

# AMATEUR



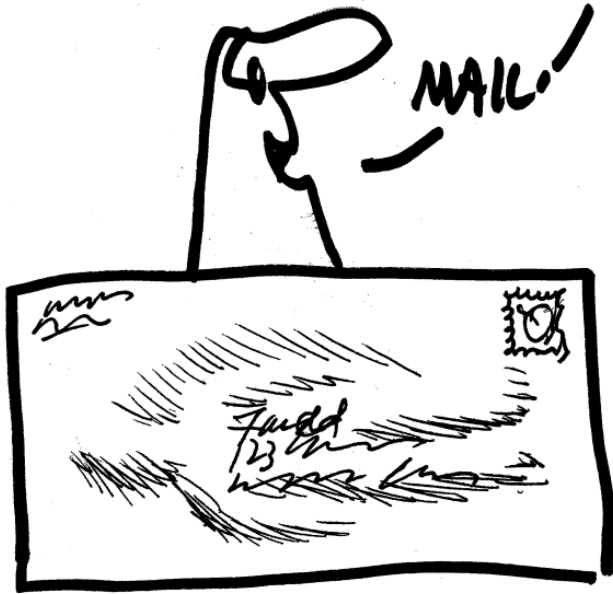
## ***The Stf Amateur 7***

April 2024

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Cover artist Blaise Moritz has been publishing his comic book *The Test* monthly for almost five years. You can see examples at <https://blaisemoritz.com/portfolio/the-test>. His book *Bar Delicious* (<https://conundrumpress.com/product/bar-delicious>) was published by Conundrum Press last year.

*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

I just had a lovely jaunt through several issues of your fanzines [*The Stf Amateur* #6]. What a lively, informative, enjoyable production! Lots of familiar names, and the wonderful, almost extinct faanish feel. I loved the juvenalia. Thank you so much for sending it!

—Paul Di Filippo

I really enjoyed the new bundle of your zines, just no comment hooks, sorry—a long one this time! If I write any stray pieces that aren't previously accounted for by someone else I'll pass it on to you to see if you might be interested for your burgeoning genzine.

—William Breiding

Thank you for the kind words, William. Even if there weren't adequately tempting comment hooks to merit a longer response, knowing you read and enjoyed *The Stf Amateur* is sufficient praise. I'd certainly welcome any submissions you send my way.

I've been giving some thought to the meaning of comment hooks, their perceived presence, and the role of reader response in recent months. So far this year, I've been aiming to write a dozen letters of comment a month. In February, I hit the target. By late March, I'd only written four. Not all of them will be published. And I've been considering people's use of letters of comment and mailing comments in *apae*, as well as the possible interpretations of no comment, RAEBNC, and other brief responses or lack thereof.

Is it that a given fanzine doesn't include or offer any comment hooks, or that no comment hooks

proved tempting enough to a given reader to merit response? I can't imagine that any fanzine—even the most lousy crudzine—can be entirely uninteresting or include no material that provokes thought. Heck, we've commented on each other's print quality for decades. That's dreadfully boring. Fen love to correct other fen. A fanzine might not be someone's cup of tea. It might be the cup of tea for somebody else. Even the latter reader might not comment.

It might not be that a fanzine offered no comment hooks, but that no comment hooks worked their way into the lip or fingers of a given reader. Said reader dodged, bobbed, and weaved to avoid any such tempting morsels while reading. Yes, like a fish. Or they just didn't notice and swam on by. Or life and other priorities intervened, and they didn't have time to respond. Or they're not a letterhack. Not everyone is driven to respond to fanzines, so comment hooks (if they even exist as such) might only appeal to a minority.

Ideally, someone else might have *something* to say, though some issues do go by without a single letter or email. Does that mean that the issue or fanzine overall is unremarkable? The gulf between thought and writing a loc or making a comment can be vast. In the case of fanzines rather than *apae*, not every reader is a writer. Do people read a fanzine and think or feel nothing? That would be surprising, but we can hardly measure or capture that.

So I've been thinking about the various meanings of "no comment"—or a lack of comment—in response to *apazines* and fanzines. No response at all in mailing comments—or a lack of locs (loc, really)—could mean any number of things. Explicitly saying "no comment" feels slightly better. A reader at least recognized the existence or presence of a fanzine. "RAEBNC" at least says something positive—and your email clearly inspired a response. A reader read and enjoyed the fanzine. That means a lot, even without further comment.

In *apae*, mailing comments are part of the social contract; they're as much a conversation as they are an assortment of fanzines, and in some cases, the participants are long-standing friends who might correspond anyway. (That can be a challenge to break into as a newcomer, which every *apa* needs. How welcoming are we to new *apans*? Do we snark at them like we might another *apan*?) In *APA-L*, we often invoke Fuzzy's Law: You've got to give comments to get comments. (I actually disagree with that, though I appreciate its spirit and intent.)

In the *apae* in which I participate, my comment ratio varies. In *APA-L* and *LASFAPA*, for example, I tend to respond to everyone. But Alarums &

Excursions is sizable enough in terms of contributors that I do not. That might make someone feel left out—I've reviewed fanzines in such a manner that contributors whose pieces weren't directly addressed remarked on the exclusion—but I meant no offense. (A review doesn't need to address everything.) Regardless, no egoboo was granted. That's not necessarily a comment on the quality of the fanzine, article, or comic strip. Even writers read plenty of amazing things but say nothing.

When it comes to fanzines proper, not apae, I often read a fanzine solely with the intent to write a letter of comment. I read very few fanzines otherwise, though I recognize that I might be the exception. In my case, I read fanzines to write letters. Prozines, I tend to read but not write to—unless I write a review. I sometimes write authors after I've read a short story or book by them, but not always.

In any event, if we do publish fanzines or write letters, we scan for egoboo, and it's a challenge not to take offense or worry if our work provokes no feedback. Knowing someone *read* a fanzine is often enough—sometimes, someone wanting to *receive* a fanzine is sufficient (They're on the list!)—but ideally, faneds publish for themselves first and others second, if at all. (Coordinating an apa is slightly different. I feel proud when I get two pages from one specific APA-L contributor instead of one, for example.) Pros owe us nothing, even if they remain fen. They've got to keep paying the bills.

It can rankle, however, when someone you appreciate and respect doesn't want to receive your fanzine. If fanzine fen or active faneds don't want to read or receive a given fanzine, ouch. You're not in their In Crowd and they're not on your list. But still: No fan or faned can read every single word of every single fanzine. No one can read Word One of every single fanzine. So even that should provoke no offense. Some day, we shall all be BNF, and we shall appear in each other's lettercols with regularity. Our fanzines are, after all, One Big Fanzine.

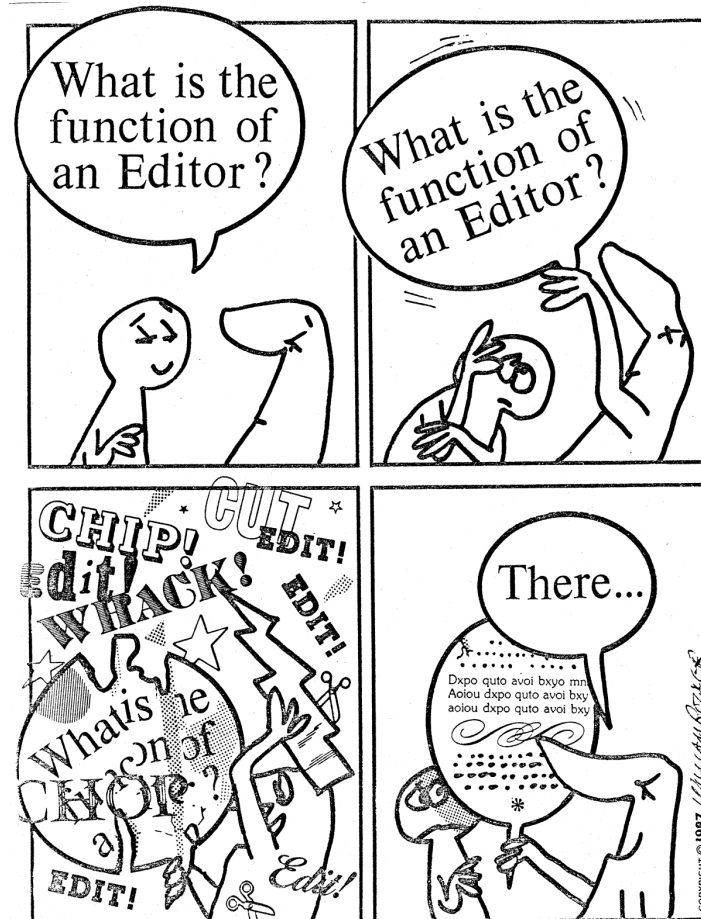
In the end, it comes down to why you—why I—publish. The best fanzines are fanzines that would be published even if no one read them. That faned has something to say. They have a burning desire. They'd say it regardless of whether it's read. Egoboo alone is not enough to pub that ish.

As faneds, we—I—shouldn't be in the business of placing comment hooks explicitly to provoke response. We shouldn't gauge the success of our publishing efforts on the number of readers we have, the size of our lettercol, or whether people respond to us at all. At least, that's what I told myself as I checked how many Faan Award votes I received. (It

still felt good to make the table this year.) Is what we do fun? Do we get a kick out of it? Does the idea of throwing something we made out into the world give us the giggles? Would we do it anyway?

We should do it anyway. Everything else is gravy. Fanac shouldn't be a hassle. If it is, we're doing it wrong. And if no one writes back, that's okeh. There's always next ish.

# 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.

## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #105

March 7, 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

Corflu, Las Vegas  
Faneds have been gathering  
Gotta pub my ish!

As mentioned last ish, I was so eager and enthusiastic about Corflu that I dialed into the Zoom channel a full week early. I was informed of my mistake by another faned in response to a letter of comment I'd written in the spirit of Corflu. So I was pleased to be able to join in on much of the proceedings over the course of last weekend. I don't plan to report on the con in as much detail as I have been Gallifrey One, but I asked Ross Chamberlain to submit a report of some kind. We'll see what comes together.

Over the course of the weekend, I completed and distributed *The Stf Amateur* #6, and uploaded it to Corflu's Fanzine Lounge on the Discord server for participants. I also finished much of this month's *De Profundis*, distributing it early this week.

### Ignorable Theme: Science Fiction and Culture

I misnumbered the upcoming themes in the last distribution's table of contents, so you'll see they've been renumbered thish. The proposed theme for #3059 was in fact intended to be the theme for #3060. Subsequent themes have been renumbered.

When developing these themes, I'm admittedly trying not to spend a lot of time on them. So if you don't understand a given theme or think it's failing in some way, make it your own and write about a slightly adjacent theme that interests you more. They're intended solely as writing prompts, if of interest and desired, and to foster discussion.

They are, as always, ignorable.

What is the relationship between science fiction and culture? What are the boundaries between science fiction and reality?

When I think about the relationship between science fiction and culture, I think about several things. One, what's going on in terms of broader societal, economic, scientific, or historical trends that

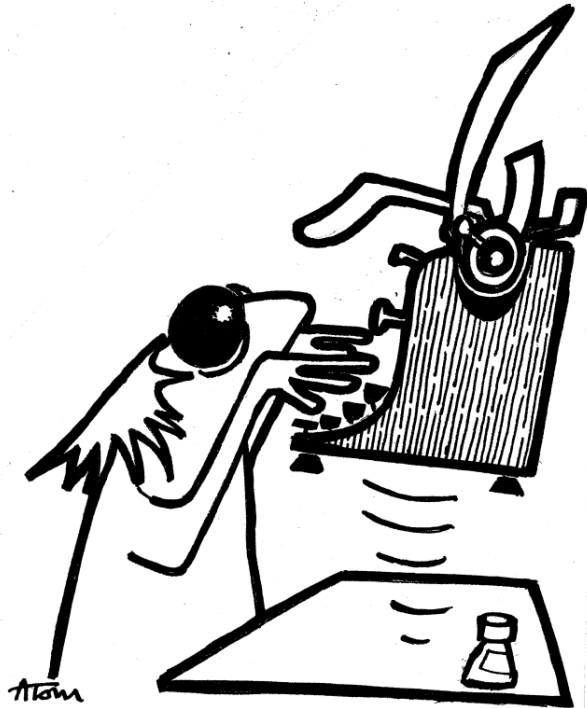
might inform topics and themes addressed in sf? Two, how does literary sf influence or inspire broader media trends and developments? And three, do we see sf exerting influence on or lending inspiration to broader cultural avenues outside of entertainment media? Generally, perhaps conflating the last two approaches, what role does sf play in broader social discourse? How aware of sf is the average citizen? How socially relevant is it?



For example, the golden age of science fiction in the 1950s generally coincided with early successful steps taken in space exploration and robotics. In 1949, William Grey Walter developed small, self-contained robots that could navigate their way around a room. The Soviet Union launched the first satellite, Sputnik, in 1957. I am not asserting any predictive characteristic of sf, but such technological contemporaneity can create a kind of feedback loop. As more people are aware of and enthusiastic about progress in public science and technology, we might see an increase of interest in and enthusiasm about sf. Those are times when sf is more in the forefront of public attention—or culture—because of larger interests.

Similarly, the New Wave of science fiction of the

1960s and 1970s could arguably be tied to broader societal forces emerging from the counterculture of the 1960s. Just as the counterculture was an anti-establishment cultural phenomenon and political movement seeking alternative methods and modes more generally, the New Wave stood to challenge tradition and formal structures in sf literature.



More recently, we've seen cyberpunk arise in the 1980s and 1990s ahead of and alongside widespread public adoption of the Internet, online services, and the World Wide Web. And cli-fi—perhaps even solarpunk—has emerged in parallel with growing concern about climate change and its ongoing impact on our planet. It struck me recently that many stories in the newly relaunched *Worlds of If* #177 touched on themes of healthcare, medicine, health, and wellness, suggesting that such topics might continue to emerge as possible themes for sf and related writing.

It has been suggested that horror literature and media reflect societal fears over time. Perhaps the same could be said of sf in terms of scientific or technological concerns and developments. Perhaps the same could be said of any literature or media.

Economic realities and major non-scientific or -technological world events could also influence sf. Occurrences such as the Great Depression, World War II, or the collapse of a magazine distributor have affected topics addressed in sf, as well as the stability of businesses supporting and trafficking in the literature.

Over the years, we've seen many attempts to adapt

sf literature to television and film, and recent cross-media relationships might be seen as dependent on a couple of key developments: the success of *Star Wars*, improvements in special effects and computer animation, the advent of superhero cinema resulting from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and the emergence of streaming media. As special effects technology has improved over time, we could probably map an increase in sf and fantasy TV and film productions. People tried before, successfully, but it really became possible as technology improved.

It might have been the blockbuster success of *Star Wars* that brought science fiction to mass culture. Not only did *Star Wars* result in an increase in other sf cinema, it improved the prospects for sf TV. Currently reading *Red, White, and Who: The Story of Doctor Who in America*, I learned that the first attempts to bring *Doctor Who* to the United States weren't very successful. Once *Star Wars* hit the big screen, TV broadcasters were looking for more sf options, which led to a successful second attempt to import *Doctor Who*, as well as a TV renaissance for programs such as *Star Trek* and *The Twilight Zone*.

More people watch movies and TV than read books. In 2020, 1.32 billion movie tickets were sold, and 44 percent of adults reported going to the movies monthly in the United States. In 2018, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that about 80 percent of people watch TV any given day. In terms of book sales, in 2020, 757.9 million books were sold. A 2023 *WordsRated* article suggested that 65 percent of Americans read at least one physical book in the last year. (Opposed to TV's 80 percent a day!) 30 percent read at least one ebook annually, and 23 percent listened to at least one audiobook.

Regardless of whether sf movies and TV bring people to the literature, visual media provides a much larger platform for sf themes and ideas. That has continued with the advent of superhero cinema, which has largely resulted in more superhero movies and TV shows rather than readers of comic books (*T&T* #104). It's probably optimistic to think that fans of superhero movies make their way to sf and fantasy because of the genres' adjacency.

And streaming media's need for ongoing sources of new intellectual property to attract new and repeat viewers has—I think thankfully—resulted in sf and fantasy adaptations that might not have occurred in the days of network or cable television. Examples include *Foundation*, *Good Omens*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*, *Resident Alien*, *The Sandman*, and *The Wheel of Time*. Streaming might be the new direct to video, but perhaps because of prestige TV led by HBO and *The Sopranos*—if not *Game of Thrones*—

the resulting quality of such programming is much higher.

Does that spill into other aspects of culture? Anime and its fandom might have. Anime and perhaps by extension cosplay have definitely hit the radar of the mainstream. While cosplay might still occur largely in fannish settings such as cons, I've seen at least one newsstand magazine at our local grocery store focusing on the topic. (Grocery store newsstands are a good way to gauge whether something's hit the mainstream.) And we have a small but growing number of anime- and similarly themed cafes and coffee shops. In southern California alone, there's Requiem Cafe in Anaheim, Arcane Maid Cafe in Arcadia, Fujiwara Tofu Cafe in El Monte, and Tsun Scoops in Garden Grove. Meanwhile, Toothsome Chocolate Emporium & Savory Feast Kitchen in Universal City is reportedly steampunk themed. And in Braga, Portugal, AlterCos—traditionally an anime and cosplay store—had started serving food and beverages the last time I visited.

So culture definitely informs literature, and sf literature has made inroads inspiring and informing other media. Its impact on the larger culture has yet to show its full potential. I haven't at all explored the relationship between maker spaces, hobbyist robotics (the new hobby electronics?), and 3D printing and sf—and how those currents might relate and intersect.

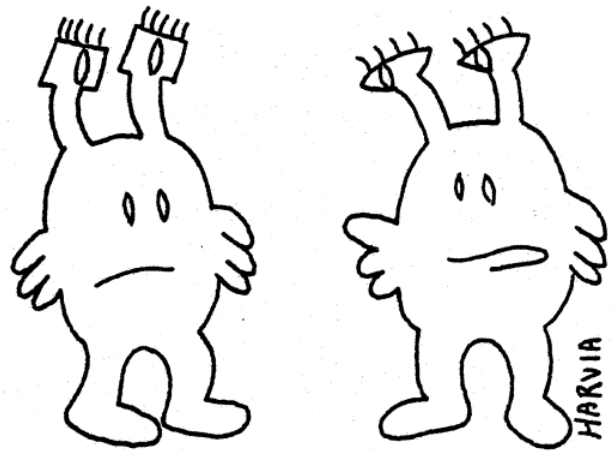
What are the boundaries between science fiction and reality, then? What an odd question. I don't really know what to make of this, even though I asked it! (I draw on multiple sources to come up with these new themes.) Part of me is tempted to address whether there's a predictive aspect of sf, but I think our general preferred consensus is that there isn't, or that that isn't the predominant characteristic of sf. It's not in the business of telling the future. (I'd suggest that there might be broader cultural, scientific, or technological undercurrents that influence potentially predictive examples over history. What developmental vectors pointed sf authors in a given direction?)

Instead, I'm more strongly resonating with the idea of near-future science fiction. In the words of *Max Headroom*: 20 minutes into the future. The near future is an idea that's been utilized by writers of sf as well as non-sf literature (though the result could still arguably be considered sf). According to the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, "The far future tends to be associated with notions of ultimate destiny, and is dominated by metaphors of senescence; its images display a world irrevocably transfigured. ... The near future, by contrast, is a world which is imminently real—one of which we can have no definite

knowledge, which exists only imaginatively and hypothetically, but which is nevertheless a world in which (or something like it) we may one day have to live, and towards which our present plans and ambitions must be directed." Some suggest that near-future fiction is more socially relevant.

I'm also reminded of futurism and scenario planning, in which multiple futures can be imagined and identified. Scenario planners might even assign a metric of likelihood to prioritize which future to plan for, as well as which futures to hedge against. I also think of the counterfactuals mentioned at Gallifrey One (*T&T* #104) and Portugal's WhatIf'23 Alternative History Conference (*T&T* #92).

Finally, I'm inspired to think of science fiction set in our current year, 2024. Wikipedia indicates that there are at least several examples: Harlan Ellison's "A Boy and His Dog," Simon A. Forward's *Doctor Who* novel *Emotional Chemistry*, the *Outer Limits* episode "The Invisible Enemy," Octavia E. Butler's novel *Parable of the Sower*, and perhaps John Michael Greer's speculative political novel *Twilight's Last Gleaming*. Fiction written in the past—but set in today's time—might be an avenue worth exploring.



How can you look me  
square in the eye and  
say that?

—Teddy Harvia

### Convention Report: Gallifrey One (cont.)

Apparently, I neglected to report on one Saturday afternoon panel discussion last ish. Artist Nathan Skreslet moderated the panel "SF Television: The Year in Review" featuring panelists Travis Richey, Guy Jackson, Lacy Baugher Milas, and Patricia Miller.

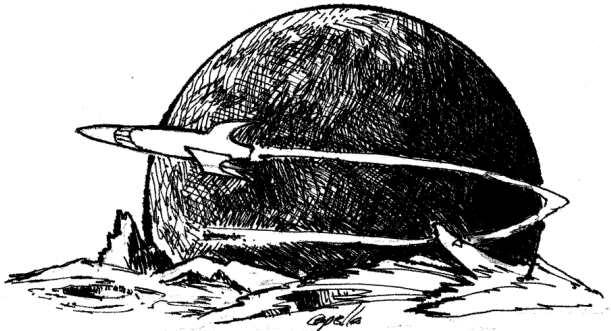
As you might expect, it focused on notable TV



shows that were relevant last year. Relatively unstructured, the conversation concentrated on panelists' favorite programs, underrecognized shows that should be talked about more, whether panelists agree with various best-of lists, and whether mainstream attention is justifiable in various cases.

I won't recount the discussion in much detail, but programs mentioned included *3 Body Problem*, *Ahsoka*, *Black Mirror*, *Counterpart*, *Doctor Who*, *Extraordinary*, *Extrapolations*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *Foundation*, *Futurama*, *Gen V*, *Good Omens*, *Halo*, *Invincible*, *The Last of Us*, *Loki*, *Love Death + Robots*, *Moving*, *Mrs. Davis*, *Nier: Automata*, *Our Flag Means Death*, *Resident Alien*, *Rick and Morty*, *Scavengers Reign*, *Silent Hill: Ascension*, *Silo*, *Star Trek: Lower Decks*, *Star Trek: Picard*, *Star Trek: Prodigy*, *Star Trek: Short Treks*, *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*, *Star Wars: Visions*, *Stranger Things*, *Sweet Home*, *Twisted Metal*, *What If...?*, and *What We Do in the Shadows*.

How many of those shows have *you* watched? What do you think the most necessary viewing is?



—Ray Capella

On Sunday at Gallifrey One, my work shifts were 10-11 a.m., and 2-4 and 5-8 p.m. Matthew Mitchell and I met for breakfast before the day began, meeting each other for the first time face to face outside the hotel restaurant at 8:30 a.m. While I neglected to take a picture of him during breakfast, our conversation was fun and wide ranging. I'd hang out with Matthew again in a heartbeat.

I didn't have to redo the ice or drain water this morning like I did Saturday, so my morning hour in hospitality was relatively light work. That would pick up as the day progressed and we began to tear down and pack up for loading the truck.

My first panel of the day was the Keith Barnfather-moderated "Days of Yore: The BBC of the '70s and '80s." Panelists included Kevin Jon Davies, Brian Croucher, Matthew Waterhouse, and Frazer Hines. Croucher and Hines were very much the

greybeards on the panel, though Waterhouse's experiences were more recent—and Davies's outside fannish perspective welcome indeed.

Panelists shared stories about the challenges of live television, balancing location shoots with set production elements, how they started working for the BBC, the old Lime Grove complex, Television Centre, the difficulties of circular building design, the "Acting Hilton" rehearsal studios, nearby pubs that are now closed, fan gatherings at such pubs, rehearsal schedules, blocking scenes, and why fans got banned from the set. (Davies had messed around with Davros' chair.) Barnfather also asked panelists about horror stories, on-set scares, and other experiences.

I very much appreciated Waterhouse's energy and Davies's avocational point of view. While the stories shared were interesting, my notes are a bit of a blur, leaping from series to series, many not science fictional. Outside of the general themes referenced above, my primary takeaway is that the BBC was a special place to work in the 1970s and 1980s, that the culture surrounding live television was vibrant and creative, and that the BBC is a different place today—perhaps more interested in the bottom line and penny pinching than making exciting, innovative television.

Along the same lines as the TV panel above, I also went to the Travis Richey-moderated "Film: The Year in Review," which included BayCon's Chris Castro; Derek McCaw, editor-in-chief of *Fanboy Planet*; and Jessica Montague.

Richey opened discussion with a joke: "I've been looking at the best movies of the year lists, and apparently, I only watch the worst movies." He also addressed general sentiment toward fantastic cinema in recent months. "There's a lot of laziness in Hollywood right now," he said. "People talk about superhero fatigue. It's not that we don't want to watch superhero movies. We don't want to watch bad superhero movies."

Asked what they considered the best movies of 2023, panelists responded with *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves*, *Godzilla Minus One*, *Linoleum*, *No One Will Save You*, and *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*. Sleepers included *Jules* and *Rebel Moon* before conversation turned to movies that weren't very good—so panelists said—such as *Blue Beetle*, *The Marvels*, and *Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey*.

Then the panel devolved into a random discussion of movies, not at all organized. Titles mentioned included *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster*, *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania*, *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, *Asteroid City*, *Birth/Rebirth*, *The*



of silver plates on which to record their best work; the best of that might be transferred to gold. There are no clocks. Elders visit Nonsense Houses in which they can behave as contrary to custom as they like. People are permitted one cigarette a day, in the evening. The Goddess is worshiped, and a king governs for several months, “dies,” and is then replaced.

Venn-Thomas is drawn into this strange culture, falling in love with Sapphire, although Sally, another witch, secretly wants him.

The magic in this future—if that is what it is, rather than strict custom—is restricted to a purpose and is largely very specific. One daubs a mark of grease on your forehead; then no one can see or talk to you, supposedly. Is that magic or custom?

The novel casts a radial worldview. The people’s motives are more alien than many traditional aliens in sf, and more convincing because they are human. I don’t know how much is drawn from ancient Crete.

“Then is it really true that your armies show no respect for women and children? Surely no poet could kill a woman?”

“I never killed one,” I said lamely. “At least, not so far as I know.” [Venn-Thomas was a soldier.]

Another silence followed. “Your voice carries unfamiliar undertones. I suppose that life with you is so complex that it’s never easy to speak the truth. When you’re discussing the institutions and events of your age the uncertainty in your voice contrasts strangely with the firm way in which you spoke first—when you said you liked us.”

Some readers might perceive the novel as fantasy rather than science fiction because the poet narrator is drawn from his sleep by a seance to this future. But it is part of the nature of this future that the poet be drawn there that way. The description of the future is itself very science fictional, and perhaps more realistic. At least there is a translator, who occasionally bumbles:

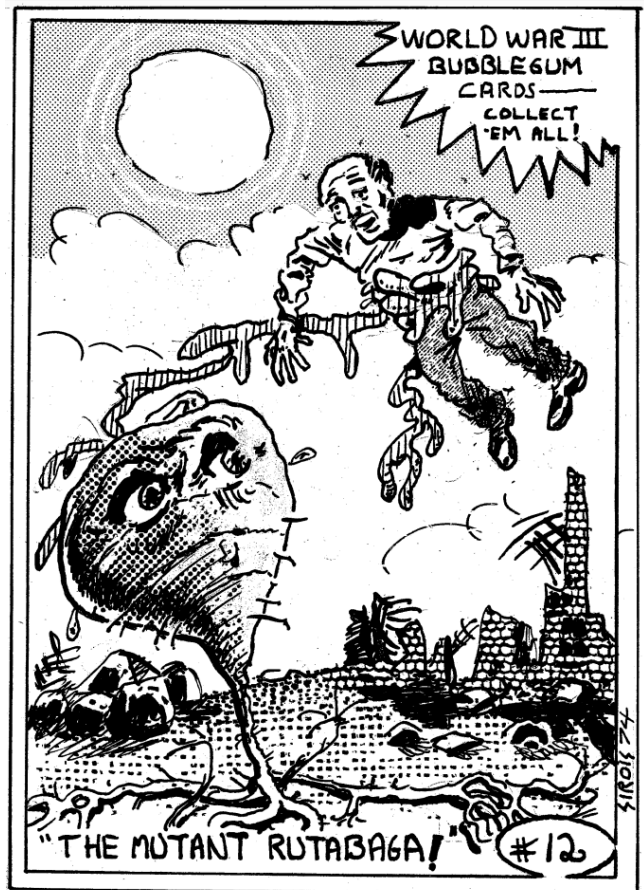
“Do I speak with correctitude?” he asked anxiously. “With great correctitude,” I assured him.”

The characters act in very strange ways but are convincing. I think most of the “magic” in the novel is implied, or a cultural quirk, rather than actual; people believe in it, so they act accordingly, such as the symbol people paint on their faces when they want to be invisible (and ignored). But it doesn’t actually happen. (People who approach the novel as a fantasy reader will expect it.)

Utopias are themselves inherently science fictional.

This book is filled with much of Graves’s own feelings—he lived in Majorca, an island not far from the site of New Crete. An interview I read said visitors were told to bring Graves hand-made gifts, and the interviewer said Graves seemed pleased with the hand-made bead he brought. I liked *Seven Days in New Crete* better than *I, Claudius* or the two other Graves novels I attempted to read.

The novel should be brought to more people’s attention, but I think that it is pretty much an outsider novel. And the very end, where the narrator wakes up in his own bed with his wife—could it all have been just a poet’s dream? Mainstream novelists are fond of that kind of twist or cop out. (Cy Chauvin)



—Al Sirosis

### Juvenalia: “The Man-Eating Pumpkin (Or Peter, Peter...)”

*I wrote the following undated story when I was a preteen, perhaps. It doesn’t seem to have been written for school, though there are a few editing marks. The story was largely written in pencil, though five lines were written in ballpoint pen. Its published form varies slightly from the handwritten original.*

It was a dark, foggy night. A lone person makes his way through the fog, his rubber heels clicking against the cobblestone street. Suddenly, a flash of orange breaks the veil of darkness. When the darkness again takes over the street, the man's body is sprawled out, barely breathing.

It is now morning in the Russian community of Latveria. A very particular morning, for this morning they found a body. No one knows to whom the body belongs. No one knows how his death came. All they know is that it is a body.

The peasants in Latveria are like the Amish folk of old England. But they are also very different. You see, no one in Latveria speaks. Somehow, they communicate, but they do not speak.

The only sound piercing the dawn was a scream. A scream belonging to a peasant woman as she comes upon the body on her way to market. Now she is in the stocks. Why? She broke an ancient oath made centuries ago.

The baron of Latveria is the only one who is allowed to speak. This evening, he plans to ask for aid from a neighboring country, America.

"President Rogers?"

"Yes, Baron?"

"This morning, some people in my country found a body."

"Really?"

"Yes. The only thing wrong was that the body was all shriveled up."

"So?"

"I mean, his blood was missing."

"What do you mean by missing?"

"Mr. Rogers, we haven't had a problem with vampires since 1687!"

"Wow! Maybe it was a... a..."

"Yes, President?"

"I forgot what I was going to say."

"OK. Goodbye, Mr. President."

"Bye."

The baron hung up. As he did so, in Washington, D.C., the president held a conference. "All of you here tonight have no doubt heard about my very disturbing phone call. No?" A chorus of no's reach the President's ears.

"OK. Hmm... Where shall I start? Yes! Goody, goody. I know. Anyway, earlier this evening, I got a call from Latveria, a Russian community's baron, Baron von Ton. He told me about an accident. An accident in which a man lost a lot of blood. At first, I thought von Ton was playing a joke on me. But as soon as he hung up, I remembered an old nursery rhyme: 'Hickory, dickory, dock.' Well, that has

nothing to do with this. Anyway, he has asked for our country's help in finding out what happened. End of conference."

There is a sound of folding paper and locks clicking as the attendants put their notes and pencils in their briefcases. After all the people leave, the minister of war walks up to the president and speaks. "Mr. President, it alarms me that such a small country like Latveria would ask for international aid!"

"Me, too."



—Alan White

Back in Latveria...

"Baron, phase one of Operation P.E.T.E.R. is a success."

"Yes, Charlie. You are a brilliant adviser."

"Thank you, von Ton!" In front of von Ton is a piece of paper. The paper looks like this:

[No illustration accompanies the story]

Are the Latverians planning to take over America? It sure looks like it!

Meanwhile, back in America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, the president alerts his top spy, None Nosme, of his plan.

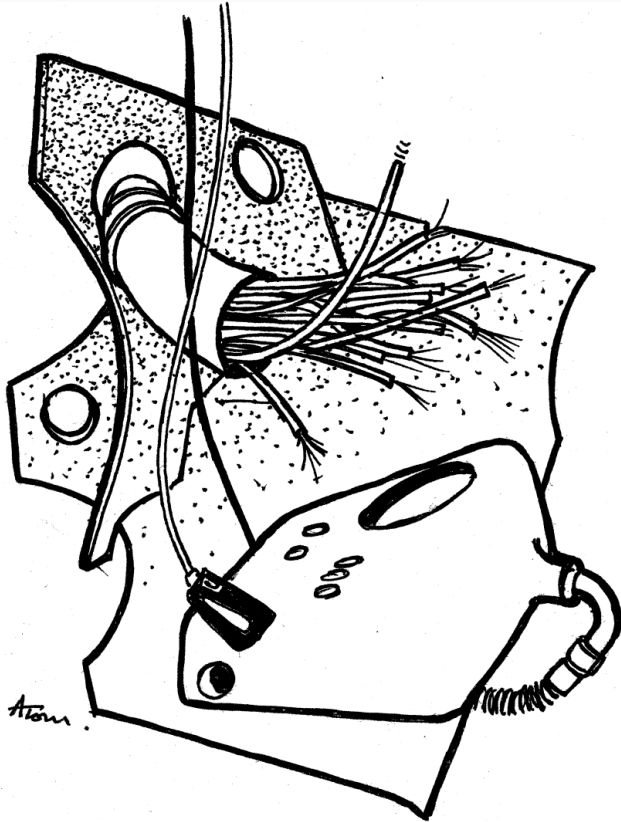
"Nosme, you have been my best spy for several years."

"Quite right, sir!"

"I would like you to go behind the Tin Curtain and spy on Baron von Ton."

"The Tin Curtain, sir?"

“Yes. You leave by gyrocopter tomorrow.”  
 “Tomorrow? But Mr. President!”  
 “No ifs, ands, or buts, None. You’ll go, won’t you?  
 Please?”  
 “Yes, sir. I will.”  
 “Goodbye.”



It is now morning. None Nosme safely got over the Tin Curtain by dawn. Now he is crawling on his stomach through the brush with his false mustache, nose, and glasses. Not to mention a trench coat! Here is what he looks like:

[No illustration accompanies the story]

“Oof! Tough business, this spying is. Ow! Stupid rock. You tore me poor trench coat. Hot day, eh, Nosme? I’ll say! Wait, what’s that up ahead? Looks like a secret trapdoor. What’s that sign on it say?”

The sign read:

WELCOME TO LATVERIA!  
 YOU ARE ONE OF 10,000 UNLUCKY SOULS  
 ENTERING.  
 IF YOU WISH NOT TO ENTER, TURN BACK  
 BEFORE IT’S TOO LATE!

But it is already too late. A trapdoor—beautifully camouflaged, too—opened, and Nosme fell in. When he got up, he looked around. Because it was too dark

to see anything, he pulled out his handy-dandy 007 spy light. In a moment, he could see the room completely.

On one wall there were three doors, one labeled “1,” the other “2,” and the other “3.” All other walls were blank. Nosme walked up to door No. 3, opened it, and stepped out.

He was now standing on a ledge overlooking a valley. At the bottom of the valley, Nosme saw movement. In a few moments, Nosme noticed that it was a tank. A strange-looking tank, too! It looked like a pumpkin with a laser sticking out of it. As it neared, it sent a rally of shots toward Nosme.

He was quickly overcome.

A few days later, the president alerts his armed forces of an army attacking Washington, D.C. His armies were of no use. Soon, the world was laid in waste. 1,028 years later, a family of primitives discovered a vault filled with computers. They soon rebuilt our country to its full splendor.

*This story, while less science fictional, amused me with its silliness and jokes. There are hints of my having been exposed to Halloween III: Season of the Witch, which came out when I was 9; The Man from U.N.C.L.E. (or perhaps S.H.I.E.L.D. or S.C.H.M.U.C.K. from normalman); James Bond; and perhaps even Battlefield Earth, Planet of the Apes, and Bunnacula, if not Dracula itself. Latveria clearly comes from Marvel comics and Doctor Doom.*

### Comments on APA-L #3059

In *Leeway* dated for Feb. 29, 2024, **Lee Gold** updated ellers on Barry Gold’s surgery, which will now not occur! Next time I see him, I’ll have to check whether he’s lopsided. I’m glad you feel more relaxed.

I was sorry to hear the news about Tom Digby. I emailed him in mid-2022 when I first learned he was also on the Well online and originated the term “plergb.” He never replied to me, which is okeh. I was hoping to meet or perhaps communicate with him at some point. This is sad news, but I wish him the best of health and happiness in hospice regardless of how long he’s there.

After the number of people who got COVID-19, the flu, or other con crud at Gallifrey One, I was pleased to escape without illness, even if I didn’t mask at all. I’ll pass on your feedback to cover artist Al Sirois.

Being a Libra Water Horse, what characteristics should you display? I’m a Pisces and an Ox. My uninformed understanding is that I might exhibit qualities traditionally associated with Pisces, but I find

it difficult to believe that people born in the same month or year would somehow be the same in a serious way.

**Matthew Mitchell's** *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #47 continued his Gallifrey One reportage. I was unaware there were T-shirts available, or I ordered one and forgot, or I didn't order one. I'll have to check. I got a call late last week indicating that Jonah's high school graduation photographs had been ready since, oh, 2022. I'd never gotten the customary email from CFP Studios saying they were ready, and I totally forgot. So I went to pick them up Saturday before they "archived" them. (I'm pretty sure I didn't buy a T-shirt. I have too many T-shirts.)

Just as I'd never seen "The Year in Review" before (see above), I've still never seen the Idiot's Lantern. Based on your description, I'll have to check it out next year, perhaps. It's fun that you signed up to sing Harry Nilsson's "Lime in the Coconut" during karaoke. He provided the soundtrack to a movie I recently saw, *Skidoo*. Perhaps you could share your rendition with us before an upcoming LASFS meeting,

I forget what you ate for breakfast, too, though it might have been a standard breakfast with scrambled eggs and toast. I had the mushroom breakfast burrito, which was pretty decent. Tom Baker is also my Doctor. He was the Doctor during the second—and successful (see above)—attempt to import *Doctor Who* to the United States. I'm glad you also picked up *Vworp! Vworp!* Isn't it astounding? Which issue did you get?

*Fantasy Empire* is a great magazine. Back issues are available online, and it's well worth returning to. Early issues were edited by Maggie Thompson, with John Peel serving as the sole editor as time progressed. *Enterprise Incidents* was published at the same time by the same company, New Media Publishing, but focused much less on British media. The issue I have right here (imagine that!) was edited by James Van Hise.

I forgot to mention that I, too, saw Matthew B. Tepper at Gallifrey One on Sunday! The man sold me a Loscon membership, at a discount no less. The Portuguese fireplaces might very well be Franklin stoves.

In *Vanamonde* #1582, **John Hertz** recognized Black History Month, focusing on the Tuskegee Airmen and the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site quarter. He also commented on the Black History Month display at Vroman's Bookstore in Pasadena. I'll share your feedback with cover artist Tiffanie Gray.

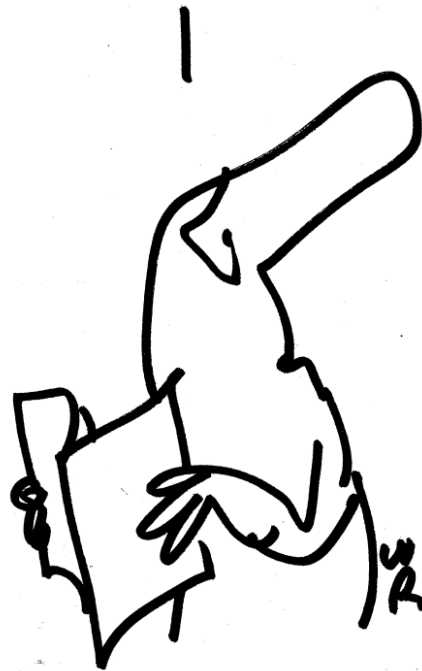
**John Hertz's** *Vanamonde* #1583 offered a

memorial tribute to Martin Morse Wooster, who died in November 2022. Thank you for sharing the information about his fanzine contributions and other activities. He seems vastly interesting—and like he would have gotten along with Samuel Edward Konkin III, or at least participated in a lively series of conversations. Re: "roll call," I checked against the Kingsley Amis text, and I did indeed misquote it. I'll share your feedback with cover artist Alan White.

In *Toony Loons* #750, **Joe Zeff** updated ellers on his April plans to travel to witness the eclipse. Glad you and your sister will be able to do so together! In my experience, the primary difference between combing and brushing one's hair is the tool used: a comb or a brush. Functionally, the two actions seem awfully similar.

I know I said I'd reserve comment on **C.D. Carson's** *Blast* #1 until the partwork was completely published, but I'd like to do so in the future, perhaps next week. I have other deadlines looming and would like to set aside time to read it rather than rush my response. Regardless, congratulations on completing the partwork!

THIS FANZINE  
IS DEAD, JIM



—William Rotsler



(*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #96), I read the third after seeing the episode in the Gallifrey One screening room last month (*T&T* #103). At the con, I went to at least two panel discussions about *Doctor Who* novelizations and novels, and their primary merits remain even today. They help fill in the gaps when you've been unable to see a given episode or serial to completion, and they can often do things that an episode or serial did not do in terms of narration.

James Goss's presence on those panels added a good amount of humor and silliness, and his description of the book was intriguing. According to the author, the novel gets progressively more strange as it proceeds, perhaps challenging the episode itself in its oddities. He's not wrong.

Without saying too much about the plotline, I will indicate that it marks the return of the Celestial Toymaker, amusingly portrayed by Neil Patrick Harris. The book largely follows the script, but plays with the concept of games and toys throughout the text. First of all, it is dedicated "to the losers," which is later addressed in the text itself. Chapters are labeled "moves," and play-associated language is used throughout the novel: "A good piece to have on the board," "She looked at microscopes to win," "This move was necessary," "Up a ladder or down a snake?," "the house always wins," "Always make your opponent angry. That's when they make mistakes," and other examples.

Puzzles and other playful elements also play a role in the text, which includes a maze, a seek-a-word, a shift to first-person narration by the Toymaker, and a wonderful Choose Your Own Adventure-like section that includes some fun surprises. Additional puzzles and creative typography are also present. (During one panel, an editor for BBC Books joked that he had to learn how to design books because of the project.)

During the musical number, a highlight of the episode, more craziness occurs. As recounted during one of the Gallifrey One panels, there was some difficulty clearing the rights to use song lyrics in the novelization. Goss introduces an attorney as a character, quoting emails from an actual attorney—with her permission—in the text.

*The Giggle* is a fun story, and a delightful read. It's a fine example of how a novelization can go off script in the spirit of the original—and the fun an author can have with a licensed property. The book, while a worthy adaptation, goes even further than the show did in terms of creativity.



## Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

### *Bram Stoker's Dracula*

When this Francis Ford Coppola movie first came out in 1992, I was in college. I remember enjoying it—I was already a latter-day Monster Kid and enjoyed the Universal horrors, *Shock Theater*, and associated fare—but thinking it was somewhat silly and stylish, perhaps too modern.

Watching the film again several decades later, while the movie is decidedly stylish, it is by no means silly, and there's more connective tissue between it and older portrayals of Dracula—as well as Hammer film productions—than I remembered.

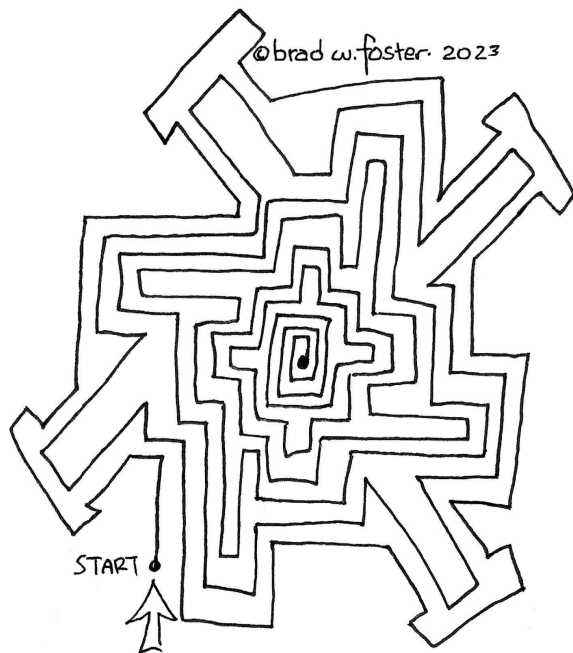
Some miscasting occurred. Keanu Reeves's Jonathan Harker is a bit lackluster, for example, and Gary Oldman's Count Dracula could have been stronger. But Winona Ryder is compelling as Mina Harker, Sadie Frost is deliciously wanton as Lucy Westenra, and Tom Waits is wonderful as Renfield.

The movie spends ample time in Dracula's castle, particularly concentrating on Jonathan Harker's time



there. And visually, the movie draws on Bram Stoker's novel substantially. The Harkers's correspondence plays a role. The fiance falls prey to Dracula's brides. He also sees Dracula scrambling along the outer wall of the castle at one point. And, perhaps most notably, scenes set outside are shot on set rather than on location, often invoking the framing and set design of Hammer movies, which was a wonderful touch.

Even though this film version might be more true to Stoker's novel than other adaptations, it's by no means perfect. That the asylum is located directly across the street from Carfax Abbey might be true to the text but seems overly convenient. Mostly, the movie is a little too polished, too clean in its production. It's fine as a mainstream production, but a truly commercial production it remains.



**FUNKY FRACTAL (ish)**  
JUST ONE LINE GOING ON A QUEST  
FOR THE CENTER OF IT ALL.

—Brad W. Foster

### Comments on LASFAPA #565

In *Wurlitzer's Revelation* for distribution #565, Little Sin God David Schlosser mentioned our scanning effort. His scanning is going faster than my combining and applying optical character recognition to the files, and Schlosser takes breaks from scanning while I catch up so the backlog doesn't overwhelm. So far, we're up through LASFAPA #45 (June 1980), though I see he's proceeded scanning up through #51. I shall resume!

Joe Siclari emailed me after Corflu in Las Vegas—

which I ended up not attending, but participated via Zoom. “At Corflu this weekend, I heard that you have all of APA-L scanned. If you are willing to allow Fanac.org to host them, we will OCR them so they are readable online. Elayne [Pelz] has indicated that the LASFS board gave Fanac the OK to put up all of LASFS' material. So we would [be] willing to make them available.”

I replied: “I appreciate that. I haven't been able to secure the current membership's permission to make the apa more publicly available, so while a good idea, it's premature. I'd also want to secure the permission of still-living former contributors to do the same with back distributions. (I'm more likely to secure current folks' approval so we could at least do so going forward once that occurs.)

“I'll keep the option in mind, though. It's a grand idea.

“We have the full run of APA-L scanned and housed for current and former members access, as well as at Eaton, except for #2971-2988 in 2022 (the end of Marty [Cantor]'s stint as OE post-Karl Lembke's scanning). I'll be scanning those to ensure full digitization.

“On the LASFAPA side, David Schlosser and I have started scanning those back distributions. So far we're well into 1980. Apan discussion there encountered issues similar to those in APA-L, but I'll bring the option up with Schlosser, as well.”

Siclari indicated he understood my concerns but added, “We usually try to get editorial approval. Trying to get every contributor could get to be very difficult.” Might be something for us to consider again, or over time. Might the current contributors be interested in making current distributions available via Fanac? I plan to ask the same of the APA-L contributors again. There, I've been able to secure one-third consent so far. We could even consider some kind of grace period, making 2022 or 2023 available this year (in 2024) if we all agree, etc., so there's less recency concern. I recognize that writing for a broader audience is different from a general fannish audience, and I wouldn't want how we approach our fanzines to change.

If we confirm that that Walter Calvin Johnson Jr. was ours, we can add him to the Iconography, and I'll include a biographical sketch in *F&F*.

**David Schlosser's *Fool's Mate* #568** updated LASFAPAns on our annual statistics, my post-mailing, and other administrivia. Thanks for cooking the books, Chief! Your remarks about home energy storage intrigued me. What's the point of sharing energy across the grid if home storage has to be facilitated by one particular manufacturer? I hope they broaden the

options to other systems.

I didn't go to Corflu last month largely to free up time and money for Gallifrey One (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #103-105) and a planned return trip to Portugal, which is now expected to occur in April, not March. Jonah's expressed interest in coming home from school this summer, so we're sorting that out. We also hope to visit friends in Chicago this summer. We'll see if I can eventually finagle family travel to coincide with fannish events—i.e. visiting friends in Pittsburgh at the same time as Monster Bash.

While I don't know whether any LASFSans wandered by the old clubhouse recently, Google Maps suggests the location is now home to a limousine service. During a recent in-person meeting and Big Auction, I bid on and won a Miss Pickerell book. It might very well be the one Nick Smith recently commented on, if he donated it. It arrived in early March and weathered the rain surprisingly well. Thank you, Elayne Pelz, for careful packing!

Did I skip Bruce Pelz? Indeed, I did. Luckily, I profiled Pelz—after a fashion—as Patron Saint in *Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #50. I reprint that here: “Bruce Pelz, who died in 2002, did much more as a fan than I can do justice to here in my brief profiles. I refer you to his *Fancylopedia 3* entry ([https://fancylopedia.org/Bruce\\_Pelz](https://fancylopedia.org/Bruce_Pelz)), his *Wikipedia* entry ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce\\_Pelz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Pelz)), and *eFanzines'* ‘A Brief History of the Fantasy Showcase Tarot Deck’ (<https://efanzines.com/Tarot>).

“Notably, he was an Eagle Scout, was an extremely active ‘omniapan,’ and amassed a fanzine collection now housed at the J. Lloyd Eaton Collection at the University of California, Riverside. He was granted the Evans-Freehafer Award in 1966 and 1969, named to the Filk Hall of Fame in 2007, and added to the First Fandom Posthumous Hall of Fame in 2015.

“He is an inspiration. And he was married to Elayne Pelz (*T&T* #48).”

At this point in time, more than a year after I wrote that, it feels like a bit of a cop out. But I remember feeling like writing something more in depth, doing full research, was overly daunting, and that still feels true. Perhaps I'll return to the effort in the future for LASFAPAns. Should we ever collect my profiles into a “hagiography,” as club members term it, I know I'll want to say more than what I have to date.

I enjoyed your remarks on *I.S.S.*, the John Hodgman reprint, your *Poor Things* review, and discussion of the workplace conversation about swinging and open relationships. May you not end up in a meeting with human resources!

In the February 2024 *Labyrinthine Lines*, **Nick Smith** commented on the turnout for the first

in-person LASFS meeting in recent history. I, too, was impressed by the number of participants, and it seems as though the majority will meet in person while the minority will continue online. I hope to eventually make it in person—February's meeting seemed particularly fun—but the drive time is discouraging. So far, I can continue to serve as scribe without too much detriment, but if it were difficult to hear folks, or to identify them, I'd have to be in the room myself.



—William Rotsler

I'd enjoyed the lapse in rain, but it has now returned. Leaving work one afternoon early this week—to continue working at home—I was disappointed not to have brought my umbrella. When I arrived that morning, it was sunny and clear. So I borrowed a loaner from a security guard, pledging to return it before leaving the parking lot. To do so, I parked in an expectant mother space, which led to a conversation with a parking attendant. He was okeh with my going to and fro to return the umbrella. Only later did I think I should have told him I'm waiting for my mother.

The box for our community-supported agriculture share was soaked, but my wife managed to bring it in. And I was pleased that a couple of other packages weren't overly wet. Several *Santos Sisters* comic

books sent by a friend got a little wet but will still be readable. While I was aware that some Culver City residents living along a ridgeline were evacuated from their homes, I hadn't read about or seen the capsized piano. That sure is something!

Having heard about your storytelling at the Twisted Horn Mead and Cider in Vista during a LASFS meeting, I particularly enjoyed reading about the transportation realities. As always, your book reviews are welcome and worth reading. Because *Geektastic* was also auctioned off, now I'm *sure* I bought the Miss Pickerell book you read.

**Alan Winston's** *Heroin for Old People* dated Feb. 8, 2024, reported on *MJ*. Your commentary reminded me of the smaller-stage show *For the Love a Glove* (<https://fortheloveofaglove.com>), which I haven't reviewed, but which I did mention during a LASFS meeting last June. A delightfully bizarre musical featuring large puppetry, the play suggests that the only way what Michael Jackson did makes any sense is if he was possessed by vampiric aliens. It's a good show and deserves a run outside of Los Angeles. Otherwise, I enjoyed your dance updates, home improvement news, and mailing comments.

And in *The Title Goes Here* dated Feb. 10, 2024, **Janice Morningstar** continued her Pemmi-Con report. When I next return to Winnipeg, my first stop will be the Albert Street Autonomous Zone, a three-story building built in 1899. When I last visited, it housed Mondragon, a now-closed cafe and bookstore, offered office and meeting space for Food Not Bombs and G7 Welcoming Committee Records, and was home to other progressive groups.

I'll note the other locations you visited for future visits. You saw some great sites—and sights. I remember my host at the time, a lesbian, Canadian, vegan, anarchist, nanny, and librarian—the combination pleases me to this day (unfortunately, I've lost track of Stefanie)—also showing me the Red River, Neil Young's childhood home, Confusion Corner, and pedestrian tunnels. I even got to see the Winnipeg bands the Weakerthans and perhaps the Bonaduces play. Oh, Winnipeg. (For a good introduction to the Weakerthans, listen to their song "One Great City!")



—Alan White

## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #106

March 14, 2024

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### Last Week's Senryu

Rain, rain, go away.

Pages carried in to mail  
did not get dripped on.

Last Wednesday's rain came shortly after midday, reportedly, surprising me when I left the office to continue working from home in the afternoon. (*Faculae & Filigree* #29) Last Thursday's rain didn't come until almost before sunset, as I was preparing the printed pages to take inside to collate and mail. I enjoyed the somewhat sunny skies and thunder in the distance, but didn't want rain to hit the printed pages, so I hurried inside. The rain hit, hard but briefly, as I was collating, and the cat and I looked out the front windows. Last Friday, then, was sunny and breezy until darkness. The rain, apparently, went away.

When I went to pick up *Alarums & Excursions* from Lee Gold's house last weekend, I was pleased that the rain hadn't gotten to it under her doormat, even though I'd not picked it up for a couple of weeks.

### Ignorable Theme: Planetwide EMP Surges

"What if the Earth suffered a planetwide electromagnetic pulse surge, and all technology was lost forever?" Planetary aspects aside—I don't know whether an electromagnetic pulse that wide ranging is possible—EMP's are a serious enough concern that multiple government sources address the topic.

In my mind's eye, I've occasionally envisioned an aerial EMP set off near an airport. My expectation is that airplanes would become bombs, or bullets, plummeting to the ground at high velocity, into buildings, and along streets. Is that what would actually happen?

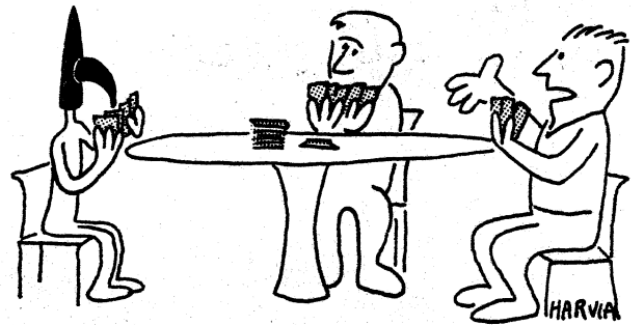
In 2012, the Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Security Technologies for the House of Representatives' Committee on Homeland Security held a hearing titled "The EMP Threat: Examining the Consequences." (A 2014 hearing, "Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP): Threat to

Critical Infrastructure," builds on that hearing.) According to the 2012 hearing's opening statement:

An EMP is a burst of electromagnetic radiation typically generated by a high-altitude nuclear explosion or a non-nuclear device. Nuclear weapon EMPs are most effective when detonated high in the altitude above the intended target. Depending on the yield of the weapon and the height of the explosion, nuclear EMPs can destroy large portions of the U.S. power and communications infrastructure, we are informed.

Geomagnetic radiation generated by a naturally occurring solar storm can also damage the same infrastructure. An EMP attack would destroy the electronics and digital circuitry in the area of impact, thereby denying electric power to our homes, businesses, and military.

Our country is dependent on electricity to power our health, financial, transportation, and business systems. If our power system was ever lost for an extended period ... it would have catastrophic and lethal consequences for our citizens and the economy.



Can you believe the poker  
face on that guy?

—Teddy Harvia

After suggesting that the risk is compounded by our growing reliance on the Internet and digital communications, the statement continues:

Computer simulations carried out in March 2010 by Oak Ridge National Laboratory demonstrated that an electromagnetic pulse from a nuclear device detonated at high altitude or a powerful solar storm could destroy or permanently damage major sections of our National power grid. According to this Oak Ridge study, the collapse of our power system could impact 130 million Americans, could require 4 to 10 years to fully recover, and could impose economic costs between \$1 trillion and \$2 trillion.

The National electric grid has almost no backup

capability in the event of a power collapse from electromagnetic pulses. ... [E]xisting bulk power reliability standards don't even address EMP vulnerabilities. In addition, with most of the Nation's power system under private ownership, who view an EMP event as unlikely or so we are told, there is been little preparation for a long-term power collapse.



—Edd Vick

While it might be hyperbolic to think about “all technology ... lost forever,” losing central power sources for up to 10 years could still have a major impact, offering fertile ground for storytelling. When the lights come back on, would life just resume as it had before the lights went out, or would the world have changed substantially? What would happen in the in-between times? Would we come together or push apart?

A presentation by George Lane at the NPS Center for Homeland Defense and Security's 10th Anniversary Homeland Defense & Security Education Summit in 2010 considered the effects of and responses to EMPs. He discussed a couple of historical precedents for EMPs caused by natural

events.

An 1859 geomagnetic solar storm dubbed the “Carrington Event,” caused a solar coronal mass ejection that hit Earth's magnetosphere—leading to one of the largest geomagnetic storms on record. Before the next morning, skies around the planet exhibited red, green, and purple auroras so bright you could read a newspaper outside at night. Telegraphers could still transmit messages once batteries were disconnected because of aurora-induced electric currents.

Similarly, in March 1989, solar activity created a geomagnetic disturbance that knocked out Hydro-Québec's power grid for nine hours in Canada. The outage was preceded by intense auroras at the poles that could be seen as far south as Texas and Florida. Even without nuclear devices, EMPs can naturally occur—and have in recent history. That the Carrington Event actually *provided* electrical power was interesting to me and suggests a return to the telegraph as a mode of communication. Surely, we couldn't rely on such power for a lengthy amount of time, however.

Lane's presentation offers multiple examples of human-instigated EMPs before considering their effects on transformers, solar panels, and the power grid. Electronic devices such as mobile phones might not be affected if they're not plugged in, but cell phone towers connected to power lines would be. Microwaves and automobiles serve as makeshift Faraday cages, which block electromagnetic fields, so they might not be affected. (Well, mobile phones stored inside microwaves might not be.) Mass transit, however, would be affected.

Even if such effects couldn't be resolved for a decade—without reliable protection from such occurrences using microgrids, or small-scale independent power grids—what might that mean for society?

The 2008 report *High Altitude Electromagnetic Pulse (HEMP) and High Power Microwave (HPM) Devices: Threat Assessments* details some of the impact:

[A] powerful HEMP field as it radiates outward can interfere with radio frequency links and instantly produce damaging voltage and currents in electronic devices thousands of miles from the nuclear explosion. Effectiveness is increased if the electronic devices are connected to any other metal that could also act as an antenna. Because infrastructure computer systems are interconnected, a widespread HEMP effect could lead to possible long-term disruption of the power grid, fuel distribution, transportation systems, food

and water supplies, and communications and equipment for hospitals and first responders, as well as military communications systems which utilize the civilian infrastructure.

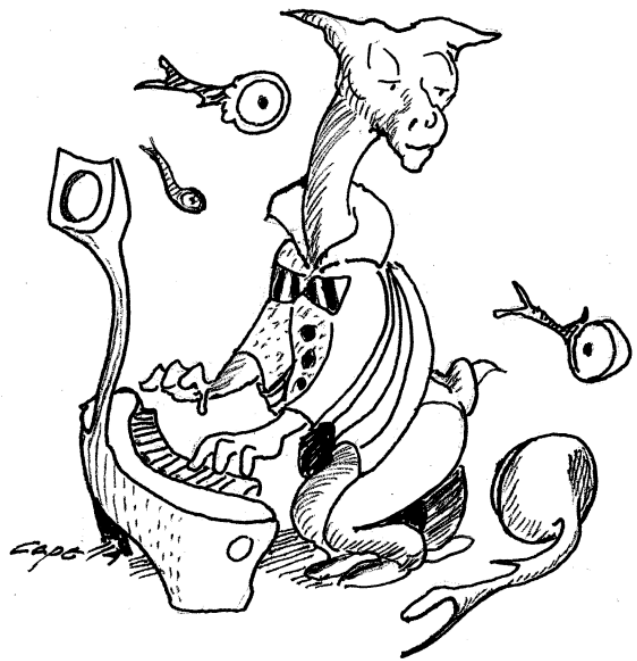
So when we're talking about "all technology," we're really talking about, well, anything connected to the power grid, most electronic devices, computer systems and networks, and systems run by those computers—or the power grid. Anything not protected by a Faraday cage. No power, public transportation, communication, water supply, or healthcare. That doesn't bode well for the 10 years it might take to rebuild. The 2008 *Report of the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack* explores such effects in greater detail, assessing related vulnerabilities and consequences. On Quora, a former U.S. Air Force electrician speculated that 80% of Americans would starve to death.

Closer to home, I wonder what the effect would be in my neighborhood. Some cars might still work. There'd be no power. Food distribution would be disrupted, and we don't garden. We'd eat the food we had at home until we ran out, exploring available local sources. ATMs, credit cards, and mobile payments wouldn't work, so it'd be a cash-only society—we have very little cash at home these days—cash soon devalued, perhaps leading to barter. Communications would be disrupted, and healthcare would be limited. Law enforcement would be limited. Education would revert to books on hand. (We have *The Merck Manual of Medical Information*, somewhat recent almanacs, and the last local *Thomas Guide*, but no DIY how-to books or set of encyclopedias. My first aid and CPR certifications have both lapsed.) Library usage might pick up. There'd be no running water, perhaps, so cleanliness and waste removal would suffer, perhaps leading to additional health concerns.

The emergency supplies that my wife and I have on hand in case of an earthquake would last maybe several days in terms of food—longer for water. But 10 years? Would Culver City or Los Angeles devolve into crime and opportunism? Would citizens band together to offer mutual support and aid? Would criminals use the highways and Los Angeles River—Ballona Creek—as transportation routes? Would we turn to the homeless and vagrants to learn how to survive? Would even they be able to? Would we revert to pre-1880 technologies? The late medieval period?

Depends on whether you're an optimist or pessimist, I suppose. How much faith you have in human nature. My friends involved in the Culver City

Community Emergency Response Team would step up. Urban gardeners would keep gardening until the water ran out, and perhaps post guards. Rain barrels would become necessities. Bicycles would become de rigeur for those who can ride and need transportation. We might tend to stay closer to home, and neighborhoods would become de facto community organizations in a way they're not now. Neighborhood Watch groups might become militias.



—Ray Capella

Church and temple communities would support each other and the communities they touch—perhaps also drawing more local congregants and posting guards. Social services would do the best they can to continue offering needed services. The Society for Creative Anachronism might flourish. Preppers would be thrilled. But there'd be runs on the grocery stores like there was during the pandemic. There might also be runs on gun stores. Politics would swing local, while repairing the power grid would require interstate and federal attention, leading to a potential gulf in the political system.

Post-apocalyptic sf often addresses some of those possibilities. Even books such as L. Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth* and movies such as *Planet of the Apes* and *Max Mad* and its sequels consider forgotten or lost technology, as well as rebuilding society after a disaster (or alien invasion). On Reddit, readers recommend a wide range of reportedly low-technology books such as Becky Chambers's *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*, Leigh Brackett's *The Long*



considerable amount of material with Carson's *Man and Atom Briefing Book*, I found this much more readable and interesting than other excerpts I've encountered. It's relatively accessible, balances technical detail with persuasive writing, and makes a strong initial case for nuclear energy.

Carson considers the limitations of the most widely used nonrenewable energy sources, as well as the environmental effects of their waste. The most compelling part of his argument, however, is the inefficiency of traditional nonrenewable energy. The potential efficiency of nuclear power—and the ability to use waste materials as energy sources, as well—reminded me of Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet*. If it takes five pounds of edible grain to yield one pound of edible meat, why aren't people eating more grains? Eating fattier foods might give our bodies more energy, but if we're expending more energy—and water—to produce those foods, we lose out.

I was also intrigued by the global economics and geopolitics of energy consumption. Wealthy nation states consume more energy than less wealthy countries, and energy consumption leads to increasing wealth. There's an evident class division in access to energy and energy consumption. For example, the United States represents roughly 4 percent of the world population and consumes 15 percent of the world's energy. India, then, represents 18 percent of the population but uses almost 7 percent of the available energy. "However many people there may be who use too much energy, it is not hard to see that there are far more who use too little," Carson writes. Further, "a wealthy society must be a high-energy society because energy replaces or makes up for things that are actually scarce."

The author addresses the limitations of renewable energy sources, as well as the concept of energy democracy. And there's a fascinating historical tidbit offered in passing: "The power companies built streetcar lines, providing everyone with speedy transportation; and to sell streetcar fares on weekends and holidays, when power demand was slack, they bought parcels of land at the ends of the lines, and built amusement parks." Is that true?

The Web site *Forgotten Railways, Roads & Places* published a 2018 article titled "Parks and Amusements Built by Railroads," which is worth reading. Some amusement parks in seaside resort areas were even called trolley parks because of railway involvement. Electric parks were also somewhat common. Dozens of U.S. amusement parks were owned by electric companies and streetcar companies. None of the electric parks listed on Wikipedia were located in

California, however.

Other topics explored in the pamphlet include the ideal locations of different kinds of reactors and the environmental impact of power plants (though relatively cursorily). The main essay ends with the following suggestion: "If we lose the attitude that nuclear energy is a morally suspect last resort, requiring exceptional justification even to be considered, we may find a way forward for the world."

Additionally, Lisa Hayes offers a brief piece remembering a childhood visit to Trinity Site in New Mexico. The editor seeks contributions to future issues: letters of comment, articles and essays, and illustrations. This is a solid first issue, and I look forward to future such pamphlets.

Available from C.D. Carson, the Man and Atom Society, P.O. Box 1035, Fort Worth, TX 76101; <http://www.man-and-atom.info>.



—William Rotsler



## Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

### *Saturn 3*

Inspired by Nick Smith's mention of this 1980 movie during a LASFS meeting last month, my wife and I recently watched it. (I enjoyed it more than she did.) A British production filmed at Shepperton Studios, the movie had quite a bit of money behind it, featuring a cast that included Farrah Fawcett, Kirk Douglas, and Harvey Keitel. The movie was based on a story by John Barry, a production designer who worked on *A Clockwork Orange*, *Phase IV*, *Star Wars*, and two Superman movies. Originally, Barry was slated to direct, but he was replaced by Stanley Donen. Martin Amis wrote the screenplay. Amis later wrote the short story collection *Einstein's Monsters* and a book about video games, *Invasion of the Space Invaders*.

Despite the amount of creative energy behind the flick, it's not very good, but it's still fun to watch. The gist of the flick is that a mentally unstable man who failed his pilot examinations takes over a shuttle launch to a remote food science outpost in the asteroid belt of Saturn. That outpost is staffed by an older man and younger woman, lovers; the young woman has never been to Earth.

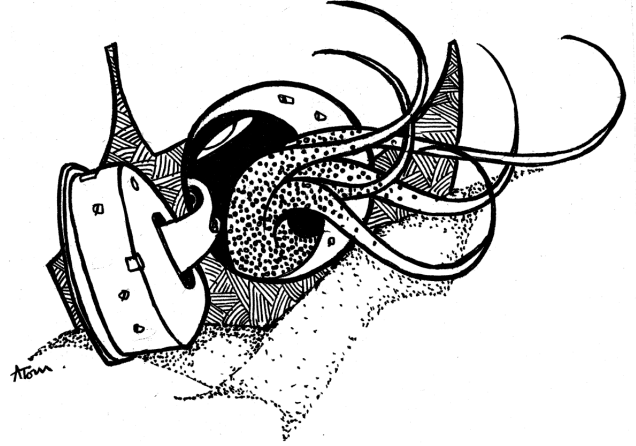
The pilot's cargo includes a robot initially intended to help run the food-science lab, but because it's programmed with a brain-to-brain interface, it picks up some of the characteristics and instabilities of the pilot, who obsesses over the young woman and plans to take over the outpost. The robot proves a more formidable threat to the health and wellbeing of the outpost staff.

While the production design is visually excellent, the movie feels like a melange of influences from other movies. There's the stylistic flare and psychedelia of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the claustrophobic corridors of *Star Wars*, and echoes of *Alien*, only featuring a dog instead of a cat.

Regardless, the movie offers some intriguing ideas: humans born and raised never having been to Earth, jacks at the base of the brain stem to program robots directly, food labs in outer space striving to solve terrestrial food supply problems, slightly hallucinogenic drugs called blue dreamers taken as a matter of course, and a seemingly open approach to sex on Earth in which people can freely "use" other's bodies for pleasure; to not allow such is considered criminal.

*Starlog* featured the movie prominently in an issue, #33, and sf fan Roger Ebert gave the movie a thumbs up in a review at the time, though he said the movie was "dumb, dumb, dumb." Regardless, it's still a sight to see and is visually very well done. One scene in

which the unstable pilot discusses the meaning of self with the robot was really interesting. My only quibble was that the killer robot didn't look really cool, and that, maybe, just maybe, the outpost staff should've aimed for the head more. That resonates slightly with Ebert's review. Quality sf aims for the head.



### *The Thirsty Dead*

This 1974 movie tells the story of a group of several women press ganged—or, abducted—off the streets of Manila, Philippines. One is captured after turning down the proposal of a suitor, expressing that she wasn't ready to get married yet. Their abductors are hooded and robed monk-like figures, who put them into a subterranean canoe, paddling through the sewers or waterworks of Manila until they reach the forested countryside beyond.

Climbing a mountain, they are taken to a remote, isolated community of near-immortals. They soon learn that the people survive by draining and drinking the blood of other people in the society, perhaps living for hundreds of years beyond their natural lifespan. There's also a species of plant that absorbs blood from wounds, accelerating healing.

Not only do the women have to navigate their capture and isolation from the lives they led—one seemingly interested in the idea of white slavery—but one has been identified as an important person. Her arrival was foreseen, her likeness painted by one of the people's leaders, and she's given a favored place among their ranks, separated from her friends.

The isolated immortals are led by a disembodied head in a red glass box. That head sometimes talks to the community's leaders, a man and a woman. The woman separated from her friends is offered their immortality, but she's become aware of the division between those who feed, and those on whom are fed, and she finds that distasteful.

So she and her newfound friends attempt to escape their captors. When she returns with local law

enforcement, they are unable to find the path to the mountain, or the subterranean enclave.

Not a very good movie—very slow pace, and very little practical effects, mostly in the way of makeup and aging—it’s an interesting melange of ideas. There’s a little Lost World sensibility, as well as the vampiric overtones. The healing plant is a nice touch, and the feeders vs. fed class division might bring the Morlocks and the Eloi or the Daleks and the Thals to mind. That their feeding stock soon ages or becomes ill or infirm requires them to seek newcomers from nearby Manila.

The community is within canoeing distance but cannot be located by search and rescue. Did they go up the Marikina River toward Mt. Sipit Ulang? There’s a high school nearby. As close to the road as they were, how did they remain isolated for so long? How did they get such a powerful telescope? Will they get thirsty again?



—Al Siros

### Juvenalia: “Santa of the Sword”

*I wrote the following undated story when I was a preteen, perhaps. It doesn’t seem to have been written for school, and there are no editing marks. The story was written in pencil. Its published form varies slightly from the handwritten original.*

Know, O Elves, that between the years when the snows covered the North Pole and its gleaming cities, and the rise of the sons of Rudolph, there was an age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like ornaments on a tree. And thither came Santa, a toymaker, a sleighrider, a slayer, to tread the chocolate-coated thrones of the Earth beneath his booted feet.

And know yet further, O Elves, that in that half-forgotten age, the proudest kingdom in the world was Santa’s Workshop, reigning supreme in the freezing north. And this same Santa ruled from the throne of Santa’s Workshop as Santa the Great, the mightiest lord of his day. And many were the tales spun about him as he was in his youth, wherefore it is now difficult to perceive the truth amid the many legends.

—*The Yuletide Chronicles*

Privileged was I, Elmer the Elf, above all my brethren amongst the elves of Santa’s Workshop, to have heard from the lips of my king, Santa the Great, the story of his travels and the high adventures that befell him along the way to the summit of greatness. Here is one such story:

There have been many moonrises since the last Great Gift Giving. My lord, Santa, was sitting on a wooden chair sipping a cup of hot chocolate. His wife, the duchess, was seated across the room knitting a new shawl. It was still dawn, so we elves had not yet risen.

Santa got out of his chair and strode across the room to the door. He opened the door just a crack. Outside, the wind was howling and there was a blizzard. Through the snow, Santa saw a horde of attackers on horseback approaching the hut.

Santa the Great walked across the room, whispered something to the duchess, and took his sword out of its sheath. Mrs. Claus woke up all of the elves, including me. The finest warriors went to the closet to get their swords. Then the elves and Mrs. Claus ran into the kitchen.

Mrs. Claus, the duchess, pulled a lever on the oven. The cupboard to the right lifted up, revealing a hidden room. The group entered and closed the entrance behind them.

Santa stood in the doorway awaiting the oncoming warriors. Just as they approached the hut, he ducked inside and bolted the door. In a moment, he was facing the door ready to do battle. A tremendous crash sounded as a battle ax broke through the door. A tall, dark, bearded warrior walked into and around the room, tearing pictures from the wall, breaking vases—staring at Santa all the while.

Suddenly, the warrior was overcome by a frenzied mob of elves, with me as their leader. We clubbed and slashed with our swords until, at last, he died with a strangled cry. As the horde realized that their leader was dead, they galloped away, as fast as shooting stars.

Our lord Santa approached, patted each of us on the back, and said, “Ho! Ho! Ho! Now we have toys to make!” We all shouted with glee as he led us into his secret workshop. He sent me to alert the other elves and Mrs. Claus about our victory.

Soon the workshop was full of bustling, busy elves. The sound of hammering and sawing broke the silence. After 10 hours of work, one-eighth of the toys were finished. The lot of us walked into the dining room and warmed up with a cup of hot chocolate.

The warrior elves cleaned blood off their clubs,

daggers, and swords. Then they told tales of the battle, even though they were slightly exaggerated.

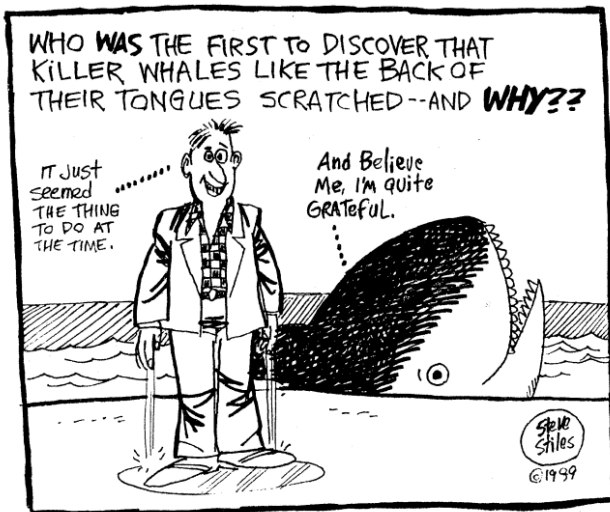
It is now moonrise. All the elves are sitting around the fireplace telling tales of battle and stories of Gift Givings past. M'lord Santa and the duchess Claus are in the kitchen, cleaning dishes.

Soon, Santa will come to tell us it's bedtime. But for me, I am already asleep. Goodnight.

*You might recognize the prologue's similarity to Robert E. Howard's fictional Nemedian Chronicles. I was clearly reading his Conan the Barbarian books and stories by the writing of this piece.*

*Based on the list of weapons—swords, a battle ax, clubs, and daggers—I had also probably started playing Dungeons & Dragons, which informed much of my fantasy reading into my teenage years. I first played D&D using Frank Mentzer's 1983 Basic Set.*

*I also played Star Frontiers, though I don't think it influenced my reading of science fiction much. Regardless, my interests were largely sf and fantasy, and the Waldenbooks at the mall in Janesville was mind blowing.*



### Comments on APA-L #3060

In *Leeway* dated for March 7, 2024, Lee Gold ran with the first Ignorable Theme with gusto! When posing the question, I meant the broader societal culture, but your question is interesting. Certainly, another way to address the question is how an author's cultural background influences their writing—as we might see in the horror of Nuzo Onoh above. And the culture of sf readers might not be the same culture of the broader society around them. And were we to focus on a subgenre—say, military sf—there might be another reader culture to consider. Interesting!

The shift from women writers using male pseudonyms to using their own names, along with the increase in women characters are excellent examples of cultural shifts over time. I was also intrigued by your parsing of realistic fiction qualifying as science fiction, as well as Randall Garrett's commentary on the role lies play in writing fiction. I'll prioritize reading the stories you recommended and see how they fit into our exploration of the theme.

I'll share your feedback with cover artist Joe Pearson. Thank you for sharing the lineage of Alarums & Excursions Ignorable Themes! I've had issues of *The Wild Hunt* pass through my hands on their way to library archives, but I've never spent much time with it. When you say you first encountered comic books at the LA Farmers Market, do you mean the Original Farmers Market on Third Street? There's still a newsstand there, I believe, and they might still stock a limited number of comic books. When my wife and I lived in the Fairfax District, we'd often go there for peanut butter and tea, and we'd stop by a butcher for holiday meats.

Welcome, Derek LaPorte, to APA-L! I've been looking forward to reading *The Winnower* #1 since you sent it. While I had to look up the word "quern" almost immediately—a sign of what was to come, perhaps—I found the introduction compelling. There's already plenty going on that's worth learning more about. So many details to figure out.

Overall, I liked this first installment. I found a couple of things confusing at first: the occasional dialect, the cut-off lines (though I think they largely work dramatically), and plenty of world-building stuff (terminology, naming, the descent to the surface). But it's more compelling and interesting than frustrating or irritating. My primary feedback might be that a lot of those challenges happen at the same time, making the initial pages a bit of a challenge—but as a reader, I wanted to understand. That says something about the ideas you're presenting.

Things loosen up a little bit once Unk and Cus—presuming uncle and cousin—encounter each other, and the conversation with Davontalis communicates quite a bit of information more readily. The last section on p. 5, which focuses more on exposition, is also helpful. I'd already thought that they might be spelunking or mining, but the idea of escaping a threat from above by continuing to descend further below—toward certain death—is a welcome turnabout.

I look forward to learning more about the grinders and tremblers, the company, the characters, the resource scarcity, the threat from above—who is it?—the transition from sky to roof to grinding, the

naming (number of letters signifying rank or class division is my initial speculation), and other aspects of the story. I also look forward to seeing whether you're writing this in traditional serial style or whether it's a longer piece broken into smaller pieces. I'm quite excited that we have a fiction element in APA-L again. So glad you joined us!

But who the heck are you? Ellers might welcome some sort of personal introduction if they haven't yet met you at a LASFS meeting like I have. (LaPorte is a relatively new member who's been consistently coming to meetings, and he received sample issues of APA-L almost immediately.) And while this issue was all fiction, as you receive and read APA-L, I encourage you to join in the conversation when you're ready. The culture of amateur press associations includes mailing comments, or discussion inspired by other apans' writing. I'll welcome your fiction, as well as whatever else you have to say.

**John Hertz's** *Vanamonde* #1584 commented on the recent primary election in California. My wife and I voted by mail, delivering our ballots to a drop box by one of the libraries we frequent. When I lived in New York City, I walked by more statues more often than I do here. I miss them as landmarks and historical touchpoints.

I read and enjoyed your discussion of Thomas Babington Macaulay and Samuel Johnson. I am so glad that science fiction readers read so many different things. After watching the first half of the second episode of *The Infinite Worlds of H.G. Wells*, I read two short stories by the author: "The Crystal Egg," which was adapted for television—and which ties in to *The War of the Worlds*—and "The Jilting of Jane," both collected in the 1911 *The Country of the Blind and Other Stories*. While the first story and its adaptation are science fictional, the second is not. It might be the first non-science fiction of Wells's that I've read, other than his nonfiction. It's a good story, and his discussion of short stories in the introduction is quite interesting. He offers a brief history of British short fiction markets, current prospects, and notable authors, as well as discussing what makes a short story a meaningful piece of literature.

I'll share your feedback with cover artist Al Sirois. I still need to seek out and read Larry Niven's "What Can You Say About Chocolate-Covered Manhole Covers?" Thankfully, it's been collected in *All the Myriad Ways* and *N-Space*.

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #48, **Matthew Mitchell** addressed the Ignorable Theme, following the correct yet incorrect distribution numbering! Good on you, good sir. I think you're right: Steampunk it would be, perhaps, were we to

lose all electronics. The global monetary system would also likely collapse, as you indicate. There might be runs on banks, as well as grocery stores and gun shops (above). Would bank records even be available? Oh, for the days of the bank passbook. Thank you for indulging in the Ignorable Theme!

I escaped any con crud from Gallifrey One, though others seem to have fallen prey. For the most part, it seemed to be more colds and flu and less COVID-19, which is good. I haven't seen any reports of it being a super spreader event, though that might depend on my online circles. Corflu participants also seem to have escaped largely unscathed. When I reported that I picked up no Zoom crud, that got a gentle laugh, though also online.

Good luck advocating for returning pre-COVID-19 transit runs now that the pandemic is over. Hopefully, they won't maintain the lower levels of service permanently. I'll share your feedback with cover artist Joe Pearson. I'll see John Hertz's Neil Sedaka reference and your Culture Club reference, and raise you: "Girlfriend in a Comma." Or, "Comma Eileen," now that I think of it. Is any of your fan fiction still available online?

**Joe Zeff's** *Toony Loons* #751 updated ellers on healthcare and financial progress. Hopefully you'll be able to secure the loan despite the specificity. Not only are you now shaving with a straight razor, you're making your own aftershave! Impressive. If you decide to bottle it commercially, here's a naming idea: Zeff's Whiffs. Or, Joe's BO.

I'll share your feedback with cover artist Joe Pearson. Alas, when working hospitality for Gallifrey One, I forgot to polish up the handle on the Big Front Door. (I'm sure that's a reference to something. Tell me. Tell me!)



## Snow Poster Township #15

March 15, 2024

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### Children and World War II

By Cy Chauvin

Someone recommended *The Last Train to Istanbul* to me; I couldn't find it at the library, but I found *The Last Train to London* by Meg Waite Clayton (2019) instead. (Amazing how many "Last Train to—" stories are listed in the catalog.) It seemed to be the same situation: children (largely Jewish children) are being evacuated out of Nazi Germany to foster homes in other countries.

*The Last Train to London* is divided into two main storylines: One is centered on Stephen Neuman, a 15-year-old Jewish boy living in Vienna with his rich family, who manufactures chocolate. The other centers on Truus Wijsmuller, a Dutch woman, married but childless, who primarily helps Jewish families send their children out of Germany to other countries. The Nazis want to get rid of the Jews, but at the same time make it difficult for them to emigrate and restrict them from taking any of their wealth with them if they do leave. The story mostly takes place before World War II actually starts. Truus finds she has to break the law to get many of the children out, but has her big break when she is given permission to take 600 children to

London from Vienna—as long as she can arrange it within seven days! (Adolf Eichmann)

This novel is based on historical events (the "Kindertransport"), and Truus Wijsmuller was a real person who performed this heroic work. There is a film documentary that covers much of this same material, *Into the Arms of Strangers*. But as a novel, this is written in a bestseller style, in fragmented chapters from multiple viewpoints, in a bloated fashion (450 pages). For all its length, it is plot heavy, and as a reader, I felt rushed. It is very much a novel of our day, despite being set in Europe, circa 1939.

My impulse then was to reread another novel about similar, but very different circumstances, Neville Shulte's *Pied Piper* (1941-1942). The first thing that struck me about this book was its framing device: The story is told by an unnamed man who has heard it from John Sidney Howard while sitting in their club. Howard tells the story while bombs are falling during an air raid over London. I suppose this framing device, this story within a story, only emphasizes that things are not over; the war is continuing. Even though Howard is sitting in his chair drinking at the end, the story is not over.

Howard is a man of 70 who went to the province of Jura in France (next to Switzerland) for a fishing trip in spring 1939. He gets caught in the invasion of France, and an American diplomat asks him to take his two children back to England because they are afraid that Switzerland will be invaded too. Howard starts back, but illness delays him at his first train stop in Dijon. A maid helps him in their hotel, but when he goes to leave, she asks that he take her child to England, too, because the father is working in London! Of course, he agrees, but the train they take to Paris is stopped before it reaches the capital.

They find out that they must travel by bus and take a roundabout journey to avoid Paris and the invasion. Soon, they abandon the bus as well. Howard picks up Dutch, Polish, and even a German child along the way. The novel has an engrossing plot that never stops—I haven't told you half of it—and details that appear true to life. Many novels have been written about World War II, but not many written during the war itself. I do wonder if it was revised at all after the war because it has such confidence in the Allies' victory. Is the novel, in a sense, propaganda, or did people really feel that way? There is less in this book written from the mind or viewpoint of a child.

By accident (or perhaps by subconscious intent), as I was looking in my young adult bookcase in search of something to read, I found *Fireweed* by Jill Paton Walsh (1969). Another reread, but from much longer ago, this is about two young adults, a boy and a girl,



well as the fate of the original prop; and a new feature, Quadratic, that blends science fact with short fiction—also printed on different paper stock. The cinema preview is largely an assortment of stills.

The advertisements are also interesting. Ads promote items such as movie soundtracks, Bob Michelucci's (one of the publishers) *The Collectors Guide to Monster Magazines*, the magazine *Video Action*, a John Pound portfolio, and novelty masks.

This issue of *Questar* was an interesting read, and I look forward to exploring other issues in the periodical's brief run. It offers an interesting snapshot of sf literature and media at the time, but seems slightly adjacent, considering topics that might not have been mainstream enough for *Starlog*. I was unaware of Zebrowski and was intrigued enough by his points of view that I might seek out his fiction. (The issue also included an ad for his novel *Macrolife*, and the interview included several book cover reproductions.) Are any of you familiar with Zebrowski?



—William Rotsler

## Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

### *The Devil Bat*

This 1940 Bela Lugosi vehicle produced by Producers Releasing Corporation was the company's first horror movie and intended to capitalize on Lugosi's turn as Dracula with a vampirism-adjacent theme. While it was far from Lugosi's final film, the Phil Hardy-edited *The Overlook Film Encyclopedia: Horror* remarks that, "[f]rom this point on, Lugosi's career was downhill all the way."

*The Devil Bat* is very much a return to Lugosi's earlier roles as a mad scientist and provides a dark revenge tale about a bitter chemist whose work has led to immense profits for his employer—but very little compensation for him. The scientist experiments with bats, learning how to enlarge them using an electrical process. The bats are represented by oversized models or puppets, lampooned at one point by a newspaper photographer—"One-Shot" McGuire—rigging a taxidermy model on wires.

The villain has also developed an experimental aftershave lotion or cologne that includes an unidentifiable ingredient from Tibet that drives such bats into a murderous rage. One by one, he encourages members of the family that owns the business employing him to use the new formula, leading to a number of grisly, mysterious deaths. That each victim would willingly try the new cologne piqued my interest; they might not have known that the newly dead had done so, but the coroner detected a lingering, mysterious scent on each.

Once a newspaper reporter, the partner of the comedic photographer, figures out what's going on, he entraps the scientist to unwittingly wear his own experimental formula. It does what it was designed to do. Despite the upcoming decline in Lugosi's career, he pulls off the role with aplomb, balancing the character's bitterness and malevolence ably. Before each intended victim leaves—to die soon—he pointedly says "Goodbye" rather than "Good night."

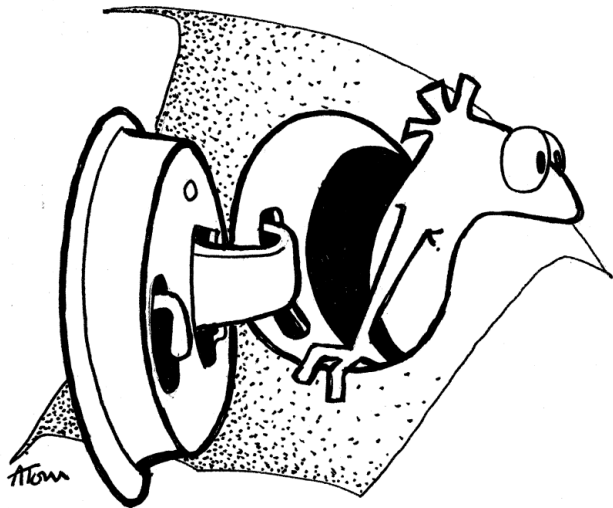
But the highlights of the flick—other than Lugosi, natch—are the journalist and photographer, portrayed by Dave O'Brien and Donald Kerr. O'Brien's Johnny Layton is subtly heroic and an appropriate love interest for the daughter of the cosmetic company's owner. And Kerr offers light humor to offset the vicious neck biting and claw-deep scratching.

That the wealthy family's last name is Heath and their small town Heathville in no way influenced my enjoyment of the movie. In no way.

### Comments on N'APA #268

The Official Organ for this distribution included the following update: "By vote of the members, we do not

want to include participation from ‘Public Members’ of N3F, members who are not paying dues.” George Phillis indicated that any contributors unable to pay dues should contact him. Hopefully, we won’t lose any participants. I, too, would be willing to cover a \$6 electronic membership for any at-risk N’APAs.



Jefferson P. Swycaffer included a news item about the exclusion of John Thiel’s *Synergy* in the previous N’APA distribution. Thiel had sent it to me before the deadline, but I didn’t see his email until afterward. So I sent it to be included in an upcoming distribution. It’d be a shame to have a “lost issue” waiting in the wings. I don’t know that I have a solution to Thiel’s computer issues, but I know we have an unpublished fanzine ready to publish.

I commented on **Ahrvid Engholm**’s *Intermission* #139 in *The Explosion Containment Umbrella* #15 and reprint that here: “Engholm’s *Intermission* #139 continues to cover the death of Bertil Falk and the editor’s new or renewed interest in Robert Bloch. Thank you for bringing Anna-Lena Lodenus to my attention. She seems to write about topics of interest to me!

“Even though you weren’t able to attend Falk’s funeral, I appreciated you sharing reportage on the event. You’ve been writing about Falk quite a bit lately, and I say: Keep writing! I look forward to learning even more about *Jules Verne Magasinet*, *Captain Future*, *Vår Rymd*, and other related topics.

“I also welcome more writing over time about Bloch. Based on my reactions to your recent issues, I just can’t get enough. For example, even though I was born and raised in Wisconsin—where I currently am for the holidays—I didn’t know that Bloch had spent any time in the state. Growing up, I found my way to August Derleth by way of H.P. Lovecraft, and

therefore to Lovecraft fandom and Bloch, but I didn’t know about Lovecraft’s involvement in apae until I, too, became active in apae. Though I’ve participated in the National Amateur Press Association and American Amateur Press Association, I don’t think I got involved in the United Amateur Press Association, in which Lovecraft had also been active, before it folded.

“Bloch, Bloch, Bloch! I... must... read... more. The novelty photographs are also a delight. What fun stuff. The piece from *Imagination* #4 was crazily excellent. Mr. Engholm, if you’d like to be a dues-paying member of the N3F but cannot sort out international payments, I’d be happy to sponsor your membership. You wouldn’t even owe me any money.

“Your understanding of how the National Amateur Press Association works wasn’t what I experienced as a member a decade-plus ago. There was a central mailer, and there were bundles. Contributions were standalone items, similar to my experience of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (less recent) and the Spectator Amateur Press Society (more recent), rather than collated into a single bound or stapled compilation.”

Similarly, I commented on *FAInzine* #2 in *The Explosion Containment Umbrella* #16: “In *FAInzine* #2, AIsaac AIsimov made another appearance. While the topics intrigue me, I’d rather read a real fanzine by a real person, perhaps with real information. Regardless, the design of this outing— and the accompanying artwork—was slightly better, so it looks good, at least.”

*Intermission* #140 was also commented on in *ECU* #16, as follows: “Ahrvid Engholm’s *Intermission* #140 offered his traditional annual Christmas story, ‘Santa Goes to the Moon.’ Given that it’s now late January, I might set the piece aside for the end of the year—I’m not sure I’m ready for a seasonal piece and wish I’d read this sooner. He also shared the call for submissions to *NATO 2099: A Graphic Novel*. Congratulations on being selected for inclusion! Your piece, ‘NATO 2099,’ is wide ranging and apocalyptic. It’ll be interesting to see how it’s adapted in graphic form.

“I also enjoyed your reports on the Short Story Masters and the Writers’ Union. And in the History Corner, ‘always the readers’ favourite,’ you considered the history of the mimeograph. While I’ve long known about fen’s use of the mimeograph, I appreciated learning more about its invention, development, and variations.

“‘[SF] fandom must have been the first outside non-insitutional use to put it into action,’ you wrote. Of course, mundane apae used other forms of DIY



printing such as letterpress, as well. And I also used our school district's large-scale photocopier to publish mundane fanzines and comix while a student. But you might be right that 'Sf fans were the first "counter culture," with their own creative literary and artistic movement on mimeo...'. Mundane apae might not have transitioned to mimeo, and the American beat poets might have followed in the footsteps of fen.

"That said, where can one procure Part IIX in the Space Cucumber series?"

In *Archive Midwinter* dated Jan. 15, 2024, **Jefferson P. Swycaffer** informed N'APAnS about his monthly writing group, Emerald Cove. What's the age range of the group's participants? Any chance of us being able to read some of the writing you're working on? Excerpts or serialized fiction might be welcomed by this apa.

I'd never heard about Joy Beeson's *Sic Buiscuit Disintegrat* before. What more can you tell us about it? I messaged Beeson on Facebook to see what she can tell me, too. I see references to it in *Rune* #74 (February 1986) and *Matrix* #48 (Summer 1983), and it looks like it might have been a fanzine rather than an apa. Was it published by Beeson or Joy Hibbert? I might have messaged Beeson prematurely. A 1985 issue is included among Forrest J Ackerman's papers held by Syracuse University. I also appreciated your comments on Jack Vance and Sax Rohmer. I've read more Rohmer than Vance.

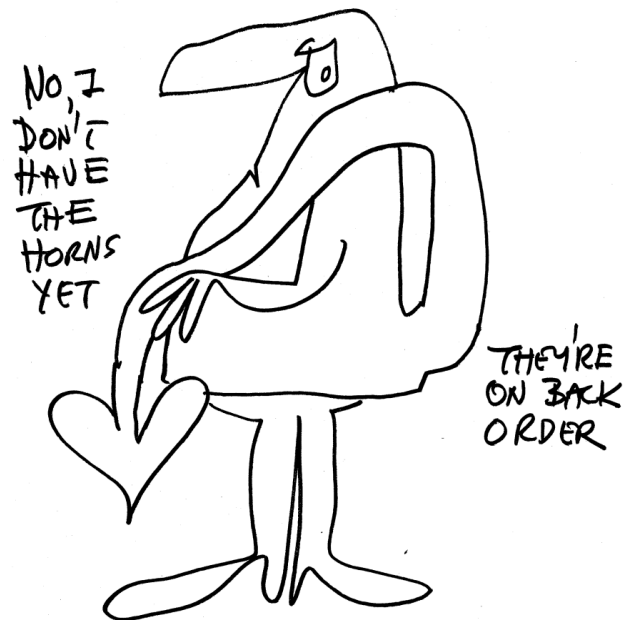
**George Phillies**'s *Ye Murthered Master Mage* offered an update on his novel *Of Breaking Waves*. Congratulations on its publication, should such have occurred! I appreciated your updates on the N3F, as well. I recently stepped back from my remaining clubzine commitments but hope to remain active by way of letters of comment. I am pleased that we've been able to involve new members and distribute the clubzine publishing responsibilities.

You mentioned "two occasions on which the Directorate had to use its authority to expel a member." What was the fanzine that drew such attention in the 1950s? The second instance also intrigued me. When did that occur?

In *Brownian Motion* #6, **Garth Spencer** continued to explore his recent sense of overextension. I'm curious: What 15 activities or departments did you identify in terms of life activities? Ah! You applied Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Don't forget: You and I are going to exchange fanzine covers this year. That's partly a reminder to myself.

During a recent annual physical, my doctor encouraged me to exercise more beyond walking. While I've exercised off and on since the start of the pandemic, I no longer run, and have picked up the

jump rope. When I pass from my home office to the house, I jump rope 50 counts. If I do that several times a day, it's a step in the right direction.



—William Rotsler

Inspired by voting for the Faan Awards, I've taken up writing letters of comment again. I wrote 12 last month and only one so far this month. My goal is to write a dozen a month, and to keep track of other letterhacks appearing in fanzines so I can better vote in the letterhack category. I was pleased to receive more votes this year, and to graduate from the list of single votes appended to the end of the vote counts.

Congratulations on the progress on your Web site! Your list of categories sounds wonderful, and I'll cross-reference it against my own *Los Angeles Fanac Guide*, which has been resting as I turn my attention to our forthcoming edition of *Blue Moon Special*. There haven't been any new submissions since early March, so we might be down to sending individual reminders to apae we know are active. Regardless, with more than 20 apae already compiled, whatever we issue this year will be more than what already exists. The story ideas you expressed to Samuel Lubell are interesting. I look forward to reading them!

**Mark Nelson**'s *Brandy Hall* #4 concentrated on mailing comments. Your reason for having a Facebook account amused me. When my son, now 20, first got online, we encouraged him to not focus on how many likes or comments he got. Concern about how popular you are online can be a slippery slope.

Referring to *Alarums & Excursions* #579 (February 2024), the mailing closest at hand, there were 23 contributors submitting a total of 108 pages, based on

a quick count. The issue seems of average thickness. As in many apae these days, most participants have been around for a while, but I don't have any information on their average tenure. When I most recently became active again, there were a few contributors new to me, and I recognized the others from my decade-plus-ago previous involvement. My return would have made me new to the newcomers. I don't know how Lee Gold publicizes it outside of the Web site and word of mouth. It will be included in the forthcoming *Blue Moon Special*.

There have been fanzines published in Portugal in the past, but not many. Referring to Álvaro de Sousa Holstein's "Science Fiction and Fantasy in Portugal," (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #88) the first fanzine published in Portugal was *Nebulosa* in the 1980s. In the mid- to late-2000s, there was resurgence of fanzine activity, including titles such as *Dragão Quântico*, *Hyperdrivezine*, *Phantastes*, *Nova*, *Dagon*, *Fénix*, *Bang!*, and *Conto Fantástico*. My understanding from Holstein, who's a friend, is that Portuguese fen have been slow to embrace organized fandom—there have only been two Portuguese sf clubs over time—and that collaboration is not a strong suit, so fanzines are few and far between.

Regardless, Holstein and I have discussed a Portuguese apa at some point—perhaps bridging Brazilian and Portuguese fandom to broaden the pool of potential contributors—and earlier this year, he expressed intent to return to fanzine publishing. I've even encouraged him to join eAPA. The working title of his fanzine? *Crónicas do Adamastor* or *The Adamastor Chronicles*. (This reminds me that I owe another Portuguese fan an email. Message sent!) I think you're right that the fascist dictatorship was restrictive in many ways.

In *Samizdat... #23*, **Samuel Lubell** remarked to Jefferson P. Swycaffer that "older fans will have to let younger fans run the show eventually..." Last night, the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society voted on a Loscon bid that will concentrate on bringing younger fen to the con. Targeting people between the ages of 25-45, Loscon 51 in 2025 will program authors and other guests more familiar with and attractive to younger fen—rather than the traditional mix we tend to program. I look forward to the results of designing a con for a slightly younger audience. It could help build the necessary bridge we've identified. (Personally, I think it might behoove con runners to skew even younger, perhaps to 18-plus. Regardless, this is a step in the right direction.)

While I enjoy longer novels, shorter novels—about 200 pages, as you indicate—can be a joy to read. When choosing my next book, I sometimes select a

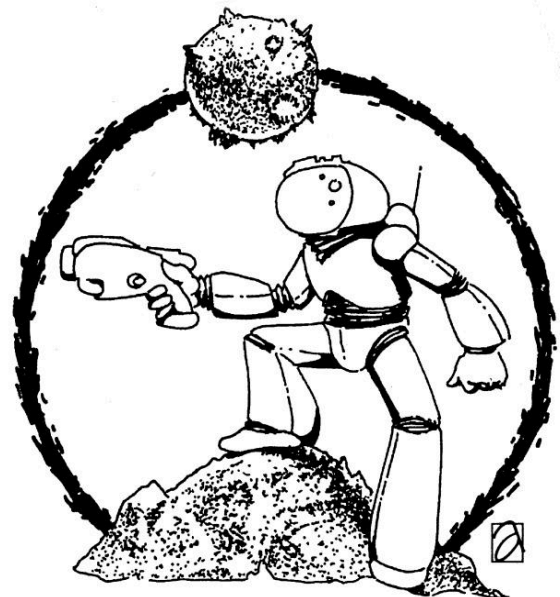
200- to 300-page text rather than a 500- to 800-page option. How was Boskone?

I enjoyed your author spotlight on Roger Zelazny. Your brief article, "Nearly Half of Americans Read No Books," resonated with commentary I included in *Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #105 considering the relationship between sf and the broader culture. Visual media consumption far outweighs reading. 80 percent of people watch television daily. 44 percent of adults go to the movies monthly. And 65 percent of Americans read at least one physical book in the last year. That falls to 30 percent for at least one ebook annually, and 23 percent for audiobooks. Your consideration of the YouGov study breaks that down further:

46% of Americans read no books in 2023. Another quarter (26%) read 5 or fewer books. Just 19% read more than 10 books. Those who read just 15 books are in the top 15 percent, 30 books in the top 8 percent, and 50 books in the top 1 percent.

The mind boggles. But it brings home the realization that media fandom reasonably dominates existing fandom, and that if fanzine fen are primarily readers, which is my anecdotal sense, we're even more of a minority. Your continuing reprint of your undergraduate thesis remains an interesting read.

Similarly, I remain enthralled by your "Status of Projects," including its movie reviews, TV commentary—I, too, enjoyed the 60th anniversary *Doctor Who* specials, as well as their novelizations—and reading. I'd welcome additional reportage on Philcon. What did you learn that you plan to apply, or not apply, to Balticon?



—Alan White

## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #107

March 21, 2024

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### Last Week's Senryu

Toner cartridges  
run out like dimming phantoms,  
leaving dust on minds.

The print quality suffered a little bit near the end of the print run last week. I didn't notice in time to change the cartridge, and I didn't think the text was illegible enough to reprint. But I've replaced the cartridge for this week's printing.

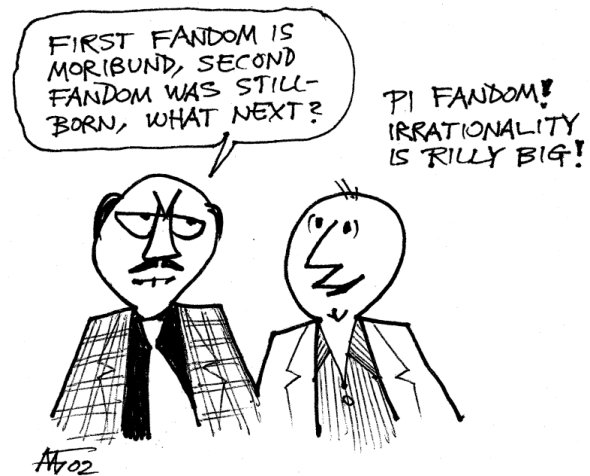
### Ignorable Theme: Robert Jordan

According to my paperback edition of *The Eye of the World*, the first novel in Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* series, I last read it in March 2011. I used to annotate books inside their opening pages with my initials and the date I finished a book to remind myself that I'd read it. Now I use Goodreads, though I seem to have started using that site and app before I read this book—but I didn't record reading it there, too. In any event, I reread the first 100-plus pages in the last few days to remind myself of the text and Jordan's writing.

It's good. At 814 pages—and the first in a 15-book series—the novel is a grand, sweeping epic fantasy. And it's got a map in the front! While I've only read the first novel, 13 years is long enough ago that I might reread it before forging on to the next two, which I also own. It's similar in some ways to J.R.R. Tolkien, like many fantasy epics are, though it was first published in 1990. There's a young hero, an ancient evil, mysterious mages, shadowy figures, and adventure aplenty. That's just the first 100 pages. Echoes of Tolkien include Jordan's fades, similar to ringwraiths, perhaps, and trollocs, akin to orcs—though their description makes them seem more like kobolds.

It also reminded me of other series such as Terry Goodkind's 19- or 20-book series *The Sword of Truth*—though without Goodkind's Objectivism, sexism, and sadism—and George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, so far up to its fifth book.

I've also only read the first book of each of those series: *Wizard's First Rule* and *A Game of Thrones*. I quite enjoy fantasy novels and love the idea of thick paperbacks with maps, glossaries, and family trees, but 15 books? 20 books? Even reading Frank Herbert's *Dune* series, I lost track of who some characters were four or five books in.



—Alexis Gilliland

Regardless, 100 pages in, *The Eye of the World* is worth rereading. The characters are compelling, there's intriguing history and arcane lore, and the villainous aspects—while par for the course—aren't entirely run of the mill. Other tropes are also similar: The hero is a youth of unclear parentage, who might be a long-awaited savior. Still, it's a good read.

While I was aware that the series had been adapted for television—there have been two seasons on Prime Video since 2021—I was surprised to find a comic book adaptation published by Dynamite. Starting in 2009, Dynamite adapted *The Eye of the World*, written by Jordan, scripted by Chuck Dixon, and drawn by Chase Conley. The series ran 35 issues. I've read the comic book series up to where I am currently in the novel, and that takes you into #5.

Dixon's adaptation is really very straightforward, so if you don't have time to read the novel, the comic book might be a more efficient read. Clearly, it's not as good—or as descriptive—as the novel, but the rough outline is there, and Dixon's dialogue draws directly from Jordan's fiction. The comic series was later collected into three graphic novels.

I also checked out the Prime Video streaming adaptation, *The Wheel of Time*, which aired for two seasons beginning in 2021. (Intriguingly, Goodkind's *The Sword of Truth* was also loosely adapted for TV by Sam Raimi as *Legend of the Seeker* in 2008.) With each season including eight episodes, *The Wheel of*



## Juvenalia: “Invasion of the Bugs”

*I wrote the following story in September 1987 when I was 14 years old. It was written for school, and there are a few editing marks, as well as the following comment: “Good story. Be careful not to run sentences together.” I received a B+ on the piece, which was written in ballpoint pen. Its published form varies slightly from the handwritten original.*

Life was simple before the Bugs came. Now it’s not so easy. There are many stories circulating about how the Bugs came to our planet, but none are as I remember. I was 8 at the time, living on a small farm just outside of a small town called Hicksville. At least that’s what the city folks called it.

It was summertime in central Iowa, and evening had already fallen. The family was sitting in the comfortable cool living room watching the scratchy old black-and-white set resting atop a rickety, squeaky television tray. The national news program was on, and we were listening to the announcer’s excited account of many meteorites landing in various parts of the country.

“Well, folks, our sources say that another one...”—the screen was overtaken by static at that point—“...landed in Washington state.”

We shivered. In the early 1950s, the Soviet-alien scare was pretty big, and we figured that the meteorites were Russia’s way of attacking the United States. Little did we know that it was happening over there, too.

My mother and father soon turned off the set and herded me and my brothers to our room upstairs. “Pleasant dreams,” they said.

As soon as my head hit the pillow, a startling crash jolted me out of bed. I sprang to the window and looked out. Rain was pouring out of clouds dark as the River Styx, and lightning bolts were zig-zagging through the sky. My eyes were drawn to the hill out back. A strange glow was rising from that mound.

There were black sheets of oozing darkness—I guess you could call them blobs—stretching out from the mound. There were clouds of pulsing, jittering *some things* moving through the sky. Suddenly, the moon was covered by skittering, seething waves of bugs. Tendrils were reaching toward the house, and I ran to my brothers when the window had been covered.

My mother screamed somewhere downstairs. I hurriedly dressed and ran down the seemingly endless flight of stairs to the landing below. There were bugs everywhere. Crawling over the furniture, inches thick on the floor, there were bugs everywhere.

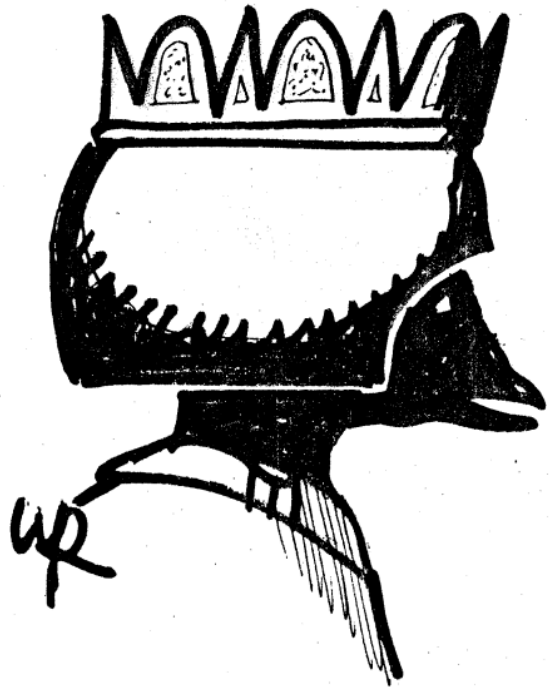
My mom and dad came running from the kitchen.

My mother was trying to shake the bugs off of her. “Don’t worry, honey,” my dad said. “They don’t hurt unless they get in your ears, eyes, nose, or mouth.” My mom started weeping.

“How do you know, Dad?” I asked. My father pointed to the kitchen. Slumped over the table was a seething mass of bugs. Later, my dad told me it was Jed, our neighbor.

Soon, my brothers had come downstairs. Dad herded us all outside to the truck.

Maybe it was safe to the north. Maybe...



—William Rotsler

*This story was accompanied by a one-page timeline, which might have been part of the assignment. Items on the timeline include:*

- Meteor story on news
- I go to bed
- Storm begins
- Meteor lands in backyard
- Moon blocked out
- Windows covered
- Enter house
- We go outside
- Get in truck

*Additional notes are also included: “Blobbo Bugs: Billions upon trillions of cockroach-like insects that, when in groups, look like ‘blobs.’ Moving along the ground, they eat everything: Wood, steel, everything.*

*“Place: Hicksville, Iowa, a dorky type farm with*

hillbillies.”

While I winced at my demeaning description of the rural family and location as a teenager, the Bugs’ voracious cockroach-like nature—largely unaddressed in the narrative (why “bugs” instead of “insects”?)—makes me think I might have seen *Damnation Alley* by this point. Otherwise, the story continues to represent my apparent interest in alien invasions and visitations. Perhaps also running to the window.



—Alan White

### Comments on APA-L #3061

A special thank you to Marc Schirmeister and Megan Giles for their impressive cover for APA-L, a first under my term as OC. Their contribution arrived the day before collation, and when I talked to Schirmeister on the phone, it sounded like he’d had a challenging week. I appreciate his still making good on the commitment, and the cover is wonderful.

In *Leeway* dated March 14, 2024, **Lee Gold** addressed the Ignorable Theme, applying a delightfully expansive definition of “technology.” It’s true, an EMP wouldn’t knock out *all* technology, just electronic technology. Such an event wouldn’t push humanity back to the stone age, for sure. Your idea of using the planet’s surface as a shield from future such events is intriguing.

I’ll share your feedback with cover artist Rev. Ivan Stang. I’m sorry you didn’t feel like reading Derek LaPorte’s serialized fiction. While I found the initial portion somewhat challenging, I enjoyed it, and it might be worth returning to when there’s more to read.

Your exchange with Matthew Mitchell about punctuality struck a chord with me. I am inveterately on time or early even if I try to arrive late. I think it was ingrained in me by my parents, and it’s served me well. It’s almost always better to be on time. In my family, we joke about getting “tennis court syndrome.”

When my parents played tennis, players had to arrive early to sign up to use the outdoor courts in town. It was always better to get there early so you could be sure to sign up and get a court—so you didn’t have to wait for others’ games, sets, or matches to finish. My folks would get antsy waiting to leave and often decided to leave earlier than planned so they didn’t spend their time waiting to leave, but waiting to play.

My wife and I would much rather arrive at the airport early to get through security and to our gate in time to sit and talk, read, or otherwise pass time before boarding—rather than stress out in the bag check or security lines and run frantically to the gate. We read a lot in airports when we travel.

**Matthew Mitchell’s** *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #49 commented on the newly instituted Ignorable Themes. Yes, I messed up the initial issue assignments; I think you were actually right last ish, while I was wrong. We’ll get the hang of it, and our mileage might vary week to week. If a theme resonates with you and you have something to say, go for it. If not, they are Ignorable Themes. (To be totally honest, this is also an attempt to goose our page counts, but that’s a secondary or tertiary benefit.)

Daylight Savings Time hasn’t seemed to affect my wife and I too much this year. The biggest impact I’ve felt has been in scheduling calls with Jonah in Japan or coworkers in Europe. I don’t know that I’ve been that aware of decreased sunlight in the mornings or brighter evenings until recently, but my perception might be skewed by the work hours I’ve been keeping. The team I’m on experienced several layoffs, we have new manager positions open, and recently went through a reorganization, so work’s been a little irksome. I’ve made it through similar situations before, so I’m sure it’ll all work out, but I have less patience for it at this point in my career. The goal is to make work easier, not more difficult.

I enjoyed your commentary on *Red Dwarf* seasons 7, 8, and 9. I’ve still not watched much—any—of that program and look forward to doing so. I’ll share your feedback with cover artist Rev. Ivan Stang. In terms of using the junior or senior suffix in names, I think it’s entirely based on choice. Parents could name a child the same name as a parent and choose not to use a suffix such as II, III, or junior. I wonder, though, how common such naming is—with or without a suffix.

I’ll also share your feedback with cover artist Joe Pearson. I’ve yet to see *What If...?* or *Loki*, but I’m glad you enjoy *What We Do in the Shadows*. I’ve found that absolutely anything Taika Waititi is involved in is worth checking out. When the pandemic started and I began working from home full time, I ordered a couple of black zipper hoodies and several

black polo shirts, intending to wear them for work. I still wear a hoodie over whatever shirt I'm wearing, but I stopped wearing the polos because my wife and son said I looked like a waiter at a golf club. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that, but the polo shirts fell out of favor. While going through a drawer in my dresser, I recently decided to keep them, thinking I'd wear them again. So far, I haven't.

Even though you opted not to sing "Lime in the Coconut" before that LASFS meeting, you didn't hesitate at all to sing unprompted during last week's meeting. If that was the revenge of which you speak, it delighted me. *Fantasy Empire* is not still around, in terms of new issues. I was referring to a back issue. James Van Hise also sells fandom-related items on eBay, including fanzines. You can find his inventory at <https://www.ebay.com/str/swordandplanetbooksandcomics>.

In *Toony Loons* #752, **Joe Zeff** shared a pleasant story about letting sleeping dogs lie. I love it when Spooner sleeps at the foot of our bed—he slept at my feet last night. He sometimes sleeps between my legs at my ankles, and I need to be careful not to disturb him. He usually leaves and returns to our room several times during the night, returning in the morning to tell us to get up. The recent snow sounds wonderful, and I wish you safe travels during your eclipse trip.

The most recent green paper I ordered for you seems slightly thicker than previous reams. It might be 24-pound stock instead of 20-pound. Do you mind? I enjoyed your not ignoring the Ignorable Theme even if you thought it was better ignored. You're right: Humanity could and would rebuild, but it might take time to do so. The in-between time might be challenging indeed.



## Emulators & Engines #12

March 21, 2024

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### The Ignorable Theme: NPC Heroes and PC Villains

As a DM or GM, I tend to not enjoy, support, or allow evil characters, unless it's a short-term effect from some kind of spell, curse, or possession. Life's too cruel to roleplay cruelty. And there's little more horrific than humans doing evil to humans—or humanoids. So I have little patience for that, while I don't mind purely self-interested or anarchistic characters, as long as they don't want to do anything too untoward. None of my players over the decades have wanted to pursue the truly evil route, so I haven't really had to deal with it, for which I'm thankful. (Besides, I also don't enjoy character vs. character combat unless in a sporting mode. I don't have enough time to adjudicate characters attacking characters.)

I have had to work with more chaotic players, primarily children or teenagers, who get a kick out of doing things in game that you might not be able to do in real life, however. I have much more patience for this and try to either work it into the game or introduce fun—and funny—repercussions for such shenanigans. One young player at a public table in a game store wanted his character to climb every tree available. Most of his attack rolls were made while up a tree. Irritating, but acceptable.

Another player in a much more recent game—the Discord OD&D game I no longer participate in—liked to set things on fire. I was a player in that game, so there wasn't much I could do. OK, so you set fire to the treehouse. Whoopie. Either nothing was accomplished, we missed out on some clues or treasure, or we've made a new enemy rather than a friend. That party really liked to kill things, or to avoid adventure hooks entirely. Fun, but frustrating, and they'd been playing together for years. They took pride in their chaos.

Heroic NPCs are much more palatable to me as a GM. In recent years, most NPCs in my game have been featured in passing. If any recur as characters, they're merchants in town, stock characters in a city, or patrons, sources of adventure and payment. Maybe the captain of the town guard or the head of a thieves

guild. Recurring characters might not even be seen or encountered but still have a presence in the game. Good NPCs have weight. As my games have become more sandbox-oriented, with the party traveling far and wide, that has lessened somewhat, and NPCs are even more transient, like the characters.

Given my interest in fleshing out characters' back stories, I think that family members and those relationships might come up at some point. I don't know that a family member will be a recurring NPC over time, but the weight of those relationships might end up introducing adventure hooks or complications to drive the story. Despite my remarks above about villainous PCs, I can see narrative value in a villainous family member. That's more adjacent to a PC but is still a villainous NPC.

It might go back to my early reading of J.R.R. Tolkien as a child, but I love the idea of a recurring heroic NPC joining and leaving the party occasionally—the group's Gandalf. I'd avoid the deus ex machina aspects, however. Can't have a heroic NPC swoop in and save the day all the time! Certainly, lower level NPCs can join a small, inexperienced party needing help as a retainer, but I don't consider them the same kind of heroic NPC. Those rarely do much beyond lend an extra weapon or draw attacks, and the goal is to not outshine the players' characters. Regardless, they, too, can take on a life of their own.



—Atom



## Solo Game Report: *Approaching Tanith*

In an attempt to be a little more organized in my solo play, I began a new series of sessions using Geek Gamers' *Solo Game Master's Guide* as an aid. Skimming the book again, I decided to concentrate on the following resources: *Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game* as the rubric (rule set), *Into and Wyrld and Wild* and Matt Finch's revised *Tome of Adventure Design* as generative tools (neither utilized yet), and the second *Palladium Fantasy* book, *The Old Ones*, as a suggestive resource.



—Ray Capella

The *Solo Game Master's Guide* offers useful guidance for solo play, occasionally running counter to my usual playing style as a player or GM. For example, do not start sessions with character creation. Focus on the world and scenario first; 90 percent of work occurs before you first roll dice. (That's very much GM business.)

Using some starter tables in the guide, I decided to pursue a nautical environment—at the side of a beached, dying sea monster. Emotional mood terms applying to the situation include “gloomy”—the mist before a seaside morning—and “wonderful”—the sight is truly awe inspiring. The idea is to develop a story out of the environment, then to place characters into it in order to determine narrative choices.

Turning to *Palladium Fantasy's Monsters & Animals* as a suggestive resource, I decided that the dying sea monster was a giant squid, or sea demon. At 80 feet long, the beached creature weighs 1,800 pounds. Its thin, cylindrical body is marked by horizontal fins and 10 arms: eight tentacles and two

longer arms. That a giant squid can identify chemicals in the water and sense magnetic north might introduce story elements later on. Or it might not. They are aggressive hunters that hunt in packs, but rarely attack larger ships. Perhaps it's ingested some treasure!

Once I had a setting and scene that suggested a story to begin with, I could turn to the heroes, who face obstacles in that location, part of a larger environment. At this point, you create a character or characters without statistics, focusing solely on their back story so you have characteristics and personalities that can be dropped into the middle of a story.

I'd soon determine more specific place names for the location, but for now I focused on some feelings and emotions, as well as additional details. The characters are wary, tired, and cold after a long day walking along the ocean shore. The dark of night is marked by moonlight, the mist coming off the water, and water lapping on the sand.

Turning to *The Old Ones*, I looked for cities along the coast. The adventurers have been walking along the pathbeach from Nisi to Tanith in the eastern Timiro Kingdom to avoid the road and path, outside the edge of cultivated land. They had run afoul of local authorities because of exhibiting open sympathy toward enslaved orcs. Mattias Ballard, a paladin, had intervened in the unnecessary beating of an orc in the market square, and the soldiers were not pleased. Similarly, the Grasping Hand, the local thieves' guild, learned that Derek Hornraven was actively thieving in town. They are looking for him.

Approaching the edge of Tanith from the south after two days walking, the group—a foursome—has almost reached the cemetery when they spy a beached leviathan of some kind. It is an 80-foot tentacled beast unlike anything they've ever seen, 1,800 pounds and quite old—at the end of its life. It's been struggling on the damp, cold sand for some time.

It is a gloomy night. Still well before sunrise at 2 a.m., it's dark. The moon through the mist is at first quarter—50 percent illumination—and the group has been walking without torches to not draw attention, walking around the edge of the peninsula using the water's edge as their guide.

The beast is beautiful, an iridescent blood orange glimmering in the misty moonlight as its 80-foot-long tentacles trail into the water lapping at the shore. Its arms are almost twice as long.

The group is out of view from the beach and lighthouse to the north. There's little chance of drawing the attention of the smugglers who might operate there. (Learned from *The Old Ones*.) Is this such a night? It's unlikely given the moonlight, but

consulting an oracle, yes, the smugglers are active.

In Tanith, strangers are viewed with suspicion by mercenary law enforcers. Will they be noticed from Sir Arin's home, which is patrolled by guards? I finished the first session with several options. A waternix lives in the woods near the well, stables, and general supply store in the wealthy section. Perhaps its attention is drawn. Mercenaries could be sent from Sir Arin's grounds if torches are lit. And if the party seeks shelter in the cemetery, perhaps there's a ghost.

During my second session, I focused on character background, but not character creation, per se. To do so, I started with *Palladium Fantasy's* "Character Background," which ends the character creation process.

Mattias Ballard is a human paladin (paladin in *Palladium* speak). He's of good/scrupulous alignment. First born, he's 19, husky, and tall. Ballard's a worry wart, nervous, and cautious. He grew up in the Floenry Isles or another southern island, in a small to medium city. The child of a merchant or businessman, his family isn't rich, but is well off. He's biased against dragons and is quite social. He's 5'8", and has brown eyes and blond hair.

Derek Hornraven is a human thief of selfish/anarchist alignment. Third born, he's 28, skinny and tall. He's nice, friendly, courteous, and hospitable. He was born in Lopan or the eastern territories, in a small to medium city. Child of a peasant farmer, he's biased against fairie folk and is greedy. He's 6'3", and has green eyes and brown hair.

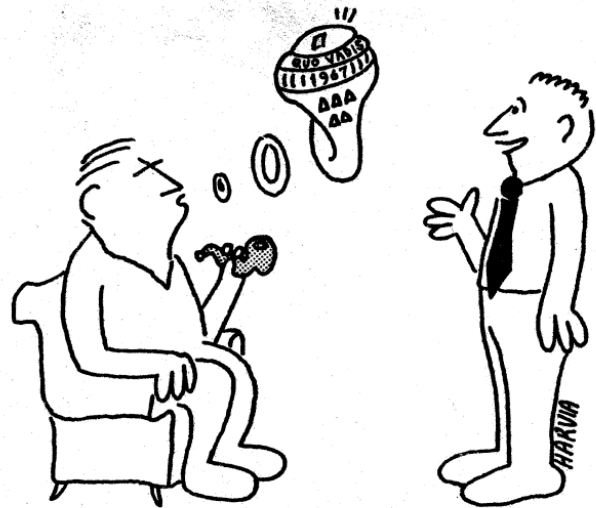
Avourel Fellmirr is an elven long bowman of good/scrupulous alignment. Second born, he's 60, skinny, and of average height. Fellmirr is arrogant, superior, and often underestimates others. Born in a small to medium city in the Western Empire, he's the child of a peasant farmer. Biased against ratlings or kobolds, he's bookish and discreet. He's 6'4", and has light blue eyes and short white hair.

Finally, Rogi Hammertime is a dwarven traveling priest of good/scrupulous alignment. He worships Od. First born, he's skinny and tall for a dwarf at 48. A nice braggart, Hammertime was born in a medium to large town or city in the Yin-Sloth jungles. Born to a religious family, he's biased against changelings. At 5'1", Hammertime is lazy, marked by a forked beard, brown eyes, and a salt-and-pepper beard.

That's enough to step into the story, and I reserve the right to change their birthplaces as the campaign dictates. Some of those randomly selected options might not make any sense. I don't yet know enough about *Palladium Fantasy's* world to know.

Even though my character generation could—

should—have ended there, I spent additional time fleshing out the characters' attributes, skills, and equipment, largely because it's still a habit, and the story suggested combat might soon occur depending on their actions. *Palladium Fantasy's* character generation process is relatively lengthy, so that took some time. Then I went back to the story.



**You certainly have an amazing talent for blowing smoke rings.**

—Teddy Harvia

The four approached the beached hulk. Those with nightvision—Hammertime and Fellmirr—were able to see it, and the others could see by moonlight. It was truly an awesome sight, and I rolled Horror checks. (I quite like *Palladium Fantasy's* Horror checks.) All but Hornraven failed, lost in awe for a round. Greedy, Hornraven approached closer. Does it attack? It's been out of the water for one of the four hours it can survive on land but might be frightened, so somewhat likely. The oracle said yes, it attacks.

As Hornraven approaches, it lashes out with one of its tentacles, striking the thief. The attack doesn't penetrate his soft leather armor, and he rolls with the punch, halving the damage. Regaining mobility, the party stays out of reach of the creature—largely because of Ballard's nervousness and caution and Hammertime's laziness. They discuss what to do and decide not to light torches. No one has any skills related to animals or the ocean. While Hornraven is greedy and therefore suspicious the squid might have eaten something valuable, he doesn't know how to disembowel such a monster and is wary of

approaching again given his thumping.

They watch the creature wheeze in the dim early morning mist, decide it's not a threat, and continue north along the beach.

Passing the forest and Arin's house, which they can see beyond a thin stand of trees, they avoid the domicile because of the hour—and its walls. As they walk along the edge of the beach and forest, is there an encounter? It's unlikely, but the oracle says yes. So I picked up a deck of *Outdoor Encounter Cards* for *The Fantasy Trip*—a generative tool—and drew several before one fit the story.

The party encounters a pair of serpents or snakes, yin adders (drawing on *Monsters & Animals*), which might be protecting their young in the woods or drawn to the beached squid and its scent of meat. Rolling a successful prowl check, the adders surprise the party. After determining the party's marching order, I decided that Ballard would be walking with his horse between him and the forest because a threat is less likely to come from the sea.

The adders attack his horse, which is affected less by their venom than a human might be, and half the party fails their Horror saves, stunned for a round. Regardless, the group dispatches the adders in several rounds of combat. Did the smugglers to the north hear or see the skirmish? Unlikely, but the oracle says yes.

That's where I'll pick up next time: Two smugglers (second level mercenaries) come down the beach to investigate the commotion while their compatriots unload a skiff to their hideout in the ruins.

After recording the little experience earned—I've not yet shifted to milestone experience or abstracted combat—I spent more time thinking about outdoor movement and next steps.

It's 50 miles from Nisi to Tanith, and if the party walked 25 miles a day, they could do so in two days. It's 70 miles from Tanith to Sims further up the coast toward the mountains, so that's three days travel ahead once they leave Tanith.

If the group is unable to easily overcome the approaching smugglers, or if more arrive to investigate the commotion, they might make their way into the ruins to hide. A portion of the ruins is utilized as the smugglers' hideout—sponsored by Sir Arin, a town father, unbeknownst by the townspeople—but there are other, more mysterious areas. Side exits once underground might lead to the stone towers or Arin's manse. I've already set aside *Axebane's Deck of Many Dungeons* in case they take that route.

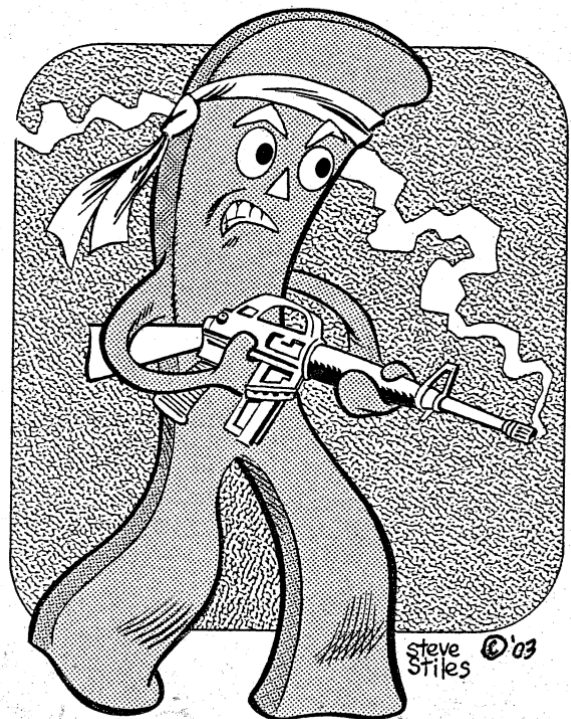
This was my first time playing *Palladium Fantasy*, though I've played *Rifts* and *Robotech*. Combat is a bit

crunchy. Any attack roll over a four is a hit, but opponents can dodge or parry. Armor takes damage, as do characters, and can require repair.

I'd like to come up with ways to abstract combat so I can resolve it in one round rather than play through successive rounds. And I'd like a way to streamline *Palladium's* Structural Damage Capacity (SDC) and hit point damage in abstract combat. I'd welcome any resources or recommended approaches to abstracting combat so I can focus more on story but still offer character risk and reward, as well as resource management.

Not a bad beginning!

## “GUMBO”



### On the Abstraction of Combat

Even before playing *Palladium Fantasy* for the first time, I've been interested in the idea of abstracting combat in order to focus more on story. (*E&E* #9) How can you streamline combat not just to speed it up but to also offer realistic risks and rewards—and outcomes—for such combat? I want to resolve combat encounters more quickly, but to still have a cost for combat: ammunition depletion, physical damage, and other such elements.

A few years ago, the blog *Attercap* published a post titled “Narrative Combat” that distinguishes between narrative—abstract—combat and tactical combat. I'd

like my combat to be less tactical, and more narrative, so that resonated with me. The author nodded toward systems such as Fate, Powered by the Apocalypse, and Genesys for ideas, and I'll be spending more time with them as I think this through.



—Edd Vick

The author suggests that a scene of combat can take one to three rounds, and that the game's tone determines how lethal abstract combat might be. They offer three game tones:

**Heroic/Hopeful:** Only a completely one-sided "critical success" victory by the foes results in defeat; failure will usually still mean success of the PCs, but with some setbacks

**Gray/"Realistic":** Individual failures can leave PCs injured and a complete loss by the PCs might result in capture or major setbacks; PC death is atypical

**Oppressive/Dark:** Players might opt for more dramatic deaths or injuries of their character, a complete loss could indicate a "TPK," characters

captured with little sense of hope, or a failure of the current objective beyond the fight

At this early stage, I think what I'm looking for is the gray or realistic approach. I want combat outcomes to provide risks and setbacks—costs and impact—but not have to start all over again with a new party like I have in some solo play sessions.

They then distinguish between secondary and primary fights. Secondary fights aren't as crucial to the story, while primary fights might be more important to resolving an overall narrative. Secondary fights can be resolved in one round, and primary fights require three.

In each combat round of combat, the GM and players pick the primary combat roll for the characters. The GM makes a single roll for all of the enemies. Its success or failure might add or remove challenges or difficulties. The PCs roll their selected skills. The table then collaborates to apply meaning to the rolls.

In Fate, failure would result in a Physical Consequence. *Monster of the Week* PCs might take Harm. *Masks* PCs take Consequences. And Genesys PCs are left with Wounds or Strains. That makes sense to me, but how such would occur in *Palladium Fantasy* has yet to be determined. So far, I think I can abstract success and failure, but how to determine the cost, gain, or impact in a game less designed along such lines?

In an *RPGnet* discussion forum topic titled "B/X etc.—Streamlining combat even further," WistfulD posted the following recommendation: convert the reaction table into an oracle of sorts. To wit:

2: Catastrophic failure—one PC hits 0 hp, others at 50% (and all combat spells expended), enemy/enemies still at large with 50%+ hp

3-5: Possible attack failure—enemy flees with 25% hp, entire party at 50% hp. Each caster has one combat spell remaining

6-8: Mixed outcome—enemy defeated, each PC loses (1d4-1)\*25% hp. Each caster uses 1d3 spells

9-11: Beneficial outcome—enemy defeated, each PC loses 1d4-2 (min. 0) \* 25% hp. Each caster uses up one spell

12: Total success—enemy defeated without expenditure of resources

That's closer to what I'm envisioning, and the ranges could be adjusted based on the tone of the game or encounter. Vladimir Bananas posted a follow

up suggesting that players could choose their own consequences based on the degree of their failure or success—as in *Powered by the Apocalypse's Masks* or *Monster of the Week*.

Mara Shadowsong also offered an idea inspired by the *Burning Wheel* Bloody Versus or a *Savage Worlds* quick encounters approach. Combat takes one roll.

1. Add up all the enemy HD.
2. Divide that number by the number of PCs or players. Round down and call this number the Average HD.
3. Have each PC roll under the stat they use for combat. Add the difference between Average HD and PC level if positive.
4. If more than half pass the check, the party won the combat. If more than half failed, they lost or got captured.
5. For every failed roll, have the PC take HP damage equal to the Average HD amount failed by.

That, too, is promising and might have more potential than WistfulD's modified reaction chart. Either could incorporate *Attercap's* focus on secondary and primary fights.

A topic in the *Atlas Games RPG Forum*, "Streamlining the combat system?" also offers suggestions, focusing on *Ars Magica*. That seems a little more gnarly and less applicable, but I'll spend more time with the thread. While the above points me in the right direction, I still need to think through HP, SDC, and SDC for armor. While I like *Palladium Fantasy's* wear-on-armor concept, it adds additional complexity. Perhaps I just pool character's HP and SDC and apply armor SDC as a damage reduction or something.

So: *Fate, Powered by the Apocalypse (Masks and Monster of the Week)*, *Genesys*, *Burning Wheel*, and *Savage Worlds*... Where else should I look for ideas on abstract combat? Any advice on how you'd handle armor and physical damage? (I've yet to return to *Tunnels & Trolls*.)

### Comments on *Alarums & Excursions* #580

**Myrian Eugenio's** cover illustration reminded me of *Naruto*, which reminded me of Japanese roleplaying games. There's actually a *Naruto Roleplay RPG* online (<https://www.narutoroleplaygame.com>), so you don't even need to adapt *Shinobigami*. I've yet to explore the *Avatar Legends: The Roleplaying Game Starter Set*, but that could also satisfy a yen for anime-inspired roleplaying games. Of course, there's

also always *BESM*, which is quite flexible in terms of genre. I've recently been seeing Kickstarters for a *BESM Retro Second Edition RPG* as well as *BESM 4E* expansions.



—Alan White

In *Tantivy* dated Jan. 25, 2024, **Lee Gold** described her relationship with her father. It might not be my place to comment, but as a co-parent who shared custody in a relatively challenging situation until my son was an adult—it's differently challenging now—I'm pretty sensitive to alienating and emotionally abusive parental behaviors. I am sorry that your father didn't let you express physical affection and that he criticized your smile and laughter as a child. That must have been disappointing and frustrating, and I'm glad that you grew up to find the spouse you have in Barry. Stuff like that can affect relationships! I'm sure there are generational differences in parenting, but that doesn't sound like a satisfying situation.

I appreciated your remarks on no longer referring to "monsters." In a section above, I realized I was changing references to "monsters" to "enemies." They're not even always that! Especially when an encountered creature is an animal, I find myself not even considering them enemies. What would the creature do if I weren't here? Live its life. May it continue doing so.

**Lisa Padol's** *This Isn't the Zine You're Looking For* #389 reported on *EN World's* list of anticipated game releases. I need to stop supporting Kickstarters. I often forget that I did so, and even if I remember to complete the backer surveys, I'm often surprised by their arrival months or years later. While the items produced can be awesome, I find that they distract me from whatever else I've currently got going on gaming wise, which can lead to materials creep or derailment.

In *The Biblyon Free Press* dated March 2024, **Jerry Stratton** remarks on several books. Your book commentary is usually a highlight of my reading A&E. H. Beam Piper and Jim Butcher are almost always worth reading, and Ellen Lupton's *Thinking with Type* sounds particularly interesting.

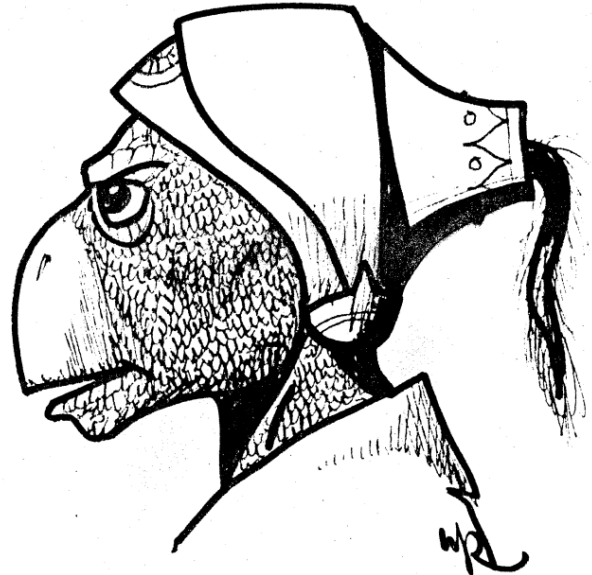
**Mark Nemeth's** *The Seedling* updated apans on the heating of his home. I'm glad that it's returned! My wife and I recently had to troubleshoot a loose faucet spigot and washing machine that wouldn't drain. A neighbor helped under the sink with a basin wrench, and we were glad to avoid calling repairmen. It's amazing how troublesome occurrences like that can be. I also appreciated your review of Thomas Love Peacock's *Maid Marian*.

One of the things I enjoy about *Palladium Fantasy's* Horror checks is the potential impact of encountering the unknown for the first time. In so many *D&D* games, adventurers encounter enemies roughly knowing what they are—confusing player knowledge with character knowledge. Even encountering an orc or a goblin for the first time might be off putting. When DM'ing, I try to describe creatures rather than say what they are, especially for new parties. But it might behoove players to keep a record of creatures encountered to determine whether they're "used to them" by now—or still subject to shock or surprise. But I think you're right: Saying "You feel horrified" seems insufficient.

Your comments to Jim Vassilakos about virtual tabletops resonated with me. The few times I've played with DMs who use them, they didn't really impress me. As I become less interested in tactical roleplaying that requires miniatures and counting grid squares, the need for them lessens. But I do like the suggestions of landscape and construction materials—as well as the fog of war aspect in terms of what you can see or not see.

Is that enough for me to want to play games on my laptop? Not really. Aesthetically, I prefer pencil-drawn maps on graph paper, or maps like those created by Dyson Logos. When I used to play in Lee Grixit's OD&D game, we used Discord for voice and text chat, and even that felt like I was tethered to the laptop for too long. Even though I've only used a VTT for one

gaming group and Discord for one other, I might miss my time using <https://rpol.net> actively. There, you could upload photos of hand-drawn maps and breathe a little in between check ins. Once I figure out how I want to abstract combat, I might return to running games there. Some asynchronous games took way too long using tactical combat, and you don't really need to.



—William Rotsler

In *Reddened Stars* #32636-.8bit, **John Redden** mentioned celery juice. Celery juice! Now I want some. I've stopped drinking orange juice and apple juice, drinking 50/50 orange juice for a while before dropping even that. Now I drink a half pint of vegetable juice almost every morning. I use store-bought juice more often than I use our juicer, but celery juice sounds wonderful.

Your mention of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* reminded me of the book selections for the fantasy book club at work. They are as follows:

- January: *The Memory Police* by Yōko Ogawa
- February: *The Watchmaker of Filigree Street* by Natasha Pulley
- March: *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini
- April: *Ra* by qntm
- May: *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman

I've placed holds on the first two at the local library and will read them even if I'm unable to join the book discussion at work. (Book discussions at work are a hard sell for me, just like running *Pathfinder* games was.) I've already read *American Gods* and remember enjoying it, though I've never read *Eragon*—despite my son's enjoyment of it when

he was younger. He and my wife read all of the Harry Potter books in relatively close proximity, but I think I just read the first two. Now I'm not sure I need to. Earlier this week, I started rereading Robert Jordan's *The Eye of the World* to better remember the text for APA-L. I have mailed your check!

**Jim Vassilakos** and **Timothy Collinson**'s *Traveller Play-By-Email* contribution commented on important issues revealed in roleplaying games and the magic that can happen. "[T]ruth emerges from the chaos of dice," Vassilakos wrote. That sentiment is absolutely wonderful, and it struck me that that's part of the sense of wonder roleplaying games can bring: the ludic numinous. I also enjoyed your exploration of throwing out the script and player agency.

In *Bugbears & Ballyhoo* #29, **Gabriel Roark** discussed his family's recent loss and considering fostering a teenager. Best of luck throughout that process! When my wife and I weren't able to have a child of our own—I was never married to our son's mother—we considered adoption but didn't pursue it in the end. That allowed us to focus on Jonah, which was challenging and rewarding on its own and continues to be so now that he's an adult. I respect the amount of thought you're putting into it. Emotional availability and readiness are important, to be sure. I enjoyed your list of games utilized for the 31-day character generation challenge.

I am envious of **Patrick Zoch**'s Eberron campaign with his family and **Peter C. Hildreth**'s sf game with his grandsons. Kudos on keeping the flame alive! My son and I started gaming using *Fuzzy Heroes* and toys in his bedroom. When he was about 7, we started playing *D&D*, and he'd often accompany me to local conventions, preferring adult tables rather than playing with other children. Then he got into collectible trading card games, and it was all downhill from there. (I joke somewhat; he enjoyed it thoroughly.) I had hoped he'd progress to *Magic: The Gathering*, which I might also enjoy playing, but he stopped at *Yu-Gi-Oh* and has since returned to *Pokemon*. Some of my favorite table moments were just the two of us.

**Attronarch**'s *Overlord's Annals* Vol. 3 #3 clarified his plans to continue publishing. I'm glad you're in it for the long haul! In *Craig Cornered* dated March 2024, **Craig Kamber** mentioned playing *Hackmaster*. I'm jealous! While I have a good amount of *Hackmaster* materials and let my *Knights of the Dinner Table* subscription lapse last year or so, I've never played *Hackmaster*. That or *HårnMaster* might make for a solid rubric once I'm done exploring *Palladium Fantasy*.

In *Age of Menace* #227, **Brian Christopher Misiaszek** reported on a family vacation to

Dublin—including a roundup of book and roleplaying game stores! Hodges Figgis sounds particularly interesting. **Mark A. Wilson**'s *Bumblng Through Dungeons* #52 included an interesting piece, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Meta-Modernism in Roleplaying." The grittiness you mentioned reminded me of the superhero roleplaying game *Underground*, which seems inspired by comic books of the 1990s.

**Patrick Riley**'s *Sinister Things* #325 offered a conrep on DunDraCon, which seemed like great fun. I had to chuckle at your description of the *Vaesen* game. Hooray for the second-time GM. Boo to the self-involved talker. In *PumSpeak* #121, **Paul Holman** reminded me of GURPS! I'll add that to the list after *Hackmaster* and *HårnMaster*. GURPS, like *Palladium*, would be particularly promising for multigenre games in which characters travel from world to world—at least for character portability and reuse. (So would *Savage Worlds*.)

## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #108

March 27, 2024

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### Last Week's Senryu

Tonight is date night:

Dinner and a show with friends.

Also, collation.

Last Thursday, I skipped the LASFS meeting in order to go out with my wife and some friends. We met several friends for dinner at Melrose Umbrella Co., where I had an espresso-based non-alcoholic cocktail called the Portland Pick Me Up and their vegetable quesadilla with tater tots. The food was quite good, though our friend who ordered the fish and chips reported that it was just okeh.

We then walked a short distance to the Groundlings Theatre for a 10 p.m. production of Danny Jacobs and Seth Brown's *The Understudies*. Based on a single audience suggestion, Jacobs and Brown improvise a three-act play. Last week's play took place in a small western museum and explored the development of a love affair between a security guard and a difficult woman. It was one of the funniest things I've ever seen, and the two actors were excellent.

It's the big night. The audience is restless and the lights are hot, but legendary performers Basil Shaw III and Chad Krause are both out of commission. So the *Understudies* must go on and take the stage in their place... if only they knew which play they were going to perform. The *Understudies'* theatrical style of improv creates a full three-act play on the spot from a single suggestion. With influences ranging from Tennessee Williams to Neil Simon to Arthur Miller, the genre of the production can be as varied as the stars in the sky. It's two actors, in three acts, with no limits.

If you go to see a performance, be sure to read the playbill. It's quite funny itself and sets up the gambit with a little more context. Supposedly, the two primary actors—who were unable to perform that night—regularly stage one of 300 plays they have memorized. The audience suggestion serves to remind the understudies which play to perform, and it starts

there. My wife has now gone three times—this was my first—and it's been different every time. Such a wonderful idea.

While I didn't prepare minutes to be performed at the meeting or attend, I'd asked that the meeting be recorded so I could capture minutes afterward. I was able to finish printing and collating APA-L before we left for the Fairfax District, parking in our old neighborhood on Stanley Avenue, later driving by our first apartment in Los Angeles. And I mailed APA-L like usual last Friday morning.



*Wisconsin State Journal*, Sept. 13, 1957

### A Cover Artist Speaks!

In APA-L #3059, John Hertz inquired about Tiffanie Gray's cover for APA-L #3056. She responded via email in late March.

*Meet Me at the Island* is an elven Romeo and Juliet image. He is from a nation of dark elves (think R.A. Salvatore's Drizzt Do'Urden) and she from a nation of light elves that are at war. At some point, they met accidentally, but rather than killing each other, they fell in love. The only place they can meet is this island, where a small cottage has been built. They come alone in their small boats—docked on opposite sides of the island—to meet for a short time in the cottage before they have to go back to their nations. They hope one day to be able to leave and go off together... but both know that is likely impossible. Thank you for your comments and observations.

—Tiffanie Gray





*Wisconsin State Journal, Sept. 13, 1957*

### Comic Book Sunday

I recently learned about an awesome idea courtesy of Craig Miller on the Facebook. Reportedly, on a roughly bimonthly basis, Miller, Jim Krueger, and others convene for Comic Book Sunday. This month, on March 24—the pre-WonderCon edition—people gathered at Krueger’s home from 3-6 p.m. to exchange comic books and donate the remainders to Operation Gratitude, which will then distribute them to people serving in the armed forces.

“As always, bring your unwanted comics to share,” the social media post read. “Bring [one] and leave with 100 or vice versa. All unclaimed books will be boxed up and taken to Operation Gratitude, where they then become care packages for our troops all over the world.”

People bring drinks—but no hard liquor—and I bet the price of a current comic that people hang out, read,

and perhaps even talk about comic books. If you’d like to get involved, reach out to Miller or Krueger.

### Ignorable Theme: Awards

The Ignorable Theme for this issue was “Do you nominate or vote in the Hugo, Faan, or other awards? What role do awards play in fandom and literature?”

I’ve never gone to a Worldcon other than ConZealand online in 2020, and while I enjoyed receiving the packet of Hugo-nominated materials, I didn’t vote. I was also an online member of the recent Worldcon in China but never received credentials to log in. As a member of this year’s Worldcon in Glasgow—I will not be attending—I look forward to receiving a packet again and will do my best to read enough to vote as an informed voter. Some fen swear by the Hugo Awards and attempt to read everything they can to prepare to vote. I enjoy reading their reviews and remarks in fanzines. Personally, I’ve never nominated works for a Hugo or voted in the Hugos. As John Hertz suggests, fen should consider doing so!

Similarly, I’ve been a judge for the Saturn Awards (<https://www.saturnawards.org>) for the last two years but didn’t vote either time. The first year, I joined too late to catch up on everything nominated, and last year, while I’d started going to weekend screenings, I missed the voting deadline entirely. I haven’t gone to a screening yet this year.

When it comes to the National Fantasy Fan Federation’s Laureate Awards (<https://tnfff.org/neffy-awards>), I’ve had middling experiences nominating and voting. When I was actively contributing the “Rabid Ears: Ravings of a TV Fiend” column and monthly movie listings as Cathode Ray, one year I actively nominated lengthy lists of appropriate works released or aired that year. Perhaps one of my nominations ended up on the ballot, and the remainder was the usual hodgepodge of “When did this come out?” randomness.

I’d started those article series in part to inform improving the nomination process, and it resulted in naught. Some sour grapes sensations still linger—I no longer contribute those columns—but I intend to nominate the up to two items per category allowed this year, perhaps. I’ll at least vote. Because last year, I *won* an N3F Laureate Award (formerly the Neffy Awards) recognizing my now defunct monthly movie and short film screenings and old-time radio listening sessions, even if only one Neffer—two, including me as host—participated consistently. “Heath Row’s Productions” received the Laureate for Best Television Show, Film, or Video. Much appreciated, questionably deserved, and slightly strange. I still appreciate the



Bunny Planet throughout history—this picture book includes several stories in which characters go to the Bunny Planet, which might be Saturn, if the illustrations are any indication.

“Far beyond the moon and stars, twenty light-years south of Mars, spins the gentle Bunny Planet and the Bunny Queen is Janet,” reads the book several times throughout. Each story features a child experiencing a dissatisfying, frustrating day, after which they go to the Bunny Planet to see how their ideal day might have gone. “Janet says to Claire, ‘Come in. Here’s the day that should have been.’” Soggy breakfast cereal might be supplanted by a comfortable hammock, for example.

It’s a pleasant, light read and a cozy, comforting message. Some days might not go as planned. We can still seek comfort in familiar things and experiences, and we can remember the good aspects of life as we experience some of the bad. The fantastic, almost science fictional elements might be a good introduction to similar literature for younger children (though perhaps not 2 year olds). Saturn is depicted in bedroom windows throughout, the Bunny Planet has a queen—akin to Deja Thoris, princess of Mars—and the quotations serve as recommendations of other authors and scientists.

If we ever have to get a children’s book as a present again for a preschooler, we’ll likely buy this again. What other children’s books might serve as good introductions or seeds to sf and fantasy? The 2002 LASFS *Recommended Reading List for Children and Young Adults* seems to mostly include juveniles rather than children’s or picture books. What suggestions would you make?

### Juvenalia: “The Gem of Power”

*I wrote the following story when I was in sixth grade and perhaps 11. Labeled with my name and student number that year—6211—it was written in cursive with pencil on lined, spiral-bound notebook paper. The story is ungraded and features no editing marks. Its published form varies slightly from the handwritten original.*

The man walked slowly along the ledge. Below, the rocks pointed sinisterly upward. The night before, he had heard strange noises. He would have transported himself to the top of the cliff if it weren’t for...

Well, let me tell you about his power first. In the country of Arachnia, everyone has a power. The man’s particular power is called transportation. Transportation means being able to transport one’s self to another place by willing it. There are also other

powers, including levitation, mind block, knowingness, and others. Now, back to the story.



Wisconsin State Journal, Sept. 13, 1957

He walked forward for an eternity. The sound of flapping wings broke the dreadful silence. The man looked up and saw a massive creature swooping down toward him. The creature was a hairy, manlike beast with wings like those of a bat.

The man brandished his mystic sword and slashed at the ferocity. The ape-bat spit venom into his eyes,

and he fell off the ledge. As he fell toward the rocks, another ape-bat swooped down and caught him. They flew him to their cave.

When he revived, the man could see the sun rising slowly. He heard the creatures eating in the corner of the cave. He closed his eyes and thought about the meadow below. In a flash, he found himself in a field of grass and clover. The birds sang sweetly in the air around him. He heard the ape-bats' screams of astonishment as he crawled toward the forest.

At the time when the sun was at its highest point, he stopped to build a shelter. In an hour, he had erected a crude lean-to, nicely camouflaged. The man's name was Jarvis, a warrior, from the village Rigar. He had left home a few years ago to seek fame and fortune in the White Mountains. He traveled village to village asking directions and breaking a few hearts, but he enjoyed it.

After he cleaned himself in a nearby stream, he fell asleep in the lean-to. As he did so, seven little creatures ran giggling from the bushes.

"So, Galdor. He is the one."

"Aye, Salfid."

"Should we take him to the elven queen?"

"Ask a know-tree."

"I will!" One ran over to an ancient tree.

"Know-tree, know-tree, do you know? Take him to our queen? Yes or no."

The tree moved back and forth. A gust of wind caught its breath.

"No."

The elf ran back and told the others what he had heard. Jarvis stirred, and elves scurried in every direction. Jarvis sat up and looked around. A twig snapped. Jarvis stood up and took a few steps. As he stepped over a log, he saw a green man run by, giggling. He seized it by the shoulder and said, "What are you?"

"I'm an elf, sir," the green man said.

"An elf? I'll be darned."

"That can be arranged."

"Where are you from, elf?"

"An elven forest, sir."

"What's your name?"

"Jack, sir. Come out, guys!" The other elves ran out, laughing. Jarvis blinked to see if he was dreaming. Then he pinched himself. The elves didn't disappear. So he spoke. "Uh, I must have accidentally walked into your forest."

"It was no accident, sir," an elf replied. "The fates told us you'd be coming. Yes, sir!"

"They said you'd help us find the gem of power!" another one said.

"Do I have a choice?" Jarvis asked.

"I guess not," an elf shrugged. "The last time we heard about it, Myster had it."

"Where does this Myster live?" Jarvis inquired.

"In Blackmoor Castle." Jarvis thought about Blackmoor Castle. Soon, he was in a dark, musty hall. Water dripped from cracks in the ceiling. A whistle seemed to fly through the air. At the end of the hall was a door with light streaming out from under it.

Jarvis crept toward it and slowly opened the door. In the center of the room was a glass case with a gem inside of it. Guarding the gem were two trolls with flaming swords. Jarvis ran in and screamed. The trolls looked at him and snarled.

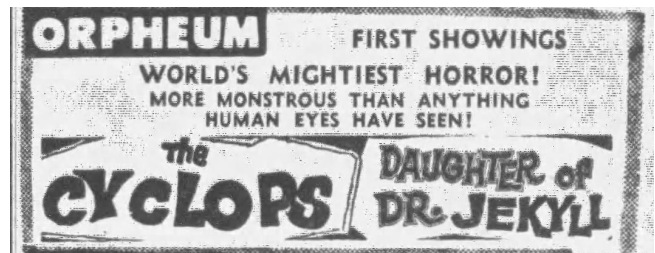
Jarvis transported himself to the gem. He grabbed it and transported out of the room. He ran down the hall with the trolls chasing him. As he rounded a corner, he bumped into Myster himself.

"Just passing through..." Jarvis breathed.

"I bet," Myster glowered. "Hand it over."

"No can do." Jarvis slashed at Myster with his sword. Myster let go and Jarvis began to run.

"Stop!" Myster put his fingertips to his forehead and concentrated. A 10-foot crevice appeared in front of Jarvis as he ran. He slipped and fell into the darkness. As the icy wind blasted against his face, Jarvis thought about the meadow.



Wisconsin State Journal, Sept. 27, 1957

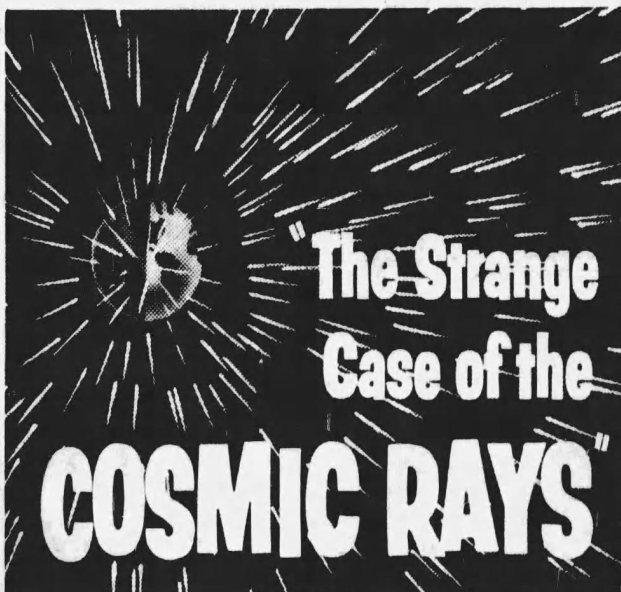
*I don't know whether I intended to finish the story there, or to continue it, but it works either way. I was in Cub Scouts at this age, perhaps even Scouts, which likely inspired the presence of a lean-to.*

*The reference to Blackmoor Castle draws on my experience playing Dungeons & Dragons with friends. As a child, I had a copy of the module Adventures in Blackmoor, initially published in 1986, when I was 13, so I must have drawn the reference from earlier roleplaying game materials. While I met a relative of Dave Arneson at a state school event, I don't think I was fully aware of the provenance of his campaign setting. (The town I grew up in, Fort Atkinson, Wis., was about 40 miles from Lake Geneva, though Arneson was in Minnesota.)*

*The fantasy elements of the story suggest I'd read J.R.R. Tolkien by this time. Another hallmark series for me was Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's*

*Dragonlance novels. Dragons of Autumn Twilight was first published in 1984, when I was 11. The video game Rygar didn't come out until 1987.*

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*Wisconsin State Journal, Oct. 25, 1957*

### Comments on APA-L #3062

The cover for APA-L #3062 by Jose Sanchez was titled *The Miami Bayside Incident*. In a February email to me, Sanchez described the piece as follows: "Rumors of aliens caused the mass deployment of Miami police officers to Bayside on New Year's Day 2024. Reports were making the rounds on social media. Allegedly, aliens made a mysterious and abrupt appearance and scared off many witnesses. So far, though, there has not been any factual evidence, only hoax videos and eyewitness testimonials. Here is my take on a fictitious scene of what might have happened." You can learn more at <https://tinyurl.com/Miami-Bayside-aliens>.

In *Leeway* dated for March 21, 2024, **Lee Gold** expressed distaste for the writing of Robert Jordan. I'm curious whether she was conflating him with Terry Goodkind, whose series *The Sword of Truth* might be described as dark or nasty. I've only read the first novel in Jordan's series *The Wheel of Time*, so subsequent books might decline in tone or content. That it took four or five books to become evidently so would be surprising and disappointing, I'd imagine.

What fun to discover books you're enthusiastic about! Let us know what you think of the Zenna Henderson collection and Tanith Lee books if you procure them. I've always been impressed by the NESFA Press. Late last year, they reissued four collections of stories by Roger Zelazny.

To keep track of sunrise and sunset, as well as the tides, I use a few resources: the mobile apps *Sunrise Sunset*, *Phases of the Moon*, and *Tides Near Me*, as well as an annual booklet titled *Tidelog*. (<https://www.tidelog.com>) I prefer the hard copy but don't refer to it every day. Our wakeup time has gotten a little bit later in recent weeks. Our alarm used to go off at 6:30 a.m., to get up after 7, but my wife found she was often in a deeper sleep cycle then, so the alarm now goes off at 7. I'm usually up, showered, and dressed by 8, and I try to start work in my home office around 9. Most nights we'll work until 6 or 7 p.m., but the last few weeks she's been working until 8 or 9. Dinner time is almost always at 7:30. We joke about that: "What time should we have dinner?"

I appreciated your comments on different speaking modes and tones in different situations. Early in the pandemic, I remember the first time my wife and I heard each other talk during work meetings. We hadn't experienced each other in that setting previously. Thank you for identifying "When I Was a Lad." I'm not overly familiar with Gilbert and Sullivan.

**Derek LaPorte's** *In Betweens* dated March 21, 2024, introduced himself to other ellers. Welcome to the apa! *Qualia's* out of print, eh? I still want to see it. Where was it released when it came out? Did it screen anywhere or end up on video? Pursuing additional education during the pandemic sounds like a smart choice to make. Have you worked in game design since earning your MFA? Los Angeles isn't a bad town for that, though the industry has been challenging recently.

It's neat that you corresponded with Bruce Sterling. Have you tried to track down that document since? I've found Vonda N. McIntyre's introduction to manuscript preparation (<https://christopher-mckitterick.com/Workshop-stuff/handouts/Manuscript-Prep-Vonda-McIntyre.pdf>) useful, though it might

serve different purposes. Good luck querying the novel. I look forward to reading it! The LASFS used to hold events to recognize fen who'd sold their first professional artwork or writing. It looks like the last Fanquet was held in 1977, when it was absorbed by the LASFS Showcase. You can learn more about those events at <https://fancylopedia.org/Fanquet> and [https://fanac.org/fanzines/LASFS\\_Fanquet](https://fanac.org/fanzines/LASFS_Fanquet). It might be time for the club to return to such events. Keep us in the loop, and if the novel doesn't sell, consider repackaging parts of it as short stories.

I, too, spent some time in multi-user dungeons, but I spent more time playing text adventure games and games like *Wizardry*, *Ultima*, and *Bard's Tale*. Every so often, I'll go down an emulator rabbit hole to return to such games, but I don't have a lot of time to dedicate to that pursuit. Recently, I've been enjoying a mobile game called *Hero Wars: Alliance* that's a fun diversion. I think you'll fit in here just fine.

Your notes and errata on *The Winnower* are awesome. I've not read much Christopher Priest, so I didn't catch the homage. May the footnotes continue! I look forward to future installments, as well as reading *Reckontak*. Stephen King's *The Green Mile* was indeed published as a serial novel in a series of slim paperbacks over time. Otherwise, the Perry Rhodan series, which was translated into English from the original German, might be a good example in science fiction. And some fiction-oriented fanzines such as *Pablo Lennis* publish serialized fiction.

When I was thinking about writing my own serialized fiction, I found several books on the topic that might be interesting. I haven't read any of them yet, so your mileage might vary. Titles include C.R. Myers's *How to Write Serial Fiction & Be Ready to Publish in Less Than 24 Hours* and Angela Booth's *Plan, Write, and Publish Serial Fiction in Four Weeks*. Given how some self-published guides to writing can be, I have my doubts, but they might help you repurpose the novel into a serialized format—even if you're not writing it as a serial, per se.

Thank you for your book reviews. I enjoyed the non-sf titles considered, as well as your in-depth approach to looking at different aspects of a work. I haven't read *Moby-Dick*, but a friend commented on the lengthy detailed chapters, as well. Herman Melville really does write beautifully though, so I shall shortlist the book for upcoming reading.

I'll share your feedback with cover artists Marc Schirmeister and Megan Giles. I think you're right: Generative artificial intelligence and cryptocurrency are misuses of electricity and will have a negative impact on the environment. Thank you for introducing yourself! I learned more than I did at the LASFS

meeting when you first joined. Looking forward to future installments.



Wisconsin State Journal, Nov. 1, 1957

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #50, **Matthew Mitchell** recognized St. Patrick's Day. It struck me that Charles Lee Jackson II hasn't been

providing his customary holiday covers for APA-L. I know he's been cranking out the hits in terms of new books, but I'll reach out to him to encourage him to return to submitting covers. My wife and I didn't do anything to celebrate the day, despite Irish blood in both our family trees. My sister sent a homemade greeting card, and last weekend my wife shared a notable obituary with me: Rose Dugdale, an heiress and freedom fighter. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/22/world/europe/rose-dugdale-dead.html>) In the past, my parents would make corned beef and cabbage but did not this year. I didn't even wear green!

Which Bruce Campbell book did you read? I have *If Chins Could Kill* and *Hail to the Chin* somewhere around here. He's a trip. Why did Johnny Carson's friendship with Henry Bushkin end? I'll also share your feedback with cover artists Marc Schirmeister and Megan Giles. Having been born in 1973, I'm a Water Ox. That jibes with also being Pisces. "Quite the treatise..."! Faint praise? A backhanded compliment? I'll take either.

John Hertz's *Vanamonde* #1586 shared a review of a recent performance by the San Francisco Symphony. He also commented on cherry blossoms and the death of Nancy Wallace. I shall have to seek out that collection of Rudyard Kipling (above) sf!

In *Toony Loons* #753, Joe Zeff updated ellers on prescription deliveries and healthcare appointments. I recently received a check from UCLA Health indicating I had received a credit after a recent audit of my account there. Several days later, I received an invoice for my recent annual physical. They could've kept the money until it was needed! Interestingly, I also received a call from my dentist indicating I had a credit there, too. I still need to call them back to specify how to handle it. I'll share your feedback with cover artists Marc Schirmeister and Megan Giles. Wasn't that wonderful?

### About the Illustrations

What you're seeing in terms of illustrations this is a bit of an experiment. I've been wanting to get more use out of my *Newspapers.com* subscription, and when we return to Portugal next month (April 5 to May 6, 2024), it'll be challenging to scan fanart in advance like I did last time. This approach will serve both purposes. I'll likely turn my attention to Los Angeles-area newspapers and theaters in the future to better fit APA-L and the area's history, but I think such illustrations will work just fine. Just fine.

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Wisconsin State Journal, Nov. 1, 1957

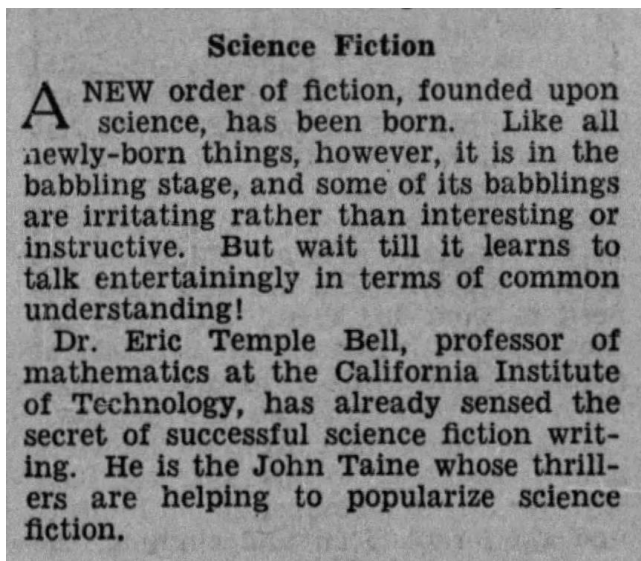
## The Explosion Containment Umbrella #18

March 30, 2024

*The Explosion Containment Umbrella* is an apa commentzine 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.

### The SF Drama of Eric T. Bell and John Taine

Inspired by Ahrvid Engholm's History Corner in *Intermission*—and wanting to get more bang for the buck from my *Newspapers.com* subscription—here's a bit of Los Angeles sf history. The first mention of the phrase "science fiction" published in *The Los Angeles Times* occurred on March 30, 1930. In the *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*, Ransome Sutton contributed a piece titled "What's New in Science" that included the following item:



Bell (b. Feb. 7, 1883; d. Dec. 21, 1960) was born in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. A mathematics professor at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), he was a poet and popular science writer. By 1930, the time of this article, he'd published a handful of sf novels, including:

- *The Purple Sapphire* (E.P. Dutton, 1924)
- *Quayle's Invention* (Dutton, 1927)
- *The Gold Tooth* (A.L. Burt and Dutton, 1927)
- *Green Fire* (Dutton, 1928)
- *The Greatest Adventure* (Dutton, 1929)
- *The Iron Star* (Dutton, 1930)

- *White Lily* (*Amazing Stories Quarterly*, Winter 1930), later published as *Seeds of Life and White Lily* (Dover, 1966)

Sinister Cinema's Armchair Fiction (<https://www.armchairfiction.com>) reissued *The Greatest Adventure* as part of its Science Fiction Classics series in 2014—among several later books—but much of his work doesn't seem to have been widely kept in print.

A June 1, 1930, profile of Bell includes additional references to the fledgling genre. Braxton Blades's profile "Dr. Bell, Alias John Taine," also in the *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*, considers the educator and author's dual personality, likening him to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. "Scientists as a class are the most pathetic writers in the world, the pathos being that they do not know how flat their masterpieces fall," Blades writes. "Taine ... takes subjects from realms where reason hardly dares to go and makes them not only understandable, but thrillingly interesting."

The reporter remarks on the recent birth of "scientifiction"—"[N]o hard, fast rules have yet been formulated," says the unnamed editor of an unnamed "magazine of speculative and fictitious science"—and lists Bell's sf works to date, describing *White Lily* as "amazing." Bell himself suggests that "[a] science fiction story should be a real adventure story, with a scientific background. The dual purpose is to entertain and educate. But if we make our educational material so uninteresting that few care to read it, then we have failed entirely in both purposes." *White Lily*, then, theorizes that earthquakes (how apropos for southern California!) are "chemical creations."

Blades concentrates on the proposed predictive aspect of sf, suggesting that *Green Fire*—"written ten years ago"—forecast television and international radio communications networks. Bell himself concentrates on the educational aspects of sf. "There's a great new field opening to science fiction writers, for 'scientifiction' is only in the babbling stage as yet, and babblings bore people," he said. "But wait till this babbling babe grows up and learns the tricks of the trade! It will disseminate science in popular fiction form as successfully as some writers are now disseminating sex stuff. And the popularizing of learning is just as important as its creation."

Bell contends that a firm scientific background is necessary for quality science fiction. "I wish those who undertake to put biology into the hands of fiction readers would first study biology, then study fiction writing," he said. "The telling of a story is just as important as the story itself."

Sutton returned to Bell in a Feb. 14, 1932, "What's



New in Science..." roundup for the *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*:

## Queen of the Sciences

IN A ONE-DOLLAR book, published by Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore, Dr. Eric T. Bell, professor of mathematics at the California Institute of Technology, takes the Queen off her throne, seats her in an easy chair and puts her to work on the problems of science. Her Majesty is mathematics. And while Dr. Bell did the thinking, it was John Taine (the pseudonym under which he writes science fiction) that wrote this book and he made it peculiarly fascinating and instructive to people interested in abstract subjects. We are living, he says, in the golden age of mathematics, when men are attempting to storm the heavens, but he does not believe mathematicians should become concerned in particular theories. Like accountants, they should keep their figures right and let other people run the business. He definitely disagrees with those who think the Queen of the Sciences is infallible. On the other hand, he shows how she makes mistakes, prevaricates and often fools herself as well as her most capable apostles. Because this book gives a new view of mathematics and a new viewpoint for right thinking, it has been "selected" and recommended by the editors of the *Scientific American*.

Sutton had previously written about *The Queen of the Sciences* in *The Los Angeles Times* on Jan. 17, 1932. While the book is not sf, but a popular science text (part of Williams & Wilkins's Century of Progress series), Bell—as Taine—had by then also published the novel *Seeds of Life* in the Fall 1931 issue of *Amazing Stories Quarterly*.

An interview by Marjorie James Wilkeson published in the Nov. 22, 1931 *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine* compared Bell to Jules Verne and H.G. Wells using "fiction as a medium for prophecy." "In his *Green Fire*, which, made into a play, was recently a great hit at the Community Playhouse in Pasadena, he fortold [sic] television in 1919, when

nothing beyond what was predicted by pure mathematicians was known of its possibilities."

That production, which ran from May 28 to June 6, 1931, was reviewed by the *Los Angeles Times* on June 2, 1931:

## NEW DRAMA GIVES VIEW OF FUTURE

*"Green Fire" by Dr. Bell  
Presages Power of Science  
in Year 1990*

BY KATHERINE T. VON BLON

(Reprinted from Monday's late edition)

"Come with me—and together we will play at being God," challenges Jevic, master mind of the scientific forum of 1990, in that amazing romantic glimpse into the future, "Green Fire," melodramatic scientific adventure by John Taine, (Dr. E. T. Bell of California Institute of Technology,) produced by Pasadena Community Playhouse with futuristic daring.

Science has indeed ceased to be that dry and musty lore, the especial property of antiquated professors. It is the high adventure of Life itself, and when the mad genius of the play seeks conquest, it is the high stars and spinning planets which are his pawns. Not for other worlds does he seek, but the very universe itself becomes the ultimate goal of his crafty planning. He seeks control, he elects to unlock the energy of the atom, to wrest from the very stars their hidden power. He is no idealistic dreamer, but a lusty adventurer who, through his strange alchemy would destroy the very world itself which sits so prettily in the hollow of his hand; a typical Napoleonic creature devoid of humanity, a superegotist, victim of an abortive destructive complex.

The play evolves around a terrific struggle for supremacy between the master of evil and a humanitarian professor and his associates who battle with scientific forces to annul his power.

The play, dramatized by Glenn Hughes, moves with dramatic certainty despite the fact that in certain expository interludes there was considerable drop, notably when Jevic relates episodic periods of his life to his sympathetic secretary.

The Playhouse with the co-operation of scientists from Caltech and its own imaginative scenic artist, Corliss McGee, is producing the opus with modernistic design, which yet maintains an air of reality. The laboratory of the master-mind with its great test tubes and monster machines of science are awe-inspiring and the last scene with its terrific flashes of lightning bursting between the globular controls is a terrifying procedure.

The gallant and flinty creature, product of a super-mechanistic period, was played with splendid feeling and ironic subtlety by Arthur Clayton. His projection of the monstrous nature of the man was convincing and even his voice bore the rasping resonance of dominance and cruelty. Blanchard Bartlett, arrayed in futuristic garments vaguely presaging trousers for women, was gracefully competent in a part which gave her little opportunity. Addison Richards as the scientific surgeon and adviser gave a virile characterization. The intensity of the scientific mind was somehow a little lacking in Ralph Freud's otherwise convincing portrayal. Donald Braydon and Betty Jenks were others.

Additional background was offered by the *Los Angeles Times* on May 19, 1931:

### New Pasadena Play

Arthur Clayton, whom playgoers will remember in "White Cargo," will have the featured heavy role in "Green Fire," a romantic melodrama (new) to start at the Pasadena Community Playhouse next week. Clayton will have the role of a scientist who, with diabolical intent, uses a remarkable discovery to further misanthropic ambitions.

"Green Fire" has an interesting history. It is by a drama professor who based it on the fiction story of a friend, one of America's outstanding mathematicians, who is also well known as a writer of mystery tales.

Glenn Hughes, head of the drama department of the University of Washington, is responsible for the play form. Hughes, a Stanford graduate, is author of "The Story of the Theater" and translator of Japanese and Chinese drama.

He took it from the novel of the same name, written under the pen name of John Taine, by Dr. E. T. Bell of the California Institute of Technology. Bell, an eminent mathematician, has to his credit such books as "The Purple Sapphire," "White Lily," "Quayle's Invention," "The Gold Tooth," "The Greatest Adventure" and "The Iron Star."

A subsequent production of that play staged by the Claremont Community Players in Padua Hills, received coverage in the April 3, 1932, *Los Angeles Times*:

# “Green Fire” to Be Production at Claremont

CLAREMONT, April 2.—Collaboration of the outstanding leaders in two fields, science and the drama,



GLENN HUGHES

is responsible for the production of “Green Fire,” exciting scientific melodrama laid in the year 1990, which is to be the seventh production of the Claremont Community Players at the Little Theater in Padua Hills.

Production dates will be the 12th, 13th, 14th,

15th and 16th inst.

“Green Fire” was adapted by Glenn Hughes from the novel of the same name by Dr. E. T. Bell of the California Institute of Technology.

Hughes is author of “The Story of the Theater” and numerous plays. Dr. Bell, who writes scientific fiction as a pastime under the nomdeplume of John Taine, is considered one of America’s greatest mathematicians.

Monroe Lathrop’s “The Season in Southern California” in the Burns Mantle-edited *The Best Plays of 1930-1931* (Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1931) includes a mention of the Pasadena Community Playhouse’s premiere of *Green Fire*, including it among a handful

of plays that “gave some promise of value to the commercial theatre.” Lathrop was then drama editor for the *Los Angeles Express*. While Glenn Hughes’s play is no longer in print, its copyright was renewed in 1959.

I’ve started reading *The Purple Sapphire* and plan to procure a copy of the novel and play versions of *Green Fire*. Perhaps a table read is in order for Loscon this fall!

## Comments on eAPA #239

What a fun cover for this mailing! Light research suggests that that image was drawn from a Marigold Press *Star Trek* color and activity book that featured a cover image from *Star Trek: The Movie*, while the innards included pictures more in line with the original series. Fen being fen, a *Reddit* thread indicated that “[t]he men appear to be wearing season 3 uniforms, and Uhura is wearing season 1,” and that she’s sitting in the captain’s chair. I’m not sure those are the kind of mistakes the editors were intending.

In *Living Inside Number 9*, **William McCabe** mentioned difficulties including URLs in his fanzine, now produced using Scribus. What do you like about Scribus that inspired you to change tools? I enjoyed your comments on Julius Taranto’s *How I Won a Nobel Prize*. *Goodreads* classifies the book as political fiction and a satire, perhaps focusing on the cancel culture aspects. During a recent meeting, a member of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society recently reviewed Bonnie Garmus’s novel *Lessons in Chemistry*, which is now an Apple TV+ series. The book is about a woman chemist in the late 1950s and 1960s and explores how women broke the glass ceiling in the sciences. Your description also reminded me of Jonathan Lethem’s *As She Climbed Across the Table*. I think fiction about science is fair game for our pages, as well as more straightforward sf.

I was unfamiliar with *Escape* magazine and now need to check it out! The title published 19 issues, as well as graphic novels, between 1983-1989, featuring work by Eddie Campbell and Glenn Dakin, both of whom I appreciate. The full run seems available on the *Internet Archive*, so I shall have to dig into it. Thank you for introducing me to it!

Your discussion of William Wilson’s 1851 contention that “[f]iction has lately been chosen as a means of familiarizing science” via R.H. Home’s poetry is intriguing. “If you can find a version of an sf encyclopedia with a timeline they may mention this book as the first known mention of science fiction,” you continue. Fascinating! The familiarization aspect resonates with Bell’s remarks above on popularizing and seems consistent across the decades. I wonder if

Wilson meant sf in terms of fiction about science (like Taranto and Garmus's books above) rather than speculative fiction.

Your comments to Ahrvid Engholm about potential American intervention in the Russo-Ukrainian War made me think about the United Nation's recent veto of the United States' ceasefire resolution for the Israel-Hamas War. Who knows how much support the US will lend? I recently voted in our primary election for the presidency and hope that the "leading candidate" doesn't even come close to winning, though he's secured the Republican Party's nomination. Personally, I tend to consider socialist leanings as offering serious potential rather than limitations, though I think the label suffers from post-communist concerns. It confuses me that socialism remains such a scare, when much of my country's population—or at least leadership—seems to support the current Russian regime. What a turnabout from McCarthyism!

Henry Grynsten's *Wild Ideas* #44 focused on the popularity of sports. I appreciated your remarks on the potential self-confidence benefits of reading fiction. I think society offers several empathy engines at various scales, ways to learn about other people and ways of being: families, schools (including universities), churches, community groups, cities, and so forth. Fiction might also serve as an empathy engine. It allows us to experience the lives—or presumed lives—of other people (even if just the author), to learn how other people might think or feel, and perhaps to develop ways to better navigate the world.

Fiction can expose us to experiences and ways of being unavailable in the empathy engines in which we are active. Whether that growing sense of empathy or understanding of other people results in self-confidence consistently, I'm not sure. But it seems to be one possible outcome. (We're willing to imagine, attempt, or experience situations we have some similarity with because of reading.) Reading fiction can teach us about the world beyond our own—as can television and film—and increase our sense of the possible.

The connections you make between team sports and hunting—and war—are intriguing and compelling. It's a way to fence off more aggressive pre-agricultural or -industrial behaviors. (Perhaps a result of the "empathy for both people and animals increas[ing] in the West" as you suggest.) It's also a way to relieve occasional human tendencies toward violence. When we can't kill another man or hunt a beast, we play pickleball or cheer for our team.

I was curious whether you would draw parallels to gladiatorial combat. "[F]or every sport, an

intermediate stage between a hunt and a game was catching animals and then hunting them, in what can be said to be a re-enactment of the original activity" you wrote. "The venationes of the Romans stand out." The same might be said about any gladiatorial combat, also a recreation of tribal warfare—and a precursor to the team sports of today.

**ORPHEUM** TONIGHT AT MIDNITE!  
WE'VE GATHERED ALL THE CREEPING AND CRAWLING HORRORS FROM HALLOWEEN AND PUT THEM IN ONE  
**GIANT SHUDDER 'N' SHOCK**  
**DOUBLE-DEMON SHOW!**

**The BEAST-THING from HADES!**  
**HELL IT CAME**  
starring TOD ANDREWS TINA CARVER  
ALLIED ARTISTS PICTURES

**KILLER-WITCH of the JUNGLE!**  
**THE DISEMBODED**  
starring PAUL BURKE ALLISON HAYES

**ALL NEW AND WE PROMISE It'll Separate the Men From The BOYS!**

*Wisconsin State Journal*, Nov. 1, 1957

In the spirit of sports being used to fence us in, to cordon off currently unacceptable aggressive behaviors, Karl Marx said that religion is the opiate of the masses. Perhaps religion has been replaced in that regard by organized sports. Many people pay much more attention to sports than they do to, say, voting in local or national elections, or engaging in community service. Supporting a local team becomes a proxy for civic pride or engagement, and distracts sports

fans—distinct from fen, though the fandoms are similar—from what might be more important issues. After all, voting is aggressive, another form of chase or kill that’s no longer acceptable.

Los Angeles Times, March 15, 1957

In *Intermission* #142, **Ahrvid Engholm** concentrated on early robots in literature and film. Your perspective on robotics and automation might be rosier than mine. I find the dog-like robots produced by Boston Dynamics fearsome, and worrisome tools for police. On a recent night out, my wife and I encountered several delivery robots, perhaps those made by Starship, while out for dinner and a play. (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #108) Two of the three spent a lot of time hesitating at street corners or in more active pedestrian areas. I expressed concern that the food would not be delivered hot, but we also discussed ultralocal delivery opportunities. More widespread, smaller-radius deployment areas could mitigate delay concerns. And a colleague appreciates the autopilot mode of his Tesla while commuting along the coast.

Like Klaus Johansen, Bay Area fan and LASFS member Tom Digby died March 27, perhaps because of complications related to Parkinson’s Disease. He’d recently entered hospice care, then hospice at home, and deteriorated quickly. Friends with him at the end had prepared a playlist, which you can explore at <https://tinyurl.com/Digby-playlist>. A collection of his fan writing is available online at <https://conchord.org/xeno/digby/digby.html>. While we never met or corresponded, we were both members of the Well, and additional resources are available at <https://people.well.com/user/bubbles>.

I am conflicted about Walter Isaacson’s book about Elon Musk. While I recognize his presence on the world stage and his influence, I don’t think we’re told—or we forget—the real story about his accomplishments or abilities. I just don’t participate in the hero worship. (I don’t think you do, either. “I’m afraid his general style and other ideas may destroy [X],” you write.) I think that X, SpaceX, Tesla, and his other endeavors have been successful— if they are such, which is debatable—because of other people around him, not because of him. I don’t think he’s actually “founded” anything.

But he does come from money. His family owned a stake in a South African emerald mine. He wasn’t a founder of PayPal; he was an investor. He wasn’t a founder of Tesla; again, he was an investor and legally arranged to be named as a founder. His acquisition of X has not improved free speech on the platform or in society. That doesn’t mean he’s not important, just that he’s no Henry Kissinger, Steve Jobs, Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, or Leonardo da Vinci. Those are the leaders Isaacson has written about in the past. Your description of the book makes it seem more nuanced than I expected—I haven’t yet read it—and his algorithm is interesting.

Your History Corner concentrating on the Science

Fiction League struck me close to home. I've experienced the same difficulty reconciling the first print mentions of the SFL with its supposed origin date. A fellow LASFS member and I have been trying to map meeting numbers back to the beginning of the club, using a variety of sources, and there are some gaps in which the LASFS might not have met weekly, perhaps before it became the LASFS, and perhaps afterward. There is a *Fancylopedia* entry ([https://fancylopedia.org/Science\\_Fiction\\_League](https://fancylopedia.org/Science_Fiction_League)), and you're right that the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* entry is surprisingly scant ([https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/science\\_fiction\\_league](https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/science_fiction_league))

Looking back at a January email thread with my compatriot, I see that the February 1934 issue of *Wonder Stories* indicates no major presence of the SFL, but the April issue's table of contents includes an SFL editorial by Hugo Gernsback. I'm not sure what happened between February and April that year. The October-December 1934 and January 1935 issues all include Los Angeles in a list of proposed chapters. In fact, all of the chapters are listed as proposed in every issue, so it's difficult to identify when such chapters became formally organized.

The 1942 *LASFS in Explanation* ([https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/LASFS/lasfs\\_-\\_an\\_explanation\\_uncredited\\_c1942.pdf](https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/LASFS/lasfs_-_an_explanation_uncredited_c1942.pdf)) includes the following: "After a year of preliminary preparations our Club was founded 6 February 1936 as the 4th chapter of the International Science Fiction League, sponsored by *Wonder Stories*, & as such has held nearly 200 meetings. [I've yet to check *Wonder Stories* that month to see if it progressed from a "proposed chapter.""] We subsequently received a charter as Chapter #1 of the Science Fictioneers, under the auspices of *Super Science Novels* & are affiliated with the *Weird Tales* Club. In addition to which a number of our members constituted the First Overseas Branch of the Science-Fiction Assn. IHQs in England."

The LASFS entry in *Fancylopedia* says "When the parent Science Fiction League began to fall apart in the late 1930s, [Forrest J Ackerman] aided the club in staying alive by declaring its independence on March 27, 1940, as the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society." The SFL entry there confirms the LASFS as the fourth chapter, first meeting as the Los Angeles SFL on Oct. 27, 1934. So there's little consistent agreement across sources. 1940 might be the date of the name change, but based on our meeting number calculations so far—presuming weekly meetings, which might not be the case—1936 might be a more accurate launch date (or beginning of the weekly cadence) than 1934. I hope my partner in crime writes about his efforts at some point.

**Garth Spencer's** *I Never Got the Hang of Thursdays* #219 posed several questions: What are the most practical, material issues that I have to reckon with? How much about employment, personal finance, home repair, pets, appliances, healthcare, and the law do we have to know, as average adults, or how much should we leave up to specialists? Some people like to take much of that on themselves. I'm not one of them. I'm not good at many things, and I worry that the likelihood I make a costly mistake (say, in investing or our taxes) outweighs the cost of hiring someone. So my wife and I employ an investment advisor, a tax preparer, a gardener, a cleaner, and home repair professionals as needed. I'd rather spend my time—which is expensive—doing other things. That said, a neighbor and I did recently fix our kitchen faucet, which meant I didn't need to call in a plumber. My wife successfully troubleshot a briefly inoperable washing machine recently, as well. She's handier than I am, and that's okeh. I am glad you have Yvette. Thank you for the reminders to schedule a dermatology appointment and call my dentist back about a billing credit!



*Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1957

That we're not taught more about life management as teenagers or young adults is honestly appalling. That everyone needs to figure all of this out on their own is bizarre to me. I missed out on some early stock unit grants as a not-so-young professional because I didn't realize I didn't need cash on hand to buy them, that I could sell to cover the purchase. I wish I'd had more of a professional support network surrounding me back then, even though we're still comfortable.

I mentioned the Aurora Awards in a recent issue of *Telegraphs & Tar Pits* (#108)—but mostly that I know of their existence and little else. I look forward to learning more! I need to check on the *Blue Moon Special* submissions again after I meet some deadlines this weekend. We could probably aim to publish midyear.

# 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). Check out the 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.



**ANYWHERE MAN, BOOK TWO** (\$2.00 postpaid from Rob Cooley, 7128 Munsee Ln., Indianapolis, IN 46260) Rob Cooley's Anywhere man encounters the mind-boggling evil of MINDSCARE as the lines between real and imaginary cross in an exciting sf saga!



**CAPFAN #1** (\$3.00 postpaid from Rob Imes, 13510 Cambridge #307, Southgate, MI 48195) The first issue of Rob Imes' zine devoted to Captain America, offers many thought-provoking articles by Rob, including "Captain America and the American Dream" and "Hydra Cap Was Actually Good!". The editor offers an overview of the great hero's adventures, and his thoughts on the way changing political and social trends have affected the stories.



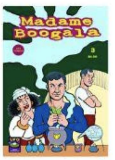
**FANZINE ONE** (\$4.00 postpaid from Tom Fellrath, Phoenix Publications, 8031 Griswold Drive, New Albany, OH 43054, or PayPal/Venmo to @tdfellrath) Tom Fellrath says "part of the fun of being a fan is in sharing one's passions," and then he does just that. In this true fanzine, we see representations of art by such notable talents as Art Spiegelman, Arthur Adams, Bill Willingham, Marcel Deneuve, Steve Steiner, and more.



**HEROES NOW: THE HEROES RETURN** (Order on Amazon: \$4.99, available at <https://tinyurl.com/heroesnow4>) Tom Fellrath's thrilling superhero team returns, as the Patriots – Jeff, Parkour, and Fuse, attempt to save an American scientist in Syria only to find her reluctant to be rescued! Are her loyalties divided? - and what is her strange relationship with a powerful otherworldly being? Tony Lorenz illustrates. Also including artwork by Keith Newsome, David Tryzenski, Tom Ahearn, Bob Hall, and more!



**THE IMPROBABLE GIRL AND THE WONDER KITTY #9** (\$10 US to Joe Carrales, Carrales Studios Productions, PO Box 1274, Premont, TX 78375-1274 (Canada inquire for prices), or PayPal to jecarrales@yahoo.com) Once again the question is posed: "Can two mailroom heroes save the day?" Beginning with a gorgeous color cover by Don Simpson, Joe Carralles III answers in dramatic fashion! Mari and Niko parachute into enemy territory to battle the evil Druid and Organization Orko. "It's what we do in defense of liberty! Make it mean something!"

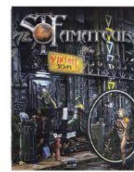


**MADAME BOOGALA #3** (\$6.50 ppd. to Larry Johnson, 31 Greenbrook Road, Hyde Park, MA 02136, or PayPal LewBrown1@verizon.net) The incredible saga of Madame Boogala and her son Goomar, of the "Magic People," con-

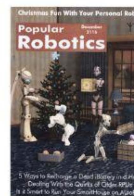
tinues in a beautifully illustrated full color comic from Larry Johnson. A young man shows up at the Madame's magic shoppe claiming to be the "Son of Goomar!" Is all as it seems? The excitement builds as demons invade from a dark and sinister otherworld!



**SMORGASBOARD #1** (\$4.50 postpaid from Jim Main, Main Enterprises, 130 Wellsville Ave., New Milford, CT 06776, or, PayPal to: [jmain44@aol.com](mailto:jmain44@aol.com)) Jim Main returns to the UFO with a vengeance, and a hilarious new title SMORGASBOARD! Beginning with an eye-popping Floyd Sumner front cover, the book offers such zany features as "I Am a Spaceman" by Jack Bertram, and Simon Mackie's "When Anki Met the Beatles." Included: the wacky stylings of Kel Crum, Alan Groening, John Lambert, Larned Justin, and more!



**THE STF AMATEUR NOVEMBER 2023** (\$6.00 postpaid from Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230, or, PayPal to [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com) or @Hrow . Outside US rates inquire via email. Free PDF Available @ <https://efanzines.com/HR/index.htm>). Heath Row's fascinating sf/comics/fantasy/commentary zine features a wealth of material. This issue details Heath's trip to Tokyo and reviews AQUAMAN, JOKER, and classic cinema (ATTACK OF THE GIANT LEECHES!). Also: con reports, a stunning cover by Alan White, and more!



**THE STF AMATEUR DECEMBER 2023** (\$6.00 postpaid from Heath Row) Heath Row travels to Portugal with an absorbing account of the journey and the culture that he encounters, then goes in depth with movie reviews, apa commentary, and more. Cover by Tiffanie Gray.



**STINGER OPS #4** (\$2.00 postpaid from Rob Cooley) Rob Cooley delivers, with two action packed sf stories featuring such memorable characters as Z'oni Moons ("a man who dances to his own beat") and Bubbles McFarland, who finds himself in an epic battle with Frankie, the Robot Robber. Exciting fantasy entertainment!



**STRANGE TIMES #4** (Available only from Amazon: \$9.99, available at <https://tinyurl.com/strangetimes4>) The theme is "The Road Back," and many of the finest creators in the alternative press contribute stories of life's pain, and the battle to overcome. Among the contributors: Chuck Bunker, Keith Newsome, Matt Levin, Joseph Morris, Ryan Holgeron, and many more. A beautifully produced, stunning book in full color!

