

THE DRINK TANK ISSUE 166



THERE'S NO WAY TO EXPLAIN



Things seem to be changing all over the place. The latest thing is BayCon, which made a change that is really a return to some kind of normalcy. Grizz, a great guy who would have made a good con chair, was removed and that led to Michael Siladi, a friend of mine and a guy who I think knows how to run a BayCon better than almost anyone else. He founded the thing so I guess that really says he should have a solid way to do it. There are people who have trouble with his management style, but I've always thought he does a good job. BayCon's hitting a new hotel, which is stressful, but not impossible to go through as they managed to do a good BayCon last year in the Escher Marriott in San Mateo (future home of Con-X-Treme Two: The Shocking Sequel). The funny thing is I think it's a good idea to move around the chairmanship of any con, but sometimes you need to shore up and put the mantle on someone who's been around. The press release listed the reasons as unresolvable differences, which is a bad thing, but they happen sometimes. I've heard nothing, but I'm hoping that it was one of those cases that a single point stuck and they couldn't reach a compromise and this was what happened.

BayCon is my home convention. When

I think of cons, it is highly colored by what I've been through at various BayCons. It's a well-run con, most of the time, with all the problems that every con has at one time or another having happened at one time or another. It's always been a fun con for me, with few major problems that have ever affected me. I've been to cons all over the place, and it's one of the most fun cons I've ever been to.

And this year, Tim Powers is the Writer GoH.

And to me that's a big deal. Tim Powers is a great writer, a guy who I think gets too little credit for the way modern fantasy has grown and who sometimes gets left out of discussions on good SF-tinged fantasy fiction (I'm thinking of books like *Expiration Date*) and is really one of the great writers of urban fantasy. That's a genre that is so wonderful, but often takes a backseat to books by mainstream authors that happen to have elements of fantasy to them. Think Letham and Chabon on those matters.

I am working on a tribute zine for the Fanzine Lounge. I need to work on it shortly and try to make it a fantastic zine. I'm hoping that I'll get to use his art that once ran in *Amra*. It's always good to get to use lesser known art. I know that he drew a Christmas card in the Green Room at LosCon in 2006 (Selena, my favourite fan artist, got it, I believe) and I need to find a way to get back to him shortly.

And of course, that brings up my other passion: wrestling. There was *WrestleMania* a couple of weeks ago and sadly I missed it. I also missed the Frank Shamrock vs. Cung Le match held in San Jose that was called one of

the best MMA matches in history. I watched Ric Flair's retirement ceremony on YouTube and I got myself a little bit teary-eyed. He was such a big part of wrestling in the years when I got into wrestling in the 1980s. I totally thought that he'd die in the ring at 75, never having retired, performing in front of 200 fans in some National Guard Armory in North Carolina. Now, I know that wrestlers seldom retire and stay retired, but everyone seems to be saying that Ric's out for good. And they gave him a great way out with the entire roster coming out to play tribute. Way to go.

And of course, there's *Dancing With the Stars*. I love *Dancing With The Stars*, but I seldom get to watch it since they moved it off of Wednesday, which I still think is the perfect day for it. I have to say that they referenced Sheryl Crow songs (and by extension, the *Talking Heads*). I do have to say that I think they should try and release a Cd of the versions they've done of Popular songs. They did a fun version of *Blue Monday*.

They also had a commercial for vitamins with Larry Seil (I think that's his name) one of the guys from the old *Square 1 TV* and that was awesome. He works a fair deal, but seldom does he get much to do. I always liked him.

And I should also mention that having a non-cable TV now is kinda nice. I was happy to get to watch some *Psych* on NBC. *Psych* is a great show and the first season was so good and the second season started good and ended up even better. I've only seen one episode of Season 3, but it was a good.

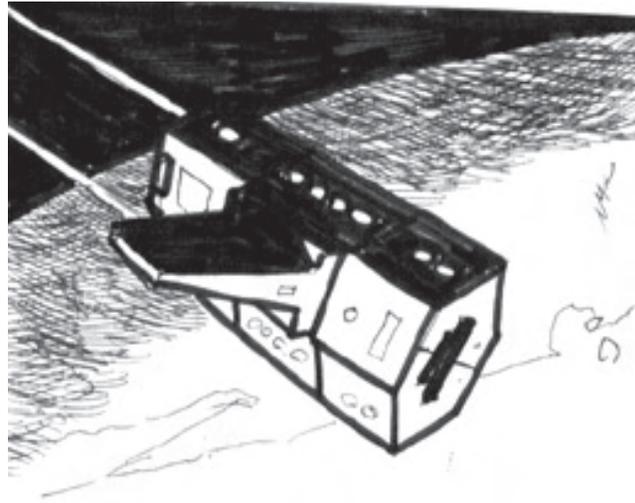
You can see, I've been kinda scattered.

The funny thing is that I always get ideas for new projects right when I start to get busy with other things. I've already got the plan to write the lame story of the three guys on the eve of Prohibition who go to San Francisco to score enough liquor to get them through the rest of their Senior year at Stanford by splitting up and having two of them figure out a way to fix a wrestling match between Stanilaus Zybysko and Ray Steele while the other would go off with a beautiful Latina and rob a ship. That story would be good to work on, and since I see it as a musical, I just wanna work on the story and get it out to someone.

And now I got a new one. A very darque idea that will be hard to write. I actually mapped out the basic story and the characters and I now know that I'll start it as a part of my NaNoWriMo this year, but there's no way I'll ever finish it. You see, it's a big twisted story with a ton of characters who all bounce off each other in a Altmanian sort of way.

It was inspired by the film *Festen* and *The Wild Party*. The idea is this: a guy has serious erectile dysfunction and goes to a shrink who puts him under and they recover the memory of his abuse at the hands of his father. He is then invited to a five hundred dollar a plate dinner to support his run for Senate. His sister figures out what he's going to do and then has to come up with ways of stopping him from ruining the event since she's her father's campaign manager.

Then there's the speech writer and her girlfriend, the conservative academic who are the Lesbian Couple of All Conservatives. They broke up nearly a year ago, but since they're so



involved with the campaign as the face of their GLBT front, they have to fake like they are still a couple, including having one of them get a new girlfriend but has to act like they're just having an affair and not a relationship. I thought about this as a separate story once, but it fits so nicely here.

There's the hired killer who dresses as a security guard and kills a reporter who was coming to attend the event, but when he changes into the dead guy's jacket because his was ripped, the Campaign manager thinks he's the reporter and ushers him into the house. That's another story I had in mind once that I thought would fit.

And then there's the actor who was once the best teen actor in the world during the 1960s. He ended up falling out of the limelight and when the Queer film explosion happened in the late 1980s, his agent convinces him to play like he's gay and he starts to get roles, but then decides that he's tired of being in films that no one sees and that don't make much money. He goes back to his church and falls out of the

limelight, leading the PR people to call him as a part of bringing gay people into the campaign limelight because of homophobic comments the candidate made. He sees it as a chance to get back into the public eye and restart his movie career.

Then there's the guy who wants to be a documentary filmmaker and keeps filming the event and taking everything onto film. There's the girl who's a wrestling promoter in Hawaii who is trying to get into regular society by supporting the senate run. There's the Irish comedian who is known for his imitations who is asked to MC the entire event, but can't seem to pull it together. There's the brother who has to deal with the girlfriend he left behind when he went on to the biggest ad firm in Silicon Valley.

And then whole thing is a comedy...kind of. It's a comedy in the same way that *Dancer in the Dark* is a comedy.

Yeah, it's one of those kinds of things.

I got all these film snippets that I keep seeing and as I went through making the outline (which I did yesterday morning), I realised that this would make for a great three hour movie by Paul Thomas Anderson, but it's not something that I could ever do myself. Still, I'm gonna write it and play with doing a script, but that'd take forever because it's a huge piece that I'm envisioning. I could cut back, but all those snippets seem to play with one another and feature all the stories collapsing in on themselves.

So, I come up with all these ideas and they take over my thinking and make it hard to play with. I've gotta stop playing like a fiction writer. I've gotta just go out and write stuff that's fun for me to write.

Eastercon: The Report from the Legendary Liz Batty

I started Eastercon early this year. Wednesday, to be precise, when I went over to Ely to help move the art show equipment from Tim and Marcia's garage (which is larger than my entire flat) and into a van which would head off to Heathrow the next day. I have never actually made it into an Eastercon art show, but having shifted what seems like several tons of steel for it I vow to actually go in this year.

On Thursday I cram all my stuff, including a large box of cake, into a couple of bags and head towards the hotel. I get about three feet into the lobby before encountering Judith (the chair) who knows a willing volunteer when she sees one, and I go to help the art show unload. The reason I'm there on Thursday this year is partly that as a programme organiser I felt a sense of obligation to help set up and not just turn up on Friday expecting all the programme to run smoothly, but as it turns out there's not a lot for me to do and I was a lot more useful as part of the art show assembly crew. It was also because I wanted to go to the aforementioned Jonathan Coulton gig without having to get back to Cambridge, and since the gig finished after the last train home this was a sensible decision. I ended up waiting in the rain for a night bus and getting back to my cheap hotel about 1am before crashing out.

Friday morning I get up early and head to the Radisson Non-Euclidean.

Which I actually find fairly easy to navigate, with the exception of the first time I

head to my room and go the wrong way around the loop of bedrooms, and take a hundred yard detour when I'm actually a stone's throw away from ops and green room. My room is ready at 9am and I think I'll go and register, except registration isn't open until 10am. Ah. I sit in the lobby and chat to Paul Cornell, who is awaiting the Hugo nominations. Next time I see him the nominations are out and he's running back to his hotel to blog about it, fielding congratulations on every side. (And as an aside, I know Blink is a fantastic episode but so is Human Nature/Family of Blood, and if Paul gets a Hugo

I think he might actually explode with joy on-stage. You know you want to see that, Denvention members.)

At some point on Friday morning I acquire the programme ops radio, which I will be wearing for about half the rest of the con. This gives the impression that I am super-busy at all times, when in fact the amount of times I will be called over the radio over the next four days is minimal and most of Friday I spend trying to work out what the people on the radio are saying and figure out which way the volume control goes. By this point the Third Row have assembled to mock my new cyborg enhancements, and there are panels to go to.

Graham is on the panel about Heinlein, which I decide to skip in favour of more



beer. Niall responds by giving me text message updates on the madness of the panellists, so I feel beer was the right choice. The first panel I make it to is The Hovercraft of Disbelief, about suspension of disbelief and what you can and can't take in a book, and it starts with the kiss of death to any programme organiser as the panellists sit down and profess they don't know what they're doing on this panel or have much of an idea what it's supposed to be about. And then they proceed to do a great panel and show why they're on it.

When It Changed is the panel where I stuck a bunch of female authors on stage and let them talk about their careers. Many thanks to Juliet McKenna for stepping in at the last minute on this one, I thought it was good but didn't

ever really catch fire.

The best part was seeing Tanith Lee, who I hadn't seen before but is a great panellist - gracious, interesting, and opinionated.

The BSFA Book Launch was the fullest I ever saw the Tetworth room, thus proving that free booze really does conquer all. I left after half an hour for a mighty Third Row curry, where the usual suspects acquired a Paul R, Shaun G, Paul C and his agent Simon for a trip to a curry house a mile away, which



you'd think was a twenty mile trek through the arctic wilderness for all the complaints I got about the distance. It was a very good curry, and the staff were unfazed by an impression of Emperor Palpatine commenting on the Clarke award shortlist and by sixteen people generally being disorganised and chatty. We returned in time for me to not go to the UK Short Fiction Markets panel and sit in the bar and the atrium for the next four hours until I admitted defeat and went to bed. I never actually got to the Newbury bar, and it seemed that the atrium and real ale bar were where the social focus of the con was - understandably, because it was easy to drift out of the programme rooms and never get any further than the atrium. Also after 11pm it smelled of bacon.

would you put in the Big Brother house?". I caught 20 minutes of China Mieville's GoH slot (seeing only parts of panels would become a recurring theme of my con), but that was enough for me to see why the man has so many fans as he did a speech which combined words such as "hegemonising" and "fucking wrongheads", and it's doesn't hurt that he's extremely hot.

Next up was Fantastic London, a natural panel for a London Eastercon about the how and why of using London in your genre fiction. I saw most of this and really enjoyed it - Graham moderated Neil Gaiman, Geoff Ryman, and Louis Savy, and it was a great mix of people on an interesting topic. In a room the temperature of a meat locker, but you can't have everything.

Saturday I got up waaay too early for breakfast, so I could go collect my radio and go to a 10am panel on the Mythology of Fantasy. My first encounter with the Neil Gaiman effect - I have never seen so many people at a 10am programme item. I would guess there were 350 people in there. Unfortunately I think it was a bit early for the panellists too, despite Nic's Gaiman-upstaging pint, and the questions were slightly odd - like "What's your favourite god?" and "What gods

I was starving by now, so I turned in my radio and went to MacDonalds, and came back to find that the Hay lecture was about to begin and no one had sorted out the tech. This was the first problem I actually had to deal with, and marked the first (but not the last) time someone would check that I'd remembered to eat and sleep that day. Luckily it was all sorted and I went to have a pint and go to a different panel about editing, only to discover radio coverage in the distant Tetworth room was distinctly scrappy and I'd better go back to the main building, which turned out to be a good idea as there were more things to sort out for the BSFA awards.

Post-awards, we attempted to eat in The Pheasant pub, only to find they were already filled up, including Paul Cornell having dinner with Neil Gaiman and taunting us. We ate at the Marriott hotel next door and arrived back in time for Right to Reply, aka should authors reply to reviews, aka the panel I was thinking might start an argument. My programme philosophy was to write a panel description with questions in it, get at least a couple of people with differing viewpoints on there, and let them fly. Right to Reply was a panel where this worked well, as there were enough points of disagreement to get some debate going but not enough to start stand-up arguments, and all the panelists were witty and affable even at 9pm. See later in the report for those panels which worked less well.

I decided to stay in the bar rather than go to At Least I Can Get a Fanzine Article Out of That, which I regret now as apparently it was a great panel. Ah well, you can't have it all, and

I proceeded to make with the drinking to try and forget about Dr Roberts telling us about poo and Ang telling us all about the art of chicken fisting.

Sunday morning I got up bright and early for breakfast again, and was thwarted by having to wait ten minutes before the hotel managed to replenish the supplies of fruit and milk for cereal. Watching fandom eat a hotel breakfast is like that bit from Little House on the Prairie where the swarm of locusts come and eat everything in Carrie's farmstead.

I started watching Books on the Web, which was unfortunately less interesting than I hoped, and I think it's because this is one of those panels I did several years too late. Like the debate about blogs being the new fanzines, we've stopped having the debate and all settled on the answer already. I didn't see the end of the panel, as the voices in my ear summoned me away, but I understand that Cory Doctorow did not put down the laptop for the whole panel, leading to the new panel idea, put Doctorow in a Faraday cage and see how long it is before he goes into withdrawal.

I heard part of Charlie Stross's GoH talk, but it was a) freezing in the main programme room again and b) a lot like a live-action version of his blog. Instead I warmed up and waited for Not the Clarke Awards, which I always love because it's just 90 minutes of intelligent talk about books, books, and more books. And occasionally whether the judges are on some sort of special crack. Verdict: this year the judges are fairly sane, except for The Red Men. Sadly, this panel was not that well attended, and I think it suffered due to proximity

to the Gaiman and Stross GoH talks whereas I was hoping it would benefit from them.

However, going to the panel before did mean I had an excellent seat for Gaiman's GoH spot. I was quite worried before the talk started, as we had well over a thousand people on site, and only 600 seats in the main hall. In the end we didn't quite fill the main hall, but it was close, and I was quite glad of my seat in the fourth row. (The third row was already full, y'see.) I would have preferred less readings and more of a Q&A session, and a bit more enlightenment on the Q&A for those of us without complete recall of all Gaiman's work ever, but he's a very good reader, and an entertaining guy, and seems to be modest and charming despite his fame. What a git.

By now it was 3.30pm, and despite all the reminders I had failed to eat, so I got a Creme Egg McFlurry much to the surprise of Chris Garcia who couldn't understand why I was eating ice-cream while it was snowing. This put me on a good big sugar high, which is a good job because next I had to do a panel. In fact I had to moderate it, which would be terrifying except it was a discussion of the BSFA award results, and really it could be moderated by a monkey. We had an interesting discussion with a very small audience, many of whom were the Third Row and some of whom could not resist sighing loudly when we made a point they disagreed with. Despite an outbreak of not putting up your hand like a good audience member we had a nice discussion and I was only incoherent at one point, so I call this a win.

Just time for a speedy hotel dinner com-



prised mostly of cake before catching the end of Fan History: Why Bother?, apparently after the exciting bits had taken place. Stayed for Two Minute Warning, in which four panelists ranted for two minutes on a number of topics, Chris Garcia was hysterically funny, and Ian Snell told us about his DIY toe surgery using Torchwood as anaesthetic. A swift pint and it was off to Comics as Collaboration, a great discussion between Paul Cornell, Matt Brooker and Bryan Talbot about working with others which covered lots of ground.

And then Mitch Benn! Alright, first I was feeling a bit panelled-out so I had a realxing chat for half an hour, but then there was Mitch Benn! And he was hilarious and brilliant. I missed Don't Cross the Streams, which

was apparently an example of where having conflicting views on a panel goes a bit too far and you end up with an unproductive back and forth, in this case Graham and China Mieville on one side against Peter Weston about the line between fantasy and science fiction. Then more beer, being jealous of Lilian getting to talk to Mitch Benn and Neil Gaiman (I would undoubtedly have become a tongue-tied fangirl, but I never did manage to talk to Gaiman or Mieville, sigh), weird vodka in the Montreal party, watching Chris stick twenty koalas in his beard for the good of the League of Fan Funds, more talking and planning with James B, until we ended up in the atrium and I decided it was time for sleep. But not before Shaun G caught up with me for a nice chat which made me wish I had started it sometime before 3am.

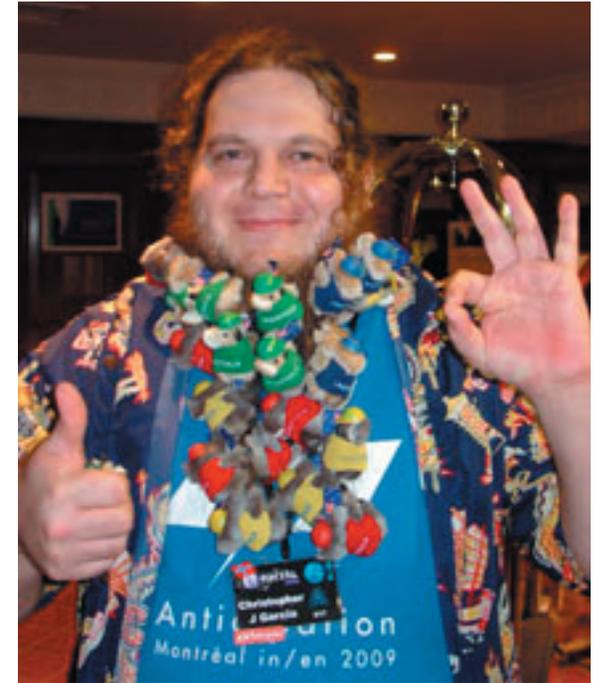
Woke up to find that I might only have had five hours' sleep but hey, my roommate John Coxon hadn't actually made it to bed at all and he was due to moderate Neil Gaiman early in the afternoon. Dragged myself down to breakfast and off to the bid session to watch Odyssey 2010 get voted in, not that I had any doubt it would be. Next up It Was Ten Years Ago Today, part of the BSFA 50th Anniversary programming, and I saw all of ten minutes of the panel before the little voices in my ear talked to me and it was programme troubleshooting time. Persuaded Chris to be emergency Sex and the Singularity panellist, did not at this point realise it was going to turn into a horrifying and hysterical panel with way more talk of hippo nether regions than I envisioned. Took a break here before I managed to get the Hitchhiker's panel offstage and watch You're Reading It

Wrong. Well, half of the panel anyway, but enough to hear Tanith Lee call Jeff Vandermeer a genius.

Moving swiftly on, I had my second panel, If I Ruled the Eastercon. We had an interesting debate about Eastercons which would bloat this report even more if I tried to go fully into it, but it was mostly another round of the age-old debate about what is the core of Eastercons and what is the edges and how we all have different opinions on this, and also how Tony wrote a fanzine about bondage. And then it's the end - the closing ceremony. Low point of the closing ceremony: seriously, I've been to five Eastercons now and I don't have a clue what the Phlosque award is about, and if you can't remember the names of the cyberdrome winners, please write them down. High point: Sparks took control of the three Martian teams (you were supposed to gain points for your team at various fun activities over the con) and declared himself Supreme Ruler, then passed control on to the Great Pink Pig. Enjoyably bonkers, as opposed to obscurely bonkers.

Final dinner with the Third Row in the now much emptier nearby pub, where Graham attempted to collect some minions and we played fantasy Eastercon guest selection. Oh, and I taunted Niall with a vegetable. Finally the Dead Dog, where I met yet more interesting Americans and thought up entertaining fanzine names until it was time to finish up and head for home. Another year over, but that was a damn good con.

Odyssey 2010: Once More, With Heating?



Yes, that's me up there with 21 koalas on my beard. Now I figured this out: each Koala was about 2oz. If you multiply 21 by 2, it's 42. 42 oz is pert near three pounds. That's three pounds hanging from my beard. Hair. Beards are hair. And there's 3 pounds of koala hanging from the hair that comprises my beard. At first, it was fine. After a few minutes, it was slightly annoying. After that, it was actually painful. Now, I've had Evelyn hanging from my beard when she was 4 or so, but this hurt more because it was little bits all over instead of two points of heavy hanging.

I was also very lucky that I have so much beard so that I could manage to hangin 21 koalas off of it. There are two layers, especially on the upper layers. As we went along, people would buy things and we'd throw in a free koala...from my beard!



To leafy Tanworth-in-Arden in the heart of Warwickshire, where Ann and I replace our houseguest Chris Garcia's cancelled visit to Peter Weston's palatial *manse* in Sutton Coldfield with a pilgrimage to St Mary Magdalene Parish Church, last resting place of 1970s singer-songwriter Nick Drake.

We grab a pint at the Bell, once a regular filming location for the notoriously inept British soap *Crossroads* (coincidentally, later a regular acting gig for Drake's sister

Gabrielle, she of the purple wig and silver mini skirt in *UFO*), then stroll across the road to view the simple headstone ("We rise, And we are everywhere") and the scattered offerings around his grave. Afterwards, Ann and Chris stroll around the church itself, notable for the stained-glass windows designed by pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones (whose display at Birmingham's city art gallery is reportedly equalled only by those in Paris and New York).

It's a spiritual interlude in Chris's

TAFF tour, plus I'm delighted he's at last had a glimpse of real English countryside and maybe a sense of this nation's subtler heritage. Sadly, we have less than twenty-four hours left in his company, just enough time for a gathering of the infamous MiSFiTs at a Chinese restaurant in central Birmingham and a couple of episodes of *Torchwood*.

Three days later, I find myself at a rather more sombre fannish gathering, the funeral service for veteran Birmingham fan Ray Bradbury. Multiple generations of the Brum Group are in attendance, including Rog Peyton, my erstwhile *Critical Wave* partner Martin Tudor, Chris Morgan and his wife Pauline (aka Pauline Dungate), Vernon and Pat Brown (the former shortly to guest at Novacon 38), Tony Berry, Dave Holmes (Rog's righthand guy back in the glory days of the Andromeda Bookshop) and Peter Weston (finally back from the family duties in Bournemouth which scuppered Chris' visit).

Like Burne-Jones, Ray was somewhat of a polymath: sculptor, cardplayer, magician, dog breeder, publican (and those are just the interests I know of). As chronicled in *Prolapse #10* (currently available via eFanzines), he decapitated this very correspondent at the first MiScon, later presenting me with the shiny badge he reserved for all such "victims" (as a mark of respect, I wore it

for the funeral). In 2002, we attempted to organise a full-blown magic show for Novacon, a plan which finally came to spectacular fruition a full five years later; I take some solace in that.

The service ends with a round of applause from his fellow entertainers, which I take to be a traditional salute at the fall of the final curtain. Still, if it's true that real immortality lies not in our brief passage between womb and coffin, but in the memories of those we leave behind, Ray's going to remain with us for decades to come.



I loved the visit to the the Bell and the Church. I love Churches, what can I say? The windows were magnificent and there was a stack of Bibles, mostly dating to the 1910s, but a couple that well into the 1880s and one from the 1750s (that was badly in need of Conservation as well). If I ever make it out there again, I'm making sure to spend some time out that way because there's some lovely country to be seen!



TAFF Report is done!

I have finished the Chris Garcia 2008 TAFF Report (called *Rockets Across the Waters*, thanks to John Jarrald for that title!) and it's available on-line to any how wish to read it...with a catch.

Since I won't be selling copies (it's too big and pricey to sell), I'll be sending the user name and password to all those who donate to TAFF. You can mail a donation to Chris Garcia 962 West Weddell Dr. #15, Sunnyvale, CA 94089 or you can drop me an eMail (garcia@computerhistory.org) and I'll let you know the PayPal directions.