

Outlets

Consonant Enigma

Issue 2



The Well Mannered Guest

Andy Trembley

Contributors:

Andy Trembley
 Abby Blackfox
 Chris Garcia
 Simons Flower
 Riyuen
 KeBaPPi
 Raimo Kokko
 Laura Toivola
 Sina

You've got to love a good fan-centered convention. One of the nice things about fan-centered conventions? They celebrate and reward fandom itself.

Think about it.

Commercial shows like *Creation Entertainment*, *Star Wars Celebration* and *GenCon* have Guests of Honor. They have actors, writers and professional artists who they highlight and celebrate.

Only fan-run, fan-centered conventions have Fan Guests of Honor. It's a tradition that dates back to at least 1948, when Wilson "Bob" Tucker III was the first Fan Guest of Honor at a Worldcon. Of course, you have to *do* something. Yes, Virginia, if your fanac is prominent enough, you too could be invited to a convention as their Fan Guest of Honor.



In the early days of conventions, it was all about bringing far-flung fans together. Air travel was expensive, bus and train travel were slow. Relationships were established and maintained through mail and fanzines. That really cool fanwriter from St. Louis might not be able to come to a convention in California on his own nickel, but the convention could bring him out as a guest.

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Ish Dish

Hello and welcome to Consonant Enigma: Outlets a/k/a CE#2. This issue is jam packed with works about the creative process in fandom.

Staff:

- Editor : Kristina Kopnisky
- Associate Editor: Simon's Flower
- Associate Editor: Abby Blackfox

Andy Trembley leads us off this issue by illustrating that there is more to guesting at cons than free food in the green room and having a differently worded badge. Abby chimes in with a great piece on LARPing. Chris Garcia comes through again with a stellar piece about the joys of crafting a hoax. Simons Flower has provided an editorial piece on her experiences as a slash fic writer. It should be noted that she is one of the people that runs a large HP fic site called the Quidditch Pitch.

In this issue I am happy to be able to include fanart. Information on how to find more art by these wonderful folks can be found on page 16. Also new this issue, a letter column!

CE #3 will look at virtual spaces in fandom. I am hoping to have that issue published around January 16 2008.

To receive either a soft or hard copy of this or future issues please email consonantenigma@gmail.com. In exchange for an issue I request one of the following: in kind trade, a letter of comment, an article or pictures that can be used in future issues (please contact me before submitting this material), or if you would like a hard copy I request funds to cover the cost of production and post.

Different conventions and different con chairs have their own reasons for selecting guests. Some con chairs select local fans who have made significant contributions to the fan and convention community. Some con chairs still go for the old standard; fans they've met at other conventions, guests that they hope will bring something interesting and different to their convention.

Regardless of their rationale, it's still all about rewarding fandom and fanac. What sort of fanac? Often it's related to conrunning. It is, after all, the sort of fanac that's most visible to the people making the invitation, the sort of fanac that they're closest to.

That doesn't mean that other fanac isn't important, and isn't recognized. Most conrunners and SMOFs got involved in the back-end of conventions to ensure that conventions supported their fanac. Fanzine writers work in fanzine lounges. Costumers run masquerades. Gamers organize tournaments and run gaming rooms. Artists work on art shows. Fanfic writers edit convention anthologies. Fans of every type work in programming.

"Every moment you're not in your hotel room, you're on. When you're in the dealers' room shopping, you're on. When you're having dinner in the restaurant, you're on. When you're crawling the parties you're on."

Conrunning might be the best way to get noticed, but it's by no means the only way. Some conventions might even prefer other sorts of fanac over conrunning.

Keep up that fanac, and you may just get an offer you can't refuse. Kevin and I did.

Forgive me. It was for BayCon 2005, and the convention had a "Godfather" theme. Still, that invitation is the kind of thing that you want to say "yes" to right away. It's great for the ego. Why shouldn't you?

Don't ever let anybody tell you that being a Guest of Honor is easy.

Being a Guest of Honor at a convention is a working weekend. It's not just the heavy load of program items. It's not opening ceremonies, "Meet the Guests" and the Guest of Honor speeches. It's not the breakfast/brunch/dinner with convention volunteers and paying attendees.

Every moment you're not in your hotel room, you're on. When you're in the dealers' room shopping, you're on. When you're having dinner in the restaurant, you're on. When you're crawling the parties you're on.

You've got a responsibility to the paying members to be charming and open when you're in public. They're the folks who paid for your room, your per-diem, your plane ticket and all the other perks you get as a Guest of Honor.

If you're not, it'll reflect badly on you and badly on the convention (for inviting you).

It's still worth it to be part of the fannish tradition, and the perks can be good. You might find yourself attending a convention you wouldn't normally consider going to. You might get a much nicer room than you would normally reserve. You will find you have better access to events and the other guests than you normally have.

You may even find yourself making long-term friends. There's nothing quite like being a guest and finding you have a lot in common with the other guests.

As for us? We're going to Philadelphia. Philcon 2007 (one of the longest-running local Science Fiction conventions around) has invited us to be their special Costuming Guests in just a few weeks. ☼



LARPing Towards Immortality

Abby Blackfox

There's a commotion outside as two vampires furiously play rock-paper-scissors against each other. Another vampire, a dark-haired woman that deliberately dresses like a schoolgirl with a taste for fishnet and velvet dog collars, regards the gesturing pair and runs outside to find out what's going on.

It turns out that a gargoyle's pinned down a traitor in their midst, and getting some colorful epithets thrown at him. The traitor, yet another vampire, is trying to bargain her way out of getting crushed to death, but the wooden stake in a nearby hand means she's dead.

That is, of course, if the mortal police don't show up first. Or if the local werewolf pack doesn't hear the racket, and come to join the fun.

The other option to end the fray and send the gargoyle running for cover – usually not part of the city, or allowed off his leash even to crush traitors to the Prince – would be the real police showing up because the neighbors are complaining about noise.

This isn't really a pack of vampires, werewolves, gargoyles and other various creatures. This is a LARP out of the White Wolf universe. Live Action Role Play is a specialized, occasionally bizarre vision of roleplaying games where the players not only create and memorize the stats of their characters, but also dress, talk, and move like their characters. Much of the interaction is spontaneous, based on enough plot and gameplay that even the most awkward of player can pull off some brilliant lines.

The gargoyle could crush a police car with a few good throws, but the man playing the character is smart enough – computer tech by day, *Counterstrike* player every other night of the week – to stand up, offer a hand to the vampire he was just trying to kill, and wave as the police drive by.

"Nothing but a bunch of friends that got high GPAs in college," he'll mutter under his breath. That's probably what the police are thinking, too.



Most of these people are in their mid-to-late twenties, work in some kind of technology-driven industry, and would be found in the local Denny's drinking coffee until 3 a.m. if it weren't for the LARP. In the same closet that the vampire velvets and torn jeans of a werewolf are kept, there's probably also some computer parts, the extra components for the PS2 and Wii – because you never know when three other friends will come over and want to play – and t-shirts from thinkgeek.com.

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“That is, of course, if the mortal police don't show up first. Or if the local werewolf pack doesn't hear the racket, and come to join the fun.”



LARPing (cont.)



But not allLARPs are the same, and the world in which LARP is contained – RPG – is massive. Not all of them feature a White Wolf brand of horror, but there are definite themes beyond creating characters and running scenarios.

The fantasy lover runs back to the classic worlds of Dungeons and Dragons. He picks out his beloved half-elf warrior from a stack of character sheets and spends three weeks sewing the Ancient Tabard of The Ancestors (+2 charisma) that he created when the character was first invented for a tabletop game from high school, all so he can show it off to the friends that played that same tabletop game ten-something years ago.

Meanwhile, in the futuristic RPGs like EarthAD 2 – with that *<Blade Runner* or *Soylent Green* feel – the players take that extra step to bring their character to life by giving their cyborg character mechanical parts from the local Home Depot.

Yet, whether it is a vampire, cyborg or half-elf, the kind of player varies as much as the character. The more repressed the city – such as Salt Lake City or Boise – the more extreme and exclusive the LARP is. The more laid back the city – Santa Barbara, for example – the more likely you'll find LARPer taking over the rental house one of the Narrators and be just loud enough to irritate the neighbors but not enough to get visited by the police. Cities like Los Angeles or San Francisco ... well, let's hope that those vampire velvets aren't from Hot Topic and the fangs are fitted to your teeth, or you'll be laughed out by the neonates that really look like Gary Oldman from *Dracula*. These people get streets closed down and pictures in the newspapers as positive parts of society. Their Prince *does* have fangs, and their local ruling werewolves have tattoos of skin being ripped open to expose (ink that really looks like) fur.

But we're pulling away from the point. Let's be frank: most LARPer are geeks. These are the people that were mocked in school for hiding in classrooms and computer labs. They remember the first video game they ever played, and many of those games were in black and green. In fact, they probably still own that game, and play it with a reverence usually saved for saints. Most wear glasses and have endured the torment of wearing braces in their formative years. They fix their mother's computer, their neighbor's printer, their boss's fax machine, their grandmother's iPod ... except on certain nights. Oh, you can call, but if they showed up to fix whatever's broken, you might not want to let them in. Grandma doesn't need to see her precious grandchild in ripped jeans, black leather and fangs.

And when that vampire pinned by the gargoyle finally gets staked and sent to a second and final death? She'll be pinned over by her player. Comments will be made as if the vampire character actually existed, and somewhere, her clansmen are preparing vengeance for the violence against their family. The character sheet, folded and creased to bits from being tucked in a pocket too long, will be framed like a modern-day Picasso in his red phase. She's a one of a kind, while the clothes are picked out for a new character already being planned for the next LARP, starting the cycle all over again. ☼





Laura Toivola

“...whether it is a vampire, cyborg or half-elf, the kind of player varies as much as the character. “

Hoax Me Once, Shame on You...

Chris Garcia

Sometimes it's good to lie. That may go against everything you've learned since that time in pre-school when you broke Little Suzie's pencil holder and blamed it on the class guinea pig, but it's true. Sometimes, lies serve the purpose of illuminating the truth. Now, it would be hard to classify hoaxes as anything other than lies put to purpose, much like foma in the works of Kurt Vonnegut. Hoaxes are untruths, no question, but usually they play a role by forcing us to understand that meaning of things we usually mostly float along with.

Fandom is one of the few places where a good hoax is appreciated anymore. In the 1800s, there were dozens of great hoaxes, many played as outright cons, but most just done for the flip of it. Perhaps it's the fact that hoaxes are fiction written in activity that makes them so appealing to fandom. Some of the most impressive moments in the history of fandom have been hoaxes. In the earliest days, fans would create false identities and write in-character. Bob Tucker, the Father of Fandom some have called him, created Hoy Ping Pong as one of his pseudonyms. The Great Staple War was the first major hoax in fandom, and one of the most important in setting the tone. It was 1934 and Father Tucker and Donald Wolheim staged a fake feud over the use of staples in science fiction publications through the Brass Tacks lettercol of Astounding Science Fiction. This was less than five years after the first SF Fanzine and well before even the first science fiction conventions would appear. There were even people who took them seriously, including the magazine's editor, and that would lead to great confusion and consternation.

"Fandom is one of the few places where a good hoax is appreciated anymore. "

Hoaxes have been around since the beginning and have never stopped. In the Bay Area, the legendary fan Carl Brandon was created by Terry Carr and Ron Ellik. He was put on the waiting list for FAPA when someone asked what would happen if a black fan applied for membership. 'Brandon' then responded that it wasn't a theoretical debate any longer because he was black. From there, a great many other smaller hoaxes grew, including the legendary Tower of Bheer Cans to Heaven.

Bay Area fandom has always been a site for great hoaxes. The Little Men, founded in the 1940s and continued through the 1990s, once got national attention by declaring that they owned the moon. Carl Brandon became a major legend in fandom and people like Carr, Ellik and Bill Donaho all put some powerful juju over on fandom over the years.

Recently, I've been involved in the tradition. I've started, played along with and in a couple of cases finished, a few hoaxes, all in good fun and some with an actual point. The first happened in 2005 when I had heard about the mayoral race in San Jose. I hadn't lived in San Jose in about a year, but I knew that there'd be a lot of fun to be had. I was already writing The Drink Tank and I wanted to do something strange. I decided to announce that I was running for mayor of San Jose, a city where I did not live and therefore could not be elected mayor of. I called my campaign 'Me for Mayor' and started it in the pages of The Drink Tank. I printed up fliers and I distributed them. I held a few 'rallies' where I would stand on a literal soap box by San Pedro Square and announce my plan: to bring back the 200+ foot light tower over the intersection of Santa Clara and Market streets. The plan was to simply get out there and make folks think a little...or to make a public ass out of myself for the hell of it. I'm still not sure which was more important. The election happen and I slunk away without much notice, but that's OK because a few months after Chuck Reed was elected, there was a note on the front page of the Mercury talking about rebuilding the light tower as a part of a massive arts council project. I was win!

The second hoax I personally took part in was concocted by Andy Trembley and Kevin Roche. You see, they were interested in doing a hoax for the 2006 WorldCon. The hoax they came up with was very simple: Casa de WorldCon. The idea was simple, since there's huge amounts of traffic between Southern California fandom and NorCal cons and events, everyone passes by Casa de Fruta, an agricultural attraction that most folks use for either a restroom or snack stop on the way to and from. It's a small piece of the road, but those of us long-haul drivers know it and perhaps even love it a little. Andy came up with the idea that we hoax hosting the WorldCon there in the small trailer park and tiny motel. I agreed to do the progress reports, 4 page zines talking about all the wonderful things that would happen at the con. I went on an extra trip and took a lot of pictures that I used. After a couple of regular progress reportish issues, I started getting stranger and stranger. First, I said that Hunter S. Thompson, the deceased writer who has inspired much of my gonzo attitude, had endorsed us in a tape recording that was recently uncovered. I did an article about a raving lunatic who endorsed us. One about how all the other cities in the running had been declared Nuclear Hell Holes. In short, I was snarky, tried to be funny, and made fun of as many typical convention progress report traditions as I could.

And that was where I was secretly doing something very right.

You see, progress reports aren't something that a lot of bids do. They put out websites, they keep info flowing, but mostly PRs are the realm of seated cons. The other bids put out one issue altogether, a meaty one of more than 30 pages for the ultimately unsuccessful Chicago bid, while we managed 6 issues of about 26 pages. We had art and comedy and strangeness that fit as neither (such as the world's snarkiest crossword puzzles) and they had information. We were answering their seriousness with our silliness.

And at the same time, increasing the seriousness.

Yes, we were proposing a bid that couldn't win, but we were also forcing light on to the voting. Yes, we were being crazy (and in my writing I was supporting Denver over Columbus and Chicago, which seemed to have annoyed some) but we were making sure people really understood the process the best that they could. Some people took us seriously, said that we were hurting bids by hoaxing it, but we explained through our LJ (and a handy one-sheet explaining how to vote for us produced by Kevin Roche) that we wanted folks to look at their ballots seriously, to take their choices seriously, even if they were simply funny choices. It is completely possible to be both deadly serious and totally irreverent at the same time to the right crowd; the kind of crowd that can hold two completely different thoughts in their heads at once. In short: it's something you can do to fans.



We did well. Out party at LACon IV was a success. I couldn't stay for the whole thing, mostly due to the fact that I hadn't slept in about 38 hours, but there were people and they had a good time. We got 79 votes in the voting. That was as strong a turn-out as we could have hoped for. More than anything we pissed off some people and made some laugh, but everyone, whether they realized it or not, participated in a large scale piece of educational performance art.

And maybe that's what hoaxing is: art. I am admittedly possessed of little in the way of talent outside of talking. I'm a legendary talker but that's almost a survival instinct. I can't paint, my writing, while plentiful, seldom crawls out of the mire than is frivolous and I can neither sing nor dance. But I can come up with scenarios where the collective truth is blurry enough and lie entertaining enough to whip folks up. In other words, I can think of a world that is more colourful than our own and make people want to be a part of that. That is what a good hoax does. A good hoax makes you think about what can change, both big and small, and what you can do to make it matter.

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Hoax (cont.)

The final of my major hoaxes (and I will say that I've got dozens of tiny ones hiding in the corners, shading their eyes) was AhwahneeCon, a bid to bring Westercon to Yosemite Valley. It was a silly bid which took a lot of what I learned in doing Casa de WorldCon and applying it to the new bid. This was my idea, and had I know that it would have been possible for us to win due to the oddness of the Westercon site selection rules, I never would have done it. I did several progress reports called Half Dome Happenings and I wrote a lot of little things. I had a full army behind me this time. Though we didn't collect as much money or as many pre-supporters as we had for Casa de WorldCon, we did have more people helping with the parties and wearing our ribbons proudly on their Con badges. We threw a great party and managed to kick some money back into the BASFA Party Fund. We had done our duty. We got a higher percentage of votes for AhwahneeCon than we did for Casa de WorldCon, and I'm very proud of that.

I'm probably going to hoax again. The draw is just too strong. Perhaps hoaxing is the end product of an active mind. The desire to put out a concept that is false and exceptional into a situation that is dull yet real appeals to me because we understand that Truth need not be True. It merely needs to feel true. ☀

Worldcon? In Hollister?

There's a lot more to Hollister than trendy clothing, motorcycle gangs terrorizing the citizenry and... something...

Hollister is home to **Casa de Fruta**, an enduring California landmark fruit stand and event center, celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2008. What better place could host the 2008 Worldcon?

Nestled in the beautiful Pacheco Pass, only 30 minutes from San Jose Mineta International Airport, and on a major route between the SF Bay Area and Los Angeles, Casa de Fruta's 14-room *Casa de Motel* and 300 space *Casa de RV Park* will provide a convenient and unique Worldcon experience. You won't be lining up for an elevator at our facilities.

Conference facilities are just as unique. Casa de Fruta's Country Park, Music Hall, Carousel (for round-robin discussions) and Train (Casa de Choo-Choo) offer opportunities unequalled.

Vote Hollister in 2008. Vote *Casa de Worldcon!* Join, and be fruitful!

Bid Chair: Andy Trembley • **Mayor of Casa de Worldcon City:** Chris Garcia
Kevin Roche • Barbara Johnson-Haddad • Kevin Standlee • Dave Gallaher
Spring Schoenhuth • Fred C. Moulton • Lisa Deutsch Harrigan • Cheryl Morgan
Casey Swan (Dailey Swan Publishing) • Adrienne Foster • Jay Lake
Henry W. Osier • Carole Parker • Mr. Shirt • Lynn Gold
Chris O'Halloran • John O'Halloran • Mitzi Jones • LaMont Jones

*Hollister in 2008 pre-support forms and agents available to help you
at this very convention!*

Website: <<http://hollister2008.livejournal.com/>>
E-mail: hollister2008@bovil.com

"Hollister in 2008" is a committee of the *Bay Area Science Fiction Association*
"We do these things not because they are easy, but because they are weird!"

Slash: Not Just for Gay Men Any Longer

Simon's Flower

When I first started in fandom around twenty-five years ago, I was innocent. Though I wrote what would now be considered fanfiction – I didn't know that's what it was called at the time – I never wrote anything other than meeting a male rock idol, sleeping with him and having him fall in love and marry me. My female leads were, if not literally myself written in fanfic form, complete Mary Sues.

How times have changed.

Though I can't recall exactly when, something about how I looked at pretty men changed. I began to wonder what it would look like if two pretty men kissed. I began to wonder what it would look like if they did more than kiss. I realized that my own fantasies were no longer quite as vanilla as they once were and a threesome with those bisexual pretty men would be very interesting. I read some real person slash (RPS) but it didn't appeal much. It's easier to completely imagine something than to change what you already know about a real person.

Despite that, it took twenty years before I wrote my first piece of slash fiction. As a writer, I'm considered a "switcher" in that I write both het and slash, sometimes both when I write threesomes. Most writers, at least in the Harry Potter fandom, are one or the other, rarely both.

Writing slash, in addition to het, has allowed me to broaden my horizons. As naïve as it may sound, writing slash opened me to starting to understand homosexuality. Being raised in a heteronormative world gave me a negative view of homosexuality, a very "us vs. them" mentality. Once I began writing, I began to see the appeal on a completely voyeuristic level. After more time passed, I began to pay much more attention to GLBT issues.

The predominance of women in writing has led to two very different "camps," the ones I mentioned before. There are those who write only het and don't read or write slash. Many find slash distasteful. Most of the remainder read and write slash exclusively, finding het distasteful though, in most cases, they're straight. There are few men who write fanfiction, but those who do seem to be split fairly evenly into the het camp and slash camp.

Writing both het and slash, for me, has become an outlet; writing slash is freeing. When I'm writing, I can imagine myself in a different location, as a different person. I can think about what it would be like to have a different history, a different present, a different future. Writing slash reinforces that even further because I have to completely change my perspective, no longer writing a character loving one of an opposite gender, but writing a character who loves one of their own gender and all the societal taboos that breaks.

Because, let's face it, there are only so many boy-meets-girl stories you can read. ☼



Riyuen

LOC Box

From John Purcell:

Welcome, to the big, wide world of fanzine fandom! I am positive that you have already received a loc from Chris Garcia, possibly even Lloyd Penney, but this is how it goes. You pub, others write in. Or trade.

Thank you. Chris was actually instrumental in getting me involved in zining. The letter from Lloyd Penney is later in this letter column.

Which leads neatly into a discussion point about one "nugget" of fandom, response. Back in the day, as Chris Garcia noted, the main means of communication between fans were the fanzines and the US Postal Service. The physical distances involved between most fans was huge, so unless you lived in a major city where a half-dozen or so science fiction fans lived - like Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, and Boston - the likelihood of getting together with other fans was damn near bleak. Correspondence was the initial force that drew the nuggets together to coalesce in the atom known as Science Fiction Fandom.

This is probably the best analogy that Chris is probably looking for in his article (which is a decent introductory bit; for anyone who really wants to read up on the beginnings of fandom, check out *The Immortal Storm* by Sam Moskowitz, *Up to Now*, by Jack Speer, and *All Our Yesterdays* by Harry Warner, Jr.; all are indispensable additions to a fan's library). Imagine if the nucleus in an atomic model is labeled "Science Fiction" and orbiting it are assorted electrons of different sizes labeled "fanzines, cons, feuds, clubs, N3F, Star Trek, Star Wars, anime, comic books, fantasy, Sword & Sorcery," ERBdom, Regency Dancing, and so on. That would be a good visual image of what fandom here in the early 21st century looks like. Some of these electrons, like fanzines, have shrunk over the years, but they still are an important component of this atomic model. Others are growing rapidly while others expand and shrink at random intervals.

As you can probably guess, this is a rather unstable atom, subject to explosion at any given time. The way I look at it, when the mass of one of these electrons gets too large and increases its orbital speed accordingly, it will escape the gravitational pull of the parent nucleus and become its own atom; eventually, even this escaped particle will become the nucleus of a new atomic model, collecting its own group of orbiting subparticles. The process is repeated time and again as each atom - including the parent atom, of course - continues to split.

Scary, isn't it? But over all, fandom is a fun place to be from time to time. The main thing to draw from Chris' article is that fans are generally a gregarious lot who enjoy each other's company and making new friends. Participate like Chris - well, not exactly like Chris; I can't imagine anybody else with that kind of energy level; talk about an unstable isotope! - and you will be accepted into the group. Yeah, it's a bit like getting initiated into a fraternity of sorts, but there's no real hazing process, and it's an open door. Anybody can join if they're really interested in getting involved and doing stuff that can increase the enjoyment level.

Very well put! Given Chris' infectious energy levels when he is in public, the atomic model seems apropos.

This loccking stuff is exactly the kind of participation that increases the fun. I hope you enjoy my zine and will respond in kind if you so feel. It is up to you. I will say this: you have made a wonderful start with your first issue, Kristina. By stating a quarterly schedule, you should acquire a goodly number of locs (letters of comment) to build a solid letter column around. Ah, there's that atomic model analogy again...

There are other things in your debut ish that I enjoyed, too. Simons Flower said something in her Phoenix Rising con report that I have seen over my decades of convention attending. If there are any mundane groups or individuals in the same hotel that a SF con is being held, you are going to get some Very Strange Looks. Actually, I love observing the culture clash since I appear to be so mundane in appearance. (Looks are so deceiving...) In a way, this increases my enjoyment of a con, albeit in a small way. Cons are a lot of fun, even for satellite fandoms like Anime and Harry Potter. If you're interested in it, you'll have fun.

"If you're interested in it, you'll have fun." Precisely!

This leads very neatly into Andrew Trembley's article, "Party Life." This held an interesting bit of information to me. I had no idea that Andrew's first contact with organized fandom was Minicon 28. That was the year after my last Minicon (number 27, held in 1992). Minneapolis Fandom was where I encountered fandom, and it was a wonderful place to be in the 70s and 80s. It still is, I am sure. But Andrew picks up the spirit of what Minicons were like back in the day, and it is sad to think that such an initial exposure can color your perceptions and expectations of other cons.

Those expectations and perception would also seem to be what would keep a person coming back to conventions in their chosen fandom. Kind of like a seeking a fandom grail. In my opinion, the rush of a great convention can make up for 3 or 4 disappointing ones. Mediocre panels and poor hotel service become pale memories in comparison to raucous bid parties and dynamic guests.

That is what happened to me when I went to my first con after 14 years away: AggieCon 37 (March, 2006). A completely different environment from what I knew so well for so many years in my younger - and single - years.

The underlying message Andrew says, though, is so important: the success of a con lies with the people who are working on it, especially the unsung volunteers. Been there, done that. Besides, if you get involved the chances of your meeting really neat people increases, and thus the enjoyment level of that con ramps up. The added bonus here is that at other cons you attend you will probably run into some of these people again, immediately giving you that all-important bonding feature that makes fandom so unique.

It is such a hard concept to explain in words; the best way to do so is simply attend a science fiction convention and get involved. You will either love it or hate it. But I'll place my bet on the former happening.

I couldn't agree more.

Finally, I get to Abby's Renaissance Faire bit. My family loves to attend these, and my wife will be putting the finishing touches on our costumes for this year's Texas Renaissance Festival coming up at the end of September and running through the end of November (8 weeks!). It is unlikely that we will ever join a guild, but College Station does have a SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism) group that is prominent at the RenFest and AggieCons. Valerie has expressed a desire to join and become a part of the costuming part of the group. They are an interesting bunch of people, too, and I have met some of them. Once again, here's another orbiting particle of SF fandom that has spun off on its own to create its particular sub-genre atomic model. It happens.

Hey, this is a decent sized loc for a first issue. Good job, Kristina! You filled your ish with good comment hooks and a pleasant, eye-friendly layout. I look forward to your next effort, and hope to see you at a con someday.☀

~~~~~  
From John Coxon (editor of Procrastinations):

Firstly, I'll just say that I'm liking the way you've laid it out. As you'll be able to see if you ever check my fanzine, Procrastinations, out on eFanzines, I tend to plump for a rather simplistic layout, and your fanzine is a very simple but elegantly designed one. It has pictures in it and everything, but maintains an extremely linear and professional feel which I can only dream of ever achieving in the future.

***Thank you.***

The articles you've included in the issue are interesting – I may be biased, as I'm mentioned in it, but Chris Garcia's article on nuggets and how they are at the centre of social groups was absolutely fascinating. I have always found his writing about various things quite interesting, though, so that'll explain that. Oh, and he's always really, really nice about my zines, and everybody should vote Chris Garcia in the next TAFF race. Yup.

***It was a tremendous boon to our inaugural issue that Chris wrote that piece. It was a joy to read and very thought provoking.***

(continued on page14)

## LOC Box (cont.)

The article on parties at conventions contains a slight factual inaccuracy – British fans do not retire to the pub at night at conventions. Now, because I've only been to three conventions, and one of those had a thing called a 'fannish living room' which was, essentially, a room party but in function space and with a much better selection of drinks, I could well be incorrect, but room parties definitely, definitely happen. Hell, at my first convention, I hosted a rather good room party. I wasn't able to actually attend, but my roommate assured me it was top-notch, whilst I assured him I'd had some very good fun with my new female friend down in the bar and later elsewhere. I think British fans, who usually secure the opening of the con bar until fairly late, are content to spend as long as possible in the bar and then either bring drinks from their room down into the (now almost deserted) bar or go up to their room and continue drinking there. I'd be very interested to hear from my fellow Brits who might have more experience than I with these things – perhaps that can be a thread in the next LOC column of Enigma.

I must confess that it was interesting to read about Harry Potter fandom over in the US, since a friend of mine was recently closely involved with running a Harry Potter weekend (which, fortunately but entirely by chance, was held over the same weekend as the release of the final book...!) and I found it interesting that the report of the convention in your zine was talking about people who had dressed up as various characters, whereas the various people I met who were talking about Sectus (this being the British con) hardly mentioned anyone being in costume at all. I suspect that this may be yet another difference between the USA and the UK, but I am not really a member of that particular fandom and thus would feel uncomfortable talking about it as if I had any real clue whatsoever.

As I've said pretty much all I wanted to say about the ish, let me just close by saying that Chris Garcia usually knows what he's talking about when he recommends a fanzine, and he wasn't wrong in this case. I look forward to reading the second issue.

***Thank you very much. I am glad to hear that you enjoyed reading it. I definitely enjoyed putting it together☀***

~~~~~  
From Lloyd Penney:

Your fanzine is a fanzine I've wanted to see for a while...why do we do the things we do, what tradition drives us to do it, who started it, why do we congregate and then snark at one another. I hope Consonant Enigma 1 is just the first in a series of serious examinations into the fannish psyche. We might find some scary things, but they need examination, too.

Human behavior, fans in particular, have always fascinated me . I kept looking for a zine that would sate that craving. Eventually this desire combined with enough time spent in Chris Garcia's acquaintance lead to the creation of CE#1.

Chris Garcia told us all you're from the Bay Area, so I might see some photos of some of the fannish fun already seen in The Drink Tank and SF/SF. What better source material?

Yes. We do share some of the same resources.

Science fiction grew up around many things...the feeling of isolation in a small town or even a big city, the being isolated by your peers, the feeling of boredom in an every-day life, and interests that nothing in your purview could satisfy. Science fiction adventures took you out of your humdrum existence and took you into excitement in an extremely unusual environment, where you could immerse yourself in an exciting adventure. What a refreshing vacation from your life. I honestly believe that reading any science fiction adventure is a psychologically healthy and mentally refreshing break. Back in your everyday life, though, you want nothing more than to share this new found satisfaction of your inner dreams with someone, and you wonder if anyone else has ever found what you've found. The answer is yes, there is a network of people out there who have found what you've found, and they share that relieving interest with many others around the world, and you breathe a sigh of relief, and say, I'm home. I have found my family. That network is fandom. Fandom is a family like others, and we gather and fight and refuse to speak to each other and embrace each other.

Some years ago now, there was a special convention in Toronto. The city was selected by the members of more than 20 assorted Lord of the Rings websites to be the host of Gathering of the Fellowship, scheduled to be held at the same time as the release of the second Lord of the Rings movie. So many of these people were simply on-line pseudonyms to each other, and finally, they were able to meet. Nothing beats the physical meeting. The convention brought together people from all over the world. One woman I met from Warsaw, Poland was nearly in tears, saying she had dreamed of meeting all these people to share their deep interest in the tales of Middle-Earth, and finally, they could. The Gathering fulfilled a deep desire to share that interest, and no doubt created friendships that will last a lifetime. I attended and met with some of the committee, including the chairman, Ed Rodriguez, and while few of them had attended the kids of conventions so many of take for granted, he saw their value, and the opportunity to meet brought so many together. The convention lost money, and a sequel convention in Toronto lost even more, but the event solidified LotR fandom...I hope the lack of further conventions won't pull them apart. The Harry Potter essay by Simon's Flower details a similar convention with similar results.

Conventions can feel like coming home for fans. So many of us are fringe to mainstream society. Finally finding a place where we are not the “other” can be incredibly emotional.

Andy Tremblay asks what makes a convention. It's the people, plain and simple. My kind of convention has my friends, both old and new, contains something for me to do and say, something to leave behind, and something to take away. It has good food and drink, good conversation and comfortable surroundings. It contains tradition and something new, and creativity mixed with tradition. Some conventions don't have parties because they are parties themselves (I'm thinking of relaxicons like Midwestcon, and specialty conventions like Corflu), but some intense get-together, party, a little liquor to loosen things up a little and there's a party to make some memories with. Andy, I'm sure I attended your party at ConAdian.

Arguably the attending fen create this for themselves. Often the actual convention, as planned by the staff, is a loose framework that facilitates the interactions you have mentioned.

On page 5 is the question, “What makes my kind of convention different from other kinds of conventions and shows?” My answer off the top of my head is the social interaction. One of my employers is an agency that supplies registration staff to conference and trade shows. Yes, I get paid to work registration. There is some level of community because of the common interest or industry, but as far as the evening goes, there's dinner and local attractions, and not much else. There might be a sponsored lounge, but not much socializing. We know that party is one of the best vehicles in creating community.

Thank you for bringing up the contrast in that way.

Chris Garcia is right, at the dawn of fandom in the early 1930s, fanzines were fandom. As much as I like fanzines, I like other activities, too, and as fandom encouraged creative and strange activities, conventions came about to allow others to finally meet, and more and more activities were created. If people complain about all the specialized clubs, activities, conventions, etc., they are victims of the anarchic nature of fandom, going off and doing whatever it damned well pleases. I know that Star Trek brought a lot of people into fandom, and I suspect I'm one of them, but others must have come in through the variety of activities, and the appreciation for specialized talents. There are science fictional outlets for most crafts...songwriters and musicians are drawn to filk, as those who create with their hands are drawn to the art show, the masquerade and the dealers' room.

Modern fen do suffer an embarrassment of riches when it comes to potential fanac.

I have been involved in fanzines for nearly 25 years now. With the exception of about a dozen articles and a handful of pieces of filler art (that few knew about until recently), I have spent all that time in the local. It's been rewarding, and I took Harry Warner's fine example of loccing all fanzines to heart. Every zine deserved some kind of response, and with a few exceptions, I have tried to do that. Some have accepted me, others have not, and I haven't had many opportunities to make myself known to fanzine fandom at large. I have been to three fanzine conventions, two Dittos and one Corflu, all in Toronto. Yvonne and I will be attending Corflu Silver in Las Vegas, and it will be interesting to see how a large group of fanzine fans reacts to me, and how I react to them. Some people are nice in person, and not so much in print...

Like any virtual relations, it is easier to be snarky in text than when you have to deal with the person face-to-face. I have seen folks who were brutally hostile toward each other in print behave with the utmost civility when they are put together in meat space.

One thing we do see in fandom is politics, and I believe there's good and bad politics. Good politics makes things happen, and bad politics tears down good ideas and good people. I hear complaints about how bad fannish politics is, and I hear others say, “Well if you think fannish politics is bad, you should see...”, and you can fill in the blank with just about any other activity. Friends of min just ran a two-day RenFaire in British Columbia, and the politics were fierce. SCAdian types spread rumours about them because the friends were not SCAdians themselves. Others spread rumours, ruined hard-fought-for deals, and more, yet the event took place, and all was well, according to the sketchy reports I've seen. They are already planning to do next year's event, and with some track record behind them, bad politics will have a harder time hurting them. RenFaires should be held in the spring or fall. Toronto used to have one this time of year, but it failed financially, and the closest we get is a three-day event held in the beautiful confines of Casa Loma.

See, I was certain I could write a decent letter for this zine; I just didn't think it would go to a third page! There's lots to talk about here, and I'm in my element here. Just bring on the second issue, and we'll have lots more to talk about. Looking forward to it! ☺



KeBaPPi

Graphic References:

Fan art provided by:

Raimo Kokko - kisucat.deviantart.com

KeBaPPi - kebappi.deviantart.com

Laura Toivola - murklins.deviantart.com

Sina - lennylein.deviantart.com

Riyuen - riyuen.deviantart.com

Photos and hoax con bid artwork provided by:

Abby Blackfox

Chris Garcia

Andy Trembley