



The Drink Tank 375



Let us begin with Mr. Milt Stevens! on issue 368 (Fear) and 370!

May 15, 2014

Dear Chris,

Unlike my usual practice, I'll be commenting on material from two issues in this LoC. Starting with #368, I have no idea why I watched two of the Robocop movies. Describing them as absurd doesn't quite cover it. The premise seems to be that police work is one long murderous rampage. Police officers are paid to go out and shoot people on every shift. OK, many people seem to think that is the case, but it isn't.

For one thing, shooting people requires a horrendous amount of paperwork. Even big city gunfighters, who are fearless in combat, shudder at the paperwork. Talking with the possibility of a judicious application of brute force is a better way of handling the situation. Robocop would probably have problems with many police situations. For instance, can you imagine him taking a report? If he found a lost child, the little tyke would opt for staying lost.

These Hollywood movies today never manage to

get the paperwork right!

To be blunt, the creation of Robocop required body snatching. Body snatching is a serious no-no in our culture. Evil multi-national corporations should avoid such practices. In the interests of diversity, they should import Haitian zombies instead.

Ha! Zing!

In #370, the issue if devoted to fear. Elsewhere, I've said I'm not the least bit afraid of being dead. However, there are some forms of dying I wouldn't like. I don't experience fear very often. As a matter of fact, avoiding fear is one of my goals in life. No, I don't want to hold your pet tarantula. I don't want to be burned alive or thrown from a great height either.

I am a bundle of fear, but that's to be expected - I grew up in the 80s.

Smells can trigger fear. Rotting flesh does the job quite well. Even if you know it is just hamburger, it still grabs your heart and makes you want to run for the next county. I think it only works with rotting mammalian flesh. Rotting fish smells awful but doesn't seem to provoke the fear reaction.

I can say, with great certainty, I know not the smelling of rotting fish!

I don't like horror movies. However, my favorite horror movie is "Tideland" by Terry Gilliam. It's particularly horrible because there isn't anything supernatural in it. It's about a male and a female drug addict and their daughter. Their daughter is withdrawing further and further from reality. The most horrendous scene is of the little girl cuddling up to her father who died of a drug overdose last week. In the background, you can hear the flies buzzing on the corpse.

I must see that one. I've only seen a couple of Gilliam works, and while I enjoy them, I think his stuff is best enjoyed after it's spent a few years in the Oak.

Yours truly,
Milt Stevens

Hey, how about more Milt! This time on #371!

Dear Chris

In Drink Tank #371, Taral is certainly correct about sex and the

male imagination. Hardcore pornography is an example of providing too much information and not allowing the imagination to go into action. Hardcore porn impresses me as being clinical rather than erotic. The most effective sex scene I've ever encountered was in a movie titled "Phaedra" from a play by Racine. The scene was entirely lights and music. However, it didn't just show you what sex is like. It showed you what the very best sex is like.

While I admit that hardcore porn can be useful, it's also rather formulaic, and only when there's something funny goin' on that it gets beyond titillation, which is what it's for, right? On the matter of the best sex scene in the history of film, I gotta go with Do The Right Thing.

J. C. Arkham to the contrary, I don't like being scared. I like Hollywood happy endings. I want all singing, all dancing, and love conquering in the end. If I want a reminder as to how lousy reality is, I can always watch the news. Long ago, Aristotle commented on the use of blood and guts in entertainment. He conceded you could produce a reaction that way, but it wasn't art.

I'm of the low-brow persuasion.

Even after years of doing what I did professionally, I still didn't like looking at morgue photos. On one occasion, I recall thinking I was too squeamish. Then I realized there wasn't any problem in not liking to look at morgue photos. They are ugly and disturbing. It is when you start to like looking at morgue photos that you have a problem.

The few post-death photos I've seen have been the famous ones - Kennedy's autopsy, James Dean, Janey Mansfield, Mary Kelly from Whitechapel, you know, the big ones. I don't think I'd want to see many more...

I'll be interested in seeing your comments on the Hugos. I've already made a fair number of comments on this year's nominations. I will probably make a few more. This year the awards are more politicized than I have ever seen them before. People should remember that war is the ultimate extension of politics.

If you didn't hear my yelling "Vox Fucking Day!", then you managed to avoid the blast radius.

Yours truly,
Milt Stevens

More Milt! This time on 372!

June 2, 2014

Dear Chris,

I wasn't expecting Drink Tank #372 quite so soon. If I commented on every point in this issue, I would produce a document as large as the issue. So I'll restrict myself to some general comments on the Hugos and some specific comments on the novel category.

A camel is a horse designed by committee. The Hugo rules were designed by a committee with delusions of competence.

I don't know if I'd go so far, but there is a certain sense of chaos that runs as deep

1. There are too many categories.

Some people think inclusiveness is a good idea. I don't know why they think that. If we include more and more material, we risk death by evaporation. Science fiction and fandom will become meaningless terms.

Chris, you are the most energetic person I know. You seem to be able to keep track of the current categories. You may be the only one. In order to keep track of blogs, fancasts, and graphic stories, I would have to give up my current hobby and pursue a new hobby with a new group of people. I don't feel like doing that.

I don't keep track of blogs that closely, but I try and keep from being surprised too much when I read about them on Facebook.

2. Voting is too easy.

There were almost 2000 Hugo nomination voters this year. Many of them were just following orders. \$40 for a supporting membership (which includes a voter packet) is a good deal. Who cares if you only know one nominee it the whole shooting match? If nothing changes, we are going to see the Hugos diddled every year from now on out. The winners will be those who control the largest number of shambling minions.

That is a possibility. Let's not forget though, a smaller, less inclusive group gave They'd Rather Be Right a Hugo, so no one's perfect.

Best Novel

Just to let people know what my tastes are like I will include a list of what I nominated for best novel. I usually use the NESFA list to look for likely nominees.

The Arrows of Time by Greg Egan
The Ocean at the End of the Lane by Neil Gaiman
Ancillary Justice by Ann Leckie
Neptune's Brood by Charles Stross
Burning Paradise by Robert Charles Wilson

My Ranking

Fifth place—Parasite by Mira Grant

For many years, I have believed that Richard S. Shaver was the worst SF writer who ever lived. Mira Grant challenges that assumption. This is the worst novel I have attempted to read since the last Hugo nominated Mira Grant novel. The characters all talk and act like 13 year olds. The science in this novel is below contempt. I figured out the ending by page

2. I think it is the most stupid ending of any novel I have ever read.

Ouch! I didn't think it was a great novel, and I had no idea about the good or bad of the science, but I did enjoy much of the last set of Mira's books.

Fourth Place—Warbound by Larry Correia

People who think this is a fun book would probably enjoy having flaming bamboo shoots inserted under their fingernails. The plot is a blend of X Men and Mortal Kombat with magic replacing mutations. The magic works whichever way is convenient at the moment. The characters are paper thin, and the prose is one long cavalcade of clichés. By comparison, Parasite is godawful while this is only quite bad. That means I would recommend it to my worst enemy.

And who would that be, Milt?

Third Place—Wheel of Time #1, Eye of the World by Robert Jordan

I thought about reading the last volume of this series but realized it

would probably be incomprehensible to the casual reader. So I read the first volume instead. It was an enjoyable read. It is under the influence of Lord of the Rings and is written in a style used to produce very long novels.

I like Brandon and Robert Jordan better than I like the books, so it'll be one of those on the "Books by Folks I Like" instead of "Books I Like" shelves.

Second Place—Ancillary Justice by Ann Leckie

This is a fine first novel. It has already won the Nebula and may well win the Hugo.

I really enjoyed it!

First Place-Neptune's Brood by Charles Stross

This is a funny book, and I like funny. I don't know whether the galactic capitalism would work or not, but it certainly gave me something to think about. I liked the bat like privateers who were also insurance underwriters. I liked the collectivist squid too. Stross has been nominated several times before, and I have voted for him several times before. However, he has never won, and that is why I'm giving him the nod over Ann Leckie.

Yours truly,
Milt Stevens

Stross has never won either, and I think he may be due, but Ancillary Justice is really really good!

Now, let's change things up with Mr. Lloyd Penney!

June 3, 2014

Dear Chris, James and Vanessa:

Yesterday was a helluva party. Anniversary, birthday, two new jobs, and free shots and dessert at dinner. I wish days like this one could come along a little more often, but I sure enjoy it when they do. With the new job, I have to arrange my time a little better, so with that comes some morning writing. Here comes some comments on The Drink Tank 371 and 372.

CONGRATS, OLD BOY! WELL-DONE INDEED!

371...Because we can see as graphic a piece of art or a photograph as we like, we've cut back on using our imaginations. The cover is proof of that. I thought at least SF fans' imagination could put it all together, at least...

Indeed! I loved it.

Yvonne and I sold our Loncon memberships and cancelled our hotel in London, so we did not vote on the Hugos, and based on what I saw, I am not sure I'd have voted anyway. You'd have my vote, Chris, but yours was one of the few familiar names on the ballot for me. SF and fandom have left me behind, which is something I always figured they would do eventually.

I have never been a fan of horror stories or movies, but I can tell you that local fan, costumer and propmaster Adam Smith worked on the Saw movies (many of them made in Toronto), and award-winning magazine Rue Morgue has its offices in Toronto, too.

Rue Morgue's worth readin'! I've tried to get it on teh Hugo ballot before, but it doesn't quite make the long list, it seems.

There is a small group of Battle Beyond the Stars fans in Montréal. It would be great to get them to write up why they like that show so much, and go beyond the JohnBoy in Space meme. Meanwhile, I will entertain myself with all my Babylon 5 DVDs, and reminisce about how good that show was.

I now want to document this strange clan in Montreal...

My loc...As a vendor, CostumeCon was good, but Anime North was better, with our sales nearly doubling. We have to look into more shows where we can sell our goods and make a small mint. Today is the second day of the new job, and I have not slept well. Probably nerves, anticipation and too much caffeine. I need to get some more time to finish off my Loscon trip report and caption the photos Alan White gave me.

Looking forward to it, Lloyd!

372...and I am sure I won't have much to say here, but I will try. When I see the controversy over sexist behaviour at conventions, Vox Day, the Jonathan Ross mess, the screaming over so-called fake geek girls, etc., this isn't the SF and fandom I know. This is a much more modern version I do not recognize, and I don't want to recognize it. It's become

too public, and too indicative of society in general. It has indeed left me behind, and good for me. I am from a generation or two ago, and the Hugos no longer represent my interests, which have become pretty particular over time.

There's a think a little later on in the issue that sorta touches on that...

The Spring Schoenhuth jewelry on page 7...I am sorry to say that the octopus/kraken medallion on the front of it is available at most Michael's craft stores. I have purchased it myself, and sold it on my jewelry table.

I still want to get that piece for Gail Carriger!

I think you've put your finger on it, for I see it in the Hugos and the Auroras, too. The fan award nominees are all about SF, and not fandom. Perhaps we are too close to what's left of fandom to see it fading away into a fond memory for a select few.

That is a sobering thought...

And now, more from Lloyd on the same issue!

June 4, 2014

Ran out of time yesterday! Will finish it up and get it out before I head to work.

My apologies, Chris, I hope you do well with Exhibition Hall, but I know next to nothing about the rest of the ballot. I am now completely uninformed about the SF field in its current state, and shouldn't have access to a Hugo nomination form or final ballot. I am, however, always interested in how others placed, so I hope to see a full report as to who got nominated, but didn't make the ballot.

Journey Planet's up there, and I hope it does well. We really love doin' that zine, and it would be nice to at least beat No Award!

I am going to fold it up here, Chris...gotta catch the bus that takes me to the bus that takes me to work. It is good to be back in an office again, and thee paycheque will be a welcome relief. Take care, hugs to Vanessa, thank you James!, and see you with the next issue. (Must work again on Loscon trip report!)

Yours, Lloyd Penney.



H.P. LOVECRAFT



Howard Phillips
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August 20, 1890

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On a long walk back from war, a traveller returns to a town he had once spent a great deal of time in as a young man. He had been quite popular, had been kind to all children, had taught language and was always kind and helpful around town. His leaving had left a hole in the heart of the town, only to be filled by a new generation of bright, intelligent young people. They were now in charge of the town, and while they had been young when the traveller had last been there, he was still widely-known, and his duty and kindness was widely remarked on.

As he entered town, he was instantly recognised by the citizenry, and a crowd gathered in the central square. Everyone pulled out all their food, the vendors let all the people of the small, distant village take freely of their fruits, breads, oils, and strong drink. A large table was put together and heaped with food and candles that would burn late into the night.

And it was around that table that all the Bright Young Things

who had come up in esteem while the Traveller was away were enraptured with his stories. He told tales of the war, of what he had seen as he travelled on his way back from battle, the incredible people he had met along the way. He had the table laughing at one minute, and crying at another. Every heart at the table was full of love for the Traveller, and they asked him to raise a toast with the last of the beer.

“Alright, in tribute to one of my favorite people from when I was here last,” the Traveller spoke, “here’s to my good friend Jert!”

And the laughter that had been so close not moments before seemed a day’s walk away as every face seemed to go white at the exact same moment. At first no one seemed able to say anything, and the Traveller noticed after a few moments.

“I understand that he died shortly after I left, but the stories I have of our time together! Jert, to you!” he called, raising his glass to the sky again.

“Do not say his name like that!” said of the leaders of the church in the village.

“It’s not right!” called a young woman through hands folded in front of her mouth.

“No!” said another man.

“Jert! Imagine raising a toast to him!” said a voice away from the table.

And a fury of voices raised in concern, some in anger. Often, one person would become agitated and another would simply try to calm them, but would only make their rage louder. Many began to speak of things that were a step or two away from the matter of Jert. Others, typically older people of the town, tried to interject their own opinions, some even speaking in favorable terms of Good Ol’ Jert, as they knew him. The argument went on for ages until the Traveller, not having said anything since his toast broke in, shouting as loud as possible.

“What is this all about!” he yelled.

“Jert is a devil!”

“Jert was a thief!”

“Jert was a defier!”

“No, Jert was a good man!”

“Jert was so helpful!”

“Jert was my closest friend!”

The Mayor of the village, lulled from his early evening nap, came out to the Town Square.

“Jert!” The Mayor bellowed, “You all KNOW you are NOT to speak of Jert!”

The hollering fight started again, and it was more minutes before the traveler could regain control from those trying to ask the Mayor a question.

“Now,” The Traveler called over the now-muffled uproar, “will someone tell me the story of why it is now banned from talking about Jert?”

And the fight started again, with more and more yelling, though many tried to actually bring some examples of why Jert was no longer to be tolerated, but they were universally shouted down. The Traveller kept trying to get a grasp on what people were saying, but there was too much noise. All he could do was turn to the Mayor and ask him directly.

“What’s the meaning of this?” he asks the Mayor.

“This is why we don’t talk about Jert anymore.” The Mayor said.

“What did he do?”

“At this point, it matters more what they THINK he did than what he actually did.”

“Why is that?” The Traveller asked.

“Because at least that is in the present.”

And the Traveller left town, never to look back on the village he had once loved so much.





The Digital Game Museum volunteer mimed to me that he was deaf, and asked if there was any sound coming out of the pair of ancient speakers plugged into the back of a brown 14" CRT TV set. Nope. We checked that they were on, the red power light was lit, the speaker volume control was turned well past its tell-tale click. He kept pointing to his ear, I kept shaking my head. He checked the connections, and the volume control on the front of the TV, but no joy. Finally he powered off the Atari game console and re-booted Pac Man, and those familiar tones from my past started playing. I gave him a nod and a thumbs up, and worked my way behind a row of tables with cathode ray tube TVs, Atari consoles and controllers, toward the front the Sunnyvale Library program room where Dan Kramer was trying to speak over the din.

It was Atari Day at the library, and the Program Room was lined on three walls with all manner of Atari console games, every one being played by someone, with a small cluster of people waiting for a player to give up seat at a game. That morning, most of the players were grade school age or younger, and there was a parent or two flanking them. Some were offering

(unwanted) help, most were taking cell phone photos and videos. There were more boys than girls, but not by much.

The middle of the room was set up with rows of chairs for Kramer's talk. By the time I arrived at 11 am, every seat was full and the SRO was four deep in the back. This is the man who championed the creation of the Trak-Ball controllers for the Atari 2600, and when I finally found a place up front to stand, he was holding up the retail box for one of the large controllers with trackball. There were two of the consoles on the table in front of me, one being played by a grade schooler. Kramer was easy enough to hear over the game sounds, thanks to a mike and a decent audio system.

He described how the idea of a trackball was met with some confusion – the tradition at Atari had been mostly joysticks and buttons, so it was hard to see why a trackball would work in a video game. But finally he was able to get one produced and sent to retailers.

Kramer now lives near Yosemite, and he described preparing to move from the Bay Area. Over the years he had built a space under the roof of his garage, and little by little filled it with Atari bits and pieces. When moving day arrived, the collection was a big pile in front of the house, and his wife said something like “what are you going to do with that junk?” He replied it was too late to do anything, let's just move it with us.

He said it has been better than having a 401k.

Kramer hasn't retired, he has a business repairing game equipment at his new home.

Over in the teen section, they had set up four full sized arcade games, also being played by children of all ages. I watched one very small boy on a step stool playing a Star Wars game, and each time his mother would signal from behind him that other people were waiting, he would hold up three fingers. I think he meant hours.

Also in the teen area was a row of flat screens connected to computers running simulations of arcade games. Those were not getting much attention.

Moving on to the Adult Fiction area (home of science fiction and graphic novels) was a grid of chairs set up for the afternoon talk. I



got there 20 minutes early for a seat in the 2nd row, to hear Al Alcorn, the inventor of Pong.

He's a fascinating, animated speaker, with a very low-tech slide show of talking points and a couple of rare photos. Alcorn said it was important to understand where he came from. He was a Berkeley engineering student who graduated with degrees in EE and CS and was an active participant in the anti-war protests and events at People's Park. A running theme in his talk was the informality of the Silicon Valley startup set.

He started out working for Ampex, where he met Syzygy founder Ted Dabney. Soon he was recruited to work at the startup, which changed its name to Atari when it was discovered that someone else owned the name.

He worked for Nolan Bushnell, who assigned him what he thought was a test – to build a game two people could play which had a target on each side and an object which bounced between them. He wire wrapped a circuit board with the design on it, plugged it into an off the shelf black and white portable TV set, added a tray for the coins to drop into, and built it into a small counter-top console.

Bushnell said it needed directions on the front – pin ball machines had directions, after all. Alcorn complied with:

1. Deposit quarter
2. Ball will serve automatically
3. Avoid missing ball for high score

They put it in a bar for a test run, not expecting much. Soon a call from the bar said it had stopped working. Making a field repair call, Alcorn found the trouble was the coin tray was full, jamming the game.

The popularity of that first Pong machine gave Dabney and Bushnell the idea of manufacturing them on a mass scale, which they did.

Alcorn indicated he was a bit embarrassed about some of the accolades he has been given for creating the distinctive Pong sound effects, because with the chip he was using there wasn't any choice – there were only a handful of bits available.

One of the next projects was to put the game into a console for home use, which led to putting entire games on a single chip, and the cartridge game was born. Partnering with Sears put the company on the map.

Alcorn said the company style was to hire creative people, which is why he hired a 19-year-old Steve Jobs as a technician.

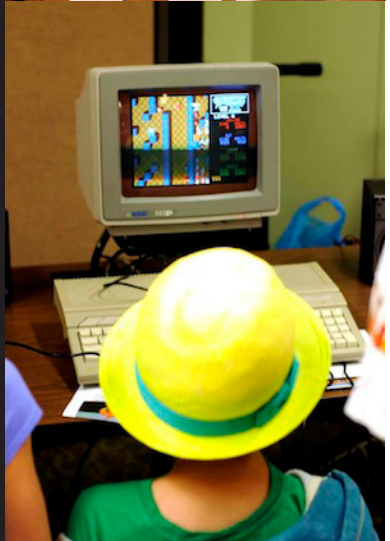
And in a classic Silicon Valley turnabout, he has worked as a consultant for Apple. He also went on to work with other startups, and continues to do consulting.

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The Digital Game Museum www.digitalgamemuseum.org is located at 3553 Ryder St., Santa Clara, and is open every Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm. While introducing Alcorn, Executive Director Judith Haemmerle invited the standing room only crowd to visit, "but not all at once. We can probably hold about 22 close friends."



The Digital Game Museum



Some Action in the Back Section

So, we're burning through issues leadin' up to issue 400, which WILL be released on January 31st, 2015. Vanessa and I are workin' on stuff, James has been pulled away for duties with the London WorldCon, but is still pumping content towards us, and in general, we're settling into a new life.

I'm moving, which may slow things down, but it's in with Vanessa and that's been wonderful. Sadly, she got serious burns on her fingers a couple of days ago and is recovering. I'm doing what I can, but sadly, as always seems to be the case, when I need to come up big, I try and fail, though not too badly, and I usually get things right the second time. Vanessa is slowly learning the fact that I don't learn, which I imagine is difficult. Luckily, she's starting to feel better, which is good. Her day on Wednesday was REALLY awful for her. I did what I could, and I hope it was enough.

I'm also still looking for a new job, which is hard in Silicon Valley when you have no tech skills. I've found a ton of Blogger gigs, but none of them seem to want me. I counted up all the resumes and responses I've sent out. 10,421 as of last count. I'm averaging about 100 a day or so. It's much easier than it used to be. Still, I've got a total of one interview and it was for a job that would have paid 10 bucks an hour. Sigh.

Not going to WorldCon this year sucks. I'll watch the Hugos on the Broadcast like the rest of the world. Lots of great folks going who I'd love to meet, but alas, I am not one of them.

Art Credits

Cover by Vanessa

Page 2 - Photo of Roy Lichtenstein Painting at the MoMA by Chris Garcia

Page 10 - 11 - Photos of HP Lovecraft-dedicated signage in Providence, RI from Vanessa

Page 12 - Photo by either M. Todd Gallowglas or James Konijn. I forget...

Page 14 - Photo by Vanessa

Pages 15-18 - Photos by Howeird

