

NOTHING LIKE THE GOOD OLD DAYS



THE DRINK TANK ISSUE 137

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**Letter-Graded Mail
sent to garcia@computerhistory.org
by my Gentle Readers**

**Let us begin with a new
LoCster...Alison Scott!!!**

I hang my head in shame really; you've got to 136 issues of your fanzine and I haven't previously read any of them. I have been a true Luddite in the matter of electronic fanzines, much preferring to get them in nice paper packages. I am not yet sure that this has changed, but I am determined to give electronic zines another go. Having said that, I can't find a colophon or mailing address anywhere on 134, 135 or 136 -- can I suggest you ensure

these are easily findable on every issue?
Well, I never do a colophon or a ToC for the simple reason that I don't like doing them. I try and include my eDress with the LetterCol heading and sometimes on the cover too. I probably should make sure that it's found more often in every issue.

Charlie Stross is more geeky than me -
- or than you, I'd bet -
- and he tipped me and all his other LiveJournal

friends off to the fact that the Nokia 770 Internet Tablet was available on closeout for a fraction of its former cost. So I have bought one, and am using its .pdf reading capabilities to read The Drink Tank, Vegas Fandom Weekly, eI, and other stalwarts of efanazines. It is, I think, lovely, though I am not sure how well it would work for people whose eyes are beyond small print.

Yeah, small print is tough. My eyes are actually a little too weak for too much of it. I always say that eFanzines.com has some of the best fanzines going (including all the ones you mentioned). That Nokia 770 is a sweet piece of electronics.

I would love to get one, but even at the discount that they're offering out in these parts I'll never be able to afford one with what I take home. I have to agree that Chuck's probably far geekier than I am even though I'm a geek for a living!

James Bacon's tribute to the marvellous children's department in Foyles should, I think, have mentioned that the reason that the Foyles children's department is so good is that for many years it has been managed by Fannish Giant Julie Rigby. Julie's now moved on to a job outside retail, so expect the department to succumb to the forces of entropy in the near future.
It's always a bad sign when someone who really understands children's retail leaves. Gen, my Ex, runs a toy store that has had ups and downs in that department.

I sleepily read Robert Hole's note about his experiences of Westercon on my way into work, thinking 'gosh, what a strange con Westercon must be'. Reading it a second time, a lightbulb came on over my head. Which was handy, as it tends to be a bit dark in the Large Government Bunker where I work.

Cheers

Alison

You know, I totally missed the gag the first time I read it. Then I got it. I hope you at least have good ventilation in the Bunker...

Thanks Alison!

**And now there is Mr. Texas
LoC...John Purcell!**

AHAH! This time I've got you **cold!** While you're in St. Louis attending the NASFiC, I can loc your latest zine without worrying about you sneaking the next one past me! Thought you could escape me and my evil plan... *BWAHAHAHAHAHahaha hahaha.....*

I thought about it, and if I owned a laptop I totally would ahve hosed you!

Man, I have got to meet James Bacon some day. I love bookstores. It doesn't matter to me whether they carry old or new books; if it's a bookstore, this is a place I love to go. I do have to admit that the sound of Waterstones corralling so much of the UK market for book sales is an interesting development, It makes me wonder if their US counterpart is Barnes & Noble or Hastings. And I like both of those places because they're bookstores. Go figure.

James is a good guy. Met him at LACon. I'm a bookstore nut too, especially used bookstores. But you've heard me talk about that once or twice, haven't you?

Derek McCaw's article was fascinating, and I guess until he started listing all these shows out that I never realized how many TV



shows were based either completely or partially on comic book characters. I guess I'm not really surprised either, since they are all escapist fare and the typical American television viewer loves to admire larger-than-life heroes, or at least pines for someone to Save The Day as needed. There is really good stuff on the tube along these lines right now, and I am enjoying it. The ultimate version of this is on that questionable cable channel, Sci-Fi, with Stan Lee's *Who Wants to be a Superhero?* This show appeals to that part inside all of us who wish they could fly, catch the bad guy, and make a difference if only they had some kind of special power. It is a frivolous show, but so are all the others. We share this fantasy, and therein lies the appeal of comic book heroes. It is definitely a fun fantasy to have.

Who wants to be a Superhero was an abomination! I'm gald it tanked, no matter how much warmness I feel for good old Stan Lee. Derek's the guy I go to for Comic answers.

Hey, I think I would have enjoyed attending Robert Hole's version of Westercon 60. Talk about your alternate realities! Unfortunately, I would not be surprised if some of the micro-programming items of some cons actually did have flower arranging, stfnal quilting bees, and so on. It Could Happen. Maybe Robert is issuing a warning call about what cons are turning into. Take heed, future con goers. We might be in for it.

Well, the hotel was confusing so I totally believe that he could have ended up Somewhere Else...

Anyway, I am happy that you have picked up a life. Even if it does mean that your zine publishing schedule slows down a bit, sometimes there really are things - and people - which are much more important than fan pubbing. Boy, doesn't that sound weird coming from another faneditor! But it is true. Some times you just have to put something on the back burner when a more important matter crops up.

Just don't STOP publishing, y'hear?

All the best,
John Purcell

Yes, people are more important...especially cute people...



On the Philosophy of Large Cons and Their Smaller Cousins

By Christopher J. Garcia

You may have read the issue of *The Drink Tank* where I discussed what made my perfect WorldCon. Identity, I said, was nearly as important as facilities themselves. It had to feel like something special, have a flavour of the town it was being

held in, feel like something different from other WorldCons while still maintaining the WorldCon quality. In short, it should say 'This is OUR WorldCon'.

I realize now that I may not have been 100% right. It is possible to go too much the other direction, to lose the thing that makes the WorldCon, in the case of this article the NASFiC, special. You can strip away the importance by not making it distinctly of the feel that should accompany a major con. As an

example, I shall use the 2007 NASFiC, TuckerCon, Archon 31 as my example.

Now before I get accused of bad mouthing a con, I really did have a wonderful time there. It was a brilliantly programmed con with lots of great stuff happening. The facility was really good and there were cheap hotels all around the convention centre so there was no problem getting a place that would suit the needs of almost any attendee (with the exception of the matter with the Holiday Inn who demanded full pre-payment before check-in). I had a lot of fun, there were a lot of good people around and I'd happily attend another Archon anytime I could make it happen.

But it wasn't supposed to be an Archon. It was supposed to be a NASFiC.

The thing about the Big SF Con of the Year, typically a WorldCon though once in a while it's a NASFiC, is that it feels like the Big SF Con of the Year. It draws people from all over, the major players, the big writers, the beautiful people of fandom and prodom. You get people in who you'd never see at the local con and people who only make it out for the Big SF Con of the Year. People should wander out of fannish hibernation to attend the BSFCY. It should feel like it's worth doing so just to rub elbows with the others who did the same.

With the NASFiC this year, it

never felt like a NASFiC; it felt like an Archon. It was a big regional convention that drew all the locals (or at least the important locals) and a smattering of people from the two Coasts. The BArea has a very active fandom and a lot of travelers. There were 8 people from the BArea that I ran into and running over the list of folks on the site that would seem to be the total of our area involvement. Boston has a big fandom and I only came across three Bostonians and a search of the membership list revealed another 2. There were a few people I met from every fannish centre of the country, but they all felt like they were the lone soldier in someone else's war as it were.

Maybe it felt like that because the big name I always expect to find at a WorldCon weren't there. No Ben Yalow. No Sharron Sbarsky. No Art Widner, Jack Speer or Rusty Hevelin. LA fandom was particularly absent. I didn't run into a regular LA fan (though I ran into two or three LA Pros) and that's unheard of. I ran into four or five LA fans at the tiny Philcon I went to in 2002, and here there were none. You can't blame a con for not drawing the right people, as it were, and it did have the fact that a lot of the regs were saving their funds to go to a WorldCon in Japan that was going to cost a lot of money. These things happen, but because of it, it never felt like the kind



of con that makes me write those long rambling Thank Yous.

The other problem was hearing what the regulars to Archon thought about the con. They complained that the price-increase to NASFiC level pricing was keeping some folks away. They have a point, but if it felt like a NASFiC there should have been no complaint. There were a few complaints that I heard about moving the Archon date to early August instead of

October, which chapped me slightly more. The NASFiC is traditionally held in Summer and that should have taken precedent over the date of Archon. It seems like all the locals put this as Archon first and NASFiC second. The feeling was this was Archon, which is strange to me, but it may have more to do with my view of fandom as a whole.

Now, I'm not sure what really could have been done to change it so that a combined con could have been

both NASFiC important and Archon true. One thing was to not make the con feel like a lesser version of Archon. There were hardly any parties. Part of that was the Holiday Inn being stupid. The other part might well have been the fact that the outside groups that go and throw parties at NASFiCs and WorldCons didn't show. There weren't even that many locals parties. It felt a little dead. Certainly the nightlife wasn't up to what NASFiC levels should be. That was a problem. A few times I heard folks saying that usually Archon does this of that and they weren't doing it this year because of the NASFiC. That was a weird surprise. They should have ramped things up instead of lowering the bar, if that's true. There apparently was the expectation that since this was the NASFiC and since the money for entry was higher, they'd lose people, though it turned out that this edition was within recent year's totals for attendees, and at higher prices, that should mean more, and not less. Still, I know how these things go a bit and those two statements may well be wrong.

The only real major complaint I have is that the Green Room was not staffed. I really think a staffed Green Room as a touch-base place is an important thing and I think that cons with good Green Rooms have an easier time dealing with panelists. There

didn't need to be food or anything, but a person there to answer questions, and preferably having that be where one went to get their panelist package and such, would have been very nice. It was very well-programmed, but the Green Room was missing and when I needed to do the add and change to the panel I was on, I had to search for head of science programming.

They really had two options: do NASFiC as the Archon or do a NASFiC in August and an Archon in October like usual. The two have certain advantages and disadvantages. The possibility of burn-out increases greatly by doing a major con so close to the regular local. Look at BayCon and Westercon this year. People were fried, though doing the BSFCY first might actually be easier. The money issue is still there and who knows if the locals would have turned out in the same numbers. It's hard to figure. The other option is to combine. This is where you have to be careful. Making sure to invite National-level panelists and reaching out to a lot of folks beyond your fandom's borders will help. Setting up major events with the bigger name writers you have is very important, and there were a few big writers like Laurel K. Hamilton. Most importantly, not calling it Archon 31 first is the biggest matter. Everyone called it Archon and mentioned it was the NASFiC. The Giant sign said

Welcome Archon 31. It should have said Welcome North American Science Fiction Convention TuckerCon. Yes, it was the Archon, but it's more important that it feel like a NASFiC. That one little thing might have made me overlook the feeling of visiting a large regional.

Still, I had a great time (read SF/SF 49 for a real review) and I'd go back to another Archon anytime I can make it work.





OK, so some of you have already heard, but it's come to my attention that using the title Chris for TAFF isn't exactly a good idea this go'round. Why you say? Karmic Justice, I answer.

I spent a fair deal of last year trying to make people remember who I was. No one knew me beyond the SF BArea crowd and folks in LA, Las Vegas and a few in Seattle. Since I was so little known, I got the word out all over the place. While I was at WorldCon, I was asked "Who's Chris?" when I handed them the Chris for TAFF ribbons. That would be come a more difficult question.

I was at NASFiC, working the Montreal party, and I handed a ribbon to someone and said "Chris for TAFF". They asked "Who's Chris?" and I started to answer, "Why, I am!" until I stopped and thought for a moment.

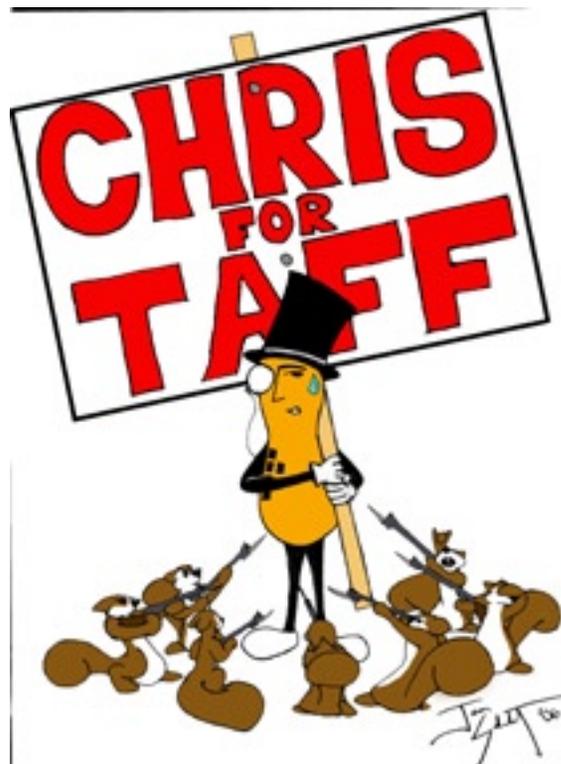
I was a Chris, but so was Chris Barkley. He was equally Chris-ish. Christian McGuire isn't called Chris

usually, but he could be called Chris.

I looked the lass in the eye and said "Well, it used to be me, but now I'm not so sure."

Now what do I do? I've got a website called Chris for TAFF and I've got a lot of other stuff with Chris for TAFF as my slogan. I've gotta stick with it, but it does feel a little strange. Not that I'm adverse to giving the other guys a push, since I think Chris Christian or Linda would all make a great TAFF delegate, but it's hard to say Chris for TAFF when there are other Chrises around. It's just kinda weird.

So I bewep my bootless campaign and sally-forth...



Sometimes, I get asked to go and look at things various places. The museum will send me as an envoy to decided which things among the crap I'm really interested in and then I'll figure out how to get them back to us (usually involving gathering a truck and lifting things over and over and over again). These trips often suck, no matter what there is to pick up. Even when I had to go and get a bunch of video game systems (ranging from the Odyssey II all the way through the Nintendos, Segas and up to the Dreamcast) I was dreading having to pick them up and go through them.

And sometimes cool stuff happens and I fall in love with a piece of equipment.

Such a thing happened to me when my curator pal Al Kossow and I were called away to History San Jose, the museum run by the City of San Jose that deals with Santa Clara Valley history and displays artifacts ranging from vacuum tubes all the way up through historic farm equipment to old trolleys that run to historic houses to a 1/2 scale recreation of the old light tower that was the basis of my quest for the Mayorship of San Jose. It's a great little museum ground and I've been going there since I was a little kid. They even have a working 1920s Ice Cream Parlor!

This visit wasn't to the museum grounds, but to their storage space.



Back in the early days of the 1900s, a fellow named Douglas Perham started collecting radio equipment. He continued doing that through the 1950s. The collection included pieces from folks like Lee DeForrest and Charles 'Doc' Harrold. Harrold was one of the first radio broadcasters and was the first radio station to have disk jockeys. DeForrest invented the triode vacuum tube and sound-on-film, which he won an Oscar for. Perham displayed it

in his house and eventually, after his death, it went to Foothill College, through some of it was displayed in the Vallco Shopping Centre in the 1970s and early 80s. That's where I remember seeing it.

The collection got it's own building eventually and a little office space.

In the 1990s, a dude name of Kip Crosby started putting together a collection of old computer stuff. He gathered a remarkable collections, including the only known examples of a few machines. He organized his collection and called his group CHAC: The Computer History Association of California. The CHAC collection was stored in San Jose in shipping containers shared with Perham, but as I understand it, CHAC was absorbed into Perham's collection. Not sure how or why, but it was.

Eventually, Perham needed more space and a display opportunity. The

good people at History San Jose came through. I'm not sure whether they bought the collection or just acquired it, but they now have it, whcih gave them access to some very important pieces, including Lee DeForrest's Special Oscar for inventing sound-on-film.

So, we went to take a look at what they might want to give us for the collection. Now, there were several very cool things, including a bisected Chuck E. Cheese that was kinda disturbing. I was looking over the stuff they offered and I turned the corner and there was something they couldn't offer: The First video Tape System.

Ampex was a very important company to the history of Silicon Valley. They invented the Quad video tape system. That was the first really important video tape system and it beat out RCA (and something that Bing Crosby was pushing). They even invented Slow-Motion Instant Replay. The video was on 2 inch tape, which were huge!



I'd seen a few of the tapes, but never one of the players.

And there it was. Gleaming on a pallet in the warehouse was one of the very first VCRs, taller than me and probably weighing a thousand pounds. It was gorgeous. I knew we couldn't take the beast, but I wanted it so!

I took a bunch of photos and spent some time simply ogling it. I never did touch it. I'm not sure why, there were certainly dials and knobs for me to play with. Maybe it was the fact that this was one item I could really consider as a museum object, worthy of being put behind a velvet rope, sealed off from the touch of miscreants like myself. I've always loved television and this was a part of what made modern TV possible.

And as many have said, it's not a fetish, it's an interest!



Another photo of the lovely and talented Linda. This one from Costume College. Photo by Chaz Boston-Baden from Hazel's Picture Gallery. <http://www.boston-baden.com/> gotta love the tiara