

The Stf Amateur
Or: *Amateur Stf*
July 2023

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Telegraphs & Tar Pits #69

June 13, 2023

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Natter: Eight Days in Portugal

Since our visit to Portugal earlier this year (*T&T* #49-52), my wife and I have been researching various communities and houses based on our previous explorations. Having identified multiple properties that we are interested in, in towns that appeal to us, within a cost range we can readily afford, we decided not to prolong the process over much, lest we miss out on one of the houses we liked the most because someone else bought it before we even took a look at it in person.

An agent we've been working with to navigate the possibility of relocating had visited one such house on our behalf already, so that was our top option. Located on a river in Fragoso, the house seemed to meet our needs, had a decent-sized yard, and was a half-hour walk from a train station. Based on that possible option, we set up an itinerary of about 10 houses in that community, Póvoa de Lanhoso, Arcos de Valdevez, and Ponte de Lima. While I took the days off work as vacation time, Caitlin had to continue working when we weren't checking out houses.

It was a whirlwind of days, with three days of looking at houses—three or four a day—and checking out the surrounding communities in greater detail. It rained much of the time we were in Portugal, like last time, but the weather took a turn for the better once we were done looking at houses. I had some time to walk around Braga, which was our initial base of operations, while Caitlin worked. We missed out on revisiting our favorite bookstore, Livraria Centésima Página, and the Exhibition of the Master in Media Arts exhibit at the University of Minho because of two holidays while we were there: the Feast of Corpus Christi and Portugal Day. The gallery and bookstore were also closed on Sunday, as well!

I was, however, able to return to Livraria Bertrand, though I didn't find any Portuguese sf or fantasy books of interest; and Altercos, where I picked up several fannish pins for my hoodie: Captain America, *Spirited Away*, and *Spy x Family*.

This time, we stayed at an Airbnb just around the

corner from our previous lodging because we wanted a kitchenette. Our location, though familiar, was far from ideal. It was located next door to Os Bravos Da Boa Luz, a cultural organization that hosted a beer garden of sorts for the holiday festivities, and the Jardim do Campo das Hortas, the site of live music and dancing that lasted until midnight most nights we were there. It was quite loud for much of most days. Coupled with our customary jet lag, our sleep patterns were inconsistent at best.

One rainy afternoon and evening in the Airbnb, I machine translated and edited a short story by João Barreiros, "The Sack of Lampedusa," which I sent to his publisher, Imaginauta (<https://imaginauta.net>). Carlos Silva emailed me back, thanking me for taking the initiative. We'll see if the English translation is of use to Imaginauta—I've been frustrated by the limited amount of Portuguese sf available in English and plan to translate and edit additional stories I've been able to obtain freely.

Sunday, we took a bus to Arcos de Valdevez, which is about an hour away from Braga and near our current second favorite house. It's a town of about 22,000 on the Rio Vez. We stopped by a local grocery upon arrival to stock up on granola, yogurt, berries, and other foodstuffs—like we had in Braga. While Caitlin worked much of Monday, I spent a handful of hours walking about nine kilometers (round trip) along the Ecovia, largely following the course of the river, to Ponte de Santar, a bridge.

While it was supposed to rain Monday afternoon, it didn't, and I walked to and from the ponte without needing my duck boots or umbrella. Along the way, I saw several mill wheel remains, including one into which I could climb; beautiful riverside scenery; an abandoned restaurant; a small business incubator; and a fishing channel of reportedly indeterminate age. Once back in Arcos, I grabbed a late lunch at a riverside cafe before returning home.

Our Airbnb in Arcos was much nicer than the one in Braga, located mere steps away from Tasca do Delfim, an old-fashioned cocktail bar and concertina museum—the concertina looms large in Portuguese folk music (and kept us awake for much of our stay in Braga)—and the Capela de Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Praça de Arcos de Valdevez, which was built in the late 14th century.

From the Reading Pile: Book Reviews

Nunslinger: The Complete Series, by Stark Holborn (Hodder & Stoughton, 2014)

Originally issued as a series of 12 16-chapter ebooks, this resulting collected novel isn't science-fictional or fantastic in the supernatural sense, but it is

hard-driving, serialized genre fiction that owes a debt to other similar western adventures, serials and series books. It's a persistently breathless approach to storytelling that maintains its cliffhanger pace relatively well for the duration.

Practically every chapter pulls you to the next, and the books pull the reader to the subsequent books, to the extent that I can hardly imagine reading these as serialized ebooks rather than all in one go. It's an intense reading experience and slightly more rewarding than I remember Stephen King's six-part serial *The Green Mile*.

The idea is simple: A nun with guns, the six-gun sister. Its execution was excellent, offering challenging antagonists, a wonderful setting, and gallant compatriots. Were it not for the more recent streaming series *Mrs. Davis*, I'd expect a TV show!

The Pride of Chanur, by C.J. Cherryh (DAW, 1982) I read *The Pride of Chanur* in a mass market paperback omnibus edition titled *The Chanur Saga* (DAW, 2000). Rather than review the collection as a whole, I plan to address each of the three novels individually. An excerpt of the first novel in Cherryh's five-book series was originally published as a short story, "The Pride of Chanur," in the October-November 1981 issue of *Science Fiction Digest*.

The novel as such focuses on the interactions of several alien races that convene at Meetpoint, a cosmopolitan space station: the mysterious, inscrutable Knnn; the dark and foreboding, thieving Kif; the formally bureaucratic Mahendo'sat; and the feline Hani. Most of the narrative concentrates on the adventures of a representative of one Hani family, the Chanur.

The Pride of Chanur's approach to portraying alien races is different than that of C.S. Friedman's *This Alien Shore* (Faculae & Filigree #20). Instead of concentrating on alien natures generally, incorporating them as backdrop or in the aggregate, Cherryh offers insight on each of the races involved in the story. For the most part, that involves detail of physiology, culture, and communication, and much of the plot relies on successful—or unsuccessful—communication.

Things kick off when some kind of humanoid cargo escapes from a Kif ship at Meetpoint, seeking shelter and protection from Pyanfar Chanur and her crew. The escapee turns out to be sapient, a spacefaring representative of humanity accosted by the Kif. This is humanity's first contact with Compact Space, a loose trade-based peace among the other aliens. Over the course of the novel, Chanur Holding stands up for humanity's place within the Compact—

not as property—while dealing with other familial, political, and social challenges.

Of the alien races, Cherryh fleshes out the race of the Chanur the most in the novel. She explores their physiology and culture, focusing on fashion and ornament, the meaning of facial expressions (including their ear posture), and social hierarchy within and among the holdings. The Chanur seem to be a matriarchal society of sorts, with women taking to space while men tend to homes and gardens on their home world Anuurn. Pride and honor come into play.

It's a rich concept, well executed—and strong enough to merit further exploration. I'll certainly continue reading the omnibus.

Sands of Dune, by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson (Tor, 2022)

This collection offers four short stories, three of which were previously published in Shawn Speakman's anthology *Unfettered III*, Bryan Thomas Schmidt's anthology *Infinite Stars*, and Speakman's *Unbound II*. In the introduction, the authors discuss their intent to focus such stories on smaller ideas—and sometimes smaller characters—to fill in some of the gaps within Frank Herbert's Dune universe.

The first story, "The Edge of a Chrysknife," takes place 39 and 56 years before Dune, sharing some of the backstory of Shadout Mapes, the rebellious housekeeper whose life had been marked by Harkonnen rule. The story is a wonderful portrayal of Fremen resistance against the Harkonnen and helps flesh out a character who proves important early in the series.

"Blood of the Sardaukar" focuses on a Sardaukar colonel bashar who's resolute that Duke Leto die without undue suffering. The story details that Sardaukar's connection to House Atreides and what transpired in the past to account for his avoidance of cruelty on behalf of the Emperor. It also sheds some light on the training and preparation of the Sardaukar forces, which is formidable.

Gurney Halleck is the focal point of "The Waters of Kanly," a story drawn from his "lost years" during which the troubadour and warrior is working as a smuggler while Paul Atreides establishes his home among the Fremen. The smugglers undertake guerrilla attacks against the Harkonnens, and Halleck's desire for revenge occasionally proves problematic.

And "Imperial Court" is set 97 years after the Battle of Corrin and the end of the thinking machines, nine years after the formation of the Spacing Guild. The piece addresses the feud between House Atreides and House Harkonnen as an assassination attempt upends a governmental appointment.

I enjoy Frank Herbert's *Dune* series thoroughly, having read up through *Heretics of Dune* and rereading *Dune* during the pandemic. But I've never explored any of Brian Herbert's work or read any *Dune*-related short stories. This collection will be appreciated by fans of the series and might serve as an excellent entry point to some of the various characters, houses, and ideas present in the novels. I found the short story form particularly well suited for the series.

From the Reading Pile: Short Stories

On the way to Portugal, I read the May/June 2023 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. When I read the prozines, I tend to read the departments first; then the poetry, if any; before turning to the short stories; and saving the longer pieces for last. Given that I read this entire issue in that manner, this writeup isn't necessarily in the order of reading, though I will break it up by sections.

Sheree Renee Thomas's Letter from the Editor draws parallels between collecting small rocks as mementos of places you've visited and finding excellent stories while reading. Charles de Lint's review column "Books to Look For" comments on the Netflix series *Wednesday* as well as a handful of recent books, including Garth Nix's *The Sisters of Saint Nicola of the Almost Perpetual Motion vs the Lurch*, which seems particularly promising.

In the movie review column by David J. Skal, he considers most of the recent movie and miniseries adaptations of Frank Herbert's *Dune*, perhaps freeing me from writing such a comparative review myself—or at least allowing me to focus on lesser-known adaptations not addressed in his column. Alex Jennings contributes a speculative poetry column, considering collections and poems published in prozines. And Paul Di Filippo finishes the issue with a one-page Curiosities column that concentrates on a 1920s fantasy adventure. This column is always a highlight of reading *F&SF*.

The issue features five pieces of speculative poetry, offering work by Gretchen Tessmer, Shaoni C. White, and J.A. Pak. Tessmer's "Silverlocks" resonates gently with one of the short stories, Melissa A. Watkins's "Knotty Girl." White's poetry is particularly strong, especially the almost-visual poem, "The Wren in the Hold."

Of the dozen short stories in this edition, I especially enjoyed four. Lark Morgan Lu's "In Time, All Foxes Grieve Westward" is about a young woman meeting the mother of an old god, the woman an even older god. The piece reminded me slightly of "The Ruby," by Beverly Suarez-Beard from *Realms of Fantasy* Vol. 1 #6 (August 1995,) as commented on in

Faculae & Filigree #19.

Zig Zag Claybourne's "For the Benefit of Mr. Kite" focuses on the dissatisfaction of a post-singularity artificial intelligence that operates a spacecraft. Readers of Iain M. Banks (*Snow Poster Township* #10) will appreciate Claybourne's portrayal of the dilemma facing the AI.

"I Paint the Light with My Mother's Bones" is K.J. Aspey's first published story. Though short—three pages—it succeeds at planting seeds for ideas and emotions surprisingly efficiently. And Watkins's "Knotty Girl" approaches the telling of Rapunzel from a new angle. The story is utterly delightful.

Other stories also struck my fancy: Kiran Kaur Saini's meditation on senior care and home robotics, "Amrit;" Dr. Bunny McFadden's outer space lesbian bar adventure, "The Lucky Star;" Margaret Dunlap's cautionary tale about AI and customer service, "We Are Happy to Serve You;" and Ria Rees's "Titan Retreat."

I don't always make it to the longer stories before a subsequent issue arrives. In this issue, Fatima Taqvi's novelet "A Truth So Loyal and Vicious" is an absolutely wonderful story about the giving and earning of names, fortune and misfortune, and telling the truth. This Pakistani author is worth looking for. And Matthew Hughes's cover story "The Dire Delusion," while one of the more straight-forward fantasies in the prozine, still serves up an intriguing story about crime, memory, and guild politics. I could see this as a novel or series of stories, even though I haven't read his Raffalon and Baldemar stories.

It's not common that I'm able to read all of an issue of *F&SF*. The experience was enjoyable enough that I shall definitely try to do so again soon. If you haven't read an issue in a while, consider picking one up; it'll be well worth the reading.

Screened at the Globe: Modern Horror Hosts

While we enjoyed exploring Portuguese television during our previous visit (*T&T* #52), both Airbnbs have only offered smart TVs with streaming services, so we haven't been able to click through the local channels. Having some downtime on our first night in Arcos, Caitlin humored me, allowing me to poke around to see what I could find beyond Netflix, which we can watch at home.

Unable to find any local programming, even streaming, I settled on a smart TV channel that's also available in the United States as a Roku channel: Horror Host Network. Developed by a company called the Poletti Group LLC, the network features classic public domain horror films brought to viewers by horror hosts. I watched two such movies: *The Horror*

of *Party Beach*, courtesy of Virginia-based Karlos Borloff and *Monster Madhouse* (<http://monstermadhouse.com>); and *Track of the Moon Beast* courtesy of Ohio-based Erik William of *Saturday Fright Theater* (<https://saturdayfrighttheater.com>).

Of the two movies, *Horror* is better than *Moon Beast*, primarily because of its musical numbers, dual rubber monster suits, and its take on beach movies of the 1960s. (It also inspired a *Famous Films* fumetti tie-in magazine!) The general gist of the movie is that dumping radioactive waste into a body of water creates murderous mutated monsters.

Moon Beast is also notable because of its perhaps inaccurate and inappropriate portrayal of Native Americans and reservation life, connection to a fictional Native American legend, and absolutely ludicrous science. A friend of an archaeologist gets hit in the head by a fragment of meteorite that lodges in his brain, only to break into smaller pieces and endanger his life—while causing him to turn into a murderous lizard monster.

It was also interesting to compare the hosts. *Monster Madhouse*, active starting in 2006, self-proclaims that it is the “most action-packed, craziest monster horror movie TV show in the world.” I don’t know if that’s true, but Borloff’s Rob Zombie-like persona and large-cast antics are a sight to see, offering chaotic interludes throughout the featured film. Compared to William, Borloff is a more traditional horror host, complete with makeup, costuming, and some music. (Compact discs used to be available on the Web site.)

William and *Saturday Fright Theater*, which began in 2016, are closely aligned with the Indie Gathering, an independent film convention; and the International Horror Hotel Film Festival and Convention. While William did don some festive attire for some sort of Halloween-St. Patrick’s Day mashup, the interstitial segments largely draw on interviews undertaken at the above-named events.

For the most part, I fast forwarded through both sets of interstitial bits. Borloff’s are meaningless eye candy—how did he get so many people to join him for the shoots?—and William attempts to elevate monster movies within the auspices of independent film, which I don’t quite buy despite my love for such flicks. Regardless, I’m glad both do (or did) what they do—and I hope Horror Host Network is able to add additional hosts and their screenings over time.

Comments on APA-L #3023

In *Leeway* dated for June 1, 2023, **Lee Gold** described a recent Shavuot celebration, which sounded wonderful. You also remarked on buying a copy of

Original Science Fiction in summer 1954. Curious whether we could identify the first issue you’d encountered, I’ve been trying to find information on the title. ISFDB doesn’t list an *Original Science Fiction* as a magazine, so I’m curious whether the title might have been different.

In July 1954, there were issues of the following magazines: *Abstract*, *Amazing Stories*, *American Science Fiction*, *Astounding*, *Authentic Science Fiction Monthly*, *Beyond Fantasy Fiction*, *Cosmos Science Fiction and Fantasy*, *Fantastic Story Magazine*, *Fantastic Universe*, *Fiction*, *Galaxy*, *If*, *Imagination*, *Lilliput*, *F&SF*, *New Worlds*, *Orbit*, *Planet Stories*, *Science Fantasy*, *Space Fact and Fiction*, *Startling Stories*, *Supernatural Stories*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Universe*, *Weird Tales*, and I’m sure others. I don’t offer that list to correct you or to suggest that you’re wrong in your recollection, but it is amazing, astounding, fantastic, and thrilling that there were so many prozines the year you started reading sf. (Other months might vary!)

The closest ISFDB comes to an *Original* in any year are *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, which ran from 1986 to 2001; fanzine *The Original Universe*, which published in 2008-2009; and *Unoriginal*, which offered one issue in 2016.

John Hertz’s *Vanamonde* #1547 shared memorial commentary on musical instrument maker Paul Laubin and jazz pianist McCoy Tyner. Thank you for recognizing their deaths—and their contributions while alive (and perhaps even after death; sometimes our work persists!).

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #14, **Matthew Mitchell** remarked on recent fanzine reading and email archive exploration. That you were was LACon III’s electronic liaison with America Online is interesting. What did you do in such a role? Was there an active fandom presence on AOL? I spent time on AOL, CompuServe, Prodigy, as well as bulletin board systems before the mainstream Web but—though I read science fiction—was not active in fandom at the time. Your reference to Denny Crane made me think of Denny Colt, who is altogether different, and delightful. I imagine the Spirit has little patience (or experience) with passive-aggressive voicemail.

And **Nola Frame-Gray’s** bacover expressed an interest in organizing a fannish room party. I enjoy seeing you at meetings of the LASFS and hope they bring a sense of that spirit to your home. You are definitely not wasting your time drawing. Keep it up!

Emulators & Engines #5

June 20, 2023

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

The Big Business of Roleplaying Games

While traveling for work earlier this spring, I picked up the April 3, 2023, issue of *Bloomberg Businessweek* at an airport newsstand. It's not often that roleplaying games appear on the cover of a major business magazine, but inspired by the recent movie, there it was. "Hasbro's Dungeon Master," reads the cover line, with the article teaser, "Can the toy giant roll *Dungeons & Dragons* into a Hollywood blockbuster— or will it just infuriate the game's fans?" CEO Chris Cocks is pictured sitting cross-legged on a hardwood floor in front of a set of shelves displaying sizable monster figures, as well as the recent *Spelljammer: Adventures in Space* slipcase set and a Beadle & Grimm's Platinum Edition.

Cocks is pictured again in the table of contents, cheek resting on a table surface, with an assortment of miniatures—including a beholder— around (and on!) his face. His eyes suggest either dreamlike musing or a desire to be elsewhere. Anywhere. And the feature on p. 34? "Hasbro's Hollywood Fantasy: Can D&D's new film finally end decades of the game's business missteps?" Such large binary questions! Blockbuster or infuriating? Ultimate success or continued failure? Roll a 1d2 and read on to see where the business journalists land in their estimation.

My question is this: Have D&D's business prospects truly been hampered by the lack of a popular movie? I can hardly believe that that's the primary business challenge facing Wizards of the Coast. The piece, written by Felix Gillette and Thomas Buckley, and illustrated by Martin Lacko, touches on the brand's (it pains me to write that) video game offerings, divisional relationship with Hasbro, "laissez-faire" content licensing and relatively recent OGL debacle, foundational history, game mechanics, edition revisions, changing leadership, and—unsurprisingly— previous movie efforts.

The article, while not a bad introduction to the game and parent company for the uninitiated, puts a lot of importance on the movie as a saving grace. I would have welcomed more analysis of the company's

—and game's—position in the industry, as well as its prospects. Regardless, it's worth a read. I'll try to scan it, but it's available online for subscribers at <https://tinyurl.com/Businessweek-DnD>.

On Mooks, or Bookazines

As mentioned in *E&E* #4, I appreciated Spike Y Jones's mention of a *Dungeons & Dragons* mook or bookazine. I hadn't yet seen one on local newsstands and sought it out. There are now two available, the one published when Jones first commented on it and a newer one published after the movie release.

The first such bookazine to hit newsstands was A360 Media's special, *The Unofficial Ultimate Guide to Dungeons & Dragons*. It is the lower-quality bookazine of the two, focusing less on the movie per se—though it's intended to capitalize on the movie release—and featuring next to no artwork or trade dress from *Dungeons & Dragons* proper.

Regardless, it's an enjoyable read for trufen and completists—and might help bring people to the game by way of the movie if they're not already involved or active. Interestingly, this bookazine glosses over most of the origin and history of the game, which the subsequent publication spends more time and attention on. It does so slightly awkwardly, opening by concentrating on the satanic panic of the 1980s, including the novel and movie *Mazes and Monsters*. The first part of the one shot's first chapter suggests that D&D thrived in part because of Harry Potter, Star Wars, and the Lord of the Rings movies—and that COVID-19 "positioned [it] as the ideal interactive hobby to keep people connected."

Part Two of Chapter One attempts to legitimize the game because, well, celebrities and famous people play it, name dropping Joe Manganiello, Deborah Ann Woll, Dan Harmon, Stephen Colbert, Gerard Way, Jon Favreau, and others. The bookazine then turns its attention to the 2023 D&D movie. Surprisingly, even this section includes little trade dress from the 2023 film. Instead, cast photos are drawn from roles in other movies, and there is but one image from *Honor Among Thieves*. The section also touches on previous movies, including a direct-to-DVD third film released in the United Kingdom of which I had been unaware.

Chapter Two concentrates on the game itself, spending little time on its history or mechanics—you get little sense of how to play from this bookazine—and offering sections on various campaign settings, recommend class pairings that might work well in a party (wizard and barbarian, for example), and the "most powerful spells & abilities—and how to use them." The second chapter ends with some advice for

Dungeon Masters, the closest we come to a play tutorial of any kind.

The third chapter is titled “For Fun & Profit” and reports on Critical Role and the popularity of streamed game sessions, the “rise of the professional dungeon masters” (gack), and a proposed D&D Hall of Fame—which is the closest we come to any kind of historical context in the bookazine. This section features Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, Jean Wells and the artist Darlene, Larry Elmore and Jeff Easley, and historian Jon Peterson. The issue ends with a look toward One D&D, expected in 2024.

More recently, A360 Media also published a Centennial Special under its Hollywood Spotlight imprint, *The Ultimate Guide to Dungeons & Dragons*. “First look at the new movie,” a cover bug indicates. I’m intrigued that the same publisher issued both bookazines; they must have secured additional permissions and rights to support the second publication, which is chock full of movie images and trade dress from the game.

As a movie tie in, this edition concentrates intently on the film, drawing on other reportage about the movie, offering stills from the trailer, describing some of the monsters featured, and detailing the characters of the flick—as well as the actors portraying them, again including photos of them in roles from other movies. There’s also a section on some of the locations in which the movie was filmed, Iceland and Northern Ireland, and the characters’ equipment (more so than costuming, really).

The History Lesson section, “A Long, Twisty Campaign” offers what the earlier bookazine above didn’t include, context for the game behind the movie. The writing addresses the game’s origin, how Gygax and Arneson came together, how their friendship faltered, and how TSR grew over time—before faltering itself before the Wizards of the Coast acquisition. The satanic panic earns a page relatively far into the bookazine, p. 37 instead of its precursor’s p. 8. Subsequent editions over time are discussed, as well as Paizo Inc.’s *Pathfinder*.

The game’s influence on manga, video games, and other media is considered, and then the bookazine turns its attention to a primer of sorts so readers can “learn the basics of D&D.” Character creation is addressed, as well. Media portrayals of the game show up in *Freaks and Geeks*; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; *The Magicians*; *Community*, *Rick and Morty*, and *HarmonQuest*; *Stranger Things*; *Ghosts*; and the Disney movie *Onward*—which inspired its own tie-in game.

Material covers the previous, less-successful movies, animated cartoons including *Dungeons &*

Dragons and *The Legend of Vox Machina*, and famous fans, just like the other bookazine. I had been unaware that Matthew Lillard was behind Beadle & Grimm’s Pandemonium Warehouse. I was also unaware of the music compilation project *Spelljams*, included in a music round up that also featured hip hop act Epic Levels, Gwar, Weezer, and the third edition-era release *Midnight Symphony*.

This bookazine ends with a consideration of community building around the game—including remarks on inclusion and that people who meet at the gaming table sometimes marry each other!—and “10 more things to try,” a selection of recommended books, television shows, movies, and games. This edition is a much better entry point to the game and associated fandom, using the movie as a starting point for further exploration and learning.

Of the two, the second one with the movie tie-in cover is much, much better. It might read more true to the experience of a long-time player who’s interested in associated media and roleplaying games more generally. And it serves as a better introduction to RPGs for the newcomer who might have been attracted by the mainstream movie.

Game Report: The Long Road **March 11, 2023**

The Side Questers

- Bo: A very muscular hobbit who’s heavily armed and scarred, she looks like a dwarf and can turn into a wolf. (Netherlands)
- Gebun Dallons: An acolyte of the Lord of the Forest, fresh from the farms of Dogborn (California)
- Keeva: An impulsive elven fighter (sixth level) from Sunspire who shares a strange bond with Bo (Ireland)
- Noxarius: A satyr druid who follows the Lord of the Forest and can take animal form (Massachusetts)
- Theren: An elven ranger, wearing a hat with a feather in it

A dwarf wearing blue and gray robes runs out of the crowd, beringed and with a ruby nose piercing. She says, “I’m going to be an avatar!” She approaches the well, attaches a bucket to the rope, and drops it into the well. She drinks, and falls to the ground.

A man emerges from the crowd and says, “Oh, good, we have a volunteer.” He begins to explain the cosmology. In the beginning, there were no gods, just entities, feelings. Some of them did become gods. And

the world became more detailed because of their modes and preferences. The world became a place in which the priorities of mortal beings were played out. Worship and interaction occurred, but the one who was most concerned of all was the nature god. That god has so many names it's not known which is the correct name. So they call it the Source. Other gods became jealous, and during the dragon wars, the Source was pushed away and forgot itself. Pieces remained.

Those pieces still focused on the purity of the wilderness, but some were more accepting of civilization and the built environment than others were. It is time for the Source to be reintegrated—and to remember itself. “All of you who have known your own versions are bringing your version back. Ah! I see our volunteer has stirred.”

The dwarf rises to her feet and is now a satyr. She asks if it's a gift, and the man says that it is a change, and that she might now become a land warden. The Source might well not be the very center, but it is the location for the project. There is nothing to fight, unless there are those who would fight the reintegration. We might have expected to see our own gods. They are all here.

They all manifest. Most have horns, except for one which has an orc head and a rhinoceros head. They look stern and kind at the same time. The audience is instructed to continue to be faithful, positive, and to let others know that the Source is for the betterment of all. The man departs and others head to the well.

Dallons prays to the Horned One seeking guidance and clarity. He feels no connection to the Horned One at all. Some of those who drank from the well have passed out. Others have moved on to the eating area. They're waxing poetic about seeing the point of all things, bodies becoming roots, and the drinking of all knowledge. “Land wardens only know a portion of this, but it would be enough.”

Not everyone who drinks turns into a satyr. One remains human. One is an elf who seems to be turning translucent and floating. A hobbit says, “I can taste the earth in my fingers.” He turns into a platypus and starts to dig, the soil turning into mud as he begins swimming. Another older woman says that she is the maker of fruits. She produces an apple and hands it to Noxarius.

He approaches the well. Noxarius moves some of the people on the ground into the recovery position on their side. He takes a drink, mutters, “That's strange,” and falls to the ground. Keeva breaks his fall a little bit and eases him to the ground. He's just limp. There's an expression of shock on his face momentarily.

Keeva smells the bucket, and it smells earthy, like water in which leaves have been soaking.

Meanwhile, back on the airship *ExtravaBo*, Bo realizes that a group of hobbits are having a picnic on the deck of the airship.

A handful of others return from breakfast to drink from the well. Most of them pass out, but one stumbles around muttering disjointed phrases to herself. Keeva decides to drink. Her amulet of Vividren disintegrates, and she becomes one with the cosmos.

Dallons decides to drink. He falls unconscious.

Noxarius regains consciousness first, sees Theren still awake, and Keeva and Dallons still on the ground. Noxarius asks whether the others partook, too—and how long he's been out. It's been two hours. Noxarius comments that he didn't feel any great enlightenment. He casts fairy fire on Theren to make sure he can still cast spells.

Keeva starts to stretch out, and there's a tree there. Keeva is now a small ent who can form a harp with her arm and fingers.

Dallons also awakens. He stands up, and his legs feel very different. He's a humanoid rabbit. Hopping doubles his normal movement speed. His hearing has improved. The whiskers now on his face aren't very functional, but his nose twitches. And his hands, otherwise normal, now have furred backs. Dallons also feels a strong sense of purpose. He feels closer to the Horned One but as though he's seeing through the Horned One to something beyond.

Another recovering pilgrim turns into a chameleon, and another becomes a wraith. The party members also see an orc paladin mounted on a unicorn.

There are five dwarves wrestling with a gold- and green-banded python. They tell him to calm down, to stop struggling, and not to change back. Their friend isn't used to his new ability. His movement is uncertain, and he's tied himself into a knot. Dallons helps the dwarves untie him, ably assisting. The python turns back into a dwarf. “I'll be the best jungle patrol that ever served the Source,” the dwarf says.

Evening approaches. A dragonfly flies overhead. It is quite large: four and a half feet long, with a six-foot wingspan. The orc paladin is sleeping in a hammock between two ents. Keeva starts feeling like settling in, connecting to the earth.

Party members find Rusty and the wagon. He tells us he drank the water, and that it tasted like a memory. He seems unchanged externally. “Did you meet the great god of the forest?” Dallons tells Rusty he feels more connected to something now. Noxarius tells Rusty the story that the man by the pillar told the

crowd, and Rusty responds that the gods might not change, but the stories we tell about the gods change.

The Side Questers spend the night and provision themselves the next morning, including a large amount of carrots for Rusty—and “Gebunny” Dallons. They find the corridor of trees again and head back to town. Keeva rapidly gets drunk as she takes her nutrients from the soil of the divine corridor. She skips and sings.

After a couple of hours, the party returns to the city. A herald announces that for the first time ever, a city has a land warden. An inn called the Everlantern is now a spiritual center. The party returns to the airship after taking a half dozen wrong turns. Dallons tries to hop up a ladder made from Keeva’s arm but falls. He doesn’t land well.

Noxarius flies up in bird form and lets down the rope ladder. The Side Questers rejoin Bo and briefly share stories of their adventures. Dallons hears the sounds of a group of people below the boat. He tells the party to quiet down and goes to the edge of the boat to see what’s happening. A crowd of people are dragging an older man in a cowled robe forward. “Make way for Kwanliiz the exorcist!”

The party decides to follow the group, using the airship, which seems to have been unmolested while floating above the city. They find their way to the Everlantern. Two constables are guarding the inn, and there seems to be a patch of grass going inside. Everyone but Keeva goes down from the ship. The constables tell the adventurers to move the ship—and that the captain doesn’t have time for civilians.

The exorcism is about to begin. What exactly is happening is above the party members’ pay grade, but it seems to involve an aspect of the gods. They ask the Side Questers to move the ship, which lands as the exorcism begins and someone speaks in Elvish—the ship is programmed to shut down when someone speaks Elvish.

The hooded exorcist comes out and says he’s done what he can and that they must maintain it with their faith. The magister’s face is scarred, as though he took an axe blow across the eyes. The young man protests: “You must make sure it doesn’t come back!” “It will come back,” he says. “I’ve done all my art can do. You must now hold it back with your spiritual strength.”

He picks up on something as he leaves, indicating that it’s a cross current of influences. He says that he can get rid of that, too, if anyone wishes. Dallons approaches the young man and asks what needed to be exercised. A young man who claimed to be a land warden brought a presence of some sort with him. That presence was controlling the inn, barricading his

parents in their room. The land warden said that it was for the green father.

His parents are OK now, but the land warden is now barricaded in the room. He asks Noxarius whether he can help, given that he’s a satyr. Party members follow him inside to the kitchen. There’s no fire lit. It hasn’t been used for at least a day.

Comments on *Alarums & Excursions* #571

In *Tantivy* dated April 24, 2023, **Lee Gold** mentioned Fritz Leiber’s *A Specter Is Haunting Texas*. I’ll have to seek that story! I also find long combat sequences boring—which was one of the things that helped temper my interest in public play. There is so much more to roleplaying than tactical combat with miniatures!

Mark Nemeth’s *The Seedling* #25 commented on Gabriel Roark’s previous discussion of the rhetoric of Gary Gygax. The exchange prompted a discussion with my wife about two of my favorite rhetorical devices: the imparting of secret or forbidden information (arcanum) and the sense that you are part of something larger (synecdoche or microcosm, perhaps). **Jerry Stratton** also offers similar remarks in *The Biblyon Free Press* dated June 2023.

I will have to seek out Stratton’s previous entry in “The V Faces of V.” Your analysis of Alan Moore’s comic book writing seems promising!

Thank you, **John Redden**, for the two packages of A&E back issues. I’ve mailed you a check for the second batch and pulled one of the issues Roark is looking for for his Arduin abstract project. After I spend some time with the lot, I’ll donate them to the University of Iowa’s apae collection. I’d like to learn more about the mini-cons you were involved in as an alternative to Strategicon’s events. I enjoyed OrcCon earlier this year but didn’t go to Gamex this year.

In *This Isn’t the Zine You’re Looking For* #380, **Lisa Padol** responds to Spike Y Jones’s contention that no one subscribes to A&E. I kinda did for a while. There’ve been years during which I’ve continued receiving the apa while running down my balance—but not participating. True, I maintained an account rather than paid for a time-bound subscription term. Someone should name a street Paper Street. Google Maps suggests that several communities already have.

I appreciated **Nick Smith**’s memories of Marty Cantor in *Labyrinthine Lines*. In *PumSpeak* #113, **Paul Holman** writes about recording online game sessions. I usually type notes during sessions and would probably not refer to such recordings. I’ll have to spend more time with **Patrick Zoch**’s “Play By Forum” in the June 2023 *The Dragon’s Beard*.

Telegraphs & Tar Pits #70

June 20, 2023

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Remembering Marty Cantor

Last weekend, Barbara Gratz Harmon hosted a memorial gathering to honor Marty Cantor at her home in Burbank. Eylat Poliner helped manage invitations and promotion, as well as food; Rob Powell brought a pop up and folding chairs, as well as some folding tables; Nick Smith provided paper- and plasticware; and I helped with set up and clean up.



Paper Hero's gamers August, Tory, and Laura

With the event scheduled to run from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., I arrived early—around 8:30 a.m.—to help with some yard work in order to help make the location more conducive to a gathering. There was slightly more work than I expected, and I spent several hours trimming the tall grass, pulling large weeds and undesired plants, and then mowing—taking the occasional break for coffee and donuts, which I'd picked up before leaving Culver City. I was almost finished the daunting task by the time people began to arrive; I'd filled Harmon's green bin and stacked about as much in the far back corner of her yard by the compost bin in preparation. As I told event goers, "It doesn't look great, but it's better than it was."

The first people to arrive were largely game players, people Cantor met through game days at the LASFS clubhouse and events at Paper Hero's Games

(<https://www.paperherosgames.com>) in Sherman Oaks, where game days relocated after the clubhouse closed. I might not remember all of their names, but August, Tory, Laura, Kendall, Francisco, Joe, and June were all very friendly, and I particularly enjoyed talking with August, Tory, and Laura.



Guests including Ben Levin, Willard Stone, Nick Smith, Joe, and others

Other LASFS members I knew in attendance over the course of the day included our host, Harmon; as well as Poliner, Powell, Smith, Willard Stone, Matthew B. Tepper, Debra Levin, Ben Levin, and Beverly Warren. I also met a friend of John DeChancie, who was reportedly unable to make it to the event because of traffic.



Host Barbara Gratz Harmon, Eylat Poliner, Kendall, the hat of Matthew B. Tepper, and other guests

There was quite an impressive food spread, and I nibbled on summer sausage, cheese, and crackers, as well as brownie bites and a piece of cake. Conversation was free flowing and focused on sf and fantasy novels, board games, cons and fandom, the

state of Cantor's apartment and estate, and the role he played in all of our lives. There was no scheduled memorial event during the gathering, but we all talked about our dearly departed friend quite a bit throughout the day. Before he left, Tepper offered some additional remarks of his own.

Harmon invited participants into her home to see some of her and Jim Harmon's book, movie, and radio show collection; antique radios—prompting me to introduce her to the Southern California Antique Radio Society (<https://www.antiqueradios.org>)—and other audio equipment, including a custom-built player for radio transcription discs. I made note of Jim Harmon's Wildside Press collection, *Harmon's Galaxy*, as well as the Ramble House doubles of his smutty paperbacks.

Even though our reason for gathering was unfortunate and Cantor will be much missed, the overall sense was that he was much loved by all in attendance. I drove home after saying goodbye to Harmon and her friend from Orange County (Paula, I believe) just before 6 p.m., firmly knowing I'll continue to think of Cantor every time I work on an apazine and collate APA-L.

Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

Natter: Eight Days in Portugal (cont.)

Even though I wasn't able to visit Livraria Centésima Página while in Braga, I did check newsstands for periodicals and books of interest to sf, fantasy, and horror fen. On the way to Portugal, during a lengthy layover in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, I picked up the June 2023 issue of *The Walrus* (<https://thewalrus.ca>), a Canadian magazine that reminds me of *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, and *The New Yorker*. The issue includes several items of interest: a feature on the Canadarm, a robotic arm used in space exploration; a piece on the changing role of public libraries, now offering mental health, homelessness, and domestic violence services; and a seven-page comic by Jillian Tamaki about the misremembered filming of *Superman III* in Calgary, Alberta, (the scene in question was actually filmed in England) and the impact that memory has had on the artist's life and sense of place.

During our last day in Arcos de Valdevez, I found a local newsstand that stocked multiple French magazines of interest to fen, as well as a couple Brazilian Portuguese graphic novels published by Panini Comics. Among the French magazines, I was drawn to *Science & Univers*, *Science & Vie*, and *Ovnis*. *Science & Univers* #47, published by CapElitis Groupe in Naintre, features cover stories on exobiology, generative artificial intelligence, and other topics. The exobiology article even includes a

reproduction of the cover of the January 1951 issue of *Fantastic Novels Magazine*, which includes Arthur Leo Zagat's 1937 "Drink We Deep" and H.P. Lovecraft's 1926 "The Cats of Ulthar." Though a science magazine, it definitely nods toward sf.

The June 2023 issue of *Science & Vie* (#1269), published by Reworld Media and based in Paris, offers cover lines focusing on astronomy, genetics, mathematics, TikTok, and gravity. The magazine, published since 1913, has a history of challenging pseudoscience. Utilizing denser, smaller text, *Science & Vie* seems the more serious—and rigorous—of the two periodicals, perhaps similar to *Scientific American* more so than *Popular Science*.

Ovnis, then, also published by CapElitis, concentrates on UFOs. The cover to #17 is subtitled "Science & Histoire," and the magazine focuses on alien contacts, interstellar meteorite research, an interview with Tony Topping, reportage on the *Congres des Enigmes et Mysteres du Cosmos* in Argentina, and a profile of John Griffin.

I also picked up Panini's *X-Men* #47, a trade paperback release translating issues of *X-Men*, *New Mutants*, *Wolverine*, *Hellions*, and *S.W.O.R.D.* from 2020-2021. Brazilian Portuguese is different from Portuguese, but there's still a sizable Brazilian expatriate community in Portugal because of the similarities, which results in the local distribution of Monica's Gang comics (*T&T* #52) and other periodicals. I saw an issue of one of the Monica titles at a kiosk but didn't need to pick up any more for now.

On the way home, during an even longer layover in Montreal, I picked up the May 20, 2023, edition of the French *Le Figaro Magazine*, which featured a tempting cover story concentrating on the modern editing and adaptation of older works to cleanse them of culturally sensitive content. The headline, in English, reads "Black Cleopatra, rewritten Agatha Christie, stigmatized Disney classics... The new cultural diktats," and the piece addresses "la nouvelle revolution culturelle." The article is behind a paywall at <https://tinyurl.com/Figaro-diktats>. Personally, I don't think older works should be rewritten or "cleaned up." While reading some Hercule Poirot stories by Christie recently (including "The Adventure of 'The Western Star'" in *Poirot Investigates*), I noted the use of the word "chink," but think it's important to retain the historical context of literature. Were I of Asian descent, my attitudes might differ. I look forward to machine translating this article most of all.

Also in Montreal, I picked up a couple of paperbacks by Quebecois author Patrick Senécal, who trafficks in Stephen King-adjacent horror and suspense novels written for French Canadians.

Publishing since the mid-1990s, his books filled entire shelves in the airport newsstands. I bought his 1995 novel *Le Passager* and 2000's *Aliss*. It'll be harder to read the novels using Google Translate on my phone, but I'll give it a go at some point. For now, it's just heartening to know there are French-Canadian horror authors active in Canada.

If we decide to move to Portugal, I won't always be able to avail myself so at local bookstores and newsstands. Even when I learn to speak the language, while that might aid my translation of local writing, there's plenty to read in English among my accumulated books, magazines, and comics. But it's fun to explore local options when we visit.

From the Reading Pile: Book Reviews

The First Book of Swords, by Fred Saberhagen (Tor, 1984)

Similar to Terry Brooks's *The Elfstones of Shannara* and Niel Hancock's *Circle of Light #1: Greyfax Grimwald* (Faculae & Filigree #9), this excellent first outing in Saberhagen's fantasy series alludes to a higher-technology time that came before. "[I]n some cases, they even had access to certain surviving technology of the Old World," he writes. In her wonderfully contextual afterword, Sandra Miesel indicates that Saberhagen's earlier trilogy *The Empire of the East* (later published in one volume) "takes place in a post-catastrophe North America whose culture is vaguely medieval. Wizardry dominates this demon-ridden age while the rare bits of technology surviving from the Old World are objects of superstitious awe." Though intriguing, that doesn't really come into play in this volume.

Despite such potential, this first book is largely a fantasy in which the gods—or beings presumed to be gods—meddle in the doings of men, unbalancing political tensions and military positions of power... just for kicks. In the prologue, one of those figures forges 12 swords, some of which come into play over the course of this book. Finding and wielding one of the swords gives its possessor certain powers, and various leaders strive to collect multiple swords to secure their positions of power.

Our protagonist, however, is a 13-year-old boy who absconds with his father's sword after an accidental slaying. He falls in with a traveling dragon slayer, who wields one of the other swords, and undergoes a series of adventures as he tries to survive; learn the secrets of his sword, Townsaver; and make his way in the world. People try to steal his sword, he loses it, he finds another sword, and he finds friendship as the world around him surges and sways in response to the meddling of the gods.

All in all, *The First Book of Swords* is an enjoyable fantasy. It offers traditional, familiar tropes—youth as hero, discovered magical power, and multiple big baddies vying to gain power—and is very well written, neither cursory nor overwritten. I shall seek out the subsequent books.

Miesel's afterword, "Sword-Play," shall inspire me to seek out other writing by Saberhagen, as well. In the afterword, she considers the author's "technical expertise and mythic instinct" in books such as *The Veils of Azarloc*, the berserker series, Saberhagen's Dracula series, *The Empire of the East*, and the subsequent Book of Swords. After a brief digression on game-oriented sf—an avid chess-player, Saberhagen often focuses on the topic of games in his fiction—Miesel explores the meaning of the number 12, the meaning of swords in myth and fantasy literature, and the various swords in the Book of Swords. Already, I can see the value and enjoyment in reading a novel about the adventures and misadventures of each sword, each possessing its own personality and power. Dan Wells's 2016 Tor.com piece "Power with Consequences: Fred Saberhagen's Swords Series" offers additional context.

Well done, Mr. Saberhagen, from your scabbards to our bookshelves. Apparently, there's a 2002 movie titled *The Book of Swords*. Unlike *The Shannara Chronicles* 2016 television miniseries, it has nothing to do with its namesake book. Instead, the film is a martial arts flick about a police officer in Chicago.

Telepaths Don't Need Safe Words, by Cecilia Tan (Circler Press, 2009)

To recognize the 18th anniversary of Tan's 1991 collection issued as a chapbook in 1992, Circler published this "Age of Majority" ebook edition. While I've been aware of Tan's erotic sf writing for a long time through the mundane zine press (I used to review erotica for Brenda Loew's magazine *EIDOS*—Everyone Is Doing Outrageous Sex), this is perhaps the first time I've read a Circler work to completion.

While it might not entirely be my cup of tea, I thoroughly enjoyed the sipping and recognize the three stories included here for what they are, well-written speculative fiction incorporating topics and themes of interest to people who might be drawn to the BDSM community. This is sexy sf, and it's redolent with a particular kind of sex—and love.

Tan's introduction recounts the initial publication of the chapbook and Circler's evolution over time. The title story was first published on the alt.sex.bondage Usenet newsgroup before a self-published edition was printed for distribution at Lunacon—where I first met John Hertz—and then multiple commercial printings.

The story and chapbook inspired the launch of Circelet Press, which, at its peak, published 10-12 erotic sf titles a year before print distribution went bust. Now, with the popularity of ebooks and subgenres such as paranormal romance, Circelet's promise has largely been validated and Tan has embarked on a new career as a romance author. These three stories are where it all began, evolving from Usenet to chapbooks to a publishing imprint.

"Telepaths Don't Need Safe Words" focuses on a couple attending a party at the Hall overlooking the Galdarin River. The partygoers, seemingly wealthy royalty or people in positions of power, are masked, and BDSM imagery abounds: leashes, whips, power dynamics, swinging, slave relations, "scenes," and rape. The sex scenes are explicit, but the overarching themes are those of the importance of consent, and of the devotion and dedication of a loving couple.

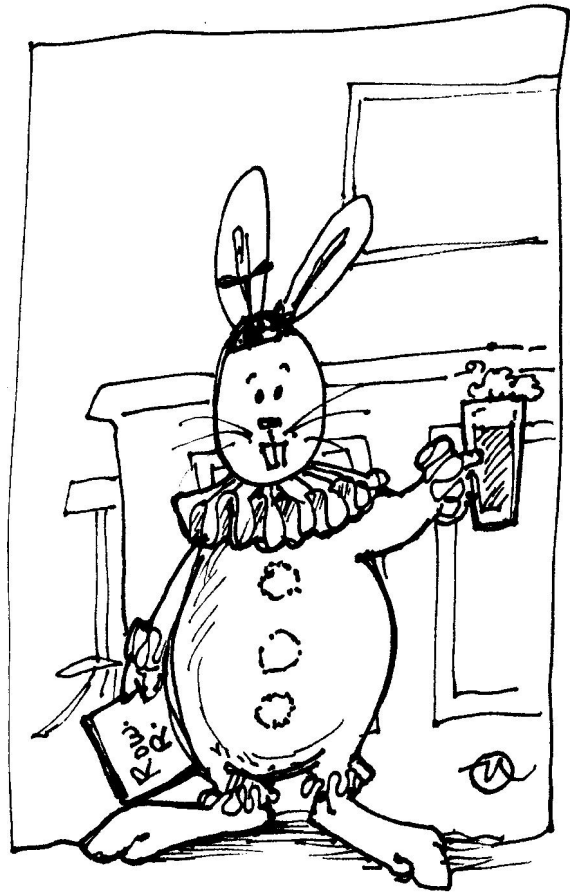
As Tan wrote in the introduction, "[W]riting an 'established relationship' instead of an 'encounter story' was radical and different. . . ." The story serves as a great introduction to quality writing of this type—even if the sf elements are few, perhaps relegated to the presence of telepathy and the fantastic setting and other characters, which suggest the long-term dissolution of immortality.

"Cat Scratch Fever" is slightly more clearly fantastic. A lordly hunter with a Keep—perhaps on another planet—captures a female feline humanoid whom he wins over in ways that remind me of the Cure song "The Lovecats."

In the end, it's revealed that the lord Calidare might not have captured his new lover as much as she has claimed him. "I had no doubt I would return to the Keep with her," Tan writes. "But I wondered, now, whether she was still mine, or if the tables had been turned." This might be my favorite story in the collection.

Finally, "Heart's Desire" takes place at another slightly futuristic party. Partygoers tease a bound subject, utilizing a cat o' nine tails. The text refers to reestablishing the rules of a scenario, and the story focuses on a wager of sorts to claim the affections and company of the bound subject, focusing on the limits of one's desire. Where is the line between play and reality? Perhaps we do need safe words.

Intrigued readers can learn more about Circelet Press, including its 2018 anthology *Superlative Speculative Erotica: The Best of Circelet Press 2012-2017*, at <https://www.circelet.com>.



Ulrika O'Brien

Fantastic Television: *Travelers*

S2E3: "Jacob"

The bulk of this episode concentrates on our CRT interrogator and the team's second encounter with him, under slightly different circumstances. The episode opens with construction workers discovering the decaying remains of travelers who'd been abducted, interrogated, and left behind, still in their wheelchairs with IV drips. While investigating the scene, the team finds a communicator, which they use to identify and contact the surviving team member: the Jacob of the episode title.

After a chase from his former home—Jacob had gone back to protect his wife after three and a half months on the lam—he gets shot, perhaps by an agent for the CRT interrogator. Before he dies, the team learns that his team had been sent back by the Director to investigate the disappearances and abductions of other teams of travelers. The most important thing that investigation yielded—other than Jacob's intense fear and a wiretap on his wife's mobile phone—was that all of the buildings in which the abductees had been housed were owned by the same company.

That company is in turn owned by the CRT interrogator, still posing as an agoraphobic and germophobic technology magnate. FBI agent Grant MacLaren goes to his home, where he communicates with the deaf-mute security guards using sign language, and gets a brief audience with the magnate, who shrugs him off and threatens MacLaren's wife.

Afterward, Philip hacks into his home server, and they find dossiers on all of the abducted travelers—including themselves. Their personal lives have been severely compromised, as the magnate's veiled threat asserts. They gear up to attack him in his home, only to encounter a messenger, who tells them to stand down. At the same time, the magnate's son is also utilized as a messenger, telling the magnate to stand down, as well. He and his son leave home in a hurry, perhaps never to return.

Other in-play plotlines also continue. Philip's dependency on the eyedrops is highlighted when he accuses Trevor of taking them. David encounters Marcy at work after taking his renewed girlfriend in for gastro-intestinal treatment; she has an eating disorder (eating cotton balls for weight loss), and he invites Marcy over for dinner with them. Grant MacLaren tells his wife that he hasn't told anyone—not even his partner, now fellow traveler, Walt Forbes—about their divorce. And Trevor shares a somewhat tender moment with his father, Gary, in a one-sided discussion about overcoming setbacks; he runs the rest of the way to school, accentuating that he's hiding his nanotechnology-aided physical recovery. And Carly and Jeff continue to try to snow the child custody evaluators, failing to pull the wool over the eyes of the primary caseworker, who attests that they might not make good spouses, but they might yet make good parents. Jeff celebrates by drinking.

Other observations: Philip's new lover is notably absent from this episode, despite the moment focusing on the addictive eye drops. And before the team leaves to attack the magnate's home, Trevor indicates he doesn't support the unassigned mission.

I have mixed feelings about the episode. I'm surprised that the magnate is escaping so soon, though he might return, or take up activities elsewhere, and the plotline might continue. And the dueling factions, while mentioned explicitly, seemed less in play in this episode, which focused on the Director's guidance, the magnate, and the personal lives of the team members.

That plotline, at least, will continue to loom large. It—and perhaps the rebooted AI—could very well propel the rest of the season.

S2E4: “11:27”

Now we're talking! Despite my light speculation last

write up that we might return to the dueling factions or Director as AI storylines soon, this episode returned to the concept of team missions—which the first season initially focused on. The beginning of the episode seems to allude to several separate missions, including the delivery or receipt of a couple plain-brown-wrapper packages to or from nervous people, and Grant MacLaren's reunion with Sen. Ted Bishop, whom you might recall from S1E9. (T&T #65)

In Trevor's mission meeting a nervous person, we are introduced to passionate environmental activist Abigail, performed by the extremely cute Paloma Kwiatkowski, who's also appeared in TV genre outings *The 100* and *Debris*, as well as sf fannish films *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters* and *Multiverse*. Upon her first appearance, I was hoping she'd make a recurring character. Spoiler: She won't. Regardless, she and Trevor share a touching moment while almost smoking and looking at the stars. Their connection is strong enough—“I'm an old soul.” “I like it.”—that she isn't able to go through with the bombing, which would have led to her death.

Abigail introduces the team to—or expands on its knowledge of and access to—a threatening experimental agribusiness seed that will accelerate the depletion of farmland's nutrients and spread aggressively, growing like kudzu. The missions have returned the program to addressing ways to change the future in order to stave off the coming ecological disaster. The team's plan is to bomb the agricultural conglomerate developing the disastrous seed, providing a distraction during the assassination of Sen. Bishop at the hands of Carly—poised on a nearby rooftop with a sniper rifle. They hope that his death will lead to his martyrdom and an increase in environmental activism, which he's become a proponent of since becoming a host. Not surprisingly, he doesn't really want to die but sticks to his mission.

Additionally, MacLaren asks Marcy to help his wife avoid the potential negative impact of a placenta abnormality. He also proposes that they buy an apartment or condominium together. Marcy, fresh off her too-short dinner with David, goes out with a doctor at the hospital at which she works. They end up in her hotel room—I presume it's a hotel because of the ice tub on the table—and after he leaves, she stares into the distance dead faced. And Philip goes to visit his girlfriend a couple of times, to take eye drops and “play” while her little sister plays video games downstairs. (I don't remember what the fictional game was called, but its title made me chuckle.)

Neither the bombing nor assassination go exactly as planned, but both missions succeed in a way. I was struck by the explicit prioritization of Protocol 1 over

Protocol 4—a protocol several characters might have broken by now—and the episode ended with Philip’s girlfriend’s little sister walking into her sister’s bedroom, now a messenger, engaging Philip’s eidetic memory to download some sort of chemical formula.

What is it for? The seed prototypes that were destroyed? Something else entirely? More importantly, will he make it?

Comments on APA-L #3024

In *Leeway* dated May 26, 2023, **Lee Gold** informed apans of an updated version of “The Tenth Nazgul Affair,” which also appeared in the recently scanned *The Best of APA-L* #3. I saw some blossoming jacarandas along Braddock Drive on my way to work early this week but haven’t yet driven southeast on Sawtelle Boulevard toward Jefferson/Sepulveda to see if those are blossoming yet. I’ll keep my eyes out for Elizabeth Ann Scarborough’s Godmother trilogy.

Matthew Mitchell’s *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #15 reported on seeing *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*. My son saw it—twice—in Tokyo and enjoyed it enough to return a second time with friends in tow. Multiverses seem to be in the comic book water, from DC’s *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, as you mention, to Marvel’s 2015 Secret Wars event—which included numerous Battleworld series positing alternate realities—to *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*. The Spider-Verse as such dates back at least to a 2014 story arc that included almost every version of Spider-Man from more than 50 years of comics and media. It even brings to mind the Spider-Man Clone Saga, perhaps including *What If?* #30—“What If Spider-Man’s Clone Lived?”—and the delightful *Marvel Tails Starring Peter Porker, the Spectacular Spider-Ham*, which reminds me of *Crazy Magazine*’s Teen-Hulk. Personally, I’d like fewer Spider-thing’s rather than more, just like I’d prefer fewer things that can hulk out. DC has seen similar diffusion with its wide range of Flash characters and even the modern-day Batman Family. I’m glad you enjoyed the movie. Multiverses might even be in the general cultural water, given the success of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.

William Breiding recently sent me some wonderful examples of hectograph fanzines, particularly Eric Mayer’s *Groggy* and *Charm*. Amazing Stories offers an excellent summary of Mayer’s fanzines—and the hectograph—at <https://tinyurl.com/Mayer-hecto>. We did experience a 730 evaluation. It could certainly have gone another way—or ways—and while the outcome was challenging, it was definitely good for my son’s health and well being. I just had to print your fanzine in color because of that glorious Angus

McKee pair of panels. Beautiful!

In *Toony Loons* #719, **Joe Zeff** updated us on his post-colonoscopy health, as well as a challenging walk home. What an ordeal! I’m sorry to hear about the state of your teeth and appetite, and I hope you’re able to address those issues, as well. 20 six-month terms? Holy crow. And here I am just at my second six-month term as scribe. I was reelected recently, though I did almost have competition. Chris Marble nominated Dean Johnson, who declined. I’ll eventually welcome someone else stepping in as scribe, though I’d hope to continue publishing *De Profundis* and *Menace of the LASFS* if my successor doesn’t want to. I volunteered to run as scribe because I thought it’d be the easiest way to relaunch both LASFSzines.

John Hertz’s *Vanamonde* #1548 opened with a page-long poem to recognize the birthday of G.K. Chesterton. I’ll add Roger Zelazny’s *Lord of Light* to my reading list, and I need to learn more about clerihews. Your remark that “it can only happen if we folks happen it,” brought to mind Howard Rheingold’s description of the Well, the Whole Earth ’Lectronic Link: “What it is, is up to us.”

And in *Vanamonde* #1549, **John Hertz** commented on the Feast of Weeks. “Judaism is about making *this* world better.” I can get behind that! I think people sometimes forget that organizations are made up of people, and that what organizations “do,” people are actually choosing to do. The abstraction can be less than helpful as “What can I do?” is eclipsed by “the way we do things,” “the way things have always been done,” and “the way I have to do this.”

That line of thinking is a way of occluding human agency and responsibility, which we’ve seen result in corporate personhood as an extreme. At work, when the personal pronoun “they” is applied to a company in writing, I usually change it to “it.” Organizations are the sum of their (wince) human constituents, and I think what we get frustrated by—even when thinking about committees—is formalized processes and methods, which can be helpful in terms of repeatability, offering gains in efficiency as long as those processes and methods continue to work well. “Getting people actually to listen and confer, aiee,” you wrote. “No! No! Do it informally!” That might also emphasize agency while occluding responsibility. If no one is in charge and no one steps up, whatever might happen then? The distributed, loose organization Food Not Bombs, which serves free food to the homeless and others, sometimes specifies a volunteer position called the “bottom liner.” That’s the person with whom the buck stops, and who needs to make sure that what needs to happen happens—regardless of who flakes in the name of informality.

Telegraphs & Tar Pits #71

June 29, 2023

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From the Reading Pile: Short Stories

Inspired by seeing the cover reproduction in *Science & Univers* (T&T #70) and Lee Gold's introduction to science fiction and fantasy, I sought out PDF copies of the January 1951 issue of *Fantastic Novels Magazine* and the 1954 edition of *Science Fiction* (see below).

Fantastic Novels was a spin-off from *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* to concentrate on novel-length work and avoid serialization. The January 1951 issue is Vol. 4 #5 and includes two stories and a poem. H.P. Lovecraft's "The Cats of Ulthar" was originally published in 1926. It's a short piece and is very economical in its mood establishment and narrative. I've read this before multiple times, and it's always worth rereading. Arthur Leo Zagat's "Drink We Deep" is the book-length novel of the issue, equal parts outre lost-world fantasy and abstract sf story that concentrates on the conflict between two diminutive groups deep within the Earth. Told in an epistolary fashion combining journal entries, letters, depositions, and other forms of writing, it's an interesting story but wanders a little, in the end feeling over long.

But the letter column, "What Do You Think?" is where the action really is. Readers share their opinions on back issues and their stories, the decisions made by cover and other artists, whether the illustrations were better in the original or the reprint, whether new stories are better than reprints, and the history of fantasy fiction—one correspondent in her 70s first read Jules Verne in 1890. Letter writers also seek to buy and trade back issues, often trying to track down long-out-of-print stories.

Letters include the correspondents' mailing addresses to aid communication, and a couple of letter writers recommend fanzines. R.J. Banks Jr. suggests *Utopian* (of which #11, near this issue date, is available via *Fanac*). And Robert E. Briney recommends *Fan-Fare* (of which Vol. 2 #3, near this issue date, is available). Briney also mentions *The Cataclysm*, a poetry fanzine he co-edited with actor Del Close, co-founder of the ImprovOlympic. I haven't found any digitized issues of *The Cataclysm*

yet, but it's mentioned in Kim "Howard" Johnson's biography *The Funniest One in the Room: The Lives and Legends of Del Close*:

In addition to his comic books, Del would devour the pulp magazines of the 1930s and '40s. He became pen pals with a boy he met in the pages of *Startling Stories*. Joined by a third boy in 1949, they began publishing their own science fiction poetry magazine called *The Cataclysm*. Robert E. Briney was the editor, while Del served as assistant editor and publisher, and it ran for eight issues. He even recruited Donna Fearing, his junior high girlfriend, to write some poetry for it. During his junior year of high school, an article in the school newspaper announced that he would coauthor *Fantastic Art*, with half of its eighty pages to present science fiction and fantasy artwork, some original and some reprints, but there is no way to confirm whether it was ever actually published.

Personally, I think it's a bit of a gamble for a magazine to offer so few stories, risking an issue's success on one or two stories' success, but the Lovecraft reprint, letter column, and artwork by Virgil Finlay, Hannes Bok, and Lawrence make this a solid issue even if the Zagat piece is uneven.

The 1954 edition of *Science Fiction* or *Science Fiction Stories* is more straightforward and stronger, though it lacks a lettercol. The issue includes eight short stories, all seemingly new at the time. Algis Budrys's "In Human Hands" considers the impact of a robot separated from a human landing crew and its impact on another humanoid race on the planet Sathrea. It's an interesting musing on the potential for individual initiative, the possible limits of one's vision, and the help a little encouragement provides.

"Peace Agent" by M.C. Pease is a humorous social sf story positing a future human society in which individual laborers are challenged by "clans," Hatfield and McCoy-like family units taking on specific roles in manufacturing or book keeping, for example. The clans compete with each other and haven't yet claimed a comfortable place in the broader society. Francis O'Keefe, agent of the Census Bureau, helps mitigate a potential controversy between two clans, as well as citizens who don't support such family units. The overarching theme is one of individuality and free thinking, as well as the benefits of communal action.

Philip K. Dick's "The Turning Wheel" is a highlight of the issue. Centered on a predominantly Asian population, it posits that caucasians are racially inferior and holds up the spiritual teachings of Elron Hu, which can help people move from being jangled to being clear. Not everyone follows Elron, however, and society is separated into different groups—bards or holy men at the top, poets, artists, musicians, workers, businessmen, warriors, farmers, and technos

at the bottom. A bard sent to determine whether a rural techno cult is a threat overcomes his prejudice toward the “caucs” somewhat and recognizes the value of their science. The story is an enjoyable about-face in terms of race and class relations.

“To See Ourselves” by Robert F. Young reveals that humans and martians are surprisingly similar, except in a very specific way. Milton Lesser’s “Give Away” is another social sf story focusing on a society based on a very elaborate gift-debt-social standing structure. “And What Remains” by Winston K. Marks is an absolutely wonderful musing on a society marked by plenitude, the challenges posed by relying on others, and the importance of individual agency. It resonates with the Budrys and Pease stories above.

Theodore R. Cogswell’s “Barrier” considers gender relations in a spacefaring society. And “Husbands, Care and Feeding of” by Mack Reynolds is a clever time-travel tale that also considers gender relations.

Even without a lettercol, *Science Fiction* is the more balanced and promising prozine, given its range of stories offered, story lengths, and topic matter. I quite enjoyed the focus on individualism and agency in several of the stories. (Interestingly, in addition to the *Dianetics* and Scientology references in the Dick piece, Ayn Rand’s “Anthem” was soon featured in the June 1953 issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries Combined with Fantastic Novels Magazine*.)

From the Reading Pile: Related Fanzines

***Fan-Fare* Vol. 2 #3 (March 1951)**

This bimonthly fiction fanzine edited by W. Paul Ganley and R.E. Briney (see above) offers fiction, poetry, and other features. The letter column, “What the Cat Dragged in” includes reader comments on past issues and their stories, including work by Del Close. “Truly, most fan fiction is pretty bad—this was surprisingly good,” wrote Mack Reynolds, who was at the time collaborating with Fredric Brown. “In fact I’ve seen stories no better in pro-magazines.”

Eugene DeWeese’s “Experiment,” the cover story, is relatively well written—to Reynolds’s point above—and offers some speculative science that sets up a solid ending. “A Paradox of Dreams” by Tom Covington is less well written and somewhat more dense, providing a wartime tale featuring a sort of BEM. And Toby Duane’s “A Sirius Matter” touches on robotics, nuclear physics, and a Sirian invasion.

The “special feature article,” Marie-Louise’s “It’s a Lie!,” considers the importance of names. Poetry by Jerry F. Cao, Duane, Helen Louise Soucy, Andrew Duane, and Lee Gann represent a variety of forms, largely well written and interesting. Cao and Andrew Duane’s contributions are particularly promising.

There’s a book review column commenting on three books by H.P. Lovecraft and Nelson Bond; news items from the United Scientific and Cultural Organization, a school honor society, and the N.T.H.S. News Association; and a fanzine review column titled “Fanimestations,” which is a great name.

In some ways, *Fan-Fare* reminds me of John Thiel’s *Pablo Lennis*, or vice versa. Not many fanzines publish fiction these days, and rather than consider such fanfiction—unless it draws on other literary and media properties—perhaps there’s still room for amateur fiction in fandom. If interested, you can read this issue of *Fan-Fare* yourself at <https://tinyurl.com/Fan-FareV2N3>.

***Utopian* #11 (November 1952)**

Edited by R.J. Banks Jr. (see above), this mimeographed fanzine also features a good assortment of fiction. An editorial by Banks discusses the fanzine’s publishing frequency and mentions a club in Texas, as well as a forthcoming reviewzine titled *Promag Parade*. (Though reading the fanzine suggests that that’s the title of the prozine review section. See below.) He also teases upcoming stories.

Banks’s “The Thing” is a sequel to Bruce Lane’s “The Griffin’s Report” and focuses on fantastic creatures, a reinstated monarch, Sinbad the sailor, and King Oberon. It’s a bit of a youthful mashup, but the story’s enthusiasm and energy is evident. “Planet Undesirable” by Forest de Vane takes place largely in our solar system, involving Mars, Saturn, and beef stew of all things.

Earl Newlin’s “The Pool of Thought” considers mechanical men and mind control. “The Child” by Don Howard Donnel is a postapocalyptic piece, and one of the better stories. And “The Last Ride,” a poem by Terence Heywood, is quite good.

Apparently, the editor and contributors were associated with the National Fantasy Fan Federation because there’s an “N3F Fen Kriss Kross” by Sandy Charnoff, who contributes other crossword puzzles. And Leif Ayen offers a somewhat lengthy and poorly typed biographical sketch of Edgar Allan Poe.

Additional content includes reviews of contemporary prozines, including *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. The table of contents on p. 45 indicates that Neffers could subscribe to the fanzine at a discounted rate and that “Promag Parade” was also offered as a standalone supplement.

At 46 pages, this is an impressive fanzine. Clearly oriented toward literary fen, active readers and writers, it’s a promising model even for modern fanzines. I appreciated the combination of short stories and

poetry, author profiles, and reviews. Those interested can access the issue at <https://tinyurl.com/Utopian11>.

Fantastic Television: *Travelers*

S2E5: “Jenny”

This episode is fascinating to watch in these post-COVID-19 times. When it first aired in Canada on Nov. 13, 2017—first streaming in the United States on Dec. 26, 2017—the closest comparison to the virus outbreak in the show was Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which appeared in China in 2002. Seeing healthcare professionals, law enforcement, and the National Guard mobilize to address and contain the virus is an emotional experience. COVID-19 broke out in early 2020.

That is the backdrop for the show. After Philip was used to download some sort of chemical formula, another traveler arrives to review the output—before departing to synthesize it. Meanwhile, the team receives a mission to pick up an antiviral treatment another team is distributing to travelers, to inoculate themselves against the rapidly spreading infection.

They also receive a mission to prevent the infection of—or to inoculate—three notable transmitters. Carly worries about her son’s health (he’d been running a fever) and debates with Jeff who should take him to the babysitter. Marcy instructs David to stay home, but he takes to the streets to care for his official and unofficial cases. And Grant’s wife has a medical appointment that suggests her pregnancy is improving.

A traveler doctor stops by the headquarters to go over the chemical formula Philip downloaded, and Philip doesn’t remember doing so. Team members check on the couple distributing the antiviral; they’re dead. Philip goes to see what he can learn from Jenny, only to find that she’s overdosed on pills.

Back at HQ, they revive Jenny, who informs the team that Philip didn’t download an antiviral agent, but a compound designed to accelerate the virus’ mutation. She also reveals that when the Director was reset, they lost the ability to send travelers back to the 21st century, so the faction found a way to send back everyone else remaining—using the device that found hosts for Forbes and the other recent arrivals.

The team realizes that all of their recent missions have been faction missions, not Director missions, and that the faction hopes to end overpopulation, now deemed the biggest threat to the future. About 30 percent of the world’s population would die.

Subplots include Marcy talking to Carly about whether they’re now more than the sum of their identities before their arrival in the past, echoing previous episodes. Carly seems to think she is, having found a new protective maternal instinct with her son.

And Marcy learns that she didn’t readily agree to be overwritten but thought she had a choice and wanted time to consider it—because of David. Her call to David initially, made after looking at pictures of herself and him—zooming in on him—suggests an interest in reconnecting and trying to find just what it was she’d discovered that made her want to stay the same self.

The plotline involving Jenny, who breaks up with Philip after the download, tossing him enough vials of the eyedrops to last several months, seems to have come to a head. The faction has grown in strength and influence, and it’s even more challenging for travelers to know who their friends—and enemies—are. With so many characters showing signs of the virus, and so few proving immune, I’m curious how it’ll all shake out.

Comments on APA-L #3025

Happy birthday, cover artist **Charles Lee Jackson II!** I hope that June 26 was a wonderful day. Thank you for sharing one of the serial stills you’ve been scanning. What do you plan to do with the resulting scans? I’d be interested in seeing more, for sure, and I’d even welcome a list of movies you have stills from, in case I ever need any for fanzines! In addition, congratulations on the publication of Peter H. Brothers’s *Citizen Kong: A 90th Anniversary Appreciation*, for which you wrote a remembrance. Those interested can learn more at <https://amzn.to/3r4V03d>.

This distribution is a little on the lighter side. I reached out to C.D. Carson, Barbara Gratz Harmon, and Joe Zeff to check in with them. Nola Frame-Gray and Susan Rothman are currently on hold for various reasons. During last week’s LASFS meeting, Chris Marble reported on visiting Don Fitch, who continues to receive APA-L weekly.

In *Leeway* dated June 1, 2023, **Lee Gold** remarked that she’s currently revising her third novel, *Valhalla: Into Brightness*. Wonderful progress! I’m glad you and Barry saw some blooming jacarandas. I saw some Friday morning on Braddock Drive near Overland Avenue while driving back from mailing APA-L at the post office. <https://faq.usps.com/s/article/2023-Postage-Price-Changes> suggests that one-ounce First-Class Mail International Letter postage will increase from \$1.45 to \$1.50 July 9. You might be looking for more detail.

I have sent your cover feedback to Taral Wayne. In addition to Gray May and June Gloom, “Gray-Pril” was new to me; I recently also heard someone use the term “Foggust.” Thank you for recommending I contact Pedro Panhoca da Silva from *Alarums &*

Excursions. Special thanks for helping me track down the title of your first sf prozine. The history of its naming is actually quite complicated!

In *Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Weird Fiction Magazines*, edited by Marshall B. Tymn and Mike Ashley, under *The Original Science Fiction Stories*, they indicate, “Mistaken form of title for *Science Fiction Stories*, itself a retitling for the second series of *Science Fiction*,” and refers to the *Science Fiction* entry. The entry for *Science Fiction Stories* (1953-1960) reads, “Title used by *Science Fiction* in its second series. Also known as *The Original Science Fiction Stories*,” and refers to *Science Fiction* again.

The entry for *Science Fiction*, then, indicates that there were two series, one beginning in March 1939 and another revived series starting in 1953. In the meantime, when *Future Fiction* was revived in 1950, it appeared as *Future combined with Science Fiction Stories*. In any event, two test issues of the second-series *Science Fiction* (sans *Future*) were published in the summers of 1953 and 1954. *Future* and *Science Fiction* then merged again as *Science Fiction* in 1955, continuing *Future*’s numbering.

“In effect, therefore, the revived *Science Fiction Stories* was a continuation of *Future SF*,” the editors write. When *Future SF* itself relaunched again, “the title *Science Fiction Stories* was prefixed on the cover by ‘The Original...’ This was to show that the magazine was a continuation of the original 1939 title, and the prefix was never officially part of the title. Nevertheless, it led to much confusion... Oh, so? Mystery solved!

Those interested can access the full run of *Science Fiction* at <http://readitfree.org/SF/#SFS>. The 1954 issue features stories by Algis Budrys, M.C. Pease, Philip K. Dick, Robert F. Young, Milton Lesser, Winston K. Marks, Theodore R. Cogswell, and Mack Reynolds. I comment on the issue above. The prefix “The Original...” first appeared on the cover of the September 1955 issue.

What you weren’t able to say in Spanish was appropriately emotional and, in English, communicated exactly how you felt. I’m sorry that the gardeners removed your geraniums. I also appreciated the letter your uncle wrote about practicing law. I didn’t think of the profession that way when I was going through our 730 evaluation and custody hearings, but looking back, your uncle wasn’t wrong. I especially appreciated the remark about rights and wrongs involving the government or one’s backyard.

Matthew Mitchell’s *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #16 updated ellers about the status of his Internet access. May your connectivity remain! I hope that you’re able to exchange desks easily at work. I

have a dedicated desk at the office where I work, but if I don’t go in consistently—I go in three days a week—I sometimes return to find my chair missing or moved, or someone else working at my desk. Before the pandemic, that was less of a risk. My desk, then, was a mess. Scattered papers and periodicals, piles of books, and a nearby bookshelf filled to the gills with work-related texts. When the office first closed during the lockdown, I picked up more than a dozen boxes of stuff from my desk and work area. Returning to the office, my goal is to accumulate nothing on my desk—so I don’t have to go through that again. I keep just enough on it to indicate that someone works there regularly. Sometimes, that works.

It’s been a while since I last enclosed some *Flash Gordon* comic strips as a bonus: last November. Jim Keefe’s strip remains one of the most sf-oriented comic strips still syndicated, and is syndicated for publication Sundays. I don’t read it regularly, but I should—and I hope you enjoyed it and seek it out.

The *Los Angeles Times* doesn’t include *Flash Gordon* in its comics section, but you can find it online at <https://comicskingdom.com>. The dailies reprint volume *Flash Gordon: Radium Mines of Electra* was published by Titan last year, the eighth volume in a series. *Comics Revue* magazine (<http://www.comicsrevue.com>) also reprints *Flash Gordon* strips, dailies and Sundays. In the most recent issue, June 2023, Rick Norwood reprints chapter two of “Sons of Saturn!” from November-December 1962 and the conclusion to “Gudrun and the Gambling Satellite” from January-February 1974. Of special note in that issue, however, is *Chris Welkin—Planeteer*. Chapter one of “The Flying Triangle” is reprinted from November-December 1951. (Also in the issue, *The Phantom*, *Alley Oop*, *Mandrake the Magician*, *Krazy Kat*, and more.)

The *Chris Welkin* strips in *Comics Revue* are introduced by Roy Thomas, who shares some information about the background of the strip, how he first discovered it as a youth, and where it fits into the broader context of adventure comic strips. Thomas also contributed an article on the strip to *Alter Ego* #182 (July 2023). That four-page article is a slightly longer introduction to the strip than Thomas’s page in *Comics Revue* but covers much of the same ground. Highlights include a photograph of the artist and writer, Art Sansom and Russ Winterbotham, a *Boston Traveler* ad for the strip’s debut, and a color reproduction of a Sunday translated into Spanish for *El Diario*. The strip merits exploration.

The Explosion Containment Umbrella #10

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The Explosion Containment Umbrella is an apa commentzine published by Heath Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA; kalel@well.com; 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to 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 #230

Our estimable Official Editor **Garth Spencer** asked, “What happened to Roger Sjölander?” I recently sent him a friend request on the Facebook, but he hasn’t responded yet—I see he’s already friends with ye olde OE. His most recent post there was June 29, so he’s still kicking around. But perhaps he’s ghosted us. I sent him a brief email indicating that I and we miss him—and that he might consider touching base if he doesn’t intend to return. If you’re still sending him distributions perhaps we follow our guidelines: “Missing three consecutive distributions will cause the member to be dropped from the active roster... .” At some point, you could send him a note indicating we miss him, that you’re going to stop sending him distributions, and that we’d welcome him back at any time. I’ll let folks know if he replies to my email.

But I also have a proposal. Let’s all write a short-short story, perhaps 1,000 words maximum, positing What Happened to Roger Sjölander. We can include them in eAPA, and perhaps send them to him in collected form. If others agree, I’d be willing to participate. It might be a fun, small project.

In *I Never Got the Hang of Thursdays* #210, **Garth Spender** shared updates on his preparation for Pemmi-Con, which is in just 18 days according to the Web site. Two weeks out, you must be very excited. Safe travels! I love Winnipeg and am envious of the members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society who are going. If those chapbooks are made available to non-members, I’d be interested in checking them out. I just signed up as a supporting member, which I seem to have neglected to do previously.

Steven Barnes’s encouragement to be mindful of the three gates of Buddhist discourse is worth considering. What I’ve read suggests that the gates are “Are these words true?,” “Are they necessary?,” and “Are they kind?” I understand the inclination to not overly or overtly blame those responsible—or irresponsible—for gaffes, mishaps, and missteps, but you might be able to find a balance between holding people accountable and being unkind. But if it’s

somewhat widely known who was responsible for a specific event, identifying them as “one fan” or something might be sufficient. Regardless, we fen do like spice in our writing, so sometimes gossip and such can be appealing. Again, balance that with not burning bridges between you and other fen, and not unnecessarily engaging in character assassination. That you’re even thinking about it suggests that you’ll find a middle way.

If you want to secure permissions to reproduce images or text in your fan history, I think you should approach those people directly. Presuming that the resulting history won’t be sold, you might be able to be a little looser in your approach, as long as you give adequate credit for material you include from other sources.

While I have seen multiple episodes of *Max Headroom*, I do not remember Blank Reg. I shall have to return to that program! I’m glad you received the button. I thought of you when I saw it.

Henry Grynsten’s *Wild Ideas* #36 opened with mailing comments before exploring whether humans have evolved to subsist on cooked food. What’s the title of the history about Sam J. Lundwall? (Ahrvid Engholm answers in *Intermission* #133 below: Jörgen Jörälv’s *Delta Science Fiction*!) It sounds intriguing. I have a copy of Lundwall’s *Science Fiction: What It’s All About* and will check it out soon.

We’ve seen a fine example of not addressing inequalities in the United States in recent days, as the Supreme Court ruled on student debt relief and affirmative action. In a country that’s still divided and driven by racial inequality, reading the opinions about being colorblind felt like a laudable ideal—and our collective goal—but a naive presumption in the current day. This is overly simplistic, but generally, laws exist to either discourage people from engaging in behaviors that people engage in, or to encourage people to engage in behaviors they don’t tend to engage in. Ideally with the collective good and the long term in mind.

The exchange between you, Engholm, and Spencer about Isaac Asimov’s borderline behavior made me think that among sf fen and writers, people who are stereotypically socially awkward might also be romantically and sexually awkward—which can lead to questionable behavior even if it’s not asserted or intended as such. In Asimov’s case, power dynamics could also come into play. Outside of unwelcome attention, I think the power dynamics are where many challenging situations arise these days. Men in power seem to privately demand or expect more than is warranted given a specific relationship.

In terms of differentiating science fiction from

general fiction, ideas—if speculative, positing an unreal state as the real state—might be sufficient. Otherwise, we do have the term “science fiction” itself. But is any fiction about science or technology science fiction? Perhaps not. So I return to the speculation, the asking of the question “What if?” SF is different from fantasy because the answer involves a somewhat reasonable extension of science or technology. Fantasy has no such requirement, so can include magic and more arcane speculation. And horror might involve the supernatural, placing it adjacent to fantasy, or concentrate on the extremes of bad action and human behavior—which would not be adjacent to fantasy.

In the main essay focusing on cooked food and its impact on human evolution, Grynnssten begins by mentioning Galileo Galilei. Interestingly, Galileo’s forced denial of heliocentrism recognized an anniversary recently. He recounted heliocentrism on June 22, 1633. Your consideration of Richard Wrangham’s *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human*—particularly German August Engelhardt’s colony and the impact of cooked meat—was very interesting.

In the April edition of *Living Inside Number 9*, **William McCabe** shared an update on adapting to retirement. I recently had lunch with a friend who described his current state as semi-retirement, as he began to slow his professional activities. I’m sorry to hear about your rent confusion and tiredness.

While I was aware of Kurt Vonnegut’s character Kilgore Trout, I didn’t know that its name was inspired by Theodore Sturgeon, whom I’ve been reading lately—or that Philip Jose Farmer ghost wrote a novel by Trout, *Venus on the Half-Shell*. The name of the main character of a short story I wrote reuses the name of a zine publisher whose work I appreciate. My idea about writing stories about what happened to Roger Sjölander might fall along similar lines. I found your examples of “people pretending to be something they are not” fascinating.

William McCabe’s May issue of *Living Inside Number 9* commented on the books nominated and considered for the Hugo Awards. The Hugos Web site indicates that the awards are “generally for works first published or appearing in” a given year and are nominated by anyone who belongs to the World Science Fiction Society or was a member of a recent World Science Fiction Convention. So it comes down to the people nominating. Who goes to Worldcon? Who joins the WSFS? What countries are they from, and what books are they aware of? I’d expect that most active readers of any literature don’t read globally but read books that are published and readily

available domestically, in their home country.

As I spend more time in Portugal (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #49-52 and #69-70), it’s increasingly frustrating how little Portuguese sf is available in English. Portuguese readers also have access to Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, and other literature, much of which might also not be translated into English. Clearly, however, the fault is mine. I only read English. But it’s becoming easier to machine translate text, and that broadens the options slightly, even if it’s slow reading.

I also found your remarks on public housing and your reading journey as a youth interesting. It was fun to have two of your issues in this distribution!

In *Intermission* #133, **Ahrvid Engholm** commented on generative artificial intelligence. While AI music might be on the increase, I think the publishing industry has already seen greater impact. In February, *Clarkesworld* stopped accepting submissions after an influx of AI-generated stories. Editors had received 700 actual submissions and 500 machine-written stories. February also brought the launch of an sf magazine entirely generated by AI, *Infinite Odyssey*. While I read *Clarkesworld*, I will not read *Infinite Odyssey*. There’s already too much written by humans, dead or alive, for me to spend time reading AI fiction.

A friend of mine, Amit Gupta, who’s written sf for *Escape Pod*, is also working on a tool called Sudowrite, which uses AI to help writers brainstorm, explore plotlines, and write. I’m much more interested in people using generative AI to make what people do easier than to do what people might do instead.

I appreciated your reminiscence of Maths Classon and the news about the Bertil Falk’s Space Opera Prize. I particularly resonated with your encouragement to translate non-Swedish writing into Swedish, given my interest in the reverse, as well. Also in this issue: the Eurovision Song Contest, the Bradford Movie Makers, and History Corner, blending reprints with commentary and description.

The exploration of finding a Swedish name for sf was especially interesting. And the Scandinavian-European Fan Fund fraud coverage resonated with Garth Spencer’s interest in writing a balanced fan history. “I covered the story in my newszine (300+ subs) and published the details on it...,” you wrote. “I thus became target of loads of slander and libel by the culprits... .”

Your comments to John Thiel on Fredric Wertham’s *The World of Fanzines* reminded me of how thrilled I was when I first learned of that book. While a great book, it fell far short of making up for the ill impact of *Seduction of the Innocent*.