



The Drink Tank Issue 190, Yo!

So, I had so much fun doing the SteamPunk review of the SteamPunk Convention, I figured I'd do another in the same vein. I went to the St. George Spirits Open House and what goes better with classically awesome liquor than Noir. So, let's start with that. Here's another great cover from the Great Mo Starkey!

The St. George Spirits Open House, November 22nd, 2008

The group of spotters arrived at the West Oakland BART station, exactly as my employer had told me. The six of them, all wearing hats, all hats from different eras, types. The six of them, three men and three women, all standing, talking like any group of hipsters. They'd been bought for the simple reason that one man can not work a single event like this, find the right person without a doubt. The description was so lax: took a trip to Spain last month, had a job cleaning houses in Marin, likes Duran Duran and stole a hundred grand from the mob. Not a lot to work on for one guy, but when you've got a team of six mingling, you can work it out. They fan out and monitor conversations. I've been a part of these over the years, a tough way to go, but it worked.

We waited for fifteen minutes longer than we expected. There were a dozen or so groups clustered around the small area in front of the Passenger Pick-Up/Drop-Off. I was the only singleton



among them. The target wasn't here. A guy like me hanging out alone in a plaza full of groups stands out and a smart mark knows when there's a hunter trying

to drink their blood, but that's the beauty of the group approach. No one expects to have six people monitoring them. Once again, parallelism works.

The bus arrives and I walk on-board, a trio of middle-aged women between me and the Six with the Hats. I take a seat near to the front, a guy with giant floppy brown hair in a Donkey Kong t-shirt sitting at the very front, a woman in a black dress who thinks she hotter than she is sitting next to him, completely ignoring his existence. The Six with the Hats walking down the aisle, remaining on their feet in the back. Better to get a view of the field. There was one of them, a tiny young thing in a page boy hat with a yellow knit dress, tortoise-shell belt accentuating the minibus and a pair of legs that could kill at forty paces. The rules of the game made it an impossibility, but a guy can dream, right?

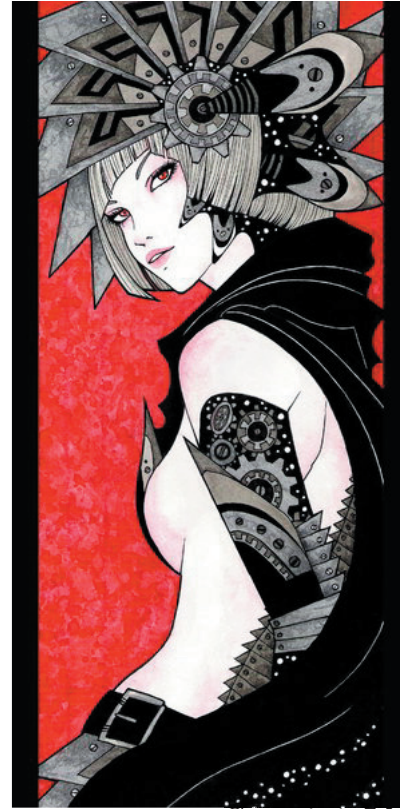
We packed the bus. Every space filled with a human body. It's not normally like this, or so everyone kept saying. It's way more crowded this time the Floppy Haired Guy said to the girl in the green tights. The, for lack of a better term, Yuppies standing behind me were talking about the last couple of trips to St. George were nothing like this one. There were seats, and they didn't have this party bus crap, but the actual Mexican bus, full of camp and fun, and not the hip-hop hooray bus that we were on. I dunno, I liked the vibe from the bus.

We made out way across to Alameda, under the water in the tunnel and across the island to the former Naval Base, the one where the Nuclear Wessels were kept back in the day. We came to Hanger One. The housing for the greatest distillery in the world, at least as far as I think. I've been there once, a meeting with a client who had a thing for effeminate mixed drinks made with expensive ingredients. He liked a Cosmo made with Buddah's Hand Vodka. I refused to understand the reasons for that.

We walked off the bus in an incredibly orderly fashion. There were almost a hundred people waiting outside, including a woman sitting on her bumper knitting. The Floppy Haired Guy waved at her from the bus. Stepping off, we got into line. The place was full of Hipsters who crawled out of their holes in Berkeley, San Francisco and off of Piedmont Ave. I hopped into line, a group of young folks in front of me, talking with two fellows who showed up in some sort of BDU ensemble. I would have thought they were Mossad, but then I caught a view of the little touches: the Martini glass rhinestone pin on the beret, the thistle glass unit badges. Sometimes you wonder about people, but other times you just say, Wow, this is fun. I liked it.

We made it in, the Six with the Hats were well behind me. I didn't have a physical description, the Employer had no idea who they were, but they'd grabbed the money and used a card to

buy the ticket to the Open House. They'd stolen the credit card, and held on to it, put they'd only charged one thing. This was a really hot ticket. I got through the line, walking in and finding that the mixed drink station was right there in the front. The descriptions of the drinks were pretty awesome. I looked them over, and if I could drink on duty, I'd have a couple. Worst part of being on the job at a time like this. No booze. I walked through into the main part of the Open House, where usually people worked bottling and distilling the miracle elixers. There was a long series of tables with wonderful food. Nothing against having a good nosh while you're on the meter. I grabbed a small plate and took one of each. The Pear and Chicken Flatbread worked, so did the Pork and Caramelized Apple Crustini. I loved those. I walked over to the center of the room to watch the Six with the Hats spreading out among the attendees. I popped a Sausage Roll in my mouth. Dear Sweet Baby Jesus, it was amazing. The pastry was flaking, the sausage succulent and the combination of the two was a miracle. The Floppy Haired Guy liked 'em too. So did what I believe is his girlfriend. She was obviously the normal



one in the relationship. The Pumpkin Blinis were right, with just a touch of sour cream. I was enjoying the hell out of it.

The Six with the Hats had made their presence felt, but in a smart way. They were wisely moving around, making fun conversation and drinking just a touch. They had to, even while working, because situations like this required them to mix as fully as possible. The guy in the bowler hat stationed himself at the cheese plate, conversing with anyone who came by for a touch of bleu cheese on their Ham and Caramelized

Crustini. I had a few of those. The one in the beret in the denim skirt was chatting with someone that she obviously thought was the mark. She was using a beautiful flirting technique that only one in a hundred of the sussers can ever master. The Employer had a good eye for talent, obviously.

I made my way to the back nine, the corner where there was no booze pouring, but a ton of food stuffs. I had to live off the foodstuffs. There was a table of Mexican foods. I'm not a guy for Mexican myself, especially the fact that they had ceviche on tortilla chips. I passed on that one, but the Tostada-y thing with

simmered pork and chipotle topped with a sprinkle of cotija cheese. It was spicy, full of flavor and contrasting textures and it helped that I was in the mood for flavor. It was bold. That's the right word.



Bold. I took stock of where the Six with the Hats were. Yellow Dress was on to a conversation that she obviously thought was a prospect, as was the Girl in the 1920s Outfit. The guys were working the

bump and run, doing a general survey of conversation and when they came across something that sounded right, they'd signal the girls for the deeper searches. These guys were real pros.

I tried the various sliced meats from Bocalone. The best salami I'd ever had. No question. They served three meats in a cone, and anything in a cone is better. There's nothing that would have made that salami any better. Magic. Simple Magic. I gotta get myself some of that. I had a moment of magic with the salami. The skies did not open up, the Earth did not swallow me whole. It could have, and I'd think I'd had a good run. Good salami.

I turned and saw the Floppy Haired Guy and his girlfriend at the Whiskey table and I walked over there. They were enjoying it, especially with a sherry rinse of the glass. The first one they had was a Port rinse, and it tasted amazing, or so Floppy

Haired Guy said. His girlfriend said that the smell of the sherry version was good. Floppy Haired Guy acted like it was as good as the salami had been. I doubt that it came out the same level.

I think they got an odd feeling from me and I turned back to the table with the Mexican food. The mini-pork sammiches were very good. Not as good as the Tosada, but tasty enough. There were roast pumpkin seeds, which were a nice add to the entire establishment. Crunchy is always a good option. I turned my back, a couple of older women were taking with the women behind the Mexican table about how they made the ceviche. I would have rather not heard that part, but I was really paying attention to the movements of The Six with the Hats. The Guy in the Ballcap had tuned into something and was headed towards the Vodka Luge. That thing's interesting. It's a plastic tube that runs through a frozen vodka bottle that brings down the temp. I walked across and stopped to tie my shoe. Yellow Dress had been signaled and came up, getting in line behind the guy who was the possibility. She started talking with him about vodka, including bringing up the various pluses and minuses of the different kinds. The Pear, the only one that's not in the fancy bottle, she recommended. He wasn't the guy. I could tell, and I think that she was sure the moment they got talking. The dude wasn't playing anything, and that's exactly what they were looking for.

She slid the thistle glass under tube, taking a slight step backwards and bending forwards. She might have been a real pro, but she loved giving a good show, I guess.

I walked around more. I came up through the group and saw that there were folks on one of the platforms getting straight absinthe right off the still. It's an amazing process and the feeling of the alcohol burning on the tongue is almost erotic, like the path licked when she pulls back and blows. I wanted it bad, but I didn't have the chance. The plinth was designed to mimic the Eifel Tower. It was gorgeous and perfect for the absinthe still. I leaned against the rail and watched people walk around, keeping my eyes open for any hints of those Six with the Hats coagulating, marking the gazelle I'd go all lion on. I noticed none of them were really on to anything, so I settled on checking out the rest of the folks attending. There were a lot of short skirts out there. It's not a normal time of year for short skirts, which made them even more a treat. Standing near the base of the plinth was a woman in a dress with a deep back. It was a nice back and you had to give her the credit for wearing it and wearing it well. She wasn't exactly the prettiest swan in Stratford-on-Avon, but she had gumption enough to wear that dress, show that back.

There were pretty boys around too. Even I couldn't help but see it. There was this one buff gentleman who enjoyed his

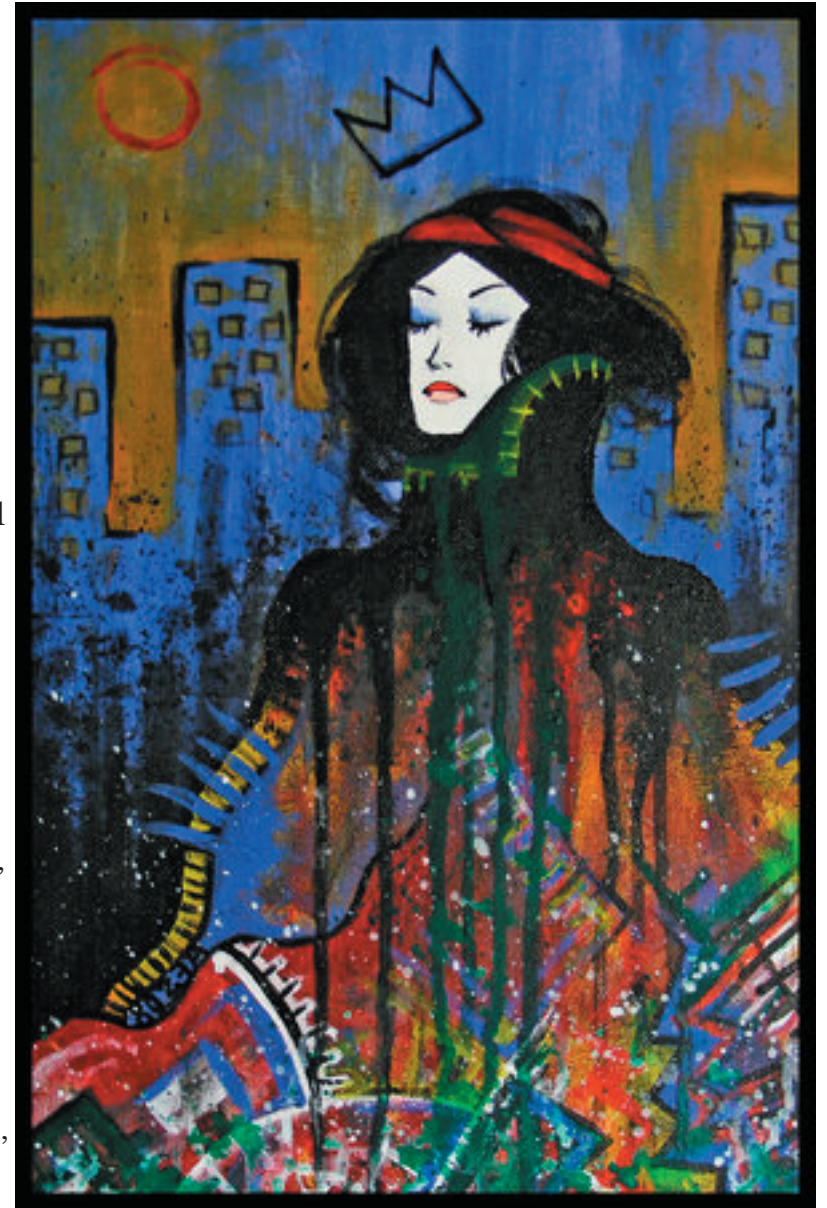
drink who was busy checking out every guy and girl in the place. It was charming in a Peter O'Toole sort of way.

There was some action. The Denim Skirt Girl was on to something near the Qi Tea liqueurs. I walked over and took my place in the line. She had tagged a guy in a Napa Valley Country Club vest. I was pretty sure he wasn't the guy we were looking for. I pulled out my thistle glass and made like I was just another chump here for booze. Denim Skirt was brilliant. She could tell that the flirt wasn't going to work so she went with the networking technique. She was out of a job and he looked like he was the hiring type. The conversation was flawless, and so was she. 100% professional. I made my way up there to the front.

"Hey, which of the two would you like?" the pourer behind the table said.

"What've we got?" I said, sounding like I'd had one or two already.

"There's the Black Tea, which is smokey and a bit heavy," he said. "And then there's the White with a strong orange infusion. They're night and day, really."



"I'll take the black." I said and he dutifully poured it.

I stuck my nose in the glass. Smokey was right. I walked off, not taking a sip. Just smelling. I walked over to the Tostada bar and grabbed one,

those two older broads were still chatting. I turned around and saw the Six with the Hats going about the vetting process. Yellow Dress was working an angle, but she was no Denim Skirt. I was getting the feeling that 1920s Girl was locking in on a group as she had been following. They were over at the Eau de Vie section, each taking a different pour and passing them around. She might have been on to something as this was an artificial group if I'd ever seen one. They'd met today, probably in line, and they were laughing a little too loud. Maybe there was someone else on a hunt in here and the ones they were tailing had gathered together unknowingly. It was a long shot, there was one girl in there, another of the short skirts in the room, who had started doing the drunk dancewalk everywhere. You know, glass help up, every step giving us Boogie Shoes, lips moving to whatever was being played. That's weird, as it was a guy with

a miked flamenco guitar and a series of pedals to give him layers of sound. It was interesting.

I walked down from the plinthe and saw that there was an open spot at the front food table and I made my way to it, grabbing a plate and took a few sausage rools and blinis. I was a fan. I walked around and saw that the Bowler Hat fellow was still by the cheese. He had a plate that had seen some action. Tiny slivers of manchego, bleu and cheddar. He was doing his job, and taking the cheese had become a tick, a silent tell at the final table that a player might make at any second. I came up alongside him.

"You might wanna take it easy on the cheese, friend." I said, not looking at him. "The Mexican in back's pretty good too."

The Guy in the Bowler looked up at me, sized me instantly as friend instead of foe, and tipped his hat, walking away. I got the cheese to myself, and I turned and kept a watch on all of them: 1920s Girl, Yellow Dress, Denim Skirt, Bowler Hat, Ballcap, Fedora, and even Floppy Haired Guy. I found myself watching, one by one picking at a mark and following it to a dead end, and every ten seconds or so, I would get another piece of cheese. I think I went through the entire wedge of brie on my lonely. They seemed to be com-

ing around, finding the stream that was bringing them closer. There was chum in the water.

I walked a bit, not wanting to be Bowler Hat Guy, and found myself next to the chocolate spot run by Recchiuti Confections. I grabbed me a Fleur de Sal, a chocolate with sea salt and caramel, and it was amazing. I grabbed the honeycomb malted, which was even better. I took long sniffs of the Black Tea Liqueur that I'd been carrying with me for more than an hour. I looked over at a small commotion. Green Tights girl was dancing to the masterful playing. She was pretty damn good. I could see a lot of folks taking notice, all conversing while keeping things going and still, eyes were on her. It was exceptional. I was drawn away for a few moments, then looked back to see that two of the guys had singled out another small group. These were people who knew each other, taking like friends, or more importantly, not talking like friends. That's how you can tell that folks really know each other. Looking at them from afar, I couldn't tell which one they were thinking of the five of them, but they had a few markers that were making me guess. I took deep inhales of my Qi Tea between studious glances. I wasn't picking up anything stronger than a worried scent on the wind from them, and that was certainly more than anyone else in the entire Hanger. I knew they were pulling tidbits from conversations and getting more and more information



and they'd have something soon.

"You wanna try the Hot Chocolate?" a perky woman said from behind a weird contraption that was mixing chocolate.

"Yeah, sure." I said, and she turned the tap, the richest hot chocolate running out into the tiny paper cup she held below the spigot. She then floated a little St. George Single Malt on top of that. I didn't have a choice, I had to taste it. I tipped it back slowly and the rich chocolate came down to me in heavenly rivulets. It danced on my tongue like some hideously florid romance novel metaphor. It was incredible, the off-flow of some magical chocolate oil tanker on the reef across my tongue. The whiskey then came on strong, a light tip-toe across, cutting through. It was a velvet and ex-acto knife situation. You can't ask for more than that.

It was on.

I made my way around, I downed the Qi and went to the table for the whiskey. The Floppy Haired Guy was right, the sherry wash was brilliant with the floral tones accentuated. I headed to the vodka luge and discover that the perfect Pear was amazing, but I wasn't done there. The basil eau de vie was powerful, but emitted perfect notes of flower and Earth and Vibrancy. The good stuff was an extra tenner, as was the Agave (or I-Can't-Believe-It's-Not-Tequila), but I never had a taste for that stuff. The Heirloom Apple Brandy was a notch

below Heaven, but no less magnificent than the angels that'd greet you. I could taste something in there, something vital and sublime. The De Profundis 20-year aged Pear Brandy, well beyond my reach in cost except after a lucrative contract, was poured into my glass. The smell alone said I would find a gentle lapping calm washing over me when I finally took the sip, and I did, allowing the liquid to

fold over my mouth. It did not coat, but it popped invisible bubbles, excited molecules I did not know I had.

The music had changed and there was a drum kit and a pair of guys with laptops playing techno. Was it even called techno nowadays? I didn't know. It was decent ambiance music, only too loud. I stepped over and saw the table where they poured the absinthe. I knew enough not to expect Moulin Rouge or Kylie Minogue dancing across my field of vision, but I had them water out the last vestiges of the De Profundis, but the absinthe went in with the ice and the water and I could smell what I can only call The Scent. It is licorice and wild flowers and anise and cold concrete and sweet briar and a lover's long wet hair after a shower. I could place that smell a mile

away now, having experienced it so closely. I remembered, somehow, that there was a chocolate that was supposed to pair well with the Absinthe, so I walked over to the table and found the Star Anise and Peppercorn Truffle. It had a little tiny white dot on top and I pressed it gently before picking it up and adding it to the mouth.

The Absinthe washed away all the



other sensations and I did not bite into the truffle at first, but let the bottom layer of chocolate melt on my tongue. It was more magic, but of a different school than the salami. I then bit and the flavors, rich and spiked and hot and torrential all came and went like a cigar smoking inspector walking the house, leaving a lingering reminder of his presence. I adored it, and maybe there was something to the pairing concept. I always just thought it was a way to sell more wine.

I saw the lovely woman behind the table by the Hot Chocolate machine. I asked kindly for one. She obliged. It was just as good as the first one, but with this slight treble hum in my brain, it was even better.

I looked at the table next to the chocolate and saw that Yelp was in the house. The service that allows anyone to say how much they hated their latest lunch or loved their hair dresser was giving out bags and other shwag. I took a bag, put my now empty glass in it and then looked around. I was supposed to be watching the Six with the Hats, and they were nowhere to be found. I walked up towards the front, grabbed a pair of sausage rolls when I went by the table. I hadn't noticed how dark it was getting. It must have been 5:30 this early time of year. I met eyes with the Floppy Haired Guy again, this time as he motored back to his girlfriend with a couple of tasty snacks and popping a blini in his mouth as soon as he left the table. I couldn't see

them.

This was worrying. If they'd been made by the Target, they could have been led off and done away with and no one would notice. No one would have noticed anything as the Girl in Green Tights and a few others were dancing in front of the



laptops and drum kit. They were having a good time. I was following the Green Tighted calves when I saw that all Six with the Hats were gathered in one location, and when a single person moved, they reconfigured. They'd made a complete scan of the place and this was the one.

I made my way to a spot where one of them could see me and give me the known signals. I put myself in the perfect place for Yellow Dress. She had her hands crossed on her left side. Woman. Her right hand was in an OK signal. Long hair. She was smiling. They hadn't been noticed. I looked at the group and there was one who completely fit the bill. I crossed my arms in front of my chest, then undid them and crossed them the other way. I was on it. She broke position and walked away. One guy, some 50-something chump in a Tommy Bahamas shirt, watched her walk up, then watched her walk away, focusing on her backside assets. Denim Skirt headed into the area where they poured the mixed drinks. 1920s Girl was back towards the Absinthe. Bowler Hat and Ballcap Guys went to play the Tempest Game they'd set on Free Play. I saw that Denim Skirt was now chatting with a guy and putting her intense focus to work on him in earnest. Good for her. I was ready and I saw that the Target was walking for the outside.

I followed her, moving from behind one person to the next until we were

out in the parking lot, the air cold, but whether it was the drinking or the coat I had been wearing all day or the fact that I was almost done, I didn't notice any more than a brief telling of the air on my reddened face. It's cold out here it said.

I had only briefly seen her, but at no point would I have made her for my target. She was tall, maybe six foot in those heels, and she was thin. She walked comfortably, just as she had when she was crossing from the whiskey table to the chocolates. She was a smiler; kept a straight face until someone paid her an attention and then she would unleash the 120 Watt smile. It was the kind that would stop the heart or start it, if necessary. I had noticed the flash of her teeth against the light Sherry of her skin. It was obviously the lighting, but it was an amazing effect and I'd have followed her more if not for the liquor calling out to me. I guess her shoulders were the thing that stood out most. She had amazing shoulders. The wide oval cut of her neckline showed one and it was amazing. Very few really understand how important a shoulder is to the entire package of a modern beauty.

She crossed the parking lot, taking out her keys and unlocking the door when she glanced across the Bay. San Francisco. It glowed with a soft white invasion of gentle fog coming from the west. It was almost a Christmas display in a far-off store window. I noticed it, but she was taken by it. She left the keys in

door and walked to the fence in a trance. I walked up behind her on the balls of my feet. She was standing at the fence, and came quickly behind her, wrapped my hand around her waist and put my roscoe to her ribs, pressing the silencer barrel of the .38 in just enough so she'd feel it.

"Ma'am, I hope you had a good time at the Open House." I said to her softly.

"I did. Best one I've ever been to." She said.

"Yeah, I had a good time."

"Of course you did. I can smell it on you."

We both sat there, staring out over the water at the City. I always liked to give my targets one last lingering sight, just in case there was an afterlife where it could be savored.

"I can tell you're either going to kiss me or kill me, and either way, I'd want to look you in the eyes first." She said.

I took my hand off her waist and took a step back, the back of my leg touching her bumper. She slowly turned around and I'm not sure which happened first, me squeezing the trigger or her lunging forward to plunge the knife up under my ribs, right into my lungs. I was done for. That much was true. I staggered forward and grabbed the fence, keeping myself upright. I had hit her in the stomach. I should have aimed higher, but in my state, thought wasn't perfect. I was glad I'd put the silencer on. She

staggered back, then got herself together, walked to her car, opened the door and drove away.

Maybe I'd done the job, maybe she'd make it to Oakland and lose enough blood that she'd pass out, go into the other lane and get hit head-on. Maybe I could collect. I wouldn't make it beyond this moment, though. It'd been a good day, an almost perfect day of drinking and eating and watching the world swirl through delicious movements. I stared out at San Francisco, closed my eyes and let what happened happen.



Letter Graded Mail
sent to garcia@computerhistory.org
by my Loyal Readers!

Eric Mayer sends us this LoC
Chris,

I'm running behind, obviously. The issue devoted to Taral's art was great. Art's kind of hard to comment on, though, if you lack the critical vocabulary. I'm glad to see Taral getting his due at last. He's been doing stuff for fanzines practically forever but back in the seventies and eighties it seemed to me that he wasn't rated as highly as he should have been in some quarters.

It's ironic to trash Rotsler in a zine devoted to a Rotsler award winner but, like you and Taral, I've never been that crazed on his cartoons. (Like you, I think his non-cartoons are better, or more to my taste) I'm not saying I dislike them, and just by being omnipresent they really cry out faanishness, but I've never been convinced they are brilliant.

Taral's well-deserving and Rotsler's always going to be remembered for those cartoons, but I'll always remember the things like the stuff that I've run.

Just to continue to be boring I also loved the decomposition piece. But the range of drawings is so impressive. By the way, I can see why Taral would be miffed when people spoke about Rotsler's line because Taral is pretty obviously the real master of line.



Re the couch potato cat. My cat's a lap potato and right now, sitting on me as usual. Some of Taral's cats look more suited to lap dancing than lap sitting.

Oh, that's funny!

Funny that no one would use that fake Bergeron on a cover. Perhaps they were afraid of the likely shit storm that would blow in at them from certain quarters. Of course Bergeron liked it, he was an artist. Or was it because it's not a very flattering portrait of Avedon?

You know, I only briefly met Avedon, but she was really nice.

Taral's essay on the unidentified fan in issue 189 amused me but if you're going to not identify someone...I mean...he called her "Faith" but her real name isn't...uh...Charity? Naw. Well, damn, I can't guess!

Chris, of course you're a writer. My

opinion is that 90% or writing is having something interesting to say. There's too much emphasis on so-called style and technical skills. I suspect one of the reasons I can't read modern sf is that too many sf writers today make a point of displaying their skills rather than just getting on with the story/ideas.

My thought is a writer some how writes for a reason other than to just write. I just write because it's fun. I also don't rewrite. I'm always straight to stencil.

Now if by "writer" you mean "professional fiction writer" well, I'm with you there. To me a professional writer is a person who makes a living by writing fiction and that does not include me. In that sense I do not think of myself as a "writer."

I'd consider you a writer. Even a pro writer. How many writers

Your Nazi Kings piece was hilarious. It sounds like a lot of the ancient histories I've tried to decipher while doing research, except that whereas they sound like they're making it up as they go along, you sound even more like it. Like Thucydides or Procopius it has a certain "je ne sais quois" -- which I think is translated as "I don't know what the fuck they're going on about."

Best,
Eric

I much prefer to read fake non-fiction these days, like the Story of Funerary Violin. That stuffs make me laugh!

IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE CANADA AGAIN

Taral Wayne

I'm appalled! It seems Prime Minister Harper is bent on a one-party, Neocon Canada, with government hollowed out so that in reality a new Corporate Compact runs the country.

His mean-minded scheme is to cut government money given to the major parties to operate. It has to be understood that some years ago, the parties were strictly limited in how much they could raise through private or corporate donations. So the parties are very dependent on public subsidy,

based on how many seats they hold in parliament. For whatever reason (read "oil money") the Conservatives have a huge war chest. I'm not sure how they got it, under the new rules, but evidently they are almost surfeited in money. On the other hand, the Liberals are nearly broke. The NDP depends heavily on their government allowance too. Without subsidies, the Bloc and Green Party can scarcely function at all. In the event the PM gets his way, all parties but the Neoc... Conservative Party would be crippled. Since he's made it a confidence issue, he will either get his way, or there could be yet another election. He may be counting on that, hoping the public will blame the opposition for not agreeing to their own gutting, and give Harper the majority he wants. Finally, he'd be

the permanent CEO of Canada.

In the face of a world wide economic crisis, and a less visible global climate crisis, Harper appears to show no interest in governing the nation, only in forcing confrontations with his opposition! It's as though destroying his enemies was more important than serving the country's interests. From his perspective, I suppose the two are

probably one and the same. L'état, c'est moi. Canada, c'est Steven Harper.

The PM seems to be hiding a secret deficit. While he concedes a deficit will likely become necessary, if the recession thickens, there's a strong possibility he's already driven the country into that state, having cut taxes and therefore government revenues, while spending our hard won savings from Liberal years on his pet war in Afghanistan. The opposition accuses him of hiding the fact by counting future sales of government assets in the current balance. Need it be said that we probably wouldn't have as much pressure to go into deficit, if years of Canadian "savings" -- i.e.: the surpluses Harper castigated the Liberals for hoarding, as well as the interest we saved by paying down a huge part of the national debt -- hadn't already been given away to corporations in the form of unneeded tax cuts. In other words, he gave our thrift away as a gift to the rich.

More serious, the Conservative's plan to sell federal assets might well be part of a well planned agenda, to hollow out the government, leaving it fewer and fewer assets in future to play any leadership role, any power to level inequalities, or ability to cope with problems.

We've recently seen the United States take a timid step away from Neocon corporate-absolutism and government nihilism, but our Neocon Prime Minister still has a full head of



steam, and is driving us with an open throttle to a future of bankers and businessmen meeting in closed sessions to determine “public” policy that will be little likely to be in our best interests.

Speaking of the PM’s war in Afghanistan, Hamed Karzai has recently demanded a deadline for the end of the war. He claims, all too plausibly, that UN and NATO troops were doing more harm to his country than good. Meanwhile, our defense minister Peter MacKay has waxed enthusiastically about the wonderful improvements Canada is making in that downtrodden country. Bridges, hospitals, schools, golf courses, drive-in McDonalds...

So who do we believe? Our minister of national defense, or a corrupt Middle Eastern potentate? It’s fairly obvious why Peter MacKay says our troops are doing a splendid job of saving Afghanistan from itself. Orders from above. Harper and the Neocons want to go on fighting in the militarist tradition what they regard as the “War on Terror”. (It’s quite profitable if you’re in the defense industry.) Likely Harper takes orders too, one way or another, from Washington.

But what about Hamed Karzai? It isn’t that we have any reason to trust him, but his recent statements are at odds with what we’re accustomed to thinking of as his particular vested interest -- ie: handouts to his government, that he and his clan can

skim. Telling us that he wants to know when we’ll leave is a surprising about-face, and it it’s crucial we understand correctly what this means. My guess is that Karzai has realized that our continued presence in Afghanistan is in fact destroying the country, and if things go on as they are, we actually endanger his regime. We might soon face a situation where our troops are doing a marvelous job of rebuilding the country, while the people and government are finally united in efforts to expel us. Sound familiar? Think Iraq. How will we justify continuing Steven Harper’s war then? Hire Georgie-Porgie Bush as a spin doctor? (He’ll be looking for an easy job soon, but then his credibility isn’t what it used to be.)

Of course, the joke could be on Harper. If he persists in his folly to emasculate opposition in parliament, or trick the voters into giving him his much desired majority, it could backfire. In making the issue a vote of non-confidence, the opposition parties can easily defeat the government, forcing the Governor General to dissolve parliament. There would have to be another election, barely a few months after the last. Or would there? Actually, no. The Governor General has the power to ask the opposition to form a government. This is unlikely since the Liberals by themselves hold too few seats to have any chance of

providing effective leadership. But suppose the Libs and Deeps (NDP) offer the Lieutenant Governor a coalition government? She would almost be obliged to accept. Hoist by his own petard, our beloved National CEO would relegated to the sidelines as the *Official Opposition*. One can almost imagine the ex-PM melting away in a wisp of steam like the Wicked Wretch of the West.

It might look like Canada again, Toto.



And another LoC, this time from the Drink Tank Letter Column debuting R. Graeme Cameron!

Dear Christopher “zine-multiplicator extraordinaire” Garcia,

You’ve really hit upon a great idea, devoting an entire issue to the current Rotsler award winner. Even better, you plan to cover future winners, and as many past winners as possible. Excellent! For connoisseurs of fan art the projected series of folios will make for a wonderful collection.

Yeah, this is something I’ve wanted to do for a while. One, it means I can do issues dedicated to the art of those fan artists that I’ve always loved (and what I wouldn’t give to be able to do a Grant Canfield issue!) and hype an award that I really appreciate and believe in like the Rotsler. My next one might be an ATom tribute, but I’ve gotta get the art from folks first and people to comment. If not, I’ll certainly try for a Brad Foster tribute at some point this Spring.

Taral, of course, well deserves the award. He is more than a ‘mere’ cartoonist, for he possesses great technical ability in the arts of perspective, shading and composition. Plus he draws really nifty stuff. I particularly like his ability to draw machines (aircraft, tanks, cars, etc) in a credible, realistic fashion.

I feel really lucky to get to run his stuff, both his writing and his art. A lot of folks have said they enjoyed the issue, though it’s not without it’s controversy as was noted around LosCon.

It should be noted that Taral is also a renowned fanzine collector and a fanti-quarian with a profound knowledge of the history of Canadian zinedom (which is my way of pleading with him for yet more articles on fannish history for my zines – subtle, aren’t I?)

Yeah, he should be giving you more stuff...but only if it doesn’t conflict with him sending stuff my way!

To take a leaf from Japanese custom, Taral deserves to be recognized as a ‘living treasure’ by Canadian fandom (being fanartist guest of honour for the upcoming Worldcon in Montreal comes close) and indeed, by zinedom at large. In my opinion he also well deserves a Hugo, it being long overdue.

Keep spawning your exuberant zines!
Cheers, R. Graeme Cameron (fanned of WCSFAzine & The Space Cadet Gazette)
I think this really is the Year of Taral (well, the 12 months starting with WorldCon) because he’s won the Rotsler, he’s the WorldCon Fan GoH and he’s got the inside track on the Best Fan Artist Hugo. That’s a rare, rare trio!

And I have to plug WCSFAzine as being really good stuff!



A brief note: LosCon was a lot of fun this year. I always enjoy the Hell out of that con, largely because it’s time away from the family and it’s a nice hotel. This year, there were elevator problems, Linda was sick so she didn’t come to play with us, and still it was a wonderful time!

A great con is not one that does everything right, it’s the one where even though there’s something wrong, you still have the time of your life. I try and remember that!



IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE CANADA AGAIN – PART TWO

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Twenty four hours have passed. Guess what? Steven Harper blinked!

The opposition parties *did* reach an agreement between themselves to form a coalition, and it has already been submitted to the Governor General that they “have the confidence of parliament”. That means they have more seats than the Prime Minister’s party, and have more right to form the government. This morning Harper announced he would change his bill, restoring the subsidies, as well as abandon several other unpopular

measures.

But it’s too late. It seems as though backing down isn’t enough for the opposition. Harper tried to destroy them, and now they don’t feel safe with him as PM. *He* has to be made powerless, if anyone in opposition is to be safe. However, a new government isn’t quite a done

deal yet.

Steven Harper has options. One is to back down further, and not make the upcoming vote a non-confidence matter. It may not be enough, and it wouldn’t save his bill from defeat. His second option is ask the Governor General to dissolve parliament and call an election. Since the previous election was only six weeks ago, it’s highly unlikely she would agree. His third option to prorogue parliament. Basically, this means ending the current session of parliament early, and not re-opening it until January.

My guess is that Harper will try to prorogue parliament - - refuse to govern the country in

effect -- rather than allow government to pass from his hands. (It’s my ball, and if I can’t be pitcher, I’m going home.) Likely he hopes time will be on his side, and the three opposition parties will sooner, rather than later, squabble. (He might be right too.)

It comes down to what the decision of the Governor General. If she decides the country ought to have a sitting government in this time of economic uncertainty, then despite Harper’s evasive tactics she may well call on the coalition to form a government. If she decides Harper is within his rights to prorogue parliament, despite its irresponsible motive, then Harper may survive. Technically she is constrained to take the PM’s advice on the matter, and if he wants to prorogue the session, she must. Then again, if the coalition remains united, they will represent a wider number of Canadians in January as much as they do in December, and



can still form a new government.

What really disgusts me is how our prevaricating Prime Minister is blaming the opposition for “undemocratic” tactics, as though he were elected president, and his executive office were being stolen away from him. Of course he knows better. There is no executive branch in a parliamentary system, he isn’t a president, and the Conservative Party isn’t losing a single seat. So the principles of democratic rule are not being violated at all. As well, he is wrong is claiming that the voters decided against electing the probable new Prime Minister to that office, and that he, Steven Harper, was their choice. It is true that the Liberals Party did not win enough seats to make their leader, Stephane Dion, Prime Minister. But neither did Steven Harper win enough seats to say that he

was any more “democratically” elected to the office. More Canadians in fact voted against his party than for it. The Conservative Party only won a plurality of votes, and is only a minority government.

But Harper knows most Canadians are fuzzy about such things, and imagine Canada’s government is much the same as the American. He hopes to persuade them, erroneously, that the opposition move is immoral.

As if created in effect a one-party state was the moral thing to do!

Liar! Cheat! Trickster! May all your beautiful wickedness be destroyed.

□

It will be interesting to see what the *next* 24 hours brings.

OK, this issue is over! I wanna thank everyone for everything and I’m pleased to say that the Venture Brothers issue that was supposed to be here will be done later because of some minor problems. These things happen.

I wanna thank all the artists including Mo Starkey, Dann Lopez, LT Dann (I think that’s a handle that is based on Forrest Gump, and yet, I still run it!) and a few others whose stuff I’ve had for years and yet, I can’t remember who gave me it! Also, gotta give big ups to Alisa Longletter (which is her real name!) for the fine pieces with the St. George’s Article.

I’ll have a review of LosCon in an up-coming issue of SF/SF. Also, if you haven’t read the latest File 770, you’re missing out. It’s flat-out great stuff!

Tales of the DORK KNIGHT



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