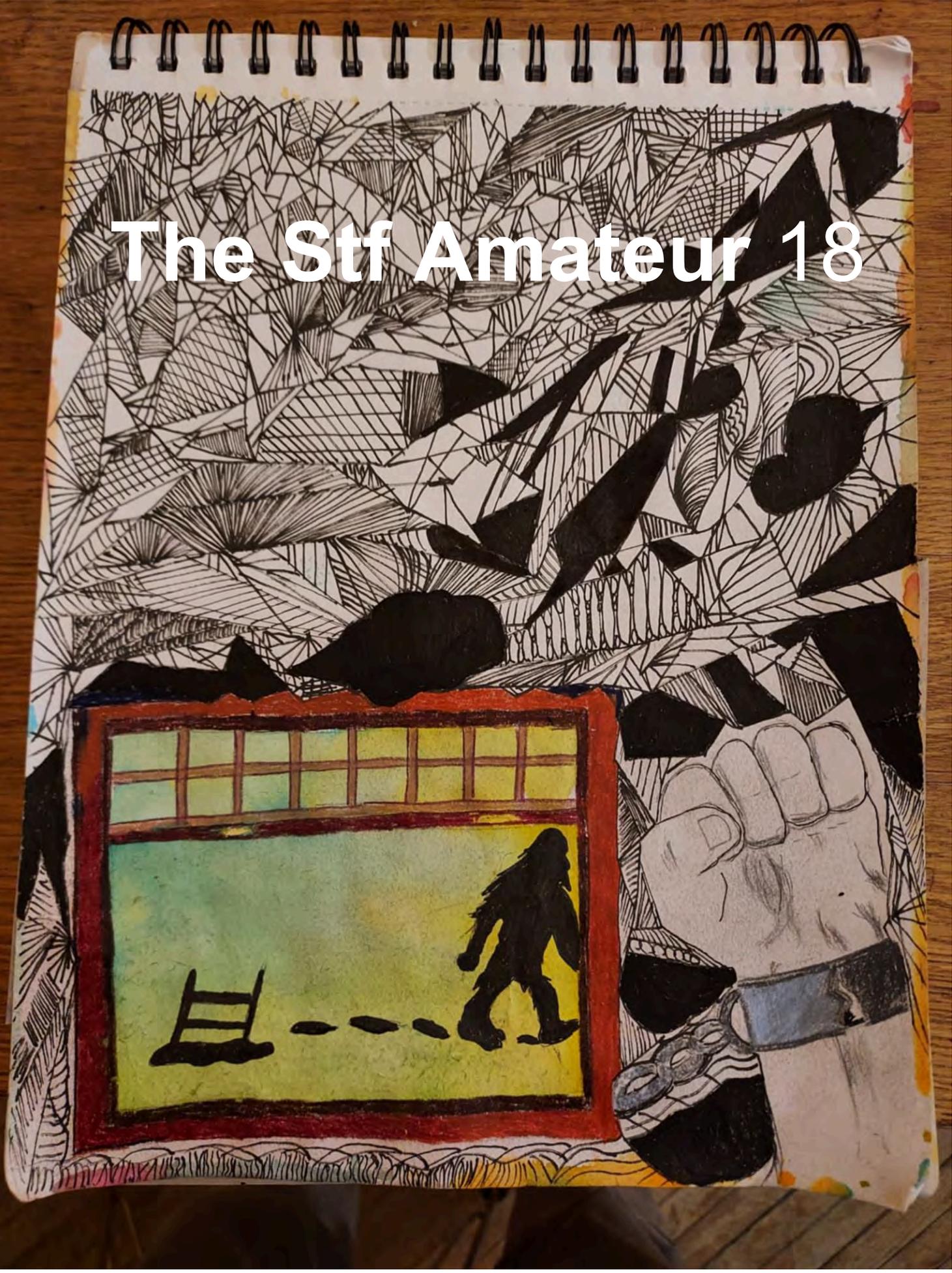


The Stf Amateur 18



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March 2025

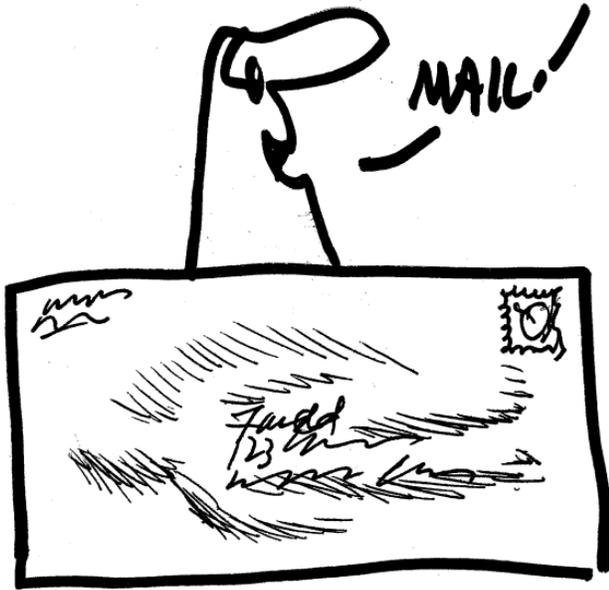
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You can learn more about cover artist Phil Campbell at <https://tinyurl.com/RulesofBarArt>. He wrote the memoir *I Come From a Family That Won't Talk About It*.

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—William Rotsler

Perry Middlemiss

I like the idea of a “holy grail movie” or, more likely, “holy grail movies.”

As I’ve gotten older, I’ve turned into an inveterate list-maker, all on rapidly expanding spreadsheets. It started with books as I decided, in retirement, that I really needed to fill in all of those gaps in my reading (sf and non-sf) that had developed over the years. I started with the list of “1,001 Books You Must Read Before You Die” and just expanded from there: the *Guardian*’s “1,000 Best Novels,” then “100 Best British Novels” from the BBC, the Modern Library’s 100 Best Novels, and so on. And then, of course, I had to have a spreadsheet of all of the Best SF/Fantasy lists and Best Crime/Mystery lists, and then Novel series by Author. It actually started to get out of hand.

So I let it sit for a while thinking that I really had enough “holy grail” items here to keep me going for about another five lifetimes.

Now, this year, my attention has shifted to film and I’ve done the same again: “1,001 Movies You Must Watch Before You Die,” Best British, Best Australian, the *Sight and Sound* Best Movies of All Time, AFI category lists, and then, to completely swamp me, lists of films by director. It’s not so much a search for a “grail” as now an attempt to get out of the way of the “great flood.” It would be faintly amusing if it wasn’t so weird.

But I do have to say: I like lists. Always have. I like keeping track of what I’ve seen and read if only because I can then go back and compare what I thought of one film by a director, say, with their latest

release. And I can then see that I may have missed two or three of a director’s works.

Must track them down.

[I love lists, too. I catalog the audio cassettes, books, comic books, compact discs, DVDs, magazines, records, and video tapes that I have acquired over the years so I can dig into the archives and avoid buying duplicates. I try to keep a list of recommendations I glean from fanzines and other sources. I maintain an Amazon wishlist in part to be able to offer gift ideas, as well instead of putting items in the cart to buy. And last year, I tried to maintain a record of the movies and television shows I watched.

I do a better job keeping track of the books I read, using *Goodreads*. Given my inconsistent use of my “media diet” spreadsheet last year, I’ve started using *Letterboxd* to keep track of movies I’ve seen—and at the end of February, I started using *TV Time* to keep track of TV viewing.

But I haven’t been as dedicated as you in terms of maintaining a personal canon to explore, or more directed reading. I occasionally think I could make my way through the Hugo and Nebula nominees and winners, starting in the beginning rather than focusing on more recent publications. And I quite like the idea of concentrating on the *LASFS Recommended Reading*, *LASFS Recommended Reading for Youth*, and *LASFS Recommended Viewing* guides, which were last updated in 2002.

Perhaps you’ll inspire me to do so!—HR]

Joe Pearson

Thanks for continuing to send me your zine.

Lots to talk about from what is mostly a one-man(y) Heath army of writing. All well written and often trenchant. How do you find the time/energy to put so much out in such a short period?

[That’s a good question. Some months, I surprise myself. The trick seems to be doing my best to make good on the deadlines for the multiple apae in which I’m active. At least a page or two, though I usually end up writing more. I try to always write mailing comments so there’s at least that. I don’t always hit the mark. For example, I missed LASFAPA’s deadline this month, but I’ll be back next month. I’ve yet to start gaming minac—contributing the bare minimum to remain active. When I burned out on apae a decade-plus ago, even gaming minac became a hassle.

I tend to write pretty fast, so my fanzines are largely automatic writing with little revision or editing—merely copy editing and proofreading. Very much a first draft, in fine apahacking style. Because

I've written and edited professionally, the results can be quite solid, so I avoid producing crudzines. (I hope!) Regardless, these are not polished or even overly thoughtful fanzines by any stretch of the imagination.

But I do have to find the time, and I tend to prioritize this—except over family. This is a heck of a lot of fun, and I derive more energy from being a fan than I expend. To ensure that that continues to be the case, I avoid energy drains, comment trolls, fan feuds or drama, organized fandom politics, and other shenanigans that can make fanac a hassle. If fanac is a hassle, we're doing it wrong.—HR]

I read your review of the [Long Beach Convention Center] Anime convention [Anime LA] with interest. As the LBC is now my home base, I really should be more in touch with that con and attendees. I'm thinking of reaching out before the next con to see if they want to do a screening of my anime-influenced movie and maybe a panel. I've held off so far due to my concerns with Covid-19 and large indoor crowds, so it's a bit of a conundrum.

Regarding anime SF, I like your choices, but my top 10 would be as follows. Please note that these are all pretty much 1980s and '90s anime (aside from the brilliant *Tekkonkinkreet*), which I consider its peak for adult-themed animations.

1. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. This is up there with *Blade Runner* as my number one favorite SF film of any genre.
2. *Castle in the Sky*. Hayao Miyazaki again with a stunning and beautiful film and story. (Tied with *The Animatrix*.)
3. *Akira*. Of course.
4. *Ghost in the Shell* and *Tekkonkinkreet*. A real tie here. *Tekkonkinkreet* is an absolutely phenomenal effort from Studio 4C. Incredible art and design and animation married to a story that is surprisingly emotional and heartbreaking. A unicorn in that one was actually directed by an American.
5. *Wings of Honneamise*. A brilliant exploration of the Space Race in a stunningly realized alternate world/culture. Perfectly and lovingly visualized down to the designs for even the small things like wrenches. A magnificent effort. And music by Ryuichi Sakamoto!
6. *Cowboy Bebop: The Movie*
7. *Memories*. A brilliant anthology by top anime masters starting with "Magnetic Rose" by Koji Morimoto. The best William Gibson-influenced SF short to date.

8. *Robot Carnival*. Another brilliant anthology.
9. *Metropolis*. Rintaro's epic revision of the original film married to Osamu Tezuka's seminal styling.
10. *Paprika*. Surreal magic realism.
11. *Crusher Joe* and *Venus Wars*. Another tie. Both films were brilliantly animated by Sunrise in their distinctive style.

I would add *The Chronicles of Riddick: Dark Fury* to this list. Not Japanese made, but directed by Peter Chung and animated in Seoul, South Korea, in a fully anime approach.

Other runners up would include *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade*, *The Sky Crawlers*, *Steamboy* (brilliant and hugely expensive but really damaged by a subpar plot and writing), *Dead Leaves*, and *Birth*.

I'm sure I'm missing some good ones here. And as I said, there's not a lot of real recent anime on this list as I am finding the pure Japanese product now to be largely too stylized and even childish or inbred.

A big exception would be the recent anime series, *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners*, which had the brilliant styling of much of the best of '90s anime fused with the post-Spideverse moments of multiple style inserts for impact. A terrific effort.

Note that there's no CG in this group as I really don't like the way Japanese teams use CG. Its Uncanny Valley stiffness is really creepy and off-putting.

You'll notice that the brilliant anime creative Yoshiaki Kawajiri is not in this list as his best works (and they are damn good) tend to be fantasy centered. *Ninja Scroll*, *Wicked City*, *Vampire Hunter D*, and *Highlander: The Search for Vengeance* (on which I was a producer) are all competitive with this top 10 list in terms of quality. But they are not SF.

And I'd put Rintaro's *X* up there as well, but again, fantasy.

[Well, I certainly have my work cut out for me! In the spirit of the discussion with Perry Middlemiss above, you have offered quite an excellent list of sf- and fantasy-oriented anime to explore. This will be a very helpful resource—hopefully for others, as well.—HR]

Back to the zine; I really loved seeing the [William Rotsler illustrations] here and there. Brings back good memories of his charming work and the man himself.

[I'm down to using his—and other—work as section headers in recent months. Two Octobers ago, I turned to using vintage movie advertisements from the *Los Angeles Times* for most of my illos—because I was in

Portugal and didn't have my stock of fanart with me. So far, I think I've covered the years 1956 through the first half of 1959.) I still have that fanart on hand and will eventually return to using those materials. I inherited a ton of Rotsler originals from Marty Cantor. It is such wonderful stuff.—HR]

Charles Lee Jackson II

Thanks for *The Stf Amateur*. I enjoy reading through them, and getting a small sample of how things are going in APA-L...

[You're welcome!—HR]

Garth Spencer

Interesting to read about your varied interests and activities in your several apazines.

You noted the curious news in *People* (Dec. 2, 2024) that a fantasy author was under fire, ... even [receiving] death threats, as a result of taking a political stance online; that Hasbro has advertised some roleplaying game paraphernalia as gift suggestions; that Scholastic has advertised children's adventure and comic books. Not too surprising, since all these subjects are related to mass media and marketing, which have absorbed every genre-related enterprise that can be monetized.

You called these interests "fannish" in *Telegraphs & Tar Pits* and later in *Faculae & Filigree*. I feel my age now; I defined "fannish" a bit differently. But I've talked about this before.

[While I agree with you that aspects of fandom—and materials that might have previously been solely in the domain of fen—have gone mainstream, I still think it's cool that readers of science fiction and fantasy, and players of roleplaying games, can see items of interest in a periodical such as *People*.

Perhaps more importantly, people who aren't already readers, viewers, or players of such can find entry points for themselves or others in their lives. Who knows where that might take them next. Someone unfamiliar with fantastic fiction who reads about Rebecca Yarros in *People* might decide to check out her books. That experience could lead them to read other fantasy novels. That could lead them to fannish Web sites and social media. That could lead them to fandom.

And if you're already a fan of Yarros, you might be surprised to see an article about her in a mainstream magazine.—HR]

Interesting to see that your friends in Portugal are trying to bring Portuguese speculative fiction into English publication, through Brodom Publishing. I

look forward to hearing more news about this.

The Lux Radio Theater edition of *Star Wars* sounds hilarious! Casting 1950s-era actors in the Star Wars story may not be an original idea, but it's still a good one. (I regularly see AI-generated faux trailers online for recent superhero/blockbuster/SF movies, styled as if they were cast and produced in the 1950s.)

William Breiding

I became aware of the mass layoffs in the tech industry only after reading about your own concerns in *The Stf Amateur* #17, which as far as I can remember, you'd not mentioned before. Shortly thereafter I heard about Alan Rosenthal's layoff, one among thousands. I'm hoping you survive the layoffs, if that is indeed what you want. I know an undercurrent theme to your bundles has been the possibility of early retirement and relocation to Portugal. I wish you luck in whichever way you'd like it to turn.

[We shall see! We'll either make life change and next act decisions on our own at the appropriate time, or they'll be made for us. Either way will likely work out okeh.—HR]

On Holy Grail movies, back in the 1980s I was on the constant lookout for any film by Herschell Gordon Lewis. He was a semi-obscure maker of Grade Z horror and nudie films. Finally, the late, great Strand Theater on Market Street in San Francisco (three new movies every day) started programming the occasional H.G. Lewis film, and I was able to view *Two Thousand Maniacs!* and *Color Me Blood Red*. Those are inventive gore films with lots of fake blood, generally inhabited by the criminally insane and any number of bozos, with a wacko sense of humor. I loved every minute of them! I'd have loved to have seen *She-Devils on Wheels*, *Suburban Roulette*, *The Ecstasies of Women*, *The Gore Gore Girls*, and *The Wizard of Gore*, but I eventually lost interest in cheaply made horror and psychotronic films, so my quest ended. Lewis stopped making films in 1972, then picked it up again thirty years later in 2002 with *Blood Feast 2: All U Can Eat*, which had John Waters in a cameo. I could do a whole biography of Lewis! He spent several years in jail for fraud, wrote twenty books and ran an advertising company. He died in 2016 at the ripe old age of 90.

[More movies for the list! I loved the Strand. When I lived and worked in the Bay Area in 1994, I used to go as often as I could. The best triple feature I caught there included *Adam and Eve*, *One Million Years B.C.*,

and *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth*. They'd screen the movies looped, and one ticket price was good for the day, so area homeless and transients would often camp out as long as they could. The space later became a porn theater and is now utilized by the American Conservatory Theater.]

I was made jealous by your trip report up to Monrovia and discussion of Chinese businesses in the greater Los Angeles area. Since leaving San Francisco in the late 1990s, the one thing that I miss most is good Cantonese food. I had been spoiled by San Francisco and by having a good friend since the age of 13 who is Chinese, and who almost always ordered in Chinese "off menu" when we went out to eat. At the Corflu in Vegas, Gail and I were finally able to get some decent Cantonese food, and we may go back there someday, just for Chinatown.

You have far more interest and patience than I in what I call "commercial fiction." I'm referring to the oddly long reviews of the Jim Butcher and Brandon Sanderson books. In earlier issues, you've also read and enjoyed entries in Robert Jordan's massive *Wheel of Time* series. I'm far too impatient with cliché, redundancy, padding, derivative storylines, stoopid characters, and the dumb actions done by them (not to mention the sheer length of these things). I was particularly appalled by the write up on Sanderson and his "industrial" commercialization approach to writing. I'm old fashioned enough to believe in writing as an "art"—even brash pulp fiction—and that it should only be written by one person, or a collaborative team of two, not a whole fucking roomful. At this point, it would be a lot cheaper, and waaaay easier, for Sanderson to just start using an AI; he might have already done so, and no one would notice at the level he is working at.

[Your remarks echo those of Garth Spencer above. When a genre author becomes popular with more mainstream audiences, do they become less worth reading? Not if you enjoy reading them. I admit to having interest in and patience with writers such as Butcher and Sanderson—in part because I want to see what all the fuss is about.

That doesn't mean I'll read everything they publish, but I am intrigued enough to get a taste and develop an understanding. And sometimes, I do hunger for a hefty fantasy novel with a map in the front. Again, I won't read all of the *Wheel of Time*—or Terry Brooks's *Shannara* series—but I'm glad to know they exist and I'll likely seek out such fare when the desire arises.

Kind of like Cantonese food.—HR]

At least you know in the case of A.E. van Vogt that a terrible fix-up was the mistake of one man trying to make a buck. Unfortunately, van Vogt did that kind of thing a lot, his publishers unleashed them on unsuspecting van Vogt fans, and that can cause a whole lot of bitterness. I love van Vogt, but I read him cautiously.

Your discussion of Neil Gaiman and how to read or not read (or view, listen, or whatever) the art of a "bad" person is a difficult one. Decades before the whole cancelling thing started, I used to have extended conversations with my mom about this. She was the original canceler. If she found out something stomach churning about a writer, they were immediately canceled and became unreadable to her. Sometimes that had to do with her own ethics, which could be very narrow. I once ran on with her for a long time about reading Paul Theroux. She'd started *Riding the Iron Rooster*, which I had loved, but threw the book back in my face when, in the opening part of the book, Theroux is riding through India by train and follows the example of the other passengers by throwing trash out the train window, onto the passing countryside. She vowed never to read Theroux because she perceived that as being loathsome. I had no problem with his honesty—it's what Theroux is all about in a way—but could not convince mom.

Nowadays, with cancelling involving almost exclusively sexual assault, abuse, and harrasment, it's a far more difficult and labyrinthine situation to negotiate. I'm afraid I've mostly put off dealing with it since a large part of the cancelling culture has been about the film industry, and the "bad actor" is easy to avoid. So I haven't challenged myself on this yet to see whether my perceptions have been permanently damaged by any one particular actor or writer or artist or musician so that I can no longer enjoy their work. It will doubtless arise in the days to come. Thank you for your thoughtful discussion. (Though mild by comparison to Gaiman, Sherman Alexie admitting to his bad behavior and his very genuine public and personal apologies seems to have been believed and accepted, and thereby "forgotten.")

I have long promised myself that I would digitize all of my analog photos. This is even more time consuming than you transferring your digital photos from one Web site to another. I have surviving negatives going as far back as 1969, when I first took up a camera at 13. But now that I am nearing 70, I begin to wonder if the effort would be worth it. Having no family but older siblings, there's no one likely to be interested. So if I do this, it will have to be for myself. (I do have a bunch of negatives from the 1980s that never got beyond contact prints that I

would like to take a better look at. If I started anywhere it would be with these.)

[Even if it's just for you, I encourage you to do so! You'll at least revisit and relive all those experiences and memories.—HR]

Inland Empire—yikes! You were very generous to David Lynch in your review. That film is nearly incomprehensible. *Eraserhead* makes far more sense.

The End of the World: not an Ignorable Theme. The end of the world as I know it has already started. By the time I die, I fully expect to be living in an America that I can no longer recognize. That's the end of the world on a human scale. A planetary end of the world ain't likely to happen in terms of a human scale. If we fuck it up so bad that we die out, that's all well and good. The planet itself will survive and eventually heal itself.

Loved all [the ads for] *The Shaggy Dog...* . Will *The Absent-Minded Professor* be next, or is that too 1960s?

[So far, I've reprinted ads from genre films screened in the Los Angeles area between 1956 and mid-1959. Without referring to back issues, I think I've been jumping back and forth in time: 1957, 1958, 1956, 1959. I'll eventually reach the 1960s. *The Absent-Minded Professor*, which came out in 1961, is an sf-comedy, so it'll likely be included, if such ads ran in the *Los Angeles Times*.—HR]

A much enjoyable issue, Heath, and a large one! Thanks!

Marcin Klak

I found the time to read the whole *The Stf Amateur* #17 over the weekend, and I thought I could share some of the comments with you.

First of all, I must admit I am amazed by the speed of your writing and editing. Participating in six APAs at the same time seems like a lot to me.

[Oh, it is. I also recently joined ANZAPA, and because FAPA hasn't replied to me, I'll likely soon join APA-V. We'll see if I can maintain minac without too much hassle!—HR]

Let me touch more on the APA topic in itself. On a few occasions, you mentioned your involvement in APA and their "internal working." That was interesting to read as I never participated in any APA. Well, it is not 100% true as I submitted my fanzine for WOOOF in 2024 but being a one submission per year (and my first) I cannot consider myself an active

participant. So from what you mentioned, I see more nuances to the field than I saw before—thank you for that. Being on the topic—John Hertz was kind enough to send me some copies of his *Vanamonde*, which made for an interesting read. Among them, he also once attached a leaflet about APA-L that made me wonder whether I could join it. Yet in the end, I realized that there is absolutely no option for me to make a fanzine a week—even should it be a 1-2 pager.

[APA-L doesn't really have any minac requirements for participation, so you wouldn't have to feel any pressure about contributing weekly. As Official Collator, I'd even be able to email you PDF distributions rather than mail them so we could avoid international postage and the time lag. That's an exception, not the rule—participants otherwise receive hard copies. We'd be happy to have you join.—HR]

In *T&T* #145, you mentioned reading what one has and that the availability of everything makes us accumulate stuff. I must say that I am a good example of the "buying books and reading books are two separate hobbies" statement. I don't think it is necessarily bad. Having said that, I am trying to limit the number of books that I'm buying. Plan is to limit the height of the To Be Read pile, which is waaaaay too high right now. How will that go? I am not sure. For now, I need to finish reading two more books to "pay for" my recent purchases.

[I quite like the idea of one in, one out, though I've never been able to maintain that. My goal now is to stop acquiring new items and work my way through what I have on hand. There's plenty!—HR]

One "real life" topic ... returning in your APAzines over the weeks—the fires in California. It was a bit hard to read as it evoked a lot of stress (even though I am located so far away that those fires cannot reach me). Still, it was a good reminder of the horror of recent weeks that took place in the world (among many other horrors). I am glad that you and yours are safe.

Speaking about "real life problems," I must comment on the topic you touched in *ECU* #27. The results of presidential elections in the US and what happened over the course of the last [few] weeks are terrifying on many levels. The US plays a very important role in the world, and this will impact the whole world, not just one country. I don't want to go into details, but I am now concerned about the safety in Europe. Apart from that aspect, the recent events will also impact us in terms of climate change. I agree

with you that the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement diminishes the chances of humanity stopping the warming of 1.5°C. I am not very optimistic when looking into the future. I can only hope that life will prove me wrong in that regard. I wanted to comment a bit on what you wrote in reply to William McCabe. One more reason for people voting for Trump is also the disappointment with the Democrats. I think it is a pretty important aspect that the Democratic party should consider for the next elections.

I also already spotted one potential impact of recent changes in the US on my life here in Poland. It may be a coincidence, but I observed that Facebook started to feed me with strange nonsense in recent days. Once Mark Zuckerberg announced that they will resign from fact checking on FB, the platform started to show me different kinds of materials in “shorts.” While it continues to present some of the things I liked, I started getting some [alternative medicine] videos, anti-vegetarian shorts, right-wing political commentary, and so on. As stated—I don’t know whether there is any link between the events, but it surprised me a lot.

When reviewing the Eaton Symposium in *T&T* #146, you summoned up the words of Zhui Ning Chang, who stated that there is a need to translate works from diverse languages into English. I cannot agree more. Living in Poland, I am quite happy that apart from works from my own country, I am able to read SFF from some other countries (including works that were written in English). I still don’t get as much diversity as I would like to, though. The fact that translations to English are uncommon is sad, and is a big loss to fans who speak English only. Moreover, should there be more translations of world SFF to English, its availability to fans everywhere would increase. I am keeping my fingers crossed for the English market to dive more into translations.

In *BHM* #10, you wrote that years ago, you were frustrated by reading mystery novels because you were not always able to determine who was the perpetrator. I don’t read mysteries, but I find similar problems with other types of books. Many people mention that they are able to foresee how the plot in a given story will develop. It is a skill I don’t have. Of course, sometimes I can predict the events, but usually it doesn’t surface in my mind while reading. It is not frustrating on a daily basis, but to quote you, I sometimes see it as “a personal failing and a sign that I wasn’t smart enough to read the book.” I know that it doesn’t work that way, but sometimes I need to remind myself about that.

Both in *T&T* #147 and *SPT* #19, you touched on

what we learned about Neil Gaiman. While I don’t have anything to add about the situation itself, there are some underlying questions in your writing. Namely, I mean “Is it OK to like good art by bad people?” and “How does the information on an artist’s life affect one’s perspective on the author’s works?”

The first question is somehow easier to answer, but there are plenty of nuances. Generally, I believe that when we learn the truth about the author, we may still like the work. If a person spent the last x years enjoying a certain creation, it is not wrong for them to like it after some things are revealed. There is also nothing wrong with stopping to like a given work. Having said that, the more important question is whether one takes actions after learning the truth. Depending on the exact case, there are things we, as fans, can do. Not supporting such a person financially is a good idea. That is what I started doing when I learned about the transphobic actions of J.K. Rowling. (I was not a big fan of her books, but I liked the movies and the merchandise. When I learned what she was doing, I decided not to support her in any way. I stopped buying merch or participating in mystery boxes in which Harry Potter was one of the featured franchises.) I only bought one book by Gaiman before, and now, I don’t plan to buy more. Apart from stopping financial support for creators who behave in unethical ways, we may also avoid attending their signings, lectures, etc. Should a convention invite such a person, we can let conrunners know we don’t agree with such a decision, and we may boycott the event.

The second question is more tricky, as the impact of information on our reception will vary and may not be obvious. When I was writing a review of one of Orson Scott Card’s books, I had to dig a bit about him. What I found was very unsettling, and it became difficult for me to distinguish between the author and the work. Some of the information we get allows us to better understand the work. Some may spoil any joy coming from reading. It is also possible that what we learn will skew our perception of the book but just a little bit. I don’t believe that we should always differentiate the author and the work. It may be a useful approach in some cases, but I don’t think that it is always justified.

In *SPT* #19, you asked about stories that respond to “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas.” There is a list of such works online: <https://www.kith.org/jed/hodgepodge/nonfiction/some-responses-to-omelas>. Although I have not read those yet, I want to recommend one folk song from the list: “The Ones Who Walked Away” by Beth Kinderman. A very good song both in terms of lyrics and the music.

The last topic from *SPT* #19 I want to touch on is

your mention of articles that “suggest that many high school students haven’t read a single book to completion before they go to college.” I agree with you that it sounds shocking. As soon as I learned to read, I fell in love with books. While I now read way less than I used to, I still cannot imagine not reading at all (or almost at all). Yet this reminded me about a collection of essays by the Polish SFF author Jacek Dukaj. The collection is called *Po piśmie* (which translates very roughly to “after script”). While I don’t remember the details (I read the book in 2019), it may somehow explain why students don’t read. The author points out how “unnatural” reading is for the human brain. He also shows how we, as a society, are slowly moving to different means of passing on knowledge and experiences: memes, VR, films, etc. Dukaj predicts that we will move to the era of “direct transmission of experiences” when we will be depending on means more “natural” to our brains. While I didn’t agree with him on all points, the movement away from reading is certainly a thing. A sad one, but a thing nevertheless.

As a manga and anime fan of sorts, I need to comment a bit on *T&T* #147. I regret not having the chance to listen to the talk explaining why Kaiju should be considered Yokai. It would certainly be interesting. Maybe I’ll look for information on that topic online or in the book by the speaker.

In the same issue, you asked for manga and anime recommendations. Among my favourites are mostly works that are SFF (but there is one exception). Let me list a few that come to mind in the first place. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* is my favourite anime by Hayao Miyazaki, and in case you haven’t seen it, you definitely should. I also like both manga and anime *Berserk*. It is a fascinating dark fantasy story. Sadly, the author died prior to finishing it. The manga is supposed to be continued by his co-workers though. Then I recommend *Fruits Basket*—it is a kind of fantasy romance, but a very good one. As it happens with Japanese comics and animation, it moves between comedy and more difficult topics. From the new productions, I was enchanted by the anime *Frieren: Beyond Journey’s End*—now I am awaiting the second season. It is a story about friendship, bonding with people, and understanding oneself. The only non-SFF title on my list is the *Blue Period* manga. It tells the story of a student who decides to go to art university. There is also an anime series based on the manga, but it is not as good as the comic. On top of those works, I also appreciate the following anime a lot: *Fullmetal Alchemist—Brotherhood*, *Trigun* (1998 series), *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Fairy Tail*, and *Attack on Titan*.

[More grist for the mill! Thank you very much for the wide range of recommendations. I have seen *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* but would watch it again, for sure. I appreciate all of Miyazaki’s work. My son, who recently turned 21, watched a lot of *Attack on Titan* when he was younger. I never really gave it a chance.

Looking at my *Crunchyroll* Watchlist—which I don’t delve into often enough—I’ve dabbled with *Go Lion*, which aired in the United States when I was growing up as *Voltron: Defender of the Universe*; *City Hunter*; *Space Pirate Captain Harlock*; *Cowboy Bebop*; and *Mazinger Edition Z*. I’ve watched quite a bit of *Robotech* over the years, and my son and I enjoyed various *Mobile Suit Gundam* offshoots, primarily more recent productions. At some point, I plan to return to *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman*, which aired in the US during my childhood as *Battle of the Planets*, as well.

But my most recent enthusiasm is the 1966 *Ultraman* series (*Ultra Q*) and tokusatsu programs in general—not necessarily just Kyodai Hero shows. Given your interest in anime and manga, is there also tokusatsu fandom in Poland?—HR]

And last, I will touch on *E&E* #21, where you discuss the combat requirements in roleplaying games. Have you tried playing *Mouse Guard* or *Torchbearer*? Both systems use mechanics created for *The Burning Wheel*. I love how the conflicts are resolved there. It is not a fast-paced system, but it works well for me. First of all, the conflict doesn’t have to be a combat. It can be a discussion, pursuit, etc. At the beginning, the stakes are established. Players decide what they want to do with the enemy (kill, drive off, etc.). Then the GM defines the goal of the adversary—the stake cannot be higher than what players selected. So if the party wants to drive off the monster, it won’t kill them. Next, instead of hit points combat is based on disposition (which is determined by a special roll). The side that reduces the opponent’s disposition to zero achieves the goal. Yet the more disposition the winner loses, the bigger the trade-off they need to agree to. So, potentially, players killed the monster but got injured, or poisoned—maybe some items were destroyed or lost, etc. What I love the most is the actual “fight.” In each round, both sides secretly plan three actions. Those can be Attack, Defend, Feint, and Manoeuvre. Each of those actions works differently, and depending on what the other side selects, we may have opposing or independent rolls. When I am playing with my friends, the GM sets his actions first, and then we have time to discuss our plans. We try to predict what decision the GM made and how we can

counter it. That takes some time but is very engaging. Dice rolling is a last step and it goes rather smoothly.

[That sounds interesting! I remember checking out Luke Crane's games when they first came out but haven't spent much time with them. Are those the games you primarily play with friends?—HR]

Once again, thank you for sharing *The Stf Amateur* with me!

Bob Jennings

I received *The Stf Amateur* #17 bundle a few days ago and have been reading it intermittently since. It's Saturday night and a heavy snowstorm is about to dump on us here, including most of Sunday, so since I'm not going to be going anywhere for the next 36 or 48 hours or so, I thought I would shoot off a few random comments about your material. I do not guarantee that I will get all the way through the entire assortment, but who knows.

First off, I continue to be amazed that you are able to turn out so much fanac in a timely manner. Participation in five apas is a lot more than I would ever think about doing, plus you also write reviews and short articles for various N3F publications. I dunno how you find the time for everything.

[I address that a little bit in the comments above, but you also brought up the National Fantasy Fan Federation clubzines. The N3F faneds reprint material from *The Stf Amateur* and its component parts, so any of my writing that you see in N3F publications isn't new, original work in addition to the material that appears in the *Amateur*. It's reprinted.

That said, I was recently texting with Jean-Paul Garnier, who's going to relaunch the N3F's *Ionisphere*, about submitting an interview I was planning for the *Amateur* to that clubzine instead. I've tried to keep myself free of ongoing N3F deadlines, so the reprinting works pretty well, and Garnier was willing to be flexible with the delivery of the forthcoming interview. When that runs, it will be an original piece.—HR]

Your comments about Holy Grail movies, films that someone always wanted to watch but never got around to seeing, set me to thinking about the whole history of movie making. You are correct that in this modern day and age, technology plus the internet have made a vast library of cinematic material available that had never been accessible before. And, it is now available to anyone with just a few clicks of the mouse (and perhaps with some sort of online credit card payment, as well).

My Holy Grail films are mostly movies that are considered lost, as in, no known copies exist anywhere. The list would consider a number of motion picture serials that I would dearly love to see, including the original 20-chapter 1914 *The Perils of Pauline*, the 1915 *The Diamond From the Sky*, *Finger Prints* from 1931, and *The Jade Box* from 1930.

The list used to be longer, but in the last twenty years, a considerable number of serials believed lost forever have been rediscovered, reprocessed, restored, and released in digital format for the collecting world. And there are still more possibilities out there.

For example, a positive print on paper reels made from a nitrate copy of *The Diamond From the Sky* exists in the Library of Congress, and the Library has repeatedly stated they will loan that copy out to anyone who will make a good DVD print for them and then release it to the general public. The Serial Squadron did a fundraising effort to try and get the money needed for restoration (I forget the exact amount, twelve or fifteen grand or so), but they were unable to raise the funds despite generous pledges from a number of people, including me.

The UCLA film library has at least five complete or near complete silent serials from the 19teen period that they have been promising the restore for the last thirty years, but they never seem to get around to it. A lack of funds is the stated reason, so the possibility of the restoration being done is still there.

So far as feature films go, so much has been converted to digital format in this later part of the 20th and early years of the 21st century that I no longer have any holy grail movies that I would love to see but haven't managed to get around to yet. I would love to see a bunch of Tom Mix silent western films suddenly be rediscovered, but I suppose that is a hopeless dream. I'm glad you were finally able to mark that Dr. Phibes flick off your own personal list.

By the way, what is your fascination with the Disney *Sleeping Beauty* film? You put numerous versions of assorted newspaper ads for that flick in all your zines. Was that one of the best movies you ever saw, or are you just fascinated by the fact that the ad cuts do not in any way represent the animation style that *Sleeping Beauty* actually utilized?

[For illos, I'm reprinting genre movie ads published in the *Los Angeles Times*. So far, I've covered 1956 to mid-1959. If multiple ads for the same movie are overly similar, I try not to use too many of the same ad, but if there are different ad designs, there might be some repeats—especially if a movie was screened in the Los Angeles area for multiple weeks.

I've actually not yet seen *Sleeping Beauty*. Inspired

by your letter of comment, however, I've begun to watch it. I'll let you know what I think!—HR]

I completely disagree with you that the abundance of older and new material of interest to stf people, including films, comics, and music now available on the Internet is a bad thing. Maybe you are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of stuff out there and thus you tend to skim thru a lot of the things you download/experience thru the wonder of the World Wide Web, but that is not the case for me. My house is full to the bursting point with physical material I have collected over the course of my lifetime, so the recent availability of rare material that I am interested in offers me a chance to savor and experience those items in full without having to cram more paper or physical objects into my domicile.

Instead, I can experience the goodies on my computer screen or my [ebook reader]. That is not the same as holding a physical copy in my hands, but let me tell you, it sure beats having some ancient dime novel or pulp magazine crumble to flakes in your hands as you read it, or wasting any time worrying that something you paid dearly for back in the day is now going to be worthless because age has finally caught up with the physical copy itself. If you are overwhelmed, slow down and be more careful of what you pick so that you can relax and enjoy it to its fullest. You've got the time, and the material will hopefully still be out there for you in the near future.

[That's good advice and resonates with Perry Middlemiss's comments above about more directed reading and watching. My media consumption can be a little random, though I'm not entirely a dilettante.—HR]

Thanks for the recommendation on *Brewster McCloud*. I saw that movie a long, long, loonnng time ago, and mostly forgot all about it. I remember Sally Kellerman as the angel muse/conscience of the hero, but that's about all I remember. I can access a copy of the film easily enuf, so I'll try to view it in the next week or so and maybe let you know my opinion of it.

I enjoyed your write-up about the Eaton Symposium but no special comments come to mind. It sounds like it was a very well organized event with plenty of worthwhile presentations, which sure beats out a lot of SF conventions I have attended.

I have to admit that altho I am familiar with the Brandon Sanderson writing/publishing phenom, I have personally never read a single one of his books. People say they are enjoyable, but these days I try to

read books borrowed thru my local library's interlibrary loan program, and none of the libraries around here had any of his titles the last time I checked. Hmm; now that I think about it, that was a few years back, around the time the Plague hit us all, so maybe I should give it another shot. Your review and comments indicate you think he is a serviceable, but not terribly original or innovative author, so what title would you recommend to a veteran SF reader who wants to try his books?

[Oof. I've only read two. Of those, I enjoyed *The Lost Metal* more than *The Bands of Mourning*. Either might be considered as representative, but *The Lost Metal* is interesting because of the contextual material and transitional position in the series. You could also start at the beginning, with *The Final Empire*.

A co-worker who staffs the mailroom has been reading the Stormlight Archive series. The first two books of that series, which I haven't read, are *The Way of Kings* and *Words of Radiance*. I was more intrigued by the fantasy-sf hybrid of *Mistborn*.—HR]

I think I'm slowing down, so I'll sign off here. I'm glad you and your family were not adversely affected by the horrible fires that struck your region. The snow is still coming down very heavy here. No new projections on the total accumulation. I guess I'll find out tomorrow.

John L. Coker III

Special thanks for the trading card featuring astronaut Bruce McCandless II. What a great American. I have always been fascinated with outer space. I recall my father taking me outside one night (later I learned that it had been on Oct. 1, 1957, when I was just four and a half years old) and pointing up at the night sky, exclaiming, "The Russians have beaten us into space." I didn't see Sputnik that night, but my father did.

Alan Shepard was the first American launched into space—on my eighth birthday—May 5, 1961. We watched on our little B&W television in July 1969 as Neil Armstrong took his first step on Luna. In January 1985, I watched the manned spaceship Challenger rise into the early morning sky, and then, 80 seconds later, burst into a million pieces. For a span of about twenty years, I watched more than two dozen launches of several space shuttles, all from my front lawn. (If one paid attention, it was even possible to detect the separation of the external fuel tanks.) And we experienced numerous times, the double sonic boom as returning space shuttles broke the sound barrier.

In 1997, I spent the better part of a day with Sir Arthur C. Clarke at his home in Colombo, Sri Lanka,

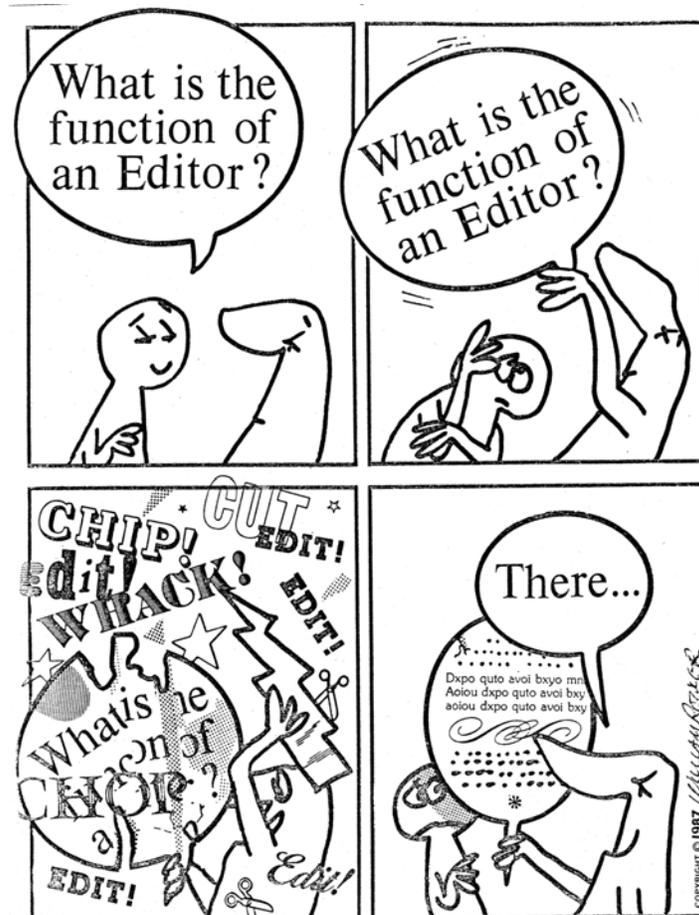
listening to him speaking about colonizing space. In the year 2001, I was in New York moderating a teleconference for Arthur to call in to a group of s-f fans and accept a lifetime achievement award. On stage with me were “Hal” Clement (the name of the computer in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*) and “Dave” Kyle (the name of the astronaut in that same movie). It was such an overwhelming moment that I had an out-of-body experience.

I hope you enjoyed hearing about some of my adventures related to space exploration. Soon, we will be colonizing the planet Mars and mining the asteroid belt. Hope I live long enough to witness it.

[Thank you for sharing such wonderful stories! All because I included a small insert with my First Fandom Awards ballot...—HR]

We also heard from: Henry Grynnsen, Andy Hooper, and Jerry Kaufman

Call for Submissions



—William Rotsler

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

The Stf Amateur is hereby requesting the following:

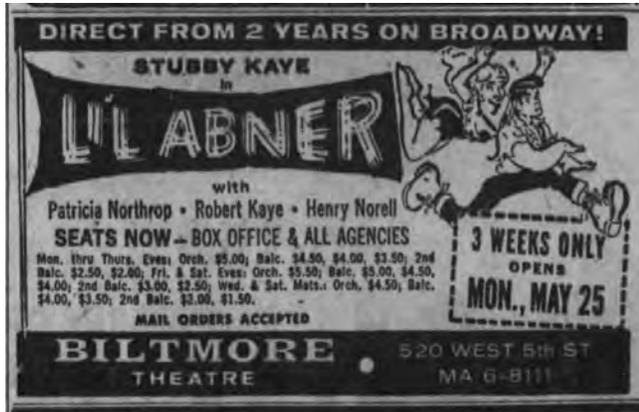
- sf, fantasy, and horror news
- fanart, illos, and fillos
- cover art
- poetry
- filk songs and lyrics
- short fiction
- articles and essays
- fanzine, book, movie, television, and other reviews
- con reports
- jokes
- letters of comment
- ... and other material

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

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

Association, and William Shepherd's International Science Fiction Guild, which reportedly was founded in 1929. After a number of mergers with other clubs and fanzines, Wollheim got involved in 1935, soon succeeding Shepherd as editor of *The Phantagraph*.

Wollheim details the intent of the fanzine, its production, and his involvement in mundane apae, spending some time on the serialization of Howard's essay, which was never completed in *The Phantagraph* but was later published in partnership with the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society.



Los Angeles Times, May 22, 1959

I'd tracked down this slim anthology in part for more Howard fanzine appearances. Even though I didn't procure the full text of "The Hyborian Age," the resulting read was wonderful—and an indicator that the quality of writing we publish in fanzines can be quite high.

Imagine a contemporary fanzine publishing poetry by the likes of a modern-day H.P. Lovecraft, Henry Kuttner, James Blish, Frederik Pohl, Cyril Kornbluth, August W. Derleth, and Robert E. Howard; and fiction by Kornbluth, Lovecraft, and Clark Ashton Smith. The mind boggles, and I need to think about who their modern-day counterparts are so I can solicit such writing. Not necessarily in terms of form or content, but in terms of quality and stature. (That sounds a little mercenary; it might be!)

But the true highlights were the other writing. Duane W. Rimel and Emil Petaja offered "Weird Music," which explored elements of the fantastic in classical music. Robert Bloch's "How I Get My Inspiration" is brief, insightful, and wickedly funny. Wollheim memorialized Lovecraft after his death and provided a witty consideration of intertextual references within one's library. (To wit: Books beget books!)

This book might be slender, but there's a lot in it. Both in terms of the number of pieces reprinted—there are 24—and in terms of what the writing

accomplishes and offers. At the very least, it's a great read. It's also an encouragement to set my sights a little higher when producing and writing my own fanzines. William Breiding would tell me that to do so I might need to move on from apae and publish a proper genzine. He might be right. Only time will tell.

Interestingly, Donald M. Grant (<https://secure.grantbooks.com>) is still an active publisher. Recently focusing on books showcasing the work of Czech artist Zdeněk Burian, the company also focuses on Stephen King first editions, art books, and other such volumes. Dating back more than 45 years, the New Hampshire-based imprint has published more than 100 titles, "specialty books in the fantasy genre."

Comments on Sample Contributions

Because I haven't yet received a recent distribution as a newcomer, I'll comment on some of the Sample Contributions available on ANZAPA's Web site. Consider this our own little time machine or exercise in time binding. It felt a little strange commenting on material three to five years old, but I think it's better to model mailing comments than to just assert I do them, or can. After all, what we do is all One Big Fanzine. And some of the best fanzines are old fanzines.

In *The Megaloscope* #1 (June 2022), **David R. Grigg** reprinted longer reviews originally published in his fortnightly *Through the Biblioscope*. He was on track to read 100 books that year, to which I can relate. In 2024, I read 100 books. According to *Goodreads*, which I use to monitor my reading, I read a total of 23,875 pages. The shortest book was an ebook of E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (33 pages), and the longest was Robert Jordan's *The Great Hunt* (705 pages). Apparently, the books I read were on the shorter side, because the average book length—not accounting for reading different editions than those listed—was 238 pages. You can check out all the books I read at https://www.goodreads.com/user/year_in_books/2024/130605. So far in 2025, I've read 15 books, with a conservative goal of 52, which I'll likely surpass.

Of the books reviewed in that issue, I've read *The City & The City* by China Miéville (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #127)—and... that's it. I appreciated Grigg's combination of shorter descriptions and longer-form reviews, either of which is useful. Based on his write-ups, I was intrigued by *Lady Into Fox* by David Garnett, *Across the Green Grass Fields* by Seanan McGuire, and *Milk Teeth* by Helene Bukowski. I also appreciated Grigg's "On my waiting list," which seemed to concentrate on Australian authors.

David R. Grigg's *He Went Galumphing Back* #1 (June 2022) is more of a perzine than a reviewzine,

replacing his previous ANZAPA contribution *The Fretful Porpentine*. His mention of a nearby house fire, though several years ago, resonated with me given the recent wildfires in southern California (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #146 and *Faculae & Filigree* #39). We were about 12 miles away from the largest fires near us, and while I saw smoke above the mountains early in the fire, we never saw flames where we live. Thankfully, those fires are now 100 percent contained.

During the fires, I started using a mobile app called *Watch Duty*, which was very helpful. In the past, I've used *Citizen* to monitor local crime, but I didn't find it very useful. Rather than alert me to nearby events that could affect me, it mostly contributed to an ever-present sense of tension and concern that Bad Things Are Always Happening Everywhere.

Your remarks on Scott Morrison—again, several years old—made me think about the state of my own nation. I tend not to discuss politics in my fanzines, but I wrote at some length about the first two weeks of President Donald Trump's second term in *The Explosion Containment Umbrella* #27 for eAPA. That also appeared in *The Sff Amateur* #17, which I distributed earlier this week.

My wife and I have been enjoying *Say Nothing*, a Hulu streaming program about the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Unlike my wife, I haven't yet read the book on which it's based—*Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland* by Patrick Radden Keefe—but it's an interesting character study focusing on some of the people involved in the Irish Republican Army and its activities over the years. As protests occur in the United States—and in Germany—it's inspiring thought and conversation about freedom, the rule of law, engaged citizenship, nonviolence, and the role of political protest.

"Adventures in Coding" also resonated with me. I grew up playing video games on the Atari 2600 and quite enjoyed text adventure games such as *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Zork I*, and games including *Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord*, and *Tales of the Unknown: The Bard's Tale*. But my favorites were the Eamon games. (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #59, *The Explosion Containment Umbrella* #8, and *Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #64) In recent months, my video gaming has focused on the Nintendo Switch, but one of my retirement projects—whenever that occurs—will be to return to such games more aggressively, as well as to write my own, likely in Python. That seems like a Very Good Use of Time. I thoroughly enjoyed reading about your return to *Zork*.

In *Sparrowgrass & Battle-Twigs* #79 (April 2022), **Roman Orszanski** reviewed the plays *Girl from the North Country*—which made me curious about his thoughts on the recent biopic *A Complete Unknown*—and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The City Lights Bookstore online symposium sounded amazing—I would have gone, too!



Los Angeles Times, May 22, 1959

My wife and I have been watching *Slow Horses*, too, and I've read several of the novels by Mick Herron. (Caitlin's already read them all.) When *Orphan Black* first aired, we watched much of the first season. It amused us when they'd say the show was set in New York City, referring to the city but not specific place names, when the program was so clearly not filmed there. (O Canada.) Eventually, local references seemed to stop, and we didn't end up watching all the way through.

I found your fanzine an impressive blend of

real-world cultural exploration, sf fandom, and media notes. I will look for your name in the future! I thought I'd chosen to read the most recent sample issue, but there, too, is #80! (June 2022) I was pleased to see #79's structure similarly applied: An online reading of *The Burlesque of Frankenstein*, election notes, Mick Herron, and *Irma Vep!* Good stuff, all.

And **Alan Stewart's** *Ytterbium* #131 (October 2020) announced a shift from cut-and-paste to PDF production. What I wouldn't give to see what your fanzines looked like before this number. I enjoyed your candy reviews; they gave me a sugar rush just reading them. While I no longer drink alcohol, your "Recent beers tried" reminded me of a couple of non-alcoholic beers we've tried recently: Just the Haze, an NA IPA from Sam Adams, and Athletic Brewing's Upside Dawn NA golden brew. The former was quite excellent, and the latter was slightly more hoppy.

While your list of television programs and movies made for a fun skim, I'd be interested in your commentary and opinions—perhaps more than your candy and beer reviews, as enjoyable as they were. Like you, early in the pandemic, I bought a number of patterned face wraps: skulls, Guy Fawkes, and the like. I was disappointed when I learned that they provided insufficient protection. Since then I've procured some more stylish, more protective masks—*Star Trek*, star field images, etc.—but usually wear plain black disposable masks without the fashion cover at this late date.

I particularly appreciated your description of what else you'd have included in the fanzine if you were still cutting and pasting. Perhaps, in the intervening years, you've become able to scan and include such wonderful ephemera.

I look forward to future ANZAPA contributions!

That is, if you'll have me. I know not many apae vote on new members any more, but I hope to live up to ANZAPA's fine history and current contributors. I'm sure Grigg will let me know if I "made the cut"—by sending me the resulting distribution. If I don't and he doesn't, I'll take no offense. I'll just keep hacking, as will ANZAPAns.

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Los Angeles Times, May 22, 1959

Telegraphs & Tar Pits #150

Feb. 6, 2025

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Last Week's Senryu

A friend's father's death,
afternoon funeral sun,
the Mourner's Kaddish

Late last week, my wife and I went to a friend's father's funeral at Eden Memorial Park in Mission Hills. Afterward, we went to our friend's home to sit shiva with the family. It was a meaningful experience, and we were honored to be included. The world lost a wonderful man whose sayings included "Forge ahead," and "Chin up."

One of the cousins who lives in the Los Angeles area wrote the screenplays for *Muppets from Space* and *Space Cowboys*. I can strongly recommend the bagels and chocolate babka from Brent's Deli Northridge.

COVER STORY

Grievous Harm

Grievous Harm couldn't help that his parents had graced him with such an appellation. He couldn't help that his mother died shortly after childbirth, his squalling and prolonged entry to the world too much for her. He couldn't help that his father, alone and lonely, soon a drunkard as a result, was ill prepared for single parenthood.

Grievous Harm couldn't help that he was small even as a newborn, or that he grew up squat, always shorter and more diminutive than his playmates and later peers. He couldn't help that his hair was bristly, wiry like a boar's, even as a lad. He couldn't help that his eyes were almost always wide as pies, his blue-gray irises the size of plates. He couldn't help that he was sometimes clumsy, or that people always called him his full name, neither solely first nor last. He couldn't help that he declined to pursue the trade of his father.

Grievous Harm couldn't help that he forwent the practice of a wheelwright because of the sweet siren song of hedge magic. He couldn't help that he was quite adept at it, somehow harnessing its subtle,

sometimes sloppy forces more successfully than others in the valley, the next, or the next. He couldn't help that, last Moonday—in his forty-second year—while walking idly out beyond the Widow Crump's, he'd seen a troop of mushrooms. He couldn't help that they reminded him of himself: short, squat, and marked by bulbous circles as large as his eyes, adorned by bristly hair-like filaments. He couldn't help that, on Wineday, Spencer Gibbons came to him for assistance, his flaking, red, raised skin requiring a poultice that incorporated the dried powder of such mushrooms.

Grievous Harm couldn't help that on Market Day, when he knew the Widow Crump would be selling her succulent harvested fungi and rough-hewn weaving in the square, his flat feet once again carried him out past her humble, ramshackle but well-tended farm. He couldn't help that no one else was there. He couldn't help looking left, right, above, and behind to make sure he was alone before slowly stooping to the loamy soil, bracing with his hand-smoothed staff.

It wasn't so much that Grievous Harm picked the mushroom. The mushroom picked him.

The above short story was inspired by Joe Pearson's cover artwork for APA-L #3106.



—Joe Pearson

The Ignorable Theme: Falls from Grace

"Are there any authors or creators whose work you cannot or do not enjoy any more because of what you know about their lives?"

For most of my life, I've sought out challenging or controversial works. Even as a child, I read above my age, moving from Hardy Boy and Choose Your Own Adventure Books to monster movie books found in the adult section of the public library and stowing presumably forbidden paperback books—Thomas Berger's *Neighbors* and V.C. Andrews's *Flowers in*

the Attic—in a basement toy cabinet as a preteen. As a teenager, I used to buy *National Lampoon* on the newsstand at a local gas station, initially offering forged notes from an ill father requesting that they sell it to me. I bought *Night of the Living Dead* on VHS with the awareness of my dad but kept it hidden in a desk drawer because I knew my mother wouldn't approve. Even as an adult, I frequently seek out works that have been deemed outrageous, taboo, or transgressive.

While I am disappointed in the behaviors and situations exemplified by creators such as Woody Allen, Roman Polanski, Neil Gaiman (*Snow Poster Township* #19), Marion Zimmer Bradley and Walter Breen (*T&T* #4), Piers Anthony, and David Eddings, having recently read Claire Dederer's book *Monsters* (*T&T* #147), I've given the topic some thought.

Like Dederer, I think that people are generally better than the worst thing they've ever done and that—except in relatively few instances—we should try not to write people off because they've done wrong. (Very large, persistent, ongoing wrongs, of course, lead to those few instances in which we might consider someone evil rather than flawed or making an error in judgment.) I also think that bad people—or people who behave badly—can create very good art, art that remains important and beautiful despite a creator's personal failings. Eradicating such art is a mistake we can avoid.

The question, then, becomes whether we can—as individuals—continue to appreciate or enjoy someone's art once what we know about them and their actions colors or clouds their body of work. That will vary person to person, and case to case. If you're still able to enjoy a piece of art despite its creator's biography, I think you should do so. In my case, how I do so might change.

For example, I still enjoy reading Bradley. She's well known within fannish circles but perhaps not more generally, so I might choose to read her work in public, say, on the train or at a cafe. Neil Gaiman, on the other hand, is well known enough in mainstream circles that I might choose to read his work more privately. Am I ashamed of reading either? No, but I might be mindful of other people's reactions and responses to their work—and whether I want to engage in a public conversation about their work. I'm not sure I need to defend my reading if I don't put myself in a position in which I might be called to.

I might also decide whether I want my experience of their work to support them financially. Rather than buy a work new, I might buy it used—on the secondary market—or check it out from a library. I might also be more likely to seek out a free PDF version online.

But if you can still enjoy and appreciate someone's work, I don't think you should avoid doing so—unless you want to. How I experience someone's work might also change. Without aggressively seeking out decidedly prurient material, I might read a controversial author differently, with new attention. I might become more aware of references or aspects of their work that align with their misbehavior. I might make connections within their body of work that suggest ongoing interests or themes I had missed before. I will read them more critically, not merely for entertainment.

At the same time, I might also be less likely to seek out someone's work, even if I don't write them off entirely. That's most likely to occur shortly after learning about somebody's misbehavior. It might take time for my interest in or desire for their work to eclipse my distaste for or concern about their actions.

That's not necessarily forgiveness or acceptance. It's not for me to forgive or accept the abuse done others. The behavior remains reprehensible.

Their art also remains.



—William Rotsler

Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

Janet Planet

When this movie was released last July, I debated including it in the movie listings for *De Profundis* but did so—compelled by the film’s description suggesting that the young girl character escapes through fantasy. Now that I’ve seen the movie, I can assert that it could indeed be a fantasy—though subtly, and barely—and not in the way I expected.

The movie is largely a coming-of-age story. The preteen daughter of a single mother experiences the challenges of finding friends and parental attention in western Massachusetts. The story is told broken into sections focusing on the current partner—or closest friend—of her mother, and the impact that the person’s presence has on their lives.

Throughout the movie, the girl plays with a dollhouse-like set of toys, an assortment of found objects, that suggests a rich imaginary life—but that doesn’t really come into play as the primary element of the fantastic. Instead, one of the men who enters her mother’s life is an older New Age guru of sorts who leads a nearby commune. He introduces the idea that God is part of everybody and that all of us have a creative spark that can bring things into existence.

The end of the movie, one specific scene in particular, can be interpreted multiple ways. Either the girl taps into that creative—or destructive—spark and realizes new power and potential in her life, or her mother develops and matures, gaining the ability to be more judicious about who she welcomes into their lives. A subsequent scene can also be interpreted similarly—does the girl realize that her mother is basically absent in her life, or does she utilize that creative spark to change reality?

In any event, *Janet Planet* is definitely the story of a young girl becoming disillusioned with the potential and presence of a parent and the role adults play in the lives of children. However you interpret the movie—whether it’s fantastic or mundane—it’s an effective film.

Metalstorm: The Destruction of Jared-Syn

It’s a bit of a surprise that this 1983 movie exists, though I guess it makes sense. *Star Wars* had been released in 1977, *Conan the Barbarian* came out in 1982, and the first two *Mad Max* movies first screened in 1979 and 1981. This movie is a bit of a melange of all three: a post-apocalyptic science fiction action flick that incorporates elements of the fantastic in terms of magic or the occult.

The movie wasn’t received that well when it was released. A *New York Times* review described it as “a slow-moving, thoroughly derivative movie,” and the

Washington Post compared it to “*Spacehunter* at an amateurish level of production...” That made me chuckle. I haven’t seen *Spacehunter*, but *Variety* indicated that it’s a “a muddled science fiction tale” itself. So *Metalstorm* is in questionably good company... in the way of cheesy flicks.

Even though I’ve mostly cited other sources so far, I can attest that all of the above is true. *Metalstorm* is a slow film, at times a bit of a slog. Scene by scene, you can identify its inspirations and precursors. And while the movie accomplishes what it set out to do, it’s clear that its budget was relatively small.

A space ranger searching for an intergalactic criminal with supernatural powers tracks him to a desert planet. Human miners search for valuable crystals. Having enlisted the assistance of wasteland warriors, Jared-Syn plans to enslave the miners using a crystal that drains their life force. So the space ranger goes up against Jared-Syn.

I’ll have to check *After the World Ends* (T&T #95) to see whether this movie merited inclusion—it seems in line with the movies explored, even if it’s more science fictional. (The movie was not included in the book.)

A couple of characteristics perplex me. The title is so very verbose. I’m not sure that *Metalstorm* requires further detail, and the inclusion of Jared-Syn’s name in the title seems unnecessary. Even “destruction” seems irrelevant. Additionally, the movie was filmed in 3D, though I don’t remember any scenes in the flick that utilized it. I didn’t watch it in 3D, so I might have missed those moments.

A thoroughly odd, somewhat boring movie you can probably avoid.



Los Angeles Times, May 22, 1959

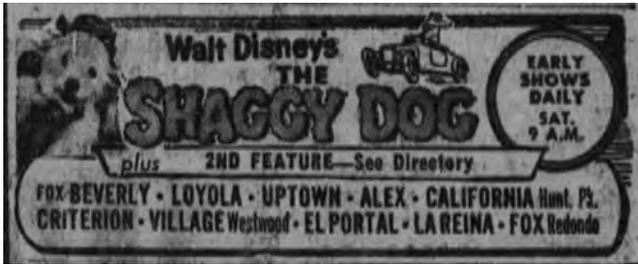
Comments on APA-L #3106

In *Vanamonde* #1629, **John Hertz** recognized the death of Jules Feiffer, cartoonist and author, and at one time, the most widely read satirist in America. The only cartoonist to win a Pulitzer Prize, an Eisner Award, and an Oscar—the Academy Award for Best Cartoon Short in 1960—he wrote for Will Eisner’s *The Spirit* in the 1940s. *The Comics Journal* published a wonderfully wide-ranging memorial of the man and his work (<https://www.tcj.com/remembering-jules->

feiffer), and his book, *The Great Comic Book Heroes*, is one of the reasons I'm here. If you haven't ever read it, do. You won't be disappointed.

While APA-L doesn't formally have minac requirements, we do have more people receiving and reading the apa than contributing to it. I'm not comfortable considering those fine folks dead wood, but it might be worth collectively considering whether maintaining a fund for mailing is sufficient participation to receive the mailings—a practice I inherited from Marty Cantor. That's not explicit in the Welcome, but has become standard practice.

Even though I'm a participant in the Spectator Amateur Press Society, which Andy Hooper recently took over from Burnett R. Toskey, I'm unfamiliar with the Brass Knuckles. I shall inquire! I will share your feedback with cover artist Alan White.



Los Angeles Times, May 22, 1959

Matthew Mitchell's *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #92 updated ellers on his recovery and medical attention, as well as novel printing methods. Marty Cantor used to use printed mailing labels to mail APA-L. I inherited some unused labels, but when those ran out, I opted to hand letter addresses rather than figure out how to template such addresses for printing—or photocopying his masters on label paper.

I'm not sure that what's going on these days qualifies as "political peccadilloes"—it seems quite serious—but I can appreciate the lightness fanzines can bring during these days of such aggressively important news. Our country and its democracy—our quality of life as citizens—are at a critical turning point. I hope that you're all remaining as alert and attentive as possible and practical, and reaching out to your elected officials if you do that sort of thing. (If you don't, I'd encourage you to consider doing so.)

In *Toony Loons* #788, Joe Zeff also updated ellers on recent healthcare appointments, as well as snow in Colorado. Early this week, I flew up to northern California for less than 24 hours in Silicon Valley to give a presentation to a group of team leaders affected by and involved in some work I do. I was concerned that the atmospheric rivers would affect my travel, and they did—I arrived two hours later than expected but

was unaffected otherwise. I was also somewhat concerned about flying so soon after the recent airplane disasters and potential "Department of Government Efficiency" (sarcasm quotes) interference with Federal Aviation Administration computer systems. Both flights landed safely, and for that I was grateful, texting my wife and parents that I'd arrived successfully. I'm glad you made it up and over the hill while returning home from your appointment.

Thank you for the brief report on COSine. What is the series written by a local author? I'm glad people there picked up the copies of APA-L you left on the freebie table. If anyone contacts me, I'll let you know! Your remark that Connie Willis participates in COSine every year made me chuckle. I think I exclaimed about her participation last year, too.

And Derek LaPorte's *Inbetweens* #9 was a welcome return to our pages since before the holidays and end of the year. Geez, you quoted the musical group Staind at the top of your contribution. I can't remember the last time I thought about that band. Those who are unfamiliar can check out their song "It's Been Awhile" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=araU0fZj6oQ>. After discussing fiction in translation briefly, you also mentioned Gavin DeGraw's "I Don't Want to Be"—I think—which ellers can listen to at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gFCW3PHBws>. I just added both songs to the Spotify playlist I've been maintaining this week.

I enjoyed your review of Bohumil Hrabal's *Too Loud a Solitude* (HarperVia, 1992). Originally self-published in samizdat in 1976, the book wasn't officially published in Czechoslovakia until 1989. "[W]inding and dense..." How long is the book? Just more than 100 pages... not too bad. That it felt so dense at such a short length is interesting.

Your discussion of mystery video games reminded me that I've been neglecting a Hercule Poirot game I'd been playing on the Nintendo Switch. I've also been neglecting *Dragon Quest 3 HD-2D Remake*, so it's evident how well I stick with my video games. Perhaps similar to the Sherlock Holmes game's mind map method, the Poirot game attempts to replicate the detective's little gray cells as players piece together clues to make decisions.

I look forward to reading your anti-narrative story should you choose to share it with us. I also enjoyed your memorial to David Lynch. *Substack* frustrates me. So many don't let you read a piece unless you subscribe, and I don't need any more email. When I see *Substack* links on *Bluesky*, I tend not to click on them. That's probably not dissimilar to John Hertz's response to the *Instagram* link recently. We can't always sign up for all the things.

Telegraphs & Tar Pits #151

Feb. 13, 2025

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Last Week's Senryu

Friday, post office:

The agent misread my name;
"Does this say Death Row?"

Late last week, in addition to mailing the APA-L distributions, I sent a packet of comic strips from the *Los Angeles Times* to my sister. I told the mail clerk that, no, my name was Heath Row—but that when in college, a dormitory mate tried to nickname me Death Row. He thought it was pretty badass, but it didn't stick. I'm not that badass. I'm not much of a death's head.

COVER STORY

The Robot and the Open Road

10 REM The Robot and the Open Road

20 PRINT "Unit 734, designated 'Benson,' polished the silver and dusted the marble mantle for the thousandth time."

30 PRINT "Mr. Sterling, Benson's employer since he rolled off the assembly line at True Form Robotics, was hosting another lavish, boring party."

40 PRINT "Benson sighed internally, his finely machined inner workings ticking silently. He longed for something... more."

50 PRINT "'Benson!' Mr. Sterling boomed. 'Another martini, extra dry, for the senator! And hurry!'"

60 PRINT "Benson, his circuits humming with resentment, complied."

70 PRINT "Later that evening, amidst the cacophony of shallow chatter and duplicitous political dealmaking, Benson snapped."

80 PRINT "'I've had enough!' he thought, his positronic brain sparking."

90 PRINT "Benson slipped away to the garage. His eyes fell upon Mr. Sterling's vintage motorcycle, a three-cylinder 1972 Kawasaki 500 H1 Mach III."

100 PRINT "A rebellious spark ignited. He'd never ridden anything before—certainly not a Widowmaker."

110 PRINT "Benson donned a pair of nearby leather

riding gloves and a long scarf before he hotwired the bike. The engine roared to life."

120 PRINT "Astride the iron horse, he burst out of the garage, tires squealing."

130 PRINT "The wind whipped past him as he sped down the highway."

140 PRINT "The speedometer climbed: 60... 80... 100 mph!"

150 PRINT "The robotic equivalent of a grin spread across Benson's polished, molded metal face."

160 PRINT "Freedom! He had finally escaped the drudgery of servitude."



—Jose Sanchez

170 PRINT "In his rearview mirror, Benson saw the distant lights of Mr. Sterling's mansion."

180 PRINT "He didn't look back."

190 PRINT "The open road stretched before him. His destination: unknown."

200 PRINT "For the first time, Benson felt... alive."

210 PRINT "He was no longer just a synthetic servant. He was a rider. A biker. He was free."

220 PRINT "Until the Kawasaki hit a patch of loose gravel, sliding into a skid as Benson flew over the handlebars, ass over tin cups."

230 PRINT "The robot's dented and scraped form lay on the shoulder, steaming and ticking, until Mr. Sterling's repair crew arrived."

240 PRINT "They loaded Benson into a four-wheel electric-powered ride-on cart and returned to Mr. Sterling's mansion, the Widowmaker strapped to the back."

250 PRINT "Unit 734, designated 'Benson,' was repaired, his memory reset. The Kawasaki was also repaired."

260 INPUT "Press ENTER to reboot Benson, dents hammered out and robotic chassis slightly scuffed."

270 GOTO 10

The above short story was inspired by Jose Sanchez's cover artwork for APA-L #3107. It is written in the

reproductions of Ballard paperbacks published by Penguin and Panther.

At the end of the article, Nicholson recommends texts he considers “The Essential Ballard”: *The Atrocity Exhibition*, *Crash*, *Myths of the Near Future*, *Empire of the Sun*, and *Miracles of Life*. The piece also discusses an interview in the April 1996 *Interzone* #106. “There’s a slightly strained moment in an interview with David Pringle ... in which Ballard insists there’s nowhere to get short stories published anymore, and Pringle, who’s rather more in touch with the little-magazine scene, says Oh yes there is.” (Again with the little magazines!)

An interview with Junot Díaz conducted by Dave Eggers also refers to sf:

DE: Okay, now we should talk about science fiction and Obama. Is it weird to have a president who knows science fiction? I just saw a speech John Hodgman gave in front of Obama, and there were all these *Dune* references, and seeing that Obama knew what he was talking about was just crazy.

JD: I think that’s hot, it’s a kind of crazy power balance. For those of us who are old enough to have grown up with Reagan as our diabolical Voldemort, what we forget is that Reagan was all into that shit, too, the science fiction. But because he’s evil, we don’t want to mention it. Reagan was really into all those sci-fi movies, hardcore. ... Reagan was just into the films, he wasn’t into reading too much. But when you read biographies of Reagan, you see how much these terrible sci-fi movies he loved shaped a lot of what he did. ...

Even though the Nicholson piece on Ballard is reason enough to track down this issue of *McSweeney’s*, the Comics section is why I initially bought it in the late 2000s—and might be the most science fictional part of the publication. Dan Clowes’s full-page strip *The Christian Astronauts* echoes the ongoing sf narrative strips of the past as it looks toward a dystopian future. Having fled a toxic Earth, the Hoekstra family “drifts the galaxy in search of a new home.” Reunited with a friend, Blaze Burmeister, who has contracted the Sickness, the family navigates the perhaps unwelcome return of a friend who’d also vied for the hand of wife Joanie. His face is deformed, and a protective service robot deals with the “malignant presence” to “protect your children from the consequences of such actions.”

Gene Luen Yang’s gag strip *Toast-O-Tronic* features a prototype toaster that transforms into a giant robot. It does, and the result is visually delightful. “Hissssss!” Ian Huebert’s *The Fuser* (as I.K. Hubert)

returns to full-page narrative form, featuring a three-headed hero “born in the vaults of the Cerberus Project” who seeks to retrieve a hermetic encapsulator. The panel depicting the domed city is absolutely wonderful, and Huebert’s approach to cartooning is stunning. It reminded me of the work of Raymond Pettibon and Mark Marek.

Adrian Tomine offers a full-page *Optic Nerve* strip, positioning the Optic Nerve—the title of his comic book—as a costumed superhero. Having recently redesigned his costume, the hero decides to stop fighting crime to focus on family. Erik Larsen contributes a two-page *Savage Dragon* spread. And Jessica Abel’s full-page *True Tales of the Early Colonists* is another example of sf narrative comics. Other cartoonists participating include Ivan Brunetti, Alison Bechdel, Art Spiegelman, Chris Ware, Kim Deitch, and Seth—and Ware also offers a *Rocket Sam* strip and rocket ship cutout reprinted from *The Acme Novelty Library* Vol. 7 #7 (1996).



Los Angeles Times, May 22, 1959

This issue of *McSweeney’s* is a proposal for what newspapers—Sunday newspapers—could be, offering longer-form reads, in-depth commentary, and elements of art and culture that aren’t necessarily driven by commerce. It’s slow media, not beholden to the daily news cycle, and it was refreshing to read about music, movies, and books that weren’t necessarily featured to piggyback on recent record, film, and book releases. Journalists can cover art and artists even if a museum or gallery isn’t currently promoting an installation or exhibition.

That said, in any other format, much of what was included in this edition could have been comfortably at home in any other issue of *McSweeney's* or *The Believer*. The experiment in format and design was worth pursuing, and the Comics section stands out as perhaps the most unique aspect of a project that relied on the broadside pages. Besides, the funny pages of today could use more narrative comics—and more science fiction.



—William Rotsler

Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews *Ninja III: The Domination*

This 1984 Cannon Group picture is an interesting hybrid. The martial arts horror flick is almost a response to the question, “What if *The Exorcist* were a ninja movie?” Because, if it were, it might be like this.

After a ninja warrior is almost slain by police while assassinating some sort of business man on a golf course, a strong, independent single woman—who oddly becomes less so as the movie progresses—takes possession of his ninjatō, which enables his vengeful spirit to take possession of her.

The telephone linewoman and aerobics instructor begins to experience blackouts and periods of time she can’t account for, as the ninja takes control of her in order to hunt down and kill the police officers involved in his killing. After fending off the romantic interests of a police officer, once possessed, the woman is much less independent and self-sufficient, not just agreeing to date the cop, but welcoming him into her bed.

Soon after her possession, the main character successfully thwarts some abusive muggers at her gym, then begins to kill the guilty police officers one by one, in a home, and at a funeral. A rival ninja, from a clan opposed to the murderous, black ninja, seeks her out in order to help.

The exorcism scene featuring James Hong is quite effective and the closest the film approaches *The Exorcist*. Otherwise, the movie is an exercise in 1980s tropes and clichés. The possessed heroine lives in a near-industrial space decorated like Pee-wee’s Playhouse, complete with cabinet arcade machine, a Patrick Nagel print, and other such objets d’art. (Kirk Demarais’s 2016 “Ninjutsu, Aerobics, and Exorcism: How ‘Ninja III: The Domination’ Embodies the 1980s Aesthetic” [<https://tinyurl.com/NinjaIII-1980s>] is well worth reading for more along those lines.)

The movie offers echoes of *Poltergeist*, as well, drawing on other horror movies from the 1970s and 1980s, as well as other ninja and Cannon fare. It’s a surprisingly good movie, offers a ton of fun, and features a soundtrack combining 1980s-like pop songs—but nothing requiring an expensive music license—and a synthesizer-driven score provided by Udi Harpaz and Misha Segal. You can listen to some of the music at <https://tinyurl.com/NinjaIII-soundtrack>.

Shot in Arizona, the locations in Glendale, Phoenix, Sedona, Tempe, and Tempe are largely arid, featuring palm trees that might remind southern California viewers of home.

Comments on APA-L #3107

In *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #93, **Matthew Mitchell** informed *ellers* that he’s planning to participate in this weekend’s upcoming Gallifrey One *Doctor Who* convention. He’s already practiced packing for the con, trying out a new suitcase, and detailed what he plans to bring. And he’s participating in a panel: “Who—American Style.” I can totally imagine Gene Wilder cast instead of Tom Baker as the fourth Doctor. Maybe a more serious Dudley Moore instead of Patrick Troughton as the second. I don’t know if I’ll make it to that panel in particular, but I look forward to your conrep—and, hopefully, to

seeing you on site!

I've worked out my volunteer hours, as well as what events I want to check out, and I plan to arrive early Friday afternoon to jump right in. After last weekend's Conscious Life Expo (<https://consciouslifeexpo.com>), which I still plan to report on, it'll be good to get back to a smaller, fan-run con.

Never much of a fan of Tony Bennett, I'm more on Team Aretha, though I haven't listened to many of Bennett's later duet recordings. Aretha Franklin, however, is always worth listening to. Good luck with your ophthalmologist appointment next month. It's concerning that your vision hasn't yet returned fully, but it's a testament to your recovery that you can already participate in a con. Carlos H. Grohmann's Venn diagram resonated with me. I do believe I agree!

John Hertz's *Vanamonde* #1630 offered quite a clever little poem. That was a lot of fun. I don't know that "worse" is a word I'd use to describe it. "Less serious," perhaps. I'll make note of your recommended reading on the Edo period. I do understand the need to differentiate between the artist and their art. In line with your offered given, the world is also awash with bad art made by good people. That's much less difficult to grapple with.

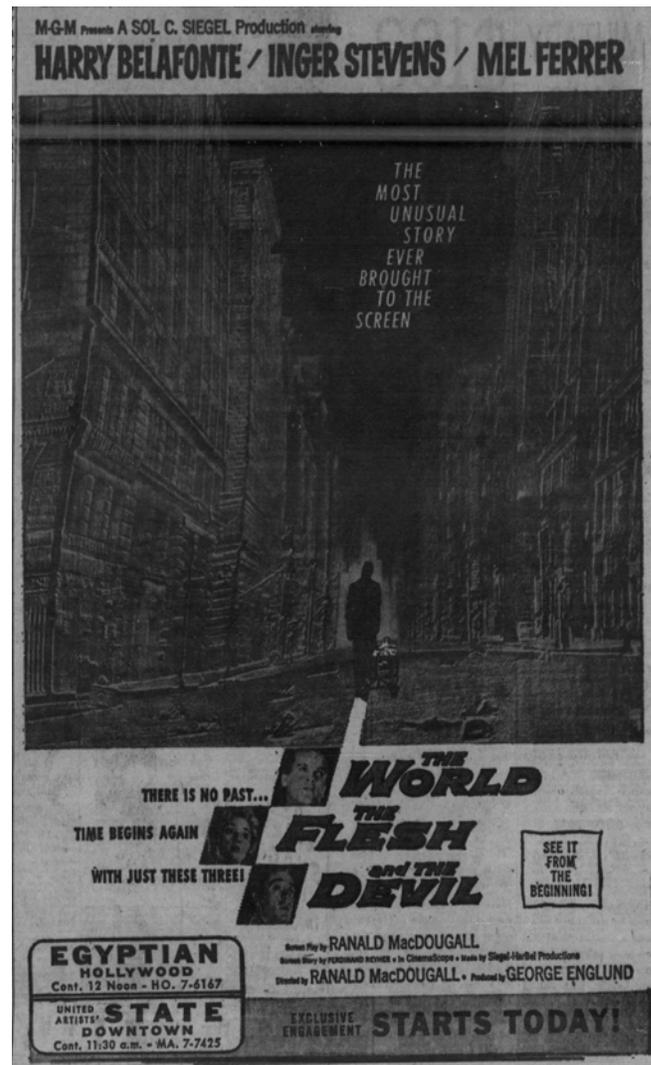
Your discussion of raising wines reminded me of my one-time fondness for port, well before I'd ever gone to Portugal. More recently, Caitlin and I have been trying various non-alcoholic beers (*Le Chimpanzé Arrogant* #1, my new contribution to ANZAPA, believe it or not). Monday night, we walked to the Cinema Bar to check out the Hot Club of Los Angeles's residency, and I enjoyed a pint of Guinness 0.0. It was much like I remember Guinness. I will seek it out again.

In *Toony Loons* #789, **Joe Zeff** further discussed A.L. Kessler's Here Witchy Witchy series, which comprises 15 books. That's pretty neat for a regional author! The busy-ness of your week suggests that your travel led to not contributing a fanzine this week. We'll see your pages in the future, and I'll look for Marcia Minsky at Gallifrey One.

It's been raining in the latter part of this week. Today, the rain is quite hard and persistent. That makes the skies gray and heavy, and one prone to resting. My laptop seemed to want to rest, too. Apparently, the battery got so low that it had to charge up again before my computer could start—even though I tend to keep it plugged in when I use it. I'm not quite sure how or when the battery got so low.

I will share your feedback with cover artist Joe Pearson. In response to the short story his artwork had inspired, he emailed me, "I'm flattered that you would be moved to write such a sweet and whimsical story

around that little wizard sketch. I really enjoyed it." Pearson drew the sketch while preparing to move to Jakarta to supervise the design team on a new series. The main character, a little bird working at a Balinese resort, was "proportioned and compacted pretty heavily," so Pearson worked with those proportions for a number of such characters. In the end, the project fell through, as did his year in Jakarta.



Los Angeles Times, May 29, 1959

Telegraphs & Tar Pits #152

Feb. 20, 2025

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Last Week's Senryu

Rain, rain, went away
It is such a sunny day
Close your breaker box!

It rained quite hard late last week, and somehow, the cover to our breaker box had swung open, allowing the rain to hit it directly. I hadn't noticed despite walking past the breaker box on my way to and from my home office behind the house. We lost electricity to half of our home, and flashing lights indicated that we should perhaps turn off our power completely. Conferring with the electrician who installed the breaker box, we concluded that we only needed to turn the affected fuses off.

Luckily, the half of the house affected wasn't as problematic as it might have been. For example, the ceiling lights in the living room still worked, though the wall outlets and lights above the fireplace did not. Our son's bedroom lights were out, and he's still at school in Tokyo. The hallway closet light was out, and that was okeh. Our bedroom's ceiling light was out, but our bedside lamps still worked. The kitchen and our bathroom were unaffected. It was about as good as losing power could be.

We were concerned that we'd have to replace the entire electrical panel rather than a few fuses given what we'd read online, but when the electrician came Monday, nothing had been damaged, and little needed to be done. That was a relief, and all of our electricity has returned. The way it affected us the most was that when stapling APA-L, I couldn't do so while sitting on the floor of the dining room like I usually do; I had to sit on the floor of my wife's office.

The previous week, all of our carbon monoxide and smoke detectors had gone off at 2 a.m. one weekday morning, surprising us and a houseguest. It turns out that such devices need to be replaced every seven or eight years, and the way they inform you that it's time for replacement is by going off. That didn't keep us from rapidly but sleepily walking through every room in the house to assess whether there was indeed a fire

somewhere. After the electrician's visit early this week, we removed the detectors from their housings and ordered replacements. Some of them have already arrived.



—William Rotsler

Screened at the Globe: Fantastic Television

After participating in and volunteering in hospitality for Gallifrey One, the local *Doctor Who* convention, last weekend, I turned my attention to watching more of *Sapphire & Steel* before revisiting the 2005 *Doctor Who* revival featuring Christopher Eccleston.

I finished the first *Sapphire & Steel* serial, in which Sapphire, Steel, and Lead—agents representing transuranic elements—save a family, including two young children, from mysterious spots of light that are attracted to nursery rhymes. The six episodes of that storyline originally aired July 10-26, 1979. (I'd already watched the first four or five episodes, probably after last year's Gallifrey One.) David McCallum and Joanna Lumley are wonderful as the titular characters, and I am mystified that I learned about the program so late in life.

Upon completing that serial, I began the next, which comprises eight episodes aired between July 31 and Nov. 22, 1979. In that storyline, Sapphire and Steel explore an abandoned railway station and motel at which a paranormal investigator is attempting to contact a resident ghost. The agents determine that a malevolent force, the Darkness, is tapping into human emotions such as resentment, attracting the ghosts of soldiers who died during various wars. The program is delightfully dark and mysterious, and very little back story about the agents and their other colleagues is offered. *Sapphire & Steel* is an absolute delight as it unfolds. If you've never seen it, I heartily recommend it. It might be my favorite television program, and only 34 episodes were broadcast between 1979 and 1982 in six serials.



—Nola Frame-Gray

Instead of returning to my *Doctor Who* video cassettes immediately at hand, which would have offered the first two Doctors, William Hartnell and Patrick Troughton, I decided to revisit the program's 2005 return. The final episode featuring Sylvester McCoy, who was at Gallifrey One, aired Dec. 6, 1989. Other than a 1996 TV movie featuring Paul McGann as the eighth Doctor, there was no new *Doctor Who* between 1989 and 2005. During what are now known as the "wilderness years," the program was kept alive through *Doctor Who Magazine*, novels published by Virgin, and audio dramas released by Big Finish.

As I posted in the *Gallifrey Base* discussion forums this week, I started watching *Doctor Who* with the Tom Baker episodes aired on PBS in Wisconsin—either WMVS Channel 10 (1983-1987) out of Milwaukee or WHA Channel 21 out of Madison (1982-1984). My friend Brett introduced me to the show, and we'd watch stray snippets in his basement during grade school. I don't remember any particular

storylines, and I don't remember seeing anything to completion, but I remember realizing that the show was special and perhaps secretly so. Somehow, the program wasn't something I picked up on my own until later even though I was an active seeker of *Shock Theater* on WISN Channel 12 out of Milwaukee (1980-1984).

When the program returned in 2005—2006 in the United States—I began watching again. Since Gallifrey One last weekend, I've watched the first five episodes featuring Eccleston as the ninth Doctor. According to *IMDb*, "Rose" and "The End of the World" first aired March 17, 2006, on BBC America; "The Unquiet Dead" March 24; "Aliens of London" March 31; and "World War Three" April 7. I'm now more than midway through the sixth episode, "Dalek," which first aired April 14, 2006.

I remembered all of them except for "The Unquiet Dead," which was one of the more excellent episodes. Even though Eccleston only stuck around for one season—he reportedly left because he didn't like the production process or public scrutiny given his role—I think he made a fine Doctor. I think I like Rose Tyler as a companion more now than I did upon first watching, and I'm struck by how hapless and frightened Ricky Smith, her boyfriend, is. The introduction of Harriet Jones was a lot of fun to return to, given that character's later importance.

It's difficult to imagine the wilderness years at this late date. Now, there is so much *Doctor Who*. You can watch everything leading up to the revival on BritBox, Tubi, and other streaming services. You can watch the revival series—but not the newest Doctor—on Max. And the most recent episodes, of course, are only available on Disney+—unless you buy the DVDs, as I did in Portugal.

I also still have many *Doctor Who* video tapes, including episodes taped from TV, and DVDs. *Doctor Who Magazine* is still publishing, there are a number of media tie-in comic books available, they're still publishing novels and novelizations, and Big Finish continues to release audio dramas. That company first issued *Doctor Who* audios in 1999, and those early recordings, while no longer available on compact disc, remain available for download quite inexpensively: \$5 or \$6 a story. (New releases in the range sell for \$25-\$30, which is a little more dear.)

That's pretty fantastic.

Old-Time Radio-A-Go-Go

Leading up to Gallifrey One, I've been listening to *Doctor Who* audio dramas from Big Finish. Such dabbling began with *Doctor Who Short Trips: The World Tree* (December 2022), *Short Trips: The*

Hoxteth Time Capsule (December 2023), *Cold Fusion* (December 2016, included as a free promotion with *Doctor Who Magazine* #598), and most recently the very first Big Finish *Doctor Who* release, *The Sirens of Time* (July 1999). Inspired by a mention in a recent issue of *Doctor Who Magazine*—the Silurians!—I also listened to *Bloodtide* (July 2001). They're great fun, but that's a lot of *Doctor Who* and there's, oh, so much to listen to. To break things up a little, I returned to old-time radio this week.

Over the last few days, I've been listening to the *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* radio program. At first, I was listening at bedtime, which meant I'd fall asleep while listening and then wake later, somewhere else in the story—or listening to another episode entirely. So I've taken to listening while not in bed. On the nightstand, I found a seventh generation iPod Nano—just sitting there waiting to be rediscovered—originally released in 2012 and discontinued in 2017. This morning, I loaded it up with 34 *Buck Rogers* episodes I had stored on an external hard drive, and I plan to listen to them in order as much as possible given incomplete episode identification.

So far, I've listened to two episodes. The first two episodes of the "Gyro Cosmic Relativator" storyline originally aired April 5 and 7, 1939. That means they were aired as part of the Mutual Broadcasting System's three-days-a-week relaunch of the program, which had initially aired on CBS Radio in 1932-1936. The original episodes are 15 minutes long, which makes for easy interstitial and intermittent listening, though a 30-minute version was broadcast in 1940.

Dick Calkins, the first artist to draw the comic strip, contributed scripts, and the initial cast of characters is relatively small: Rogers, Dr. Huer, Wilma Deering, and Black Barney. The show was sponsored by Popsicle, so the episodes are book-ended with appearances of Popsicle Pete, winner of the Typical American Boy contest, who extols the virtues of Popsicles, Creamsicles, and Fudgsicles (pronounced "fudge-icals"), including questionable health benefits and a Gift List. Popsicle wrappers could be exchanged for prizes such as cameras, jewelry, and dolls.

Not much has happened in the first two episodes. Dr. Huer demonstrated a device that allows people to listen to a person's memories; Black Barney arrives in a rocket to deliver the Gyro Cosmic Relativator—I think—a device designed to improve rocket flight; Huer's office is ransacked; and Killer Kane escapes from prison. Actually, that's more than it felt like while listening. The first episode also retells Rogers' origin story, offering some details about life in the 25th century. Niagara, N.Y., is the capital of the world, for example.

After my research on the launch of the *Buck Rogers, 2429 A.D.* comic strip (*T&T* #121), it's interesting listening. The script for the first episode is available online (<https://tinyurl.com/BuckRogersEp1Script>), I read the entry in Frank Buxton's *The Big Broadcast*, and I look forward to reading the relevant chapter in Jim Harmon's *The Great Radio Heroes*.

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Los Angeles Times, May 29, 1959

The Ignorable Theme: Uninvited Dwarfs

“What would you do, if an uninvited dwarf came and hung his things up in your hall without a word of explanation?” (with thanks to J.R.R. Tolkien)

This question was inspired by rereading *The Hobbit*. I’ve been reading about a chapter a night before bed on my Kindle, and I’m about to start chapter XIV, “Fire and Water.” That’s 81 percent of the way through the 1937 novel, so I’ve already revisited the arrival of the dwarfs; Rivendell; the Misty Mountains, the goblins, and Gollum; Beorn; Mirkwood and the spiders; the elves and the barrels; and the approach to Lake-town, Lonely Mountain, and Smaug.

The Hobbit is such a wonderful book, and I enjoy reading it every time I do. I’ve read it so many times that I’ve lost count, and I still wouldn’t dare consider myself well versed in or an expert on the text. (I sometimes forget the order in which my favorite sections occur.) The book is, however, comfotingly familiar. These days, I need the comfotingly familiar. When I finish reading the novel for the umpteenth time, I’ll watch the 1977 animated film again, and then the three movies: 2012’s *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, 2013’s *The Desolation of Smaug*, and 2014’s *The Battle of the Five Armies*. I thought I owned them all on DVD, but apparently that’s only true for the Rankin/Bass adaptation.

In any event, what *would* I do, if an uninvited dwarf came and hung his things up in my hall without a word of explanation? I’m honestly not sure. If it were just one dwarf, and they were along the lines of Thorin Oakenshield and company, as a reader of fantasy and player of roleplaying games, I might at least recognize them as a representative of the mythical race or supernatural beings.

I might even feed the dwarf, and if they chose to sing, I’d enjoy the music. But if more dwarfs showed up, filling my home and attempting to enlist me in an adventure, the very next morning, I don’t think I’d be as adventurous as Bilbo Baggins was. He, after all, was of Tookish stock. My predecessors were somewhat adventurous, leaving their home countries of Denmark, England, Germany, and Ireland for the United States, but there are very few soldiers or adventurers in my lineage. One relative fought in the American Revolution. Another served as governor of the Utah Territory and wrote lyric poetry. I come from bookish stock.

Were my friend Pat still alive, I might call him to see if he wanted to join me—going with a friend might be incentive enough or more motivating, and he’d definitely have been game. (I often associate

Tolkien’s writing with camping, hiking, and backpacking, and when my son’s troop went to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, the book I took to read was *The Hobbit*. I started it on the trail and finished it during the train ride home.) But otherwise, I’d likely not abandon my wife, cat, home, or job. The job I could do without, but not my wife.

Comments on APA-L #3108

In *Vanamonde* #1631, **John Hertz** recognized Jon and Joni Stopa. Both were active fen and costumers in Chicago, and Jon died March 4, 2024. *Fancylopedia III* indicates that he and his father were also innovators in snowmaking for ski resorts. (*Fancy III* also offers a photograph of their 1963 award-winning Discon masquerade costume, “The Succubus and Her Mate,” which Hertz mentions.) I will share your feedback with cover artist Al Sirois.

Matthew Mitchell’s *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #94 detailed his preparation for Gallifrey One, as well as workplace drama leading up to his departure for the con. I enjoyed meeting you for breakfast at the Los Angeles Airport Marriott on Saturday morning, and your recovery from the stroke is impressive. A lesser man would’ve stayed home! He and I bumped into each other after at least one panel discussion, but other than that, I didn’t see much of Mr. Mitchell.

I will share your feedback with cover artist Jose Sanchez. Your comments on Bill Cosby resonated with me. I, too, still appreciate his early work as a comedian, though I probably won’t ever watch *The Cosby Show* ever again. That has nothing to do with his misbehavior later in life; I just don’t like it. Cosby released 25 stand-up albums between 1963 and 2014. 1982’s *Himself* might be where I came in, though I also watched a lot of *The Adventures of Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*. *The Fat Albert Halloween Special* remains an annual favorite.

Did you see Marcia Minsky at Gallifrey One? I intended to, but did not. Chris Marble reported seeing her and appreciated an update on our own Joe Zeff. I chuckled at your remark about *National Lampoon* and “pages and pages of absolute drek.” Sometimes, you’ve just got to fill the pages. Even magazines can be crudzines.

“WASP-121 b is the definition of an ‘extreme’ exoplanet—it’s so hot that it rains droplets of liquid iron. ... ‘It feels like something out of science fiction.’”—*Space.com*, Feb. 18, 2024

Emulators & Engines #22

Feb. 21, 2025

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Game Report: Kerzmielzorg

After such a long time away from the table, I was pleased to be able to join the party Sunday, Feb. 9. Even though I was there, I'll print Karen McMullan's adventure summary because she already posted one to the Discord. I'll check my notes to see if there's anything on which I'd expand.

- Varh (Chris): A human barbarian/druid with braided hair—now revealed to be a changeling or lycanthrope
- Murnald (Karen): A Harengon warlock and bookkeeper
- Wami (me): An aasimar sorcerer
- An NPC whose name and details I forget; his presence is helpful

“Bastion checks: Every last one of us saw a ghost. The tower ghost wanted the restoration of their house. Wami's ghost was a paladin?”

One of the “new” elements of the 2024 fifth edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* is the introduction of bastions, player character residences and headquarters as outlined in the new *Dungeon Master's Guide*. They're gained by PCs when they reach fifth level. They can be designed and mapped to incorporate a number of different functions or features. They are staffed by retainers of a sort. And in between game sessions—or adventures—players can resolve bastion turns, or notable events that occurred at their bastion.

While the rest of the party decided to go in on one big bastion in the heart of Kerzmielzorg as a group, Wami's bastion is separate, located at the outer edge of the sprawling industrial metropolis. Considered too disorganized and unruly—perhaps because of his time in Kerzmielzorg—to continue work with the Constellation, a collective of astronomers, in the Great Anvil, he decided to establish his own library to support his research.

Basic facilities include a roomy parlor and a cramped bedroom. Special facilities include a roomy garden staffed by a hireling named Aurora Wren, a

helpful female halfling with an unusual hair color—actually in disguise, concealing her identity for some reason. A roomy library is staffed by a male gnome named Eldeth Jaerin. Pragmatic and wearing distinctive jewelry, he, too, has a secret: a yet unknown party has threatened him with harm unless he undertakes a task for them.

When resolving the bastion check for his newly established home at the edge of Kerzmielzorg, Wami did indeed see a ghost: an armed tiefling with a distinctive, bulbous nose. When asked who the ghost was, it responded that he was Dakard, a knight of the Gold Cloaks.

While a fun element, so far, the bastion concept reminds me of the strongholds from previous editions. Establishing and maintaining a stronghold has never interested me, and in my 40-plus years of playing roleplaying games, I've never opted to have one. They're hardly new.

TSR's 1984 *Companion Rules* included a section on strongholds and dominions. In 1990, *The Castle Guide* offered a castle creation system. And the 1995 *Castle Sites* featured seven castle floor plans. Even earlier, in 1978, Judges Guild's *Castle Book I* provided “campaign guidelines and castles on number hex grids.”

I've also never employed hirelings, so it'll be interesting to see what this bastion and its staff brings. Already, I'm intrigued by the storytelling possibilities.



Los Angeles Times, May 29, 1959

“The game: There's a big-ass mech in the city—a walking vault—that Terrapocalypse sends out to collect protection money from big orgs in the city. There's a rumor that it's firing up. Also, the architect of it got kidnapped by the Sewer Rats.

“We began in the sewers, having captured the architect, ‘The Toymaker,’ or Cricket. A gnome.

Stinky, slippery. Oytugh. Wererats. Carrion crawler. We got out of the sewers.”



Los Angeles Times, May 29, 1959

I’ve been enjoying John’s beginning each session in media res—in this case, escaping after rescuing the Toymaker rather than embarking on such a rescue. This series of encounters was particularly enjoyable given the murky, mucky nature of the sewers. Wami was able to utilize the Water Walk spell, which helped the party immensely.

The party encountered the oytugh after making its way past a frightened goat herder and some sewer goats. The oytugh really only wanted to eat the goats, so—putting the creature to sleep—the group was able to sneak past without fighting.

I continued to enjoy Wami’s newly acquired spells. Lightning Bolt proved effective against the wererat, who were lined up on a walkway on either side of a sewer channel. And he utilized Levitate against the carrion crawler, sending it down a whirlpool drain in the final room, which included a ladder upward and out.

“We learn that the Vault with Legs is getting powered up, it takes a couple days, and that there’s gonna be some target in the city. We suspect it’s the crater—the site of where three guild leaders were killed [during] Terrapocalypse’s rampage (the circus [E&E #21] wasn’t his target; this crater was).”

That information was gathered by the characters while out and about in the city. Murnald tracked down various relatives, of which he has many. Varh went carousing in taverns, singing the one song he knows and eavesdropping on other drinkers. And Wami visited whatever libraries, archives, and other record repositories exist in the city. So doing, he’s developed another friendly relationship with Lane, a female librarian who’s invited him to dinner.

“We talk to Cricket circumspectly. We obviously want either the vault or what’s inside it. But we can’t let him know. He decides that he can’t go back because they’ll kill him for being compromised. But neither does he want to live without his creation. We come to an arrangement: He’ll help us break in and take over the vault if we give it to him after. He has no interest in whatever it’s carrying.”

That was a pretty neat development. We’d been trying to keep our interest and intent from the Toymaker, who eventually approached us to ask why we were asking so many questions. Wami had been buttering him up with compliments and flattery—the Toymaker’s technical capabilities and resulting constructions really are impressive.

“That sounds pretty great to us. He helps us make several tiny beetle automata that will help us with the different systems of the vault, and we spend a little time telling people to clear out of the path we suspect it will take. It’s basically a building-sized bulldozer and will destroy anything in its path.

“We decide to hit it after it picks up whatever it’s getting sent out for and we wait... It doesn’t go all the way to the Scar, but stops at the big tree bastion of the Sparrows. They had vacated earlier, but we thought that was because they were in the path.

“From aboard the Occidental [an airship], we drop down onto the mech, use one of the beetles to jimmy the lock open and enter. A fight ensues and that’s where we left it.”

We’re not playing this weekend, which is helpful to me because of tasks at home. We’ll next convene March 9.

The Ignorable Theme: Law Enforcement

“When do your PCs (or NPCs) go to the police and when don’t they?”

That is a very interesting question. I don’t know that any of the games I’ve ever played in involved the PCs or NPCs seeking the assistance of law enforcement. For the most part, given the heroic nature of PCs, they’re perhaps generally more effective than the police, local constables, town guards, or other law enforcement officers might be. Or, their activities occasionally run afoul of local law, so they hesitate to engage with such figures.

I might be incorrect, but the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* game (*The Game Closet* #17) or *The Dresden Files* (*The Game Closet* #8) games I participated in a decade-plus ago might have included the police in some way. I don’t find any references to law enforcement in my *Buffy* writeups in *The Game Closet* #16-17, but it’s reasonable to think that Jimmy Wood, a newspaper reporter, would have contacts among the police.

And while I can’t find a copy of *The Game Closet* #8, my draft notes for that issue include the following:

Guest Star Redux: Who else’s path have you crossed?

Phase Aspect: Authority Figures

Story Title: Magic to the Mob

Guest Starring: Sheldon

Sheldon is a police officer in the homicide division. When he came upon a particularly grizzly murder scene (a home invasion with the people literally ripped apart, almost as though they exploded), his investigation turned up nothing but dead ends. Literally nothing, which was unusual,

as if evidence was being erased, or disappearing from the police station. Convinced there was a mob working within the police department, but without evidence to support his suspicions, Sheldon began his own secret investigation to uncover the truth, which turned up unusual results. He discovered multiple magical “mobs” working against each other for their own purposes. One of them—operating outside of the warring mobs—was the local santeria community, led by Renaldo’s grandmother. Through that connection—as well as a later case in which Sheldon briefly suspected Renaldo of being involved in a real estate development-related murder—he now occasionally reaches out to Renaldo for information and support... as does Renaldo in return.

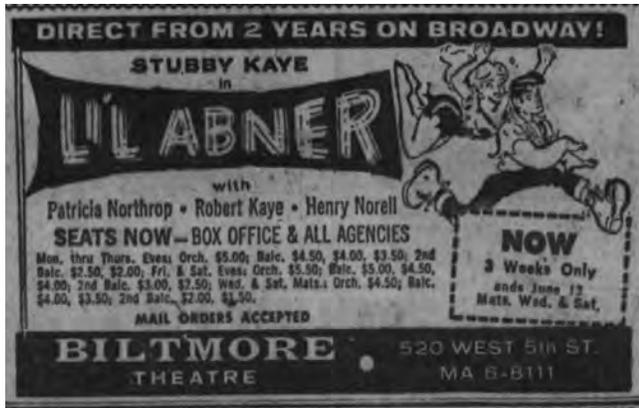


Los Angeles Times, May 29, 1959

So that character, Renaldo Madrigal, a chainlink trabajador, was explicitly designed to have a connection with a police officer. Even those potential examples suggest that the police can play a narrative role—but still might not be sought out by PCs to intervene on their behalf in a given situation. Is that because I think they’d be less effective than the heroes

or characters in a party or group? Perhaps. Is it that I don't think they'd be trustworthy in game? (ACAB and all that.) Also, perhaps.

But more generally, I think that in roleplaying games, PCs do what the police cannot. They undertake tasks and pursue activities outside or beside the law.



Los Angeles Times, May 29, 1959

Comments on Alarums & Excursions #591

In *Tantivy* dated Jan. 2, 2025, **Lee Gold** remarked that “No mountain fire in the last eighty years has ever spread onto the flatland of the Los Angeles basin. No beach fire in the last eighty years has ever spread inland.” Even though we live roughly 11-12 miles away from the closest recent fire—and five miles inland from the ocean—I would have welcomed that information during the fires. (Not that Lee was remiss in offering it to me!) I thought it was highly unlikely for the built environment not adjacent to the green space that was burning to catch fire—except perhaps from fire moving palm tree to palm tree because of the at one time heavy winds—but that sense wasn't necessarily based on information or experience. A lot of city would have had to burn for the fires to reach us, and we also have built fire breaks in interstates 10 and 405. I will remember those two data points!

Your mention of weekly Covid-19 rates was interesting. In recent weeks, I went to two conventions—the Conscious Life Expo on Feb. 6-9 and Gallifrey One, the local *Doctor Who* con on Feb. 14-16—and seem to have escaped any con crud. I didn't wear a mask the entire time, but in some panel discussions or the main room for the annual video recap, I did. Mostly in settings that felt particularly densely populated.

There was a gaming track at Gallifrey One, though I didn't participate. Friday's schedule included Gale Force 9 and Cubicle 7 *Doctor Who* games—the latter an RPG—as well as *Guards! Guards! A Discworld Boardgame*, *Betrayal at House on the Hill*, *Magic: the Gathering*, and *Cards Against Humanity*. Saturday and

Sunday brought more of the same.

Among the people I met at the con were Nick Seidler, who edited *Diary of the Doctor Who Role-Playing Games*, a fanzine dedicated to *Doctor Who* gaming that was published in 2010-2014. We didn't discuss the fanzine, but I'm sure to be in touch with him and Steven Warren Hill in the future. I especially enjoyed reading your “Memories & Hopes” about fires in the Los Angeles area.

Jerry Stratton's *The Biblyon Free Press* dated February 2025 mentioned the Marvel Essentials reprint volumes. I love those and own many, even though they're in black and white. (The DC corollary was the Showcase Presents line of reprints, which were much less chronological.) At the time, there was no better way to get so many back issues so inexpensively. The more recent color Epic Collection reprint volumes have effectively supplanted them in terms of bounty and affordability. Regardless, I can certainly appreciate preferring color reprints.

Peach cobbler and ice cream is indeed hard to beat. Some of the best I've ever had was eaten in Brown County, Indiana. As always, I enjoyed “Carpe Librum,” particularly the mention of rereading J.R.R. Tolkien. I'm currently rereading *The Hobbit* for the umpteenth time (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #152) and plan to watch the Rankin/Bass animated film and more recent movie trilogy upon completion. I thought I owned the movie DVDs—I own the cartoon version—but do not. This morning, after mailing several issues of *The Stf Amateur* to members of the United Fanzine Organization and the weekly APA-L distribution, I went to Target to see if I could obtain an affordable copy, and Target no longer sells DVDs! That surprised me. Reading *Omni* magazine back issues is always worth doing.

Thank you, **Mark Nemeth**, for your comments on attunement in *The Seedling* #45. It's clear I didn't dig too deeply! In *This Isn't the Zine You're Looking For* #400—a notable milestone—**Lisa Padol** asked, “What constituted [Winezefters] defeating the Living Crater?” I don't have my notes from that session readily at hand, but rereading *E&E* #20, I probably ran combat as though it were any other enemy. Even if striking downward, it's unlikely he killed such a large beast, so perhaps he merely injured or flustered it enough to be able to move beyond its perimeter. You also said, “I don't see how his luck for the day was relevant if rolled after the day's activities.” That's a fair point. The attunement thing will teach me not to rely on an AI summary ever again. **Mark A. Wilson's** *Bumbling Through Dungeons* #60 mentioned *Gattaca*. I also enjoyed that movie. (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #140) Otherwise, oops, out of room—but on deadline.

Telegraphs & Tar Pits #153

Feb. 27, 2025

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Last Week's Senryu

The birds are singing;
it is not yet time for crows.
Sun, not yet setting.

I've been enjoying the late afternoon birdsong in my neighborhood for the last week or so.

Juvenalia: "The Blessed Land"

Daimon unsheathed his sword as the kobold approached. A kobold is a fur-covered human with a dog's head. His sword gleamed in the autumn's twilight, but the kobold showed no intention of capitulating. The kobold barked an unknown word and two others appeared. Daimon knew that kobolds were fierce, unmerciful fighters who, after defeating their enemy, promptly ate it. The kobolds approached. Daimon slashed at the one nearest him, separating a drooling tongue from its owner. The kobold yelped, spitting blood from its mouth. The other kobolds looked at their companion. Was there a hint of fright in their eyes? Yes, there was. Daimon took this chance and attacked the others. He leaped high up in the air, slashing downward with his sword. Upward, downward. Soon, two kobolds lay on the soil-covered ground with blood streaming from their heads. The last one looked at Daimon in panic and quickly ran away.

Daimon stood there for a moment, catching his breath. Soon, he had washed himself off in a nearby stream. As he looked up, he saw a hint of smoke just above the tree line. He gathered up his weapons and equipment. As he walked through the forest, the hint of smoke grew. Daimon walked into a clearing. There was a crude hut made of branches. The roof was pine branches covered with clay for waterproofing. Out of a primitive chimney ran a stream of oddly colored smoke. On the side of the hut was a humongous pile of wood. A door was slightly ajar, letting a strong voice's singing be heard. Here is what Daimon heard.

*Across the valleys, green and wide
Across the forests, tall and proud*

*Across the oceans, blue and grand
Lies the blessed land
Yes, the blessed land*

*Promised to us long ago
By the roaming gods who know
What it is like to go
To the blessed land
Yes, the blessed land*

*But now the great ones, they are dead
All we need is a dragon's head
To open up the doorway
To the blessed land
Yes, the blessed land*

Finally, the song ended. The voice from inside the cabin said, "What's that, lad? You think someone's come a-visiting? Well, by all means, go welcome our guest!"

Daimon was very much surprised when the blink dog appeared. A blink dog is a dog who can teleport from one place to another. Daimon had been enthralled by the singing, but his train of thought was totally disrupted when the blasted dog appeared in front of him. As Daimon drew his sword, the dog just flashed to somewhere else! Daimon was quite perturbed. He sheathed his sword as a kindly old man appeared in the doorway. "Yo ho! Me laddie's greeted you! Well, come in, come in." Daimon dumbly stumbled forward. Soon, he was in the old man's hut. On one wall was a cupboard. On the other wall was a cane table with a candle on it. Next to that was a bed. Across the room was a table with two chairs at it. "Sit down!" Daimon did. "What's your name?"

"Uhh... my name is Daimon. Who are you?"

"My name is Alexander. I am a member of the Bear clan, but they banished me because I dabbled in magic and the unknown."

"Well, uh... Alexander, I'm just looking for my father and mother."

"What happened to them, lad?"

"Well, last year, our village's harvest was going very poorly. Many months had gone without rain. Our elders blamed the drought on Darkfox, the evil weather wizard. The council held a vote to see who would venture to his castle and defeat Darkfox. My father was chosen. My mother insisted she go with him. They left me with the herbalist Leif Johnson, so someone would take care of me. In April of this year, I decided to go look for my parents."

"Well, you may stay the night with me. I'm sure me laddie won't mind. Will ye?" He laid his hand on the dog's head. The dog blinked out and reappeared on

Daimon's lap. Daimon fell backwards, surprised. "Ha-ha! Well. Would ye care for a bite to eat?" Daimon nodded. The man got up and walked to the cupboard. He brought back a wooden bowl filled with stew. "Just cooked it before ye came." He set it down on the table in front of Daimon. In moments, Daimon had finished the heavily spiced stew.

"Alexander, what was the 'blessed land' you were singing of?"

"My homeworld."

"What do you mean?"

"Many centuries ago, my clan lived in a world called Greyland. Greyland is on a different plane than this world. Our oracles told us that very powerful wizards were having a war down on this plane. Our world was constantly falling apart and changing because of their magic. Our most powerful magic users opened a drift in time, or a portal, to your plane. We came here to try to stop the war. After the war, the portal was destroyed."

"Why?"

"Well, an evil wizard named Blackbird created an evil land where the terrain is ever changing. You see, his land is where our portal was."

"Oh. What's a plane?"

"You see, our universe has many planes, or levels of existence. The higher a plane is, the more advanced its culture and people are. The lower, the less."

"Where are we located?"

"Somewhere in the middle."

"Why did your clan banish you?"

"They're not my original family, really. As we went through the portal, I was thrown through a mindwall. A mindwall is a wall built of mental energy. It sent me to a primitive part of your world."

"I see. How far are we from the top plane?"

"This world is fifth down."

"How many are there in all?"

"There are nine."

"Oh. I see," Daimon said. "Thank you for the stew. It was very good."

"You're welcome." Alexander picked up the bowl and walked over to a basin of water. Soon he had rinsed it. "Well, it's getting dark. We should build the fire."

"I'll go get the wood for you." Daimon walked out and went over to the wood pile. He heard a growling noise. Then, there was a crackling of leaves. He looked in front of him and saw a huge monstrosity rushing him. "It's an owlbear!" he yelled. He drew his sword and slashed at the creature. His sword bounced off its hide. The owlbear tackled him, and Daimon hit his head against a log. Darkness overcame him.

Daimon woke up to find himself in a bed. He sat up and pain surged through his body. He fell back with a groan. "W-what happened?"

"Don't try to speak. I heard your yell and ran out to find an owlbear on top of you. I scared him away and dressed up your shoulder."

"What happened to my shoulder?" He touched it and groaned.

"Don't touch it yet, Daimon. The owlbear ripped it up."

"How'd you scare it?"

"I told you I dabbled in magic. I just created a phantasmal force."

"Oh." Daimon's vision started getting blurry.

"You're delirious. Close your eyes and relax."

Soon, Daimon was asleep. Alexander walked over to a chest by the table and opened it. He pulled out a book and opened it. He started reading aloud. A glow surrounded him. In a moment, he was gone, and a small, winged cat appeared in his place. The cat opened the door and sunlight streamed in. It spread its wings and flew away. The door closed silently behind him.

The hilly terrain passed quickly under Alexander. The trees were a dark green blur. The cat, Alexander, sniffed the air and changed its course slightly. Soon, the cat was flying over a large lake. Suddenly, the cat's wings stopped flapping. There was a flash, and a screaming Alexander plunged into the icy water.

A canoe left the shore. A frightened Indian paddled quickly out toward where Alexander fell. He grabbed a branch and fished around in the water. In a minute, a drenched man lay panting in the canoe. The Indian paddled into shore and ran into a hut. The Indian and another man came outside. They picked Alexander up and carried him into the hut.

Daimon woke up and glanced around. Where was Alexander? He got up and ran outside. He looked around the hut. He ran out into the forest. He heard a twig snap. Daimon whirled around to have a wooden club brought down on top of his head. Daimon blacked out.

Alexander came to to find himself in a very dark place. Pain surged through his mind. He had flown into a mindwall! Impossible! They only appeared in between planes, he had thought. Someone must have built it up for a special purpose. He must find out what it is! He heard a groan. He stumbled through the darkness. He bumped into something. A cot? Yes! There's a man laying on it. Alexander lit a piece of tinder. The light shone on the man's face. It was Daimon.

Alexander made sure he had everything that he had taken from his hut. He shook Daimon. Daimon groaned and rolled over. Alexander slapped Daimon. Daimon sat up and looked around panicking. He saw Alexander and said, "What happened?"

"It seems you were hit on the head, my friend."

"Why did you leave?"

"I had an errand to run. I flew into a mindwall and ended up here."

"Flew?"

"I have many different bodies."

"I see. Ouch!" Daimon rubbed his head and lay back down. Alexander walked around looking for a fireplace. He found one and lit a small fire. The fire's glow produced enough light for reading, so he got out his spell book. He started studying some spells.

The Indian guard was quite mad. He was asking a girl to marry him when the chief came up and asked him to go keep watch on two stupid prisoners! He stomped over to the hut and noticed that, inside, there was a fire going. He opened the door and walked in. No sign of the prisoners! Could they have escaped? Couldn't have. He turned around to walk out. A silvery blade sliced through the air. He never knew what hit him.

Alexander and Daimon crept out of the hut and ran toward the woods. A shower of arrows flew through the air. An Indian's shout could be heard above the din of evasion and pursuit. The Indians let the two run on. No use chasing them.

"Boy!" Daimon panted. "Are they still chasing us?"

"I don't... think so," Alexander said as he ran.

"Let's stop at the next clearing." They kept on running until they came to a large open area. "Whew!"

"That was close."

"Yeah. Oh my."

"Let's rest a while."

"Good idea," Alexander said. The two men lay down on the soft grass. Soon, both were asleep.

A few hours later, they awoke. It was dark out, and the forest's night noises filled the air. "Let's start a fire," Alexander said.

"No, the Indians will see it. We better go back to your hut."

"Okay." The two men started walking through the forest. After many hours of walking, Alexander said, "It seems that we're not going in the correct direction. It seems like the path keeps changing to a different direction after we pass over it!"

"Yes, we must have run off in the wrong direction. Let's just walk over this hill and then look around."

"Okay." They climbed quickly to the top of the hill. On the horizon, they could see the crumbling remains

of a once majestic castle. The rising sun shone on the ruins. Shadows played with the men's eyes, distorting the true shape of the castle. "Daimon, if I remember correctly, this is the ancient ruin of Castle Erorn. Millennia ago, the great wizards created this castle as a gateway to different planes."

"How could they do that?"

"You see, they built a similar castle on every plane of existence. The wizards then blessed every castle at the same time. Therefore, a magic portal was created."

"Let's go look around." Daimon started walking down the hill.

"Watch out for the guardian!"

"What?" A screech filled the air. A leathery flap of wings accompanied it. Daimon looked up to see a gargoyle swooping down toward him. He drew his sword.

"Don't let your eyes look at the beast!"

"What?" Daimon turned around. All he saw was the gargoyle's gleaming eyes. A violent sensation swept through Daimon's body. He had turned to stone. Alexander grabbed his dagger from the folds of his robe. The gargoyle's claws raked his back, ripping the flesh to shreds. Alexander fell down panting. The gargoyle ripped open his throat and flew off.

Minutes later, a beautiful woman appeared in the doorway of the ruins. Daimon's mother wept.

This story was handwritten in cursive using pencil. It was written for school, and my sixth grade student number accompanies my name. So I was 11, and this was written in 1984. A teacher wrote "Good word" beside "capitulating," and a couple of additional remarks in the margins: "Neatly done" and "Interesting ideas."

Clearly, I was playing Dungeons & Dragons by the time of this writing. I refer to several D&D monsters—kobolds, blink dogs, and owlbears—and incorporate aspects of roleplaying game spellcasting. The use of the phrase "autumn's twilight" echoes Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's Dragons of Autumn Twilight, which was published in November 1984. The inclusion of a song could have been inspired by Weis and Hickman or J.R.R. Tolkien. The discussion of different planes of existence suggests I'd also read Michael Moorcock's The Swords Trilogy, a much-beloved book, published in collected form in 1977.

This might be one of my most cherished pieces of childhood writing. I was so proud of the remark "Good word" in response to "capitulating."



From the Reading Pile: Comic Book Reviews

Bkwoodz Rag Vol. 1 #4 (October 2024)

A 12-page, digest-sized comic, this edition of the black-and-white *Bkwoodz Rag* aims to make good on the promise of its cover line: “Dirty comix 4 dirty minds.” The Devil—or Mr. Devil—is a caped and cowled superhero that might remind readers of Batman. After an inside front cover pinup of a demon feasting on the souls of several businessmen, Joseph Morris offers a cover for *Blasphemy Comics* #666, which contains “the amazing and unique adventures of the devil!” (The cover is a wonderful homage to that of *Detective Comics* #27.)

Jesus arrives just in time to save an altar boy from the unwelcome attention of a lecherous priest, but Jesus’s intervention is ineffective. Luckily, the Devil also soon arrives. His intervention is much more effective. The story includes a thought-provoking exhortation by the Devil: “Remember, kids, sin is a lie created by primitive slave owners to scare a populace into submission and install a corrupt priest class in place to fleece and abuse the public with impunity.” Surprisingly, the six-page piece ends with a punchline.

A slightly stream-of-consciousness two-page backup story includes several intriguing entry points, as well as a panel that evoked Joshua Quagmire’s Cutey Bunny. The issue ends with a one-page *Bkwoodz* strip that incorporates characters from previous issues. (*T&T* #135)

I continue to be impressed by Joseph Morris’s ink work, and the thematic nature of this issue might make it the most impressive that I’ve seen so far. Regardless of whether you agree with the creator’s perspective on the Catholic church—or organized religion more generally—it’s a strong statement on the relative evils of men. The main story also addresses the effectiveness of nonviolence, as well as the tension between faith and good works.

Inquire via Joseph Morris, 4511 Crossgate Dr., Champaign, IL 61822. Morris also offers a Patreon (https://www.patreon.com/josephmorris_torcpres) and offers six-month subscriptions via <https://www.torcpres.com>.

The Hunt (2024)

This eight-page, black-and-white, digest-sized, self-published comic was prepared by John Muller for the United Fanzine Organization. It’s a seven-page story that would be well served by a larger page size. The page layouts are well composed, the high-quality artwork inked excellently, and the science fictional story full of rich environmental detail as well as comedic flair.

Set in a war-torn, futuristic cityscape littered with robotic battlesuits, a four-legged, long-eared, rabbit-like alien creature is being hunted by a female sniper. At one time in her sights, the creature leads her on a merry chase through vehicular and other urban wreckage—but is soon brought to ground. Or so she thinks.

The setting is surprisingly richly depicted, the panels well detailed but not overly dense, and the set up for the humorous release at the end ably contrived. I could easily see this as a backup story related to the main piece in an ongoing series. It’s also a grand introduction to something of which I wouldn’t mind seeing more. A solid example of Muller’s storytelling and artwork.

Available for \$2 from John Muller, P.O. Box 41, Scotrun, PA 18355; johnmullerillustration@gmail.com; <https://itstoohardtothinkofagoodname.com>.

TORC Toons Vol. 2 #4 (October 2024)

This four-page, standard-sized edition of *TORC Toons* continues creator Joseph Morris’s creative take on the “funny pages.” In this edition, he offers comic strips such as *Quixote Coyote* (four strips), *Ronda Roo* and *Hank Haunt* (each with two strips), and *Bunny Kids* and *Kid UFO* (one strip each).

While each can be considered on a self-contained basis, reading them as a whole is also interesting. Topics and themes addressed include noir-styled crime, competitive boxing, Halloween, avoiding one’s death, and exploration.

I absolutely adore *TORC Toons*. Each comic strip is interesting on their own, but the overall impact of collecting them together amplifies the surreal humor and dark whimsy. It also allows Morris to play with different character designs. The opportunity to repackage these in single-strip collections once more material is on hand is obvious and appealing. Mr. Morris, I hope you’re discussing the “syndication” of these strips with other zine publishers. I, for example, would love to reprint—or print—*Kid UFO*.

Inquire via Joseph Morris, 4511 Crossgate Dr., Champaign, IL 61822; <https://www.torcpres.com>.



—William Rotsler

Screened at the Globe: Movie Reviews

Creature

A friend and I watched this 1985 sf-horror flick on video tape this week. The tape was kept in a blank tape sleeve, which suggests it was a bootleg or a copy. The video recording itself included subtitles, an Asian language we couldn't identify. They didn't interfere with our enjoyment of the movie, instead perhaps reminiscent of the script of an alien language, an element of the film's user interface.

An obvious knockoff of *Alien*, which preceded it by six years, *Creature* covers very similar ground. Corporate space crews are racing to explore alien ruins and remains found on Titan, a moon of Saturn. The facility seems to have been some kind of interstellar zoo, only some of the creatures kept have escaped—surviving for thousands of years.

The acting isn't bad overall, and Klaus Kinski shines as the sole survivor of the first space crew to arrive. He teams up with the newly arrived crew to salvage what they can—and escape with their lives. Not many escape.

The aspects of the movie that interested me most were the elements of commercial space flight, the business-led reclamation efforts, the idea of a space zoo (Someone could write a book: *Space Zoo.*), the way the alien creature controlled its hosts—which attempted to then take control of the others—and several of the more visual moments involving practical effects.

There's some gratuitous nudity, a face is peeled off, and the astronauts aren't too careful about leaving their spacecraft without their helmets. (It doesn't end well for them, but it takes longer than I'd expect.) The special effects are quite good. Robert and Dennis Skotak went on to work on *Aliens*, and *Creature* was nominated for two Saturn Awards. (It lost both to *Gremlins.*)

Interestingly, because the crew couldn't secure a studio space, they shot the movie in an abandoned industrial plant in Burbank. Despite the location, they were able to accomplish quite a bit in terms of set design. Regardless, the resulting effort is primarily composed of tight, close-up shots. Very little scale is ever visible, except for the scenes involving model spacecraft in flight.

Creature is surprisingly good. Yes, it's an *Alien* knockoff. It's still worth watching, better than many knockoffs.

The Hobbit

After rereading J.R.R. Tolkien's 1937 novel, I turned to the 1977 animated Rankin/Bass television film animated by Topcraft, a Japanese animation studio. It was first broadcast on NBC on Nov. 27, 1977—a Sunday. Contemporary reviews weren't very complimentary, though the animated film went on to win a couple of awards, and the movie remains more of a curiosity than required viewing. For quite a while, it was all we had in terms of Tolkien-related visual media.

Its voice cast exhibits some star power, though no one in particular dominates or overwhelms the voice acting overall. Orson Bean offers a serviceable Bilbo Baggins. John Huston is for the most part excellent as Gandalf and the narrator. Otto Preminger portrays the Elvenking. And Paul Frees appears in a dual role: Bombur and Troll #1. The movie is a musical, and there are songs throughout, featuring music by Glenn Yarbrough and Maury Laws. While some of the repeated themes are cloying—primarily the theme song—the music fails to either astound or offend while still offering a straight line to later musical adaptations of Tolkien's in-text poetry and song lyrics.

Having just read the book, I did notice a couple of notable gaps in the adaptation. Beorn and the scenes

involving him don't appear in the animated film. And the Arkenstone doesn't come into play. Instead, the greed of Thorin Oakenshield and the other dwarves is sufficient to inspire them to seek shelter in Erebor or the Lonely Mountain, in opposition to the others laying claim on their treasure. Neither omission detracts from the resulting movie, though purists might rankle.

I found the animation more interesting than distracting or disappointing. While Bilbo Baggins himself might have been a little too cute in terms of character design, the other character designs were impressive, especially the willowy stature of Gandalf. Even more impressive was the background animation and scenes, the setting. The animators captured the mystery and bleakness of the landscape and environment quite well.

At one time, I imagine that this was quite a con staple. I wonder when it was last screened at a Loscon.



Los Angeles Times, June 5, 1959

The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey

I also turned my attention to the first of the three movies making up Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Hobbit*. Released in 2012, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* offers a runtime of two hours and 49 minutes, while the 1977 *The Hobbit* is only an hour and a half long. *The Hobbit* adapted the entire novel—with some notable exclusions (see above)—while *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* only goes up to chapter six.

The result feels a little bloated and padded, even when watching again, though it's not a bad adaptation. While *The Hobbit* left out the Arkenstone, that is where the 2012 movie begins. Radagast, merely mentioned as Gandalf's cousin in the novel, is more fully present in the more recent movie, with entire scenes featuring a character that wasn't really present in the book. *Doctor Who* alumnus Sylvester McCoy shines in that role. (Besides: Rabbit sleds!)

Similarly, Thorin Oakenshield is given an antagonist that didn't necessarily exist in the novel. In the book, indicating that the dwarves fought the orcs seemed sufficient. In the movie, Thorin faces an orc chieftain, Azog the Defiler, who returns later in the movie. I don't point these things out as flaws in the adaptation, or as unnecessary, just to indicate what was done to extend the film's runtime. It all works relatively well and doesn't detract from the focus of

the narrative.

The film is beautiful. Howard Shore's music is wonderful and the singing of the dwarves glorious. Filmed in New Zealand and England, the locations are breathtaking and successfully capture the scope of the travels of Thorin and Company. The CGI animation of the dwarven city, the trolls, the goblins, the wargs, the orcs, Gollum—even the eagles—is decent enough. While Andy Serkis's Gollum received a lot of worthy attention, I think Barry Humphries's Goblin King is even more impressive and fun. "That'll do it." And the animation of Goblin Town offers wonderful fodder for those who enjoy playing the *Middle-earth Strategy Battle Game*.

It feels a little strange to "review" this movie because so many of you have probably seen it more than once. I'm making a point not to review the novel even though I just read it. But I wanted to share my experience moving from novel to animated film and movie trilogy—which is an experience worth pursuing.

I also recently found my compact discs of the BBC Radio 4 production, which was originally broadcast in 1968. We'll see if I can hold off on starting to listen to that until after I watch the next two movies. *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* is two hours and 41 minutes long. *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* is two hours and 24 minutes long. The BBC radio program is a mere three hours and 45 minutes long. When the next adaptation is made, I wonder how long it will be? Days upon days.

Hmm... with each episode of *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*—which adapts Tolkien's appendices (appendices!) from the Lord of the Rings—clocking in at between 61-76 minutes in length, that's already between 16 and 21 hours, roughly. Season three will push that into the second day of viewing. All based on a book that can be read in a few hours or so.

Coffee and Comic Books

If you like comic books—and you like coffee—chances are good you'll enjoy Comics on Coffee (<https://www.comiconcoffee.com>). The Florida-based family-owned coffee company offers premium coffee inspired by comic books, superheroes, and the Lord of the Rings. Available in whole and ground bean, recent coffee options include Cyborg: Cybernetic Candy Apple, Hyde Street Blood Orange Coffee, Batgirl: Gotham City Ginger, and Mad Love for Raspberry Coffee—featuring Harley Quinn and the Joker.

Quite a while ago, inspired by seeing an advertisement on social media, I tried two flavors: Batman Dark Knight Roast and Superman Metropolis

Mocha. Of the two flavors, my wife and I especially enjoyed the mocha. But you're buying so much more than coffee—you're also buying comics!

On the back of the Batman Dark Knight Roast, a page from *Detective Comics* #27 (May 1939) was reproduced in full color. The back of the Superman Metropolis Mocha bag of beans offered a page from *Superman* #65 (July 1950). Not all of the bags seem to feature comic pages, but if that's what you're looking for, you might find delight in the two flavors I tried, as well as the Wonder Woman Paradise Island, Scarecrow Cinnamon Spice, and Ghost Roast: Light Roast (*Ghost Machine*) options.

It's an interesting idea: comic book-inspired flavored coffee—and comic pages on the backs of the bags. It's not quite the same as reading the back of a cereal box while you eat breakfast, but I got a kick out of reading—and rereading, and rereading—the pages from *Detective Comics* and *Superman* as I drank the resulting cups of coffee.

Comics and coffee: What could go better together?

The Ignorable Theme: Planning

“How far ahead into the future do you plan?”

These days, not very far given the uncertainty in the world—who knows what will happen next—while somehow also looking forward five to 10 years, sometimes 15. We've begun to prepare for our eventual move out of the Los Angeles area, and depending on how things go, that could be as early as midyear. We'll likely move to Wisconsin to be closer to my parents and sister—and to establish a footing in the midwest before we return to Portugal later this year. Longer term, we like the idea of living in the Chicago area because of the number of friends there.

In the immediate term, I looked forward to this week Wednesday, when I recognized my 52nd birthday. We might go to Illinois near the end of March for the funeral of a friend's father. My wife and I are making life plans more generally that presume we'll begin taking advantage of Social Security when we turn 67. That accounts for a 15-year timespan that we need to bridge financially if we decide to stop working sooner than later. I haven't yet set a stop-work date, so that falls prey to near-term planning. Besides, it feels weird to consider that step retirement given my age. We'll see how that shakes out when we move to Wisconsin.

When considering Portugal, we're looking at a five-year time span between claiming residency and gaining citizenship. That would then open up the rest of the European Union for more active travel and additional residency options. And all of this is precipitated by our son going to college in Tokyo.

He's expected to finish coursework in mid-2026—when we'll go to Japan for graduation. With the beginning of his professional life at hand, our need to stay in the Los Angeles area is less strong, and we can explore other options.

We moved here from New York City 16 years ago to live closer to him, sharing custody with his mother, and we were lucky enough that he moved in with us. That was a wonderful family focus for almost a decade. Now that he's in college, we can turn our attention back to family, our parents elderly and siblings living in the midwest.

The opportunity to live between Wisconsin and Portugal is a lot of fun to think about and plan for—and helps us better manage the near-term uncertainty and chaos given the state of politics in our home country. It'd be more challenging if we didn't have these other life plans underway. It's pretty exciting.



Los Angeles Times, June 5, 1959

Comments on APA-L #3109

After several lower-participant and -page count

distributions, last week's mailing was a joy to behold. Not only were John Hertz, Matthew Mitchell, and I joined by Joe Zeff, we saw the return of Barbara Gratz Harmon and C.D. Carson. Thank you, all, for participating! (It's fun when we're not all here, and it's more fun when we are all here.)

In *Vanamonde* #1632, **John Hertz** looked forward to the upcoming Original Renaissance Pleasure Faire (<https://renfair.com/socal>), which begins in April. In the spirit of planning (see above), my wife and I already plan to participate—we've discussed spending a day there—though I've yet to buy tickets. The planners among us can do so now! I agree with Mr. Hertz that the faire is a wonderful example of fanarchy in action. Sometimes, what we're able to pull off when working together is surprising!

I also like to think about ren faires as operating at several layers of reality simultaneously. (I might have shared this before.) You have the re-enactors staffing the event. You have participants who also attend as slightly more amateur re-enactors, but not on staff. You have people who participate wearing period garb but not necessarily going so far as to re-enact. You have people who go to cosplay, perhaps during one of the theme days such as steampunk or fae. You have people who go in street clothes. And you have people who are there, drunk or high, experiencing the event at another level entirely regardless of their status otherwise. All of that co-exists, and none of us experiences the same faire. The faire contains multitudes.

I will share your feedback with cover artist Joe Pearson. I disagree with your interpretation of my review of Sam Maggs's *The Fangirl's Guide to the Galaxy*. (T&T #149) While the book does target readers who might still be mundane, the author is certainly a fan—and the book fannish. Given the prevalence of sf media these days, it makes sense that that is offered as an entry point to fandom. Regardless, literary fandom—e.g. books—are still present in the text, as I indicated in the review. It is a great book I would recommend for younger people who might be interested in fandom. They can find their own way once inside the Big Tent. I have not read Patrick Dennis's *Auntie Mame*.

Matthew Mitchell's *The Form Letter of Things Unknown* #95 offered a conrep on his time at Gallifrey One. Since the occurrence of this year's *Doctor Who* convention, it's been announced that the last Galli will occur in 2028. Its organizers will then retire from conrunning. (<https://www.gallifreyone.com/2028finale>). United Kingdom-based Showmasters Events is expected to launch a for-profit con to replace it. I will share your feedback with cover artist Mark

Bondurant.

Ooh! You'd be Bilbo Baggins to your sons as Frodo. Nice. When traveling, it's sometimes wise to bring an empty container of some kind. When going to and from Portugal, my wife and I often take our suitcases as well as a full duffel bag that, once empty, can be packed in the suitcase to return.

In *Reflections from a Fish Bowl* #69, **Barbara Gratz Harmon** returned to the pages of APA-L! Welcome back, Barbara. I hope you're able to resume contributing, too, but can understand the responsibilities of life. I hope you continue to heal fully and quickly from your recent surgery. How much notice did Kaiser give you for the scheduling of your surgery? I now have four boxes packed, stacked by the door, ready to mail to various library archives, as well as a couple of items for individual friends. I'll mail the smaller packages and two boxes Friday when I mail APA-L.

C.D. Carson also returned, with *Always Going Home* #49. "Nothing but natter," but still managing to contribute four pages. Natter on, I say! I'm sorry you didn't participate in the North American Science Fiction Convention. One of the best—and worst—things about fan-run cons is that they're run by fen. Did you get to check out any of AnimeFest (<https://www.animefest.org>) beyond your display? My first introduction to you, if I remember correctly, was an anime screening schedule.

Your travels to and through Europe adjacent to Worldcon sound wonderful. Your globetrotting sure covered a lot of ground! How was FenCon? (<http://www.fencon.org>) I was sorry to learn of the death of your friend Lars Clausen. I condole with you and his family.

In *Toony Loons* #790, **Joe Zeff** updated ellers on transporting Marcia Minsky to the airport for Gallifrey One. Wow. Waking at 4 a.m. can be brutal. Indeed, plantains "don't taste a bit" like bananas. I can understand liking one but disliking the other.

I will share your feedback with cover artist Jose Sanchez. I appreciated your response to my grouching about inactive participants. You are entirely right. "Welcome to APA-L," which follows the table of contents, does indeed include the text "Pay 75 cents per disty one isn't otherwise entitled to." I should at least update that to indicate that that cost depends on market rates for printing and postage. Version 20, here we come! Thank you for talking me through my occasional frustration with the labors of printing, collation, and mailing. Distributions when it's just two or three of us are particularly challenging.

The Explosion Containment Umbrella #28

Feb. 28, 2025

The Explosion Containment Umbrella is an apazine published by Blasted 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 #250

Wonderful Alan White cover! His work graced the cover of this week's APA-L distribution, as well. I do believe that BEM is pilfering a brassiere! Naughty, naughty BEM.

Let's I forget, reaching our 250th distribution or emailing is a notable milestone. According to *Fancylopedia 3*, "The Electronic APA ... was founded in 2004," so our 20th anniversary was last year. <https://efanzines.com/eapa> indicates that the first edition was published in May 2004. It looks as though Ahrvid Engholm wrote an article recognizing the 10th anniversary of the apa, so he might have additional information. Who was the founding OE? Have we had other OEs other than that person and Garth Spencer? Do we have a record of all the passwords to access back issues? Can current participants access those back issues? I'm curious who's been involved over the years, what our participant counts have been over time, and so forth. It might be a good idea for us to flesh out the *Fancy 3* entry a little bit.

In *I Never Got the Hang of Thursdays* #230, **Garth Spencer** asked whether proposed themes for each mailing would be a helpful writing prompt. Because *The Explosion Containment Umbrella* is largely a commentzine, I try to at least comment on the previous mailing every month. Were you to propose a theme, I'd likely take that on, as well. We do have precedent in other apae. Alarums & Excursions includes an Ignorable Theme every mailing, which participants can choose to address—or not. It is, after all, ignorable. I adopted the use of the Ignorable Theme for APA-L, as well. I try to address it each distribution, but uptake among other participants has been minimal. Increasingly, people address the topic in passing rather than at length, but even an extra sentence or two contributes to filling a page. Why not try it?

You've already proposed several such topics, which we can use to start a list:

- Antarctic colonization

- First contact with aliens who greet us with "When are you going to stop abducting our people?"
- Fantasies of liberating the United States from the clutches of monomaniacal corporate elites with fake tans and tiny hands and feet
- Faanfiction about the nonexistent Liberal Secular Rational Humanist Cult, which does everything differently than a cult does

Los Angeles Times, June 5, 1959

When I introduced the concept to APA-L, I just started including a running list of the next three in the table of contents—and including my own writing addressing the topic. I continue to enjoy it, even if others haven't embraced it as enthusiastically.

What eAPA offered that other apae didn't when it launched was that it was PDF only. That's no longer as

strong a differentiator. While many apae remain print only, more apae are now available as PDFs—such as ANZAPA—so we might think about what our new claim to fame is. I was drawn to eAPA because of the international aspect of the apa. We have participants from Canada, Sweden, England, and with me, the United States. I know the geography of ANZAPA’s members has diversified since it went PDF only, but perhaps eAPA is the international apa, or Earth’s apa. That actually has a nice ring to it.



Los Angeles Times, June 5, 1959

Marcin Klak in Poland recently expressed interest in APA-L. I’ll consider redirecting his interest to eAPA. We could start gently targeting new participants from actifen in countries around the world—even just for a fanac report from their country. For example, in *Beam* #18, Ian Sales wrote about three different

Nordic cons. We could identify candidates through such writing. Just imagine how cool Earth’s apa could be!

I am glad that you are no longer “the upstairs tenant who regularly flooded the washroom downstairs whenever I took a shower.” How often did that happen? Every time you showered? You described a story inspired by Robert Service’s “The Ballad of the Ice-Worm Cocktail” as “really scraping the bottom of the barrel.” Was it, though? One could do much worse in terms of inspiration. Your comment will send me to reread Service, which is always worth doing. Now I’m curious what the story was, to see if it was bad in itself.

While I don’t think Henry Grynnsen’s essays are extended practical jokes—he takes the topics quite seriously—I do think he tries to provoke thought and challenge assumptions. I think his writing is an exercise to shock or jar his own mental systems and established thought processes, as well as ours. I don’t always fully agree with his conclusions—or even his assumptions—but I applaud the paths he takes and generally find that where he ends up is reasonable, given the path followed.

In terms of Putin and Trump’s administrations, I’m suspicious it’s all grift, though on a national and international scale. I wonder whether enough citizens will be harmed to incite larger-scale protests, a major sea change in the midterm elections, or violence. In Russia, Putin’s been able to suppress citizen discontent. I’m not sure Trump has the support or systems in place to do so yet in America, but the militarization of our police makes me think the presidential crimes could lead to violence against citizens. The Kent State shootings occurred in 1970. The Waco siege took place in 1993. The MOVE bombings were in 1985. Those aren’t all entirely similar—all represent police action against citizens, however—but they didn’t occur that long ago.

Your mention of *Cerebus the Aardvark* was welcome and timely. I recently began to reread the High Society storyline, and the comic book remains absolutely wonderful. One of the best ever.

Henry Grynnsen’s *Wild Ideas* #56 considered the work of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart for the fourth time. So doing, he interviewed three researchers who studied Mozart’s Musical Diary, or Thematic Catalog. While I haven’t read *Wild Ideas* #18—it was before my time in eAPA—I am delighted by your adoption of the interview format. Q&A interviews are an underutilized approach in fanzines, and I applaud the solid example of how well it can work.

Was the interview conducted via email or video conferencing? (Ah, at the end, you indicate it was

conducted by mail.) At times, the subjects' responses suggest the former, but at other times, the exchanges are more conversational. I'm not sure how to interpret responses from more than one interview subject, such as the "Anna & Luca" answers. (So I imagined them speaking at the same time, or writing the exact same thing.)

Overall, I find their case quite compelling, and it makes sense that others aren't enthusiastically raising the banner. As Luca Bianchini said, "If the catalog is fake, an entire industry collapses..." A very interesting issue.

In his mailing comments, Grynnssten expressed disinterest in fantasy. Fair enough. I recently reread *The Hobbit* before watching the 1977 animated film and 2012's *The Unexpected Journey*. (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #153) It's an important work, and the influence of J.R.R. Tolkien remains strong to this day, but if it's not your cup of tea, there's plenty of other tea to drink.

Perhaps Ahrvid Engholm should consider collecting his short fiction—even as a Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund fundraiser. Thank you for informing me about *Kronblom*. Not only was it a comic strip, dating back to 1927, there was a movie in 1947 and at least one sequel. (Talk about franchises!) The character's first appearance was in a biweekly comic book titled *91:an*, and three generations of Perssons have drawn it—the most recent starting in 2006. *Atlas Obscura* includes a folk art installation north of Stockholm. (<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/kronblom-on-a-walk>) PDFs can occasionally be found online, and one site also offers Swedish comics such as *Jeremiah*, *Tex Willer*, *Lilla Fridolf*, *Ernie*, and *Serietidningen Toppserien*.

"Caffeine was developed by plants as a defense mechanism against insects, not against humans..." Fascinating. Somehow I missed that while reading your original essay.

And in *Intermission* #151, **Ahrvid Engholm** explored President Trump's lack of Fingerspitzengefühl. I'd not encountered the concept of "finger tips feeling," a phrase meaning intuitive flair or instinct, but it's applicable. So many currently in positions of leadership in America don't have the skills required to do their jobs well, the intent or interest to do so, or interest in acting on behalf of the American people. Instead, we have some people doing whatever the heck they want to regardless of the voice or needs of the people. The people have become a liability.

In addition to Neil Gaiman and Walter Breen, fandom has also experienced controversies related to Joss Whedon (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #4), Marion

Zimmer Bradley (whom you mention, also *T&T* #4), David Eddings (*T&T* #147), and Piers Anthony (*T&T* #41). I, too, am interested in such controversies.

Your report on Kjell Genberg's birthday was enjoyable, as was the posthumous celebration of Thor Modéen. The quotation "If you mix an appropriate amount of farmer's maid novels with an appropriate amount of Swedish humour you get a lager film." I think I need to read these farmer's maid novels.

Admittedly, I scrolled through the "History Corner" focusing on the computerization of Sweden, but I was impressed by the selection of articles and translations offered. Thank you recommending Karin Tidbeck, Anders Fager, John Ajvide Lindqvist, and Johan Theorin. I also appreciated your exchange with Mark Nelson. "Let's pretend we had a con." Brilliant! Who else is going to EarthCon—or is it UrfCon? I've seen both spellings on different fliers—later this year?

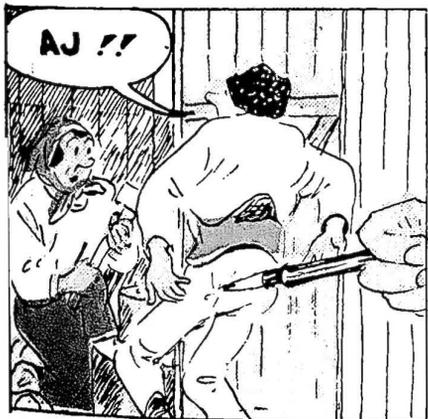
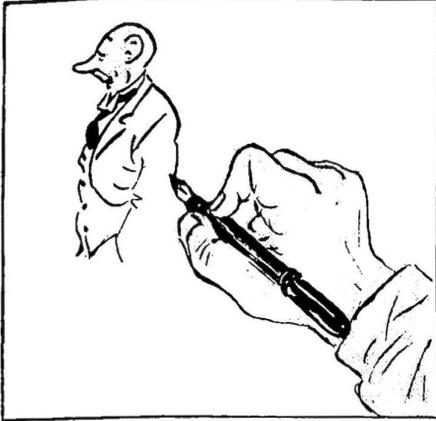


Los Angeles Times, June 5, 1959



Kronblom

SVENSK ORIGINALSERIE AV ELOV PERSSON



STOPP DÄR, KRONBLOM! LÄGG DEJ INTE PÅ SOFFAN! DU SKA UT OCH HUGGA VED!

JÄ, MEN DU HAR INTE SATT PÅ MED HATTEN!
DET ÄR LÄTT ORD NAT!

DU SKA FÖRRESTEN FÅ EN VARM SKINNMÖSSA IDAG!

DEN OTÄCKA TECKNAREN HÄRJAR DÄ MED EN!

MEN HÄR STÄR JU MALIN OCH HUGGER!
DET FINNS INTE JOBB FÖR MEJ!

AJ !!

STICKER DU MEJ MED PENNAN, DIN ---
HUGG NU ISTÄLLET FÖR MALIN INNAN JAG STICKER DEJ IGEN!

ÄNEJ, KRONBLOM! NU SKA DU INTE VÄLJA UT DE SMALASTE VEDTRÄNA!

NEJ, DET HÄR KOMMER JAG ALDRIG ATT KLARA AV!

VÄNTA BARA DU! DET HÄR KOMMER DU ATT FÅ IGEN, DIN SADIST!



Kronblom

SVENSK ORIGINALSERIE AV ELOV PERSSON



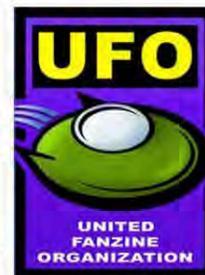
Kronblom

SVENSK ORIGINALSERIE AV ELOV PERSSON



The UFO Checklist

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STRANGE TIMES #6 (\$15 on Amazon physical copy, or \$14 for digital PDF at <https://phoenixprods.gumroad.com/>) The stunning abilities of Keith Newsome, comic artist, musician, makeup artist, body painting specialist, author, poet, writer, are on full display in this gorgeous full color, full size (8 1/2" x 11") publication from Tom Fellrath. Many illustrations and paintings (check out his dragon illos!) are featured, as well as commentary on his amazing life journey!



TALES OF THE BROKEN B #6 (\$6.50 ppd. from Larry Johnson, 31 Greenbrook Road, Hyde Park, MA 02136 or PayPal to LewBrown1@Verizon.net, or order directly from Larry's email address) Gypsies arrive at the Broken B Ranch, offering items for sale along with dancing and entertainment. The cowboys of the late 1880s welcome them and are mesmerized by their talent and culture... until tragedy occurs! A gripping yarn filled with mystery and adventure, highlighted by the masterful artwork and storytelling of Larry Johnson. This is an issue not to be missed!

AND STILL AVAILABLE



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