

Bernie Wrightson, Italian Comic Art Collecting, Lucca, El Eternauta and Commissions

I was saddened to hear of Bernie Wrightson's recent passing. A true giant in comics that will be missed but will live on through his work and his influence on the work of other artists.. I wrote about him for the Horror CFA-APA and I have nothing to add other than to present a new Wrightson piece I have added to my collection. The piece is unpublished from a project I was unable to find information about. It is a very moody tribute to the Spirit and the Eisner's legacy.



I travelled to Italy to attend Lucca this past October and further solidified my understanding of Italian comic art. I thought I'd share some of my experiences with the group. This submission will be a bit meandering and there will be several tangents so I pre-apologize for taking on so many things in one article.

Lucca and Italian Comic Art

One of the greatest travesties in comics in the English speaking world is all the truly great material we are missing published in Europe, Asian and South America. Everyone has seen Tintin, Asterix and Lucky Luke and what is not to love about them, but they are not truly representative of all the brilliant work being done in foreign language publications. Heavy Metal magazine introduced the world to a whole generation of European creators like Moebius, Manara, Serpieri, Crepax and Liberatore. Other superstars have really never gotten their due appreciation here. Artists like Tardi, Schiuten, Toppi, Magnus, Breccia and Pratt should be household names. In recent years certain books and titles have garnered some attention and artists like Guarnido and Bernet have become more recognizable names. A few have even made a complete jump over like Dell Otto, Bianchi and Carnevale. One of the more important comic powder kegs was Argentina in the 1930's to 1960's. We still get a lot of great art and artists out of South America (Tochini, Risso) but the industry isn't what it once was. Many big name artists like Breccia and Pratt spent formative parts of their careers working for Argentinian publishers. Much of this work was translated into Italian and some into French. I am not sure why, but the Italians in particular seemed to embrace these artists and books and eventually made them their own.



Recently I travelled to Lucca. It is a small, medieval town an hour's train ride from Florence, Italy. Every October the town gets invaded by 250,000+ comic fans. They call it a festival as opposed to a comic convention and I think the title is appropriate. The entire town is taken over with venues and themed areas scattered throughout. I was a little hesitant to travel there given I speak no Italian but the whole trip was made easier by the wonderful Italian people and being able to meet up with my long-time friend Max with whom I'd share a hotel room. I decided I wanted to see

Lucca before and during the festival so I arrived a day early while they were still setting up. This also allowed me several days of the convention and the ability to leave while it was still on to avoid the exodus that follows. It all worked out perfectly. This was also the 50th anniversary of Lucca, having had its start in 1966.



Panoramic Picture. Contrast of medieval walls with modern structures and comics, a recurrent paradox in Lucca.



I had arrived in Florence three days prior to travelling to Lucca to do some sight-seeing as it was my first time in Italy. I had just come from Tokyo and a manga convention. After the culture shock of my first visit to Japan, Italy seemed much more familiar but no less impressive.

I arrived in Lucca by train as the train and bus are the only easy ways to get there. The train station is just outside the old city walls and it was a quick walk into Lucca. The convention was still being set up when I arrived so there were neither line ups nor the crush of people that would later come. I walked along the walls

and through town enjoying the relative calm and the postcard perfect streets and sights. It was amazing to see normal stores getting into the festival spirit with comic related clothing, books and other items to attract fans. It was a very interesting contrast seeing the modern comic and anime themes in a medieval background.





Various dealer and Auction House booths within the Original Art Pavillion



That first night I stayed on my own inside the city walls and met up with several dealers and collectors for dinner. The next morning the con started and I met up with Max for the first time in person. I have known Max on line for over a decade and we hit off as if we had been old schoolmates. I stayed just outside the city walls with Max and his friend for the remaining two nights. There was never a shortage of collectors to meet up with for dinner and it was by far the most social convention I have ever attended. The Italian art collecting community is very well connected, friendly and hospitable.



As mentioned the festival is spread out over the entire town. The original art section is a single pavilion and housed about a dozen dealers. Above are some pictures of the dealers in the pavilion. Scott Eder sets up too but he was a little late setting up and I forgot to go back and take a picture of his booth. I spent most of my time at the convention going through the booths in the art pavilion, meeting with and talking with many collectors. Many friends I have had for years I got to meet in person but I also made several new ones. I ended up with some great art from that trip too. I will share a few highlights later on in the article. One of the more important people I met is a private art representative for several big name comic artists including Serpieri. He made a point of meeting me and introducing himself. We talked and have since developed a nice friendship. After showing me amazing

Serpieri pieces, he took a chance and asked me if I had heard of the El Eternauta. I had not. He pulled out a few pages to show me and I liked the art but it had no meaning to me. Michele gave me some background on the book and creators involved. I was intrigued. I will introduce you to the book a bit later too and some of the art.



Roberto Ricci and Marco Nizzoli with Commissioned Pieces.

I had arranged to pick up a few commissions at Lucca from artists. One was from Roberto Ricci and a Valentina commission from Marco Nizzoli. There will be a bit more on each of those commissions and the artist later in this submission.

I have often said that for me the biggest part of the hobby is collecting experiences, connections and friendships... the art is sometimes secondary. This is the reason I travel to cons--to meet artists, collectors, fans and dealers. Having dinners with these new and old friends will always be a fond memory and connected with the art I bought adding another layer to my enjoyment of it in the future. The first day of the festival was not as busy and it was relatively



easy walking around the city. I did a few fun things like trying out ninja throwing stars at a booth. There was a very large manga/anime component to the show as these shows and comics are very popular

in Italy. There were many corporate and dealer booths selling figures, toys and other manga related material. The large Italian publisher Bonelli had a large tent set up and I learned a lot about some of the more important Italian comic characters that I knew only rudimentary information about. Characters like Tex, Dylan Dog, Nathan Never, Martin Mystere, Zagor, and Dampyr. There is a whole universe of comics to discover. There were other large tents with smaller publishers, dealers and artists. I was surprised by how little of the Franco-Belgian comics I associate with European comics were present. There really is a big divide between Italian comics and French comics.

The festival did get busy on the Friday and Saturday and that was the day I decided to leave. Even on the Friday it was getting crowded. I see from the attendance records that they sold out on Saturday with 80,000 visitors. Here is a look at the line up to get into the city as I left Saturday at 10 am. Even beyond this line, at the train station there were many thousands waiting to even get this far.



The entrance line to Lucca and the Statue Garden set up outside a tent for screening movies.

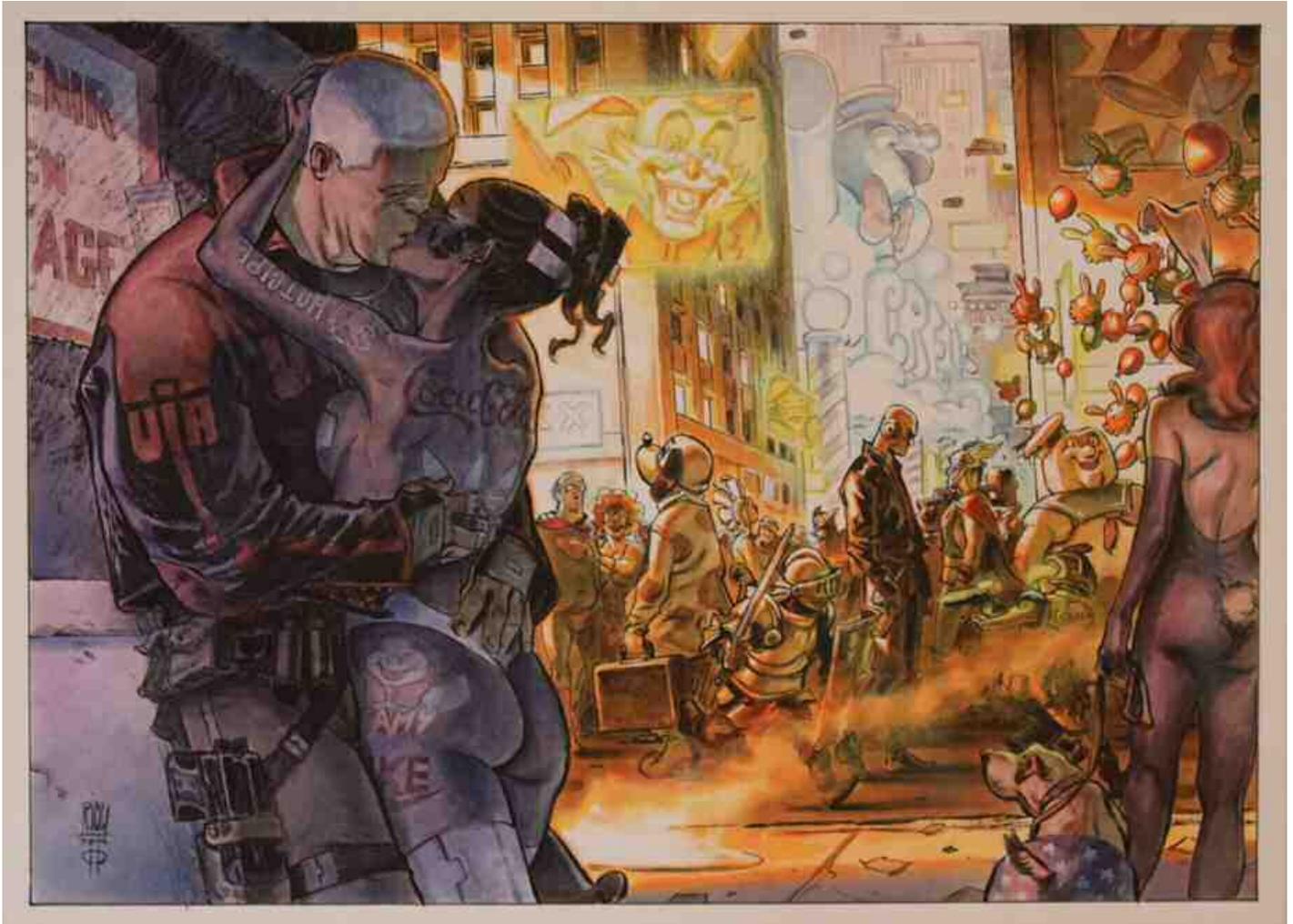


Statues and Displays Around the Festival.



Cosplayers in a Central Square.

Roberto Ricci is an Italian artist living in France. I was first introduced to his work visiting with a French collector and friend in the summer of 2015 while visiting Paris. I had never heard of him before but Arnaud showed me his collection and several pieces stood out including a Ledroit (my first one just arrived, see last page of submission) and a Ricci illustration he had commissioned. I liked the commission and went back to view it several times that evening and have visited it many times in his online gallery. I ordered the 3 tomes of Urbain, his comic, and studied the art and world he created. Although there are no English translations available, the art was enough to keep me happy and I could muddle my way through the French and German volumes I received. I loved the world he created as it is very much the world of Blade Runner but with some interesting twists. In this world, people wear costumes in their daily routine which make for some great imagery. The female character Ishrat, has corporate logos on her which is probably the image that most stuck with me from all his work.



Commission by Roberto Ricci in the Collection of a Friend

I contacted Roberto and we started talking about a commission. It took a little over a year for it all to come together and I picked it up in person while in Lucca. We had a nice lunch together and I couldn't be happier with the whole experience. I commissioned Ishrat as the central image and asked for some favorite elements to be added like the cast of Blade Runner, Leeloo from the Fifth Element and Kaneda from Akira. Roberto managed to do this including Pris, Zhora, Rachel, the owl, Deckard, spinners, advertising blimp, LeeLoo, Kaneda and his bike all into this piece. There are lots of other cool details. The whole process started with a number of quick layouts Roberto did. I picked my favorite but they were all great and would have worked out. He then sent me images of the pencils, inks, preliminary colors and then the final image. It was a great experience and the art is a new favorite.

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Layouts Options, Pencils, Inks and Color Rough to Commission.

Next: Finished Commission

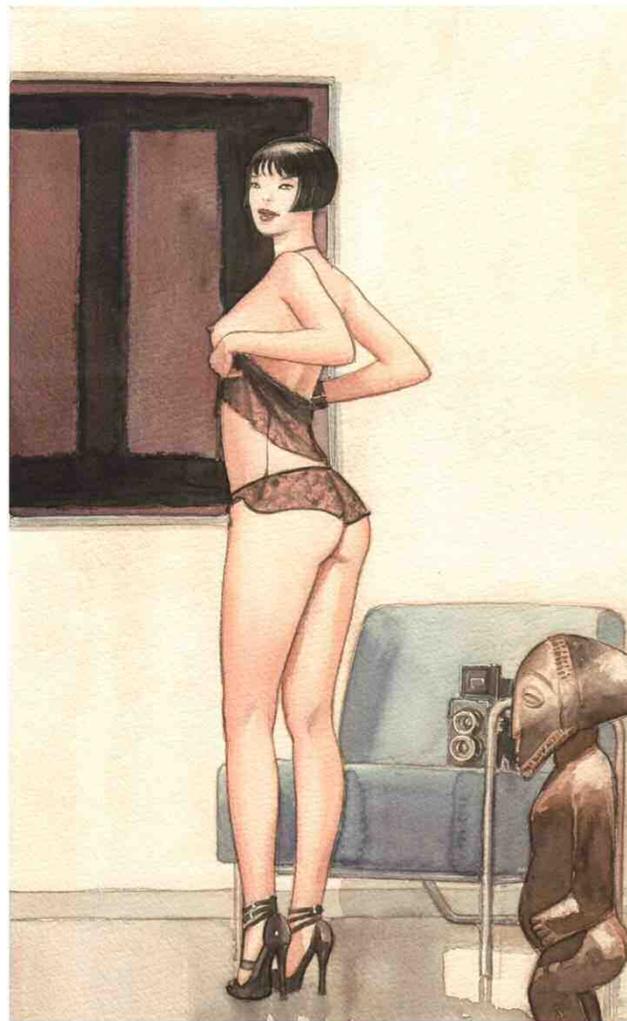


I have been a fan of Marco Nizzoli for a number of years. I think of his art as a blend between Moebius and Manara. He has a great sense of design and color but his females are what really made me take notice.



My first Marco Nizzoli art. I gave it the title Night Ledge. It was used as a cover for an Italian Comic Magazine, Arena.

My first piece by him is still my favorite and it came to me in a tough trade deal with an Italian collector. I have since been corresponding with Marco and have made several purchases from him. This commission was a last minute thing and set up just before the festival. Since he was going to be there and I was to meet him, I hoped to get some art from him personally and a Valentina commission came up. Nothing could be more fitting for a visit to Lucca than Valentina by Nizzoli. I also picked up a cool Dylan Dog pin-up that is soon to be published.



Below are a few pieces I picked up in Lucca. These include a Curt Caesar page from 1938 from Il Legionario, Gustav Trigo La Cambusa splash, Jorge Zaffino Winter World page, Horacio Lalia page from a 14 page story, Brandoli page from Alias and finally an Enrique Breccia page I picked up at the con and was able to get the artist to sign at the show. This page also helps tie my article back into the Bernie Wrightson theme of this issue as Breccia has done the legacy of the Swamp Thing justice with his detailed work. Immediately below are a few panels from the Lalia pieces I picked up.



ROMANO VOLA A BASSISSIMA QUOTA. I TRE AVVERSARI SI DIVIDONO: DUE CURVANO VERSO ORIENTE - IL TERZO ATTACCA L'ITALIANO DECISAMENTE.



ALL' AEREODROMO NAZIONALE I CAMERATI DI ROMANO SCRUTANO IL CIELO CON ANSIA.



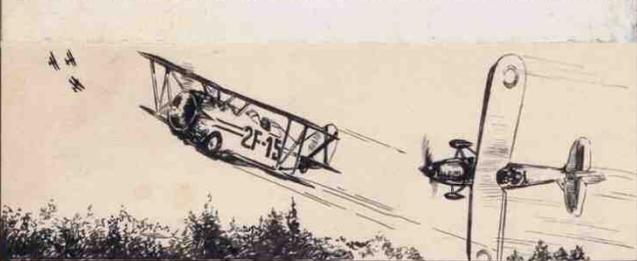
"HA ANCORA BENZINA PER POCCHI MINUTI DI VOLO!"

POSTO TELEFONICO DA CAMPO. SIAMO NELLE PRIME LINEE DEI FRANCHISTI.

"BIPLANO NAZIONALE 2F-15 SEGUIDO DA 3 HARTS. POSTI MITRAGLIERI AIUTARE DA TERRA SE POSSIBILE - STOP - POSTO 435."

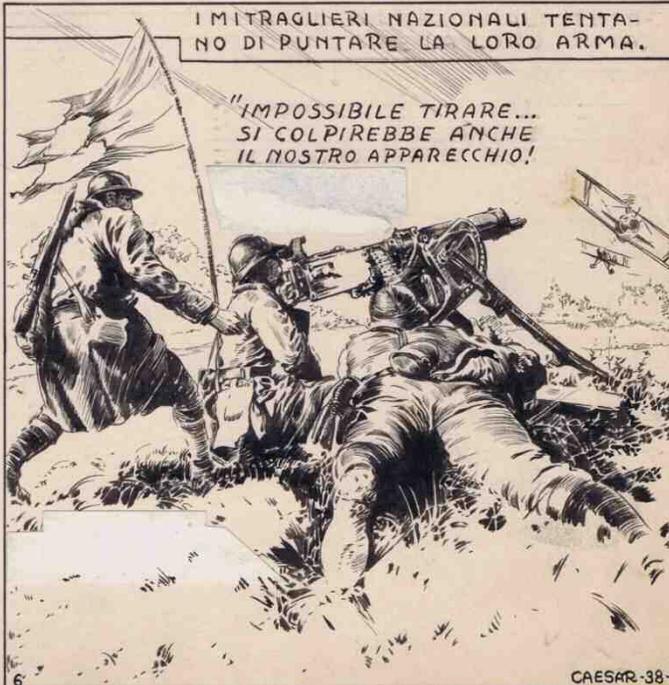


ROMANO SENTE L'AVVERSARIO VICINISSIMO: NON PIÙ DI 80 METRI. L'HARTS È CONDOTTO EVIDENTEMENTE DA UN PROVATO PILOTA ROSSO.



I MITRAGLIERI NAZIONALI TENTANO DI PUNTARE LA LORO ARMA.

"IMPOSSIBILE TIRARE... SI COLPIREBBE ANCHE IL NOSTRO APPARECCHIO!"

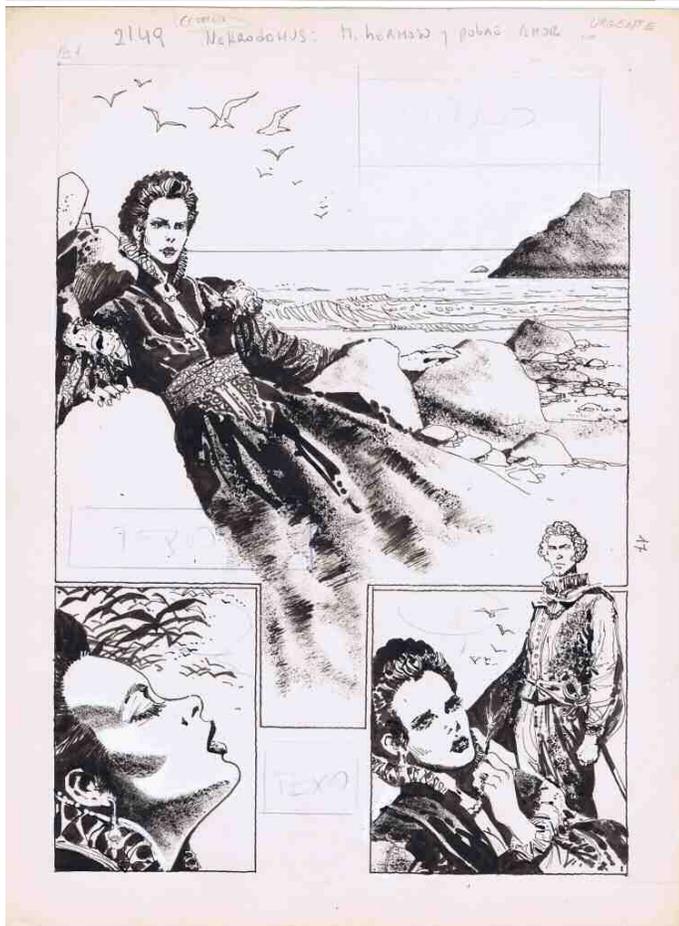
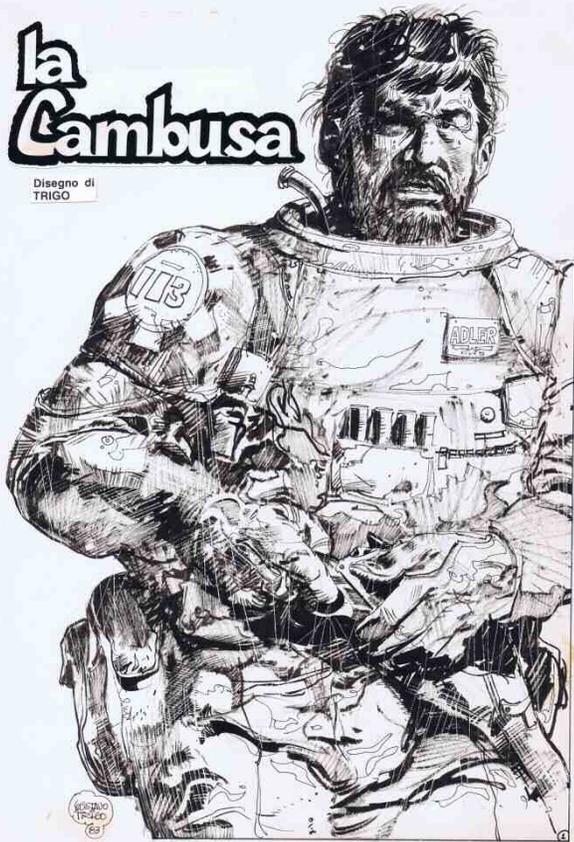


"LA BENZINA È QUASI ESAURITA!"



la Cambusa

Disegno di TRIGO





LUCCA

29.10.2016

ENRIQUE BREA

Now, El Eternauta

El Eternauta, published in *Hora Cera Semanal* from 1957 to 1959 in Argentina, has become one of the most important comic works ever. It is also a comic I am betting you have never even heard of. Let me introduce you.



The comic was written by Hector German Oesterheld and illustrated by Francisco Solano Lopez. It is the story of an event that happens on an ordinary night in Buenos Aires. A comic writer (Oesterheld) is sitting at his desk and a mysterious figure materializes into a chair across from him. The uninvited guest introduces himself as Juan Salvo and starts to tell his tale.

It starts when a mysterious snow begins to fall on the city and four friends playing a game take a moment to look at what is happening. There is something

very wrong. What unfolds is a great science fiction adventure in which man must fight for the survival of the species. The main character, Juan Salvo is helped by a few friends and his family as they discover the horror of what is actually going on. I am not going to dwell on the plot or spoil the comic for you but rather talk about the comic itself. There is a very edge of your seat and claustrophobic atmosphere created in the story telling that made the reading that much more enjoyable. Very central to this all is the Buenos Aires city scape and landmarks making this tale that much more grounded. I found the book a page turner and devoured it in only a few short evenings. It left me with that wonderful, creepy feeling I use to get watching *The Twilight Zone* on TV when I was 10 years old. There are a lot of cold war undertones to the story. This alone makes it a great comic but this is not what makes it important... there is more.



El Eternauta can be seen as a thinly veiled commentary on the politics in Argentina leading up to the Military regime and the Dirty War. In 1969 Oesterheld rewrote El Eternauta with a much more directed political message and this is seen as a critique of the Regime and of United States Imperialism. This second version was illustrated by Alberto Breccia. Oesterheld was openly against the regime and continued to write while in hiding from the government. In 1977, Oesterheld and his 4 daughter along with their husbands joined the 30,000 “disappeared” in Argentina presumed to have been killed by the Death Squads or other Military agencies. Very central to El Eternauta is the sports stadium in Buenos Aires and eerily another sport stadium is very central to the atrocities of the Military Regime as it was the place of mass executions. Lopez and the publisher both left Argentina in fear of their lives.



The character Juan Salvo became a symbol of resistance to oppression in Latin America and one can still see his image in graffiti and on subway walls.

An everyday man fighting against the system.



There have been other stories of Juan Salvo and the Eternaut published since the original works. There is an Italian comic magazine of that name started in the early 80's and even a rock band took on the name. Although it is not a comic well known here, in Europe and in particular Italy and Spain it is a well-respected and revered comic.

Fantagraphics brings us the Eternaut in its first English translation. The book is beautiful in itself with an interesting die cut

cover and packaging. This is also the best reprinting of the work to date with the best image quality as most previous reprints were done from copies of printed material and Fantagraphics had access to much of the source material. As this was originally published in a serial format, there has been some reformatting as the title boxes on each episode were not required. The original art often overlaps 2 pages as the editing process made for page changes between tiers. As a first time reader I had no idea and thought little of it. In having seen some of the original art I noticed cropped panels and panels removed from the original to make formatting possible in the new edition. This is my only disappointment with the work.



The story of the artwork of El Eternauta is also an interesting story. When the publisher fled Argentina he took all the art with him. Oesterheld gave Alvaro Zerbón the rights to sell the stories first published in Hero Cero and Frontera Magazine. Zerbón ran the Argentinian agency called Ameripress. In 1975, Argentinian publisher Ediciones Record bought all the publishing rights to El Eternauta and published it as a single volume in Argentina in 1977. They sold the rights to the Italian Eura Edizioni which published it in Lanciostory. Ameripress sent all the material including the original art to Eura Edizioni. Zerbón fled Argentina to Rome and retained possession of the original art until it was sold in the mid-nineties. The collector who currently owns the pages was the purchaser in the mid-nineties and his identity is not widely known. He has sold several pages since then and some pages were stolen. There have been two gallery shows of the art from Eternauta including a smaller one in Rome and larger one in Milan. The later was run by my friend Michele. Of the 368 original art pages, 279 still remain in one collection. There are pages for sale now and it is my understanding that there has been some interest in Argentina purchasing the entire remaining art as a cultural artifact. Below are photos from the gallery shows. The first picture shows the first page from El Eternauta displayed. On the ground are pictures of the "disappeared" and set up in a way that one was made to feel awkward standing and looking at the art so as not to step on them.



El Eternauta and Lucca



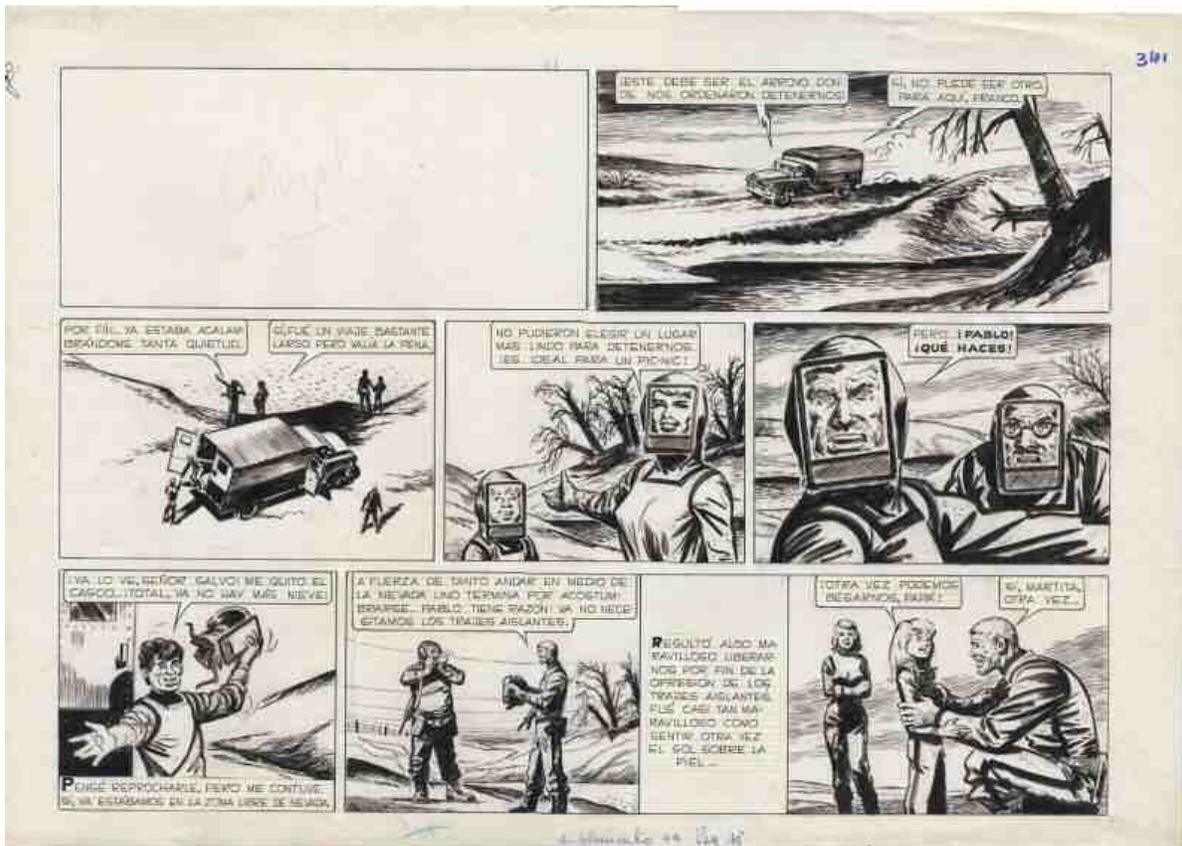
by Jeff Singh



Below are two pages from the Eternauta that are now in my collection. It would be a spoiler to explain why I picked these two very different pages but suffice to say they capture many of the themes explored in the comic. Other than another really early page with the snow and the first suit, I don't think I could have found better examples from this book. I have included scans of the same pages from the Fantagraphics book. As you can see my pages overlap 2 pages in the newer printing. There are some other changes I will point out that were likely made for editorial reasons including having to remove the current title banners that were part of the serialization. I have not seen how other, previous publishers approached this challenge.



El Eternauta Page 283 and pages 274 and 275 from Fantagraphics. Note that the top right panel on the original page has been omitted all together.



El Eternauta page 341 and pages 324 and 325 from Fantagraphics. Note that the top panel in the original art has been cropped.

The world of comics is vast yet at times it feels like it is a small place too. Travelling, meeting friends, learning about new art and artists is a great aspect of the hobby that I don't think enough collectors explore. Speaking from personal experience, nothing could be more rewarding or re-energizing for your comic reading and art collecting bug. It is nice to draw little connections you didn't see before. As I mentioned, there is the connection of Enrique Breccia's Swamp Thing bringing things back to the Wrightson theme of the article. Another interesting fact I learned since writing the above information is that Horacio Lalia was an assistant to Alberto Breccia and was indeed the model for Mort Cinder which many people consider Breccia's most important work. Breccia also worked with Oesterheld, El Eternauta and Argentinian comics. I am hoping to write a future article on Alberto Breccia once I have a better understanding of his life's work. Until next time, make mine not Marvel.

Mailing Comments: Issue 100

A truly worthy 100th issue. Great work everyone! Welcome to David Applegate as editor and a heartfelt thank you to Wally for the work he has done as editor. A farewell to Ethan Roberts who I didn't know nearly well enough.

John Stuart – I really enjoyed the pieces you decided to showcase. All well-chosen items in your collection.

David Applegate – A great overview of the history of CFA-APA. I can't imagine collecting and keeping all 100 issues. How much space does that take up? Perhaps we will digitally archive all the issues one day.

Chris Killackey – I love seeing your collection and hate seeing you leave. I hope we see you back in the future.

Ray Cuthbert – Your dedication and contribution to the APA over the years is herculean.

Roger Hill – 100 issues. Didn't see that coming did ya? That diorama looks unbelievable!!

Ben Friedman – Gorgeous illustrations from your incredible collection. I can't pick a favorite from the Booth, Coll and St. John.

Bob Kopman – That Bagge birthday commission is brilliant. I can't imagine a better piece for your wall.

Steve Smith – Great horror themed pieces. Sanjulian hasn't lost anything in over 40 years. Your pieces from '73 and '16 look like they could have been done a week apart.

Kevin Warzecha – great interviews. I particularly enjoyed the Black Hole Collector.

George Hagenauer – you know so much and have such diverse tastes, it is always interesting to see what you have say and show. I love the Stanley Pitt painting.

Alan Pinion – I've never seen Nolan inking Buscema before but it gorgeous.

Joe Latino – I dream of things like the Cleveland Trunk. Great to see images of those early pages.

Gary Land – I forgot everything said or showed once I got to the Val. I am still in awe! Great Harry Lucey covers too!

Ron Sonenthal – You Miller DD is a perfect page. DD vs. Bullseye... sigh...

Aaron Sultan – Great to hear that you have reached a point in collecting that you are content. I am hoping to be there soon. If only I had stopped broadening my horizons with international comics and strip art, I might have reached that goal too. Wow on the ASM cover.

Gary Johannigmeier – DC 70's Horror covers are among the best series in comic art history and Wrightson took them up another level. Great cover.

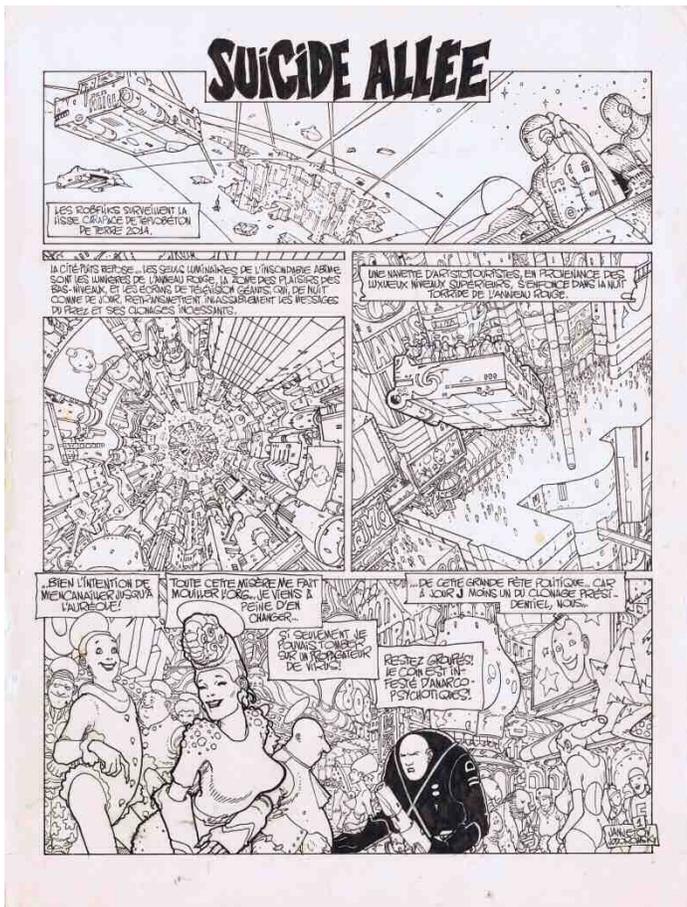
John Butler – I don't even know where to start. Herriman, Jones, Frazetta, Wrightson...all grails. I am sure everyone appreciates the large size images you provide as much as I do. Your commission collection is a lot of fun too!

Bill Leach – Great Ally Sloper art. I know nothing about this but I am very impressed.

Alan Dion - I enjoyed our phone conversation last month. I hope to see you at Heroes.

Randy Saitta – Great BWS sketch story. That unpublished Conan on a war horse is amazing.

Great work everyone!



Before the Incal – Janjetov/Jodorowsky and *Viajero De Gris* – Breccia/Trillo (above). *New York 1888 Fees&Amazones* - Olivier Ledroit and unknown - Juan Gimenez (below).

