

The Drink Tank
Issue 102

Subterranean Air Defense Blues

by

Christopher J. Garcia

There are times when we who toil in the world of Microsoft Office and cubicle walls feel like we've been staring at the same blips on the same screens for days on end. We're weak in the knees by the end of the day due to lack of circulation, having only stood when walking to our Lean Cuisine lunches at the communal microwave.

But we've got it easy.

In the 1950s, there was a fear that gripped us almost as bad as the terror we feel today of terrorists. We called it Communism in general, the USSR in specific and the Cold War in total. The US, at that point far and away the leader in computer science, needed a way to defend our air space. The Air Force knew that a Russian bomber with a large enough bomb could come and fly over the pole, drop the bomb on New York City or Washington. They wanted an Air Defense network that would be able to deal with just such issues, so they did what every administration does when they need science: they called

MIT. MIT had a machine called Whirlwind, a design which they then adapted to make SAGE, the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment.

SAGE was the largest computer ever build. There were 2 CPUs, one always on warm stand-by. Each system had 50k vacuum tubes.

That's right, our entire air defense was run on the same things that



power really good guitar amps.

The computers took up huge blockhouses which required immense amounts of power and often had more than 100k sqft of room. These places were lit with a blue light that allowed the screens to glow most obviously.

But no matter how advanced a computer system is, it still requires humans to operate it, and SAGE required some pretty tough people. The shifts were 8 hours at a stretch, requiring people to sit at large screens that pulsed in layers. The first layer being a geographic outline, the second being tracked objects, mostly planes in air traffic, and the last being details on those objects. If the object was unidentified, they could select the object using a light gun and the Weapons Director could have it blown out of the sky.

That was the business they were in, combining the stress of Air Traffic Controllers with the worst of lighting conditions. Headaches were universal and expected. At least the computer had a built-in cigarette lighter and ash trays so that the airmen assigned could smoke while they were working.

There were 27 SAGEs built and networked. Of the 27 sites, one, North Bay

Ontario (which is the one we have in the museum) lasted until 1983. The strange thing is that by 1960, when the system was 100% complete, the Russians had developed the ICBM, which couldn't be tracked by SAGE.

Best laid plans...



entry fee for this festival was exorbitant, but it seemed worth it, because this was Los Angeles, City of Dreams. The point of these gatherings isn't just to try your work before an audience that isn't biased friends. The point is to meet the shadowy power-brokers, the secret masters of moviedom who hold tight the knotted purse-strings and guard the sacred word "YES." And here, just minutes away from their hidden fortresses,

IT'S ALL IN THE GAME, OR: THE CONTINUING SAGA OF GUIDOLON THE GIANT SPACE CHICKEN vs. POWER-BROKER & THE MONEY-GO-ROUND

I haven't written about my Guidolon the Giant Space Chicken film project, and the ongoing attempt to sell it, since Issue 87, so here's an update.

We start with the story of my friend attending a film festival - which shall remain unnamed - down in Los Angeles this summer.

On the Friday night of the festival, expectations were high among the filmmakers. They had traveled from afar - even Greece and Russia, and two had returned from central Asia to screen their documentary about a fraudulent election there. The

this theatre should be crawling with these yes-men, right?

The first troubling sign was when the festival organizers kept asking my pal if she'd brought her friends to her screening. Odd. If she wanted to show it to her friends, she could have used her living room. Not spent hundreds of dollars to attend, plus airfare, plus hotel.

Yet she remained eager, lean and hungry. Like that Shawn Mullins song:

"Everyone here's got a plan. It's kind of like Nashville with a tan."

When she sat down in the auditorium for her showing, a chill went up and down her spine as a festival lackey walked to the front. She shared her timeslot with a couple shorts, but there were only a dozen people in the room. As the lackey

introduced the films and asked the directors to say something, it became clear that everyone there was a filmmaker. There were no power-brokers. There was no audience.

Everyone thought one word, but no one said it.

Scam.

Perhaps the film festival circuit is like a mob racket.

At this particular festival, awards were given. This is not unusual, except that the awards numbered over 50. 50! The program listed just over a hundred films. Was every other documentary or short or feature so deserving? My friend thought it was bogus - the number of awards diluted their value. Nonetheless, she trumpeted her award on her homepage.

I see unhappy parallels between the movie industry and the science fiction publishing biz.

Consider "Locus," which declares itself "the magazine of the science fiction and fantasy (publishing) field." One publisher - who's worked this field for 20 years - always buys a half-page ad in "Locus" for every new book. Those ads, he suspects, have never spurred a single purchase, but his authors feel like he's not pushing their books if they don't get the ad. I don't know anyone who subscribes to "Locus" who isn't a writer or wannabe,

likely checking to see if they've been mentioned, photographed or reviewed.

Are we becoming a world of would-be writers without any readers? Mark R. Kelly, editor of locusmag.com, the online parallel of the print version, said in his 1/10/06 blog entry, "Sometimes I wonder if there aren't more aspiring writers out there, intent on publishing their stories and novels by whatever means (even via self-publishing), than there are readers."

Returning to the movie biz, check out withoutabox.com. This is an online guide to film festivals. Do you know how many festivals have deadlines between now and the end of the year? 130. One hundred thirty. Forty a month. And lining up in droves are kids who've made movies in their basements or folks like me who went deep into credit-card debt to service their dreams. My animator BenniID told me of one filmmaker who sent his work to 200 film festivals. 200! Can all of these festivals possibly be worthwhile and career-enhancing? How many are just scamming the dreamy-eyed would-be Fellinis?

A staggering, unbelievable number of stories get written and movies get made every year. And that's the competition.

In the publishing biz, Mark Kelly



counted 1,300 sci-fi/fantasy genre stories published in 2000. And he probably missed some. The website The Black Hole www.critters.org/blackholes/ compiles data-points from writers who report submissions and sales to various magazines. Thus we calculate that "Analog" magazine buys one story out of every 143 submitted. Here's more data:

Analog (submissions/acceptances: 143.0)

Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (87.4)

Asimov's (38.0)

Strange Horizons (29.1)

Realms of Fantasy (21.0)

Interzone (17.0)

Neo-Opsis (10.6)

Clearly, most magazines aren't as picky as "Analog," so I'll guesstimate two dozen stories submitted for each published. (Remembering that some woeful stories are like the Wandering Jew, journeying from magazine to magazine, never finding a home.)

This guess yields about 31,000 genre stories submitted to magazines every year. Plus hundreds of thousands that sit in drawers, never submitted.

Our esteemed editor, Christopher J. Garcia, tells

me that a thousand short films are submitted to the Cinequest film festival in San Jose every year, with 100 accepted. In contrast, the Toronto festival gets 7000 subs. Not every film made is submitted, so Chris is guessing ten to twenty thousand short films are made every year, not counting student work. That's your competition.

To say nothing of YouTube, which Wikipedia - the source of all knowledge, ahem - notes receives 65,000 submissions. A day. Most of these are guys getting hit in the nuts with soccerballs, but many are serious efforts. That's your competition, too.

So if you write a story, you're struggling to get noticed in a sea of 31,000 other stories. Or to get your little film some attention, amid the tens and tens of thousands.

As Solomon said three millennia ago, “Of the making of books, there is no end.” (Ecclesiastes 12:12)

You can see why people want to do film festivals, and they hope the awards there will float them above the masses.

And in their desperation to make it big, they’ve become vulnerable to scam artists.

But still, if you want your story published, you need to print it out on 8.5 x 11 white paper, double-spaced with correct margins, shove the precious pages into an envelope and toss them upon the unforgiving rocks of some editor’s desk. (Or, for a few, they’ll take email.) Writing your works in vapor trails across the sky won’t sell your story. Nor will carving it in stone tablets. You have to mail it (snail or e) and then do the hardest thing in the world: wait.

I suppose there are other ways to meet the Hollywood power-brokers. If you don’t want to go the film festival route, you can find yourself an agent (I met a bunch) who will happily take a couple thousand dollars from you to put you and a power-broker in the same room. Or you can do the roundabout route by getting your idea published in the form of a hit novel, but then you have to deal with THAT OTHER industry. (And, if you want, there are plenty of people who will take your money to “edit” your book before

you send it to an agent.)

And yet somehow it’s possible to succeed.

I did it. At least with art.

It took years of endless nights of heart-breaking toil and sweat. When I first submitted my art to conventions in 1998, I suffered through con after con where I didn’t sell anything. I was wracked with self-doubts and self-recriminations. Then, after sales and publishing credits started building up, the recession hit. Would-be patron after patron told me at art shows, “I love your stuff, and I’d buy some if I had a job right now.” But after 9 years of struggle, 9 years of meeting editors and publishers and endless nights of painting, I have over a hundred publications and two Hugo Awards.

Not bad.

Of course I’m exhausted and jaded and burnt out.

But, hey, you have to play the game - and play hard - if you want to win.

So, more specifically, how is The Selling of Guidolon going?

We’re still shopping it around. No sales yet.

But we’re still doing the film festival/mob racket circuit, in addition to a couple other venues:

- The Licensing International Show in New York in June. There I met an animation developer who watched the whole thing and laughed from one end to the other, and then said, “I’ll have to ask my partners.” After the show, I got a call from another guy who later said,



“I thought it had great potential, but my director didn’t like it.”

- Conestoga Science Fiction Convention and Film Festival in Tulsa in July. There we won two awards, Best Animation and Best in Show. The latter was an award they’d never given out in the history of the film festival, and they basically created just for us.

- KTEH, the local PBS station in San Jose in August. It was half-time entertainment as part of Mr. Lobo (with his skits and studio antics) showing “The Day of the Triffids” as part of the annual pledge drive. Chris Garcia (voice of Guidolon) and I even got to briefly appear on TV.

- Worldcon (the World Science Fiction Convention) in Anaheim in August.

There I met another TV developer who said he liked it, but would have to ask his partners about it. Never heard back from him.

- Los Angeles International Independent Film Festival this month. There we won a Grand Jury Prize for Best Animation - wahoo!

- In November, we show it at the New York International Independent Film Festival. Wish us luck!

I’m also doing some small edits and additional animation to beef it up here and there.

I’ve learned a lot from my film festival experience and talking to



power-brokers. For instance, no one says “I’ll have my people talk to your people” or “Let’s do lunch sometime.” No, the deceptively pleasant phrase du jour is: “I love it, but I’ll have to talk to my partners about it.” What does this mean? Maybe it means exactly what it seems to. Or maybe they hate it, but won’t admit that. Or that the guy who pulls the trigger on deals is gun-shy. Who knows?

Another thing I’ve learned is that,

yes, I can say no to the evil, evil people around me.

As I detailed in issue 87, after the Licensing show we were approached by some unsavory folks who wanted us to animate an “evil chicken.” They gave us bad vibes. So, even though they seemed to have money, we turned them down. Whew. Glad to be strong enough to say no to bad money.

This was a relief, because I recently saw “Hollywoodland.” That movie

scared the jeepers out of me. Everyone in that movie is in the film biz, and all of them are corrupt - everyone's in an unstable or unhealthy relationship AND has a little something on the side. They all are letting money pluck their hearts from their chests. And they're doing what I want to do - make movies and TV shows.

I once thought that the closest thing to Hell on Earth was the San Jose Family Courthouse. There shattered people shuffle like zombies through the catacombs of the legal system, dealing with divorce, trying to get their kids back, trying to prove that they are the father or that they didn't hit anyone. Horrific.

But nothing compares to the hollow, empty eyes of the fat, bald, middle-aged men in Hollywood who long ago traded Love for one grab at the pot of Gold or the little Gold statue. They dropped a girl's hand to grasp for something else and came up empty. Or perhaps... not empty, perhaps a screenplay or two, or minor work on some movie that was never finished or never released, or went straight to video. Something less than their dream.

Was it worth it?

I dunno.

I am thankful that I've been able to make a couple trips to Hollywood and have several encounters with power-

brokers and I have escaped to tell you.

Of course, I haven't gotten that big dumptruck full of money, either.

I still have Guidolon and I am still pushing it. We'll see - cautiously - what happens.

If nothing else, as Lori Ann White says, I have a cool little movie that I made that I can be really proud of, and no one can take that away from me. And I lived my life without fearing to take risks. As Guido says in the film, "In this life, we have a choice of nightmares. One nightmare is to make a movie. The other nightmare is to NOT make a movie." I chose the making-the-movie nightmare, and so I can live without regret. And THAT ALONE is worth the price of admission.

Meanwhile, I have another idea.

Get this: Instead of Giant Monsters Making Movies, we have:

Dinosaurs Playing Guitar. Like the Monkees, but T-rex's, instead. Aging dinosaurs playing fossil records - get it? I think early next year I'll start production for a short, 3-min music video of dinosaurs playing and smashing guitars. It'd be a great idea for a TV show. Or a clip on YouTube.

Or film festivals.

There are always some coming up in Los Angles. City of Dreams.



I've tried my hand at filmmaking, even briefly worked for a porn film company filing releases (alas, I was never on set), but watching Frank try and make the dream makes me realise exactly how much I don't want to go that direction. It's not that it's scary, it's that it's tedious, expensive and at times soul-sucking. I'm just not the kind of guy who could handle that. Rejection: no problem, I'm all for it, but the 'wait and we'll call you' attitude hurts.

Even worse is that even if they know they wanna do it immediately, they'll hold back. Look too eager, even if money's already changed hands, and the supplier has the power. It's a rough world.

If Only She Could Cook As Well As Honeywell Can Compute

by Christopher J. Garcia

There are bad ideas everywhere.

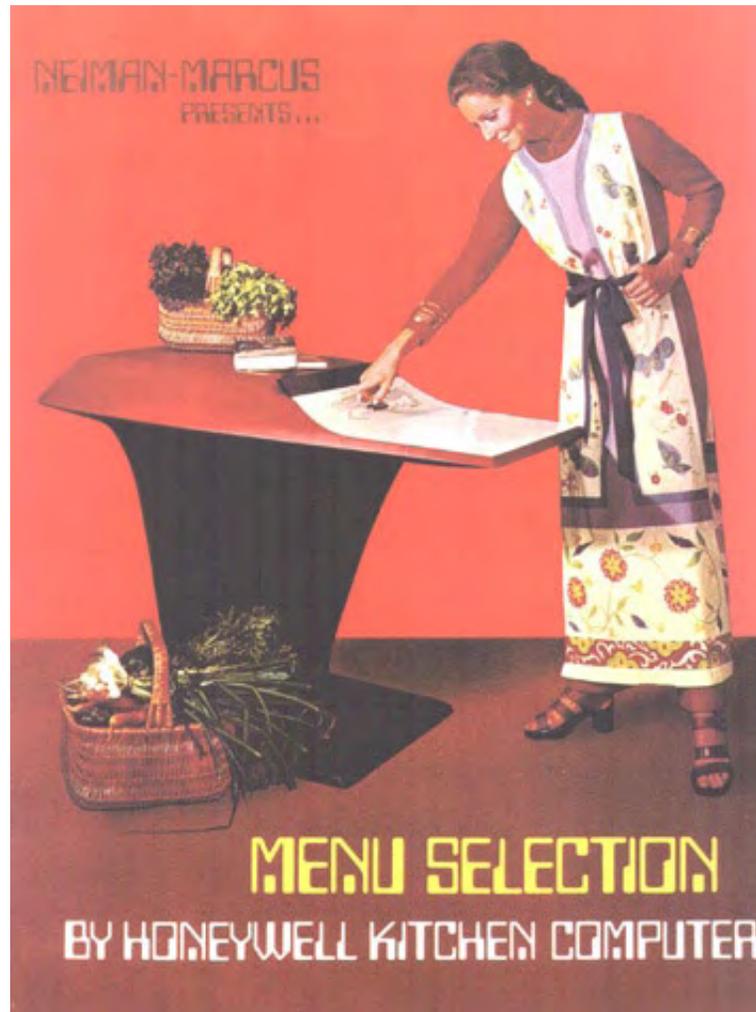
I tend to have seventeen or eighteen of them a day, mostly while I'm writing in my LiveJournal or thinking about articles for The Drink Tank. It's a rough road to have these awful ideas and not have the dough to unleash them on the world.

Sometimes, bad ideas are actually just bad solutions to real problems or, even worse, bad solutions to things which aren't actually problems. One such thing is the 'problem' of recipe storage. It's obvious that the world will end if people keep holding on to those 3 by 5 cards in little boxes or, even worse, shoved between the pages of cookbooks. There has to be a better way to maintain these precious recipes and not have them on those damned cards!

The solution, of course, is putting them on a computer in an easy to read font on a wired network that can be accessed at any time. That's the solution for today, when computers are plentiful and small enough to fit into every nook and most of the crannies in a home.

But what about the 1960s? How

were we to eliminate these despised cards in an era when computers meant IBM mainframes that rented for thousands of dollars a month and were programmed with punched cards and paper tapes that might stretch for



miles?

Honeywell solved the problem with the help of Neiman-Marcus. In 1966, Honeywell started selling a

computer called the Honeywell 316. The series was smaller than many, had enough speed to satisfy their client base, and enough flexibility to do real work in various areas.

Including holding recipes.

Someone at Needless-Markup must have seen the computer and thought that the front portion looked like a cutting board. In the 1969 catalog, they offered it for sale for 10,600 bucks. The median price for a home in the Santa Clara Valley at the time was 10,750. Go figure.

What could it do? Well, if you knew how to use the panel switches and lights, you could enter in the ASCII code for the various characters and enter your recipes. You didn't get any I/O other than the panel switches and lights, but you did get a free 2 week programming course with your purchase. There was another possible use, as the ad so sexistly noted: 'and if she pales at reckoning her lunch tab, she can programme it to balance the family checkbook.'

There's no evidence that they sold any through N-M. They ordered six from Honeywell and returned three. When the Museum contacted them, they didn't even know they'd done it.

So, even though I am swimming in a sea of bad ideas, none of mine are as bad as the Kitchen Computer.



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

Let us begin with Lloyd
Penney!

Chris Garcia's Birthday, 2006

Dear Chris:

Happy B-day, dude! Yeah, I lurk on your LJ from time to time, and that's what I found out. So, have a great time today with folks you love, but when the good times turn great, don't come to me looking for the bail money! Here's your horoscope from the Phil Booth column in the Saturday

Toronto Star...

IF TODAY IS YOUR BIRTHDAY...
It won't be nearly as arduous as you fear to bring about the changes you need. You will be at the right place at the right time. A benign and friendly sky will steer you to the best of possible destinations. Happy birthday to Carrie Fisher, 50.

You share a birthday with Princess Leia! How cool is that? While you are basking in the glow of another birthday, and feeling your arteries hardening just a little bit more, I will get going with a loc on issue 100 of The Drink Tank. I did see on your LJ that Sunday would be the deadline for getting a loc in, so here's a close-to-the-wire loc, and a birthday present, of some kind...

Thank you much for the best wishes. I didn't do much, but I had a very good birthday indeed. And I thank you for gettin' stuff out to me, though I missed it in the last issue. Other important things happened on October 21st...including the deaths of Elliott Smith and Jack Kerouac.

Great cover...that's a website I've got to check out, especially if it can do

stuff like make fake tickets.

They're always adding new things all the time. I saw them first on LJ in various folks icons

Things left behind on planes...I have found keys, a Zippo lighter, a set of headphones (and not the ones the airlines give you), and most of all, I have found coins. I have found Canadian, American, British, and most amazingly of all, Fijian. Always interesting additions to my coin collection. (I keep track of money Yvonne and I find through the year. All coins, and even some bills, transit tickets and tokens...last year, \$105. This year, \$145, and still counting. Whatever we find through the year is totaled up, and is used to take ourselves out to a great steak dinner.) I've lost a lot of stuff on planes, but I am best known for dropping change. I lost so much down the cup holder in my car that it stopped the Park gear from working. Hand to Ghod!

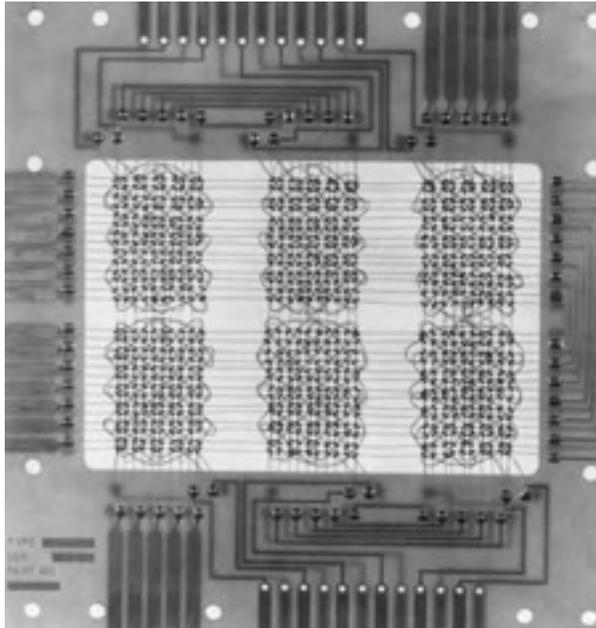
Great illo of Bono...he shows up in Toronto every so often to try to make friends with politicians here. He's been seen with Jean Chretien and Paul Martin, but I think he'd find Stephen Harper's politics disgusting, to be honest.

What's interesting about Bono is that he's so legitimately loved despite spending much of the 1980s as a Colin Farrel prototype.

When Yvonne and I were driving around LA the two days before Worldcon started, we were often amazed by the fact the city seems to go on forever. Toronto is a city of about three million, and the Greater Toronto Area, informally Toronto and all the communities surrounding it, comprises about 6 million. Yet, LA just kept going and going and going, much like a certain toy rabbit. We'd never have been able to get around if it hadn't been for good road maps and Mapquest, showing us what highways and roads to take to get to where we wanted to go and our hotel in Anaheim.

I think LA is one of the largest cities in the US by area (Sitka, Alaska and Jacksonville, Florida are larger). It's amazing to think that the number of people that live between Valencia in the North to Anaheim in the South is roughly the same as the total number of Europeans around the year 1300.

Ken Patterson should know that



only odd articles go into The Drink Tank. Where does Chris find the time to write all this? Few people know that he is the next incarnation of the Doctor, and that many of the issues he produced in (our year) 2005 were actually written while he was observing the Boer War and the Second Martian Revolution of 2218. Timewise, he gets around. Chris says he's in his 30s, but with all his traveling, he must be in his third century. And he doesn't look a day over 160...Happy Birthday, by the way, you old codger!

There is a theory that I'm part of a time-travel conspiracy, that 10 years from now I'm Jay Lake and fifty years from now I'm Art Widner.

Spent last weekend in Montreal at the local SF convention...where did you go for good drink? While we were in Montreal, we stayed at the Days Inn on rue Guy, and the best place for good sports TV and excellent burgers nearby is La Cage aux Sports at 1437 Rene-Levesque ouest.

I am a giant supporter of Anticipation and I've been wanting to make it out to one of the smaller cons there, though money and...gulp...flying stand in the way. I shouldn't be afraid of flying so much, I'll be going to CorFlu and NASFiC by plane, and if I win TAFF, well, let's just say I ain't gonna take a boat.

Hey, there's that article of mine. Number 13, hmm? Good thing I'm not superstitious, crossing my fingers for good luck...might be boring reading, but it's all true. I got to sample what both lit fandom and media fandom had to offer, and as they changed, and as my interests changed, lit fandom was the best choice for me. I am not starstruck, never have been, and much of modern media fandom seems to be about star worship. Not interested. I thought it was a great look at crossing-over.

I'd love more articles from ya, Lloyd. Gotta represent T-Dot!

Denvention 3 is a definite no-go for me. Some people I know are angry with us for not voting for the 2008 site selection. Well, we had decided that we're

not going to any more Worldcons, for they are exorbitant, and therefore we would not vote. So, we didn't vote for Chicago, true, but then we didn't vote for Columbus or Denver, either. Either someone offers me a fabulous good-paying job, or I win the lottery. That may be the only way we get to Denver. I'd offer you a job, but alas, I have none to give. I'm excited for Denver, especially since I'll be driving out there. If you play the lottery, may I suggest 04, 10, 16, 24, 29, 35 as numbers (from a fortune cookie on my desk that reads You May Soon Change Your Line of Work)

Rusty Hevelin is an easy man to talk to, and I see him about once a year at Mike Glicksohn's home. After hearing Bruce say he had a membership he couldn't use, and



hearing Rusty say he wished he could go, it was easy to get them together, and transfer memberships. Bruce got some money out of the deal, and Rusty attended an excellent Worldcon, easy peasy. Mention of a wish to meet Bob Tucker saddens me...sorry, Chris, that just won't happen. I was on one panel with Bob, and that was at Chicon V in 1991. It was called Neo-Fandom Through the Ages, and included Toni Weisskopf, Khen Moore and Lise Eisenberg.

There's a lot of sadness in me over the fact that I never got to meet Bob.

Baseball? The Cardinals and the surprising Tigers in the World Series. Any comments or predictions? How about the Tigers in 7? That should put the fox in the henhouse right there...

I'm all about the Tigers this year. St. Louis isn't a bad team at all (unlike

the Dodgers), but the Tigers need it to bring some light to Detroit.

They seek him here, they seek him there, those Frenchies seek him...everywhere. I always enjoyed reading The Scarlet Pimpernel,

or the Scarlet Pumpernickle, as far too many comedy teams had it. While much of good literature is driven by good ideas, plots and situations, some of it also has memorable characters, and the combination of the two can produce memorable reading. Sequels never seem to do well, though, and I never did read any more of the Pimpernel books.

Nor have I, but since I read the article, I've gone out and bought a few.

A shame you didn't get that TV show...I've been for several voicework auditions since last I wrote, and I got a call a few days ago saying that one I did go for, I got. Huzzah! And now to find out more. I may be the kindly narrator in a new children's show the producers may try to sell to one of the local stations that shows kids' shows, like Treehouse Television. I'll let you know what happens as soon as I figure it out myself.

I'd love to hear Lloyd Penney as the voice of something awesome! Maybe the voice of Chrysler?

Hey, John, am I impressed that Chris got to 100 issues in 91 weeks? Nah, he's just nuts, that's all. And, he's got either the world's dumbest or the world's most forgiving boss. Chris, does your boss know anything about all this?

I'm not nuts...I've simply got too much time on my hands.

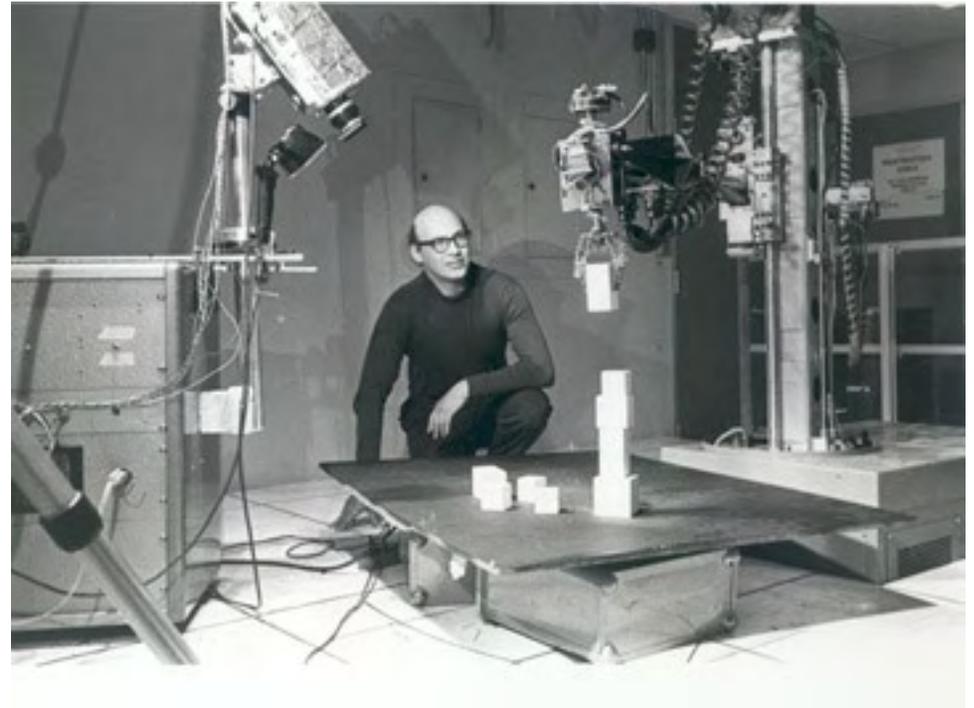
I am sure that writing about difficult stages in your lives, M and SaBean and Judith, were cathartic. Can you maybe summarize how writing those article have helped? Have they brought you two closer together, or perhaps just allowed you to understand some decisions you made? (Hugs to you all, you've been so open in your writings, you're friends I just haven't met yet.) Santa Barbara should be a house full of love and belonging.) I know one thing that I can say for the girls: they've both managed to get a lot of the anger they have at the world out. I've held on to a bunch of their articles because they're a little...well, let's just say that I'm running

a clean and slightly less depressing ship. I can't wait 'til they're there full-time!

My loc...I might have been harsh in writing about the movie industry, but so many movies are being made, and I really don't want to see about 95% of them. Another 4%, I want to see, but never get to them. Hollywood's not making money offa me. There are lots of movies being made here, but getting Canadians to watch them is a tough sell. Perhaps the best movie made here in a while is Bad Cop Bon Cop, a bilingual (!) movie starring Colm Feore. Its box office is the best a Canadian movie's ever had, I believe. Hey, Chris, got a 5.25" drive not doing anything right now? I still can't access YouTube, even with software fixes and several downloads.

I totally wanna see that movie. I love Colm Feore.

And after wiping the sweat off my brow after reading Leigh Ann Hildebrand's letter (gulp), I shall try



my best to wind up the third page of this loc. I know I'll be in trouble if I ever run into her at a convention, and something tells me I'll be having impure thoughts, which, as we know, as the very best, and that's why I'll be in trouble. You said you were taking a rest...so much for that. Off this goes to you and my LJ, take the needed rest, and see you nextish. Yvonne says Happy Birthday, too!

I am so glad I'm immune to all unpure thoughts. Why do you think I run so many pictures of lovely ladies? They keep my mind from wandering...

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Of Course The Americans Invented the Computer by Christopher J. Garcia

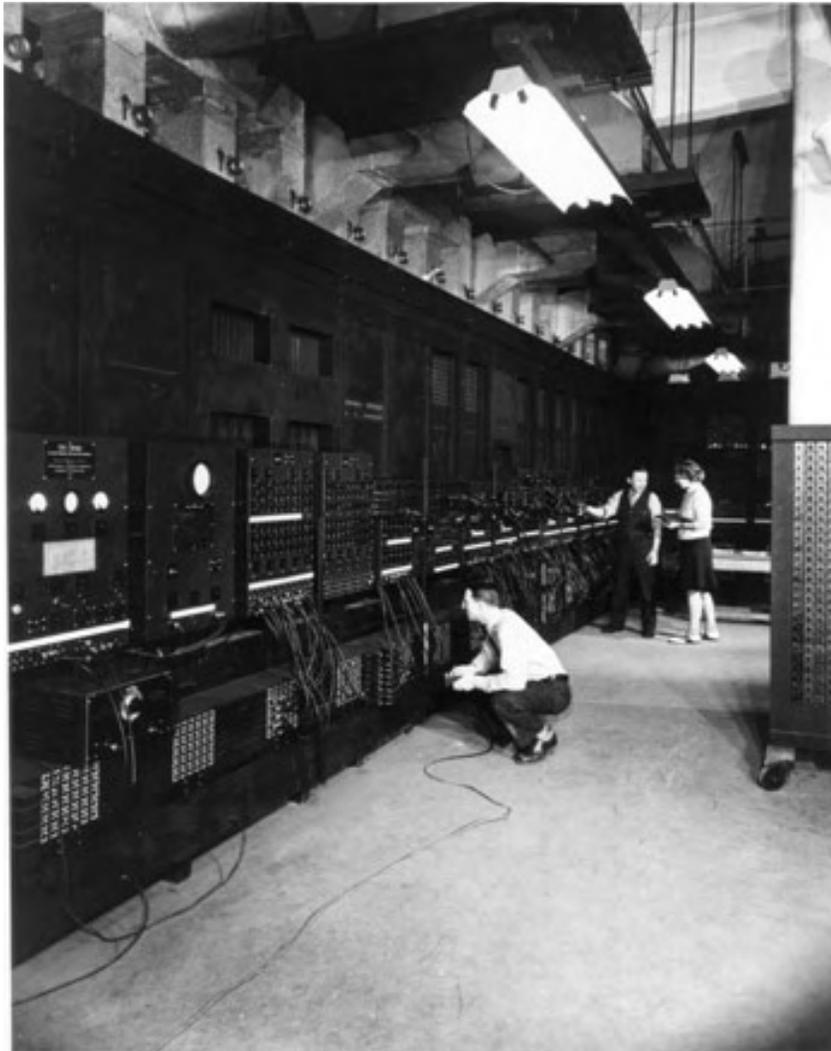
There's a question we get every time a major anniversary comes up in the history of computing.

"What was the first computer and who invented it?"

There's no good answer. There are a lot of answers that satisfy a select section of the question, but no good answer over-all. If you wanna be flighty, say Charles Babbage in the 1830s. He was working with ideas that predicted the modern computer, but he never completed it and everything he did was mechanical. You could say that it was a large company like American Totalisator or a pioneer like Vannevar Bush for the large mechanical devices they designed in the 1920s and 30s. You could say that it was the theories of Claude Shannon, or the devices of Konrad Zuse in Germany right before and during the war. There are a lot of options but none of them really fit.

In England, you'll have two kinds of answers. The first is Colossus is the first computer. Now, it was an electronic device, but it'd be a stretch

to call it a computer. It was used to crack Geheimschreiber codes using comparators and paper tape. But it didn't really compute. The second



will say it was the Manchester Baby, the first machine to have a stored programme. That was in the late 1940s, so it was close.

In the US, we know the answer:

ENIAC.

ENIAC was built at the Moore School in Philly by Eckert and Mauchly. The machine itself was large

and used 15,000 vacuum tubes, but it wasn't a stored programme machine. In fact, while it was easily the fastest machine in the world through about 1951 (the UNIVAC was faster, and so were a few research machines), it was the first to give a lot of the first generation of Computer Scientists hands-on experience. It did the number work for the Hydrogen bomb among all the other work, and in 1955, it was struck by lightning. Sadly, Science Fiction movies have lied to us because it did not gain consciousness and become evil, it simply broke and went out of use.

The designers went on to found UNIVAC and that started another wave of innovation: commercial computing (which the Brits had already invented with the LEO: Lyons Electronic Office). Still, ENIAC was the first because...well, because we say it is!

Let us not forget that the Russians were also building computers, mostly led by Prof. Lebedev and his pals in the Monastery. They weren't far behind.

Letter-Graded Mail
from Eric Mayer

Chris,

I really wanted to LoC your hundredth but I cower in the face of such a faanish bounty. In another life I tried to comment on every contribution to a zine. After all, wasn't I often a contributor, scanning the loccols for a scrap of praise (or even notice)? So I would write five page LoCs.

A Drink Tank 100 would hit my mailbox and I'd go loco loccing. I'd be commenting on the page 42 fillo when the next ish crashed down on me. And here I'd thought it wouldn't be out until real soon now. Great Ghu. I've still got the jargon but lost my stamina. So now I just freeze, knowing what has to be done, but no way to do it.

Well, it's my fault for putting so much stuff out there. I try to write my LoCs for folks the first day I read it, but I sometimes put it off a week. Not too often (though I've had to for Pixel this run) but what are you gonna do?

What should I comment on? If I comment on this, then surely, in all fairness, I must comment on that, because that was as good in its own way as this. And what about the other thing, which was more thought provoking than this or that, even if it



wasn't entirely my cup of tea? This is the kind of issue that keeps me up at night. I never know exactly what to comment on when I'm reading a zine and perhaps I miss the point of far too many of the articles I read. I felt vindicated when I read reviews of the latest Chunga that talked largely about Randy Byers' article. I had made that the focus of much of my LoC. I got it right for once! I often worry about missing an obvious highlight, and once in a while it's not my fault. One time, a copy of Banana Wings that I got had two pages stuck together. And one time I sneezed, skipped a couple of pages and had passed over an LoC about wrestling. These things happen...but mostly only to me.

You see my problem? Perhaps I

should just send the whole zine to you as an attachment and say, I enjoyed these bits. Or could I just say, not bad, but please more Harlan jokes next time.

OK, Harlan Ellison walks into a bar, the bartender says nothing, just goes about his business wiping glasses. Harlan jumps up on a stool, and still the bartender does nothing. Harlan starts seething, as he's apt to do, and then the bartender springs out and tackles Harlan.

"What the hell was that for?" Harlan asks.

"How else was I supposed to get you to give me your pot of gold?" answers the Bartender.

OK, that was stolen from a friend of mine who told it about another short friend of mine, but it applies here as well.

I salute your energy and creativity. You have been a breath of fresh air. A new perspective. You are largely responsible for grabbing my interest and making me loath to entirely abandon fandom again. Damn you, Chris Garcia!

Best
Eric

And that is the spoken goal of my conspiracy. The plot is to keep you around for much longer than you expected. And it seems to be working!

Everyone's Gotta Start Somewhere

I've talked to a lot of science fiction authors that I know have used computers for a long time. Ray Faraday Nelson started with the IBM 1401 and used the IBM 1620 and still remembers the start-up sequence. I already told folks about Karen Anderson using the UNIVAC I, which also happened to be the first computer used by Dr. Asimov (he had number run on it at BU). Even Kurt Vonnegut used an early computer for some of his research (and to make a little extra

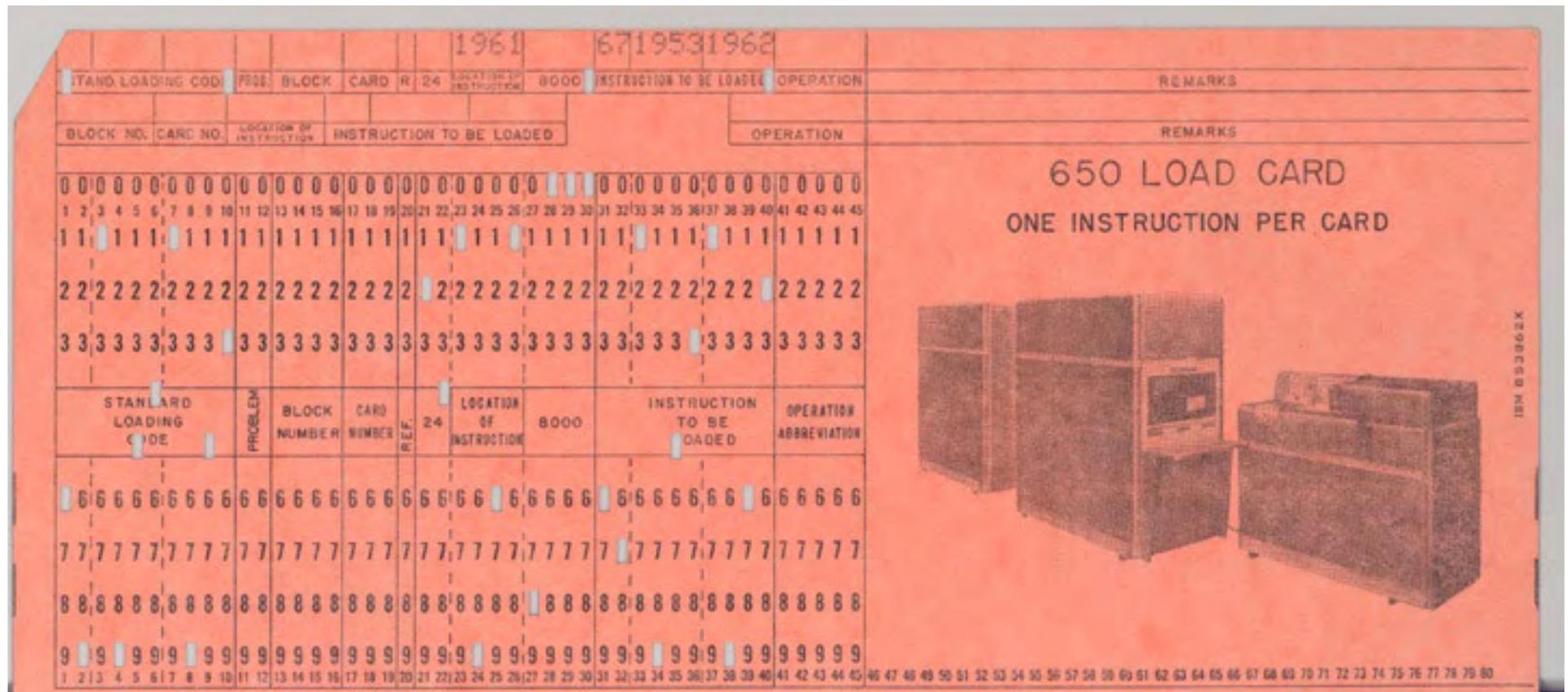
money).

Jerry Pournelle used one too. It was the IBM 650. We had a panel together and started talking about how he had worked on the beast and what it could do. The 650 was a mystery to me, so I started asking around. A lot more folks had worked on it than I had thought.

IBM was in the beginning of their total take-over of the computer industry. There was still UNIVAC lording over the public consciousness, but mostly IBM was taking the big steps forward towards conquering

everything. The IBM 650 was, like many machines of that era, a vacuum tube machine that used Drum Memory. Since it was delivered in 1954, there were no disk drives yet, but they started selling the 650 RAMAC with the huge disk drive in the late 1950s.

The 650 doesn't get the praise it deserves. There were 2000 of them made, a huge number for the early 1950s, and a lot of folks got their hands on their first computer with the 650. I wish we had one at the museum, but there's one in Germany that runs!



Grant Kruger was kind enough to send this my way after running it on his LJ. IT's a fun little article about the Evil SMoFish Conspiracy. You can comment at <http://thirdworld.livejournal.com/124661.html> if'n you're so inclined.

For those in fandom. An article that should be on [Snopes](#):

Claim: SMOFS are a secret society dedicated to ruling the nerd world.

Status: Wake up and smell the coffee! False, you old sleepyhead.

Example: Variations exist everywhere.

1. There is this secret society of con runners that are making a fortune running science fiction/fantasy conventions. You don't want to cross them if you ever want to get a book/story published, or have your TV series succeed.
2. "I deserved the Hugo, but those lousy smofs finagled me out of it and gave it to one of their buddies in a secret vote! I happen to know I got more Hugo nominations than anyone, because, after all, I sent out at least 300 of them myself!"



Photo: John O'Halloran - JohnO@TyeDye.Org

3. "I never was made a Worldcon division head for my favorite division because those dastardly, evil, smofs conspired to shut me out of the whole committee and the con itself. It's because they knew I'm so frigging brilliant that I'd make them look bad -- I mean look at how successfully I run our little local get-together at the Picayunne Coffee Corner!
4. I deserved to be president of the US but those damned smofs conspired to create the whole bloody dimpled chad scenario!"
5. SMOFS planned and executed 9-11 and then planted fake evidence to implicate o'Sammy & the boys, as part of a plot to distract regular folks from their attempt to take over the science fiction world, and therefore the future.

Origins: SMOF = Secret Masters Of

Fandom.

The term Smof was invented by the author Jack Chalker. Late at night, while socializing in the con suite at a convention, he noticed that the ice buckets were somehow always full, though he never saw anyone refill them. He proclaimed that those who kept these buckets full were the *secret masters of fandom*. From this came the term *SMOF* (Also Smof or smof), which later came to mean many things, but basically all con runners and club runners (the people who magically make fandom happen). The *secret* part has no significance other than that. Those who see their being a Smof as being part of some sort of superior clique/race have generally been lobotomized... repeatedly... oh, did I say that out loud?

Remember now boys and girls, no true secret group /society /cabal /election-fraud-team would ever use the word "secret" in their name. Plus they would be far better organized to boot. I mean some of these smofs aren't even talking to each other, never mind plotting together. And those who are talking (most of them to be honest) barely know many of each other, and are way too overloaded making your conventions happen for next to no cost (yes, there are no labor costs because these smofs are all volunteers and none of them ever make any money out

of the deal. Those making money are called (*no silly, not some other secret organization*) companies!)

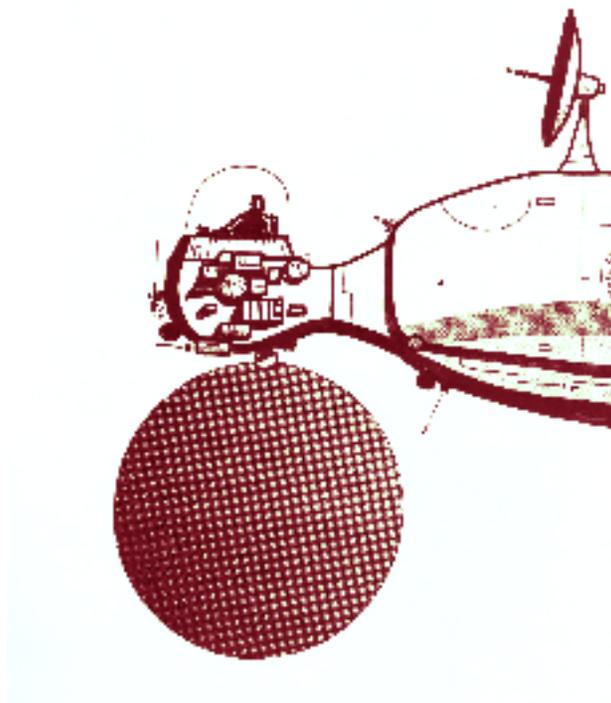
And the truth is there are thousands of smofs around the world and most of them know no more than a few dozen of the rest of the smofs. There is no central leadership, and woe betide anyone who tried to create such a leadership, for they would be so roundly ignored and disparaged to such an extent that they would fade into nothing, crying, "I'm melting, I'm melting!"

These are tales as old as time. People too readily believe in secret cabals and conspiracies. Others, feeling slighted in some way, or filled with the staggering emptiness of their own inadequacies, will make up any story in order to cover their own failures. Others really have been slighted, but it was likely personal, possibly necessary, but not a conspiracy.

Is there politics in fandom/smofdom? You betcha. As much as anywhere maybe. Some places fandom is more political than government. So do people ever get screwed over by con runners? Of course. It's called human frigging nature! People are just like that. Yes, yes, we all know that one day the aliens/angels will come down and enlighten us, but in the meantime, just accept the fact that people just plain suck a lot of the time. We get political;

we stab our friends in the back; we stab our friends in the front; worst of all: we encourage our friends to run Worldcons (shriek!). Don't imagine a frigging conspiracy just because some dumbass will not let you on their team.

Oh, and these guys are volunteers. They give of their time freely. For no expectation of reward beyond a simple, "Thank you." Givers in a world of takers. A rare and dying breed. This means your odds of having nicer than average people go way up. Which in turn means less of the kinds of nonsense one usually finds in



volunteer groups.

And finally, they have no real power whatsoever, unless you consider being powerful as spending much of your spare time and spare cash running conventions for others, just so that conspiracy boneheads can say that you are making millions being mean to people. Oh, some of them get to pick guests and the like -- woohoo, CIA eat your heart out!

Additional points:

- Worldcons can be run by anyone who runs a good bid. You can win even if all the smofs there vote against you. Elections are very free and fair.
- The Hugo Awards are open to anyone who attends or supports that Worldcon... yes, any of them can vote -- all 4.5 to 8.5 thousand of them. Many smofs don't even vote, nevermind control the process. Elections are very free and fair.
- If you cheat in these ballots, your votes don't count. Sooowwwy.
- Each convention runs their staff the way they want to. Nobody is entitled to any position, no matter what. But guess what, very few conventions are overstaffed. Make yourself available and the chances are

they *will* use you... unless you're a known pain in the butt of course (some few political exceptions do exist, sadly).

- Smofs were *not* responsible for 9-11, Bush stealing the elections, your not being able to take homebrew onto an airplane, or any other of Bush's cock-ups for that matter. And the only mistakes regarding Gore that can be tied to smofs are some of the horror movies on the video track.
- Smofs don't run the world, or the TV studios, or the publishing houses. Oh sure, some smofs have jobs in these industries, but they are a tiny minority and they are not going to go along with any corruption, even if any existed, because today's winner is tomorrow's outbid loser.
- Again: smofs make no money off this malarkey. In point of fact most of them spend some, or a lot, of their own money to make conventions happen. Why? Because they are stupid brain-damaged morons without a clue? No... well maybe, but that's beside the point. Because this is their hobby. Because they like running conventions. Because they like being a part

of it. Because they like honoring writers, artists, etc. Because they want to have a good time. Because many of them are alcoholics... no, wait, that should be, many of them drink enough at cons to appear to be alcoholics, but they usually hold down quite respectable jobs outside of conventions (yes, they have to have jobs to support this habit... no silly, the con-running habit, not the alcoholism drinking).

Aw come on! No really! What's the true status?: If you still believe smofs are a nefarious secret society, well then you probably need more therapy than any secret cabal of psychologists/psychiatrists can give you... oh wait, I wasn't supposed to mention them.

Thank you and goodnight!



The View From Higher Up

This was originally a project the museum wanted to do that got abandoned. It's a shame because I got some great words from folks like Will McCarthy, Sheila Finich, Sean McMullen, Howard Hendrix, David Brin and more. I've printed a few of them, but here's one that I don't think made it it.

“Computers have transformed modern art, from the writing of novels to the creation of motion pictures. The precise mathematical control of pixels on a screen or in a printer has had amazing consequences already, and the revolution has only just begun. Science fiction visions of virtual reality have clunked along for the last decade, but soon could leap to commercial viability. And who knows how that will influence creative types? As well, the ability to visualize the workings of abstract or unseen phenomenon--from mathematical equations to the structure and function of proteins--allows us to more easily understand nature, and ourselves. I look forward with keen anticipation to the next twenty years, which should be just as earthshaking as the last twenty--though very likely in different and hardly predictable ways.”

Greg Bear- April 26th, 2004

It All Started Very Simply...with a Loom

I can remember people coming for some of the first tours I ever gave at the museum. They were all interested in the same things as the school kids who wrote in working on various papers. They all wanted to know where it started. I hadn't formulated

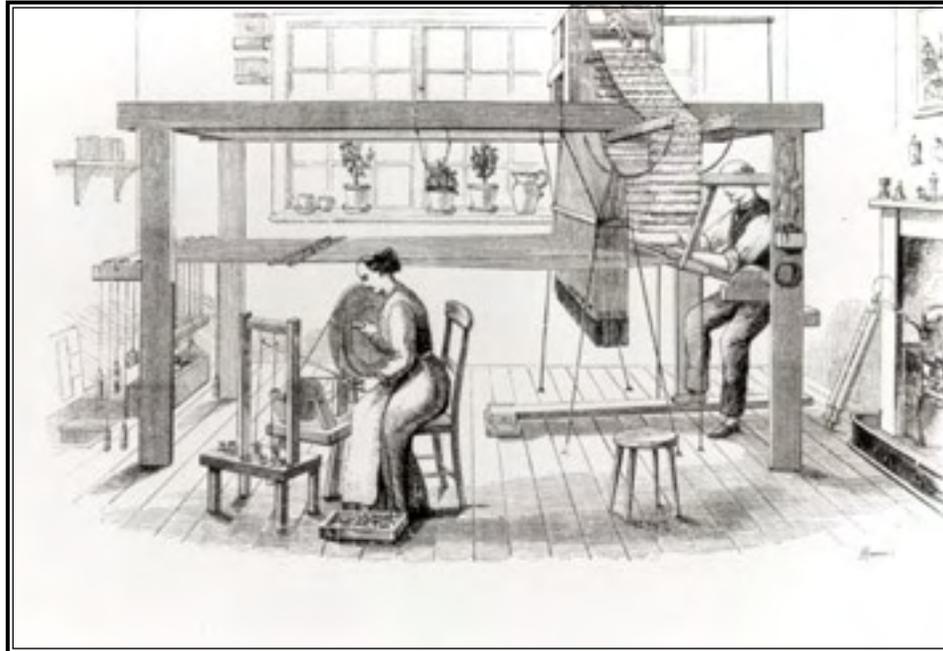
the ideas that would make up my current answers yet, but I didn't have to give an answer one day. There was a fellow, about 70 or so, on the tour and he was very quiet until one of the tour-ists asked a simple question: Where'd it all start.

I took them to the Hollerith machine, the machine that was used for the 1890 Census. I was ready to give them an earful of the competition to develop a faster way of doing the census, about how Hollerith

was inspired by seeing a conductor punch little cards to indicate attributes of various travelers so that they could be kept track of. Before I could launch into it, the old guy spoke in a slightly Eastern European accent.

"It was Joseph Marie Jacquard who invented the Jacquard Loom in 1801. He took designs from Basile Bouchon, Jean Falcon and Jacques Vaucanson and made them sim-

pler and more logical. His loom used punched cards to store patterns and that influenced a generation to use cards to store other kinds of data, including Mr. Hollerith who used it to store information on each household in America so that he speed up the census. The Jacquard Loom concept was so ingenious that it is still the basic premise for modern looms, though they



use electronics where Jacquard used steam or manpower."

There was a stunned silence from the other folks on the tour. I couldn't have given that level of advanced answer, not in my wildest dreams. I'm not that smart.

"Yeah, that's exactly right."

The guy then went on more about Jacquard and Hollerith, about

the early days of IBM and card punch accounting. The audience, which included the tour guide in this case, was just stunned. He mentioned things like the Card-Programmed Computer, an early attempt at a general purpose computer done by IBM engineers that IBM almost came down hard on but then realised the power of what they had done. He told us about people like Vannevar Bush and DH Lehmer.

He even went into how mechanical computers of Babbage would have used the cards and what followers of Babbage did the cards in the early Babbage type machines. It was almost a Graduate level lecture from a guy who seemed to have given a lot of lectures.

"Where'd you learn all that?" I asked, hoping to hear that he was the Great-great-grandson of Jacquard or a professor who had taught this stuff since the 1950s.

"I worked at Princeton as a graduate student in the 1940s. I used to sit with John Von Neumann and he would tell me how the cards worked."

Everyone's jaw dropped. Aside from Edward Teller, I'd never met anyone who knew Von Neumann, but then he dropped the bomb.

"All those stories used to annoy Einstein. He was tired of John's stories a long time before I was."

Letter Graded Mail...Long Over-Due

I bought Ed Green at a BAS-FA auction. That means I got to tell him to do one thing and I had him write an LoC on The Minute Sixty: The One Hour Zine we did at BayCon. Here is his LoC...FINALLY!

Chris,

Okay, I'm supposed to write a letter of comment for the zine that the "Fanzine in an Hour" panel put out at the 2006 Baycon.

I'm supposed to do this because you gave me this task during one of the infrequent BASFS meetings that I was able to attend. Apparently you all have some heathen tradition of auctioning off someone around their birthday, with the intent of having him or her do 'something'. Although it is a fund raiser for BASFS, there are much more dignified ways of raising money. Look at the LASFS.

Okay, perhaps using the word 'dignified' was not the best choice. But at least the LASFS methods of fund raising are more sensible.

Well, they make more sense once you understand the LASFS auction systems (If you do understand the LASFS auction system, please send



me an e-mail. I've been helping to run them for the last 15 or so years and I'll be Ghod damned to Hell and Anaheim if I understand them).

Anyway, you won the right to have me do something. And you, you fanzine writin' TAFF candidate, thought it would be clever to make me *write* an LOC for the above mentioned zine.

Now, mind you, I had to write an LOC about time, and deadlines!

Deadlines? Fannish deadlines? Boyo, I've seen deadlines for

Cons vanish in a wish and a prayer. I'd watched contract proposals gathering dust in the depths of a one foot in box. Hell, I've blown off deadlines imposed by the Pentagon; you really think that watching this one fly by like a meth addict screaming after their connection is going to bother me?

Apparently not, since this has taken almost six months to get out.

Of course, like all good little fen, I've got excuses.

I was running a major division for the 2006 Worldcon (And let me mention here that my department heads were, without exception, damn fine people who did tremendous work in spite of having me as their boss). Lots of deadlines to be waved at as they zip on by.

The business I work for is not only in its busy season, but business industry-wide is over 50% off and everyone is scrambling for construction work. Between the MMJ(1) and the SI(2), things get loud, people run around with their hair on fire and there's a lot of swearing. Oh, the deadlines that get missed trying to juggle things here. And this is where they pay me to be the sunny personality I am.

There's at least four seasons of Buffy the Vampire Slayer that I haven't caught up on. (Which is true. I never really watched the show when

it was first on, and now I'm watching it by way of the uber-DVD collection. Damn, but it's a fun show!) Oh and that new Harry Turtledove novel is out and I just have to finish it.

And what the hell, I could start this thing. Or I could deal with that shambling stack of laundry that has decided that living in the clothes hamper isn't nearly roomy enough, and is currently looking on Craig's List for a larger apartment.

Then there are the new books by Naomi Novik. The alternate history / fantasy series where dragons are real and the Napoleonic Wars are busy being fought with them. Not the typical elves and trolls fantasy stuff, but a well thought out world. Great characters and very well done. I've been thinking about getting a Convention ribbon...

Oh, I guess I'm supposed to say something about the zine itself.

Nice little zine you got there. How much for just the staples?

Oh, I'm supposed to say something about the contents of the zine?

Actually, I'm very impressed with it, more so considering it was produced under such a deadline.

Randy Smith's story about fannish deadlines and the real world was clearly the best thing in it. No slight is meant to the other writers, but Randy did an excellent job of showing



us how torn he was between the two worlds we, as fans, have to stride at times. It also speaks volumes about Randy that he understood where he needed to be, and was willing to accept the consequences for that decision. If fandom ever gave out a Hugo for a single work of fan writing in a given year, Randy's would have been one of the top five contenders.

George and Vanessa Van Wagner's piece was falling on the floor funny. But then, I've grown to expect that from the two of them. The first time I became aware of their sense of humor was at a LASFS meeting I was running, when Vanessa made a comment from her seat about some Disney films. I broke out laughing, something that didn't happen often enough when I was presiding over a LASFS meeting.

Writing well on a fast deadline

is always a tough thing to do. You should be very happy with the results of what you folks produced at Baycon. Not only was it well written, it was worth the time spent reading it.

And really, isn't time what it is all about?

It is the belief of the writer of this LoC that no deadlines were harmed in the production of this letter. One or two might have been scared, but what the hell!

(1) This is the nick name for the loud boss.

(2) This is the nick name for the sneaky boss.

Ed Green

First off, I'm so very glad to see you finally appear in print in one of the Garcia Family of Fanzines. I gotta agree, Randy's stuff was so great, not takign anything away from Derek of The Van Wagners or even myself. OK, maybe a little away from myself.

As far as your tardiness, you are forgiven because 1) there was a WorldCon in-between then and now and that must have sucked you in like the mob and 2) I'll hit you with the ruler of fandom next time I see you.

Thanks, Ed!

Alright, I'll Give You That...but is it ART?

Do computers think? No, no they don't. Can computers feel? No, no they can't. Will computers create of their own accord if given the opportunity? No. These are all criticisms that hit the computer world in the 1960s and 70s, as if these facts themselves proved that computers were not useful tools to the proper users. The biggest problem I've ever had with the idea of The Singularity is that there's no way that computers can mathematically recreate the important functions of the human brain. We're not important because we can weigh choices and make appropriate changes, we're great because we can ignore what is right and go for what feels right. There's a major difference that I'm fairly certain computers will never be able to take up.

But can computers do art? This was a question that I struggled with for a while before I came across the works of a guy named Harold Cohen.

Harold Cohen was a traditional modern artist in the 1960s and early 70s. He had a show at the Tate Gallery



among other important locations. In the late 1960s, he met several computer science-types, including Ed Feigenbaum. This led him to start thinking about how computers could be used in art.

The first thing he did was learn C, the language of the future back in the early 1970s. He also made contacts with various labs, including SAIL, the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Lab.

That gave him access to not only machines, but know-how with those machines. By 1973, he had a prototype system that he called AARON.

AARON would actually compose pictures and then, using a drawing 'turtle' it was do outlines that Cohen would then colour in. It came up with some bizarre shapes and weird constructions, but overall, it was good stuff.

As time went on, Harold found new methods and techniques that he was able to programme into AARON. The most significant advance was the table version which could also do all the colouring. This produced many impressive works, one of which hangs at the Computer History Museum.

AARON is semi-retired. We have the flatbed version and there's a turtle on display

at Stanford. Harold still does some of the computer art...or should I say a version of AARON still does it. That's the biggest question his art raises: is the computer making the art or the man who programmes the computer which does the arting. It's so difficult to tell.

Harold's a nice guy too. I met him once. We taked about Eastercon.

When I started thinking about a computing issue, I instantly thought of Arnie and he was kind enough to send me this great article.

The Urge
By Arnie Katzenjammer

I invented Fandom.

The Immortal Storm, “Up to Now” and *All Our Yesterdays* may say otherwise, but I am unshakably sure of my claim.

Yes, really and truly, and definitely not in the same sense that Al Gore invented the Internet. So I say again, and I declare emphatically, that I invented Fandom.

This will take a little explaining...

Roxanne and Bill Mills live close enough to the Launch Pad, that we are able to overcome their innate reclusiveness and entice them over on a fairly regular basis.

In telling us about their day at the Renaissance Faire and how it rekindled wonderful memories and a sense that their time for immersion in that subculture had passed. That, in turn, evoked memories of Joyce and me leaving the Fandom subculture in 1976.

That led to my explaining that we had eventually realized that we had made a colossal mistake by gafiating. “You were never gafia,” Roxanne



said earnestly. “You were always a fan.”

I was about to disagree, because Fandom seemed very remote to me for most of the 14 or so years I was gone. When I considered it more carefully, though, I realized that she had a point. My fannish urges had not disappeared; I merely channeled them in a different direction.

Starting in 1978, I began writing about video and computer games, a column in *Video* magazine with co-author Bill Kunkel. That led to me becoming editor-in-chief and associate publisher of the world’s first video and computer game magazine in the world, *Electronic Games*. That magazine became a casualty of the video game crash of the mid-1980’s, but Bill, Joyce and I continued to be gaming journalists. I designed *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* and then, around 1990, took the helm of a revived *Electronic Games*.

Like the old science fiction

magazines, those electronic gaming magazines generated lots of reader interaction. I heard from a lot of people, mostly teens, who yearned to express their love of gaming and cluster with their own kind.

So I wrote a column that broached the idea of gamers maybe doing something more than playing the games and reading the magazine. I explained the idea of a fanzine as a means of personal expression. I promised to review fanzines sent to me so that they could get more readers.

Six months later, I’d become their Rog Phillips. The reviews sparked a flock of electronic gaming fanzines and the reviews in the prozines built readership and lured still more fanzine publishers.

With premeditation, I kept my distance from EG Fandom. I was the prozines editor and fanzine reviewer, but I didn’t mix in their discussions or participate in their fanzines. The last thing electronic gaming fans needed was a colossus in their midst.

My reviewing style owed at least as much to Mari Wolff, the egg o’boosplashing giantess in *The Enchanted Duplicator*, as to the proprietor of Amazon’s “Clubhouse.” The electronic gaming fanzines couldn’t hold a candle to the ones I recalled from my fanning days in the ‘60’s and ‘70’s. It was surprising that the gulf wasn’t greater, because just about all the eg faneds

were in high school or even younger.

I was a booster, not a knocker. I took these fanzines on their own terms, praised the best aspects and tried to make it sound like fun. My conscience wouldn't let me suppress all critical comments; I always mentioned one defect so that readers wouldn't have unreasonably high expectations.

Most eg fanzine editors understood my method, but I got several whining letters from a few who could not accept the slightest bit of criticism. They all took the same line: "You don't know how hard it is to do a fanzine!" In such cases, I'd tell them about my own fanzine publishing and point out that every fanzine has room for improvement.

Those encounters, while mildly unsettling, provoked mostly laughter.

I found it harder to take the actual hate mail I got from the truly disaffected. Electronic Gaming Fandom was composed almost entirely of rebellious, contentious teenage males. In other words, just about all of them were Insurgents – and the most insurgent of them would make Laney seem like a pacifist.

These ultra insurgents lacked only one thing – something against which to rebel. As the editor and the guy who reviewed their fanzines, I was a natural target. I'll never forget one letter which included a poem about how all the fans would hold hands and dance in a

circle, celebrating my death.

One kid even started a campaign to not send fanzines for review. I told the others that who receives a fanzine is solely the decision of the editor, but I also pointed out that elimination of the review column – that was the goal – would quite possibly lead to the demise of EG fanzine fandom.

Since the vitriol came from only two or three out of hundreds of EG fans, it soon passed as the sources went off to college, discovered girls and found other ways to channel all that pent up combativeness.



Unfortunately, I was right about the column. When I left *Video Games & Computer Entertainment*, I encouraged them to keep coverage fanzines, which they did. I started a fanzine column in the revived *Electronic Games*, which gave the fledgling fandom much wider exposure. Then Ziff-Davis bought *VG&CE* for its circulation and folded the magazine. When *Electronic Games* gave way to *Fusion* in the early 1990's, the prozines ceased to give space to EG Fandom and the number of publications entered into a steep downhill slide.

There are still some like the excellent (though sercon) *Digital Press*, but the emphasis has shifted to online activities – blogs and web sites. There are two annual conventions and some smaller, informal ones.

And so, you see, I invented Fandom, even though I couldn't play in it.

Maybe it was coming so close to something that reminded me so much of my younger days in *our* Fandom that stirred those embers deep inside, a spark that burst into a flame just a few years after my stint as a poor gamer's Forry Ackerman.

So, as you see, I invented Fandom. Just not ours.

And I really, really prefer this one.

-- Arnie Katz

Last Letter-Graded Mail

Let us begin with Eric Mayer!

Chris,

Well I've heard of the 101st airborne and 101 Dalmations, now here's Drink Tank 101.

I was tempted to do an all 101 issue of The Drink Tank, but sanity gripped me tight and I held off. Thinking about it, having an issue with all digital numbers would have been better for the computer issue.

That National Registry stuff is fascinating. I didn't realize that was all online. I'll have to see if my equipment's up to it. I want to hear William Jennings Bryan. Now there's an interesting figure. A great populist, which I liked when I read about him, but then he went and blew it by getting himself on the wrong side in the Scopes Monkey Trial.

Well, I wouldn't say he was on the wrong side, I mean any side that gets paid is the right side if you're a lawyer!

Apparently his Cross of Gold speech was a real political spectacle. When he delivered the closing line, which was, as I recollect, something like "thou shalt not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold" he reportedly stepped back from the podium, flinging



his arms out to the sides, rather as if he were being crucified. Kind of a nineteenth century Madonna. Imagine stirring people up with a speech about monetary policy. He must've been some orator. That's what gets me, the fact that a pretty highbrow speech was so very well known.

You're absolutely right, you can't have a later band like Nirvana included without including the Ramones. I was really into punk rock in the mid-seventies and it just never caught on. Until a generation later. My nephew plays me one band after another I never heard of, which all sound like the Ramones, and terrific. Hmm...I hope this doesn't mean disco isn't really dead...And you're also right about the Velvet Underground, of course. I guess to make the registry bands have to be influential as well. I guess the New York Dolls and Joe King Carrasco are

out. Pity.

You know, the Dolls are back together and touring, even though Johnny Thunders is dead. I heard a lot of Velvet Underground this weekend driving to and from Tahoe. I really think they need to put in at least one of their albums.

You mention a lot of country music. For the most part my favorite song by a country music performer is Sheb Wooley's "Purple People Eater. OK, I think Hank Williams is one of the greatest singer/songwriters ever. I also like Patsy Cline. I've listened a bit to Bob Wills and he was pretty interesting. Some of the music done way back when could be very unusual. Wow, I oughta be a music critic! Well, maybe not.

I heard a hilarious story this weekend about the man who wrote Patsy Cline's Crazy, Mr. Willie Nelson. Ol' Dirty Bastard, the Wu-Tang Clan's filthiest rapper who died not too long ago, was once asked who in the music industry he most wanted to meet. He said "Willie Nelson, because that motherfucker smoked an ounce a day for forty years!" People find it strange that I like country, but really, it's what Punk comes from.

Best,
Eric

Thanks, Eric.

And Now...John Purcell!

Okay, since you're almost done with #102, let's see if I can wedge this loc in there in time.

You made it in, just under the wire.

#100 - An awesome accomplishment, my friend. I am still shocked and surprised at how quickly you rebounded from this mammoth effort to get #101 out so quickly. The contents in the *Centennial Drink Tank* are quite varied, to say the least. I really can't single out any one particular item for commentary, so let me just give you a blanket comment of "well done, laddie" and a slap on the back. Actually, maybe I should make that a kick in the pants; it's probably much more appropriate.

That's a solid comment as far as I'm concerned. I mean, #100 was big, probably far bigger than anyone ever expected it to be. Really, I'd probably have been better off just doing an issue at half the size, but I couldn't help myself.

#101 - Silicon sounds like it's the kind of con I'd enjoy: lots of films, relaxing with friends, chatting, and mostly night activities. Saturday is usually the main day of most conventions anyway, so your comment that "if you only came for Saturday,



you might have thought you were at a much larger con" makes sense. Even a small relaxacon can seem bigger if you slap some surface structure to it. I've always enjoyed relaxacons. Minn-stf used to run a couple of these every year when I was active up there. We had Anokon, which was basically an excuse to have a weekend-long party in the far-flung northern suburb of Anoka, and it was usually something like the second or third weekend in October when the weather is still pleasant during the day and chilly at night. A good, old-fashioned Indian Summer kind of scenario. Once Minn-stf moved Anokon down the road apiece to Coon Rapids, the con was dubbed Not-Anokon mainly because it was fannish, but ostensibly because CoonCon had such a negative connotation to it, even if it was deliberately misspelled as KoonKon.

Just didn't sit right with folks. So Not-Anokon it was.

Sounds like a fun con. I never make it to any of the LA relaxacons, though I hear they're fun. I might start one myself in the future. Perhaps a sorta relaxacon for hoaxers.

Interesting selections from that National Recording Registry. As you can probably guess, I am also a big fan of recorded music, and sometimes spoken word. My favorite compilation of recordings are the old blues recordings done back in the 1920s and 1930s of Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and all, by the Lomax brothers. Those old recordings are full of vitality, pathos, and passion that a lot of modern-day recording "artists" would do well to study. Pure, raw music-making at its finest.

I think all of those folks are in the Registry. I'm just not excited by the Blues at all. I don't know why, but I can't get into Robert Jordan or even Muddy Waters. It also explains why I dislike Eric Clapton (and Jimmy Page for that matter).

In your listing here, I agree with your assessment of the "Who's on First" first radio recording. It is nowhere near as funny as the filmed version; the pacing was much better in the second, plus you had the fun

of watching Lou Costello's facial expressions. They were both comedic geniuses, but Costello is generally regarded as one of the best double-takers in the business. My wife is a big fan of Abbott and Costello, especially their movie *The Time of Their Lives*, in which Lou is one of the two revolutionary ghosts trying to... well, I don't want to spoil the movie for anyone who has never seen it, but it is a lot of fun.

The filmed version also gives you those wonderful expressions. The delivery is just too fast for the first half. It's still funny, but there are a lot of little laughs that they got in the filmed version that didn't come through. Of course, they'd done that routine about a thousand times before they did the radio version. I've seen *Time of Their Lives* and was most impressed.

We have a couple CD's Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. Whenever you start to feel down and a bit overwhelmed by the idiocy of day-to-day living, slap one of these into your CD player and enjoy the vibe. Seriously, you can't help but tap your feet and smile while listening to Texas Swing. It is a lot of fun to listen to. The six disc set of Wills stuff I bought a couple of years ago is still in heavy rotation.



Another item you mention in here is Stan Getz' version of "The Girl From Ipanema." Hey, if you liked that one, check out the collaborative recording of Getz and Charlie Byrd, called *Jazz Samba* (1962), Verve recording 8432, which also featured Keter Betts on bass, Buddy Deppenschmidt and Bill Reichenbach on drums. One word best describes this album: scrumptious. There's no doubt about that. I like Getz, and my History of Jazz prof Tony Cinamo was a pal of his.

Hey, I remember watching TW3 - *That Was The Week That Was* - on television, and it was easily the best show on the tube at that time. Loved Lehrer's stuff. For ages, Dr. Demento has been playing "The Vatican Rag" on his radio program. My personal Tom Lehrer song is "Poisoning Pigeons in the Park." And then, of course, there's the Firesign Theater. My favorite - besides *Don't Crush that Dwarf, Hand me the Pliers* - is *Everything You Know is Wrong*. Great material, especially the

Regnad Kcin piece... Whoops! I was reading that through the glass on the door. I am referring to, of course, Nick Danger.

There's no question that Lehrer deserves to be in, but they chose poorly as to which recording. The recording of *That Was The Year That Was* was made at the hungry i in San Francisco and there's a mention of San Jose in it!

Anywho. A fine follow-up issue to *Drink Tank #100*. So let's see; according to your livejournal, you're almost done with #102. So here's this loc.

Did I make the cut?

All the best,

John

You made, John, by the skin of your teeth.

