hangar where they're working to restore an alien craft. Adversaries: Three Henchmen en route. One Mini Boss guarding Bean. Information: Red Falcon is close to understanding how to repair and power an alien ship. They have been repairing it with the help of a kidnapped or press ganged Millers. The imprisoned Bean was captured after parachuting in with Rizer—who was separated from Bean and knocked out. Development: Character to rescue Bean, team up, and race against time to reach the alien ship before Millers

finishes her repairs. Objectives: Survive the phase, one VP. Defeat enemies, one VP per Henchman, four VP for Mini Boss. Rescue Bean, two VP.



### Hangar Zone

Holy cow! You've made it to Red Falcon's final line of defense before you reach the mighty one, himself. The aliens, and the odds definitely don't favor you here.

**Phase Five: Hangar High.** This phase is a Dramatic Task, a race against time involving a series of puzzles, mazes, or skill checks. Location: Another Mayan temple-like structure, less maze like, featuring impressive caverns with multiple remains or remnants of alien technology and ships. Which one works? Adversaries: Three to five Henchmen, effectively time wasters to slow down Rizer and Bean (if rescued). Information: Need to locate actual operational ship. Development: Locate and stop Millers's repair before it's completed. Objectives: Survive the phase, one VP. Defeat Henchmen, one VP a piece. Rescue Millers (initially an NPC rather than a new character), one VP.



### Alien's Lair

Red Falcon, I'd like you to meet one hot shot commando. Hot Shot commando, meet Red Falcon. The unpleasantry is mutual. I'm sure, since you must blast alien larvae, alien guts, and finally the alien's heart to save the earth.

**Phase Six: Alien Ship Shape.** Location: The correct cavern and ship in the hangar—the most preserved, the most prepared, and the one with a revived alien pilot—or perhaps its spawn.

Adversaries: Final Boss. Information: Millers ends up being a thrall for the Boss. If she kisses a character—thankful for her rescue—they are prone to thrall, too, to fight their comrades so the ship repair can be completed and the ship piloted successfully.

Development: If no kiss, defeat Millers and Final Boss (the pilot). If kissed, learn of a secret energy source and that the pilot is a survivor of a previous incursion force. (This part needs a little more work.) Objectives: Survive the phase, one VP. Defeat Millers, one VP. Defeat Final Boss, 10 VP. Stop ship before takeoff, one VP. Claim ship for own use, two VP. Character could even end up on the ship after takeoff.

That was just the prep—and all prep is play, when it comes to solo gaming. I'll offer the above to Moraes as another possible playtest scenario for him to adjust and edit if he's interested. After mapping out the scenario, I've so far only played through the first phase: Welcome to the Jungle.

Before the play through, I should probably tell you about my character: Bill Rizer. His Concept is Soldier of Fortune, so think Rambo, Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Predator*, Chuck Norris, Mack Bolan, etc. He's level one, and at the end of this play session, he has four Victory Points.

*Press Start's* character creation is pretty easy. You start off with seven points you can allocate across the Muscles and Intellect attributes—and their sub-attributes. I went with the following: Muscles—5 (Vitality: 2, Balance: 1, Strength 2) and Intellect—2 (Logic: 0, Concentration: 1, Cleverness: 1). I'd initially given another point to Intellect but decided to lean more on Muscles before beginning play.

Your attributes then affect secondary characteristics: Attack (your attack bonus, basically), Defense (the equivalent of armor class), and Resistance (a damage sink before you take physical damage as Stress).

First-level characters get two Special Abilities, but they're really your basic attacks. One does 1d6+level damage (Stress), and one does 2d6+level damage. When I first made my character, I thought that these were somehow triggered by the game's Power-Up bar, but while they're affected by that, there's no basic attack outside of these "special" abilities.

The game includes two other aspects. Every character at first level can take up to 20 Stress (like hit points), so there's little hp variability character to character. And for each five Stress you've suffered,

you experience a -1 modifier, so injury affects performance.

And for every successful action you take, regardless of whether it's an attack or other ability roll, you earn a Power-Up point. You can use those to remove Stress, or you can accumulate them until you have enough to add another d6 to your attack's Stress. Buying Power-Up slots costs more as you proceed (four points for the fourth slot, five for the fifth, etc.)... I think. I've mostly used Power-Up points to wick damage off. I find this aspect intriguing, though the progressive cost is prohibitive; it reminded me of the special powers released in mobile games such as *Hero Wars: Alliance*.

That leaves us with this, then:

Bill Rizer  
Level 1 Soldier of Fortune  
Victory Points: 4

Muscles: 5 (Vitality: 2, Balance: 1, Strength: 2)  
Intellect: 2 (Logic: 0, Concentration: 1, Cleverness: 1)  
Attack: 2 / Defense: 12 / Resistance: 3

Special Abilities:  
Lion's Cunning (Attack/Target), 2d6+level: Highly targeted attack exploiting enemies weakness  
Viking's Spirit (Attack/Zone), 1d6+level:  
Desperate act of last defense, expressive explosive force

Stress Points: 9/20 (e.g. nine damage taken of 20)

You kind of make up your attacks, but it's all fluff and flavor as long as it sticks to the damage specified for level one. As you level up, you gain additional special abilities or attacks.

To attack, you roll a d20 and add your Attack bonus. Stress/damage is determined by your Special Abilities and is rolled. You (and enemies) sink the Resistance, and apply the remainder to Stress. Ability checks apply your ability scores to a d20 roll against a difficulty class or target number similar to those used in many d20 games.

Here are some notes on how Phase Zero—Welcome to the Jungle—went. I woke up in a jungle. What am I wearing? Camouflage pants and combat boots, a torn tank top, and a bandanna tied around my forehead. That's bloody in places, and my head is sore to the touch. I have a backpack, a survival knife with a compass in the pommel, a handgun (M1911A1), a rifle (M60), and appropriate ammunition for each.

What else do I have? In the backpack, there's a canteen and the equivalent of C-rations. What do I

hear? The sounds of the Yucatan, including birds and black howler monkeys. (Here's 11 hours of Mayan jungle sounds: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNU04K\\_saGA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNU04K_saGA). Here's a playlist of *Contra* soundtrack music: <https://tinyurl.com/Contra-music>.) What do I smell? Earthy humus, spicy leaves, and peppery bark. What do I see? Stereotypical, prototypical jungle.

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Los Angeles Times, June 15, 1987

Am I injured? Consulting Capacle's *Random Realities* as my generative resource or oracle, Weak No. Keywords: Manipulate, natural, vow. I was able to bandage and treat myself using materials at hand; no serious outward wounds. What do I remember? Pyre (fire in helicopter), Peaks (approaching mountains)—floating elements, attempt to protect—a fall from great height, decaying, verdant.

Additional keywords popped up: Ancient Curse Awakens, Historic Gathering, Scholarly Order, Bewitched Parting, Secrets/Culture. That was almost eerie given the setup for the game. Also: Cartographer (perhaps Rizer finds a map!), Lingering Secret in Air, Lose Ally (dovetails with Bean's imprisonment, which Rizer doesn't yet know about).

Enemies are described as large humanoid with a darkness power, prehensile tongue, and "parry deception," so I decide they have Predator-like cloaking powers.

How's Rizer's sense of direction to the ruin site? Hard DC, so target of 15.  $D20 + \text{Cleverness} + \text{Concentration} + \text{Map} = 17 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 20$ , so yes, he's able to find his way. Can he move silently to not attract the attention or awareness of enemies? Hard 15.  $D20 + \text{Balance} + \text{Concentration} + \text{Cleverness} = 12 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 15$ , so yes. He thinks he moves pretty quietly.

Does Rizer see any enemies? Consulting the oracle, No: Isolated, Vines, Invisible Aberration—again, eerily dovetailing with the *Predator* concept. So maybe he doesn't see them, but *they see him*. That's more fun despite what the oracle says. How many are there? Three. They attack the next time I play—I stopped here for the day.

What I learned—well, remembered or was reminded of—the next day in my first combat encounter is that fighting groups solo is more challenging (read: deadly) than desired. So I decided to fight them one at a time, in sequence, rather than all at once. The  $d20 + \text{Attack vs. Defense}$  is pretty straightforward, and the Resistance sink before applying Stress makes sense. But I had to reach out to the playtest's WhatsApp group to confirm what an attack was—there's no attack outside of the Special Abilities—before proceeding.

I liberally applied my Power-Up points to wick Stress away, rather than accumulating them, and I rolled one fatality (critical failure) while attacking, which led to losing five Power-Up points and my next two Action Points (actions).

While it's not difficult to remember to record Stress and Victory Points, I found myself not always recording Power-Up points for successful actions. And

I'm not sure I'm effectively using my Action Points—beyond just attacking—yet. I made a note to look into what Victory Points can be used for.

In any event, despite the initial scare of group combat, Rizer defeated the three Henchmen and made his way through the jungle to the entrance of a Mayan temple. I ended the playthrough notes with the following questions to inspire the start of the next play session: Is he able to sleep well? Does anything happen during the night? Does he have any dreams?

I'll consult the oracle, and we'll find out next time!



Los Angeles Times, Sept. 13, 1957

### The Ignorable Theme: Character Sheets

Perhaps my favorite character sheet design is the 1980 *Dungeons & Dragons* character sheet. That's roughly where I started in terms of roleplaying game experiences, and it set the standard for how I think about character development, record keeping, and

functional layout. While I underutilized it as a younger player, the Other Notes section is perhaps the most important to me now. That's where all the action happens.



Los Angeles Times, Sept. 20, 1957

Considering the 5E character sheet, I love that Personality Traits, Ideals, Bonds, and Flaws are now as front facing or forward as they are. Features & Traits immediately below those might fill the role of BX and BECMI's Other Notes. Given that I'm focusing less on character abilities and stats in my solo play—and more on character backstory and roleplaying—I appreciate that more space is given to details that would inform such play.

Over the years, I've often thought that too little room was given aspects such as Special Abilities and Special Skills (BX) and Other Proficiencies and Languages (5E)—allowing for class- and race-specific details—though the entire second side of 5E's character sheet seems to make up for any perceived historic detriments along those lines.

And D&D 4E, where I re-entered roleplaying with my son, seemed to let go of the character sheet somewhat and move toward action-based cards that required an online builder and character manager. I still tended to focus my character building on core books rather than the full range of options, but I haven't tried to play 4E since the online builder left support—to see whether it's possible or practical to

manage such characters without the Internet. The character sheet might become a basic reference then, with actions moving to notecard documentation and management.

But I've also come full circle, in a way, in terms of my use of and relationship with character sheets. When I first started playing, I couldn't easily photocopy or print sheets from the books we were using (primarily BECMI) at the time. My childhood budget didn't enable me to buy the retail character sheets. So everything was done on lined notebook paper. That's where I am again now. Even though I can afford to buy character sheets if they're sold, as an adult, and even though many character sheets are available for download online and subsequent printing, I find that for solo play, notebooks and notecards suffice.

A thought that just struck me is that I'd like to figure out an approach to character sheets or character management that better enables me to move characters from game to game. For example, Bill Rizer from my *Press Start to Power-Up!!* solo play above might work perfectly for an application of *Metamorphosis Alpha* as a rubric (see below)—presuming that the alien ship he ends up on, if he gets that far, is a ship along the lines of those in *Metamorphosis Alpha*.

What aspects of character sheets are universal? Which are game specific? And when did they stop including space for character art?

### Comments on *Alarums & Excursions* #581

In *Tantivy* dated Feb. 28, 2024, **Lee Gold** mentioned Poul Anderson's short story "Journeys End," which I've never read. Originally published in the February 1957 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, it was later included in Damon Knight's 1972 anthology *A Science Fiction Argosy*. I look forward to reading the piece! I have gone to the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum—it was one of the first places we went upon moving here, and I've gone several times—but it's been a while since I've visited.

**Mark Nemeth's** *The Seedling* #35 celebrates his friendship and literary affinity with Mike Phillips by sharing their shared remarks on "Mike's Great American Novel Nominees." I thoroughly enjoyed your divergent yet loving interactions focused on the selected titles. Your exploration of Oakley Hall's *Warlock* was also worth reading.

Your comment to Spike Y Jones on "Black Ink on White Paper Without Obscuring Backgrounds" resonated with me. I recently read Alex Yari's *Solo Roleplaying: A Brief Introduction*, and while it wasn't difficult to read, I was struck by the thought that non-Wizards of the Coast game materials published

using the Wizards *Dungeons & Dragons* 5E design template kinda fall flat with me. I know it's supposed to feel familiar and in line with official *D&D* stuff, but it ends up feeling kind of same-y and less than.

Huzzah to **Pedro Panhoca da Silva** and **Maira Zucolotto** for returning to Brazilian gamebooks in their contribution! You'll see I'm dipping into Brazilian Portuguese resources this very ish—so you two are in my thoughts while I'm in Portugal. I also thought of you briefly when coming across a mention of a couple of FASA *Doctor Who* gamebooks on the Facebook: *Doctor Who and the Vortex Crystal* and *Doctor Who and the Rebel's Gamble*, both 1986. That year also brought six *Doctor Who* Find Your Fate books published by Ballantine. And, as above, I faunch a Japanese *Contra* gamebook. Your writeup of Gabriel Garcia's *Sobreviver* sounds wonderful.

In *The Biblyon Free Press* dated April 2024, **Jerry Stratton** responded to Gabriel Roark's mention of Dragon Tree Press. I enjoyed seeing the old advertisements from *Dragon* and look forward to learning more about their publications! Your book reviews resulted in additions to my reading list, particularly Lin Carter's *Thongor in the City of Magicians*, David Drake's *Starliner*, and Mark Steyn's *A Song for the Season*.

**Jim Vassilakos** and **Timothy Collinson**'s Traveller Play-By-Email campaign report included an account of "Finding a Player for a 1PMG PBEM" that amused and aggravated me. Your hindsight is understandable: "To his credit, he warned me loud and clear ... but I didn't listen," you wrote. "I thought that maybe we could make it work. But it turned out I was wrong ... ." Well, you tried, at least. I was a little surprised by how firmly he stuck to his guns, however. I'm not sure I'd even want him at a real-world table, 1PMG PBEM aside. Declining to say even an approximation of what his character might say—when it could clearly have an effect on the morale, performance, or behavior of his crew—suggests he doesn't really roleplay or play a character. Regardless, you tried. More power to you.

In *This Isn't the Zine You're Looking For* #390, **Lisa Padol** mentioned books based on campaigns such as Steven Brust's Vlad Taltos series, Seanan McGuire's October Daye and InCryptid series, Emma Bull and Will Shetterly's shared-world Liavek series of anthologies, and George R. R. Martin and Melinda M. Snodgrass's Wild Cards series. More for the reading pile!

**Brian Christopher Misiaszek**'s *Age of Menace* #228 reported on meeting former A&E participant Miles Corcoran—always neat to see fellow apans meet in person! Kudos to you both for making the effort. And in *Random Access* #294, **Joshua**

**Kronengold** mentioned the death of James M. Ward. (Or, if Kronengold didn't, it might have been filler inserted by our estimable editor.) Ward and I were acquaintances on the Facebook, and I always enjoyed it when he showed up in my social media feed. *Metamorphosis Alpha* might be worth returning to as a rubric for solo play once I play through the *Press Start to Power-Up!!* scenario (above).

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*Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 11, 1957

## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #112

April 25, 2024

*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* is an apazine published by Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230; [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com); 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to APA-L, members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, and select others. A recent copy can be requested for the Usual. A member of the Fan Writers of America. This is a Karma Lapel publication.

### Last Week's Senryu

Watching meetings on video is not the same as going to them.

I've been able to prepare and provide two sets of the Condensed Cream of Menace for performance during LASFS meetings while traveling, but I won't be able to do so this week. Two weeks ago, I transcribed the April 4, 2024, Menace, and last week I finally finished the second half of March 21—preparing to be able to produce the May issue of *De Profundis* soon.

Given that I'll be going to Lisbon this weekend for Contacto, an sf con organized by Imaginauta (<https://tinyurl.com/Contacto2024>), it might be into next month before I finish *De Prof*. In any event, it struck me while preparing the March 21 Menace that when I undertake my duties as scribe during a meeting, the meeting is only as long as it is—an hour, give or take. When I capture minutes from the video, that can take much longer than an hour because I'm able to pause, rewind, and otherwise refer back to the video. I much prefer taking minutes in real time. I should probably aim to not pause or rewind—and just let the video flow on like a real-time meeting does.

### Trip Report: Portugal (cont.)

About a week ago, my wife and I went to Guimarães, which is about 40 minutes away. Last fall, we'd gone there for an Elliott Sharp performance during Guimarães Jazz (<https://www.guimaraesjazz.pt>), and Caitlin had stayed there briefly with a friend after I'd gone home. We parked by the train station like we had previously and embarked on a self-led walking tour at the Centro Cultural Vila Flor—site of the jazz festival—including its 18th century villa and expansive gardens with numerous hidden archways and nooks.

We made our way to Largo do Toural, where we assessed the historic edge of the once-walled city, considered the birthplace of Portugal because it's the birthplace of Afonso Henriques—and because the Battle of São Mamede occurred nearby in 1128. We

enjoyed sitting by a fountain and people watching before checking out a nearby Livraria Bertrand. Spotting the store was a happy accident; we weren't even looking for a bookstore!



Located at the edge of the square as it was, the shop reminded me of the Barnes & Noble on the 17th Street side of Union Square in New York City—but in location only. It's a smaller bookstore, nestled in what I'm sure is a historic building, and the staff was quite friendly and helpful. While their ficção científica and fantástico selection was small, it's a good example of the genre literatura estrangeira available in translation.



Ficção científica

We were even more impressed, however, by the wide range of books concentrating on the Carnation Revolution, Portugal's nonviolent transition from the authoritarian Estado Novo government in 1974. *Today* is in fact the 50th anniversary of that rebellion, and the day is celebrated as Dia da Liberdade, or Freedom Day. This trip report entry, in a way, takes us from the very formation of the country to a notable anniversary

of its liberation. (I'll likely spend more time on Freedom Day in future tripreps.)



Ficção fantástico

I also spent some time exploring the bande dessinée—banda desenhada in Portuguese—selection. They had multiple editions of the RTP's Clássicos da Literatura em BD series, which includes several science fiction adaptations. (In early 2023, I procured Júlio Verne's *Viagem ao Centro da Terra* and H.G. Wells's *A Guerra dos Mundos*.) But I also encountered the Aventuras de Blake e Mortimer BD series for the first time, in any language.

The Belgian comics series was originally created by Edgar P. Jacobs and appeared in the Franco-Belgian comics magazine *Tintin* in 1946 before reprint in book form. The titular heroes of the series are scientist Philip Mortimer and police investigator Captain Francis Blake, and their adventures often combine detective and science fiction—including time travel. During this trip, I picked up the two volumes of Yves Sente and André Juillard's *Os Sarcófagos do 6º Continente*—volumes 16-17 in the series.



We walked to the Castelo de Guimarães, as well as the nearby Paço dos Duques, before finding a place to eat lunch. Mumadona proved an excellent restaurant with comfortable seating and a tasty, light menu. After lunch, we walked around Guimarães a little more, eventually heading back to the car through a less historic section. On our return, we walked along some of the remaining walls dating back to the 13th century. That they have been preserved and can still be accessed is absolutely wonderful.



### Pursuing the Utopian Impulse

Once we were home, I was able to dial in to an online event that a friend had informed me about. As part of the Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies' Cultures of the Future Talks series, CETAPS (<https://www.cetaps.com>) partnered with Zer0 Books (<https://www.collectiveinkbooks.com/zer0-books>) to host a number of online events.

In mid-April, the series featured Billie Cashmore, author of *We Hear Only Ourselves*, and a talk titled "A Rupture in the Actual? The Problem of Utopia." Cashmore's 45-minute presentation, delivered using prepared notes, focused on the inherent tensions between the utopian impulse and a utopian program—or concerted effort to construct or pursue a utopia. "We don't yet know what our utopia will be," Cashmore said. They considered actuality and the future, exploring that progression using terms such as prefiguration and refiguration.

Referring to the work of Fred Moten and Octavia E. Butler, Cashmore's talk attempted to bridge the gap between actuality and potentiality. Commenting on speculative fiction, Cashmore said that they were largely unimpressed by literary portrayals of utopias, partly because the structure or form of the fiction usually wasn't itself utopian. Regardless, they recommended the work of Kim Stanley Robinson.





## Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

### *I, Robot*

Titled *Eu, Robot* in Portuguese, this 2004 movie starring Will Smith uses the title of an Isaac Asimov collection and draws lightly on several ideas presented by the author but doesn't really adapt any particular piece of fiction. Aspects of the movie echo "Little Lost Robot," "Catch That Robot," "*The Bicentennial Man*," *Robot Dreams*, and "The Inevitable Conflict," but the movie isn't really an adaptation of the collection or Asimov's Robot series as a whole.

*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 13, 1957

Looking at the table of contents for the 1950 collection, the short stories featured give me the shivers, a little bit, and I plan to reread the book after I

finish Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers*. (*Faculae & Filigree* #30) And while I enjoyed watching the movie again—this might have been my second viewing—*Alita: Battle Angel* (T&T #111) might be a better film. That feels strange to say.

For the most part, I didn't find Smith's portrayal of detective Del Spooner interesting or compelling. He's certainly no Elijah Baley. Smith's carriage of the character is overly petulant and surly, and despite numerous flashback scenes and a personal revelation mid-movie, his distrust of and dislike for robots strikes as hollow.

Regardless, the visual effects and character design for the robots, and the presumed corporate espionage and machinations going on behind the scenes at U.S. Robotics leading up to and after the apparent suicide of the company's founder—who coined the flick's Three Laws of Robotics—are interesting and fun to watch unfold. The scene in which Spooner is accosted by multiple carriers of wayward robots—"You are experiencing a car accident."—was visually delightful. And Sonny is a potentially malevolent entity throughout the entire film.

I had been unaware that the movie project didn't start out as an Asimov adaptation but as an entirely unrelated original screenplay. In the end, it looks like they tacked on the Three Laws, renamed a character Susan Calvin—and that's about it. All the same, it's a fun movie that offers expected critiques of automation and artificial intelligence. However, if it points people toward Asimov, perhaps as new readers, that's a fine outcome.

### *Predator*

While I think I saw this 1987 movie as a teenager when it first came out, I recently saw it again on TV in Portugal—titled *Predador*—and really, seriously enjoyed it. I'd kind of conflated it with horror franchises such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Halloween*, and *Friday the 13th*, when it's actually something else entirely.

Researching the series of movies, of which this is the first, as an influence for a solo roleplaying game (*Emulators & Engines* #13), it turns out that even though the movie is a franchise, the titular predators—alien trophy hunters—aren't the same character or creature, but different aliens from the same species encountering humanity over time. That's an interesting concept. Imagine the potential period pieces—or alternate histories—alone!

For the most part, the movie is similar to the Rambo series or any number of soldier of fortune or war movies in which protagonists face enemies in a jungle clime. The wrinkle here is that the enemy is an

alien—never identified, never explained—that brings to bear advanced shielding technology and weaponry. (Similar to the Freddy vs. Jason crossovers, there were eventually Alien vs. Predator crossovers.)

That innovative approach to first contact is interesting as far as it goes—resulting in a suspenseful cat-and-mouse game in which the mercenaries die one by one. But the larger concept, expanded primarily through tie-in novels and comic books, is even more interesting. Even though Alan Dean Foster wrote at least two Alien tie-in novels, the authors who wrote the three books collected in *The Complete Predator Omnibus* seem to be writers primarily of Star Trek tie-ins. I'm curious how much of the sf backstory comes across in subsequent movies.

The movie is much more science fictional than I remembered, even if the sf is secondary or in the background. Regardless, I'm intrigued! Interestingly, at the end of the movie, one of the characters is pictured reading a comic book: *Sgt. Rock* #408.

### Ignorable Theme: Authors from Other Countries

I haven't read a ton of his writing yet, but I've recently been impressed by the sf of Lavie Tidhar. (*T&T* #57 and 66) Born in Israel, Tidhar has lived in South Africa, Laos, and Vanuatu—and more recently in the United Kingdom. I feel that his writing reflects that background and apparent richness of experience living in multiple places.

Over time, I seem to have had a penchant for Japanese fiction. I tend to enjoy the work of Haruki Murakami and Banana Yoshimoto—both of whom quietly skirt the fantastic—and to a lesser extent Ryu Murakami. More recently, I quite liked Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman*. But that's not necessarily genre writing. I also enjoyed Un-Su Kim's *The Cabinet* from South Korea. (*T&T* #86)

Even though they're our immediate neighbor to the north, I also seem to have a thing for Canadian science fiction authors: Cory Doctorow (*Faculae & Filigree* #26), though he no longer lives there; William Gibson; and even Douglas Coupland. Though his work is unlikely to be shelved in the sf section, some of it has been delightfully near-future. (See <https://aescifi.ca/coupland-gibson> for a compelling comparison of Coupland and Gibson.)

Does England count? H.G. Wells, Charles Stross, Pat Cadigan, Arthur C. Clarke, J.G. Ballard, and George Orwell are all quite compelling. But the outcome of this Ignorable Theme's consideration begs another question. Resonating with works written by British and Canadian authors makes it pretty clear that I have a preference for English-language work. That

makes sense given what I read and speak. A future Ignorable Theme might focus more on authors whose primary language isn't English, or works in translation.



Los Angeles Times, Sept. 13, 1957

### Comments on APA-L #3066

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #54, **Matthew Mitchell** described some swelling that reminded me of an incident with my son in Japan when he was a teenager in 2017. After a walk through a cemetery that was marked by tall grass, my son's legs swelled up—skin taut like yours was—but there were more visibly evident insect bites than you described. Regardless, when we went to the equivalent of urgent care in Tokyo, the medical practitioner diagnosed it to be insect bites of some kind and an uncharacteristic reaction—and we were prescribed a steroid cream.

Your response to the Ignorable Theme might

inspire a future question: older vs. newer works. Your migration from *Star Trek* and similar media to Robert A. Heinlein’s juveniles and the Triumvirate, as you call them—Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, and Arthur C. Clarke—was interesting. I got a kick out of you completing the crossword puzzle clues. I’ll save the poetry-based clue for other ellers, but the “Sci-fi or romance” clue resulted in “genre” rather than “novel.” But I think you pegged yourself as a literary fan; you didn’t guess “movie.” I jest.



Los Angeles Times, Sept. 20, 1957

Derek LaPorte’s *In-Betweens* #2 compared two out-of-context lines from Emily Tesh’s *Some Desperate Glory* and Evan Dara’s *Permanent Earthquake*. That was a fun exercise. Not reading anything else written by either writer, I was much more interested in and impressed by the second—though I think the amount quoted might have biased me. What I didn’t like about the Tesh sentence was the shorthand of “best of the best.” My reaction isn’t relevant to popularity, however, because shorthand is widely employed today. People seem to like it.

I don’t think Don Knotts ever portrayed the Flash, but he was cast as a reluctant hero in several movies: *The Ghost and Mr. Chicken*—a horror comedy!—*The Reluctant Astronaut*—science... fiction!—*The Shkiest Gun in the West*, and *The Love God*. *The Incredible Mr. Limpet* was in part animated and Knotts

had a recurring role in the first season of *The New Scooby-Doo Movies*. Scooby-Doo might be as close as we get to the Flash for Knotts.

In *Vanamonde* #1590, John Hertz made a strong case for reading Tim Powers’s *My Brother’s Keeper*. I’ll add it to the list! I’ll share your feedback with cover artist Tiffanie Gray. I expected the illustration to work better at that size!

Lee Gold’s *Leeway* dated for April 15, 2024, mentioned Andre Norton’s juveniles. Which Norton juveniles do you recommend? *Kirkus Reviews* offers an article exploring such titles (<https://tinyurl.com/Norton-juveniles>) and *Reactor* compared the juveniles of Norton and Heinlein a handful of years ago. (<https://tinyurl.com/Norton-Heinlein>) Another group of books for me to explore! We’ll miss your presence in our pages, and I look forward to your eventual return, should that occur.

In *Toony Loons* #756, Joe Zeff finished documenting his Great Eclipse adventure. Your description of Vietnamese-style coffee reminded me slightly of Thai iced coffee—only not iced. I think the consistent appeal is the sweetened condensed milk. Mmm. Sweetened condensed milk. That reminded me of a variety of dreamsicle orange punch I came across recently somehow. Orange sherbet, sweetened condensed milk, and 7-Up sounds pretty good to me right now.

I will share your feedback with the cover artist. In terms of your table of contents comments, you might be right; my presence in that distribution was out-sized. I don’t know if it’s right or wrong, though; how do people feel? I’d rather not pull back on my writing in terms of page count, but if it doesn’t feel good, we’re—I’m—not doing it right. I remember enjoying the 1990 TV series *The Flash*.

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“Vernor Vinge, a mathematician and prolific science fiction author who in the 1980s wrote a novella that offered an early glimpse of what became known as cyberspace, and who soon after that hypothesized that artificial intelligence would outstrip human intelligence, died on March 20 in the La Jolla area of San Diego. He was 79.

“James Frenkel, who edited nearly all of his work since 1981, said the cause of death, in an assisted living facility, was Parkinson’s disease.

“David Brin, a science fiction writer and a friend of Mr. Vinge’s, said in a tribute on Facebook, ‘Vernor enthralled millions with tales of plausible tomorrows, made all the more vivid by his polymath masteries of language, drama, characters and the implications of science.’”—*New York Times*, March 28, 2024

9/1

**I SOLEMNLY SWEAR TO DEFEND THE LIBERTIES OF THE PLANETS, SAFEGUARD THE FREEDOM OF SPACE AND UPHOLD THE CAUSE OF PEACE THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE!**

**IN THE ASSEMBLY HALL OF SPACE ACADEMY, COMMANDER ARKWRIGHT ADMINISTERS THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE NEW CLASS OF SPACE CADETS...**

**WELCOME TO SPACE ACADEMY! YOU'RE HERE TO BEGIN TRAINING AS OFFICERS OF THE SOLAR GUARD... THE FUTURE OF THE SOLAR ALLIANCE—MARS, EARTH AND VENUS—IS IN YOUR HANDS... BUT--I'M WARNING YOU--**

**...YOUR TRAINING WILL BE RUGGED! ONE OUT OF EVERY THREE CADETS WILL WASH OUT!**

9/2

**AFTER INDOCTRINATION, ALL SPACE CADETS SHALL TAKE CLASSIFICATION EXAMS TO DETERMINE UNIT RATINGS... Academy Regulations**

**GIVEN A ROCKET, OVERALL WEIGHT 200 TONS, HOW MUCH FUEL IS REQUIRED TO ACCELERATE FROM ZERO TO ONE MILE PER SECOND?**

**BALANCE ON ONE FOOT, CADET ASTRO, AND TOUCH YOUR FINGERS BEHIND YOUR HEAD! SNAP TO IT... YOU DON'T NEED RADAR TO MAKE 'EM MEET!**

**YOU'RE BEING TIMED FOR REACTION SPEED, CADET MANNING... WHEN A LIGHT FLASHES, PUNCH THE CORRESPONDING BUTTON! GO!**

**FINAL AND MOST IMPORTANT TEST! FOCUS YOUR LIGHT BEAM IN THE CIRCLE AND KEEP ON TARGET NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS....**

9/3

**BY THE RINGS OF SATURN, TOM, THE GROUND IS SPINNING... I CAN'T FIND THE ACADEMY!**

**I WONDER IF WE'RE STILL IN THE ACADEMY!**

**CADETS ASTRO, MANNING AND CORBETT--- STAND TO!**

**CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'VE PASSED! YOU'RE ASSIGNED TO THE ROCKET CRUISER POLARIS! JUST REMEMBER, I EXPECT MY UNIT TO LOOK SMART, STAND ERECT AND WALK IN A MILITARY MANNER AT ALL TIMES! DISMISSED...**

9/4

**ALL CADETS, IN THEIR FIRST WEEK, SHALL CAREFULLY INSPECT THE EXHIBITS OF THE SPACE MUSEUM... Academy Regulations**

**TOM-- IT'S THE "PIONEER"!**

**YES, ASTRO--THE FIRST ROCKET TO BREAK OUT INTO SPACE AND BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE PLANETS!**

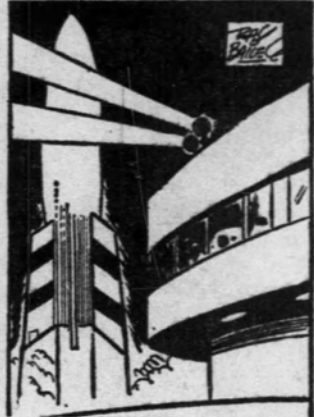
**WONDER WHY THEY CLUTTER UP THE PLACE WITH THIS PIECE OF GALACTIC JUNK--AND CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT KIND OF CHARACTERS FLEW THIS BEAT UP TIN LIZZIE?**

**YES, ROGER--I CAN IMAGINE EXACTLY WHAT KIND OF 'CHARACTERS' THEY WERE--**

**Earth to Luna and return - 7th March 2025... in honor of the brave men of the 1st rocket crew to land on the Moon, only to perish on the return to Earth...**

This page: Space Cadet comic strips from The Los Angeles Times, Sept. 17-20, 1951

Next page: Space Cadet, Los Angeles Times, Sept. 21-23, 1951



# BUCK ROGERS 25TH CENTURY

WITH HER MEMORY SCIENTIFICALLY SUPPRESSED BY THE MASKED PIRATES, ALLURA WAS SENT TO THE CITY OF DONDARIS WITH A RANSOM MESSAGE, CONCERNING THE RELEASE OF QUEEN VERNA - FINDING THAT ALURA WAS INDEED WITHOUT MEMORY, AND OBTAINING - BY WAY OF ELECTRIC BRAIN ANALYSIS - COMPLETE INFORMATION OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED, THE OFFICIALS OF THAT GREAT CITY SENT FORTH AN AIR BATTLESHIP TO DESTROY THE PIRATES' DESERT STRONGHOLD -

*Buck Rogers*

MEANWHILE - VERNA, DATTRO AND BUDDY VIEWED WITH ALARM THE APPROACH OF A PIRATE CRAFT.

THEY'LL SPOT US SURE ON THIS SANDY WASTE!

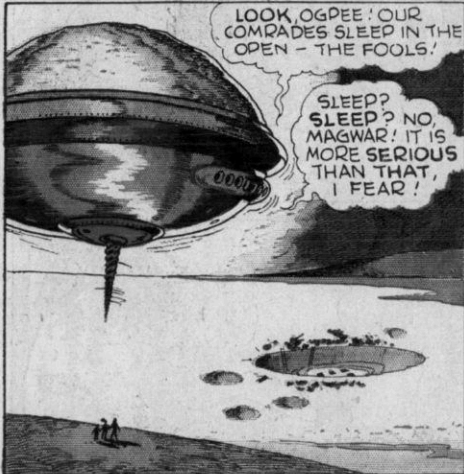
WAIT! I HAVE AN IDEA!

AND IF WE DUCK INTO THE CAVERN STRONGHOLD - THEY'LL TRAP US!

HIDE YOUR WEAPONS! I'LL PRETEND YOU'RE MY PRISONERS!

HE CAN TELL THEM HE'S GOING TO JOIN THEIR BAND!

GEE, DATTRO - CAN YOU GET AWAY WITH THAT?



LOOK, OGPEE! OUR COMRADES SLEEP IN THE OPEN - THE FOOLS!

SLEEP? SLEEP? NO, MAGWAR! IT IS MORE SERIOUS THAN THAT, I FEAR!



YOU'LL HAVE TO TALK FAST, DATTRO - OR WE'LL ALL BE FOOD FOR THE VULZARDS!

LOOK SHARP - THEY'RE LANDING!

WHO'S THAT OVER THERE? CAPTURE THEM!

LEAVE EVERYTHING TO ME! I'VE DEALT WITH THEIR TYPE BEFORE. POOR MENTALITY!



DATTRO - PLAYED A FAST GAME -

HA! PRISONERS! DRIVE ME MAD - BUT THIS IS LUCK!

MAKE THEM WALK THE INVISIBLE PLANK!

HOLD! THESE TWO ARE MY PRISONERS! THEY ARE MY DONATION TO YOUR BAND! I, TOO, AM A PIRATE!

SEE! THE SUB CHIEF GETS FRESH VICTIMS



THE PIRATES WERE FINALLY CONVINCED -

I WILL BE A VALUABLE ADDITION TO YOU FREEBOOTING LADS!

TAKE YOUR PRISONERS BELOW, THEN! AND REPORT TO THE CHIEF!

GOOD! BUT NO FALSE MOVES - REMEMBER! IT'S DEATH FOR TRAITORS!

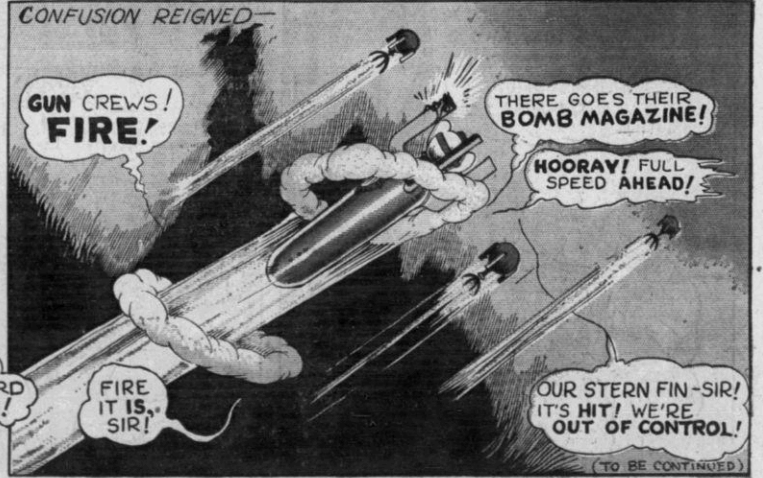


MEANWHILE THE HUGE AIR-BATTLECRAFT FROM DONDARIS RAN INTO DIFFICULTY -

ENEMY GROUND BOMBERS BELOW, SIR!

WE'RE UNDER FIRE, SIR!

RUN OUT THE PORT AND STARBOARD FLAME RIFLES!



CONFUSION REIGNED -

GUN CREWS! FIRE!

THERE GOES THEIR BOMB MAGAZINE!

HOORAY! FULL SPEED AHEAD!

FIRE IT IS, SIR!

OUR STERN FIN - SIR! IT'S HIT! WE'RE OUT OF CONTROL!

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## The Explosion Containment Umbrella #19

May 1, 2024

*The Explosion Containment Umbrella* is an apa commentzine-plus published by Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA; [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com); 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to eAPA and select others. A recent copy can be requested for the Usual. A member of the Fan Writers of America. This is a Karma Lapel publication.

### Trip Report: Portugal (cont.)

My wife and I are on the home stretch for our time in Portugal this spring. This is our final week here after three wonderful weeks since arriving in early April, and I've returned to working, so our days are less vacation-like as we try not to count down to our departure on May 6. Though the sun broke through the clouds earlier this week, as expected that afternoon, the weather has taken a turn toward rain and cooler days, which is more like the Portugal we first came to know and love. We thoroughly enjoyed the sunny, warm days we've had since our arrival, however.

One of the highlights of this visit has been our learning new routes to familiar locations. Just the other day, we learned we could walk to the Everything Store (Cidade N'Aldeia) and bakery (Pão Quente O Início Unipessoal) up the hill—one of the best views of the area from above the Santuário de Nossa Senhora de Porto de Ave—by taking a side street just down the block rather than up the steep route we'd followed previously.



During our previous visit, we could see the sign, but this pedestrian bridge was under water.

Similarly, we learned that instead of driving to the Praia Fluvial da Rola on the nearby Rio Ave—just a four-minute drive along streets we wouldn't

necessarily want to walk along because of narrow lanes and close traffic—we could walk there, approaching from the near side. (Although I still almost got grazed by a passing bus.) Instead of driving to park on the far side of the river, then down to the river beach, we can walk down a hill on our side of the river, not far from destinations we usually seek out, such as the santuário. All in just over 20 minutes one way. Because we normally walk around the river beach and along a trail on the far side of the river when we visit, walking there is a pleasant bonus.



This had also been under high river water last fall.

Not only were the pedestrian bridges across the river now visible and passable given lower water, we could access the makeshift bar and seating area beside some building remains, perhaps old mill structures similar to those encountered along the Trilho dos Moinhos do Pontido (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #111). The river beach is a narrow strip of sand that locals reportedly use during warm weather, but it's difficult to tell when the bar structure—and bathrooms—were last open.



Between the mills



The bathroom and bar structure dates back to 2001, funded by the Programa de Iniciativa Comunitária Leader rural development program and perhaps the Associação de Desenvolvimento das Terras, Altas do Homem, Cávado e Ave. A 2021 video on *YouTube* suggests that the bar and bathrooms were open then, but current signs indicate that the building might have been partially submerged in more recent years. There are at least two different potential water lines visible on the exterior of the structure, and the seating area looks a little rough for wear.



Regardless, my wife and I agree that we'll continue walking here—rather than driving to the far side—and that we'll track the progress of the seasons by determining whether we can walk across the river, not just along it. The bar structure and seating area is comfortable enough that one could take a book and hang out for some time even if it's not open. We'll definitely do that at some point.



While walking there, you also pass by the Central Hidroelétrica de Porto d'Ave, which has a garden plot

nearby and a camper parked near the facility. Back up the hill heading toward the santuário, you can follow a small lane up behind some houses to the catch basin that feeds the hydroelectric plant. While we were up there, we met a young EDP Group (Energias de Portugal) employee and didn't stick around too long lest he think we were casing the reservoir.

This is just one small example of the sites and sights around the house we stay in while visiting Portugal—and the shortcuts and new routes we identify as we become more familiar with the area.

### Comments on eAPA #240

In *Living Inside Number 9*, William McCabe discussed the sf and fantasy book group in which he's active. I haven't read *The Martian* or *Project Hail Mary* by Andy Weir, though I know they're popular—and the first book yielded a movie starring Matt Damon. (I haven't seen the movie either.) Weir originally serialized the novel on his blog (<https://www.galactanet.com/writing.html>) before it got picked up by Crown.

In 2016, he won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer for *The Martian*. That same year, the screenplay adapted from the novel—written by Drew Goddard—won the Hugo for Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form. You can read the script online at <https://imsdb.com/scripts/Martian.-The.html>. Weir also wrote Sherlock Holmes and *Doctor Who* fan fiction!

I empathize with the need to manage contributors' expectations about their newsletter submissions. Your comment to Henry Grynsten reminded me of our local football team, the Grupo Desportivo Porto D'Ave, whose playing field is an eight-minute walk from our house. We haven't gone to a game yet, but we can hear them and see the lights. The box scores appear in a local paper, *Jornal Maria da Fonte*.





Hay-on-Wye has a population of 1,500 and 40 bookstores? That's my kind of town. I remember being thrilled when I first learned about H.P. Lovecraft's participation in amateur press associations. While I participated in the American and National amateur press associations at one time, the United Amateur Press Association folded before I could join. Hippocampus Press has published several collections of Lovecraft's essays edited by S.T. Joshi, including one dedicated to Lovecraft's apahacking. In addition to his apa contributions, he was also an active correspondent. Hippocampus offers multiple volumes of his letters to Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, Donald and Howard Wandrei, and others.

**Henry Grynsten's** *Wild Ideas* #46 remarked on the Rolling Stones performing "Satisfaction" since 1965. Does the *band* get bored? (I don't think it's the audience we need to worry about; they *want* to hear "Satisfaction.") On *Quora*, someone who worked as Rod Stewart's vocal coach commented on that:

[Stewart's] answer (complete with expletives)? "People pay good money to come see me sing those songs—they deserve to hear them. They're the reason I've had the best job in the world for 50 years." "Can I sing every hit, every show? No. I mix it up with deep cuts, some covers and a couple of new ones. Am I tired of doing 'Maggie Mae'? Fuck no. That song put me on the map. And I wrote it. ... It's [four minutes] out of my life every show. Make the people happy. But could I do the same show every night? God no, that's *Groundhog Day* and it would drive me nuts"

At almost every show, Rod Stewart changes the setlist. He not only switches out songs, but switches the order of some of the songs. Sometimes "Maggie May" is early in the set, sometimes it's one of his encores. This keeps every show fresh. ...

The trick is to mix it up with some songs you've never played before or not very often. That takes the burden off of doing the same show, over and over. The tedium of that gets old, really quick.

Clearly, one's mileage might vary. I could certainly empathize with a popular musician tiring of performing their most popular songs frequently, regardless of whether that's their job, to some extent.

Your sentence "The population of Södertälje is 102,519, and there is 1 bookstore here, which means 1 bookstore per 100,000," made me chuckle. Your comment on books sold elsewhere reminded me that I, too, recently noticed books sold at the grocery store we frequent. They seem to be mostly children's and young adult fiction books, but I'll keep my eyes peeled for sf, fantasy, and Portuguese publishers of interest.

Your question is interesting: Do sellers of books—regardless of what percentage of their stock or sales books might be—count as bookstores? It might be more interesting to consider how many places in a given community books can be obtained—regardless of the kind of business it is. (We're in Portugal for four more days; I still hope to obtain a local library card before my return.)

In the main essay, "Staring at a Juice Box," Grynsten used cinematic metaphors for being trapped in various situations and risky behaviors to consider what might actually be somewhat more mundane: the human penchant for tourism. Why do we want to go where others have gone to see what they've seen or do what they've done? "The importance of things is determined by their fame, and if something has fame we must come close to it, whether it be famous buildings, paintings, places, or musicians," he wrote.

That resonated with my recent reading of Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, which explores the perceived value of historicity—among other topics and themes. Do items—or places—have inherent historical value or meaning, or is such assigned by human beings? (Yes, and yes, perhaps.) Your inclusion of Charlie Chaplin and the Tramp reminded me of other such examples. Growing up reading *Mad* magazine, paintings such as *Whistler's Mother*, *Christina's World*, and *The Blue Boy* ranked similarly in my pop culture awareness, though I was by no means contemporaneous. I was aware of them, but from where? Why?

I'll have to reread this piece, but what struck me as perhaps most interesting is the concept—and potential cost—of mediating such experiences. If you spend your time videotaping a concert rather than witnessing it more actively yourself, have you truly experienced it? If you go to see a piece of fine art, *Mona Lisa*, for example, merely to photograph it, have you really seen it? Are you performatively experiencing it for the benefit—that might not be the correct word—of another? Does the documentation make up for the

inattention? Why are you where you are? For whom are you there? Can we ever Be Here Now?

In *Intermission* #143, **Ahrvid Engholm** opened with a History Corner piece recognizing the death of Christopher Priest—and his participation in the 1985 Swecon. I don't have any Priest books cataloged in my library yet, and I don't know that I've read much, if any, of his writing. What do eAPAns recommend? Inspired by Engholm's press clipping, I looked for mentions of Priest in the *Los Angeles Times*. 2006 seems to be a high point in terms of local coverage of the author—focusing primarily on Christopher Nolan's movie *The Prestige*, which adapts Priest's 1995 novel. *The New York Times* has woefully neglected Priest's writing, but the *Chicago Tribune* reviewed Priest's *The Adjacent* in 2014. A 2015 *Tribune* review of Darran Anderson's *Imaginary Cities* mentions Priest's *The Inverted World*. So that's three for me to check out, at least!

Having recently read Jack Finney's novel *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, I should probably read John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* soon, too. Have you listened to *Moon Phantom*? Shades of *Whistler's Mother* above, the cover art to Mark Clifton and Frank Riley's *They'd Rather Be Right* seems awfully—almost eerily—familiar. I wonder where I've encountered it before. Seems strange that it'd be selected for a Hugo rather than the other books you listed, but that might be hindsight in action.

I enjoyed your writeup of the short film festival. I missed this year's Fantasporto (<https://fantasporto.com/pt-pt>) this winter (almost spring!) in Portugal but hope to check it out at some point. When I return to the States, I need to return to attending screenings hosted by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films. Upcoming films include *Laroy, Texas*; *The Fall Guy*; *Challengers*; *The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare*; *Kidnapped: The Abduction of Edgardo Mortara*; *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes*; and *In a Violent Nature*.

Today, my wife and I ran into two friends from Braga while we were shopping at Ikea in that city. They told us about a recent experience seeing a movie through a local cineclube. Such film clubs are something I haven't experienced before. They're not commercial movie theaters, and they're not quite membership organizations, but they're smaller, independent groups that frequently host screenings of less commercial movies, usually just for a single showing.

In Lisbon, there's the open-air Cine Society (<https://www.cinesociety.pt>), which screens movies almost nightly—and which has mostly sold out its events through early June. The Alvalade Cineclube

(<https://alvaladecineclube.pt/en>) in Lisbon doesn't seem to be too active in recent months. The Cineclube do Porto (<https://cineclubedoporto.pt>) seems much more active. Closer to where we live when we're here, the Braga Film Club (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/bragafilmclub>) seems promising, and the Lucky Star Cineclube de Braga (<https://www.facebook.com/cinebraga>) even more so. Thank you for sharing your *Vimeo* channels Filmfandom and Club Cosmos.

And **Garth Spencer's** *I Never Got the Hang of Thursdays* #220 remarked on the potential waning of April Fool's Day. This year, the day—much like St. Patrick's Day and Easter—snuck up on me entirely. Made me think I'm not paying much attention to the holiday or liturgical calendars. Today in Portugal is Labor Day, May Day in the United States—where we have another Labor Day on Sept. 2. Civic services and many businesses are closed today—and people have the day off work—but larger commercial organizations such as Ikea were open. We were also here for the 50th anniversary of the Revolução de 25 de Abril, which marked the end of Portugal's dictatorial regime, the Estado Novo.

“Do I mainly want to have fun, especially showing jaded fannish fans facing raving heroes and villains alike, walking stereotypes from sf, fantasy or comic books, and putting them down with a couple of dry words? Or do I seriously intend to write publishable fiction?” you wrote. Well, I know which I'd prefer you do. Please do that.

I quite like your idea about stories focusing on mental prosthetics. What assistive technologies could exist that don't currently, to help people accomplish things we don't generally consider assistive technologies for? (Perhaps even facial recognition, or remembering faces!) Personally, I think all five ideas you offer would make for interesting writing and reading. I wouldn't worry whether someone else has already done it before. Do it again, anew. I'm sure your take will be adequately different and interesting.

Your remarks on adjusting the expectations for a Canadian Unity Fan Fund recipient might be worth developing. If, as one person commented on the Facebook, it's onerous for a con to comp membership and a hotel room, perhaps you could focus on getting a con to incorporate a CUFF delegate in programming, etc.—and raise additional funds to cover their room and badge in addition to travel. Regardless, you still need at least one con to express interest in figuring out the possibilities. A confusing—and frustrating—state of affairs, to be sure.

# The UFO Checklist

The United Fanzine Organization (UFO) is a group of small press creators who come together to support and encourage each other, and to promote higher standards of quality in small press. Applicants may contact Chairman Steve Keeter, 10118 Mason Dixon Circle/ Orlando, FL 32821 (stevekeeter@gmail.com). Official UFO Website at <https://unitedfanzineorganization.weebly.com> and the United Fanzine Organization Facebook group at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tfrags>. Newsletter \$3.50 for non-members, \$20 for 6-issue subscription.



**TETRAGRAMMATON FRAGMENTS! (THE UFO NEWSLETTER)** (\$3.50 for non-members, or a 6-issue subscription for \$20 from Steve Keeter, 10118 Mason Dixon Circle, Orlando, FL 32821. Or, PayPal to: stevekeeter@gmail.com ) The Official Newsletter of the United Fanzine Organization features articles, artwork, and more from co-op members. Many of the greats of small press have been, and are, involved in this influential group.



**GALACTIC DIARY #2** (\$5.00 per copy which includes first class postage. Send check, money order or cash to Verl Holt Bond 1663 Blue Heron Lane Jacksonville Beach, Florida 32250) From Verl Bond comes this exciting post-holocaust adventure, promising, and delivering, "science fiction, horror, fantasy, & sword sorcery!" In the future, a band of heroic survivors battle against cutthroat destroyers, led by Mortimer the Torturer!



**HORSEMAN #6** (\$6.50 postpaid via PayPal to LewBrown1@verizon.net ) or snail mail to Larry Johnson, 31 Greenbrook Rd, Hyde Park, MA 02136) Larry Johnson's amazing dreamlike saga continues, as Horseman encounters a strange flowerlike being and creation ensues! A truly unique fantasy adventure, told entirely in beautiful full color, and completely wordless. Words are not needed however, this book is a dazzling feast for the eyes!



**MIDNIGHT DOUBLE FEATURE #1** (\$5.00 postpaid from Michael Waggoner, 41 Province St., Richford, VT 05476. Or, PayPal to rev\_mykd@hotmail.com ) "This comic will combine my love of comics with the classic vibe of the B-movie double bills of yore" states Michael Waggoner, and he then goes on to present two gripping sf/horror stories, written by Mike with stunning artwork by Michael C. Spell and Christopher Herdman. Spirits of the dead and demonic beings appear, amidst a classic battle of good vs. evil



**THE STF AMATEUR JANUARY 2024** (\$6.00 postpaid from Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230, or, PayPal to kalel@well.com or @Hrow . Outside US rates inquire via email. Free PDF @ <https://efanzines.com/HR/index.htm> ) The "January" issue of Heath Row's fascinating apazine features in depth reviews and commentary of UFO zines, as well as apa comments, letters, and an amazing sf cover by Larry Johnson!



**THE STF AMATEUR FEBRUARY 2024** (\$6.00 postpaid from Heath Row/ 4367 Globe Ave./ Culver City, CA 90230, or, PayPal to kalel@well.com or @Hrow . Outside US rates inquire via email. Free PDF@ <https://efanzines.com/HR/index.htm> ) Beginning with a stunning color cover by Patrick Ijima-Washburn, STF AMATEUR's "February" issue also includes Heath Row's "Telegraphs & Tar Pits" and "The Brass Hat" apazines, as well as engaging reviews and commentary. From Doctor Who to fanzine talk to UFO reviews and much more, this issue offers a wealth of fine reading.



**THE TRIUMVIRATE, VOLUME 3** (\$7.00 on Amazon.com, or PayPal \$7.00 to david.oliver.kling@gmail.com ) David Kling's absorbing sf/fiction zine includes a rare old comic strip from Steve Keeter and Steve Shipley – "The Mexican Beer Bandido" is politically incorrect, but was made during a more naive and innocent time (the 1980s). Also included: "Crimson" – Kerry Perdy's gripping story of a downed airship pirate and her adventure under a rain of blood; Larry Johnson's "Hands On Experiment", and much more!



**THE TRIUMVIRATE, VOLUME 4** (\$7.00 on Amazon.com, or PayPal \$7.00 to david.oliver.kling@gmail.com ) David Kling's "Journal of Fantasy, Science Fiction, & Horror" continues! Included "Ghost of a Chance," in which a man is led into a surreal world by his father's ghost; Robert Henry's "The Boy in the Wood," a magical adventure in a forest setting"; David Kling's own "Whispers from the Abyss," in which "a cosmic exploration turns dark." Amazing sf/fantasy adventure providing hours of great reading!

