

All I Can Say Is...



The Drink Tank Issue 140

Would it be a real issue of The Drink Tank without a couple of mistakes? The answer to that is no, and even though the Cocktail issue was the most different issue I've ever done, there were failures, one of which was misattribution. There was a drink that I gave credit to Steve Green for. It was the Olton Punch recipe. That should have gone to Ann Green, who I think might be married to the rascal king! I apologize.

Another is the fact that I can't find the piece that Bob Hole did for me. He's one of my faves and I'm always trying to include his stuff, but somehow it has disappeared from me. I was holding on to it for the LoCs to the issue, and I turned around and there it was...gone!

The other I'm fixing now. Leigh Ann Hildebrand was kind enough to send in her article very early and I put it in the wrong section. Here now is Leigh Ann's Five Things. I also offer a humble apology! Forgive me, sweet cleavage Goddess of the snark!

Five Cocktail Things

***By
Leigh Ann Hildebrand***

1. This ex-boyfriend of mine once introduced me to someone who tried

to seduce/date rape me by means of the liqueur Galliano. Post-breakup, this ex and I had become "friends with benefits", before anyone knew what that was. One rather boozy evening during one of these beneficial visits, I attended a fraternal gathering with the ex. He introduced me to this particular "brother" with a sort of sly smile that I later suspected had been the genteel Southern equivalent of nod-and-wink. Anyway, my new acquaintance mentioned that he happened to have a nearly full bottle of Galliano in his room, and suggested that I might enjoy a few quiet sips of liqueur with him there.

Now, I wasn't particularly gullible, but I was good-natured enough to go along with him, in as much as it included free drinks. (I admit I'm still easily swayed by such enticements, to a point.) So, we went to his room, where he poured a bit into two high ball glasses. I think we made a little small talk about Harvey Wallbangers. And then, out of nowhere, he asserted himself on me in such a way that I found myself lying on his bed, with him on top of me -- fully clothed, of course. Well, I was quite surprised, but I'd been brought up to take a firm hand with Southern boys.



I told him quite clearly that there must have been some sort of misunderstanding, because I was not THAT kind of girl. He immediately let me up, apologized, and escorted me back to the party. I subsequently made it clear to my ex-with-benefits that said benefits were not transitive, and that was that.

2. I was taught that nice girls don't drink hard liquor before noon, unless they're drinking one of a very few number of "breakfast" drinks. Pretty much everyone can name the more popular of these: Bloody Marys, Mimosas, and the rarer Bellini. In New Orleans, morning drinking has been



raised to an art, with a wider choice of options. Counted among these is my favorite of morning drinks, the Brandy Milk Punch. In New Orleans, there are about as many variations on the BMP as there are restaurants. Some are thick milkshake affairs, some involve whipped cream in snifters, but most are embellishments of one sort or another on the basic punch recipe.

Brandy Milk Punch

2 ounces brandy
1 cup whole milk
1 teaspoon powdered sugar
3 ice cubes
Cracked ice
Freshly grated nutmeg

In a cocktail shaker combine

brandy, sugar, milk, and ice. Shake vigorously until chilled; strain into a cocktail glass, dust with nutmeg and serve. Many people add a little vanilla.

Now, this **seems** relatively easy to make, but here's the truth of the thing: I have yet to have a good Brandy Milk Punch on the west coast. Now, I don't want one of these all the time -- they're for **breakfast** drinking, after all -- but when a west coast restaurant purports to be serving New Orleans style brunch food, I expect the place will be able to make me an coordinating mixed drink. Sadly, no. You can get a lot of lovely things in California, but a good Brandy Milk Punch is evidently not one of them.

3. I recognize a gender-based spectrum of cocktails and mixed drinks. I tell you, it bothers me when I'm out with a guy and he orders a girly drink. Oh, sure, the occasional blended margarita is okay, but only with salt, dammit. Milkshake drinks are right out, as are most fruity blender drinks. I like it when men order cocktails -- combinations of liquors with the minor additions of bitters or flavoring agents -- instead of mixed drinks. (Now, that said, the screwdriver is the quintessential drink of my childhood, and I consider it masculine by default, having seen my father down so many

of them. With *Smirnoff's*, because mixing top shelf vodka with Minute Maid or Tropicana is just wasteful. No, you **can't** taste the difference, you dolt.

4. Other drinks of my childhood, in order of the age when I first drank them:

Budweiser (age 5)
Cold Duck, Boones Farm (age 7)
Whiskey sours (age 10)
151 & Coke (age 17)

I tell people I gave up beer when I was five, and I am pretty much not kidding. On warm summer evenings when I was very little, my father used to take me with him on runs to the drive-thru liquor store. The man at the window would give me a piece of Dubble Bubble gum when he gave my father his six-pack. Then my father would basically have five of the beers, and I would drink some portion of the remaining one myself, on the way home. The cheap wine is what my parents had with pizza when my father came home from night school at the university where he got his degree. Very early-marriage-basement-apartment of them. Whiskey sours were the first mixed drinks I learned how to make as a child; at my parents' parties, I used to go around finishing up the ends of people's drinks -- the

sours were always my favorites.

And 151? Well it got the job done, at minimal cost, for some definition of 'job'.

5. My five favorite non-trendy drinks, in no particular order:

Mojito, well muddled, in a Old-Fashioned glass, not a highball.

Margarita, rocks, salt (and my favorite of those is a simple, elegant version made with Chinaco)

Pina Colada (for when I'm feelin' girly)

Vanilla vodka and Coke with Splenda (it's the post-millennial equivalent of Captain Morgans and Coke)

Appletini (okay, maybe it's a little trendy...)



And now a brief LoC from first time Drink Tank LoCer Don Anderson!

Well, now--

This is one of the few times I have printed out an e-zine and also one of the few times I have been moved to comment on one.

I suppose this is because the major theme is about the third most interest of my life. First is my wife, Sue. Second is sf and its associated Fandom. And the third is the world of Adult Beverages.

My priorities are much in line with yours...though I think wrestling might have a slight edge on Booze.

At my age I don't drink as much as I used to, and that's not unexpected. I don't have sex as much as I used to, either, but that doesn't mean that it has lost its interest for me. With imbibing, I'm just choosier than I used to be.

You know, I have a feeling I've got a couple fewer years, but I've started to feel the pinch myself and have slowed down.

We agree on some things and differ on others, but that's to be expected with this bunch.. The very first recipe you give (The Drink Tank) could be adjusted a bit, I think, to more suit my taste. Instead of Rye Whiskey, substitute Vodka, Luksuksova would do well here. It is Polish and one of the few Vodkas

that still uses the original potato base alcohol. Instead of bitters, use lime juice. The best (and spiciest) Ginger Beer I can get locally is Goya Brand which adds a bit of hot pepper juice to the ginger flavoring. It has a nice bite. Serve in a fairly large container (the Red Cup you mentioned would do, but the classic container is a copper mug) and what do you have? Why, a Moscow Mule, of course. Delightful on a hot summer day.

Ooh! Copper mug! Adds a twinge too, I'd imagine!

I also agree, in general, with David Moyce. A drink made with Vodka may be many things but one thing it is not; a Martini. I do make one minor adjustment when I wish to have a Gibson, though. I prefer it as a "wet" Martini rather than a "dry" one. Perhaps 2:1 or 3:1 rather than 5:1 or 6:1 as I would a Martini. Bombay Sapphire is the best way to go, although I have friends who prefer Plymouth. I prefer Sapphire because it has a higher level of botanicals than other gins and thus a stronger flavor. I find the Vermouth brand not to be so important as long as it is a top-shelf one.

I don't like Gin, but I have a fondness for Martinis...real and fake!

I wouldn't for a moment suggest, as David does, that an Italian Vermouth would be suitable, though.

In my experience most (if not all) Italian Vermouths are sweet and red and, of course, dry and white is the way to go.

I like several onions in my Gibsons. That way I get my daily supply of vegetables.

Always think Health first!

As for your categories of spirits, I would suggest that Johnny Walker fits into three of those. Some people might consider Red Label to be hooch or the bottom end of booze. Black label could be considered the middle level of booze and Gold label near the upper end. Ah, but Blue label, Blue label is definitely Liquor, with a capital L. I know it's a blend, but don't let that throw you off. If you can find a bar that has it, and your budget can accommodate it, try a serving. Be warned, however, that a serving may run you \$30 to \$50. You will be amazed and might even find it more to your liking than most, or all, single-malts. As for single-malts themselves, since I like strong flavors I tend to prefer Islay brands.

Gimme peat-y and rich, like drinkin' a bog itself! I've fount Blue for less than 70 bucks a bottle.

An acquaintance in Thessaloniki, Greece has told me that they go out every Friday night to a "Ouzo". They start out with a large glass of well chilled Ouzo, and sip it between bites of appetizers. after each sip, they add icewater to the drink. That way it gets



weaker as the evening wears on, and the food and drink combination allows them to get a pleasant buzz-on for the whole evening without getting falling-down drunk. It works.

Ouzo, as well as Sambuca, is a tough sell to me, but if its powers are true, I might have to rethink!

Ah, but I natter. Rest assured that I enjoyed the whole issue. I don't know how you keep it up. Admittedly there have been times when I felt "Chris Garcia"d out But not now.

Don't worry, I'm Chris Garcia'd out a whole lot of the time!

Best wishes,
Don Anderson
Thanks Don!

San Diego

by James Bacon

I sometimes can be very lucky.

A friend of mine, Jason, happens to run big media and comic events here in the UK, they are massive professional events, he is an event promoter, I suppose, as well as a record holder and archivist, one event attracts about 600,000 people over the course of a weekend. It's a media event in the sense that Film and Telly stars are on hand to sign autographs. No small parts are these people, from all of the Hobbits, to Starbuck and Apollo to Capt Kirk have signed among hundreds of others. He is also an agent for number of impressive stars on the convention circuit.

Stef and I worked very hard for Jason, especially in earlier days, we don't do as much now, as Jason has built a team around him, we still help, but thankfully not as much, we did many tasks, now we get to choose to do one of many. He is a mate and one does what one can for a mate, and we did a lot and he knew it. Occasionally though what goes around, comes around and we were given a task from the Gods.

Jason wanted to expand his London Film and Comic Con, and in order to achieve this wanted to get in touch with some big name cross Atlantic guests from the comic industry, with an eye to bringing them over to London. San Diego Comic con

is so much more than comics now, and about 50% is movie, TV and Game related, I reckon. Jason had considerable business to carry out at San Diego, but decided that Stef and I, with our considerable knowledge of comics, having had many UK comic professionals at our conventions and having been contact points previously for comic personages at Jason's events would be ideal to help make contacts while Jason and his business partners were busy elsewhere. So he flew Stef and me to San Diego comic con. Which is a bit of good luck.

We flew from London to Zurich and thence on to Los Angeles, arriving on Thursday afternoon in America. It was warm, very warm, and much more humid than I am used to, but amazingly it was America and very much so. We cleared through customs and while waiting for Jason and Mark we looked at some big LA Ford Taurus Cruiser Cop Cars. Awesome pieces of machinery, much bigger than anything we really have, and so quintessentially American.

It's an amazing place, LA. It's much bigger than London, much more spread out, flatter, every house has a garden and space around it, regardless of the neighbourhood, and a lot browner, or dustier, or so it appears, maybe it's the feeling that I am on the edge of some sort of desert. So many buildings are seemingly a sand stone colour and it just feels slightly oppressive, a heavier air pressing upon my milder north European frame. There are palm trees and buildings

are white and you can see for some distance if you are a few floors up. The freeways are just like they are in *Chi'PS* or the *Matrix* movie. The freeway is well sign posted and we head down towards San Diego, past some interesting neighbourhoods, made famous by fictional and real TV. The hoardings and advertising signs are much more in abundance and also more obvious. Maybe it's their nature, the advert on the top of a pole much more outstanding than the bill boards I am used to. They are just like the ones you see when a TV programme features LA. Why this is surprising I wonder, why are roads or neighbourhoods that I know, being an Irish lad, so impressive.

As we head south we see the famed Orange County and a lot of military land, and military beach. The dusty hills on one side seem to mesh with the sandy beach on the other, but the sea is surely azure blue and the sky is very clear and brilliant. The occasionally greenery and rugged nature of the ground reminds me of an episode of *The A-Team*, set somewhere foreign. The heat though is somewhat admonished by the cooling wafts of the air conditioning. The car we are in has an engine about four times the size of mine at home. It's a beast, yet on this road south, an interstate it seems a mere minnow among bigger sharks. 'Tangs' of which there is a variety, 'Chevies' and the bigger engined 'vets' dart past with American muscle, European cars are occasional and also slightly older than I am used to, but apparently desirable for the sake



of individualism. Then there are the 'trucks', I look on with thoughts of Lee Majors and *The Fall Guy*, as Fords and GMCs and Chevies zoom past. These monsters, which are emulated on a smaller scale in London with Range Rovers, BMW X5s and Merc G55s and have the moniker Chelsea Tractors are

dwarfed by these trucks that seemingly are as fast although perhaps not as road holding as many of the sleeker marques.

Tyres make a strange humming noise as the grooves of the concrete speed under wheel. Trucks are much longer and more individual than in the UK and I start to find something a little odd by their long nose style. Images of Chris Kristofferson enter the mind, along with the image of hard working men, but it is the size, everything is just bigger, including the men, no svelt country singers these lads. Articulated Lorries are allowed trailers to be forty foot long with a four foot overhang in the UK, in the US Semi-Trailer rigs are 53 feet long, or so I was told, but it depends on which state you are in and that's before taking into account Doubles, or Turnpike doubles of two 48 foot trailers, though I never saw one of these.

We stop on the way down for some dinner; this is of course a novelty. We stopped a large roadside restaurant, not a diner as you might imagine, but a very pleasant dinner indeed. It's like it should be, gingham table clothes, waitresses in those uniforms, with chequered aprons, and smiles and coffee and it's great, but bigger and modern. We select a selection of foods, mostly Burgers. Yes Burgers. I love a good burger any time, something I share with Elvis Presley and our own Elvis in London. These burgers are really big and really good. Fries are much more like one is used to in a fast food restaurant, but its all the other stuff, the condiments and the drinks and the service and also the portions. We are stuffed. I enjoy a Dr. Pepper, gosh it's so American, so much sweeter and flavoursome than Coke, which in comparison seems just over carbonated. We leave a tip, as we have all seen Reservoir Dogs and therefore, totally understand the American way. Though I don't understand the corn syrup.

Once we reach San Diego again it feels American, not as dense as LA, but still low and wide streeted. There is much concrete and buildings are modern in the sense they are built in the last 30-50 years, it feels. There are quite a few taller buildings. It seems to darken quicker, and dusk turns into night rapidly with some beautiful highlights streaking the sky



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as the sun dips and slides around the circumference of the hazy horizon.

At intersections (jargon – junctions) you can turn on a red, which is odd and it seems that there is either a special ingredient to the black top (jar.- tarmacadam) or the wheels in cars which allow them to make squealing noises, even at reasonably moderate speeds. Is this some sort of commercial dupe?

The hotel we book into is a Holiday Inn, it's suitable for purpose, we turn on the air con, and it's again delightfully cold. I decide I will need to stay in an air conditioned environment if my pale blue pasty skinned body is to survive this unnatural heat. It's late but even so, we are allowed to use the outdoor pool and Jacuzzi, which is delightfully cool in the nights warmth, and we mess around like schoolboys in the water, and relax and devise actions plans and list off who we need to make contact with. It's not too hard a task, introduce oneself, explain what we are about, most importantly introduce the London event and how it's growing and acquire solid and personal contact details. This is not as easy as it sounds. There will be thousands of fan boy comic fans vying to do anything to have intimate contact with these professionals, and many promoters hawking their events, but we are both business minded and can turn on both sincerity and genuine charm when needed. We also know this is a good thing, we love comics and it's easy to sell something you love.

We agree what we must do. We head to bed. Strangely although it is past midnight, Stef and I are now awake nearly twenty four hours, although we did snooze somewhat during the flight, so we sleep soundly.

It's Friday morning and we forgo a sticky sweetly breakfast to head as early as possible to San Diego Convention centre. It's a beautiful day, to most, to me the heat is already annoyingly hot. We enter the centre

and are presented with special passes, that gains us entry ahead of most, and we find where Jason and his buddies will be. They have a base of operations but then some serious business raises it's ugly head and the idea of seeing them later soon disappears and we agree to try and catch up at some time.

We decide that everyone we need to see will be in the main hall, I have no idea what we base this decision on, but it's a sound one. We agree to work smoothly, with no delays for personal stuff, except short ones. What this means is we will scan and check out the hall as we go, walking by areas or aisles that we reckon we just won't find the people we need to meet, and concentrate on making as many of the contacts as we can. When something catches our own personal interest we agree to take note of the aisle and it will be something we come back to.

The main hall is huge. It's 1918 feet long, walk it up and down and you've walked over a klick. From side to side it's 300 feet wide, and you won't make that dash in less than ten seconds. I work it out, it's the size of seven rugby pitches, laid side on side. That's damn big. It's set out in areas, but we walk in what is the north end of the hall. This area, on the North east has dealer's tables, mostly comics. There are so many it's hard to describe without becoming some sort of listophile. We proceed promptly, noting stalls of interest, for instance one is just for Nightmare Before Christmas, Stef's fav film, so we note it carefully. East of these stalls there is a sort of

Fanzine alley. This is a number of aisles where amateur artists and comic producers sell their wares and attempt to get better coverage and perhaps be seen by the pros.

We move on, as we head south the shops become larger establishments, covering up to a dozen tables. Then it becomes more professional in the build, there is a whole section just dedicated to Star Wars about a third of the way south. Around this are other professional trade stands, such as Lego and a multitude of Movie companies promoting their current big thing. The DC stand is where we first hit it good, and manage not only to meet and make a number of good contacts, including the head of marketing, but in the few moments afterwards we get a couple of sketches including one from Howard Chaylkin, who is somewhat impressed that an Irish boy, found and read Black Kiss while at a Catholic Christian Brothers school. A gentleman indeed it's nice to have a small bit of crack.

Strangely, I reckoned Friday was quiet, or something as there was no queue for Howard and his compadres, and all were class artists.

We enquire about Jim Lee, and get some details of when he will be signing. We note and move on. More professional trade stands, these are just massively impressive, and we meet a Director of Dark Horse, and again make more contacts. It's hard work. It takes time to explain

our mission, how we are working for someone else but how it's about growth and development. Everyone is positive and we reckon the accents help a huge amount. We have quite a few contacts, but already it's past midday and I am very warm indeed. It's really very hot outside and the air con obviously is working its best, best but at midday I comment about the heat and Stef mentions it's midday.

As we move south, we come across more professional and business stands, Manga is huge and has a big chunk of the space here, as do computer games, banks of consoles are available to play on, web based games and the usual fringe elements found in the corner of most shops have massive stands dedicated to them, all very strange, seeing Emily having so much merchandise and all the girls wearing striped socks. We take a break at lunch, it's rough and ready and expensive, but it does the trick. We meet one of our main contact's agents, which is incredibly cool just after lunch, he again is open to talks and wants to know more.

We come to artists alley. This is another large area, tightly tabled, where professional artists buy table space and sell sketches, artwork and sign comic books. There are many aisles of artists, and we take our time going round meeting some we need to. It's an opportunity to get some sketches as well, a good way to broker conversation is to bring business. We meet a number of UK based artists who greet us with astonished warmth



and it's a great laugh. We hear about what parties are on where that night and again, we plod around the area getting the names we need.

From here we cover the southern end of the hall. It's mostly more dealers here, and I find a most amazing shirt shop, which I take note of, and we head back for the signing we wanted to get to. Which is then cancelled. So we double back and cover an area we know we missed. We meet a number of good contacts here. Mike Mignola has his own mini stand and we get chatting and I buy some stuff as he is amazingly brilliant and we also get introduced to an agent who is interested or at least heard that something may be going on in London.

It's the afternoon. We are a bit disappointed that we have missed Jim

Lee, at this stage he is the only major name off our list who we really need, and to be honest we have exceeded our expectations. We bump into another UK comic artist, who is chilling, a previous guest at one of our cons, and get chatting. He is with other people, unknown to us, they have an inside track. We learn that Jim Lee will be doing a signing at 4pm for a business; we get the name, it's well over an hour away.

We trek all the way back up the hall, we are becoming slightly familiar with the layout and we find the stall, it's right up the north end, we ask the chap if a signing will be happening. He says it will be. We buy some Jim Lee comics and see that already there are five people in the queue, so we sit down and join em. We sit and relax and look through our contact notebook, adding names from cards to it, so we have cards in the wallet and details also in the booklet. Email is the preferred way of contact and we are amused at how simple and yet how cryptic some of these emails are.

Jim Lee arrives and the signing begins, it must be well after 4pm. We get up to him, and we get stuff signed, as he signs we sell our pitch and he is impressed and gives us his contact details. I am cheeky and ask for a sketch. He gives me the quickest yet most distinctive batman sketch I could ask for. I am amazed. The shop owner lets the cheekiness slide, we are from Europe you see.

Europe. Are you from England,



nope, I am from Ireland, I repeatedly have to say. I am Irish. Really, cool. Well my great great grandfather was Irish. Ah, I see, I nod and smile. Why are some people not proud of saying they are American. It's a damn fine place be times and has some damn fine people, and comics. I have Irish relatives, sure, that's cool, but really, born in the USA, you're as American as a coffee with damn fine slice of

pie. Although maybe it's welcoming, for me, you know, it's a long way from BallyDonkey to San Diego. I should stop, they were all nice people.

We are jaded, it's been a long day and we meet up with the boys who have had equally a bastard of a day, but somewhat successful. We hang about among actors and then we go back to the hotel. It's Friday night and the work has seemingly not finished. We shower shit and shave as they say in San Diego, and do our best to look and smell good. It appears we are off somewhere good.

We meet some actors and jump a couple of taxis to the The W. This is a Hotel in San Diego, well it's not really just a hotel, and it's pretty fantastic to be honest. We come to a halt and two taxis unload, there is a Queue to get in to the Bar come club, although that is not where we are destined. Jason walks across the road, we follow, he ignores the Queue and speaks to the head doorman, they clock who is walking across, and by the time we are there, we are being waved through, past this amazing queue of just uber cool looking people. The bar is like all those big airy bars you see in American movies, except there are more windows, more seating and loads of legs, but we are proceeding up and away from the bar. It's odd as Stef and I were told that we were going to a beach bar, and I am rightly confused.

We go up a couple of floors and again are welcomed through another cordon and into what I find out is a

Lord of the Rings party. Well we are with Lord of the Rings actors, so that makes sense. I can barely describe it. It's a beach. You walk out of the building onto the roof, behind there is the W tower, the hotel bedrooms. There is concrete to the bar, which is a wooden affair, and then everywhere else there are sand and big beach umbrellas. Open fires billow high flames, and it's a who's who of LOTR. I am somewhat blown away. Not by the people there, but by the view. To all sides there are Glass skyscrapers. You can just make out the sea in one direction, beyond all the naval stuff. Its mind blowing, I feel like I have walked into a different world. The world you only really ever see in movies. It's warm, I am on a roof beach, all around me is stunning architecture and the sky is clear.

We have no real task here, but Jason is as ever busy meeting and greeting and also just chilling out. We get chatting to people, and we are of course noted for our accents by the locals despite the abundance of foreign accents. We enjoy drinks.

As the night continues, the party finishes, to a degree and the venue opens up. This is good, as the atmosphere changes a bit and there is more noise and we relax. Later, somehow I meet a lady in white uniform, bedecked with ribbons, and I can hardly do anything except smile. She is a captain, a pilot from the USS Reagan, I see there are more naval types, all in superb looking uniforms. I get chatting, she introduces me to

another lady, junior to her, but also a pilot and friend. They bring me over to meet their friends. Its good chatting. They are amazed an Irish lad is in the W enjoying drinks, they themselves are having a big day, there was a big celebration all day, and now they are chilling out and have come here to escape a bit.

We talk war. Well I am not going to be rude, they are fighting men and women. I listen and then I explain that I am personally against the war, that I used my democratic right to march



against it, and that I think it was a bad idea. They are all very attentive, including the young and dangerous looking ones. They wonder why I enjoy a drink in their company. I explain that regardless of what political masters deem, I will always respect and always have done, the job a soldier, sailor or pilot carries out. It's a very tough job, there is much more to being in the navy than Iraq, that I am obviously aware of history, or Germany, of the USSR and generally enjoy democracy. They are all somewhat amazed. I should be some sort of crazed left wing looney, not congenial and pleasant and actually displaying respect. I smile.

I am Irish for godsake. We have fourteen planes, 10,000 soldiers and some ships that are not much bigger than ocean-going Trawlers. 70% of Victoria's army were Irish. We may be rebels but we respect the commitment, the patriotism and bravery. Politics, well that's the pants bit really.

I am not there to make war, I am there to have a good night, and enjoy some drinks. I somehow have gained an interesting level of respect. I am introduced to the most senior airman on board the ship, who is an older gentleman and is the Flight Captain or somesuch, but it's clear he is not a captain, like some of the others.. The younger guys are lieutenants. Fighter pilots. I am among the young gun heroes of the navy, top gunners and potential aces. They are surprised I know a jet ace is five kills. The LTs are stiffer than everyone else, one of the girls explains they are junior officers



and need to be on their best, whereas she has been flying a good while, I note the light blue on a ribbon and ask her if she has done UN duties. We talk about Ireland and the UN.

My friends meanwhile wonder what's going on, they know I am a bit anti-war, but see I am rather enjoying myself with these aircraft carrier air warriors. They are just people. I note the Republican element to their attitudes, but they enjoy a beer and are fine folk. They regale me about many things, and I even hear about Vietnam,

awesome. I am invited aboard, it's a serious invite by someone senior enough to make it happen, I would love to but I graciously turn down the invite. It's very late now, and we head back to our hotel. I get a warm kiss on the cheek from the girl I met, I smile and I wonder what she makes of me at all. I wonder other things too.

We get back to our own hotel, the night has flown by and we decide to have a swim to finish it all off, it's sometime in the early hours of the morning, the weather is still warm enough and we chill and relax. I am running on a mixture of adrenalin and excitement, yet am suddenly shattered.

So we came to Saturday, it was another humid, hot and clear skied day. There is a confab first thing to assess how we've done. In the absence of any distractions, it appears we are ahead of the game, and the plan is to catch up with a few people, but to now enjoy the convention.

Stef and I agree to start one end of this gargantuan hall and walk to the other end. We both have a few dollars to spend, and we also reckon, we can spread the word and catch interesting people by browsing, keeping the eyes peeled and most importantly watching and listening.

It's so vast yet I start on a whammy and find a stall selling Akira cells, and immediately buy a really nice Kenada Cell and backing pencil, it's sweet and great value. We plod on, I browse at comics, we are at the north end of the hall. There are some real

bargains, and some not. Some bigger businesses have to sell their wares at 20% off, and signs seem to be changing and appearing as retailers vie for business, especially on graphic novels, where there is no shortage of supply. We pass by many stalls, knowing instinctively that there is nothing there for us, others we poke in, and others we look hard. Graphic novels are getting cheaper as we go, and as we round a corner and see why, there is a chap selling stacks of Graphics at 10 bucks (jargon) apiece, and who is doing deals. In real money that's a fiver, and that's cheap, for graphic novels that are top end. I reckon I pay a quarter of what I would in Ireland, a third of what one would pay new in the UK. That's a whole other article. We buy quite a stack of comics er graphic novels, trade editions, collected comics, whatever.

As we proceed we see many girls, many more than one would expect, Manga is responsible for that in a big way, and the presence of manga collectables, products, toys and generally just Nippona is everywhere. Yet even so, San Diego is obviously a draw so there are girls along in abundance, Stef and I use our foreign charm and get pictures of and with with a variety of lovely ladies, like dirty old men, and the girls adore the attention and look big eyed at us as we speak, and even more when stef does an oirish accent, which he can do offensively well. Like how often do you see a cute Leia, like at most SF cons, the attempts are worthy, but you know, not like HOT!

So we hit the fan area, it's good, I buy a wicked DVD, and some excellent home grown comics. Conventions and fan groups abound, and I see people I recognise from other quarters of fandom. On our way round Stef sees two very nicely dressed girls, we go to work, and find out they are promoting an event, X-Sanguin. We nod knowingly, they reckon it's the best night out over comic con, it's only ever at that time, and that it's huge, all Goth and Fetishistic and we should go. Stef is already going, but we say we'll catch up at their stall.

Onwards, forever onwards. Every stall has free stuff, badges, posters, comics, intros, people signing, people doing sketches, it's just wildly amazing. We get huge bags to hold this stuff in. We gorge ourselves on free comic paraphernalia. We get about half way through, by halfway through the day. We break for lunch, as always we also have a few business cards as we went along, and we are doing good, we are through the comic area, and the media stuff is much more spaced out, and more spectacular, and therefore takes less time to be amazed and subsequently 'cool, seen that'.

We go upstairs, to make a rendezvous, and realise that there is a huge convention centre upstairs, dozens of rooms and talks and auditoriums and another huge hall, with more free stuff and actors signing. You get one signature free and then you have to pay for further ones. We make the meet, do some talking and consider if we should hang around,



we don't we scoop some cool stuff and head back down to the melee and the crowds and the main hall.

In the artists alley, I get some sketches, from people I would never have imagined I would meet, including Rick Geary which is cool. Many comic artists are hard at work, they stack up the sketches to order, it's good business and they are earning their money, and I see some stunning work. The charge is relatively cheap for a

piece of artwork, and most also have comic pages for sale. I buy some pages of artwork, but from a dealer who seems to have portfolio upon portfolio of pages. A lot is of no interest, but I buy a few pages.

I love comic artwork. I love the way the ink is on the page, you can feel where the pen has indented, or where a marker (sharpie – jargon) has been used instead of the inking pen for the lines. The blue pencil's sometimes

curving around the final line. In some cases there are even speech bubbles pasted on, others a whole panel has been redone and glued on. It's such a real craft, and some of these comics sell in the 100's of thousands on a monthly basis. It really is an art form of an unquantifiable scale. There is a level of detail and beauty about some pieces, so intricate and time consuming and then it's part of a story that one may fleetingly speed by in a thirst to quench the satisfaction of finishing the read. Of course many like me, repeatedly go back and consider the artwork, although I always try and savour good imagery as I read. I buy a page or two to add to my sketches and collection at home.

A number of publishers have great tables and I am very impressed with the Red Star table, it's a great science fiction story, never ending I suppose in one sense, but I adore the style. It's not because they have free stuff or a gorgeous looking girl looking like the main character, but this publisher is not mainstream, per se, and therefore back home one never sees posters or point of sale material, like you do for DC and Marvel and Dark Horse, so when one comes upon a stand dedicated to something this special, it feels great. I buy comics I already have just to get them signed, and to shake hands. Business is one thing, but I am a comic fan.

We get around the manga stalls, and gaming stalls, I take a lot of photos of the Lego, there are two areas, a Star Wars section which is part of

the greater Star Wars portion and the Bionicle bit.

There are no shortage of models promoting big corporate things, like the girl in the glass fish tank and these complement the ladies who are turned out so well. We meet Buddy Jesus, and many other characters from comics and pulp culture. It's amazing how many people go out of their way to dress as their favourite character. At times we look oddly normal, but our distinctive accents get us noticed. I refind the stall selling shirts, bowling shirts, and I buy some, a punisher one and a couple of others, they are very nice, genuine merchandise and so cheap, but just so unattainable in the UK.

We buy various things as we proceed, I buy a really cheap die cast model of Keneda's bike from Akira, we meet the guys from the wonderful kids cartoon Happy Tree Friends and buy a load of merchandise and get it signed. I also get a sketch which I subsequently never find. It was of Flippy, the vet, and I have no idea what happened and I am very careful with that type of thing. Too much excitement, like a kid losing Lego in the back of the car.

Stef of course, who is a little less definite decides to go back a buy a few things I knew he should buy, he is getting better, but I have this message from a book buyer, 'if you like it, and want it, pick it up, look at it, hold it, consider it and BUY IT if that's what you want', 'if you have never seen it before, if you put it down you may not

see it again, so buy it'. This works very well for me, but not for Stef, although I must admit he is much better, who is more frugal with cash, and sensible, but only momentarily.

So we head around and pick up some bits and meet the X-sanguin girls again. Now we have mentioned that this party is on, to the rest of the gang, and so decide to buy tickets for everyone, as agreed. There is a lot on tonight, but we reckon this will be up our street.

It's near the end of the day, and we reckon we have walked every aisle in the venue, which is a big achievement. We head back to meet the lads, and go to our hotel to shower and change, for what becomes a very busy evening.

We went back to the hotel and had a shower, shave and put some clothes for later into a bag. First off we went to the W again, for some drinks. There was another party on, this time we were just waved through. Like regulars, but I suppose we did look like a rather distinctive bunch. The



beach was heaving and there were no shortage of recognisable faces. Stef was sorta excited about X-sanguin, we had no idea if it was going to be like a small room with a few people in black or a real fetish club, bordering on a club of a deviant sexual nature. The chat was polite and Stef and I spent a lot of time talking to the marketing type of lady that one meets at these things, with no real task or duty required, but along for the drink and socialising, that was us too, so it's easy to chat to these broads (jargon for bints).

We had some cocktails and it was considerably early when we departed by taxi in convoy to the Grand Hyatt. This was the venue of the Star Wars party, and a superb party venue it was. The Hyatt is a class hotel, not as modernistic as the W, much more classical in appearance and interior. The reception area reminded me of a train station. Up we went, to the roof pool, or whatever it was called. A large open area, a number of floors high, looking out towards the sea, and a sort of modern Greco Romanic attempt to make this area interesting. It was full of people who are part of the Star Warsian Empire. Actors, promoters, agents, execs and fans who are now honchos they were all here, and there were even some dudes in costume. While business was being discussed myself and Stef wandered around. The food spread out was amazing, there were free drinks, the place was packed, yet it was still a lame party. I can't really explain why, it felt like everyone

was pretending or trying to prove something or on tenterhooks. It was weird, Stef and I avoided inquisition and paced slowly around the huge pool, taking it all in. It was like people were meant to have fun, but didn't know how, or were worried they weren't allowed. We chatted to some nice people sure, but not really here to 'party'. Even restrained socialising felt like it was a tedium or distasteful task to these people required as part of being there, but it was being present that was all important, sure if it's relaxing, but this was rigid and boring.

To be honest, we found it intriguing in an odd point and laugh, but not too obvious, anthropological sort of way. Terrible, from a hall of geeks and freaks where we take them all as we see them, to a pretentious party where we mock the well dressed socially pretentious.

Soon we decided we would be off to X-sanguin, it was after nine, pitch black and the party was going on there. The boys decided that this would also be a good time to leave, and so did some of their more famous associates, who were from other movies. So we went again in taxis to the address. We had put our entrance marks on, little temporised tattoos, onto the neck, they were in cool velvet pouches, a neat trick. As we went the taxi driver warned us that this was a bad area we would be going through, and I noted many ladies of the night in garish gear working their living as we growled along, it was another Taurus.

Well ladies of the evening, a naval thing I supposed, it was only as he explained that these were mostly men that I considered that to have been a discussion point with yon pilots of the sea from the night previous.

We came upon a nicely sized church, very gothic and imposing in both stature and design, hearses were parked up outside, like I imagine sports cars are outside clubs, and we got out and went in. We had tickets, but some of the people with us, didn't.



Jason did his thing, and spoke to the owner/organiser, who was only more than happy to have film personalities at his venue and special night, and we were given special VIP status and greeted like old friends. Luck you see.

The church was strangely shaped inside not the usual long and cross piece, more rectangle side on. Where the altar once was now a raised dais with a DJ and a grand amount of technological machinery pumping out sound and lights. All around the darkened dance floor there were illuminated dancing poles, and raised blocks for girls to groove to. The music was rock, goth, metal and industrial. De rigueur was black, PVC, corsetry, piercings, and generally that dangerous fetishistic look. There were hundreds of people here, it was a sea of movement.

We were ushered upstairs to a gallery, perhaps once where the choir did their thing, was turned into a selection of secluded and curtained areas, which looked like Arabian tents, no floor or chairs, just raised level cushioning. Plush and private.

There was a lounge, where food and drink was laid on, and then there were a couple of rows of gallery seats, with which to observe the proceedings down below. The booze at the bar was cheap, and the girls were plenty. We had a ball. Suddenly catapulted into hero status by the girls we met, as we had turned up with the professionals, Well we didn't deny it, smiled and dined on it.

Stef loved it all. This is his scene. He is a creature of the night, a man who loves Lovecraft, seeks satisfaction in slippery sliding PVC and finds the whole look to be a stimulant and aphrodisiac. I just enjoy it, it's good, but noisy. So we chat with the girls in the VIP lounge and have drinks, and there is some spanking fun, and although not as serious as one has encountered, a young lady is brought to a climax by some expert English spankage. Fascinating to watch, some people were slightly unnerved, the

screams were piercing, and young ladies collapsing always gets a look, but even so, well let's say a mark was left.

We frequently descended into the hoi polloi to 'mix it' with everyone, which was great, these were our people. Some of the girls who were up on the poles were terrifically angelic others violently physical, nearly wresting the pole into some sort of



submissive punishment. Clothes were characteristic, all styles, a number of comic influences and costumes were about but in the minority. Of course again our shouted accents placed us apart from everyone. The music pumped out, and the church was lit in such a way to just give that edginess that one requires. As the night wore on a level of debauchery of course entered activities in the darker corners, which, among consenting

adults, is of course wonderful. PVC was defiantly in, whether it is camo, nurse, Russian soldier, there were many styles on show. Not my thing, it's a bit too sweaty to be honest, and I have helped Stef out of his gear maybe once too often to really like it. None the less the variety of dress, the Betty Page look, the vampish look and of course the occasional dreadlocked blitzkrieg booted chicks were all around.

It was all very friendly and nice, and we went back upstairs, to watch from afar and socialise in a somewhat calmer environment, it was a terrific night.

Anyone who lives anywhere near San Diego, should go, no, must go, and immerse themselves into this wonderful fictional derived world of piercing darkness, heavy music and evil beauty.

At the end we were some of the last to leave, we admired a hearse, and chatted and were drunk and got back and had a swim and we were truly wrecked.

I spent another two days in America. Doing more of that really. At the end I was glad to be going home. I found everyone to be wonderfully nice, except for two security guards who were ejits, and really enjoyed the whole experience. I yearn for San Diego Comic Con, it's such a blast. It rates up there with worldcon for me. I ate in many places, usually between the end and going to the hotel, just nearby, food was all big portions. I hung out

in an opulent house in orange county, with a pool and tennis court, and more cars in the garage than I can count on one hand. I went to a serious mall, with armed security at the jewellers and took it all in, I ate American food as much as I could, and was glad to get home, away from the heat, eventually exhausted drained and generally at the end of my energy resources.

I hope to do New York comic con, at some stage, but I wonder will there be the same night activities. Perhaps not, perhaps maybe.



So, I'm a guy who would seem to be the perfect match for a Renn Faire. I've got an adaptable hairstyle that can work in many different eras. I'm a big fan of history, so wouldn't it make sense that I go to these things.

And yet I don't.

At least I didn't until this last weekend. I had planned to go many times over the last decade plus, but only this year I had the incentive of a lovely lass who would be a major of the festivities. The Lovely and Talented Linda would be performing with her group Bella Donna, a troop of Courtesans from Italia. They are a frisky group and amazingly talented with the singing and joking and awesomeness. They were all wonderful.

And it got me thinking: why the Renn period?

I mean, there's nothing really special about that time

in the history of the World when you compare it to, say, Ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome or China. Why, I love the idea of a Reformation Faire. That would be great, especially when you think about all the Inquisitioning you could do. A Restoration Faire would be interesting, but after a conversation with a pal, I figured out the perfect idea: The Depression Faire!

It's still recent enough so that we could find people who could tell us if we were being authentic enough and far enough away that we could easily wait them out if we don't like what they have to say! It'll be great and the costuming will be easy...just cut the fingers off of some old gloves and stand around an old oil drum! I'm telling you, old cars, grubby clothes, it'll be HUGE!!!



Pictures courtesy of <http://www.renaissancefaire.net/>, Copyright © 2006 Richard G Lowe Jr (the pic of the Lovely and Talented Linda and Jennifer), James Bacon and Stef took the ones from Comic-Con, except for the last two which were from FanboyPlanet.com. Art came from the wonderful Selina Phanara, Wigite, Derek Oak, Darren Weevie, and Cratch (Not sure where it came from, which is odd because I've had it on my hard drive for at least a year!)