



# The Drink Tank



ISSUE THE THIRTEENTH

FURTHER TALES OF INTEREST

PRESENTED BY

CHRISTOPHER J. GARCIA

## Andre Norton- 1912 - 2005

As I once said to a dear friend on his death bed "Even when the train's a long-time comin', it still knocks it out of you when it hits." Anyone associated with fandom knew that Andre Norton was very ill and not going to make it much longer, but still hearing of her actual death took it out of me.

Andre Norton's particulars, like her birth name (Mary Alice Norton) and the fact that she lived to be 93 are all sorta sidelights to the fact that she probably hooked more young readers into science fiction and fantasy than any other writer I can think of with the possible exception of some dude named Heinlein.

I went to an amazingly strange school district as a kid. They had a unit every year after about 4th grade dealing with Science Fiction. In sophomore year, you did a big author's report on a science fiction author (well, any author from an approved list, but no chose the non-SF folks, except for Sylvia Plath). I did mine on Vonnegut. Five kids did Andre Norton. They read all the Witch World that had come out by then and a few more. I traded a couple of my Vonnegut books for the four Time Traders novels. I read most of Witch World while I was in college and I wrote a strong paper, which almost became my thesis, on Andre as an important station of entry into science fiction for young readers. I think that when the future thinks of Norton, they'll see that she was so important in bringing young readers to the genre. I think it's already started to happen with the SFWA Andre Norton Award that will be awarded starting next year.

I read that Andre didn't want a funeral, but wanted to be cremated with a copy of her first and last book. That is the way to go out in my eyes.

12 pt. Courier New by Jay Crasdan

Andre Norton's death means a lot more to me than to Chris. While I know Chris has read some of her books, I may be one of the few who can say that they've read every one of them. That's right, every book Andre Norton ever wrote, I've read. I got hooked on her in 7th grade, reading The Crystal Gryphon while waiting for the lights to go down on my first viewing of the revived The Wild Bunch. I tore threw her books, all of them. I had to beg and barter and steal to get some of them, but I have them all in my locker, all of them trashed from over-reading.

I'd say that Andre was my gateway, but I had been reading several authors of SF by that point. Norton was merely the first one to get my undivided attention. Her style, at times simplistic and at others over-powering, guided me ahead, bringing me to writing my first stories when I had not yet finished Jr. High. I wrote my own Witch World book while a freshman and my second the next summer. I even sent Andre one, whcih got me a letter back saying that she rather enjoyed it, but that I shouldn't keep doing them.

To Andre Norton, Grand Dame of Science Fiction! I salute you and know we'll never see the likes of you again.



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## Marty Cantor's Holier Than Thou

I've been reading. Thanks to the Corflu auction and the generous nature of Jan Stinson, I've got my hot little hands on a pile of fanzines from the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. The whole lot tend towards great with a couple of stellar pinnacles.

The first of which is a three-issue run of Holier Than Thou, numbers 21, 22, and 23 from the mid-1980s plus issue 27, which I believe was the final issue of Holier Than Thou. The first three happen to be the ones that followed a piece by Richard Bergeron and the following issue devotes a lot of space to the TAFF Wars of 1984. What's interesting is that I remember reading this stuff in the early 1990s, when my friend Johnny let me have run of his collection, but now it seems much different, and certainly much less important with another 12 years of distance. The take of Ted White on the whole situation is interesting, though Marty's look at the whole thing is closer to what I imagine my thoughts would be. Oddly, the whole TAFF thing isn't even the most interesting thing in issue 21. That goes to an article by Richard Weinstock in his series called The Law and Order Handbook. The issue featured the great edition titled It Ain't Easy Being Brutal. There's also a great Brad W. Foster piece called Wooden Tits: An All American Totem. It took me forever to warm up to Foster's work, but I've finally caught the fever and really enjoy his stuff now.

Issue 22 is very different, with some more slop-over from the TAFF Wars. There's another great edition of The Law and Order Handbook, this time on the Penal and Criminal Justice system. The issue is solid over-all, though there was one major problem that I had. Bob Lee did an illustration called The Perils of Ethnic Take-Out Food. It features a big-breasted lass being violated by a chili pepper while a Mexican-accented half-an-avocado commentates. This bugged me mostly because it plays on all the stereotypes that I hate to see printed about my people. Still, you could get away with doing stuff like this in the mid-1980s.

Issue 23 is good, though I'd say it was a step or two down from 22. The two best articles were Callahan's Cross-Time Cat House by Milt Stevens and Donald Franson's (whatever happened to him?) hilarious mock-interview with 1995 TAFF winner Mr. Holdover Funds. The Cover, a great Foster piece, is another highlight.

I'd say Holier Than Thou was one of those great 1980s fanzines that sorta gets pushed aside. Compared with the fanzines that came around in the late-1980s and early 90s that were products of Adobe Electronic Publishing software, the design seems somewhat primitive, though no question that it's solid through and through. The art, often sleazy and just the way I like it, was uniformly good. I can see why HTT got three Hugo noms over the years. Marty's work has always been top flight and this is no exception.

### A Very Short Story

#### Her Work Day

Dara had been staring at the screen all afternoon. *God*, she thought, *what did I do to deserve this?*

The brutal screaming of columns of numbers across the monitor, the buzzing and whirs of the computers, the sound of tape being passed through whatever the hell it passed through. She nearly cried when the whistle went off.

*Damn you Charles Babbage for unleashing this*, she thought as she walked to the cinema to see the latest Edison filmplay.





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## Crossing: A film Review

I had just seen a movie which wasn't the best at Cinequest. I was feeling rather betrayed by the entire festival, as always happens to regulars after they see a weak film in the theatre. As I walked away, I saw that a film from the People's Republic of Canada was showing. The film was Crossing and I am so glad I didn't just head out to the bar and start drinking.

The first thing I thought after stepping out of the film was 'Wow, this was what X,Y should have been'. The film dealt with a soon-to-be-married wiseguy and his promise to his dying father to make his family legit. Yes, you've heard that premise before (Sly Stallone's Oscar being a personal fave) but this was wonderfully done with the character of Daniel, played with perfect reaction by Sebastian Spence, nearly exploding once the beautiful Davina, played by the lovely Crystal Buble, is introduced as a hooker ready to make his dreams come true.

The X,Y thoughts come from what those dreams are. Daniel wants to be a woman, or at least wants to play woman in his sexual encounters. Davina is more than willing to help him come to his fantasies, partly as a way to escape her own nightmares. Daniel can't just become a crossdresser, he's a mob guy after all, so he can't risk being found out. Buble plays Davina so smartly that you see that all her actions are right in the world the movie presents.



remarkable subtle performances these actors get out of such huge characters. Buble, who I recognised from Rollercoaster, is a real find. She's radiant and heartbreaking at the same time. You can believe she's a hooker trapped by an unfeeling pimp while also believing that she wants nothing more than to help Daniel by allowing his fantasies to come out. When she makes him dress as a woman while she comes fully-equipped as a guy, you can see that Davina is doing what's 'right' in her eyes. Buble walks a tightrope and pulls off an excellent performance.

Director Roger Evan Larry does such a great job here that I'd be surprised if Crossing doesn't make it to US Home Video release. Canadians are lucky, they can watch it in a theatres later this year. I highly recommend this film for folks who like great acting in films with great scripts.

## The Simpsons Season 5

Anyone who knows me at all knows that there is nothing I love more than The Simpsons. The Season 5 DVD set is great, easily the best of the seasons they've released so far. Why do I claim that? Well, there's the fact that two of my all-time fave episodes, Cape Feare, where Sideshow Bob comes to kill Bart, and The Boy Who Knew Too Much, where Bart can clear Freddy Quimby from an assault charge only by exposing his truancy, are both on the disks, as well as Homer's Barber Shoppe Quartet.

The extras are far too much to watch all at once, but they are great. I love the deleted scenes, mostly because they explain a lot of the little foul-ups.

## It's been a while since I've talked about Rasslin'

I write my twice weekly column, Falls Count Anywhere, for Fanboyplanet.com. It's a fun little piece and it lets me watch a lot of wrestling, both new and old. I recently picked up one of my favourite DVDs, the Chris Benoit Story, and watched his old matches from Japan.

You can watch Chris Benoit matches from Japan with non-wrestling fans and they'll at least see the level of athleticism in them. Evelyn loves his older stuff, though she doesn't much care for modern wrestling. Five year olds are excellent judges of quality.

The DVD is full of great matches from Chris' days with ECW, WCW, and from Japan along with the WWE stuff that he's done over the last 5 years. He's a Hall of Famer and this DVD set makes me happy to be a wrestling fan in the age of the good worker.

Now all I need is soem Giant Haystacks footage and I'll be happy



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***A couple of years back, I was asked to write a series of articles for OnceUponADime.com, a site promoting the film Comic Book: The Movie. The site only used one of my fake comic history articles, but I had written about twenty of them. So, since I now have somewhere to use them, I'm going to start putting one in every couple of issues. The first one is about my personal favourite false hero: Mr. Excelsior!***



Art by Alan White

## The Mr. Excelsior Story

Or

### How a Comic Book Hero can Annoy a Generation

December 3rd, 1938. Duluth, MN. A young Armenian immigrant called Al Saboungian drove his cousin's car from store to store while trying to find a place to sell his new comic book, *Fantastica!* Featuring Mr. Excelsior. The book, written by Saboungian and drawn by his close friend Morris Nichols, was a 16-pager printed on an old press Saboungian found in a barn three months prior while working a day job for the owner, Mr. David Larry. Al negotiated the use of the press three evenings a week in exchange for Saboungian working on his farm. The agreement first led to a small pamphlet titled: *Heroes of Today*, a small hand out featuring a character from a distant planet that could fly, was impervious to bullets and heat, and could run at supersonic speeds. In Saboungian's haste, he forgot to name the hero. As of 1989, only three copies are known to exist of the 30 or so printed, and only the Smithsonian's is in better than fair condition.

After a few weeks, Saboungian and Nichols began working on a new hero, one who had a name in addition to the power of flight, being impervious to bullets and heat, and running at supersonic speeds. He named the hero Mr. Excelsior. This time, instead of just letting the hero do his heroing, Saboungian invented an alter-ego, a Harvard English professor named J. Alfred Cantrell. The action in the first issue focused on Mr. Excelsior stopping a band of robbers from taking a bank vault. The story was predictable and more than a little derivative. As Saboungian drove throughout Duluth, all looked bleak until Michael J. Brandon came across Saboungian in a diner.

"Al looked down, and he had a small stack of *Fantastica* on the counter next to him," Brandon remembered for the 1987 documentary *The First Heroes*. "I asked what he had there, he showed me the comic and I was hooked. I took him to my office and we made arrangements."

Brandon was a powerful lawyer in Minnesota, and had graduated from Harvard as part of the class of 1922. He bought the press from the farmer and set up a small shop for Saboungian and Nichols to work in. Brandon used his connections to get the book carried in more stores than any other small-press comic available at the time. Early issues of *Fantastica* had between five and seven thousand issues printed, though only a few dozen would actually sell. Saboungian and Nichols would produce an issue in 4 to 5 days, and then print the run over the next week. Brandon bankrolled the operation, hardly noticing the hundreds of dollars a month he lost on the project.

"Brandon was the ultimate money mark." Said comic expert and curator James "Wizard" Reel. "He never asked any questions, just wanted an issue on every newsstand so he could say he was a part of it. His connections got them wartime paper exemptions, too. He just loved being in, or at least near, the business."

The comics never sold well for a number of reasons. First, Saboungian, while a fine writer in his native Armenian, never quite caught on to the English language, and had Nichols fix his spelling and grammar mistakes. Nichols did not possess a strong sense of style, so the issues



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of style, so the issues seemed flat.

"A large part of the Excelsior character was the fact that he corrected criminals of their grammar as he fought them, and with Saboungian doing the writing and poor Nichols correcting him, he often got the corrections wrong." Noted the Wizard.

Another problem was the comic itself. Since Saboungian was always a thrifty man, he used the cheapest paper he could get his hands on, often getting extremely thin paper that you could almost see through. To save on binding, Nichols always stapled each issue once in the upper left hand corner. The ink had a tendency to come off on the fingers of anyone who touched it, and there was no real cover.

"(It was) among the cheapest books ever made," recalled retired Harvard professor Merrill deHubot "but it still had charm many books lacked. Brandon would have three copies of each issue sent to the university, and I would always get one, as I was the only graduate student who would admit to reading comic books."

Many young people picked up one issue and then never tried another comic again. Super collector Walter Zamias, the 79-year old owner of more than half a million comics, bought one issue early on and never bought another. He claimed the cheap ink Saboungian used rubbed off and smudged other covers. Nichols was the one who suggested following the standards of the industry, but his suggestions were ignored until the on-set of WWII.

"With the War on them, many publishers were facing shutdown due to paper rationing. Brandon lobbied for, and got, exemptions due to the fact that they claimed to be a service to the children of America, and the Armed Services." DeHubot noted. "Brandon would see to it that a thousand copies of each issue made their way to the boys on the front."

Brandon acquired high-quality paper and inks for Fantastica, as well as bringing the title into a size that the men overseas could take in their kits. Sales were still slow in America, and many of the issues that made it to Europe were unread.

"I can remember getting an issue when I was going across to France," deHubot noted, "and it was the most horrible thing, even worse than many of their other issues I had read. I traded it with another man in my unit for a harmonica, and later that night, I was beaten in my bed and the shredded issue of Fantastica lay all around me. I don't really blame him, since who would want to read a comic with a three page segment discussing the inappropriateness of 'ain't'"

After a few issues, Fantastica was sold to a publisher from New York. The group, Battle Comics of America, purchased the title from Brandon and brought Saboungian and Nichols to New York to continue to write and draw the stories. The book was renamed American Victory, and featured Mr. Excelsior going to Europe to help the boys, and always ended the issue with a lesson on proper grammar and the importance of correct speech.

"There is nothing Saboungian hated more than a man who swore, even if he was in the heat of battle." noted Steve Sabellico, writer of the failed revival book *The Golden Boys*, a title which featured Mr. Excelsior in a prominent role.

American Victory sold no better than Fantastica, though there were always thousands of issues in backpacks across Europe and the Pacific. Mr. Excelsior fought the evil menaces, always making in back to Harvard Yard in time to teach his 8 am Shakespearean Literature class. The stories also made grand leaps of the impossible.

"Sometimes, it seemed that Saboungian had no concept of time and distance," Sabellico claimed. "One issue that I read had a student of Cantrell's getting drafted, and then shipped out immediately after class for the Pacific. Mr. Excelsior followed him on the boat from Boston to the Pacific, a trip that apparently took several hours, and then saved him on the battlefield. The young lad was discharged, and came back to class, completely healthy the following afternoon."



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Mr. Excelsior didn't merely save his students on the battlefield, but infiltrated the Reich as well. Several issues dealt with Cantrell going to teach Hitler English, supposedly for the day when the Nazis would walk into London. Excelsior then learned of all the German plans, but at the moment he was to stop Hitler all together, he was discovered and Hitler managed to run away into his escape tunnels.

"The stories were silly, absolutely, but there was a genuine likeability to them." Said Nichols in the 1987 documentary, "Mr. Excelsior was a proud American, and a good example to all those around him. I always draw him with Al's head of hair, as the character was very much Al Saboungian."

"There is no question that the writer wrote himself into his character." Added Brandon.

Saboungian came to Boston from Yerevan in 1930. He sold newspapers on the corners for several years, while studying English under Dr. Raymond Cleveland, a Harvard educated teacher hired by the congregation of the St. Vartanantz Armenian Orthodox church in Chelmsford, MA. While studying and working, Saboungian began to work on translating his own stories, all of which featured a main character with the power to go from one place to another at incredible speed.

"If you needed something dropped off in Salem, you gave it to Al and he'd have it there and back in half the time of anyone else." Al's wife, Mara Saboungian, remembered at his funeral in 1988.

Saboungian was well-known for his swiftness of speech in Armenian, often correcting the grammar of his friends and family, a trait that earned him few friends. Al left for Minnesota in 1935, when he heard that a lovely young lady was available if he wanted to marry her. He jumped at the chance and they were married for fifty years.

As the war went on, Battle Comics of America lost greater and greater amounts of money on American Victory, and though they published a dozen successful titles, the weight of American Victory made it hard to do business. A young friend of an editor at BCoA recommended a Philadelphia artist's character The Reverend to replace Mr. Excelsior in American Victory, after an issue of Fighting Tales featuring the Reverend became the best selling comic in the history of the publisher. Soon, Saboungian was pushed out in favor of younger, more American talent. Mr. Excelsior would never again correct a dangling participle.

Mr. Excelsior never appeared in a comic of his own again. He made appearances in attempted Golden Age return books, including Sabellico's spectacular failure The Golden Boys. In the 1970s, a Chicago punk band, having discovered a stash of wartime comics at a used book store, named themselves Mr. Excelsior and featured T-shirts with the hero in the traditional Harvard "H" logo. The band performed a half-dozen shows, including one opening for The Angry Samoans, then faded away, much like the hero they based themselves on.

Some comic book experts say that by giving Fantastica and American Victory to our G.I.s, that the comic industry was forever ruined for those unlucky souls. Others claim that Mr. Excelsior himself could have been a great success, and only failed due to the poor writing of Mr. Saboungian. Others believe that a Harvard professor who constantly corrected the grammar of both his friends and his foes was doomed from the beginning. Whatever the reason, Mr. Excelsior failed, though now, with early issues fetching up to four thousand dollars on the comic market, you can't claim that he wasn't a valuable part of the American comic tradition.

"I would never have gotten into the business if I hadn't come across my Grandfather's copies of Fantastica and American Victory." Noted Sabellico. "I loved the campy fun of it. I'll always cherish those issues, even though I sold them to make rent long ago."

Added deHubot "I've talked to people over the years, and a few who had heard of Mr. Excelsior. All of them agreed he had a profound effect on them, even if it was 'don't let this happen to you!'"



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LETTERS OF COMMENT, COMPLIMENT AND COMPLAINT  
SENT TO GARCIA@COMPUTERHISTORY.ORG  
BY THE GENTLEST OF MY READERS

M Lloyd- Geelong, AU

Chris has done it again. You've managed to put out an issue that I had little interest in on first scan, yet really enjoyed once I really gathered all the content of it. You actually started a protest. I'm stunned and completely unsurprised. I read your SJ Merc story on-line, you media whore, you. Also, loved Frank Wu's cover for ten. You need more fan art. What would you ever do if someone actually dropped a Letter of Comment into the mail and it showed up? I'm fairly certain you'd run away like a little girl.

**Ah, M, as always you cut to the heart of me. Yeah, it was a fun little mockery of those who had real beefs with real issues. I really liked Frank's thing too, I just wish I could get more folks to do art for me, but as I've said before, with the way I'm putting these things out, it ain't gonna happen.**

**You're right that I've never gotten an actual LETTER of Comment (should we start calling what I get EoCs?) but I'm certain I would only freak out for a couple of minutes if one actually popped into my mailbox. Hell, if they actually included cookies, I might make them the Patron Saint!**

John Garcia (Yep, he's my Pops)- Milpitas, CA

I finally got through that pile of print-outs. You write a lot. You should try and find something more suitable to do with your time, like womanize or drink. I really liked the article on that movie about the guy who becomes a girl (**X,Y**) because it makes me certain that I don't ever want to see it. You're doin' good, still not good enough to keep me from reading my Niekas, but good enough.

Pops

**So, you might be wondering about that Niekas ref. He recently refound all of his Niekas collection after 10+ years without them. He's been rereading them for the last month or so. Now, if only he could find all his old Granfalloon and give them to me, that would be great! Glad you liked the review, the author of the book the movie was based on enjoyed it too.**

Trufen.net recently released the vote totals from the FAAN Awards given out at Corflu. Needless to say, I didn't win, but I did come in 15th in the Harry Warner Jr. Memorial Award voting with a total of five votes, which is odd since I know I didn't vote for me and the folks that I regularly LoC, like Peregrine Nations, weren't there to vote for me either, so I have no idea who possibly would have voted for me (maybe Frank Wu and someone else). I also got three three points towards the Best Fan Writer, but I know exactly where those came from (Frank Wu, thank you for very much). I always said I wasn't in this for the ego satisfaction of awards and admiration, but it's nice to see that one or two folks out there appreciate my stuff. My five points in the HWM Award tied me for fifteenth with Ted White, Victor Gonzalez, Randy Byers, Curt Phillips (who got one of my votes), Arnie Katz, and my British Fannish Hero, Greg Pickersgill, far better folks than I deserve to be tied with!

So, as I frequently say, I got far better than I deserved.

The Drink Tank is Directed and Produced by Christopher J. Garcia and posted to eFanzines.com by Bill Burns. I'd love to hear from you, and if you're so inclined, drop a line to [garcia@computerhistory.org](mailto:garcia@computerhistory.org) anytime. If you're one of those who likes to believe that everything has to be able to be touched, you can send real mail to Christopher J. Garcia at 1401 N. Shoreline Blvd, Mountain View, CA 94043. Do you like Hot Dogs? I can't seem to get enough of them. Wow, those are good eats. If you've got a good Chess story, send it my way for the June SuperIsh!