



**The Stf Amateur 9**

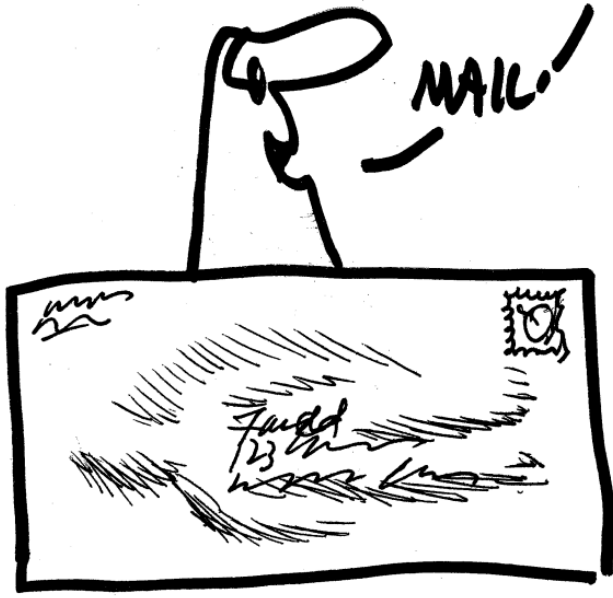
## ***The Stf Amateur 9***

June 2024

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You can learn more about cover artist Larry Johnson at <https://tinyurl.com/LarryJohnsonComics>.

*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 the Fanac Fan History Project (<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

[For the last few months, William Breiding and I have engaged in a lively email exchange. Several of those wonderful and welcome emails—and my responses—are lightly edited below. (He wondered why I didn't publish them last ish!)—HR]

**William Breiding:**

By and large your reasoning is sound in your comments about “no comment.” ... I'm a harsh critic of fanzines and fan writers and some fanzines and writers I find just dreadfully dull and they will be unlikely to receive a loc from me. ... Luckily fanzines are by and large digital these days so these fan publishers are none the wiser because they are not wasting postage on my non-response, and no hard feelings occur. ... The whole issue of fanzines as gifts is a problem I struggled through with *Portable Storage*. Some seemed to find a big fat fanzine coming to their homes unasked for an affront, not a gift at all, and seemed offended, when I was thinking it was a gift!

[Your comments about fanzines being a gift ... merits thought. I certainly view them as such. If someone sends me theirs, they Want Me to See It. I'm Important Enough to get one. Especially a big fat awesome fanzine that clearly took work and cost beaucoup postage. It surprises me that people would take receipt as an affront. Maybe it's just the physical reminder that Someone Has Your Address. What am I supposed to do with this thing?—HR]

In my own case, I have a variety of reasons why I'll come up with a “no comments.” I value what you are doing so I will tell you, at the minimum, RAEBNC. If I did not value your work I'd simply not respond, even with that. Because I like your work and hence, you, I read everything, or nearly everything, in *Stf*, you can be assured of that. But I frequently tire of my own voice and opinions and even though I might have enjoyed your zine I (1) simply have nothing to add or (2) am in a cycle of hating my voice and want to keep silent. Even with fanzines I enjoy, like Andy Hooper's *Captain Flashback*, and Nic Farey's *This Here...* I frequently go months without responding because I have nothing to add to the conversation. And, being a kind of ultimate fanzine fan, worse even than Harry Warner [Jr.], I can sometimes be very hermit-like, and non-communicative. For instance, this email I'm responding to only now: I just didn't feel like dealing with correspondence. Nothing personal to you, Heath, I do it to family, old friends, and fans I've known for forty years. ...

[Thank you for liking my fanzines and thereby me. Same, as the kids say. Besides, my understanding blather aside, Every Single Word I write is worth reading. There might be a new one in there somewhere.

I will never interpret your silence. ... Any words are a gift with this stuff... —HR]

As you know, if you read the latest *Captain Flashback* [#64], I sometimes dream about fans. You've recently made an appearance in my dream life—twice. Most recently after our recent exchange.

[That is most flattering! I rarely dream about people I haven't met face to face, and it usually denotes how they've emerged into new or ongoing importance in my life.—HR]

Two things were on my dream mind (1) you do too many apazines which precludes (2) doing a dynamic genzine. We were in conversation about this (in person) in the dream. I think the dream was sparked by your “call for submissions” for a genzine, which to my mind is not the best way to get quality submissions (though I'm impressed Cy [Chauvin] has been sending you stuff). Have you approached any writers and artists you admire and queried them about possibly contributing to *Stf Amateur*? Just wondering.

[That might indeed be the case, but to be honest, without the apae deadlines, I don't think I'd be this focused or prolific in my writing. Right now it's fun to apahack and see what each month brings—69 pages

most recently—and see if I can gently swerve into genzine stature even alongside the apahacking. But the hybrid approach does raise questions. Are people submitting to an apazine with a small readership? Yes. Are they submitting to a longer fanzine with a potentially larger readership? Yes. Is that more or less challenging to either set of potential readers? Is that challenge frustrating enough to quell reading? That's the risk, I suppose.

Cy has been sending me material in pieces and parts, initially for publication in *The N3F Review of Books*, though I stopped actively brokering for George Phillis as my contributions to the Nefzines waned. I have yet to start querying people and started including the call for submissions on a whim to see what it drummed up, if anything. There's Cy, who sent me another review a while ago... and I plan to group his material into longer roundups to give him more play and a byline instead of a tagline, as you've alluded to. And I've received a couple of short stories for reprint from a LASFSan who might have intended them for my teased relaunch of *Shangri L'Affaires*, though I'd rather use them in the meantime rather than wait to gather enough material for a clubzine. The idea you raise is a good one, though.—HR]

In the first dream, oddly, your wife also made an appearance. Since I don't know what she looks like or even her name I thought this rather interesting. Don't really remember what the dream was about, but it might've had something to do with your trips to Portugal.

[Her name is Caitlin. She's a gift.—HR]

I just read your loc-a-torial in *Stf* #7, the “no comment” expansion stuff from our email exchange. There are a number of points I'd like to address.

Since my first dip into fan publishing in 1974, it's been my experience that silence is the resting state of fanzine fandom. In both incarnations of my genzines, *Starfire* in the 1970s and *Portable Storage* in the 2010s-2020s, there were a core of active respondents of maybe 40 people that were truly engaged with what I was doing. That's not counting the contributors, of course. I don't know how many contributors *Starfire* had, but *Portable Storage* had over 100 contributors through its nine and a half issues; that means writers and artists, not letter writers. I know this because we went through and counted them all and gave thanks to all by naming them in issue Nine, the final issue (there was a follow up digital-only issue of letters and two bonus articles that was counted as a “half issue” because there was no hard copy). (Btw, you did an

excellent job delineating all the variables entailed in exactly why there might not be any comments forthcoming on a given issue of a fanzine.)

[What's neat to me is that with *eFanzines* and *Fanac*, I don't—can't—even know how many people are downloading or reading any given issue. I know how many people have requested that I email it monthly (66 lovely people), and I know how many people thank me for sending it via email (Perry Middlemiss), and I receive the occasional LOC or email that can be used as an LOC. I realize that it's a numbers game, and a funnel. And I quite like the phrase “silence is the resting state.” RAENBC, unvoiced—perhaps. Part of my recent editorializing is a bit of a goad: for submissions, for LsOC. And it seems to be snowballing gently, which is heartening.—HR]

The “40” folks who were engaged enough to loc is actually a significant number. Each incarnation of my genzine had a print run of about 180 copies. When I mentioned this to someone at Corflu 41, their response was “that many?”; i.e., saying in effect they thought that was a pretty good turn out with a print run of 180. But I would have preferred more, even just an “I got it in the mail today” email would have been great, but that, apparently, was asking too much.

[When I published *Karma Lapel* as a newsprint tabloid with Steve Willis and Scott Saavedra covers, I printed 1,000. I didn't distribute that many, however, and recycled many bundles over successive relocations. 180 is a sizable circulation for a fanzine, and a 22 percent LOC rate is pretty darn good. As you said, more would be nice. Part of why we do this is to interact with friends, perceived, imagined, or actual.—HR]

Following this train, I think it's probably been the experience of the majority of fanzine publishers that digital-only fanzines get far less response. There are some who get amazing responses like, say, Nic Farey, but Nic's secret is that he actively pursues engagement first by sending direct to a fan and second, by not just his written persona, but by his subject matter. It feels as though Nic is talking directly at you. With your setup, that is not the case. A few other digital fanzines also have great loc columns, but they remain the exception, not the rule.

[That came up during a fanzine panel at Gallifrey One earlier this year. PDFs can be shunted aside, not seen, and forgotten, while a hard copy sits around and demands occasional touching. Even with my intending to write 12 LsOC a month, I wrote not one last month,

and that means I read no fanzines other than the apae in which I'm active. "It feels as though Nic is talking directly at you. With your setup that is not the case," resonated with me strongly. In each apazine, I am talking directly to other apans in the comments, but my general content talks to everyone, and effectively no one. I also liked your use of "at you" vs. "to you." At, it is! That might be okeh.—HR]

And then as referenced above, we have the weird hybrid of *Sf Amateur*—it's a collection of zines written for apas, which does not automatically make one want to respond if you are not in that specific apa. Apas are, at their best, conversations, (and at their worst, frustrating, when you don't get any MCs!) and a different beast than a genzine or perzine. By trying to turn *Sf* into a genzine while maintaining the separate apazines you have set yourself up for a particularly difficult task. It's innovative and interesting, and I'll be fascinated to see how *Sf* morphs over the next year, and what you will be able to pull off. I'm hoping it won't fail and that you start producing a hot shit fanzine that everyone wants to be a part of. But to do that you have to engage not only a readership, but a cadre of potential contributors. And to do that (and to succeed) you are going to need to go far beyond just writing a full page "wanted: contributors" ad and start personally querying (i.e., begging!) those you admire to see if they might send you something. If you just wait to see what comes in over the transom it could be very disappointing indeed. I don't know what levels of writing you are willing to publish. But remember this: low-level writing continues to encourage more submissions of low-level writing. You set a nice high bar in your own level of thoughtfulness and writing ability, but as a fan editor, where does your bar sit? It's something you need to think about. If you are serious about doing a genuinely good genzine. Which I am. Some might say I take it too seriously. But I consider fan publishing art and I take art seriously.

[The gold here is "But to do that you have to engage not only a readership, but a cadre of potential contributors." Initially, transom it is, indeed, and I'll have to exercise editorial selection... Your caution against low-level writing is well taken, and I will avoid that. That gives me the idea to think about what kinds of content I'm currently producing—tons of review-like stuff (in part, I write so I watch more and read more, so I have more to write about), tripreps—and what I'd like more of—articles, essays, sercon, fiction—and approach people who write such things.—HR]

You are off to a good start with Cy Chauvin's sercon writing, but you blew it by its placement—his first pieces I couldn't differentiate from your own work without working to identify it was Cy. With issue #7 you've clarified who's writing far better, but Cy is still not well presented enough. That is also something you'll have to consider if you want to attract consistently high quality contributors. They are not going to want to get lost in between a bunch of Apa-Natter.

[That is a fair criticism, and resulted from my not packaging Cy's standalone reviews. Given that I start with apazines—again with the hybrid approach—I wanted to share Cy's commentary with each apa—which led to not doing a more sizable roundup that would give him more marquee presence. He doesn't seem to mind so far (Hi, Cy! We're talking about you.), but it's a fair point. Taglines aren't the same as bylines, and nesting his reviews amongst my own doesn't showcase his work or voice as well as I might as an editor.—HR]

The problem I had with your "ignorable [themes]" is that you very fully cover most of the territory. The electromagnetic [pulse] piece and the disruption of the electrical grid was timely for me because *The New Yorker* just had a long piece on this issue, pretty much a cautionary tale revealing that we (the entire human Earth) are not ready for a solar disruption and aren't likely to be by the time it happens because the issue seems so diffuse. The piece didn't deal with it as a human-made act of war, but that seems quite a probable thing to occur at some point in the nearish future. The article predicted the long side for reestablishment—10 years or longer at this point.

[That is something else I've been thinking about recently. Do apans crowd out other apans? If one is prone to writing more, does that encourage or discourage other participants? I don't want to write less, but if it's discouraging others, maybe I do. In any event, I hadn't seen *The New Yorker* piece and will seek it out.—HR]

The sf and culture topic: You missed the obvious, which is culture affecting sf. Think about the Sad Puppy assault on the Hugos in the twenty-teens and what prompted that assault—sf's ongoing cultural diversification. The whole affair was a tempest writ small of what's occurring in larger world culture. One that is going to intensify over the next decade.

[I think I addressed cultural currents affecting sf as a literature, but I neglected cultural impact on fandom

and fanac, to be sure! The Sad Puppies were definitely an encroachment of conservative forces on fandom.—HR]

Since retiring, I've finally found some time to start viewing a portion of some of the sf/f streaming series. From what I've watched, I'd say that the fantasy series have it over the sf, with the possible exception of *The Expanse*, which was freaking awesome. The following is a list of the series I've watched that I've liked: *The Expanse*, *The Magicians*, *Halo*, *The Umbrella Academy*, *The Witcher*, *Cowboy Bebop* (the original anime series is wonderful, but I also enjoyed the live action version), *Sweet Tooth*, *Wednesday*, *Lost in Space*, *Carnival Row* (an excellent piece of writing, that), *Wu Assassins*, *Another Life* (this was somewhat sketchy, but enjoyed, nonetheless), *Fate: A Winx Saga* (surprisingly effective and heartfelt), *Night Flyers*, and *Into The Badlands*.

I also enjoyed these non-sf/f series: *Song of the Bandits* (a Korean epic based during the occupation of Japan), *The Sinner* (an extremely dark take on the detective genre), *Marco Polo* (a high-strung, well-written series), *Mystery Road* (an Australian detective series), and *Godless* (a gorgeously done Western). Also, a guilty pleasure: *The Black List*; James Spader is a hoot.

Of course, I've watched the biggies, *The Wheel of Time* and the Lord of the Rings series, both of which I enjoyed. Like you, I thought the diversity and inclusiveness were well integrated and entirely thoughtful. I did laugh at your wife's comments that *The Wheel of Time* was Emo Boys at the Ren Faire! But then one could say the same about Peter Jackson's Tolkien epics—Orlando Bloom? Oh, swoon! I tried *Stranger Things* and was completely put off by Wynona Rider's ham-fisted acting and gave up during the third episode. I assume it got better because it was hitting the Emmy Awards.

Oh yes: That cover is just gorgeous! You've set a high, high level. Keep up the good work.

As ever, I enjoyed the latest bundle known as *Stf Amateur* #8. Occasionally I wish I had an ansible attached to my brain so that I could instant message you while I'm reading your work so you could get my thoughts-as-comments; they may not manifest in other media, like the written word, otherwise. So I'm pushing here because I want to see this experiment of yours succeed. It's oddly become something of an issue with me, how apazines are leaking away talent from genzines. There are people out there I don't even know about who are writing great zines for apas that I've never heard of.

[Isn't that the case? I was perusing some samples from the Southern Fandom Press Alliance not long ago and was struck by the quality folks who've gathered there. And if ANZAPA weren't so daunting in its size, that seems to be a place to be, too. If only I could contribute to one more apa!—HR]

I'm hoping your example, if seen widely enough, will encourage all those strangers in apas to become friends by posting at eFanzines.com (hi, Bill!).

[It's not a bad idea. Apazines aren't given the same weight as other fanzines—unless they're older, and then by *Fanac*—and often don't make it beyond their apan strongholds.—HR]

When you first started posting your weekly zines at eFanzines.com, I thought it was mildly wacky and egocentric.

[That made me grin. I forget who it was, but during my first foray into apae, at least one fellow apan in some apa wondered aloud—or in print—who the heck I thought I was. “God's gift to fanzines” might have been used pejoratively. I wish I remembered who that was—and what I'd done to warrant that! The egocentrism is intriguing to me. Don't we do this stuff to share with the world? Isn't it all somewhat performance? Why five people when it can be x? (Given my previous comments about having no idea how many people see or read anything online.)—HR]

But it wasn't until Bill insisted that you start bundling them that a wider picture of your personality became apparent. And as you've proceeded, your apazines have become lengthier and meatier.

[I've noticed that, too, especially since I've (a) started keeping track of my page count monthly and (b) identified what I over index (reviews) and under index (everything else) on.—HR]

(You can have lengthy zines and be skeletal and surface—the meat comes from the willingness of depth.) How you produce nearly 70 pages every month is beyond my comprehension or ability, though! I'm hoping that you can successfully transition to making *Stf* a genzine. I don't see exactly how you are going to do that. It's an innovation, certainly, because of the number of apazines. Have you given any thought as to exactly how you would transition to a genzine?

[What I don't want to do is cut the mailing comments or shuffle them all to the back matter to isolate them

or enable people to just skip them. But I have thought about leading with more article-y stuff, grouping all the reviews into respective sections, and so on. The thing is, I want to move on to the next apazine and next ish rather than spend time editing or repackaging the *Amateur*. I also want to publish *De Profundis* (a week behind deadline) and *Menace of the LASFS* (three months behind deadline). I'm also a month behind on LASFS minutes because of my travels. There's so much to do and so little time. So I hack on, creating multiple not-quite snapzines and hopefully not crudzines. That might not be sustainable if I decide that a general readership is more important to me than a weekly cadence of productivity or page count monthly. I worry, though, that focusing on a genzine as such will lead to not writing or publishing. These deadlines drive me.—HR]

Your presentation of Cy [Chauvin]'s work was muddled at best. You need to figure that out, eh? I haven't seen any of your old mainstream zines, or know if you had other contributors, but first rule: Please your contributors! You have been able to get some really great covers. Consistently the best overall at eFanzines.com. I suggest you use the same wiles you've used to get the artists to approach the writers you admire. I'll stop there, but I could certainly continue to discuss the topic.

[At the end of *Karma Lapel*, before it went perzine again (KL-chan, then *Hedge Trimmings*, and others—which earned me the remark from one wag that I was the Samuel Pepys of the 1990s), I definitely had a stable of contributors, mostly of articles and such. All the reviews were mine, except for a few.—HR]

Random comments: re fanart and fanartists. Probably my all-time favorite fan artists would have to be Steve Stiles, Dan Steffan, and Ray Nelson. Two of those guys are now dead (hint: not Dan!). There have been so many of them throughout our history. [William] Rotsler, of course, and Atom. Currently working, Ulrika O'Brien is one of the best, and like many of our fanartists, she is also a great writer. Kurt Erichsen remains vivid, too, and as you know he's publishing again (see [the United Fanzine Organization]), and the latest *Endeavor* is a thing of wonder. Jim McLeod and Joe Pearson are out of this world, though Jim is not working too much these days. I adore both Taral [Wayne] and Marc Schirmeister's work. Incredible line work, with very specific fetishes. Grant Canfield, of course! Talk about amazing. Al Sirois (the old work you've been

publishing is really fun, but what he's doing now: incredible.) Brad Foster has been one of fandom's stalwarts not only as an artist but as a lochack. Alva Rodgers. George Barr. Alicia Austin. Kip Williams. Charlie Williams. Steve Fox. Tom Foster. The list is just too long. Aesthetically, the use of fanart: In *Portable Storage* I wanted to use art very specifically for the writing, so I was unable to publish as much "fillo" and cartoon work as I had wanted. I had very specific goals for that zine. The eighth issue I was able to let loose a little with more "fillo" work because it was *The New Yorker* pastiche issue. So lots more cartoons and random sketches. Artists tend to be undervalued in fanzines so I really wanted to make space for artists to shine, and included a lot of artist portfolio work.

[That's also something I haven't done yet—commission art to accompany writing, which I did as editor of *The National Fantasy Fan*. Your list of artists is welcome and useful. I quite liked the portfolio section included in the recent *Worlds of If* relaunch issue. That's something else to consider: portfolios like we used to order through the mail... only as PDFs like Alan White's annual collections and more recent compilations. Most of my fillos are archival work from Marty Cantor's collection, with permission from the still living. I've yet to seek new illos but have received some from Ulrika O'Brien and White. I see Teddy Harvia is doing new work again, so that might be worth seeking out, as well. His archival work is very fun.—HR]

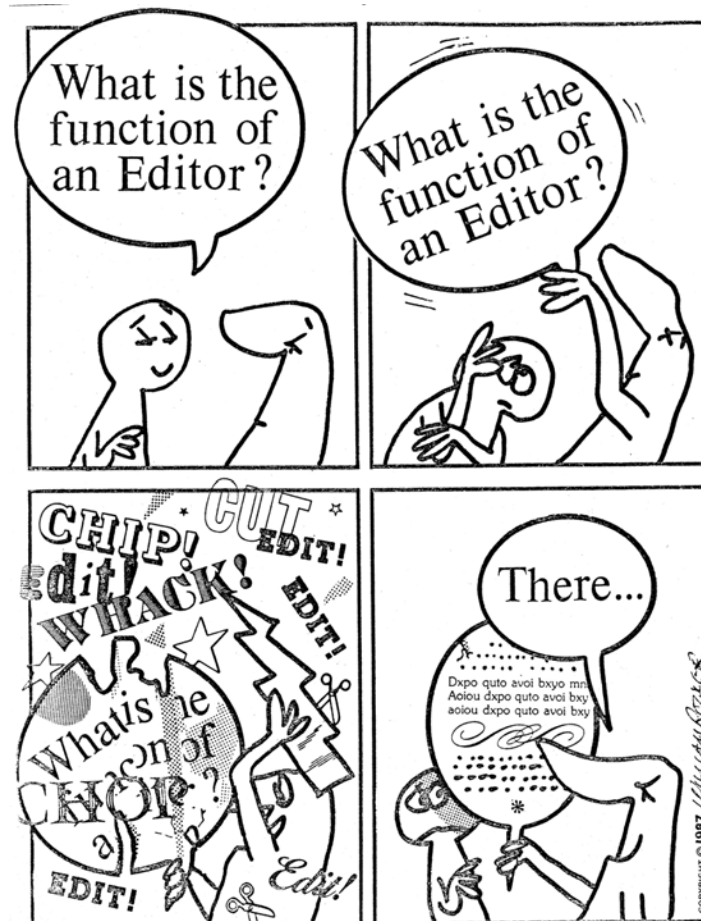
Alex Garland: You reviewed *Ex Machina*. Garland is probably one of the most undervalued sf filmmakers right now. His works as a screenwriter, director, and novelist are subtle and exploratory. He doesn't tend to be splashy, with heavy concentration on character and theme.

[I was unfamiliar with him and will seek more. The movie impressed me.—HR]

Favorite quote of the issue: "Regardless, I'd rather read comic books"

[And that's the honest truth.—HR]

# 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 #113

May 2, 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

Joe planned to be late,  
so I waited until morn.  
Just 16 minutes!

Last week, Joe Zeff let me know that his contribution to APA-L would be late. The 2 p.m. PT deadline is 10 p.m. here. Because we're not printing and mailing while I'm in Portugal, it made sense to give him some leeway. Doing so didn't delay anything. So I decided to go to bed instead of waiting up, and planned to email the distribution the following morning.

I was pleasantly surprised Friday when I woke up to see Zeff had emailed his fanzine at my 10:16 p.m.—hardly late at all! I managed to email the distribution by 8:45 a.m. my time—12:45 a.m. PT. It was waiting for you when you woke up.

### Trip Report: Portugal (cont.)

Thursday, April 25, 2024, was the 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, which marked the end of the authoritarian Estado Novo: Dia da Liberdade. The weeks and months leading up to the holiday—and anniversary—have included ongoing features in print news media and on television focusing on the history of the mid-1970s transition to democracy. We were aware of it even last November.



Raising the flags for Dia da Liberdade

On the day itself, my wife and I drove into Póvoa de Lanhoso having obtained a copy of the schedule of events planned to recognize the day. We parked at the end of the park toward the trailhead (*T&T* #111) before making our way to the Câmara Municipal da Póvoa de Lanhoso for the opening ceremonies.

After a performance by a marching band that approached the câmara from up the street, we witnessed a flag raising that included the European Union, Portugal, and local flags. Mourning doves were released into the air with a fluttering of wings before a number of speeches. It was a special moment to share with the citizens of Póvoa de Lanhoso.

At the same time, the local weekly market was in full effect on the other side of the parking lot by Cyber Café—which is mostly cafe and not very cyber. The people who run it are very nice, and we've enjoyed their coffee several times, but there's no public Internet terminals on site. The last time Caitlin and I went to the local market, it was raining quite hard, so it wasn't the full experience. This time, it was the full experience, with the entire area full of vendors of clothing, household goods, produce and food animals, and other items for sale.

We bought some clothespins, a deliciously buttery goat cheese, and a couple of CDs (see below)—and were pleased to see the people who sell produce at the Taide market earlier in the week. They seemed pleased to see us, too. Walking around briefly downtown, we also experienced a sound check by a musical group that would perform on stage later that afternoon. We were honored to be in Portugal to share such a meaningful anniversary of such an important day.

The next day, last Friday, we ventured south to Lisbon for the first time. We were able to check into our hotel room mid-afternoon, so we planned to leave midday for the four-hour drive. It was a pleasant drive, combining country roads with highways—our rental car equipped with a transponder for the tolls—and we stopped a couple of times: once for gas, and once at a rest stop offering restrooms and picnic tables.

Our reason for going to Lisbon: Contacto (<https://imaginauta.net/festival-contacto-2024>), an annual sf convention, this year's recognizing the 10th anniversary of Imaginauta (<https://imaginauta.net>), a small publishing company focusing on Portuguese sf and fantasy. I'd been in touch with its founder and editor Carlos Silva and looked forward to participating in the event.

The hotel wasn't far from the site of the con, the Biblioteca de Marvila, and the event began Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m. Friday night, Caitlin and I settled in at the hotel and walked to the nearby 1940 Fonte

Luminosa before grabbing a quick dinner at Istanbul Kebab and Pizzas. After we ate, we walked around the corner to Livraria Martins, where we primarily browsed in the poetry and theater section. Interestingly, mystery and fantasy were shelved in the same section—the first time I’d seen that.



Mystery and fantasy shelved together!

Several books richer, we repaired to a nearby cafe, Mini Copa, for tea, cake, and light reading before returning to the hotel for the night. One of the books I procured was a 1988 Portuguese translation of Heinrich von Kleist’s *About the Puppet Theater* (*As Marionetas*), which was later collected by Antígona in 2009. The book, issued by Hiena Editora, was dedicated to the Museu da Marioneta in Lisbon. (<https://www.museudamarioneta.pt/en/museum>)



So that is where we started our day Saturday, before I headed to Contacto. Having downloaded the Bolt mobile app the night before—it’s like Lyft or Uber—we walked to breakfast at Sam Cafe before hailing a car to the museum. It’s a wonderful,

intensely focused collection of marionettes and related items, eventually concentrating on the history of Portuguese puppetry, its primary practitioners, and modern examples of the art. Later exhibit cases resonated with items we’d seen at Cinanima, which was interesting. (*T&T* #91)

We picked up an early lunch of *tosta mista* at a cafe in a nearby park (Jardim São Bento, perhaps) before I hailed a car to Contacto in Marvila. Arriving before the program began, I was able to explore the event’s layout and book tables.



Several publishers had materials on display: Imaginauta, Divergencia (<https://divergencia.pt>), Escorpião Azul (<https://editoraescorpiaoazul.wixsite.com/bandadesenhada>)—whose *Edição Extra* I’d picked up at Livraria Martins just the night before—and El Pep (<https://edicoeselpop.blogspot.com>) run by Pepedelrey, the latter two purveyors of independent comics. I particularly enjoyed meeting Silva and Pepedelrey.

Though I don’t yet speak Portuguese, I went to the first panel discussion featuring Ana Teresa Barreiros,

Erdan Nightwalker, Inês Rodrigues e Melo, and Nuno Almeida: “What Is Fantasy For?” It seemed like an interesting and energetic conversation, primarily devoted to each panelist responding to a series of questions in sequence. I picked up on references to J.R.R. Tolkien, mainstream literature and young adult fiction, the Chronicles of Narnia, cosplay, and other authors including George R.R. Martin, Joe Abercrombie, Mark Lawrence, and Veronica Roth (see below). I look forward to becoming more adept with the language so I can better understand such conversations—I’m sure the programming was rich over the course of both days.

Shortly after 3 p.m. I met up with local fan, author, and editor Octavio dos Santos (<https://octanas.blogspot.com>), with whom I’ve been corresponding via email. We spent a couple of hours getting to know each other and discussing Portuguese sf and fantasy literature and media, local fandom, his work as a journalist and sf pro, the role of music, and other topics. I then returned to the hotel to meet my wife for dinner at a nearby restaurant: People. That led to at least one *Soylent Green* joke.

The next day, Sunday, Caitlin and I went to Castelo de São Jorge for the morning. We’d made plans to meet a long-time friend from Sweden for ice cream that afternoon, so we parked near his home before walking to the castle. While my friend and I hadn’t seen each other in person since 2001, we’d kept in touch, and he’s lived in Lisbon since 2013; when he saw that I’d RSVP’d for Contacto, he reached out to me to see whether I planned to visit Lisbon. I was already there! It was so much fun to reconnect with him and meet his family. Small world, smaller.



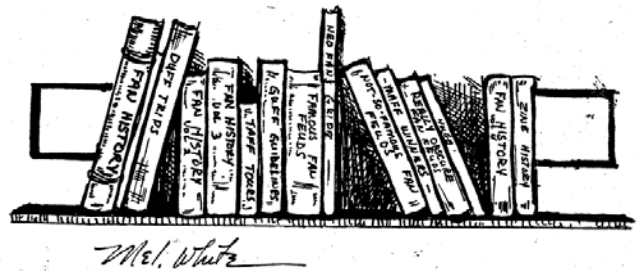
The castle features a number of artifacts and exhibits before you enter the castle proper, which helps visitors orient themselves to the history of the

structure. Originally built by the Moors in the 11th century to house their army, Portugal’s first king, Afonso Henriques, claimed it in 1147, making it a home for the royal family. The castle’s grounds are notable for their view of the city below, as well as its peacocks, perhaps descendants of those brought to Lisbon during the 15th century Age of Discovery. The peacocks are quite numerous—and quite loud.

You can walk around much of the edge of the castle along the top of its walls, affording some excellent corner views. You can also walk down a 150-step extension down to a smaller observation platform that’s effectively a dead end. You might not realize that until you get there, but it’s still worth the extra walking.



After fully exploring the castle, we stopped for a brief lunch at 28 Cafe—which I didn’t realize was transit themed while we were there—before returning to my friend’s neighborhood to see his home, meet his family, and enjoy some afternoon gelato before our return north. An excellent first visit to Lisbon!



### From the Reading Pile: Book Reviews

*The Body Snatchers* by Jack Finney (Atria, 2015)  
Having recently watched *The Invasion* (*Faculae & Filigree* #30) and being a fan of the 1956 and 1978 movies titled *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, I recently read Jack Finney’s 1955 novel *The Body*

*Snatchers*, which served as the source material for all three, as well as other movies. Originally serialized in *Collier's* magazine in late 1954—the periodical featured a shorter version in the Nov. 26, Dec. 10, and Dec. 24, 1954, issues—this was first published in book form in 1955. It was rewritten as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* in 1978, though I'm not sure how the texts differ.

This 2015 Atria edition, borrowed as an ebook from the library, features a foreword by Dean Koontz. The novel is excellent, reminiscent in a way of Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* in its relationship to its movie adaptation. And it's much more science fictional than any of the movie adaptations to which I've been exposed.

Primarily, the novel explores the idea of panspermia, or life forms in space drifting to Earth, where they rejuvenate and spread. In the case of Finney's novel, it's a form of alien invasion, as an alien life form consciously spreads to other worlds, fully well knowing that its beachhead on any given world will be short lived. The aliens—the body snatchers—explain exactly what is going on and why through some relatively lengthy and detailed exposition, which I quite enjoyed.

The theory, the notion, whatever you want to call it, that some of our plant life drifted onto this planet from space, is hoary with age. It's a perfectly respectable, reputable theory, and there is nothing sensational or even startling about it.

Lord Kelvin, one of the great scientists of modern times, was one of many adherents to this theory, or possibility. Perhaps no life at all began on this planet, he said, but it drifted here through the depths of space. Some spores, he pointed out, have enormous resistance to extremes of cold; and they may have been propelled into the earth's orbit by light pressure.

Though published in the mid-1950s, the book takes place in the mid-1970s, and the narrative begins on Oct. 28, 1976. Knowing that the book was rewritten in 1978, I'm curious whether the original serialization included that date. Finney's combination of panspermia, Capgras delusion—an actual psychiatric disorder—first contact, alien invasion, small town intrigue, and love story is a fun, compelling read.

Critics including Damon Knight, Groff Conklin, Anthony Boucher, and P. Schuyler Miller have offered a relatively wide range of reviews, assailing the book's scientific inconsistency and lack of originality while praising its straightforward readability. Personally, I enjoyed it, and I'll seek out other film adaptations in the future. Even the love story aspect resonated.

Finney contended that the book wasn't at all about the Red Scare of the 1950s. And on NPR's *Fresh Air*

in 2011, Maureen Corrigan suggested that the body snatchers might merely represent people changing, aging, developing, and growing. Perhaps that's terrifying enough. We all change over time, for good and for ill.



—William Rotsler

## Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

### *Divergent*

I haven't read any of Veronica Roth's young adult dystopian novels, but I was inspired to watch this 2014 adaptation of her 2011 book, the first in a series, in part because of *Alita: Battle Angel* (T&T #111). The movie was titled *Divergente* in Portugal. Incidentally, a speaker at Contacto last weekend (see above) mentioned the series—and Roth—as an inspiration.

In any event, not having read the books, I watched the movie solely as a movie. It's not bad, but it's chock full of concepts that will be familiar to readers and viewers of YA dystopian fantasy. Society is messed up. In a post-apocalyptic Chicago, Lake Michigan is dried up—yielding a couple of awesome

CGI views of beached ships—and the city is protected by a very tall fence. It's unclear what it's being protected from, though it might just be the rest of the world. (I expect future outings to include a *Wayward Pines*-like revelation, but only time will tell.)

Inside the city, the population is recovering from the unexplained apocalypse, divided into five factions—the brave, kind, intelligent, selfless, and honest—that fulfill roles based on their faction. The kind are farmers. The intelligent administrators. The honest adjudicators. Brave, police officers. And your place in society—your faction—is determined by the family in which you're raised, as well as the outcome of personality tests applied when you reach young adulthood.

Usually, similar to Harry Potter's Sorting Hat, the faction assignment decision is clear-cut. Unless it's not. Unless you're... divergent... or representing multiple personality types. Unless you can't be pinned down or defined by the narrow rules of society, man, because you're too much of an individual, a free spirit. In that case, you're considered a threat, someone who undermines the stability of this society in recovery, and someone who should be chased down and killed, actually. So there's that.

The protagonist, a young woman, tests as brave, intelligent, and selfless—but keeps that secret, choosing the Dauntless (brave) faction, in which she undertakes a series of tests that will ensure her a place in that group of fun-loving, highly energetic—borderline psychotic—soldiers. There's a handsome, brooding love interest with a past. There's a conspiracy in which the Erudite (intelligent) strive to utilize the Dauntless to exterminate Abnegation (selfless) in order to seize power. And the movie ends with a *Maze Runner*-like run to the border after the attempted coup is thwarted.

I make fun, gently, but I enjoyed the movie, would watch its sequels, and might even read the books, or at least one. I enjoyed the transparency of the YA themes as well as the science fictional approach to aptitude and personality testing. What if society were defined by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator? What if India's caste system were more broadly applied?

### **Warcraft**

After watching *Divergent*, I was keen on watching a straight-ahead fantasy, and in the DVR queue, this 2016 video game adaptation was the closest thing going. Titled *Warcraft: O Primeiro Encontro de Dois Mundos* in Portugal, it's actually a very enjoyable movie—and serves as a prequel of sorts (I think?) for the Blizzard Entertainment video game series. It was reportedly based on the tie-in novel *Warcraft: The*

*Last Guardian*, written by Jeff Grubb—who's also written *Magic: The Gathering*, *Dungeons & Dragons*, and *Star Wars* tie-ins in addition to a wide range of *D&D* roleplaying game materials.



*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 27, 1957

My experience with the video game franchise focused on 2004's *World of Warcraft* online game. Similar to my wife's enjoyment of *Myst*, I enjoyed *World of Warcraft* because you could just run around exploring the lush and beautifully rendered world even if you didn't engage with it as a game. (If I had more time, I'd play a game like that even now.) The movie struck me as somewhat similar, utilizing places from the game—Stormwind, for example—and aggressively using CGI to represent the orc horde, magic, and fantastic beasts.

Escaping the orc's homeland, which is being destroyed by evil magic, an orc mage opens a portal to the human realm of Azeroth, first bringing human and orc forces into conflict. A half-orc woman serves as an intermediary between the two groups, as well as a love interest. Refreshingly, there are good and bad characters amongst the horde—the orcs—as well as the alliance—the humans. And the portrayal of the moral decline of the human mage Medivh is well executed.

Occasionally, the special effects can be distracting—there's... just... so... much... CGI!—but there are some very cool visuals, including a battle griffon, a

stone golem, and the progressively evil influence of fel magic. Human knight Anduin Lothar is charismatic and heroic. Orc chieftain Durotan is principled and honorable. And Khadgar is a gifted young mage who's briefly taken under the wing of magical guardian Medivh.

However, it struck me that this could have been the *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* of its time, but I'm not sure that it was. In February, *World of Warcraft* averaged almost 9.3 million monthly players and 2.5 million players daily. Those aren't 2016 numbers, but more than 50 million people have reportedly played *D&D* around the world. How many *currently* play? Sure, the Warcraft games only date back to 1994, but why wasn't this movie a bigger deal than it was? Tonally, it's similar to the *D&D* flick. And it makes me want to explore related tie-in novels and the roleplaying game.

### Ignorable Theme: Soundtracks

This week's Ignorable Theme asked: "Do you listen to movie and TV show soundtracks? What are your favorite sf, fantasy, or horror scores—or related music?" Back in 2022, I used to monitor ongoing genre soundtrack and film score releases (*Snow Poster Township* #4-5 and #7, and *Faculae & Filigree* #15, for example), and I've been impressed by how streaming television has increased the amount of genre media soundtrack material—*music*—available for fannish listening. I'll consider resuming the practice of monitoring new releases.

Portuguese fannish acquaintance Octavio dos Santos (see above) has compiled a directory of 900 record albums inspired by sf, fantasy, and horror. (<https://tinyurl.com/sf-records>) I don't agree with all of his selections—for example, I'm not sure Herbie Hancock's 1964 *Emyrean Isles* qualifies—but the list is rich fodder for discussion, as well as for listening. You can't go wrong exploring what's on that list.

So far this week, I've been concentrating on his selections listed into the mid-1960s. That includes Joe Meek & the Blue Men's *I Hear A New World: An Outer Space Music Fantasy*—which demands further exploration—Hancock's *Emyrean Isles*; several Sun Ra recordings including *Art Forms of Dimensions Tomorrow*, *Secrets of the Sun*, and *The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra Vol. 1*; and the Byrds' *Fifth Dimension*. Check out the list. What would you add? What would you remove? There's so much good listening worth exploring—and absolutely none of it soundtrack oriented. We discussed that when we hung out together at Contacto last weekend.

But in the last few weeks, one of the records I've been listening to most frequently is a CD compilation

issued by the Portuguese film festival Fantasporto. (<https://fantasporto.com/pt-pt>) Based on the booklet's centerspread of festival posters, the CD might have been released in 2003, the most recent poster included in the design. The CD compiles 15 songs and pieces of music, representing mostly then-recent genre films. Mario Dorminsky offers liner notes on the pieces selected, which draw on movies from *Blade Runner* to *2001: A Space Odyssey*. You can check out a playlist recreating the compilation at <https://tinyurl.com/Fantasporto-CD>.

And last week at Póvoa de Lanhoso's weekly market held at the Campo da Feira, I was pleased to see at least two music vendors, mostly selling Portuguese traditional and dance music on CD and thumb drives. (A memory stick containing who knows how many MP3s sells for €15.) We'll return to them, to be sure, but the CD I bought at the market, appropriately, was *The Best of Vangelis*.



A CD vendor at the market

### Comments on APA-L #3067

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #55, **Matthew Mitchell** asked a rhetorical—or perhaps existential—question about his hands. Do your hands look alike? Do they look the same day after day? Do you remember what your hands look like? Surreal, man.

In response to the previous Ignorable Theme, you discuss the writing of James White, who hails from Ireland. I've appreciated your mentions of him during LASFS meetings (see the March 2023 *Menace of the LASFS*, for example) and have added the series to my media recommendations list for future exploration. I'll also have to check out Jorge Luis Borges's short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." You and I landed in the same place in regards to the English language.

I'll share your feedback with cover artist Al Sirois. Your recollection of Paul Verhoeven force fitting a

screenplay into Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*—or vice versa—reminded me of the movie *I, Robot* (T&T #112). I misread “garlic roaster” as “garlic monster,” which made me chuckle.

**John Hertz's** *Vanamonde* #1591 discussed Passover, which ended April 30. “[D]uring the Seder we are all like royalty,” he wrote. Your and Lee Gold's conversations about Judaism and related topics are a highlight of APA-L for me. My wife's name is pronounced “Kate'-Lynn,” with the stress on the first syllable. Some day, I'm sure I'll say it in your presence. Her family's lineage is predominantly Irish. I'll share your feedback with cover artist Alan White.

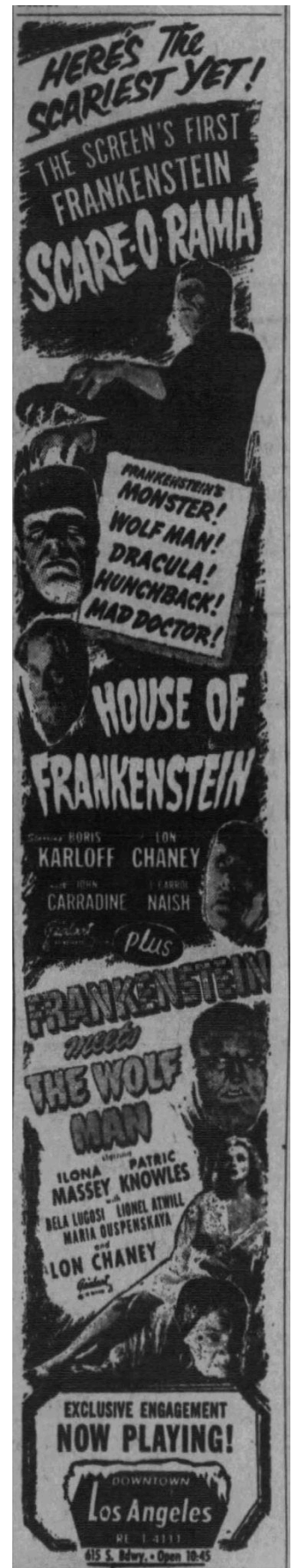
In *Toony Loons* #757, **Joe Zeff** updated ellers on personal finance and health insurance developments. When the fish and chips truck was there, did you eat “two thirds of the fish, and about half the chips” ... in the truck? How did they feel about that? How did you feel afterward?

Good news that you've procured a ticket for Bouchercon. May you get the hotel room sorted easily. My wife and I are planning a trip to Chicago in early July to see friends before continuing to Wisconsin to see my parents and sister.

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“In 1950, a U.S. Army psyops officer named Paul Linebarger used a pseudonym to publish a science-fiction story titled ‘Scanners Live in Vain’ in a pulp magazine. It was about a man named Martel who works for the ‘deep state’ in the far future as a mysterious ‘scanner,’ or starship pilot, and whose mind is manipulated by evil bureaucrats. After a new technology called a ‘cranching wire’ restores his true senses, he recognizes that his bosses within the government order a hit on anyone who challenges their control of space travel and the economy. Martel ultimately joins an insurrectionary movement aimed at overthrowing the regime. ...

“Linebarger, who died of a heart attack in 1966 at age 53, could not have predicted that tropes from his sci-fi stories about mind control and techno-authoritarianism would shape 21st-century American political rhetoric. But the persistence of his ideas is far from accidental, because Linebarger wasn't just a writer and soldier. He was an anti-communist intelligence operative who helped define U.S. psychological operations, or psyops, during World War II and the Cold War.”—*The Atlantic*, April 28, 2024



*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 6, 1957

## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #114

May 9, 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**  
*Madame Web* soundtrack  
while I finish collation:  
almost 1 a.m.

Is combining PDF files collation? Regardless, I was indeed listening to *Madame Web*. Now that I'm back from travelling, we resume print collation and mailing rather than emailing the full roster PDFs.

### Trip Report: Portugal (cont.)

Caitlin and I returned from Portugal on Monday. The Friday before our final weekend, during which we prepared the house for departure, we ventured into Braga for the first time this trip—other than Ikea at Nova Arcada. We drove in for lunch to spend several hours walking around before meeting a couple of friends at their home outside the city for dinner. It was raining again, so we took umbrellas and hoped that it didn't rain too hard. Thankfully, it didn't.

Upon arriving, our first stop was Altercos (<https://altercos.com>), which, in its new location, is now primarily a restaurant first, and shop second. Hosting the Naruto Uzumaki Anime Restaurant, the menu is Japanese influenced and anime inspired. I ordered the Naruto Ramen, which was quite good. Wasn't the best ramen I've ever had; wasn't the worst. (I had just been to Tokyo, so my standards are high!) And we enjoyed catching up with the proprietor Luis, who ended up having family connections with the previous owners or managers of the restaurant by the Castelo de Lanhoso near the house we stay in when we visit.

After lunch, we walked around to revisit our favorite locations, stopping at two bookstores to fill time. I picked up my usual issues of *A Batalha* and *Mapa* (<https://www.jornalmapa.pt>), as well as an edition of *Os Lusíadas*, a 16th century epic poem. After searching unsuccessfully for stationery as a present for our friend, we also stopped by the Livraria Bertrand, where I assessed their sf and fantasy

sections before sitting down to take a rest from walking.



The fantástico is most prevalent, shelved above the ficção científica and jovem adulto (YA), which I hadn't noticed previously. Before returning to the car to head to our friend's home, we checked out a local chocolatier, Leonidas. (<https://leonidas-lovers.pt/>)



[pages/leonidas-braga](#)) We enjoyed pastries and chocolates with tea, then left the city.

The previous day, Thursday, while running errands in Póvoa de Lanhoso, we visited Casa do Livro, the local library. They don't issue library cards, per se, but we signed up to be able to use the library should we want to (five books at a time, for 15 days), then explored the stacks. It's a small library, mostly in Portuguese, but there are a few shelves of English texts. The highlight, however, was an Oferta (offer or gift) shelf by the front desk on which there were shelved many science fiction paperbacks.



They were not library discards, but they were free for the taking. After texting a friend about the find, I took about half of them, the librarian providing a paper bag. A handful of them were Galeria Panorama titles from the Série Antecipação. The remainder were from a series of reprints published by Publicações Europa-América. In the late 1970s and 1980s, PEA issued the Livros de Bolso, série Ficção Científica.

Initially I thought it was serendipitous that the

science fiction was shelved so near the entrance! I look forward to reading them in parallel with an English edition as I begin to learn the language.

### **Fantastic Television: *Star Trek—Strange New Worlds***

While flying back to Los Angeles via Frankfurt, Germany, I realized that Paramount+ was featured on the onscreen entertainment. I'd picked up several newspapers while in the Frankfurt airport (see below) and noticed an article in the *Financial Times*' May 6, 2024, edition about the Skydance bid for Paramount. (<https://tinyurl.com/Skydance-Paramount>) The topic of potential bidders for Paramount had come up earlier this year at Gallifrey One (*T&T* #104), and in many ways, the future fortunes of Paramount are the future fortunes of Star Trek-related television and streaming series.

Given that serendipity, I decided to finally check out *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*, of which eight episodes were available courtesy of Lufthansa. I watched the first three. "Strange New Worlds" first aired May 5, 2022, so it was almost two years to the day—even more serendipity! "Children of the Comet" aired May 12, 2022, and "Ghosts of Illyria" aired May 19, 2022.

What a wonderful program! The first episode ties into *Star Trek: Discovery*, and Anson Mount and Ethan Peck reprise their roles as Christopher Pike and Spock. Spock's engagement with T'Pol was a delight. Celia Rose Gooding's casting as a younger Nyota Uhura brings back a beloved character, and Dan Jeannotte portrays George Samuel "Sam" Kirk, brother of James T. Kirk. Finally, Jess Bush's role as Christine Chapel revives another beloved character. She even flirts teasingly with Spock!

Episodes address rescuing a Starfleet officer from warring factions, one of which has reverse-engineered a warp bomb after witnessing a *Discovery* mission—concentrating on General Order One, later the Prime Directive—intercepting a threatening comet that turns out to be so much more, and the disappearance of a colony—touching on genetic manipulation.

The intertextual connections between this series, *Star Trek*, and *Star Trek: Discovery* are rich and well represented, and the reuse of footage from "The Cage" strengthens that relationship. As good as the show is—these first three episodes are well written and rock solid tonally—I wonder whether it works because it is what it is, or because of its connection to the original series. Gooding has big shoes to fill taking a role originally played by Nichelle Nichols. Do I like her as Uhura, or do I just like Uhura? A similar question could be asked of Bush as Nurse Chapel, though she

seems to be broadening her remit a little in the role.

Regardless, it's fun watching younger versions of characters I have loved so well for so long, and I look forward to seeing how the series unfolds.

### Ignorable Theme: Fan Feuds

"Have you ever been involved in a fannish disagreement or feud? What's the most recent fan feud of which you're aware?" I wouldn't say that I've been involved in fannish feuds, but when I served on the directorate of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, I'd occasionally be involved in disagreements and public debates about club activities. Most of those involved the editing of Nefzines, primarily accusations and instances of plagiarism—and how to address them. Otherwise, I tend to try to be relatively politic in my fanwriting.

Regardless, over the years I've sometimes rubbed people the wrong way or offended people unintentionally. In one instance, during my first foray into apa, a fellow apa contributor thought I became involved with too much swagger, and William Breiding even commented recently that "When you first started posting your weekly zines at eFanzines.com, I thought it was mildly wacky and egocentric." So I'm mindful of asserting too much ego in my enthusiasm. And I remain apologetic for offending the people who've taken issue with things I might have written.

When I've taken issue with others, I've tried to keep it to personal correspondence and outside the pages of my fanzines. It's usually not important to name names when such things occur, as that tends to merely stir a pot best left resting.

The first fan feud—if that's even what it was—I became aware of was perhaps the Breendoggle (*T&T* #4). I was also aware of the Sad Puppies affair, but does that count as a feud? Garth Spencer has recently questioned why fannish hoaxes have diminished. I wonder whether fan feuds have similarly diminished.

*Fancylopedia 3* (<https://fancylopedia.org/Feuds>) suggests that feuds are marked by efforts to exclude one of the participants from fandom. So the more recent Chengdu Worldcon Hugo debacle might qualify given the treatment of some of the actors involved. (For example, Dave McCarty not allowed to attend Eastercon [<https://tinyurl.com/McCarty-Eastercon>].) And I recently learned of something via social media that might also qualify. Milwaukee-area sf author Patrick S. Tomlinson has been experiencing an ongoing series of "swatting" and other harassment because of remarks he made about Norm Macdonald. (<https://tinyurl.com/Tomlinson-swatting>) Most recently, a literary agent reached out to a con

committee attempting to get Tomlinson barred from attending a con. I don't know many details and couldn't immediately find the post I encountered this week (<https://tinyurl.com/Tomlinson-agent>), but such occurrences mystify me.

Who's got the time to seek disagreement? Who's got the energy to sustain it? With fandom as small as it is, how do we balance inclusion and acceptance with better handling bad behavior? Con runners are increasingly discussing how to handle "broken rungs" in sf clubs and con committees. But feuds seem somewhat different. When do personal disagreements overwhelm the greater good of fandom as a group?



—Alan White

### Comments on APA-L #3068

I selected Rev. Ivan Stang's artwork for this distribution's cover because of recently seeing (*Faculae & Filigree* #30) and reading (*T&T* #111) *Starship Troopers*. The crustacean-like creatures reminded me of the Bugs.

**Matthew Mitchell's** *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #56 detailed recent office travails. Having worked with a family law attorney for our child custody evaluation and related matters, it was alarming how quickly one could burn through retainer money. I quickly learned to only reach out to my attorney—who was very good at what he did—when something truly mattered and needed to be acted on. Not to vent, grouse, or commiserate... sometimes to seek advice. And when we did talk, to be very direct and organized in the conversation. We liked each other and got along well, but that's not why we were talking, and small talk is costly. I don't miss being in

that situation and having those expenses.

Good luck to Nick with his college plans—and tracking down whether he was indeed diagnosed with dyslexia. A co-worker was recently diagnosed with ADHD, which has made all sorts of things clearer to her and hopefully more manageable given that new understanding about herself.



The *Star Wars* Original Motion Picture Soundtrack is a favorite of mine, too. Growing up, I somehow obtained a gatefold LP of the record. I don't think I had the original pressing, *Star Wars: Original Soundtrack*, which reportedly included a painted poster by John Berkey and was formatted to accommodate an autochanger record player—though my parents owned one. One record included sides one and four, and the other included sides two and three. That's actually pretty innovative. My sister might have also had the soundtrack on cassette.

Your mention of Danny Elfman's *Batman* score reminded me of a time in which I absolutely adored Elfman's film work. His more recent work doesn't seem as unique, unified, or inspiring, but his early scores—several for Tim Burton projects—remain delightful. At one time, I had a CD of *Music for a Darkened Theatre: Film & Television Music Volume One*, which featured work from films such as *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, *Batman*, *Beetlejuice*, *Nightbreed*, *Darkman*, *Tales from the Crypt*, *Forbidden Zone*, and others. Scads of genre fare, and an excellent composer.

I'll share your feedback with cover artist Joe Pearson. I appreciated your description of and alignment with secular humanism. My wife often

comments that it'd be wonderful if there was some sort of "church" available for the non-religious. In Los Angeles, the Philosophical Research Society (<https://www.prs.org>) comes close, and in New York City, there was an organization that advertised on the subway, but I don't remember their name.

Thank you for commenting on the *Space Cadet* and *Buck Rogers* comic strips. I didn't include them last week because no one had remarked on them yet—and I didn't want my page count to be more than half of the distribution. If others are enjoying them, I can continue pulling them from back issues of the *Los Angeles Times*. I'll have to watch *Predator 2* when we return to Portugal later this year. It's on the DVR there! Your reasoning for choosing your response to the clue "romance" is sound. It's definitely challenging to solve crossword puzzles without the crosswords!

Your comments that "Your page count being the highest in this APA is no reason to cut back on your output. It should be giving the rest of us (and I include myself in there) incentive to provide more material every week, or every other week as the case may be," are much appreciated. If other others want to weigh in, I'd welcome the feedback. I tend to be able to hack this stuff out relatively easily but don't want to discourage or disincentivize others with my verbosity.

In *The Winnower* #3, **Derek LaPorte** continued serializing his fiction. I continue to enjoy the unfolding story, the occasionally missing punctuation and trailing off of thoughts, the periodic paragraph indentations mid-sentence, and the distinct terminology. Your consistent playfulness with language and formatting is fun to read. This installment didn't quite remind me of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, but there were moments of resonance in terms of slang. The pour-and-spark trial scene was quite compelling. I could feel the mounting tension and suspense and quite enjoyed the ongoing consideration of the changing odds. "This is intended to test competency for the job. Not the participants' luck!" "[T]his is an extraordinary time." "[A]re we not more than the letters of a name?" Those were among my favorite sentences. The dream sequence introduced some interesting exposition, and I continue to look forward to future installments.

While I was initially put off by the characteristic nature of your writing, I'm either getting used to it—and therefore finding it less daunting—it's growing on me, or the challenging aspects are diminishing. I'm curious: Do you feel that you've been writing in a consistent style, or that the initial near-inscrutability is decreasing as you continue? Is

that conscious or unconscious?

**Joe Zeff's** *Toony Loons* #758 told ellers about a fall experienced by Marcia Minsky. I'm sorry to hear about the compressed fracture and hope that she heals fully and quickly. I don't think I knew that you smoked a pipe! How long have you done so? Do you pay as much attention and care to your pipes as you do your razors and strop? I imagine you and Marty Cantor discussed pipes and tobacco blends over the years given that you two shared that interest.

I have never really smoked much: a pipe briefly after college as an affectation, and cigarettes periodically, largely socially and when drinking when I still did so. When I sang with a band in Boston, I found that a couple of pints and a couple of cigarettes made for a delightfully raspy singing voice, but even then, I don't think my partaking of either was that mindful or intentional. While in college, I'd often get the urge to smoke cigarettes with the coming of cold weather. Even though I no longer smoke, I still associate autumn and winter with tobacco. It never made much sense to me to smoke when it was hot outside. While in the Frankfurt Airport returning from Portugal, we were surprised that smoking lounges still existed. They were sponsored by Winston. May your mouse never lose its trackball.

### **The State of SF on German TV**

While I read and watched TV quite a bit while in Portugal, the only news I procured was via a Portugese newspaper, *Jornal de Noticias*. (<https://www.jn.pt>) I didn't at all keep up with domestic news or news sources, except for social media, while traveling.

While in the Frankfurt airport connecting during our flights home, I was able to pick up several free newspapers. In English, we procured the *New York Times* and *Financial Times*, and I thumbed through several German newspapers, as well. Those included *Bild* (<https://www.bild.de>), *Die Welt* (<https://www.welt.de>), and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (<https://www.faz.net/aktuell>).

Even though I don't read German, I looked for anything science fictional, science- or technology-related—and comic strips. *FAZ* included a well-drawn strip titled *Glückskind* (*Lucky Child*), drawn by Flix. (<https://der-flix.de>) The Rhein-Main section of that paper also included a gag panel credited to a cartoonist whose initials look like “kao,” “kap,” or “kaz,” but who is not Kaz.

*Die Welt* also featured an article about the prospects for Paramount (see above), perhaps my first exposure to the news. *FAZ* included a piece with the headline “Wer stoppt die tötenden Roboter?” ([\[tinyurl.com/FAZ-robots\]\(https://tinyurl.com/FAZ-robots\)\)](https://</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

I had more luck with understanding the newspapers in English. The *Financial Times* included pieces on the use of ketamine in the workplace (<https://tinyurl.com/FT-ketamine>) and Russian sabotage (<https://tinyurl.com/Russian-sabotage>).

But the German newspapers offered a good showing of sf and fantasy options in the TV listings. *Bild's* grid called out screenings of *Die Tribute von Panem—Mockingjay: Teil 1*, *Resident Evil: Afterlife*, *Robocop*, *Stargate*, *Star Trek—Das nächste Jahrhundert*, *Colony*, *Tremors: Shrieker Island*, and *Ghosts*.

*Die Welt's* listings included *Die Simpsons*, *Quantum Leap—Zurück in die Vergangenheit*, and several movies featured in *Bild*. And *FAZ's* full page of listings—more column inches than the other papers—better called out *Raumschiff Enterprise*, the German title for *Star Trek*, indicating multiple time slots for *Stargate* and *Star Trek—Das nächste Jahrhundert*, even detailing episodes shown.

Not only is American broadcast media alive and well internationally—not at all a surprise—but American sf is well represented on German and Portuguese television.



—Alan White

## Faculae & Filigree #31

May 10, 2024

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### Trip Report: Portugal (cont.)

Having returned from Portugal early this week, my trip report is almost at an end. All that remains is commenting on the bounty I found at a newsstand in the Frankfurt Airport, Flughafen Frankfurt Main, during our connection home.

Flying to Portugal in early April, we connected in Newark, N.J., but returning, we connected in Frankfurt, Germany, instead of our usual Madrid—which offers its own newsstand wonders. While I was primarily checking the shops for books—do they still publish Perry Rhodan?—I had better luck in the periodicals section.

Having explored the bande dessinée—banda desenhada in Portuguese—sections of most bookstores we visited, I was surprised to find BD available on newsstands, as well. One airport shop had multiple copies of several editions of *Asterix* and *Lucky Luke* available in German. I picked up one of each, *Asterix und Maestria*, the 29th volume in that series, and *Lucky Luke: Jesse James*, the 38th volume in that series. I don't read German, but the artwork by Albert Uderzo and Morris, respectively, is glorious, as is the coloring in these softcover editions.

Donald Duck and Disney comics also seem quite popular in Germany. The newsstand offered four different comics, thick digests featuring nondescript typesetting of the translated text. I picked up *Lustiges Taschenbuch* #584 (<https://www.lustiges-taschenbuch.de>), a 254-page reprint volume largely drawing on Italian comics from the late 2010s. Interestingly, it was priced the same as the BD volumes, both of which offered about 50 pages.

Other Donald Duck and Disney titles on the rack included a multi-volume *Lustiges Taschenbuch Sonderedition* (<https://www.lustiges-taschenbuch.de/ausgaben/nebenreihen/sondereditionen>) celebrating Donald's 90th anniversary, the current issue of *Lustiges Taschenbuch Young Comics* (#9), and a comic featuring Goofy whose title I don't recall. How do they translate, "Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy"?



—William Rotsler

### Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

#### *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*

While in Portugal, I realized it was May 4—Star Wars Day—reading the week's issue of *TV 7 Dias*, which I get for the TV listings. In the TV Cabo section, there was a half-page item headlined "Maratona das Estrelas." The Star Channel aired a marathon of six *Star Wars* movies. I DVR'd the first three. I also checked whether anyone had posted about the marathon on the *Facebook* group SCI-FI PT—Ficção Científica. (Someone had!) That day and the next, preparing to return home, I watched *Star Wars: Episódio IV—Uma Nova Esperança* and *Star Wars—Episódio V: O Império Contra-Ataca*.

I don't need to review them as such. We've probably all seen them multiple times, but it was a fun experience watching them on TV in Portugal on a day when Portuguese fen—and fen around the world—were also watching. The versions they aired were later re-releases with CGI additions. I always

find those distracting and detracting and have made sure to buy DVDs including the original films so I can prioritize watching them. I amused my wife with comments like “That wasn’t there before,” “Jabba the Hutt wasn’t in the original movie,” and “Boba Fett doesn’t show up quite yet.”



—Alan White

That week, I also read most of *Star Wars Insider* #222 (December 2023), which I’d brought with me without planning ahead for Star Wars Day. Thinking this made me laugh, but if you like Star Wars, it’s a good magazine! That’s all it is. Highlights in this issue include brief pieces about a remastered version of the video game *Star Wars: Dark Forces* and a novel prequel to *The Phantom Menace*, a Book Club roundup of several new books, a Republic Roundup of two phases of titles aimed at readers of all ages, an episode guide to *The Mandalorian* Season 3, an interview with puppeteer Tim Rose, and a short story by Lydia Kang, “No Big Deal.” Other content includes a focus on books and comics that focus on the time immediately after *Return of the Jedi*, fandom reports, and another short story I have yet to read, Richard Dinnick’s “Valnir and Laizhu.”

While there’s quite a bit of material on current streaming series, I was pleasantly surprised by how much attention is paid to the literary universe, as well. Literary fen who appreciate tie-in novels and related works, and media fen alike can easily find entry points to the Star Wars universe. It even inspired me to read a tie-in novel myself. I’ll likely review that in the future.

### Comments on LASFAPA #567

Awesome cover, Anonymous—and somewhat timely given the lapse of copyright on Steamboat Willie as he appeared in *Steamboat Willie* and the silent *Plane Crazy*. (<https://web.law.duke.edu/cspd/mickey>) I won’t try to survey the state of takes on the character since the lapse, but it’s yielded at least two horror movies (<https://tinyurl.com/Deadline-Willie>), and *YouTube* initially blocked people uploading the

original cartoon. (<https://tinyurl.com/YouTube-Willie>)

We’ve seen similar things with Winnie-the-Pooh, which has yielded at least three Blood and Honey flicks. (<https://tinyurl.com/Variety-Winnie>) I find all that quite uninteresting. Even though newly public domain characters might show promise for darker portrayals (see <https://tinyurl.com/PD-horror> for one perspective), why is our first inclination to drag beloved characters through the blood and mud? Maybe it all goes back to *Air Pirates Funnies*, *The Adventures of Tintin: Breaking Free*, and other such samizdat detournements. Perhaps even further, to the Tijuana Bibles that sullied classic film and radio stars, as well as comic strip characters.

There are certainly examples of more respectful implementations, such as those in *Public Domain Fanzine* (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #17), but I wonder where all the “straight” takes are. Couldn’t they flourish? There’s so much that could be done with characters like these; character assassination and ruination are hardly the only options. Where are the stories written by Michael Chabon and Jonathan Lethem? Why isn’t Robert Sikoryak or Craig Yoe drawing new comics featuring the characters? Jeffrey Brown has done so with Star Wars characters—with full approval and commercial support.

Even if more mature and nuanced in their portrayal, adult stories—even stories for younger readers—might not need to swing so far. Perhaps creators are adapting such figures in less provocative new work, but that’s not gaining media attention. Perhaps for every example like *Bambi: The Reckoning* or *Peter Pan: Neverland Nightmare*, there are five or 100 less vicious portrayals and stories worth reading. It seems a rich opportunity for acceptable fanfiction and other fannish works. Not just slasher movies.

In *A Must Curious Case of Deja VU(nited)*—there’s a lot going on in that title!—David Schlosser told tales about his spring travels. My wife and I have had TSA PreCheck for some time now, and I highly recommend it. Returning from Portugal on Monday, we had our interviews for Global Entry, for which we’d already applied and been conditionally approved. You can either schedule an interview or drop in for one when returning from another country. The process didn’t take very long.

What fun to screen an anniversary message during a spring training game! Even though she was un-surprised, how did she react upon actually seeing it? When you started on the trip prep, did you write on a tablet or laptop? I recently learned that an APA-L contributor writes his fanzines on a tablet while on the bus sometimes, so I am newly curious about where and how we all write these things. I always write on

my laptop at my desk.

Your combination of baseball, golf, restaurants, movies, and bookstores made for a compelling vacation report. It sounds like you have places you frequent when you return. Wait... there was a *con*, too? When you take a trip, you really take a trip. The push bar on the pool gate made me laugh, too. How old were the issues of *Rune* on the freebies table? (Ah, at least back to #53!) Finding stuff like that makes my pulse quicken. Have all of *those* been scanned?

Your remarks on the slash fiction panel made me wonder about Steamboat Willie and Winnie-the-Pooh slash—not with each other (Ew!), but with appropriate characters. I might prefer that over slasher fare. Heh, slash > slasher. I'm glad you were able to volunteer so much for the con, too. This combined trip/rep/conrep was really fun to read. I'm surprised your last lines didn't read, "Home. Greet critters. All's good. Exhausted!" (And, your arene quip was quite clever. I had to look it up to make sure I got it!)

**David Schlosser's** *Fool's Mate* #570 was almost as long as the above trip/rep/conrep! How does he do that? Reaching for the Stevie multiple times. (Helped me realize it's awarded for total page count submitted, not page count in a given fanzine.) I fell behind on combining and OCR'ing back issues while I traveled, but Schlosser and I have agreed to open up the back issue archives when I reach #100. I'm just a handful away, and I recently assured our illustrious Little Sin Ghod that the accumulated backlog—he scans faster than I do what I do—is in no way demotivating. Gotta catch up, gotta catch up!

Who the heck watched *Hawkeye*? Just kidding. What do you dislike about how you wrote in older fanzines? Thank you for explaining that the Iconography is for participants who died while contributors, rather than former participants.

More on expectant mothers: Even women who've already given birth might have expectations. Perhaps the sign should just read "mothers." Thank you for bringing "Ronald Reagan-Carl Sagan-San Diegan-Pagan Blues" (<https://thesession.org/discussions/19220>) to my attention. That's fun, and I'll have to spend time with it. I would love you or Alan Winston to describe what "pulled off a Gunderloy" means.

I'll have to revisit Winston's fanzine to remind myself about the "science fantasy" debate. A fellow eller recently suggested that "speculative fiction" is a more useful all-encompassing term, but I like distinguishing between sf, fantasy, and horror, even if some horror might fall under fantasy, if supernatural. Good news you were able to rearrange your schedule. Keep us updated on the bike path developments!



—Alan White

In *The Nine Wrong Answers*, **Alan Winston** detailed recent home repairs that sound quite disruptive! Hopefully the work is done by now and things have returned to normalcy. In Portugal, some electrical work was done in the living room to allow for additional outlets and dimmer switches, and the next time we visit, there'll be new bookshelves there, too. The addition of a new couch and chair will make our visits more comfortable, and it's already better than it was when we first started staying there. Luckily, most of the work except for deliveries has occurred while we weren't there, except the electricians left a pile of refuse in the mud room, where the coat and shoe racks are.

We also need to replace the insulation in our attic in Culver City. When we had our roof done, it got quite dirty up there, and all we've done is make sure the furnace is clear. That's on my list for this year: clean out the old, install the new. Well, hire someone to do so. How was the New England Folk Festival? Your May sounds quite busy. It's an impressive schedule. With our return from Portugal, I'd hoped to catch the last weekend of the Original Renaissance Pleasure Faire, but we'll stay home this weekend so I can finish the May issue of *De Profundis* late. Checking the Web site now, however, it looks like next weekend is the last weekend, not this weekend. Perhaps I'll make it yet!

I enjoyed your commentary on *Kristina Wong, Sweatshop Overlord*. I'd forgotten that Donald Trump was president during the pandemic! How could I have done so? Ah, nostalgia—but not for that presidency. May he not have another.





Karter Mycroft's short story "Mixtapes from Neptune" uses a mixtape playlist as the framing device for a sad little story about the ending of a relationship and pursuing diverging paths. Mycroft also works as an ocean scientist, and the biological aspects of the story work quite well—the maritime theme resonating lightly with Firehammer's novelet above. You can check out the story's playlist at <https://tinyurl.com/Neptune-Mixtape>.

"To Pluck a Twisted String," a short story by Anne Leonard, concentrates on the power of music, glass, artwork (paintings as spells!), and the loss of a child. Continuing the theme of strings, A Humphrey Lanham's "My Embroidery Stitches Are Me" explores the motivations behind body modification, as well as its undoing. While the story could have been horrible—it did give me the shivers—it stops shy of body horror.

Getty Hesse's short story "Teatro Anatomico," however, embraces it. The piece explores the mentor-apprentice relationship, public performance, bodily autonomy, and rebellion. It takes seriously what *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* approached glibly. (*The Brass Hat Mind* #5)

"Night Haul" by Andrew Crowley is another reason for reading this issue. So many aspects of the work of Stephen King arise in this short story, but it is far from a King pastiche. Like "Shining Shores" above, the ending suggests that the story is only just beginning. It is a delicious piece of horror writing.

Kel Coleman ("a Marylander at heart": attention, Samuel Lubell!) contributed "On the Matter of *Homo sapiens*," another rare sf piece in this issue. The story considers robots—sentimechs—who debate about the "resurrection of *Homo sapiens*" while trying to learn more about humanity while geocaching.

"Sugar Steak" is also worth seeking out. Written by Jenny Kiefer, proprietor of Butcher Cabin Books in Louisville, Ky. (<https://www.horrorbookstore.com>—buy some books!), the short story reminded me of splatterpunk, a more aggressive King (specifically *Thinner*), or perhaps Clive Barker or Poppy Z. Brite. The images captured by Kiefer are astonishingly visceral.

I haven't read all the stories yet—two novelets and two short stories remain—but I also read the poetry, Charles de Lint's book reviews, and Carol Cooper's Curiosities column. This is the first time in a long time I've read so much of an issue of F&SF, and if the recent run is even close to this edition, Sheree Renee Thomas's stint as editor is and will be glorious indeed. Scour the shelves for this ish—and read the thing.



—William Rotsler

## Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

### *Child's Play 3*

Having recently watched *Child's Play 2* earlier this year (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #101), a friend and I watched its 1991 sequel, *Child's Play 3*, mid-month on video cassette. While it's not as good as its immediate precursor, there are a couple of moments that make the flick worth watching.

For example, the beginning. *Child's Play 2* ended in the destroyed remnants of a Play Pals factory, in which Chucky—the franchise's possessed plaything—had been melted down into a mound of plastic slag. *Child's Play 3* starts here, the remains of the production facility heavily cobwebbed, and workers in protective suits preparing it for renewed operation. The puddled remains of Chucky are retrieved by remote control, and some of its blood (yes, the murderous doll still oozes bodily fluids) drips into a vat of plastic or rubber, enabling the continuation of the series.

I also enjoyed the boardroom scene during which

the company's CEO decides to resume production and distribution of Good Guys dolls despite the previous movies' "bad publicity," blaming it on the deranged ravings of one disturbed child. A staff member tries to discourage the decision, to no effect. Of course, that goes well for everyone over the course of the rest of the movie.

But the ending is the highlight, taking place at a carnival, as it does, shades of *The Funhouse* (*The Brass Hat Mind* #1). I love carnivals, and this cinematic carnival features one of the best haunted houses I've seen at such a venue. Rather than the usual plywood, glow-in-the-dark spray paint, and dusty Frankenstein mask most honest-to-gosh spook houses feature, this one is amazing. Not only do the creatures within remind me of the alien character design in *Killer Klowns from Outer Space*, it's quite large and expansive, almost a Space Mountain-like rollercoaster. That leads to an excellent chase scene and climax, echoing the ending of *Child's Play 2*.

Otherwise, it's a lame flick. None of the main cast is retained, except for the voice of Chucky (who is not Danny DeVito, but watch it with him in mind!). The boy protagonist has grown up to be a young man and has been sent to a military school. That leads to the expected student bullies, strict discipline, clandestine snogging, and drill sergeant stereotypes, as well as an annual war game that resonates with the campwide games of movies such as *Meatballs*.

Regardless, Andrew Robinson (*Hellraiser*'s Frank "Jesus Wept" Cotton) makes a strange comedic appearance as an aggressive military school barber, who makes sure that all of the students are "bald" (oddly, not bald), or at least very well trimmed.

The primary problem I had with this film was the overwhelming number of catchphrases intended as laugh lines. "You just can't keep a Good Guy down." "Don't fuck with the Chuck." "Chucky's gonna be a bro." I guess I can imagine them working in a crowded movie house in 1991, but they tend to fall flat and feel like gratuitous try-hardism.

In any event, watching the movie and APA-L #3068's Ignorable Theme on genre soundtracks led me to listen to Graeme Revell's score for the 1990 *Child's Play 2*. Composed for orchestra, the score was performed by a 90-piece ensemble conducted by Shirley Walker, who also provided the orchestration. Search for it on your streaming services of choice. The score is really quite good. A double-LP pressing by Waxwork Records sold out, and La-La Land Records offers a compact disc version of the score. Faneds might be particularly interested in the track titled "Photocopy Finish."



—Alan White

### Comments on N'APA #269

I previously commented on *Intermission* #141 in *The Explosion Containment Umbrella* #17. Those remarks read as follows: "In *Intermission* #141, **Ahrvid Engholm** updated eAPAns [and N'APAns] on his viewing of *Oppenheimer*, winter and New Year's Eve, cross-country skiing, SpaceX launches, and the Russo-Ukrainian War. During our honeymoon, my wife and I visited Los Alamos, N.M. It's one of the most bizarre cities I've ever been in. Reportedly claiming more PhDs per capita than any other city in the United States, it's kind of a no place place. Very sterile seeming.

"Two notable locations we visited included the Black Hole, the Los Alamos Laboratory salvage yard, and the Los Alamos History Museum. The former was an astounding array of research lab castoffs and has been covered quite well by *Wired*. (<https://www.wired.com/1995/04/the-black-hole-of-los-alamos>) The latter offers a relatively solid look at the history of the area, including the Manhattan Project, but when we were there in 2008, somehow neglected the potential risks and impact of nuclear energy or weaponry. The only token nod they made to such concerns was a visitor participation exhibit in which you could write your thoughts on a three-by-five card to put into a shoe box. The museum was pretty well white washed of any anti-nuke awareness or sentiment. I appreciated your expansive commentary on *Oppenheimer*, as well as the connection between Los Alamos and *Astounding*.

"That you progressed to consider H.G. Wells's *The World Set Free* and its portrayal of atomic bombs was

very welcome. Your healthy excerpts suggest that the book is worth reading, as are most by Wells. Your recommended playlist of related songs also merits exploration. Thank you for the listening suggestions! The song by Johnny Bode was a definite delight, profanity aside.



—Alan White

“While you might have run out of material from the Stockholm Royal Library, your roundup of Atomic Age toys and other assorted media coverage made for delightful reading. Winston Churchill was also cited during the alternate history panel [at Gallifrey One earlier this year]. I might have to spend more time with his writing!

“I also read and enjoyed your discussion of Thor Modeen. World cinema—non-English cinema—has a lot to offer, and I’ll see what’s available of his work domestically.

“H.P. Lovecraft might have written 10 letters a day, but that doesn’t seem to be that many in the time before television and the Internet. Even with reading and radio to draw your attention and time, correspondence was much more common, and it’s a natural outgrowth of amateur press associations (or vice versa). Personally, I’m trying to write just 12 letters of comment to fanzines a month. It’ll ensure I read more fanzines, and it’s a fun form of fanac in addition to apahacking and pubbing. I was inspired by voting in the recent Faan Awards. And Corflu is occurring this weekend! I was so excited about the con that I actually dialed into its Zoom channel last weekend by mistake. Thank you for your thoughtful response to my comments about discrimination and

inclusion.”

I also commented on *Fainzine* #3 in that same issue of *ECU*: “*Fainzine* #3 again utilized generative AI to pub its ish. While I didn’t read it fully, I got a kick out of its resonance with *Intermission* #141’s topics and other fannish themes. **Ahrvid Engholm** still resides therein.”

**John Thiel**’s *Synergy* #48 mentioned Christopher Mark Rose’s novelette “Three Sisters Syzygy” in the September/October 2023 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. I was able to pull that ish from a nearby box and proceeded to read the story—and others (see above). When was synergy more au courant in fanzines? By the “research of Rhine,” do you mean parapsychology? I know that Dianetics made its way through the science fiction community, as did another psychological or philosophical trend that I forget (symbolic logic?); what other examples have waxed and waned over time? Edgar Dubourg, Valentin Thouzeau, and Nicolas Baumard’s February 2024 *Poetics* article “The psychological origins of science fiction” and Gavin Miller’s 2020 book *Science Fiction and Psychology* might prove interesting along those lines.

I’m not sure how *tranquil* sf as a literature might be, though it is escapist. Does science fiction bring readers—or viewers—comfort? (The traditional structure and tropes of epic fantasy might, even if other content proves troublesome.) If anything, I think the best sf is thought-provoking, perhaps even challenging. If dystopic or critical of the current state of the world, its discomfort might inspire other interests and perhaps activism. And if utopic—or if not, merely portraying the promise or potential of science and technology, a possible future—it might be inspiring in other ways, encouraging a look to the future rather than a complacent acceptance of current times.

Your use of the term suggests another possibility, however. If you mean tranquility along the lines of prayer- and meditation-like states, or the collective hypnosis of sorts brought on by Noh theater, can sf bring readers closer to the numinous? The closest we come, in my experience, is in stories and novels that truly consider the scale and scope of the universe, beings and artifacts almost as old as it is, waypoints left for others to find, and perhaps approach those who have come before. How do others experience this sensation, if you have? What kind of sf helps you experience the numinous? I’m sorry you lost recent N’APA mailings, John. I’d be happy to send them to you.

I previously commented on *Intermission* #142 in *The Explosion Containment Umbrella* #18 and reprint

those remarks here: “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 Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society 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 3* entry (<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>)



—Alan White

“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).'



—Alan White

"The LASFS entry in *Fancylopedia 3* 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."

In *Archive Midwinter* dated March 10, 2024, **Jefferson P. Swycaffer** expressed interest in helping Ahrvid Engholm remain a member of N'APA. I, too, would help support that. Congratulations, also, to Sweden on becoming a full member of NATO in early March. Somehow, the importance of that occurrence didn't impress itself upon me previously. My fandom, too, is in the age of the photocopier, though I remember carbon transfer paper and overhead projector transparencies in school.

*Mark's Very Large National Lampoon Site* indicates that Henry Beard and Christopher Cerf's article "Americans United to Beat the Dutch" was initially published in the April 1973 issue of *National Lampoon*, the Prejudice issue. It's been reprinted a couple of times, and there was a *National Lampoon Radio Hour* segment based on it that aired in 1974. I miss that magazine.

We don't need to worry about my departure from the N3F. I'm a member, with dues paid into the future still, I believe. Which Agatha Christie novel featured the narrator as the culprit? That is, indeed, sneaky.

**Mark Nelson's Brandy Hall #5** shared experiences attending sf conventions. Your first con occurred on my 15th birthday. That's kind of neat. While I recently learned about the state of Wisconsin fandom—mostly through the Turbo-Charged Party Animal APA, Milwaukee Amateur Press Association, the Madison Science Fiction Group on *Facebook*, and Madison, Wis.-based bookseller Hank Luttrell (all thanks to Andy Hooper)—I was entirely unaware of any local fandom while growing up in southern Wisconsin. I didn't even make it to GenCon as a *Dungeons & Dragons* player in the late 1980s. (I found the idea of playing with strangers too daunting; I thought it was competitive.)

The Leeds University Science Fiction Society has played an important role in your fandom! The now Leeds University Union Sci-Fi and Fantasy Society seems to still be active, and primarily focused on board games. I haven't been sending them the LASFS newsletter *De Profundis*, but just added them to the list. Your anecdote about feeling like you "didn't have an in-depth knowledge of written science-fiction" reminded me of a college student I know. He went to his university's anime club, asked them a few questions about what he considered to be important anime, was shocked when they hadn't seen what he'd seen—and hasn't gone back since because he didn't think they knew anything. I know that's not how you felt, but it might be the obverse experience: The Know-It-All. I'm sure you're not a Know-Nothing. You wouldn't be here if you were.

Your naming your mailing comments "The

Mathom House” reminded of of Piers Anthony’s novel *Tatham Mound* (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #100). “One wonders how many recent SF fans parley their involvement in fandom into a pro career,” you wrote. My sense, as a relative latecomer is that it was once Much More Common. The LASFS, for example, still has guests show up now and again who are writers looking for other writers or writing groups, and the club doesn’t currently include many people along those lines. We have our Hoary Old Pros such as Larry Niven and John DeChancie, but not many active aspiring writers or younger writers. One recently joined APA-L and has been serializing his fiction in his fanzine, which I welcome.

Given the potential for online fandom—disorganized fandom—to help distinguish new writers via blogging, social media, podcasts, and the like, I don’t know what organized fandom has to offer such people. One can accomplish what one used to through fanzines online in any number of ways. I read recently—source and citation conveniently not remembered—that the *Analog* (I think) editors accept perhaps 1 percent of the stories submitted. I get the sense that editors are striving to diversify the authors and voice in the prozines.

Your mention of British Science Fiction Award winners and Australian Ditmar award winners makes a fair point. If we’re global citizens, perhaps we should consider All the Awards. What other awards exist? That’s a listicle waiting to happen, but I won’t undertake it now. Colin Steele’s comments in *The Canberra Times* are interesting. I wonder! I read an enjoyed your “Swedish Words in English 2.” The editors of the fanzine *Rune* might, too!

In *Brownian Motion* #7, **Garth Spencer** brings up another national award we should all pay attention to: Canada’s Aurora Award! R. Graeme Cameron’s breakdown of Canadian representation in the Faan Awards also reminds us to look beyond our own—my own—borders. The Venn diagram titled “An Organized Collection of Irrational Nonsense” offers rich fodder for exploration. What was its source?

When a faned doesn’t number their fanzine issues, I am grateful when they date them. Your paragraph following your remarks about a Chaos Department for the N3F read like an outline or back cover blurb for a paperback. You should write it! It reminded me of something like Craig Shaw Gardner’s *Slaves of the Volcano God* (*Faculae & Filigree* #30). Your reading list “rut” sounds like a good place to be, actually!

Your snorting at my use of the word “literary” in relation to sf and fantasy made me grin. I shall strive to be more aware of using the term, if not just to imagine you snorting when you read it.

**Samuel Lubell’s** *Samizdat* #24 mentioned Allen Steele’s revival of *Captain Future*. Where did I just encounter *Captain Future* otherwise? There’s the 1940-1944 pulp magazine, the 1978 anime, the now-public domain superhero dating back to the 1940s—who seems different from the pulp hero. None of them are ringing a bell. Was there also a British comic book? Norman Light produced a comic strip from 1953-1954 that might be what I’m remembering.



—Alan White

“Affirmative action isn’t discrimination to fight discrimination or giving minorities extra perks. It is recognizing that some people have unfair advantages and trying to compensate for them,” you wrote. Hear! Hear! Our son fell “victim” to this, in a way, when he applied to college, and I am frustrated by the impact the result is having on his college experience, but I can understand that neither he nor my family are disadvantaged. He’ll be more likely to overcome whatever setback occurred than someone in a different situation—even if it’s irritating. (Besides, he currently faces other challenges, which is the One Thing I’m Not Writing About in Fanzines given family events in mid-May. Perhaps some day.)

Your profile of Marion Zimmer Bradley resonated with me. I’ve enjoyed her fiction, but have also lightly researched the Breendoggle and read her daughter’s book *The Last Closet: The Dark Side of Avalon*. (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #4) “Should people read good books by bad authors?” you asked. (How do you know if they’re good if they go unread?) In a 2012 Opinion piece for the *New York Times*, Charles McGrath considers “Good Art, Bad People.” (<https://www>.

[nytimes.com/2012/06/22/opinion/global-agenda-magazine-good-art-bad-people.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/22/opinion/global-agenda-magazine-good-art-bad-people.html)) I think that bad people—or people who make mistakes, people who hurt others, or people who hold disagreeable beliefs—can still make good art, and it’s possible to appreciate it, even if it’s complicated by the context of the creator. I can also understand avoiding it if you find something particularly loathsome. I’m likely to read it or watch it, but I might consider whether I give someone New Money after bad actions come to light.



—Alan White

Thank you for sharing your Hugo nominations. The Baltimore Science Fiction Society’s Compton Crook Award for Best First Novel shall definitely go on the list of available awards when I get around to looking into those. Club awards offer an interesting addition even to national awards—though some awards might meet both criteria. Thanks, also, for serializing your 1989 undergraduate thesis. I think I’d missed that you “very carefully did not tell Harvard [it] was [on] 19th century science fiction.” Sneaky! Cheeky! Your comparison of Awesomecon, Balticon, and Capclave is telling. Wow.

And in *Ye Murthered Master Mage* #269, **George Phillies**—glad to see you in our pages!—offered N3F updates. Ooh! Someone has already paid Ahrvid Engholm’s N3F dues. Who went ahead and did it?

Kudos to you, good sir or madam. “I have been so busy that I have considered getting a real forty-hour-a-week job so that I would have more free time,” made me chuckle.

In 2022, *Wired* published an article titled “Was Voltaire the First Sci-Fi Author?” (<https://www.wired.com/2022/01/geeks-guide-ada-palmer>) It details that a 1752 short story by Voltaire titled “Micromégas” features first contact with aliens from Saturn and a star near Sirius. In 2016, the *Guardian* contended that Johann Valentin Andreae’s 1616 *The Chemical Wedding* is the first sf novel. (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/23/work-from-1616-is-the-first-ever-science-fiction-novel>) *Discover Sci-Fi* offers additional contenders at <https://discoverscifi.com/the-pioneers-of-imagination-the-first-science-fiction-stories-ever-written>. But, surely, it’s 2024. Why haven’t we yet identified this yet? We should be able to do in terms of story, novel, and perhaps identify firsts by country. (Okeh, I now have two new pet projects: A roundup of sf and fantasy awards, and identifying the first ever sf story and novel. Join me in the endeavor!)

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What speculative fiction awards are you aware of? (Clip and send to ye olde faned any way you like!)

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## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #115

May 16, 2024

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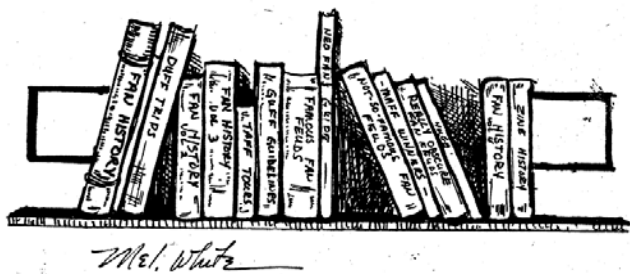
### Last Week's Senryu

Punctuation strays,  
transmogrifying queerly,  
but only in print.

I experienced an odd printing error in my fanzine last week, as you might have noticed if you receive a mailed distribution. (The PDF version was fine.) Smart quotation marks, apostrophes, and em dashes were replaced with little faint boxes when printing. Researching the issue online, I updated my printer's firmware and removed the printer from my computer, adding it again before printing.

That seemed to fix the issue, though it popped up again intermittently when printing *The Stf Amateur* #6-7 for the United Fanzine Organization. (The errors don't appear consistently throughout #6, and seemingly not at all in #7.) So I took to removing and adding the printer before each printing session. That seemed to do the trick.

We'll see if I have to continue doing that, but I'll be especially aware of whether it shows up in other ellers' contributions when I print this week.



### From the Reading Pile: Book Reviews

*Star Wars Battlefront II: Inferno Squad* by Christie Golden (Del Rey, 2017)

Inspired by Star Wars Day and watching *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back* earlier this month while in Portugal, as well as reading an issue of *Star Wars Insider* (*Faculae & Filigree* #31), I sought out a tie-in novel that took place immediately after *Star Wars*. While I've read the *Star Wars* Trilogy novels by

George Lucas, Donald Glut, and James Kahn, and own several Han Solo novels by Brian Daley, I haven't read many *Star Wars* tie-ins. (Luckily, there's a timeline of recommended Del Rey tie-ins that identifies where books fall in relation to the movies in most Del Rey editions.)

While I've enjoyed reading *Star Trek* and other tie-ins in the past, the *Star Wars* tie-ins I've read, well, haven't been very good. This novel should be an exception. Golden wrote the first Ravenloft novel, *Vampire of the Mists* (*Theoretically: Game #1*) for TSR, and was awarded the International Association of Media Tie-In Writers' (<https://iamtw.org>) Faust Award—and named a Grandmaster—in the year this book was published.

Was the book an exception? The video game tie-in—the novel serves as a prequel for the game *Star Wars Battlefront II*—was okeh. There are a couple of instances of lazy, modern writing such as "That was on her," and "I'm glad to be seen," which I'm not sure would have been said "long, long ago." But for a novel based on a first-person shooter, it was surprisingly fun to read.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the book is that it focuses on an Imperial survivor of the destruction of the Death Star and a squad of imperial soldiers who infiltrate a band of rebels who regularly strike back against the Empire. That surprised me, but the sympathetic approach to the characters, imperial and rebel alike, overshadowed any temptation to empathize with the Empire writ large, and there's still quite a bit of goodness in the novel.

The bulk of the novel concentrates on the squad's formation, members' individual routes to infiltrating the group separately, and their involvement in a number of raids once they've gained the rebels' trust. Over time, they begin to empathize with the rebels, no longer viewing them as enemies of the Empire but just as people—even though the book doesn't end well for the rebels at all.

The squad's real assignment, however, is to identify an Imperial information leak, and to stop it. Despite the grisly end of the rebels, the squad's mission is a success, and the identity of the leak comes as a surprise. More surprising, however, is the attention paid to character, not just in terms of their identities, back stories, and characteristics, but in their interpersonal connections—with each other as well as within the Empire. For example, the protagonist is the daughter of an Imperial leader, her mother an artist, which lends additional weight to her sympathy for the rebels. (Even the Death Star and its destruction is given a back story!)

So, a fun read, but not a great book. It might be that



Star Wars tie-ins aren't as well written as Star Trek tie-ins, or it might be that I care more about the Star Trek universe and therefore recognize more as I read. But I enjoyed *Star Wars Battlefront II: Inferno Squad*, especially its storytelling about characters other than the rebels on which the movies and other spin-offs might concentrate. You can tell stories about anyone in a media franchise. This novel is a fine example.



Los Angeles Times, Sept. 20, 1957

### Ignorable Theme: Underrepresented Ideas

The week's Ignorable Theme proposes, "On which topic or theme—or science—would you like more sf to focus? What ideas could be explored more?"

When I reviewed *Worlds of If* #177 in *The Brass Hat Mind* #7, I was struck by the potential of healthcare, medicine, artificial intelligence, advertising, and marketing as topics for speculative fiction.

Most of the time, when considering this question, my interest is piqued most strongly by writing about the natural sciences. Life science, or biology, is particularly rich fodder for speculative storytelling, I think. I've particularly enjoyed the biopunk work by Rudy Rucker and the ribofunk writing of Paul Di Filippo—they both offer good examples of what biological sf can look like. Among the physical sciences, physics and perhaps astronomy are already

relatively well represented, while chemistry and earth science might offer room to grow. More recently, biological sf could address healthcare and medicine (applied sciences, perhaps), body modification, body hacking (in terms of diet, physical activity, or other means of adjusting your physical—and mental—state). Were an author to focus on meditation, prayer, or dream, that could begin to rub up against psychology, below.

I don't know that I've read much sf focusing on the formal science of mathematics, but theoretical math seems to present opportunities, as do other formula-driven disciplines such as logic. That leads us to the social sciences, which is where my knowledge and experience—and perhaps interest—is strongest.

Social science fiction could concentrate on topics such as anthropology, archaeology, economics, human geography, linguistics, management science, communication science, psychology, and political science. When considering current societal undercurrents, communications-oriented sf could focus on misinformation, propaganda, and new media, including social media. If the mobile phone and Internet are prosthetics, that could combine social science and life science. What do those technologies and modes of communication mean for brain development and human evolution?

Let's not neglect the humanities. Sf has a deep well to draw on when considering philosophy, religion, foreign languages (back to linguistics!), history, language arts (back to linguistics!)—poetry as computer programs for the brain?—the performing (Noh theater as mass hypnosis?) and visual arts. Speculative fiction about art and music almost always intrigues me.

So, I guess: All of them? My answer so far reminds me a little of my early work documenting the branches of science and science fiction. (*T&T* #20-21) So let me be a little more intentional. I'd like more sf to focus on biology, earth science, and the social sciences, the latter of which I think we have more experience with on a daily basis. I'm especially interested in the possibilities afforded by linguistics. There could also be more sf about architecture, urban planning, and transportation.

In terms of current technological trends, I think commercial space travel; deep sea exploration; misinformation and propaganda (and perhaps its impact on the electoral process, opinion polling, and marketing research); advertising, marketing, economics, and finance (including the continuing abstraction of money); the Internet, mobile phones, and social media; and self-driving cars, home robotics, and drones offer particularly intriguing possibilities in

the near term.

That might primarily be near-future sf, but it's where my interests currently lie.

### Comments on APA-L #3069

John Hertz's *Vanamonde* #1592 opened by recognizing Jazz Appreciation Month at the end of said month. When I listen to jazz on the radio, I tune into KKJZ, or KJazz, and I enjoy hearing David Benoit's program when I do. Benoit recorded for GRP Records, which was also home for Chick Corea, Eric Marienthal, and other musicians my father and I listened to avidly while I was growing up in southern Wisconsin. I enjoy Benoit's radio show more than I enjoy his own recordings and appreciate his presence on the airwaves.

While in college, I hosted an early-morning jazz program on WNUR in the Chicago area. My own tastes have run more toward bop, post-bop, and free jazz, so Hertz's questions about comparisons resonated with me. Do Charlie Parker, John Zorn, Tim Berne, Albert Ayler, John Coltrane, Joe McPhee, Eric Dolphy, Steve Lacy, Weasel Walter, Hal Russell, Anthony Braxton, and Peter Brotzmann—yes, I played the saxophone—all play the same kind of music? Perhaps. There's a lot of room for different kinds of jazz fans within the music of jazz. (Seek out *The Mighty Boosh* sketch "Jazz Trance" for a fun perspective on the music.)

In jazz, listeners definitely focus more on the performer than on the composer. Individual performers matter more than musical groups, though particular groupings over time have created marvelous music. In jazz, it's more about the player than the band, per se. Even the ways labels release, catalog, and index recordings focus on the performers. And major index projects such as *The Penguin Guide to Jazz Recordings* and Tom Lord's impressive *The Jazz Discography* focus on recording sessions and dates as much as they do on performers. Alternate takes can yield wonders, and sometimes the musical chemistry is richer on a specific date—regardless of the ensemble. Classical music is certainly more refined. In jazz, refinement might not be the goal. It's a music of the hothouse, not the parlor or concert hall, though it can find home in both. Unless you're talking about smooth jazz. Which isn't jazz.

Nola Frame-Gray later mailed me hard copies of her three most recent bacovers, which made me wish I'd waited for the printed versions to scan—instead of using the photographs she emailed me. Next time! She's still unable to read APA-L so isn't currently receiving it. I look forward to future submissions regardless.

It's a fair cop that publishing creates media. I, too, am puzzled by the perceived division between verbal and pictorial speculative fiction. Yet many fen prefer one over the other, at the other's expense or exclusion—even in the apae and fanzines of this enlightened age. One of the things I like about APA-L is that we largely embrace both. Even the ellers who read avidly are open to other media forms. I will share your feedback with cover artist Al Sirois. He's pictorial!



Los Angeles Times, Oct. 18, 1957

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* Vol. 1 #7—which I believe is actually #57—**Matthew Mitchell** described recent legal skirmishes. I'm glad that you returned to fandom, to the LASFS, and to APA-L despite the Time Meddlers upheaval that led to you and Maribeth resigning. There's no need to share the details. Bygones, bygones, and all that.

The Sad Puppies kerfuffle is a good example of cultural undercurrents affecting fandom. It was an example of conservative voices asserting themselves in what is generally a politics-free zone—though sf can be very political, as can fen. I understand that politics often led to occasionally active disagreements even within the pages of APA-L, and I'm pleased that that tends not to be the case currently, regardless of what our individual politics might be. I'm also glad that we're able to discuss religion without being exclusionary. The spiritual aspect of APA-L is a highlight for me. What's the other topic we're not supposed to bring up at dinner parties? According to the School of Modern Etiquette, we should avoid discussing relationship status, health and appearance, planning for children, politics, religion, and personal finances. So, don't talk about *life*. Or, do. We seem to

do okeh.

Ooh! “Lumbers.” Good one, sir. *From Hell It Came* is streaming on Tubi, Apple TV, and Prime Video. A DVD is available from the Warner Archive. I do not own it on DVD. I dare say you’ve made me want to see it. I’ll share your feedback with cover artist Rev. Ivan Stang. The other morning, I had a yen for an Egg McMuffin while on my morning walk, so I stopped by the local McDonalds. Instead of ordering at the counter, they now offer interactive kiosks, so I began my order there. I was prompted for the number on a table tent, but there were no table tents, so I went to the front counter to grab some—giving one to another patron in the same situation. Then the kiosk wouldn’t accept my credit card for payment. Instead of going to the counter to order and pay, I left to continue my walk home. Isn’t technology grand? Not only do such kiosks remove jobs that could be held by humans, they don’t work any better than the people who could work there. And this Grumpy Gus works for a Big Tech company.

Joe Zeff’s *Toony Loons* #759 shared a story about running out of gas and blocking traffic on Main Street. Wa-hoops! What an active day juggling medical appointments that was. Oh, the logistics. (Another possible topic for sf!) What could you possibly have said or done—that was trivial—to make Sam Frank consider you an enemy? Was he joking? What was Frankie Thomas like? Did he speak at a LASFS meeting? That would have been a neat presentation.

In Portugal, *literatura policial* describes mysteries, crime fiction, detective fiction, or what might be considered police procedurals—basically, mysteries. I first thought it had something to do with the police. It might.

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Los Angeles Times, Sept. 13, 1957

# Emulators & Engines #14

May 21, 2024

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

**Solo Game Report: *Holocaustic Dungeons***  
Somewhere along the way, I learned about Silverwolf Comics (<https://www.silverwolf.info>), a small press that published a handful of black-and-white titles in the mid- to late-1980s, including *Dungeoneers*, *Eradicators*, and *Grips*. The Sacramento, Calif.-based publisher founded by Kristopher A. Silver, owner of the store Alexander's Comics, released early work by Tim Vigil (*Faust*) and Ron Lim. Silverwolf also had a games division.

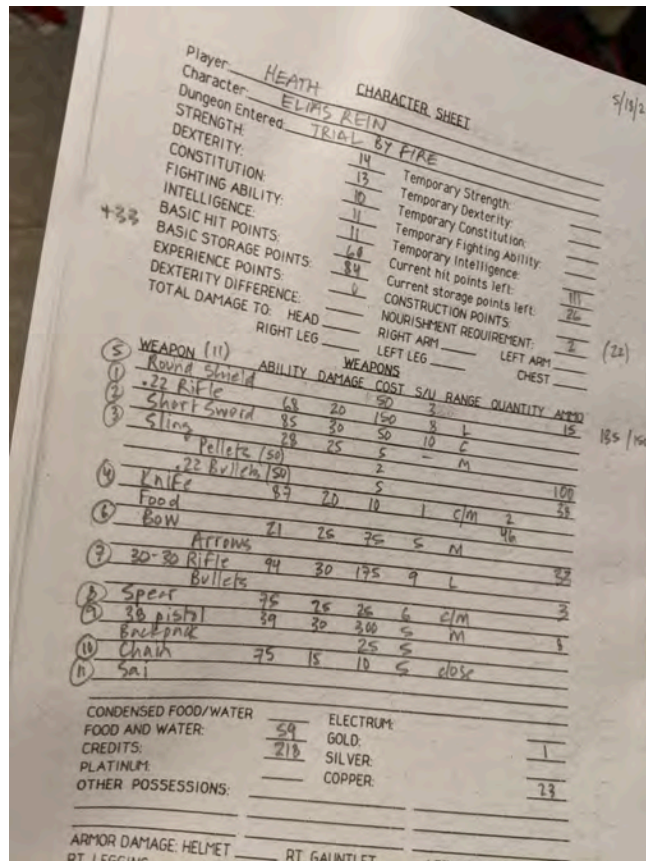
Its primary game was *Holocaustic Dungeons*, a delightfully self-published and homegrown game offering hex-based dungeon crawls that remind me of interactive fiction outlines. Set in the future, the game resonates with movies such as *Cube* and *The Running Man*. (The cover might have been drawn by Gary Amaro.)

The “*Holocaustic Dungeons*” were built as strongholds of sorts to protect certain items in the late twenty-first century. However, as time passed, and the media was finally able to tap into the security cameras, the building was turned into a stage for adventurers to seek their fortune while at the same time creating entertainment for the multitudes in the cities.

Characters are effectively gladiators, and you can play as a single player with no GM, with a single character—or multiple characters. The randomized encounters scale based on the number of characters, one adversary per character. Silverwolf published more than 20 slim supplements for the game— which is a 36-page digest—including at least two adventures (the nine-part *Dungeon of Doom* and the six-part *Blair's Revenge*), a number of log and map books, an *Arena* game emphasizing the gladiatorial nature of the combat, and two weapons-oriented books. The company also published a magazine, *Wolf Prints*, but I've not yet seen a copy.

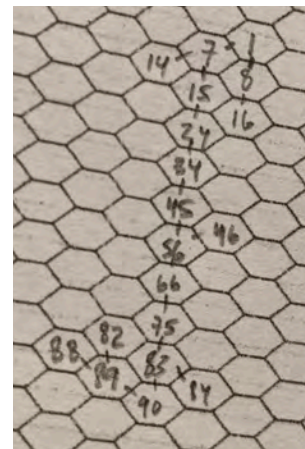
Having last played *Holocaustic Dungeons* upon first encountering it in the late 2010s, I returned to the game in mid-May. Instead of using one of my characters from 2018-2019, I made a new character,

naming it using the *FaNG Fantasy Name Generator* mobile app, and tackled the game's training adventure “*Trial by Fire*.”



Character generation and combat is relatively streamlined and simple, though the random generation of weapon abilities using a d100 frustrated me. If the number of weapons you can use is limited by an ability score, you quickly fill your weapon slots while progressing through the futuristic dungeons. Why would you use a weapon you have a 21 skill for—needing to roll below that value on a d100 to hit—instead of a weapon for which you have a 94?

The dungeons themselves are sterile, no-place places, a series of empty hexes four moves across in any direction, adversaries always staying in the center, and the possibility for a door on each side of a hex. “*Trial by Fire*” indicates what kind of room each hex is, though that could be randomly generated with some slight adjustments. Your adversaries are randomly



generated: ability scores, weapons, and other possessions. And weapons have potential damage values, which are decreased according to a percentile roll each time you hit. (To be honest, I maxed out the damage each hit—for my character *and* adversaries—in order to speed combat.)

ROOM	DOORS OPEN	NOTES	DOOR TAKEN E/W
1	4-8 5-7	In room	4
6	4-16	Adversary	4 (6)
16	4-15, 5-17	Danger	4
7	4-24	10- Pain	4
15	4-24	1- Adversary	4
24	4-24	8- Treasure	4
24	4-45	22- Combination	4 (2)
		1- Adversary	4
		21- Weapon	4
		11- Feel Good 66 HP	4
45	4-56	Nourishment	4 (2)
56	2-46 7-66	17- Weapon charged part of	4 (2)
66	4-75	21- Construction	6
75	4-83		2
83	2-84 4-91		4
91	6-94		4
94	1-92 6-91	5- Treasure	2

The game is very much rollplaying more than roleplaying, because just like your adversaries are only stat arrays, your character, though named, is also just a stat array. So what's the point? Your goal is to exit the dungeon. Along the way, you need to collect pieces of a key—two pieces in the case of “Trial by Fire”—in order to leave once you find the exit room.

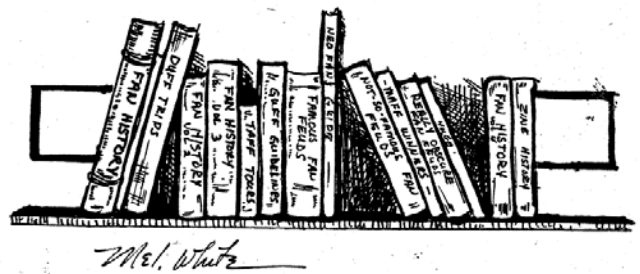
Given the limited number of weapons you're able to use, and that that can only be increased by increasing your Fighting Ability through the use of Construction Points, which are earned by exiting a dungeon, the game quickly becomes an exercise in resource management: ammunition, and food and water. Once you run out of food, there's a maximum number of hexes you can explore before you die.

In about an hour, I generated a character and explored 14 hexes, defeating five adversaries, in turn earning five Experience Points and looting the bodies for their weapons, ammunition, credits, and food. Experience Points can be used to increase weapon or shield abilities, which might make the usable weapon count restriction less onerous.

I do like how the game manages shields. They take a maximum amount of damage per attack before dealing damage to a character, and they have a total amount of damage they can take over time before they become inoperable. The game booklet also details damage done to different parts of the body, and how that affects combat. For example, if you lose both arms, you can no longer wield weapons, but you can jump and kick your adversaries. That's quite funny.

Elias Rein hasn't found either of the two pieces of the key or located the exit room yet, but at least he hasn't died. My initial characters in 2018-2019 (Vincent Ogden, Mollie Cruz, and Aaliyah Mendoza) died pretty quickly. Read as written, adversaries never leave the center of a hex, so if they don't have a long-range weapon—but you do—your character can remain at a safe distance and pick them off before moving—unless you want to conserve ammunition or seek more action-oriented combat.

Despite the lack of character or adversary detail, the inability to roleplay, and the sanitized nature of the setting (there are Adversary, Nothing, Friend, Danger, Treasure, Pain, Feel Good, ability score, Nourishment, Teleporter, Null, Wish, Weapon, Combination, and other rooms), *Holocaustic Dungeons* is still a diverting pastime. I might not care whether Elias Rein escapes the “Trial by Fire,” but if I feel like rolling some dice, it's not an entirely unpleasant way to spend some time.



### From the Reading Pile: Magazine Reviews *Adventurers Club* #16-17 (Summer 1990 and Summer 1991)

The “Hero Games Quarterly” published by Virginia-based Iron Crown Enterprises wasn't really a quarterly at this point in its history. Editor-in-Chief Jeff George (#16) recognizes that in his editorial “Nuff Said,” as well as the house magazine's “new, upsize format.” So does the subsequent Editor-in-Chief John Brunkhart (#17). Not only did George move on to other things, Hero series editor Rob Bell also left ICE to become a congressional staff member in Arizona.

Regardless, these two issues of the 48-page magazine offer an interesting snapshot of ICE and the Hero System at this point in time. ICE had moved beyond its Rolemaster beginnings and fully embraced the Hero System, a joint venture with Hero Games that grew out of *Champions*.

#16 is the “Special *Fantasy Hero* Issue” and was published shortly after the release of the revised second edition of *Fantasy Hero* and *Fantasy Hero Companion*. The issue features *Champions* errata; an article on poisons, venoms, and drugs for Hero; stats

for a couple of western-themed robots; a *Fantasy Hero* NPC, weapon, and magic item; and a complete adventure scenario for *Fantasy Hero*, “Doomspoint,” which could be modified for other fantasy systems. Additional material features a couple of more modern NPCs, including one that’s baseball themed.

#17 was published a year later, missing the intended quarterly publication schedule. *Champions* continued to plug along and *Ninja Hero* had been released, yielding some “Silly Martial Arts” gleaned from the Red October bulletin board system and 10 additional martial arts styles. The issue also includes *Ninja Hero* errata.

Shades of *Holocaustic Dungeons* and *Arena* above, Mark Bennett offers an article on gladiators for *Fantasy Hero*. The then-recent release of the *Western Hero* campaign book inspired the inclusion of several NPC stat blocks for the “Greatest Western Heroes That Never Lived,” such as the Lone Ranger and Tonto (and Silver!), the Duke, Kwai Chang Caine, and the Man with No Name. Bennett also contributes an article on Native American magic for *Western Hero*.

While #16 featured a cover by Walter Velez and interior artwork by Terry Pavlet, the art budget for #17 must have been smaller because interior art was largely drawn from public domain Dover Publications material. Interestingly, the masthead for #17 includes Monte Cook, who took over as Hero series editor after Bell’s departure.

It looks like the most recent Hero System books were published in 2017. Given the branching out from a superhero-focused roleplaying game to fantasy, martial arts, and western themes, at one time Hero might have been a solid contender for the role GURPS, the Generic Universal Roleplaying System, has played. A Hero house ad even included the phrase “Universal Role Playing.”

Other advertisements promoted additional games such as *Twilight: 2000*, *Space Master*, *Cyberspace*, *The DC Heroes Role-Playing Game*, and *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs*, as well as *Origins ’91* and *GDW Games’ Challenge* magazine. Another house ad featured Campaign Classics such as *Vikings* and *Pirates*.

While the issues were fun to return to—and “Doomspoint” offers inspiration for solo and other play—I’m struck by the limitations of house or system-specific periodicals. I suppose game masters and players who utilized the Hero System might have been looking for new character types, NPCs, weapons, magic items, and scenarios, but as a player now, the options feel limited—and restricted to then newly released products. What did we want from such magazines back then?

The articles on gladiators, Native American magic,

Wanted posters as adventure hooks, and the “Doomspoint” scenario might still have legs regardless of what games you play—particularly because of the historical detail and potential for modification. Otherwise, the issues feel like museum pieces. The early 1990s weren’t that long ago!



*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 20, 1957

### The Ignorable Theme: GM Mistakes

When I was younger, I played *Dungeons & Dragons* with friends from school. We were first introduced to the game during Boy Scouts, and older Scouts would often bring their *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* materials on campouts in order to play in the evening. We thought *AD&D* was too complicated and challenging, and we were younger, so we took to *Dungeons & Dragons* in the early- to mid-1980s.

We’d play in our homes and during church youth group lock-ins at the church overnight, and I’d spend hours in my room making characters and drawing maps. I usually served as DM, and while most of our sessions were self-created, we also utilized published modules—when we could afford them.

I remember reading or running *Adventures in Blackmoor*, *Castle Caldwell and Beyond*, *The Isle of Dread*, and *Ravenloft*—we were playing *AD&D* by then. My biggest mistake as a DM—and my only GM regret—occurred while running *Ravenloft*.

I don’t remember what level characters my friends were playing, or how giving we were in terms of magic items generally, I do remember this: The character played by my friend Steve Schultz, with whom I’m still in touch, had acquired something—or knew a spell—that enabled him to take vaporous form. Once the party had encountered Count Strahd von Zarovich, once combat was going the party’s way (which it probably shouldn’t have so easily) and Strahd tried to retreat strategically to recover, Schultz’s character took vaporous form and chased him through every nook and cranny of Castle Ravenloft, harrying him until Strahd fell. Strahd just couldn’t get away from that initial encounter.

My resulting memories of *Ravenloft*—and Strahd

—both of which should have been desperately challenging, was that Strahd was easy to kill. The party found him, chased him, and killed him. While I’ve never been an anti-player, vicious, or overly challenging DM, I know that I wasted an opportunity with Strahd. He did not play the role he could have played in the module. Perhaps the party was over-leveled for the module. But I definitely played Strahd and adjudicated the players’ actions incorrectly. The climax of the module should have been more challenging and threatening, if not frightening.

When I ran the fourth-edition *Curse of Strahd* and associated modules in organized play through the Adventurers League locally, I focused much more on the horror-inspired mood, tenor, tone, and atmosphere—and concentrated on better playing Strahd, who was much more of a foreboding, distant, mysterious, and malevolent influence. He was also much more formidable.

**Comments on *Alarums & Excursions* #582**

**Caio G. D. S. Silva, João P. F. Santos, Kauam S. Belsi, and Nikolas M. Santos’s** delightfully colored cover “Honor of Trolls” reminded me of the anime *Dragon Ball Z*, as well as *Tunnels & Trolls*. Somehow, I missed that Rick Loomis died in 2019 and that Rebellion acquired *T&T* last year. (<https://rebellionunplugged.com/tunnelsandtrolls>) I last received a PBM News email from Loomis in September 2017, and the acquisition by Rebellion could bode well for the game. Recent discussion in the *Tunnels & Trolls* (Let’s Talk About *Tunnels & Trolls*) Facebook group expresses curiosity about the company’s plans. I hope Ken St. Andre benefits.

In *Back to Brazilian Gamebooks Part II: Cercado por mortos* (2018), **Pedro Panhoca da Silva** mentioned several games that explore decoloniality, including *Steam Runnerz RPG*, *Odú RPG*, and *Caravana*. Having recently read a *Star Wars* tie-in novel featuring Imperial protagonists (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #115), I’ve been thinking about the empathetic treatment of adversaries and the portrayal of demihuman races. I haven’t given much thought to how colonialism shows up in roleplaying games.

In *Traveller Play-By-Email: Plankwell Campaign, Ch 34: Psionics 101*, **Jim Vassilakos** discussed Jack Kerouac with Mark Nemeth. After several decades of reading and appreciating Kerouac, I recently learned that he wrote at least one science fiction story. That was entirely news to me! (I read it this morning before my flight to San Francisco International Airport.) Your comment to Michael Cule about the ship name *It’s Difficult to Pronounce* made me think of the fiction of Iain M. Banks. (*Snow Poster Township* #10)

While I clearly cannot claim to have coined the phrase “ludic numinous,” I haven’t actually looked into whether others have used it. Kudos to Briony Clarke and *Animate Being: Extending a Practice of the Image to New Mediums via Speculative Game Design!* I appreciated your comments on abstract combat and agree that “there needs to be enough there so that everyone understands what went right and/or wrong, [and] who did great and who messed up.” I’ll continue to give it thought. When I played more online—play-by-post on RPOL, for example—I’d



Los Angeles Times, Oct. 11, 1957

often outline default actions so the DM could effectively run my character in the spirit I intended should I be Away from Keyboard inconveniently.

**Jerry Stratton's** *The Biblyon Free Press* dated May 2024 mentioned *Blake's 7*. You know, I've never watched that either! (I've been watching the first season of *Special Unit 2*, which I'm sure is not as good.) Your section title "Ludus Antiquus" is wonderful. As always, I enjoyed "Carpe Librum," especially the review of the Isaac Asimov collection. According to the *Internet Speculative Fiction Database*, the novelette "To Tell at a Glance" was initially written in response to a February 1976 request from *Seventeen* magazine, which subsequently rejected it. Asimov subsequently submitted half of it to the *Saturday Evening Post*, which published it in February 1977. Searching *ISFDb* for *Seventeen* suggests the periodical published no documented sf, which is a shame. I got all excited. (That said, *ISFDb* also doesn't list the sf story by Kerouac I recently learned about—which was published in *Nugget*—so its records might be incomplete.)

In *Sinister Things* #327, **Patrick Riley** admitted to removing Player Name from his homemade character sheets. "I know my name." That made me chuckle. I read and appreciated your comments on the abstraction of combat; you've given me some things to think about! My developing approach might work for solo play, but not group play.

**Mark Nemeth's** *The Seedling* #36 mentioned his own solo play. I'll read with more attention to such references and discussion! The La Brea Tar Pits recently hit the news in Los Angeles because several teenagers became ill after ingesting cannabis edibles while on a chaperoned field trip to the museum and grounds. Initial reportage suggested that the youth had experienced "contact with [a] mysterious substance," but that was more fully reported later. However, the occurrence did get me thinking about "mysterious substances" one might encounter at a tar pit or paleontological excavation site.

Your comments "it's hard to find people to play with at all" and "I genuinely don't enjoy hanging out with a large portion of RPG enthusiasts" resonated with me. We pick our friends; we pick our tables.

In *Reddened Stars* #32634-.8bit, **John Redden** shared his initial experience reading Frank Herbert's *Dune*. That does sound perfect.

**Dylan Capel** explored gamebooks in *The Silent Temple* #31. I enjoyed your descriptions of *Cages of Fear*, *Exquisite Corpse of Maggot Keep*, *Grave of the Kraken*, and the works of Rose Estes. That *Grave of the Kraken* draws on the GNAT gaming system is intriguing; I'll have to look into that. I also read and

enjoyed your conrep on Salute 2024. I'll have to give more thought to your distinctions between Free Kriegspiel Revival, Old School Revival, and New School Revival. It seems that people apply the label OSR to a lot of different stuff these days.



*Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 25, 1957

In *Mundus Vult Decepi* for A&E #582, **Michael Cule** reminisced about using lined notebook paper for character sheets. I wonder whether anyone's ever tried to develop a Universal Character Sheet. Even Judges Guild's *Character Codex* sheets were oriented toward *AD&D*. Your call for version control is valid. Your description of *D&D*'s current target audience made me chuckle.

**Mark A. Wilson's** *Bumbling Through Dungeons* #54 included a mention of R.A. Lafferty. I really must read more of his writing. In *Random Access* #295, **Joshua Kronengold** nattered on about his recent social schedule, including a visit with Paul Holman! (I love it when fellow apans are able to get together. This



week, I'm working up in Mountain View, Calif. It doesn't look like I'll have time to wrangle any of the Bay Area LASFAPAns, but I might make it to a nearby game store.)



Los Angeles Times, Nov. 1, 1957

As you began to recount your recent reading, the juxtaposition of “kidlit” and “Highlights” inspired me to misread that as *Highlights*, or *Highlights for Children* magazine. My wife and I recently attended a performance by the Understudies (<https://www.facebook.com/understudiesimprov>) at the Impro Theatre. The improvised three-act play was set in a carwash, and in the waiting room, there were back issues of *Highlights*. The actors thumbed through an issue, commenting on its word puzzles and *Goofus and Gallant*. They did not remark on my favorite

aspect of *Highlights: The Timbertoes*.

Your character sheet remarks that “the needs of a new player to a game—who needs the character sheet to communicate core system concepts—differ from an experienced player who mostly needs to use the sheet to keep track of the basics of their character...” resonated with me. I was unfamiliar with the concept of playbooks.

After the theater performance last weekend, my wife and I stopped at a nearby Fatburger for a late-night hamburger and cheeseburger. It felt like a pretty Hollywood thing to do. I ordered a cola and was surprised how much I enjoyed the Pepsi. I don't usually drink soda, but when I drink cola, I guess it's usually Coke. It made me wonder whether I had a preference.

I enjoyed your discussion of *Brindlewood Bay*. I supported the Kickstarter and have received the materials, but I've yet to read or play them. My wife tends to enjoy mystery-oriented games (*Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective* is a favorite.), and my parents enjoy reading mysteries, so I thought it might be a fun entry point to roleplaying games. I look forward to learning more!

Thank you for your comments on my use of fanspeak and apa acronyms. My apazines end up having a broader readership through my monthly fanzine *The Stf Amateur* (<https://efanzines.com/HR>), so I try to respond to others' writing in a way that doesn't require someone to have read the initial fanzine and doesn't require knowledge of apa. Based on your feedback, that approach seems to be working, at least a little.

In *Mermecolion at a Picnic #452*, **Spike Y Jones** offered some quite amusing personal updates as details related to his email address and phone number. I've got to pay more attention to our indicia! I enjoyed your mention of the doorbell camera in the 1935 *Werewolf in London*. I'll have to seek that out. Thank you, also, for your mentions of Green Ronin's magazine *Engine* (<https://tinyurl.com/GR-Engine-1>) and Steve Jackson's recommendation of *Senet* (<https://senetmagazine.com>). I look forward to checking them out.

**Craig Kamber's** *Craig Cornered* dated May 2024 included a spell write up for That Thing I Forgot. I got a kick out of that. It'd be useful in real life, too! In *This Isn't the Zine You're Looking For #391*, **Lisa Padol** commented on the “information-danger cycle, where you get information by confronting danger, and learning information leads to danger,” which I found intriguing. It reminded me of the introduction of a wandering monster in response to dawdling too long searching for secret doors or traps, staying in one

place for just a little too long. I quite like the idea of a countdown clock.

I appreciated the reference to Ursula K. Le Guin’s “Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown” and will seek it out. I’ll have to learn more about character keepers, as well as playbooks (as mentioned above).

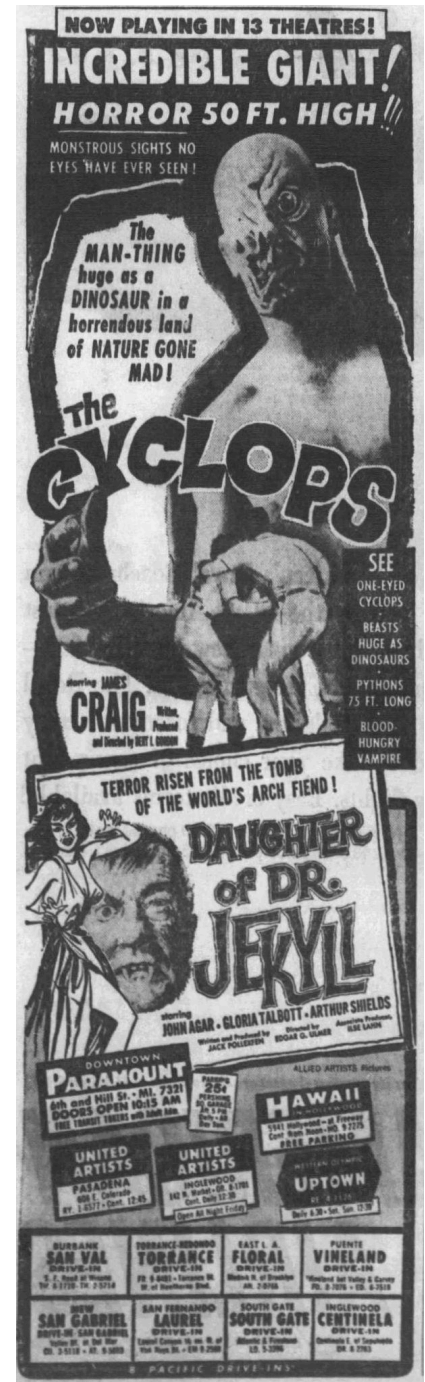
In *Bugbears & Ballyhoo* #30, **Gabriel Roark** expanded on the 2024 RPG Character Creation Challenge. “I have numerous RPGs sitting on my gaming bookshelf, iPad, and computer with which I’ve not done a thing except read them (in some cases, not even that).” I find myself in a similar situation. Your reference to Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson’s point of view on revamping worn levels of a dungeon was thought provocative. In *Holocaustic Dungeons* (see above), which is a futuristic gladiatorial game, rooms recharge after five turns—so if you move back through them, they’ve been repopulated by a random adversary. That makes sense for that game—I’m sure there’s a staff behind the scenes assigning adversaries to the various rooms—but wouldn’t necessarily for a more ensconced headquarters or similar setting in *Dungeons & Dragons*. If kobolds frequented an area, rats might learn to avoid it. If the kobolds were dispatched, it might be a matter of time before the rats were bold enough to return. The living dungeon concept might be more along the lines of *Holocaustic Dungeons*’ five-turn refresh.

**Patrick Zoch**’s *The Dragon’s Beard* dated May 2024 featured a conrep/triprep about the 2024 Dice Tower Cruise. Your priorities were clear! “We passed on the opportunity to get sunburned and stayed on board to game,” you wrote. Have you been to the Bahamas, Haiti, or Jamaica before? I’ve never been on a cruise before, so I’d be torn between the game activities, other cruise activities, and port days. You are one dedicated gamer; that’s why you went on this particular cruise! Were the games scheduled? Did you have to sign up for time slots? How were table dwellers determined? (Just Players Wanted flags?) Were there any games that you weren’t able to get in on? Your board game photographs were a delight. *Five Peaks* sounds particularly interesting to me. “Playing games next to a window overlooking the ocean was lovely”: I can only imagine.

Your comments on the Quest Calendar *Leaf Riders of Wrenwood* resonated with me. Last year, I played its *The Voidspark Chronicles* (*Snow Poster Township* #8) but didn’t become too engaged with it. I’ll have to check when I return home, but I think I petered out in March or April 2023—and have kept the calendar and other materials around in case I decide to finish it. I might not do so. I found that playing the game daily wasn’t a habit I developed, and that I’d wait until I

had a handful of days to catch up on before sitting down with it, perhaps weekly. Even that approach didn’t pull me through the game.

I had to chuckle when I read that you joined a *Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game* on Discord thinking it was a FASERIP game. It sounds like you got over your initial surprise and weren’t necessarily disappointed. I was inspired by players not selecting Marvel characters to play—but creating their own. Some of my most fun gaming experiences as an adult occurred while playing *Mutants & Masterminds*.



Los Angeles Times, Nov. 1, 1957

## Telegraphs & Tar Pits #116

May 30, 2024

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### Two Weeks' Senryu

Delayed emailing  
because of LASFS Menace.  
I will catch up soon!

Three-day business trip  
Walked the trails of Mountain View  
Two ducks on a pond

This was my first business trip in about a year, and the first trip to the main campus of my employer in quite some time that I really enjoyed and was energized by. That had to do with the onsite for which I went to Mountain View, Calif., flying into San Francisco International Airport, but it also had to do with staying in a hotel closer to the bay, on the edge of Charleston Marsh and Stevens Creek.

In any event, returning to Los Angeles around 8:30 p.m. last Thursday meant I missed the LASFS meeting and wasn't able to print or collate APA-L before Friday morning. I put it in the mail shortly after 11:30 a.m.—two weeks in a row collating late! And I certainly wasn't able to wrap up an ish of my own.

### Trip Report: Mountain View, Calif.

I wasn't able to engage in too much fannish activity while I was in Silicon Valley last week for work, but I tried. Departing early last Tuesday morning and returning later Thursday evening last week, seeing my calendar reminder for the Bay Area Science Fiction Association (<https://www.basfa.org>) meeting the Monday night before I left and reading Ken Patterson's minutes the next afternoon while at work held special meaning.

Giving everyone far too late notice, I emailed the Bay Area participants in LASFAPA to indicate I was in town and available for dinner, able to travel to Mountain View, Sunnyvale, Palo Alto, and other nearby areas, if folks were able to gather. They were not. Janice Morningstar already had plans for both evenings, and Alan Winston was also booked. Regardless, I enjoyed the email exchanges and will strive to make plans before I head north next time.

I also sent a hello to Christopher Garcia via Facebook Messenger—not expecting him to be able to hang out given where he works and lives, and family responsibilities. (As well as the too-late notice.)

Locating area bookstores, I considered stopping by Bell's Books (<https://www.bellsbooks.com>) or Books Inc. (<https://www.booksinc.net/PaloAlto>) in Palo Alto, or the Books Inc. (<https://www.booksinc.net/MountainView>) in Mountain View—the Palo Alto Books Inc. was not far from a restaurant my colleagues went to for dinner—but I don't need any more books and had brought two that I was currently reading.

So I stuck close to campus and walked around the more natural edge of the area. On the way to the hotel after work last Wednesday, I walked past the original site of the Rengstorff House, one of the first homes built in the city around 1867. Not too far away, there were a couple of empty buildings once home to CrystaComm, an electrical and optical materials design and manufacturing company. The front door to one of the buildings was open, but I couldn't get it open enough to enter.



At a cross street, I looked down toward the NASA Ames Research Center but decided the street didn't go all the way to it because of the creek. Reaching Charleston Road, I headed east, eventually crossing a fitness trail before taking another that skirted the eastern edge of Charleston Marsh. I didn't explore too many of the side trails but did visit an observation deck over the marsh. I followed the trail north along Stevens Creek—parallel to Stevens Creek Trail—crossing a parking lot before heading east to bridge the creek. Near where I was staying, there were several ponds, and I spent some time watching the ducks as the sun approached setting.

Next time I go to the main campus, I'll explore the

Stevens Creek Shoreline Nature Study Area Preserve and follow Steven Creek Trail out into the bay. This trip, I spent the evenings in my room, reading. I finished *Demon in the Mirror* by Andrew Offutt and Richard Lyon (see below) and continued reading Robert Jordan's *The Great Hunt*.



Los Angeles Times, Nov. 8, 1957

## Movies Badly Explained

By Tristan Louis

*12 Years a Slave*: A Philadelphia man visits the south and spends longer than expected there.

*Alien*: A woman astronaut with a cat suffers discrimination as no one on her ship is willing to listen to her.

*Casablanca*: The story of a bar and its regulars

*Gattaca*: Genetic engineering will make for a better society.

*Her*: The future OpenAI wants to build

Mad Max series: Here's why cars are cool

*The Maltese Falcon*: A heavy drinker looks for a rare bird in San Francisco.

*Minority Report*: Let's build a surveillance society.

*Oppenheimer*: A recruiting video for nuclear power

*Ready Player One*: Virtual Reality will make the world better.

*RoboCop*: A militarized police force is a force for good.

*The Social Network*: Creating a generation of entrepreneurs

Star Wars series: A young man finds love, gets denied a promotion, and gets angry. Later on, he dies saving his son in a battle with his boss. Many years

later, someone tries to follow in his footsteps but gets beaten by a girl.

## Protection from Electromagnetic Fields

By Adrian Kresnak

Health research is difficult. Signs and symptoms are hard to measure; linking them to a cause takes extensive study. Knowledge widely accepted by the medical community might be unknown or rejected by the public. People suffer, but we don't always know how to help them.

I want to establish that so you know where I'm coming from when I talk about the health risks of electromagnetic fields. I'm not a doctor. This is not a medical article. I'm talking about it as a potential source of inspiration for science fiction stories.

Radiation is a funny thing.

The dangerous kind, the kind that happens around nuclear disasters, is ionizing radiation. That radiation removes electrons from atoms and molecules, causing damage at the most fundamental level. The Hulk's gamma rays are ionizing; so are X-rays.

Humans protect ourselves from ionizing radiation by limiting our exposure to it. That's why the medical technicians put a heavy apron on you when you get an X-ray.

Not all radiation is ionizing. Light, for instance. Radio waves. Microwaves. Of course, even non-ionizing radiation can be harmful. Sunburn won't immediately kill a person, but it's still unpleasant to experience. Like with X-rays, we protect ourselves by limiting our exposure. (Wear sunscreen when you're out in the sun!)

Pendants and stickers are advertised as protection from electromagnetic fields (EMFs), but I believe a more effective protective device would function more like the apron or sunscreen. Those are physical barriers between the source of the radiation and the person. Consider a foil-lined lunch bag, for example. Electronic devices would go inside when not in use, limiting the potential radiation.

One person could store their own devices that way. But our modern life is full of electronic gadgets radiating their own electric fields. How does a society protect itself as a whole?

There are health risks that we humans accept, explicitly or not, as an inevitable part of life. This article is about EMFs, but this principle also applies to COVID-19, microplastics, or summer heat. I don't like the nihilistic, shrugging acceptance of risk, but that is where I've ended up.

## Eternity's Dilemma

By Joshua Sky (© 2024)

Phil sat in the lonely diner, sipping black coffee, watching the colorful traffic soar by. Chromium red and blue beauties, digitally retrofitted to glide on air. He leaned his head on his fist, wondering if his son was mad at him.

He's probably upset about something, Phil thought, feeling a reservoir of ambivalent guilt. These days it seems like anything I do makes Ken upset. Though, what I tell him today ... maybe that'll change his mood. Make him appreciate his father more.

The automated door slid open, and in strolled his son. From his harried appearance, it was apparent that he hadn't picked a stylish skein, but psy-leaped as is, casually dressed in a plastic tee along with mismatched jeans. Black stubble etched a shadow around his jawline, and his face wore a begrudged expression that telegraphed, I'm here because I'm obligated.

He rose, hugging Kenneth's stiff frame. "Hello, son. Coffee?"

"Hi, pop. Sure, thanks." They sat smiling in pained restraint. It hurt to see Ken so aged; in his mid-fifties now, wrinkles under eyes, creased face, thinned hair. Ironically, Phil appeared thirty years younger than his son, cloaked in a holo-skein. If a casual observer saw them dining, they'd guess their roles were reversed, Ken the father, Phil the son. Maybe that's why my own child despises me, Phil thought. I won the Oedipal war.

Phil flagged a waiter, who instantly popped over. A flickering hologram of a cheerful twenty-something, clad in a crisp blue uniform, paper-white hat tilted to the side. "Coffee, two sugars." Phil stated.

"So, how are things in the good ol' server?"

"Fine, though boring." Phil sipped from his mug.

"Boring? How the hell can you get bored when you can do anything?"

"In a weird way, the lack of limitations is limiting ... When I first migrated, it was exciting. I partied, gorged on a buffet of drugs, and slept around. I'm over it. Without repercussions, everything's lost its luster."

The waiter brought over the caffeine. Ken tore open two packets of sugar, pouring steams of white crystals into black liquid. He peeled open a small cup of milk, adding it to the mix. The contents in the red mug roiled.

Phil watched the whirlpool, which had its own faint gravitational pull. "There isn't an easy way of saying this ... the reason I asked you to visit is because I'm going to self-delete."

Ken's face didn't betray a centimeter of emotion. He continued swirling the liquid in his mug, deepening the strength and speed of the vortex. "I thought you were financially secure."

"I am, and I'm leaving it all to you." Son locked eyes with father. "Like I said, I'm bored."

Ken chuckled darkly, then caught himself. "You're serious?"

"Yes, have you been listening to anything I've said?"

"Okay, okay. I never know when to take you seriously. If you're so bored, just wipe your memory. Everything will seem new again. Don't worry about me, we barely see each other anyway."

"No, I'm just over it ... I haven't been myself for a long time."

"What brought this on?"

"I guess it started when I began wondering whether or not I'm really me. Am I still who I used to be, or just a digital shadow?"

"You're a string of numbers in a floating computer. A great copy, but a copy nonetheless. Who cares? Look around, you can go anywhere, do anything—you've got the money."

"Yeah, but what's the point?"

Ken reached across the table, taking his father's hand. Phil nearly recoiled, surprised by the gesture. Surprised that he cared. "You don't have to die, dad."

Phil, with his other shaking hand, mistakenly took his son's coffee, and sipped. "The thoughts of being alive or dead for eternity are equally terrifying. There's no escape from forever. I can't live like this. I just can't."

"That's the burden of existence. It's heavy for everyone. One day, the servers will short out, and you'll be gone, I'll be gone, and then my son—and on and on."

"How is my grandson?"

"Good. Sorry Travis couldn't make it. These trips to the server are expensive, and considering the news..."

Phil bit the bottom of his lip. "I would've paid." From his breast pocket he took out a sheet of smart paper, sliding it across the desk.

Ken eyed it curiously. "What's this?"

"It's a contract. The higher-end servers have a law where you need a direct family member's permission to unplug yourself."

"So that's why you asked me to come."

"That's part of it."

"Selfish until the end." Ken lifted the contract, reading it carefully, then glanced up. "You sure about this? This is a permanent solution to a temporary problem."

“I’ve made my decision.”

After paying the tab, they walked to Phil’s fly-car. Outside, the air was sweet, and the town appeared to be an idyllic setting with numerous brownstones and tall trees. The only thing betraying unreality was the occasional floating advertisement offering afterlife upgrades.

Phil was parked a few blocks away. He had a shiny silver Mercedes OO—the hatch doors opened and they got in. “Where to, Phil?” the car asked.

“Take us to the Black Office.” There was a pause, as the auto processed the information. “Sorry—please repeat.”

“The Black Office.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Just take us there.”

The car engines hummed as the vehicle rose into the air and sped forth. Ken stared out the window at the shrinking landscape. The town was small compared to the gray mountains and surrounding forestry.

The vehicle accelerated, the view below transformed into a whizzing blur of liquid color. Within moments, the car began to decelerate and up ahead stood the plastic spires of a gray city, Manhattan II. Ken leaned forward, and Phil smiled at his son’s excitement. “The city of anonymous emperors,” Phil quipped. “Ever been?”

“No, but I’ve read all about it.” The city was completely modeled after its predecessor. New York was destroyed decades ago, but remade again within the digitally indestructible plane. Closer and closer the buildings grew as they advanced, gaining perspective. Massive gray protrusions, millions of shimmering windows, the colossal structures emitted an aura of cold unstoppable power.

The Mercedes weaved between two skyscrapers and took alternate routes to avoid the armada of traffic. After ten minutes, they began to descend, passing through multiple grids of bridges holding up Greek statues of muscled men wrestling for domination, overseeing pedestrians in a hurry to go nowhere.

“Arrived at destination,” the car said as it self-parked in an empty spot on a bridge. The doors hissed open. Phil and Ken got out and stretched. At the corner of the sky-bridge were a series of shops and an ebony cube that had a single door and no signs—the Black Office.

Together, they walked to the entryway. “I can’t go in with you. I’m sorry.” Ken said, gazing at the ground.

“It’s okay. Just—just let me really look at you one more time.”

Ken stood erect, staring his father directly in the eyes. Phil took in the vision of his child, the proud, aged man he’d become. “Kenneth, my son. You came through me, are of me, but you are not me.” They hugged. “My time is up.” With that, Phil handed the car keys to Ken and walked through the onyx door.

To his surprise, the walls in the Black Office were bright white. It was sparse, without decoration, and behind the counter stood a bald man in a dark uniform, wearing a plastic smile. It was as if he were expecting Phil’s arrival. Maybe the car rattled me out, he thought. Doesn’t matter anyway.

“Hello there, Phil.” The clerk said blithely in a rough New York accent. “How can I assist you?”

“I’m ready to check out.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. Has your time with us been unsatisfactory?”

“No, it’s been great. I’m just ready to go.”

“We understand. While we make preparations for your self-deletion, would you mind answering a survey?”

“I’d—I’d prefer not.”

“We understand.” The clerk began typing away at a holographic interface. Then the monitor went red.

“Something wrong?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Philip, but it appears that your file is corrupt.”

“My file, corrupt?”

“There seems to be an error in the data banks.”

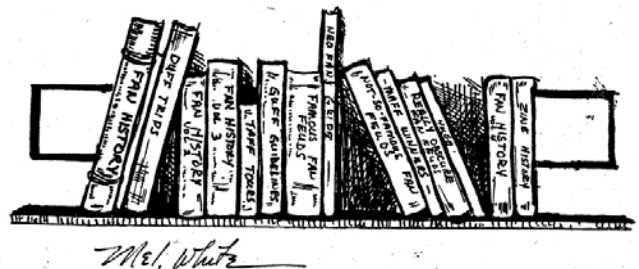
“What does that mean?”

“Our technicians are working to repair your information. In the meantime, enjoy complimentary gold account privileges during your stay.”

Frustration coursed through him, “I don’t want a gold account. I want to end!”

“I’m sorry. Goodbye.” The clerk suddenly disappeared, an illusory hologram. The computer was no longer willing to negotiate.

Phil left the Black Office and returned to the bridge. His son was gone, and the Mercedes with him. Phil began to walk without direction, wandering and wondering if this afterlife would ever end.



## From the Reading Pile: Book Reviews

***Demon in the Mirror*** by Andrew Offutt and Richard Lyon (Pocket Books, 1978)

The first book in the three-book series *War of the Wizards* was published by Pocket's Timescape imprint with a Boris Vallejo cover painting. Featuring a compelling heroine, Tiana of Reme, a pirate captain and adventurer along the lines of Conan the Barbarian or Red Sonja, the paperback secured promotional blurbs from Jerry Pournelle and Andre Norton, who also compared the protagonist to John Jakes' Brak the Barbarian, Fritz Leiber's Gray Mouser, and C.L. Moore's Jirel of Joiry, which might be the most appropriate parallel.

*Demon in the Mirror* is an excellent book. If the subsequent two are anything like it, the entire series is a must read. I've not read a lot of Offutt or Lyon, so I can't critique their collaboration, but the book reads seamlessly, and I wasn't able to identify any authorial lapses or gaps suggesting the work of two writers.

For the most part, the storyline details adventurous travel and the collection of multiple arcane body parts, as Tiana tries to retrieve the limbs and body of a dead sorcerer, ostensibly so he can be destroyed and her brother freed. Each body part—arms and legs, torso, and head—outré relics, all, seems to have a corrupting influence on those around it.

Over the course of the novel, Tiana and her foster father Caranga the black encounter magical serpents, a vampiric order of nuns, a potion maker, highriders—sailing on the updrafts during thunderstorms—and woodlings, demonic hawks, animated shadows, aggressive plants, and other challenges. She determines the identity of their benefactor, a shadowy presence in a mirror at one point, and is able to avoid being manipulated malevolently.

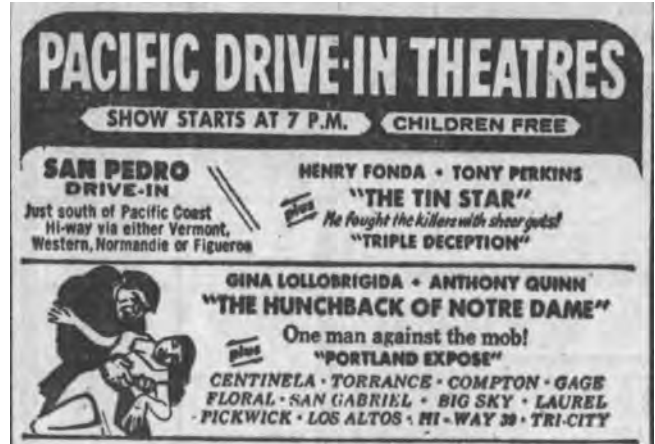
Even though the book is a bit linear—we went here; then we had to go there—each section is compelling enough to read well, and when Tiana and her father split up, the dual narrative—Caranga's written in the form of a ship's log—proves refreshing and a bit of a reset.

An impressive example of sword and sorcery fiction, and authors I'd return to. The books don't seem to have been kept in print since the early 1980s, but the third in the series, *Web of the Spider*, was reviewed in *Extrapolation*, *The Patchin Review*, *Science Fiction & Fantasy Book Review*, and *Science Fiction Review*.

## From the Reading Pile: Short Stories

Before my flight north to SFO, I read Jack Kerouac's short story "cityCityCITY" in *Good Blonde & Others* (Grey Fox, 1994). I'd first learned about the

story—perhaps Kerouac's only sf story—in *Selected Letters: 1957-1969* (Penguin, 2000). In 1957, Kerouac wrote to his agent Sterling Lord about whether he'd been able to locate the manuscript for "cityCityCITY," a "science fiction story written in 1954-1955" according to a footnote.



*Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 8, 1957

The sf "sketch" was eventually published in the August 1959 issue of *Nugget*, retitled "The Electrocutation of Block 38383939383..." In Robert Creeley's preface to *Good Blonde & Others*, he cites biographer Tom Clark's remark that "magazines such as *Escapade* were those few which had no prejudice against [Kerouac]." Indeed, many of the pieces compiled for that collection had been published in periodicals such as *Escapade*, *Nugget*, *Pageant*, and *Playboy*. According to the Editor's Note at the end of the collection, the original ending of "cityCityCITY" is different from that in *Nugget*.

As it was originally written, the story is definitely science fictional. Set in the future, the story details a vastly overpopulated world, the surface of the Earth covered with metal, and humanity segregated into numbered zones or blocks. You cannot travel from block to block, and when citizens become too unruly or numerous, entire blocks are destroyed, the people burned to death. Generally, the populace is sedated by a number of drugs distributed by Master Center Love, lest their merit—measured by a "little rubber disc adhering to the brow"—suffer.

Kerouac doesn't take entirely naturally to science fiction, but the story works as a Kerouac story even if it's a bit roughly hewn as an sf story. The pulps of the time likely wouldn't have taken it, though they perhaps could have if they'd been queried instead of a skin mag or other slick.

When the story ran in *Nugget*, the cover of the issue included a cover blurb: "A New Story by Jack Kerouac." The Contributors notes in the front of the

book say, “His new story in this issue, ... is a corker, a variation on themes by Huxley and Orwell.” Printed opposite a piece of art by Arno Sternglass, the story includes the subhead, “About life in a drugged, steelplate, geometric cityCityCITY, the day after Tomorrow.” The story reads largely the same as the original manuscript as published in *Good Blonde & Others*, except for about two pages that were cut.



*Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 15, 1957

Those two pages are important. The magazine version ends just before the block is electrocuted. In the original manuscript, the block leader’s son is launched into space in a rocket ship, shades of Superman, to pass out and wake, to read a letter from his father. “It was my life’s dream to see that you would get out of this Overpopulated Totalitarian trap,” Kerouac writes. “Our reward is without end.”

If the New Wave began in the early 1960s, Kerouac’s “cityCityCITY” is a precursor, published in 1959 and written in 1954-1955. Imagine a world in which Kerouac wrote more than one sf story. He very well might have. The *Internet Speculative Fiction Database* doesn’t list this story but lists “Ronnie on the Mound,” which was first published in *Esquire* and much later included in the anthology *Field of Fantasies: Baseball Stories of the Strange and Supernatural*. Luckily, “Ronnie on the Mound” is also in *Good Blonde & Others*.

Having now read it, though it details a fictional inning of a fictional baseball game between two fictional teams—the Chicago Chryslers and the

Pittsburgh Plymouths—populated with fictional players, I don’t know what’s “strange and supernatural” about it. It’s hardly an alternate history, even with the fictional teams.

*Good Blonde & Others* also contains Kerouac’s preview of F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu*, published as part of the *New Yorker* Film Society’s Movie Series Notes for winter 1960-1961. His notes are largely descriptive, though still beat, and Kerouac mentions “the great vampire dissertations of Ranft and Calmet written in the 18th century.” That’s pretty fantastic.

### Comments on APA-L #3070

I reached out to cover artist Mark Bondurant after seeing a cover for LASFAPA #97 from 1984 to ask if he still draws. Boy, does he ever. We’ll see more of his work in distributions to come. As David Schlosser and I continue to scan and upload LASFAPA back issues, I’ll have to spend more time checking out the artwork to determine whether people are still around—and creating. Bondurant is definitely an exciting addition to our cover artists!

In *Vanamonde* #1593, **John Hertz** recognized Larry Niven’s birthday in verse before celebrating fanartist Ray Faraday Nelson. I am lucky to have corresponded with Nelson briefly, though through mundane zines, not sf fandom. We met via a listing in *The Letter Exchange*. (<https://www.letter-exchange.com>) I appreciated your biographical sketch and donned my propeller beanie in his honor. I wish we’d corresponded longer. I’ll watch *Beany and Cecil* with new appreciation.

Joe Pearson and I most recently emailed in late May. He and his family went to Portugal, and we were in the country at the same time but weren’t able to meet up while traveling. I hope to publish some of his travel sketches in the future. The Goethe Institute’s response about Hermann Hesse’s *The Glass Bead Game* was amusing.

**John Hertz**’s *Vanamonde* #1594 focused on snooker before concentrating on professional artist Greg Manchess and his 2023 lifetime achievement award from the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists. (<https://asfa-art.com>) I’ll have to learn more about that organization.

Given its proximity to the Castelo de São Jorge, I might have been close to—or seen—Estação Martim Moniz, but I’m not sure. I’ll retrace our paths to see if I can determine whether I was there. Aren’t bánh mì delightful?

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #58, **Matthew Mitchell** recounted his viewing of recent *Doctor Who* episodes. Your reaction to longtime Whovians puzzled me. Do you disagree with their



opinions about the new episodes, or are you suggesting that their standards should be different—comparing more recent episodes to previous seasons over the decades? (Or, perhaps, both? Those points of view aren't mutually exclusive.)

Stephen Baxter's *The Massacre of Mankind* is a sequel to H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. I haven't read it, but it was authorized by Wells's estate and might pique your interest. That and your other ideas seem to have merit to me.

I'll share your feedback with cover artist Jose Sanchez. Your comment to John Hertz about focusing on the performer in jazz but the composer in classical led to further thinking. There have been classical music recordings available longer than jazz recordings have been available. The music's just older, regardless of recording technology. According to the Library of Congress, inexpensive phonographs entered mainstream use among the middle class by the late 1890s. Cylinder recordings lost the format war with disc records around 1910. Pre-recorded cylinders supported perhaps three minutes of music and mostly featured recordings of popular songs, instrumental music, or humorous monologues—comedy. But at three minutes a pop, classical music might not have been the most popular genre for nickelodeons in arcades or taverns, or the early home phonographs. Is it the length of the piece of music?

The UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive's Web site (<https://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu>) suggests that cylinder recordings included popular songs sung by Billy Murray, banjo instrumentals by Vess Ossman, and bands as the New York Military Band, as well as vaudeville routines and ethnic comedy performed by Len Spencer and Arthur Collins. The Edison Amberol Cylinders—and the Edison Blue Amberol Cylinders, which lasted almost until 1930—featured opera recordings as well as popular songs and music from around the world. Edison Grand Opera Cylinders offered two to four minutes of opera sung by performers such as Florencio Constantino, Leo Slezak, and Josephine Jacoby.

So opera music ranked among the earliest commercial recordings. The *Classic FM* Web site reports that the first classical recording was an 1888 performance of a George Frideric Handel oratorio. Meanwhile, the first jazz record—the Original Dixieland Jass Band's "Livery Stable Blues" and "Dixie Jass Band One Step"—wasn't released until Feb. 26, 1917. (My birth date, but not the year!)

My theory is that in classical music, one focuses first on perhaps the piece of music, and then the composer—or vice versa—because of a stronger concentration on the composition as such. In jazz,

similar to popular songs before the pop music we know today, there are standards, yes, but because of jazz's improvisational nature, maybe listeners focus more on the performer than the composer of the standard, who mostly provided a framework for the music played rather than the actual music played. (In jazz, the composer of a standard might not even be widely known.) Classical music sticks to the score more, while even jazz standards utilize a fake book that offers the melody, chord progression, and lyrics—but leaves the rest to the players. Once you get beyond standards in jazz, there is no composition, so there's no composer, only performers.



Los Angeles Times, Nov. 15, 1957

Opera, to return to that, does focus on the soloist, the performer, but I don't know whether it does so more than the composer. Also in classical music, one

could take into consideration the conductor, which might also be important.

My apologies for the misprinted characters in Hakuna Errata. I wonder why the other smart quotation marks and apostrophes printed okeh, but not *those*. You might be right about the prevalence of the double record album side sequencing I mentioned. I've read that while that method was introduced to accommodate stackable automatic record changers, they had largely been replaced by manual turntables some time in the 1970s. Double 78 records had also been sequenced for autochangers, though concern about record wear and warping increased after the introduction of the LP record. I remember it being exceptional, but I don't know how many double LPs my parents owned. The LASFS might very well be an example of church for the non-religious.



*Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 29, 1957

**Joe Zeff's Toony Loons #760** expressed frustration with sibling rivalry about what to watch on television. May that disagreement become more... remote as you develop solutions that meet both your needs! I'm sorry your COVID-19 booster shot took so much out of you. I get my second shingles vaccination on Monday and have heard that it can be painful. Fingers crossed. I hope you're feeling 100 percent better by now. I stopped emailing everyone APA-L distributions when I returned from Portugal. If you'd like to resume receiving it via email as well as in the mail, let me know. Mail delivery the last couple of weeks seems to have been spotty up your way.

In *In Betweens #3*, **Derek LaPorte** reviewed Akupara Games' *Cryptmaster* (<https://www.akuparagames.com/game/cryptmaster>). It is indeed interesting that the name-shrinking idea appears in the game as well as in your fiction. I see it's available via Steam. Do you play on a personal computer, tablet, or mobile phone?

The Portuguese paperbacks I selected at the library were left behind in the house we stay in when we visit. Off the top of my head, I don't remember that I prioritized them for reading, but I look forward to returning to them when we return to the country later this year. I read and enjoyed your review of Brian Evenson's novel *Immobility* (Tor, 2013).

## Comments on APA-L #3071

I debated delaying the printing, collation, and mailing of this week's distribution even further by hacking out a snapzine but decided against it. I don't like that I'm not in this dist'n, however. At 11 pages, it's likely to be the year's slimmest, even with the wonderful cover by Taral Wayne. I initially misread the Jerry Collins copyright as "Bombioids," but they are instead Bambioids.

From *WikiFur*: "Bambioids, also known as the Haku Hasin, are a race of humanoid Cervidae (Deer) alien beings, created by furry artist Jerry Collins. ... A highly advanced space-faring 'gender-egalitarian matriarchy,' they are well known for their ... highly menacing, fearsome and destructive weaponry, spiffy spacecraft, and a lusty love of life."

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown #59*, **Matthew Mitchell** commented on how his "Future Sense has become especially blunted," largely because of mobile phones, personal computers, and the Internet. The James Webb Space Telescope and its photographs counter the sense that the future is already here.

I'll share your feedback with cover artist Mark Bondurant. In addition to the jazz show I hosted for WNUR, I also produced the folk show for a while—maintaining an ongoing calendar of local folk and related music events—and co-hosted a surf, rockabilly, and garage rock show called "Shakin' and Stompin'." The cover artist for *The Stf Amateur #7*, Blaise Moritz, was another co-host. I later DJ'd for WMFO, Tufts University's radio station in Massachusetts, but not for as long. When I first moved to Los Angeles, I reached out to KXLU to see if community members could volunteer, but that didn't come to be.

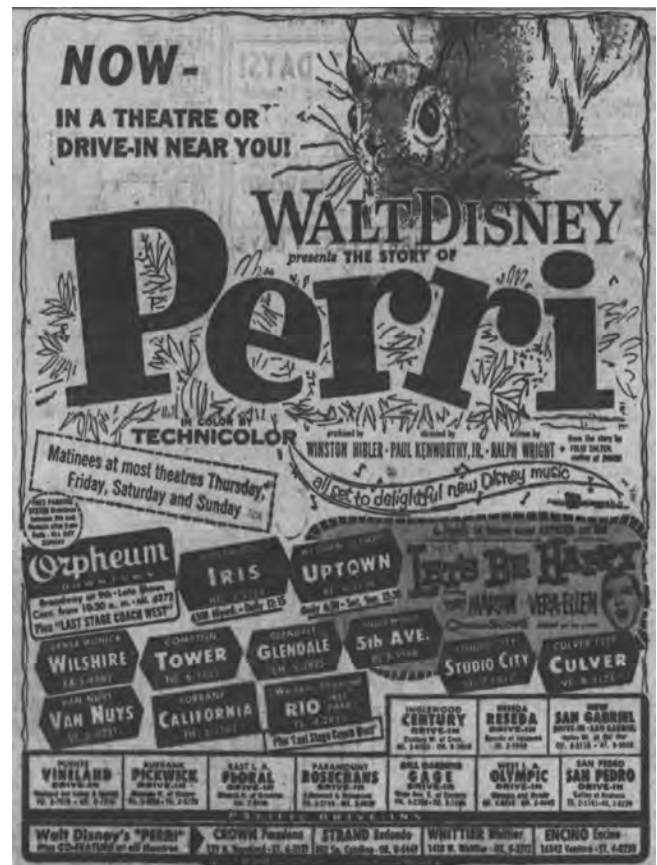
Your mention of a McDonald's app made me grin. On the cab ride home from Los Angeles International Airport, the taxi display indicated that if I used a credit card with a chip, I'd need to use the PIN. I'm never prompted for a PIN and am not sure I know them, so I downloaded the Curb app to pair the ride and pay through the app. I spent the whole car ride home trying to get the app to work. I couldn't sign up because my phone number was already in use. I didn't remember the password, so I sought to reset it. I reset it but still couldn't log in. So I paid in cash. Once home, I learned I could log in using my phone number, but not my email address. Well, next time, perhaps I'll use the app now that it's set up. That struck me as not very helpful or future-oriented. The whole experience seemed to be a deterrent rather than making it easier to pay—even if I had the cash.

**Joe Zeff's** *Toony Loons* #761 described some healthcare appointment and transportation challenges. I hope that Marcia heals fully and quickly, so the logistics are easier. I also hope you two are able to sort out your television disagreements. My wife and I have shows that we watch together and shows that we watch alone. Neither of us leaves the TV on for background noise. Your forthcoming yardwork sounds formidable! I still need to get rid of the manual lawn mower and fertilizer spreader we no longer use. They're just sitting there! In any event, Bespoke Post is your jam, as they say.

I'll share your feedback with cover artist Mark Bondurant. Between you and Matthew Mitchell's comments on *Doctor Who*, I'll need to keep tabs on when the DVDs come out, if they do. I feel like I'm missing something, which I actually am.

And in *Vanamonde* #1595, **John Hertz** offered one of the most beautiful poems I've read in a while. Kudos, good sir. The taiyaki you describe are also served at Altercos' Naruto Uzumaki Anime Restaurant (*T&T* #114) in Braga, Portugal, I believe. Next time I'm there—or somewhere else that has it on hand—I'll try it! Do you like bean paste?

I, too, enjoy L. Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth*. I've read it several times. I'll have to read more about "Dave Kyle says you can't sit here," but your description seems apt: "Close." I'll share your feedback with cover artist Jose Sanchez. The brief history of condensed milk you recounted was interesting!



## The Explosion Containment Umbrella #20

May 31, 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.

### Comments on eAPA #241

Is that a Steven Fox illustration gracing our cover? I reached out to him earlier this year inquiring whether I could use his illustrations among Marty Cantor's fanart materials but haven't heard back from him. Does anyone know the best way to contact him?

Via email in late May, our official editor, Garth Spencer, proposed a theme: "Each of us goes through changes at transitional points in life, some of them more obvious than others. ... What have we learned from our transitions at puberty, when we became men, when we transitioned from having jobs to having careers, if we married and had children, or when we finally realized we were so *over* with conventional life designs? What do we expect to go through next, and what may we learn from it?"

In my early 50s, I think I'm at a transition point, too. Our son is a year away from graduating from college and no longer living with us. My wife is a few years older than I am, and our finances suggest that we might be able to stop working in the next few years—earlier than expected—especially if we move somewhere with a much lower cost of living. That means that my professional career might soon be over, and I can turn my attention to the side projects from which work distracts me.

Given that possible near future, I find that my patience with and openness to nonsense—at work and otherwise—is rapidly diminishing. At times, that can be frustrating at work, but I'm attempting to approach it so it's actually liberating. I might be free to take more risks, knowing there's a light at the end of the tunnel. Outside work, I feel an increasing need to focus my attention and energies so I can do fewer things better. I also feel like more wisely choosing who I spend time with, in order not to expose myself to energy drains and other frustrating types.

In terms of fanac, I've already started taking steps in that direction. I'm no longer actively contributing to National Fantasy Fan Federation clubzines other than N'APA, though some editors reprint my fanwriting. And I recently decided not to run for another term as

scribe for the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. I'll continue to publish *De Profundis*, working with my successor, and I'm considering ceasing the publication of *Menace of the LASFS*—in part because I'm three months behind.

That will hopefully free up enough time to better focus on my apahacking so deadlines don't feel so onerous—and so *The Stf Amateur* continues to improve and evolve toward a proper genzine. Last night, I was reading about Claude Degler. There's a lot not to like about his involvement in fandom, but I was introduced to the term "fanarchist." While organized fandom has been my entry point and home for so many years, perhaps I can seek a slightly looser affiliation—continuing to participate and support club activities without actively serving in a leadership role. In any event, something's got to go, and serving as scribe takes up quite a bit of time.



*Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 13, 1957

Looking back, one thing I've learned is that what I once thought was so important might no longer be important. What people think of me and how people respond to me seems less important as long as I'm behaving in a friendly, kind, and respectful manner. Because—this might be the most important thing I've learned—everyone has something going on in their lives. We might present a solid, stable, steady, together self to the world, online or off, but everyone's got problems, secrets, struggles, and worries. Recognizing that—and respecting it—without needing to know the details occasionally helps me respond to others' prickliness or rudeness with more grace and kindness. Not everyone can behave smoothly all the time, but we don't need to crash into such moments; we can be like water around stone, or stone within water.

That's not to say I'm a stoic—or that I grey rock people even if they're not abusive—but I'm welcoming the strengthening finding of self that occurred in my 40s and my growing sense of independence and self-reliance in my 50s. Part of that has to do with having done the "deal" over the course of my life—career, child, spouse, home ownership—though out of the order I planned. That's been a

lesson, too: Plans can change, but goals can remain the same. (They can also change.) Find the path of least resistance and go with the flow.



Los Angeles Times, Dec. 13, 1957

In many ways, what I hope to spend my time doing once I stop working for a salary—hiking, listening to music, reading, spending time with family, traveling, watching movies, and writing—aligns with what I’ve done in my free time over the decades, and what I would have done had I not focused on work instead of passions. I’ve been lucky to have those two intersect at multiple times throughout my career. Possible career paths in the past included biochemistry, starting my journalism career at *The Sun*, and becoming involved with *Factsheet Five*. Those paths would have led to a very different me.

In fact, the decisions and choices we make help determine the other decisions and choices we’re able to make, as well as the self we’re able to become. A younger me might have wanted to keep his prospects open, but as I’ve been able to focus on specific things over the years—crafting a career, developing a relationship with a spouse, and raising a son—I’ve come to appreciate the richness and depth such narrowed focus (and limited options) afford. I’ve also appreciated how life events have prepared me for new opportunities. Had I not become a father earlier than expected, I wouldn’t have been as mature as I was when I met my now wife. Had we not married and moved to Los Angeles, we wouldn’t have been able to

help raise our son. Had we not gone through a child custody evaluation, he wouldn’t have moved in with us. Had I not stopped drinking, I wouldn’t be able to enjoy life as much as I have for the last six years. I’m looking forward to an even more expansive state as I enter the next phase of my life.

Am I “over with conventional life designs”? In a manner of speaking. Many of my friends chose not to pursue professional careers, instead focusing on art and music, and I’ve long envied them for their decision. But I’m now in a position where I can perhaps stop working earlier than expected in order to devote my time, energy, and attention to other things. That feels like a luxury and a privilege. Focusing on my avocations rather than a vocation could lead to any number of things. Too young to retire, I won’t stop working. But I’ll turn my work to side projects, and that’s pretty exciting.

In *Living Inside Number 9*, **William McCabe** wrote about hay fever. I empathize with you. My father has hay fever, and I feel lucky to have avoided inheriting that from him. Allergies are not something I’ve had to deal with. While I’ve appreciated the Residents for years, I did not know that Penn Jillette performed with them or recorded otherwise for Ralph Records. I’ll have to explore that!

Your remarks to me about early sf resonated. While cataloging magazines this week, I came across an issue of *Mondo Cult* (#3, 2012) that includes an article by Ib Melchior titled “The Greatest Sci-Fi Prophet” that reprints an sf story written by Hans Christian Andersen in 1853. I also recently spent some time reading about the story papers that predated the earliest pulp magazines; many of those featured sf stories.

**Henry Grynnsen’s** *Wild Ideas* #47 explored shared dream experiences and the source of dreams. In the mailing comments, you wrote, “science fiction is a zombie genre and will never develop further.” For some, them might be fightin’ words! While I don’t think that’s true—I think all literature will continue to evolve (or devolve)—I also don’t feel the need to defend the genre. It’ll do fine with or without us, and there’s still plenty to read, old and new alike.

A hunt might have sides: the hunter and the hunted. In the sporting event recreations of the hunt, there might be two hunters (the teams) and one hunted (the ball). The hunters are competing for their mutual prey. Your responses to me expanding on your thinking were quite interesting. I’ve never actually watched *Black Mirror* because I think I’d find it more disturbing than enjoyable. Perhaps I should.

Your suggestion that “every day is ... Fool’s Day” offers pause for reflection. It also reminded me of the

song “(Every Day Is) Halloween” by Ministry, a musical group mentioned in a 1992 *Omni* magazine article as an example of cyberpunk-related music. Your contention that smart phones might contribute to the increase in ADHD, dyslexia, and autism bears research—but seems like a reasonable hypothesis. And while I try not to go too far down this path because it’s uncomfortable and feels privileged, your suggestion that “people want to have a diagnosis such as ADHD because it gives you some kind of status” also seems reasonable.

Sometimes I’m concerned that some people might seek mental health-related diagnoses because such occasionally afford accommodations or otherwise let them off the hook in terms of personal responsibility—rather than being a condition someone can learn to live with, work around, or overcome. I know people who’ve been thrilled about such diagnoses late in life because it helps explain past challenges and provides new tools they can use to thrive. I also know people who seem to be satisfied doing less than they could, regardless of any such diagnosis. And I know people who use mental health-related language in situations where it doesn’t seem warranted, accurate, or needed—but still requires response and respect.

The main essay, “The State of Nature,” concentrated initially on the Christian creation story, as well as the fall and the expulsion from Eden. Your connecting that story’s concern about being seen naked with early childhood development and common dreams, as well as the earlier Mesopotamian creation myth was compelling. I was intrigued by your comments on the evolution from animal to human as part of that narrative.

Regardless, I felt that this piece—of all your recent pieces—was much too short, and I encourage you to return to it in the future. What other dreams are consistent throughout humanity and are rooted in developmental or other events and stages? Are all commonly experienced dreams related to shared developmental stages? Do all stories tie back to shared human experience? Is there any potential for Ralph Waldo Emerson’s concept of an over-soul, or is the development of humanity and its culture so consistent all around the world dependent on other reasons? This essay raised more interesting questions for me than it might have answered, though answer it did.

Even though he couldn’t submit an issue of *Intermission*, **Ahrvid Engholm** contributed *Writing Short Stories*. He reported on a Short Story Masters event and shared the presentation he gave as part of the program. Your short story writing process is helpful but perhaps overly simplified. “Fill out the middle”? That’s the hardest part! Okeh, even though

you suggest the beginning is the tough part, you admit the middle is 90 percent of the writing, describing it as a “dreary lull” and “large.” Given the wordy nature of your slides, I can almost imagine your voiceover and actual presentation. Thank you for preparing—and sharing—this. I’ll consider it an intermission for... *Intermission*.

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Los Angeles Times, Dec. 13, 1957

**Garth Spencer's** *I Never Got the Hang of Thursdays* #221 reported losing the Documents directory on his computer. Oof. I can only imagine how that must have felt, and the hassle of reconstructing it. It's funny you mentioned Robert J. Sawyer. He gave a reading during the LASFS meeting last night, offering a six-minute segment of *The Downloaded*. It seems like a great book. During his talk, he mentioned the British Columbia Science Fiction Association (<http://bcsciencefictionassociation.ca>), and I asked him to give our regards to R. Graeme Cameron. I later emailed Cameron to do the same but should have asked him to say hi to you, too! Perhaps you know each other.

The situation with *Amazing Stories* and NBC is frustrating. I hope that the magazine receives due recompense—and is freed up to pursue other production options if NBC isn't paying them and doesn't plan any productions. While I'm a member of the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association, I don't know that I've read enough of the nominees to vote wisely. Regardless, I'll check it out. I need more reasons to dip into *On Spec*, *Polar Borealis*, *Polar Starlight*, and other venues more frequently. Ooh, the nominees are from all over the place!

Aren't the N3F Laureate nominees for Best Fan Writer and Best Fan Editor interesting? I'm no Joseph T. Major or Guy Lillian III, but it's an honor to be included alongside them. Perhaps we'll split the categories and I have a chance. I was unaware of the Speculative Literature Foundation but will look into the organization.

Your remarks about the Croatian survivalist prepper made me think of another life lesson: Reward enthusiasm. Prickly people can be prickly, as can people generally, sometimes, but perhaps there's a middle way that'll help you tap into his passions. Congratulations on securing your pension. That must provide some financial relief.

The inclusion of an Emotional Abuse Checklist made my heart go out to you. I have some experience with emotional abuse—not as a direct recipient from a parent, luckily—and know how much that can knock you back. Realizing your parents were “unhinged,” what help have you sought? Therapy can do wonders, if you're not already engaged in it. The Dust productions on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/@watchdust>) are glorious. I featured several while hosting the online screenings for the N3F.

# The UFO Checklist

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



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



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



