

An Editorial By Chris

It's weird Hollywood! Hollywood, and LA in general, is a place I love, and a place that is undeniably strange. New York, where I visited a couple of weeks ago, isn't weird as much as it is stiff. LA is, ultimately, loose and that leaves a lot of room for the weird to get out!

There's Hugo controversy. You don't need us to tell you that though, right?

I've been traveling, and then sick. Vanessa got it way worse than I did and I've been taking care of her. It Ain't easy.

It's also Cinequest time and I've managed a few days there, hanging with filmmakers and even seeing a movie! *Tim Travers & The Time Traveler's Paradox* is a fantastic film made by the cousin of a friend of mine! It's got Joel McHale, from *Community*, and Felicia Day! I got to manage the Q&A after the film and it went incredibly well! It's a foul-mouthed, violent, hilarious science fiction short film.

OK, enough of that! It's time for a look at Weird Hollywood!!!

Cover by Joe Artist



Nghi Vo's *Siren Queen* Reviewed by Chuck Serface

Figurative language about Hollywood has been circulating through human discourse since cinema first entered the world. “Hollywood magic,” for instance, refers to special effects or related techniques employed to illustrate desires and fears across the “silver screen.” This fantastical imagery occludes the malevolence behind the curtain, the industry itself, which receives metaphorical treatment as well, as, for example, when the media discusses “lupine” or “predatory” studio executives, and so we might imagine them being lycanthropes, beasts wearing human disguises. What emerges is a superficial fairy realm with underlying traps for unwary aspirants seeking a piece of the dream.

Nghi Vo amplifies her themes by transforming magic from symbolic language into something that exists. She brings readers into a Pre-Code Hollywood where movie stars truly burn brightly once achieving greatness, earning their places in the *actual* sky. Those lupine studio executives? Yes, werewolves (or something similar) stalk lots and sets, hunting contracted actors and sacrificing them to hellish entities to maintain their power. Nghi’s Hollywood reads like a poem by Samuel Coleridge, a vision true until the paint begins chipping off. Vo never defines a system for her magic, content to leave it as an accepted facet of her narrative, like the magical realism found in works by Toni Morrison, Isabel Allende, and Gabriel García Márquez.

We witness this otherworld Hollywood through the eyes of Luli Wei, an ambitious young woman desiring her place among the greats. Luli’s no ingénue, however. She clearly demands, “No maids, no funny talking, no fainting flowers.” She won’t succumb to Chinese stereotypes and would rather play the monster than the maid. She’s also queer, and readers see how career-minded professionals hid their identities and relationships, fearing that discovery would ruin them forever. That, unfortunately, all too directly mirrors our Hollywood.

Whether Vo intends it, Luli loosely reflects Anna May Wong, a pioneer who defied Asian stereotypes and eventually left for Europe when pressures became too strong. Beneath the magic, Pre-Code Hollywood is negotiation, exploitation, and marginalization. Nonetheless, Luli perseveres, finally scoring a recurring role as the Siren, a creature set against Captain Nemo in a series of films calling to mind old-time serials or the Universal Monsters franchise.

Interestingly, Luli never reveals her birth name, and she only refers to herself as Luli Wei after stealing this from her sister, which makes sense. I couldn’t imagine calling Joan Crawford “Lucille” or “Ms. Lesueur,” or Judy Garland “Frances” or “Ms. Gumm.” Luli comes into being when she’s accepted into the studio and partially succumbs to the glamour, the point at which she renames herself. When she signs that contract with that newly stolen name, that’s where her



story starts. She names herself, though, rejecting names the studio head suggests. She'll play the game, but as much as possible she'll do so her way.

Siren Queen is about more than Hollywood. It's about racism and homophobia both within the glitter and beyond. Imagine how many stars married to cover up their LGBTQ+ truths, and look how many white actors played yellow-face characters while perpetrating the stereotypes that Luli Wei and our very own Anna May Wong strove to avoid. I adore Myrna Loy and Boris Karloff, but I can't watch *The Mask of Fu Manchu* without squirming. Does Luli Wei meet a happy ending? Does she self-actualize and achieve sustainable happiness unlike many from Filmland? We could spend several classroom sessions discussing the possibilities. I will say, however, that throughout Luli never entirely surrenders.

No doubt, Vo will enjoy a long, successful writing career. After finishing *Siren Queen*, I immediately picked up her first novel, *The Chosen and the Beautiful*, a magical retelling of *The Great Gatsby*. Jordan Baker's the narrator, not Nick Carraway, and Vo switches her into a Vietnamese woman who's queer -- and it works. I'll be pre-ordering offerings from this author for the rest of my days.

She's just that good.



DAVID
GILLO

The Hollywood Avant-Garde by Christopher J. Garcia

Hollywood is where experimentation goes to die, get taxidermized, and sold as living room ornamentation.

That's probably the worst metaphor I've ever written, but there's a truth to it that I can see, and if you can't, just let your eyes glaze and follow the paths between the words until the article ends.

There's a long history of avant-garde filmmaking in Hollywood. These came in waves, followed by troughs, sometimes deep and long ones, that make you realize just how impressive it was that so much incredible experimentation was going on at various points.

It was in the 1920s that we saw the first real avant-garde films coming out of Hollywood, largely from folks who would later go on to become significant players in the system, and in a couple of cases, were already making money in the studio system themselves. The best example of this might be Robert Florey.

Born in Paris, Florey worked in movies starting at about the age of 20, but pretty quickly made his way to the United States. Landing in Hollywood, he became a journalist and press agent, which got him into the sights of the various studios, allowing him to start freelancing as an assistant director and then directing films for Tiffany, Stirling, and Columbia, all considered fairly down-market studios.

He also started making avant-garde pictures, financing them himself with tiny budgets. His first avant-garde film was a short called *Johann the Coffinmaker*. It's sadly lost, but from the surviving stills and descriptions, it was a doozy:

Having received an order for a child's coffin on Christmas Eve, old Johann induces a few of the dead to return from their graves. He offers a bottle of wine to a murderous Apache, a soldier, and a prostitute, asking them to relate how they met their deaths. When they return to their homes beneath the sod, the coffin maker hears a knock at the door. It is his own bride – Death. Together they climb into a casket he built for himself. And he closes down the lid.

Chipper, right?

This was his first foray into the world of the Avant-Garde, though some of his mainstream films had significant elements of the fantastic. The film was influenced by the German Expressionists who found hits with *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Nosferatu*.

This also influenced his most successful avant-garde short venture, *The Life and Death of 9413: A Hollywood Extra*.

This is, by a fair margin, my favorite short film, my favorite avant-garde film, and one of my all-time favorite films. Teaming with cinematographer Slavko Vorkapić, the pair used a kitchen table to create a tableau of a mythical Hollywood, clearly influenced by films like *Metropolis*. Slavko understood how to make a miniature into some-



thing grand, which is no small feat. The story is a classic (and was recycled by Florey in the feature *Hollywood Boulevard* in 1938, and later the music video for “Welcome to the Jungle”, and partly Tom Petty’s “Into the Great Wide Open”) a young man comes to Hollywood with the dream of being a star. The Studio Head writes 9413 on his forehead and he becomes an extra while others become stars ahead of him. Much of the film is in close-ups or shots of the miniatures. The sensation of the film -- and that’s what this film is ultimately about -- is one of disquiet, of failure, of transcendence, and very much of the Hollywood grind.

Even in the late 1920s, the idea of Hollywood as the graveyard for dreams was prominent.

You can still see Florey's masterpiece on YouTube, and the most avant-garde of the films he did for studios, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, again shows the clear influence of German Expressionism . . . probably aided by the fact that it was shot by cinematographer Karl Freund, who shot *The Golem*, a classic of German Expressionist filmmaking.

Several American avant-garde filmmakers were working around the country. The same year, a pair of amateur filmmakers made *The Fall of the House of Usher*, considered one of the most important films in the development of American avant-garde film.

There were many other Hollywoodlanders who worked in experimental film in the late 1920s and 1930s. Many experimental animators came to work for the big studios, including Oskar Fischinger, who made one of his most important films, *An Optical Poem*, in Hollywood for MGM.

The second generation of avant-garde masters featured a Ukrainian who came to America and eventually landed in Hollywood and one that didn't so much come to Hollywood as sprung from its filthy loins.

Maya Deren came to Hollywood from Kyiv by way of New York City. The avant-garde film scene there had been thriving since the late 1920s, but Deren didn't get into it until she arrived in Los Angeles in 1943 when she created *Meshes of the Afternoon*. This is seen as an absolute watershed moment in American experimental cinema and, in many ways the launching point for personal filmmaking. It's an incredibly important film, one that uses camera techniques to tell the story. Its movement, fluid and agile, though a bit jumpy and nervous, works completely in opposition to the Hollywood cinema aesthetic of the time.

The other, the recently passed Kenneth Anger, might not have invented queer cinema, or occult cinema, but he certainly brought both to an entirely new level. A highly disciplined Thelemite (and friend of Forry's) he created incredible experimental films, including *Fireworks*, considered to be one of the most important films in the creation of queer cinema for its exploration of homoerotic and sadomasochistic themes and imagery. There's no question that it influenced artists like Tom of Finland, and filmmakers like David Lynch. His other films, like *Lucifer Rising*, are far more interested in exploring the occult and Magick than going back over homoerotic material, though it's evident in every piece I've seen of his.

These films, along with the rise of film festival culture, led to a significant growth in the area of avant-garde cinema. Mostly, these pieces were created by those outside Hollywood, though many were intended as calling cards for entry into the system. Film schools like UCLA and USC produced some incredible experimental cinema, including a few pieces from the likes of Jim Morrison. The Avant-Garde as a target didn't penetrate Hollywood, really the Los Angeles Basin, until the 1970s and the rise of CalArts.

The California Institute for the Arts was founded in 1961 as a merger between an arts academy and the LA Conservatory of Music. The place had some rocky periods, but a few really important figures rose to prominence and influenced a massive number of students in visual, performing, sound, and cinematic arts. John Baldasseri led a camp that was dedicated to conceptualism, with noted adepts like Chris Burden. Allan Kaprow was the leader of the Fluxus camp, which I would say the group The Kipper Kids falls into, though perhaps that's too limiting.

In film, it was Ed Emshwiller.

One of the true leaders in American avant-garde cinema for his films like *George Dumpson's Place*, as well as works like *Sunstone*, done in New York. He founded the Computer Animation Lab at CalArts but then ended up as the Dean of Film/Video school, and eventually Provost.

In the 1980s, the explosion of Video Art in Los Angeles can be tied to the works that were coming out of CalArts. You had Chris Burden, but he'd been doing the thing since the 1970s. Bret Goldstone, who also released multimedia works, that evolved out of the work of so many CalArts folks, including Nam June Paik, is usually pointed to as the inventor of Video Art. It was the epicenter of American Video Art, even more than New York City.

Avant-garde film and video work helped define eras of Los Angeles motion picture work. Florey went on to make mainstream work, and Disney uses CalArts as a recruitment station. That's enough to tell me that when the going gets weird, the weird go pro.





Born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, Maila Elizabeth Syrjäniemi spent her youth in Astoria, Oregon working for fish canneries. After high school, she developed grander ambitions and headed to New York and Los Angeles, where she acted, danced, and flirted with greatness. Finally, in 1954, now known as Maila Nurmi, she entered pop culture notoriety, initiating a fine tradition for weirdos across the land, the television horror host. Crafting a look based partly on Charles Addams's maternal figure from his creepy *New Yorker* cartoons, later named Morticia for the famous *Addams Family* sitcom, Maila morphed into Vampira, and for a year, she held Los Angeles spellbound with her macabre quirkiness laced with innuendo and her strong individualist nature, briefly hitting the big time, all while hosting B-grade horror and mystery films on *The Vampira Show*.

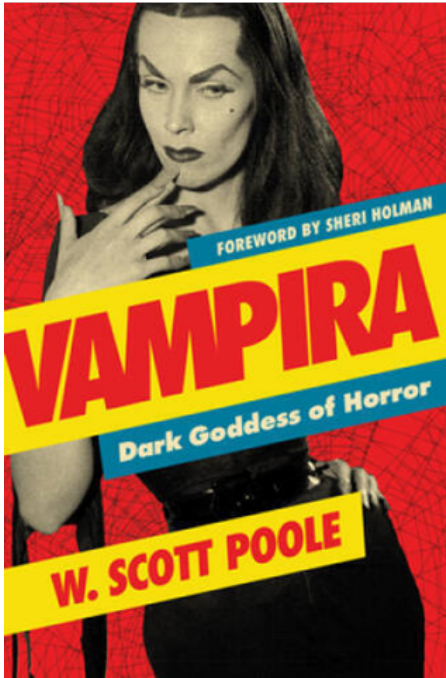
Today, stills and snippets bounce around the Internet, but no complete episodes or passages of length exist other than Nurmi's appearances on *The Red Skelton Show* and *The George Gobel Show*. My first encounter with her was Ed Wood's *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. So was yours, I imagine. Thanks to punk rockers, goths, and horror aficionados, Vampira has been enjoying a cult renaissance over the last decade and a half. She was the first, people! She launched a phenomenon that includes Zacherly, Seymour, Bob Wilkins, Ghoulardi, Sammy Terry, Svengoolie, Mr. Lobo, Joe Bob Briggs, Morgus the Magnificent, Elvira, and others sharing their love for cheap horror over stations, public access, and streaming platforms.

Wanting to learn more about her, I read four books about or related to Nurmi. Each approaches her from different aspects—the sociocultural by a Professor of History at the College of Charleston, the purely biographical presented by a loving niece, and two illustrating how her landmark efforts spawned a magnificent industry. Feel free to scream. Vampira found it relaxing. You might too.

***Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror*
by W. Scott Poole**

W. Scott Poole admits that his book isn't a traditional biography of Vampira, whom he describes as a "religion without a holy scripture." The problem? Nurmi rarely spoke about her childhood, and what she did share were fabrications designed to boost her image. She adopted the last name "Nurmi" after Finnish runner Paavo Nurmi, insinuating that they were related. Poole flatly states that Nurmi "lied a great deal about her background." This is no indictment, however. Nurmi sought acclaim in an industry based on a fantasy world that believed Mervyn LeRoy discovered a 16-year-old Lana Turner at

**Getting to Know the First Television
Hostess of Horror: Four Books About
Vampira
Reviewed by Chuck Serface**



Schwab's Drugstore, where Marion Morrison rode across the screen as John Wayne, and where Archibald Leach evolved into the eternally suave Cary Grant. Creative imagery and mythical self-promotion define the Hollywood game, but unfortunately for Nurmi, it didn't pan out well at all.

Rather than the subject herself, Poole explores social forces happening around Nurmi, forces that influenced the birth of Vampira while she partly influenced them. What bits and pieces we know about Nurmi and her Vampira – how her costume garnered notice at Lester Horton's 1953 Bal Caribe, leading to a job at KABC-TV, and thus becoming the first television horror host, for example – provide a framework for the author's discussion about 1950s cultural trends, particularly those affecting women. Domestic containment, the pin-up phenomenon, Cold War paranoia, and rampant consumerism all receive attention.

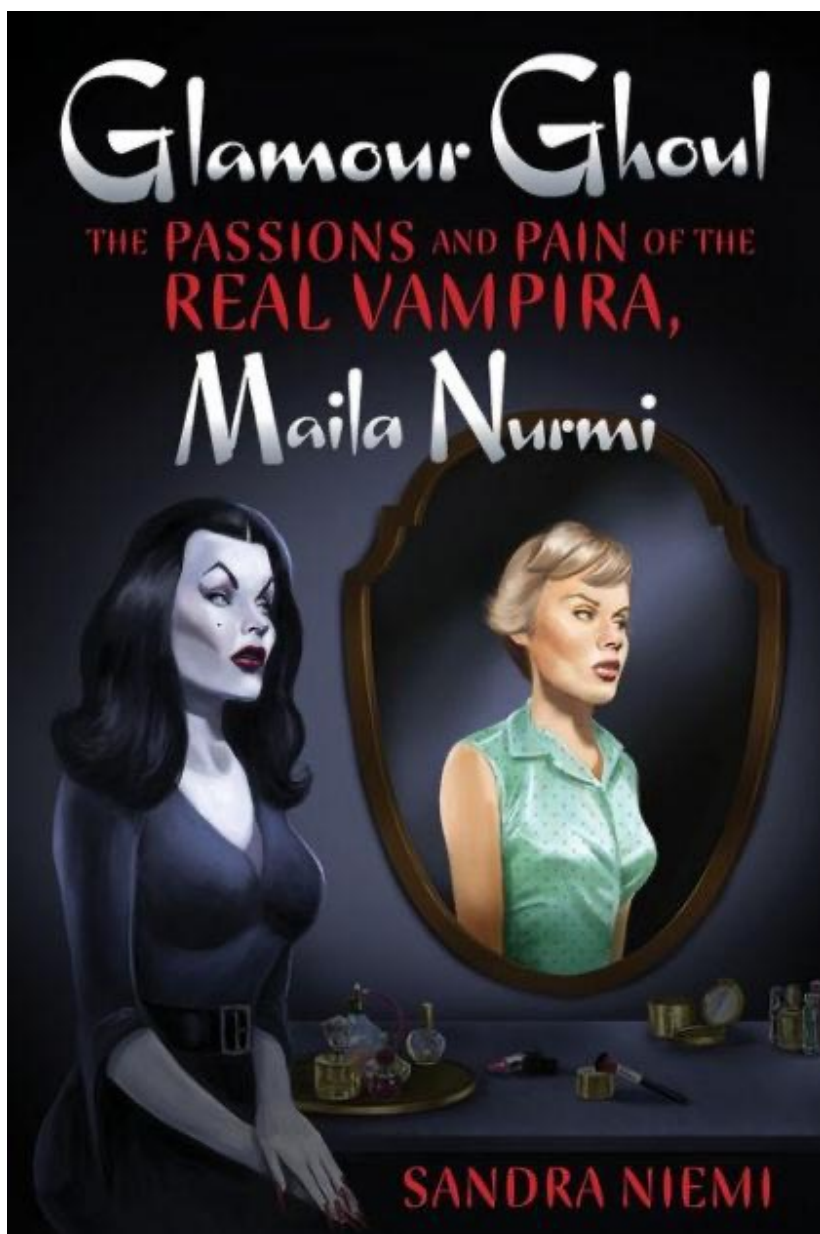
Those hoping for details about Nurmi herself might feel disappointed unless they willingly let go of expectations and go with Poole's flow because *Vampira: Dark Goddess of Horror* offers an excellent discussion. Nonetheless, I can't help wondering how he reacted upon encountering the next book, which is filled with revelations about Nurmi based on information Poole couldn't access.

***Glamour Ghoul: The Passions and Pain of the Real Vampira, Maila Nurmi* by Sandra Niemi**

During Vampira's early days, Nurmi once related "facts" about herself to a Los Angeles Tribune Reporter. Scott Bradfield of the Los Angeles Times outlines the encounter:

There isn't much to tell," she said. "I was born in Lapland I have an owl for a house pet. I have a 19-inch waist, 38-inch bust and 36-inch hips. My earliest recollection as a child is that I always wanted to play with mice. I'm very antisocial. I simply detest people. I don't like snakes; they eat spiders, and I'm very fond of spiders." Asked how she felt about children, she didn't miss a beat: "Oh yes ... delicious."

Sandra Niemi, Nurmi's niece, burrows straight for the truth behind this constructed persona. With unlimited access to Nurmi's diaries and family records, Niemi reveals an intelligent woman who, at times, couldn't cut a break while at other junctures shot both her feet while aiming at only one. After discovering her performing in Mike Todd's *Spook Scandals*, Howard Hawks brought Nurmi from New York to Hollywood for his unrealized horror film, *Dreadful Hollow*, scripted by William Faulkner -- unfortunately, it a non-starter because after becoming annoyed by a photo shoot, Nurmi marched into Hawks's office and tore up her contract. Then there's the famous Bal Caribe costume affair and her successful stint as Vampira, which lasted only a year until Nurmi descended into obscurity once again over ownership and contract issues.



Most stunning is what Niemi uncovers about Nurmi's relationships with famous men, especially how Nurmi gave birth to Orson Welles's son. They'd begun a romantic entanglement after meeting at the Brown Derby, but Welles had married Rita Hayworth, so the 20-year-old Nurmi gave her son up for adoption. Nurmi also had on-and-off encounters with Marlon Brando, a private "guitar lesson" from Elvis Presley, a long-term association with Anthony Perkins, and that legendary platonic relationship with James Dean, who essentially abandoned her once his career started skyrocketing. It's that Hollywood image machine again, friends. How could such a magnificent young icon be seen hanging out with WABC-TV's Vampira after hours at Googie's Deli, conveniently next to Schwab's Drugstore, where many a star and entertainment journalist cooled their heels? Throughout, I wondered how Niemi could substantiate the Nurmi-Welles situation. Given Nurmi's penchant for fanciful self-reportage, how much of this is true? All of it is, actually, but I won't spoil the big reveal. I will say, though, that I teared up a bit upon reading it.

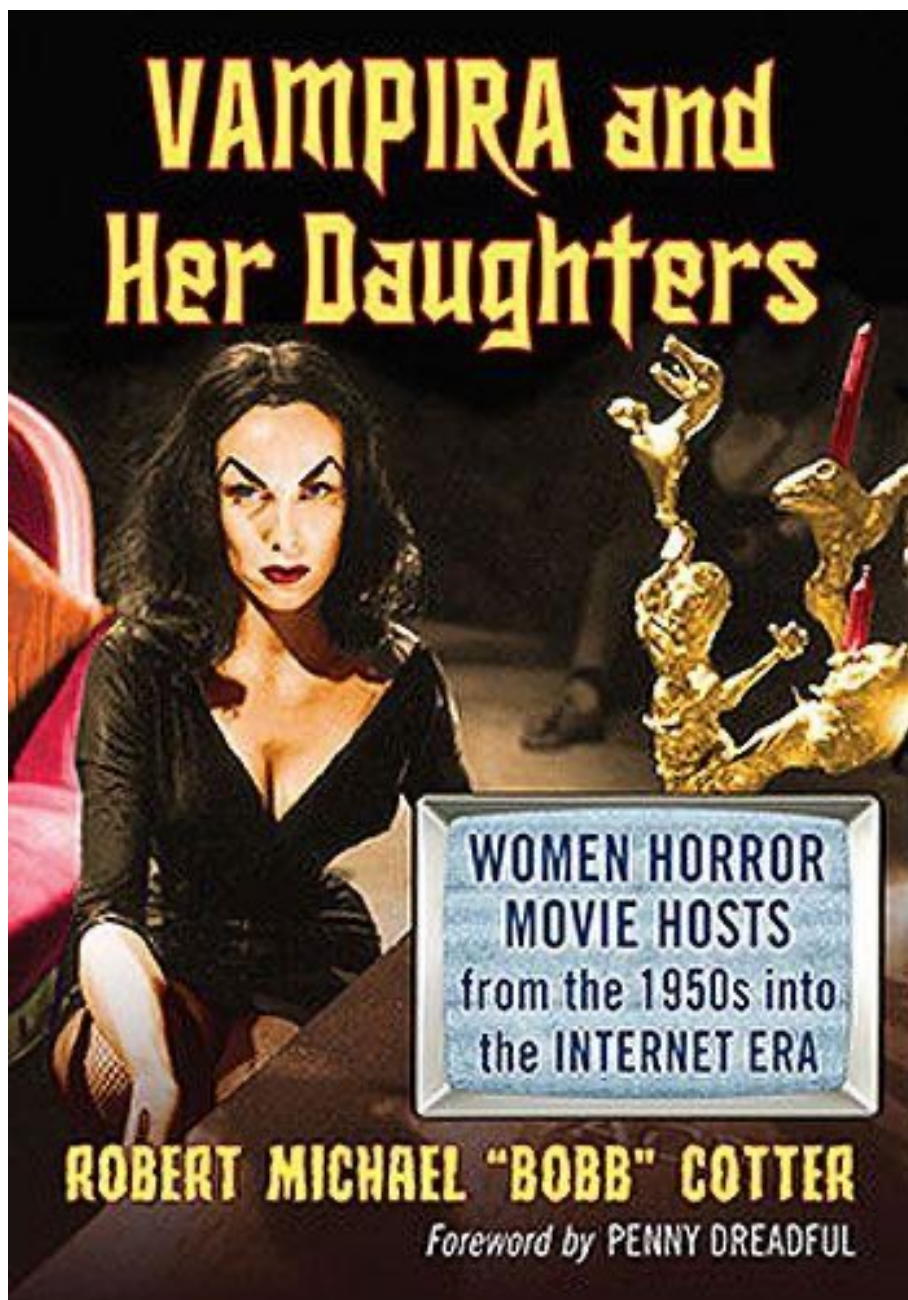
Niemi's love for her aunt comes through page after page. She's blunt about Nurmi's shortcomings, but she gives the Glamour Ghoul the due she never received while alive. There are minor gaffes (Trina Robbins co-created Vampirella, not Trina Roberts), but this volume is a must for Vampira fans.

Vampira and her Daughters: Women Horror Hosts from the 1950s into the Internet Era
by Robert Michael “Bobb” Cotter

Now, the focus moves beyond Vampira herself, and we consider the legion who at least took partial inspiration from her pioneering efforts. Even those not fans of horror have heard of Elvira, but who knew there were so many female horror hosts? Not really a study per se, *Vampira and Her Daughters* contains an alphabetical list including, among many others, Elvira, Penny Dreadful, the three Misty Brews, Marlena Midnite, Dixie Dellamorto, and even a couple of drag performers, like Aunt Gertie. Many have hung up their capes and cobwebs, but a sizeable number still haunts us.

Where information is scarce, entries run short, but Cotter does manage to interview a few. His interview with the San Francisco Bay Area's own Miss Misery, who hosted *The Last Doorway* from 2007 to 2011 (Cotter claims it ended in 2009), is delightful. I'd wondered what became of her, and it turns out she's still ticking via the Internet and streaming platforms. Long may she terrify! Maybe future editions will cover recent arrivals, for example, Tangella, co-host of the current *Creature Features* filmed at the Coulter Mansion in Bodega Bay, California. We'll see.

Oddly, Cotter devotes most



of Elvira's entry to synopsising her two films, *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark* and *Elvira's Haunted Hills*. Initially, he'd been working toward a biography of Elvira (Cassandra Peterson) before shifting to this encyclopedia. Peterson was writing an autobiography, so I thought perhaps Cotter didn't want to crowd her space. But Peterson suggested he write an unauthorized biography, so I'll attribute his gushing about these mediocre films to fanboy exuberance. His "then this happened, and then this happened" summaries are grating (pro-tip: resist such urges). There's also strange cross-referencing that may reflect individuals portraying different characters or characters that operated across platforms or channels – I can't tell. The few instances of this connect almost blank entries. But what's a book about mysterious women without a few mysteries peppered into the mix? So be it.

***Yours Cruelly, Elvira: Memoirs of the Mistress of the Dark* by Cassandra Peterson**

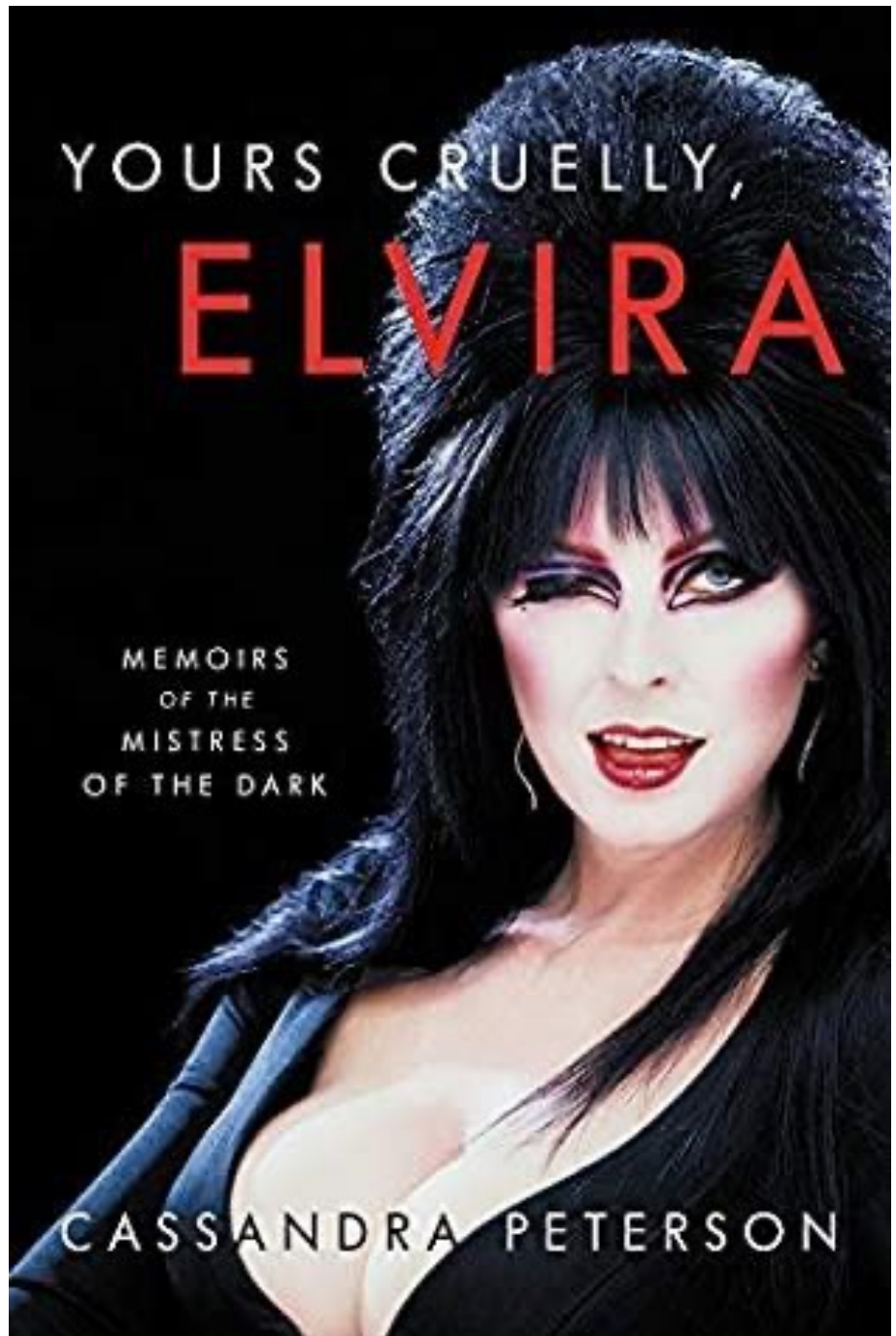
When Cassandra Peterson accepted the role that would skyrocket her career, she was to play "Vampira's Daughter," having never heard of Vampira previously. In 1981, KHJ-TV was planning to revive Vampira for television, and, as Peterson points out, "Maila was in her sixties and not up to the task." Once determining that the job must go to someone else, the station offered Nurmi an executive credit on the show and a weekly royalty for the use of the character. Peterson describes the primary meeting with Nurmi held at the beginning of this project:

Our meeting that day was seriously awkward. It was plain to see from the photos she shared that she'd once been a very statuesque and beautiful woman, but it was clear that she'd lived a tough life. She had only a tooth or two left in her head and she rambled incoherently about subjects that didn't relate at all to subjects we were there to discuss. She talked a lot about her relationship with James Dean, but in the present tense, as if it was ongoing. I wasn't familiar with James Dean, but I knew enough about him to know that he was *dead*. It was sad to see an older lady like her alone and down on her luck. I was happy the show would be an opportunity for her to make some money for the use of the Vampira name. (172)

Nurmi had other thoughts, wanting singer/actress Lola Falana for the part, and sued both KHJ-TV and Peterson, attempting to keep control of the trademark. So, the name "Vampira" couldn't fly, and the world said hello to Elvira, Mistress of the Dark. After horrendous commotion and Peterson eventually out \$35,000 for legal fees, the matter ended when Nurmi failed to appear in court. Sandra Niemi reports matters from Nurmi's side, saying in *Glamour Ghoul* that her aunt's attorney based his argument on the Lanham Act, which defines a trademark as "a mark used in commerce or registered with a future intent to use it in commerce (15 U.S.C. § 1127)." The court deemed that Nurmi's case didn't meet this standard.

Peterson reflects, “Coincidentally, Maila and I had a lot in common. She had previously worked as a showgirl and modeled for men’s magazines before turning to horror hosting. She’d even worked as a hatcheck girl like me. And according to Hollywood legend, she was a bit of a star-fucker too (172).” Additionally, both had troubled relationships with their mothers and dreamed early about escaping their small-town lives for bigger things. Eventually, this developed well for Peterson but not so much for Nurmi. Under different circumstances, the two may have been great friends. Peterson does admit that without Vampira, there would be no Elvira.

Read *Yours Cruelly* not because Elvira is the most famous horror host ever, but because Peterson herself deftly narrates her amazingly colorful life. The majority of the book deals with events before she birthed Elvira, with maybe the final fourth devoted to that entertainment juggernaut. She has realized Nurmi’s original dream, starring in films, accepting endorsement deals, and never quitting, even now in her seventies. What led to her thriving while Nurmi mostly struggled, only nearly succeeding intermittently and only achieving notoriety through fringe societies and dedicated fans? Pick up this and the other books and see for yourselves.





The John Sowden House

by Christopher J. Garcia

There are a few iconic houses in Los Angeles, but there are quite a few notorious houses, though many, like 10050 Cielo Drive, have been destroyed, wiped clean from the pretending-to-be-spotless record of the Hollywood Hills and Hopes. The iconic buildings tend to be kitsch, such as Pink's Hot Dogs, The Brown Derby, and the Fry's with the UFO sticking out. There are a few absolute masterpieces, though Frank Gehry, has left his mark on the city (I'm writing about that in another 'zine), but there's a house that takes the architecturally important, the kitsch, and the (allegedly) notorious, and gives them a single home. That would be the John Sowden House at 5121 Franklin Avenue, designed by Lloyd Wright.

John Sowden was a painter and a photographer. He made a really good living at it, too. Los Angeles was, and to a degree is, a great place for photographers and painters with its many opportunities to create for Hollywooders. Sowden and his wife liked to party. They paid Lloyd Wright, the son of Frank, the greatest architect America has ever seen not named Gehry or Venturi, to build a house that would allow for maximum partying, as well as expressing that this was the home of wild people. Wright delivered. Big time.

The house deploys an open floorplan, with a massive central courtyard that connects to every other part of the house. This was ideal for cocktail parties in the 1930s, and the column-lined courtyard became a well-known spot for sceneaters.

The most recognizable element of the house is the entrance. The stonework was done to give the appearance of a Mayan temple, though some say that it resembles the gaping maw of a great white shark. Either way, it's striking, and sets it apart from the other homes in that toney portion of Los Angeles. It's only a mile and a half from the old Ackermansion, and I can remember driving by it when I was a teen, even though at that point, it was in a less-than-pristine state, having weathered the previous 40 years. In 2001, a great renovation happened, and it was restored, and somewhat altered, by the new owner. Lloyd Wright's son Eric didn't approve of some of the changes, but adding a Jacuzzi is always excusable to this preservationist!



So why, you may ask, is the house also infamous (allegedly)?

Well, that goes down to a former owner of the home, George Hodel. In many ways, the early stories of George Hodel and that of his contemporary Jack Parsons nest nicely into one another. As a kid, Parsons was a mathematical and engineering genius; Hodel was a musical prodigy. They were both highly educated, and both had a fair number of strangenesses. Both also shared libidinous inclinations, with Hodel seducing and impregnating one of his teachers at Caltech.

Eventually, Hodel became a doctor. A well-to-do doctor, because even in 1945, when he bought the house, it would have required some serious dough.

Hodel was very much into various Los Angeles scenes at the time. He was big into the arts, especially Surrealism. He was friends with Man Ray, and you can't get more Surrealist than Man Ray unless you're Dali (or talking about the much-missed club in Boston of the 1990s . . .) and he appreciated the darker psychosexual aspects of the movement. I can't be certain, but it would make sense that he'd have attended parties at the Sowden House before buying. He married John Huston's ex-wife and had myriad lovers and flings. He was into the Hollywood kink scene at the time too. There's a lot to say about what was going on in the private clubs and basements in the Los Angeles Basin at the time, but that's another, and MUCH LONGER, article.

In 1949, his daughter Tamar accused him of raping and impregnating her. There were witnesses, but one of them recanted. There's long been the thought that she was intimidated by Hodel. There was a trial, and George was found not guilty. Later, it was supposedly discovered that George was not the father of Tamar's first daughter, Fauna. Steve Hodel, an LAPD detective turned crime author, reported that on his website.

Oh yeah, I should mention that Steve Hodel has made a post-police career off of writing about the fact that George Hodel was the killer of Elizabeth Short, the Black Dahlia. The story goes that George was a known suspect in the infamous 1947 crime as early as 1949. The method of murder, full dissection, wasn't done with the disregard of a butcher, with some precision, like a surgeon. There was testimony that Hodel and Short had been together at one point. Steve Hodel wrote this up and later tried to tie George to the Zodiac murders in a much less firm claim.

Because George Hodel certainly could have killed Short.

There's a fair bit of evidence, but one that keeps him in my mind as the potential killer is his connection to surrealism. Yes, I know, the surrealists weren't murderers, but stick with me.

Much surrealist imagery has to do with the concept of dissection. You can see it in *Un Chien Andalou* and works by painters ranging from Magritte to Frida Kahlo (and never let anyone tell you she wasn't a surrealist!) The dream-like state surrealists tried to evoke often featured heavy imagery that called to mind the after-life, and sometimes there were bodies. The fact that her mouth was sliced at the corners is, perhaps, the most surrealist image I could imagine existing in the real world.

It would be pretty thin soup if that's all there was, but there is a fair bit more. The cops bugged his house and famously captured a bit of audio that would make almost anyone appear guilty. "Supposin' I did kill the Black Dahlia. They can't prove it now. They can't talk to my secretary anymore because she's dead. They

thought there was something fishy. Anyway, now they may have figured it out. Killed her. Maybe I did kill my secretary.”

Because yes, years before his secretary had been killed.

Was Hodel the Dahlia killer? There’s never been a more likely candidate made public (including Orsen Welles) and the idea that he murdered her in the basement of the Sowden House, then dropped off about eight miles away in the vacant lot. It’s certainly possible, though many possibilities in this world never came to pass.

So, the Sowden House, which along with the Hollyhock House, the Ennis House, and the Storer House (all designed by Frank Lloyd Wright) form the most architectural distinctive houses of pre-1950s Hollywood-types, ties itself nicely into both the architecture and the (allegedly) true crime worlds.

Sounds like my kind of place, no?



Letter of Comment

Sent to drinktankeditorial@gmail.com

By our Loyal Readers!

And let us hear now from... Heath Row!!!

Just between you and me, today was a Very Good Mail Day. Not only did I receive a package of color printer cartridges (CMYK FTW!) to hold in reserve for future fanzine and APA-L printing lest my current cartridges reach a sad end too soon, I also received the February issue of *Locus*. Regardless, rest assured that I have my priorities straight. Instead of reading *Locus*' 2023 Year in Review or additional Hugo Award gossip and criticism, I choose to read... *Drink Tank* #453.

The last time I wrote you a letter of comment was in response to *Drink Tank* #438. So I shall send this missive to you care of *Journey Planet* rather than the Computer History Museum. Your professional move to Forever Saroyan inspired me to return to the writing of William Saroyan, whom I remember fondly, tightly interwoven with my love of San Francisco. Between Saroyan, Herb Caen, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Jack Kerouac, Jack London, and Armistead Maupin, a city would be hard pressed to claim stronger literary champions. Let's not forget Avram Davidson, Shirley Jackson, and the more recent Richard Kadrey, who decamped to Austin, Texas, and then Pittsburgh—also both glorious cities.

I have come to Saroyan professionally, and my love of SF fiction, that is San Franciscan fiction, is evident. Sidenote: I knew Larry Ferlinghetti for more than 35 years! He was a good dude and every time I stopped into City Lights Bookstore!

While looking for a more recent email address to use, your *Fancylopedia* 3 profile—along with Vanessa Applegate's Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund candidacy—reminded me of your 2008 TAFF trip report, *Rockets Across the Waters*. In recent days, I've been reading Marty and Robbie Cantor's 1985 *Duffbury Tales* (<https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/TripReports/TripReports12.pdf>) and *Tales of Duffbury* (<https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/TripReports/TripReports13.pdf>). While writing a letter to Andy Hooper's *Captain Flashback* earlier today, I was also reminded of Leigh Edmonds's 1975 *Emu Tracks Over America* (<https://fanac.org/fanzines/TripReports/TripReports11.pdf>). So additional trip reports might well be in my reading future. One could do worse., especially when I wasn't able to swing going to Corflu.

I love old TAFF reports, especially ATom's report of going to the Oakland WorldCon. It's great fun.

Better situated in my reading present in honor of Corflu: *Drink Tank* #453. When the "How often do you think of the Roman Empire?" thing hit social media, it hit my radar only shortly before my wife posed the question: How often do I think about the Roman Empire? Up to that point, I never

thought about the Roman Empire—ever—though I now do more frequently because the very question has been posed. In fact, the question threw me a little. According to a CBS News article online, “Ask a man in your life how often he thinks about the ancient civilization. In many cases, he will say ‘often.’” The article continues: “Many women are shocked when they ask their boyfriend, husband or dad the question and he responds with ‘every day.’” Every day? Why men? Why so often? Does *not* thinking about the Roman Empire make one less of a man? Masculinity police rejoice the world over.

Personally, I think the Roman Empire was merely a precursor to the Game. Oddly enough, though the Game is quite popular in some fannish circles, I learned about it only recently at the *Doctor Who* convention Gallifrey One. For the uninitiated, a brief introduction. The Game is a mind game. Everyone the world over is playing it all the time. Everyone, all the time, even if you’re unaware you’re playing it. Its objective? *Not to think about the Game*. Because if you think about the Game, you lose. You must then announce your loss, which will lead others to think about the Game, and thereby lose. In short, everyone reading this letter of comment just lost the Game and must make an appropriate announcement of such in the media of your choosing. Many public references to the game take the form of signs or placards that announce either “I lost the Game” or “You lost the Game.” The Game, like the Roman Empire, is a virus. And mere exposure to it can lead one to think about it—and then lose, in the case of the Game. But if we think about the Roman Empire, do we lose, or win? Just what are those fabulous prizes?

I spent a lot of time reading up on the Roman Empire in the months leading up to the issue. Roman food, as is clearly apparent from the issue, is a fascination that continues even today after having published the ish!!!

Surprisingly, the first photograph in Chris Duval’s “Thoughts on Ancient Roma” made me realize that I *have* recently thought about the Roman Empire, and not just because of the social media meme. My wife and I traveled to Portugal a couple of times last year (see *Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #49-52 and #88-92, and *Faculae & Filigree* #25 to get the general gist), and we’ll return again later this spring. The archaeological ruins of the Roman Thermae of Maximinus are located in Braga, which we frequent, and they are currently excavating an adjacent theater. Nearby Guimarães was once occupied by the Romans as a spa town. The Castle of Lanhoso in our home base of Póvoa de Lanhoso predates the Romans. And the remains of Roman bridges and roadways can be found throughout the country. Even if combined with new construction, some of those bridges still support traffic. The remains of an aqueduct once serving a monastery still trail over several kilometers in Vila do Conde near Porto. I might have been overly quick to dismiss thinking about Rome.

España Sheriff’s “Roman England” also reminded me of a 2016 family vacation in London, during which we went in search of as many Roman ruins as we could. We saw the London Stone and a few sections of wall, but we didn’t visit the London Mithraeum. Next time. Speaking of time, as dinner time approaches, your recipes are sorely tempting. My wife had a craving for pepperoni pizza earlier this week, so it being Friday night, we’ll likely seek out something similar—go to Lenzini’s on Culver Boulevard!—but I thank you for publishing the recipes bilingually. At first I just saw the Latin and was

mystified. Luckily, pizza still somewhat fits the theme of the issue. You see, the first documentation of pizza reportedly appears in Virgil's *The Aeneid*, written between 29 and 19 BC.

That's got to be worth at least a slice.

Putting it on a tight beam,
Heath Row

