



The Drink Tank Issue 153



Again, another hero of my youth has kicked it. This one is the one who brought me out of my shell and made me want to jump over stuff. And of course, I tried. I tried a lot. A couple of times I actually made it. Of course, this is the article where I say that Evel Knievel was my hero, and he kinda was, but this is also the article where I recall one of the strangest moments of my dating career.

Yeah, it's one of those articles.

Let's go back to 1979. We had a video cassette recorder. It loaded from the top. It was the one that lasted well into the 1990s and was finally retired in the year 2001. I loved it well and even after we got a regular VCR in the mid-1990s, we had it on top of it, ready to go into service if it should be called upon. It was finally retired a year after

the DVD player entered into the house (for my TV). There was a video store down the way, a Warehouse, where we could rent either VHS or Beta tapes (and could do so until 1992) and we often rented ten or more videos in a week. We rented one a lot: Viva Knievel! I loved it. I have watched it since and have discovered that it is perhaps the worst film ever made.

It's got a terrible story, Evel, who plays himself, is one of those actors who makes me think I've got a chance. Lauren Hutton is in it, and even I thought that Leslie Nielsen was a terrible choice to play a drug lord. Martin Balsam in Mitchell is far more convincing. The film was awful, but it introduced me to Evel. I was a little too young to remember too many of his jumps from when I was a kid, though I remember seeing them on Wide, Wide World of Sports once in a while. I heard him a lot over the years on various TV shows, including the Bionic Woman. He was a major part of the grade school collective subconscious. We would play imagination games where one or the other of us would do stunts. I couldn't skateboard or anything, but I could jump off of things and land, usually hurting myself just enough to make it look cool. We had this thing, a fifteen foot high series of pipes that were set up so that

kids could climb and hang. A lot of kids would jump from the 3rd set onto the grass and collect a lot of applause. I would jump from the top, the 5th set. I never broke anything doing that stupid move, but I twisted my ankle among other minor discomforts. I was also the king of taking kickballs off of the face. A kid would throw one at me and I'd just take it. That made me very much feared when fights would break out.

The addition of bikes to my life made me want to jump over things. My great aunt Bethel lived in Lake Isabella in South-Central California. It was a dry place, I never saw the lake at all, but there was a hill that ran at about an 8% grade and it must have run a half-mile or so down to an empty lot. That's where I learned how to ride a two-wheeler. I chewed up my knees and palms when I was going 20 miles per hour down that hill with no idea how to make the brakes work. When I came back a year after that, I had my own bike and the kids I had been playing with that previous summer were still there.

And I wanted to jump something.

So, we grabbed some wood from one of the poorly-guarded construction sites that still seem to abound in that little city. We set up a ramp and put various things between the end of the ramp and the landing area. We jumped each others bikes and even each other.



That was good old fashioned stupid fun. I went last and I was to jump two bikes. I made my way down and I would have cleared them, if we had nailed the ramp to the supporting boxes. I went down and since I wasn't any

good with the brakes, I was going way faster than any of the other kids had gone. I ended up hitting the ramp so fast that it pushed down and sent the wooden boxes flying forward, knocking down the bikes. I managed to stay on the bike for a few yards beyond the crash site and then ended up among the scrub in the lot. That was the worst part. Plants hurt.

We tried it again, this time with kids holding the boxes. I went to the top and came down, adding a little more brake this time. I didn't clear the second bike. My back tire caught the handlebar of one and it bent it. Somehow, I managed to land it though. That other kid, a girl named Sara as I remember it, was pissed. She hit me a lot and had to explain it to her dad. She came out to watch the rest of us jump the next day. She told her dad she lost control and ran into a stop sign. She had a new bike the next time I visited a few months later.

The day Lisa Calau agreed to go out with me I had been shopping for comics. I wasn't at my normal shop, it was Lee's Comics I think, and I ran into a girl I kinda knew. We were talking and for some reason, there was an Evel doll up behind the counter. She was a cute girl, so I was showing off and she played along. We were reenacting the crash over the Snake River when she was laughing really hard. Somehow the fact that I had tickets to a film on the next night came up and she said she'd love to come and see it. I was excited because she was cute enough to be seen in public with and I wasn't on the best of streaks. We were going to see the Crow, I think, and I was very excited to see it.

I picked her up and we chatted until we got to the theatre. The movie was good and afterwards we went off for some coffee at the Coffee Society and we chatted for another couple of hours. We were both hopped up on coffee and having a good enough time together that we decided to go to the video store and get something to watch at her place. She lived with two other girls and a dude named Terry.

We went to Blockbuster and went through the hundreds of videos. We mocked titles and laughed found the Evel Knievel movie that starred George Hamilton. I love George Hamilton. He's a huge talent in an exceptionally tanned skin and high-priced suit.

He played Evel Knievel with a style and panache that really pushed the envelope of subtlety. We rented it and took it back to her place.

We were watching it and we kissed a bit and then, oddly, she fell asleep. Deep asleep. We were kissing one second and then she was out like a light. Evel hadn't even made his biggest jump yet! Her roommates came home from Rocky Horror a few minutes later, when I was kinda panicking and Terry said that she had narcolepsy. Who knew.

She woke up a bit later and we finished watching the movie.



Everyone knows I was a big supporter of Montreal in 2009, and I'm planning on attending that magnificent con. I'm also a lover of FanArt and here is Frank Wu with a fine interview with a Fan Artist who is also the Fan Guest of Honour at Anticipation: Mr. Taral Wayne!

In Twiltone Yet Green: An Interview of Taral Wayne by Frank Wu

Part the First

Introduction

Mike Glicksohn once described artist Taral Wayne as “one of the most significant figures in the entire history of Canadian fandom.” Others seem to agree, as Taral has been chosen to be Fan Guest of Honor at the 2009 World Science Fiction Convention in Montreal.

The announcement of this honor came at the 2007 Worldcon half a world away, in Japan. Taral's reaction was typically self-deprecating. “I'm not used to good news,” he noted. “So I reached for the phone to tell the first 500 people I could think of. Damn it, though... I knew I could find a lead slug in a chest of gold coins!” Almost everyone he called was unavailable - possibly they were in Japan and had heard the

news before Taral did.

I am pleased to see Taral receive this honor because he's overlooked by many fans, despite his long history. This may be because he rarely travels or exhibits his art outside his native Toronto. His work shows up in fanzines, but these aren't read by a large segment of fandom.

Another disadvantage he has is that he often draws anthropomorphic characters, too easily dismissed as “furry art.” While he was one of the founders of this genre, Taral's artwork is head and shoulders above most of what is seen in convention artshows. His linework is impeccable: powerful, clever, supple. Unlike most furry art, his characters are anatomically believable. They have a liveliness to them; they are adorable without being coy or too cutesy.

Taral is simply one of my favorite fan artists, so I'm glad to see him finally get his due after all these years. And it has been many years.

When Taral suggested the present title for this interview, I had to admit to him that I didn't know what “Twiltone” was. Taral kindly informed me that it was special mimeograph paper. Back in the days before Xerox copiers, fanzines were printed on mimeograph machines, which used a thick, pasty, slow-drying ink. As printed

pages tumbled out of the machine, waste paper needed to be slipped between the finished ones to prevent smudging. Unless you used Twiltone mimeograph paper, which came in a rainbow of colors.

When I asked Taral to send me some pictures of himself, he even included this one, of Taral sucking a fan into a mimeograph.



Photo credit: Paul Wilson

Taral told me that the fan was “Paul Wilson, son of Bob, who is THE Robert Charles Wilson. Old friends from the 70's, so he forgives me for maiming members of his family.”

“At least I had the sense,” Taral told me, “not to send the photo of me in the silver lame mini-skirt.”

Recently, Taral's voice was loud among the din, when he voiced his displeasure about the design of the 2007 Hugo Award. The design of the trophy is partially pre-ordained by the World Science Fiction Society's

Constitution. Each year the trophy consists of a silver rocketship, though the design of the base changes year to year. The folks in charge of that year's Worldcon often pick a design which reflects the host venue. The Hugos given at the 2003 Toronto Worldcon had a wooden base cut like a maple leaf. Philadelphia's 2001 Hugos featured Ben Franklin's kite. The Japanese Worldcon's Hugo base featured their native superhero



Ultraman. (Ultraman also appeared at the opening ceremonies for the Hugo Awards ceremony, fighting off various giant monsters.)

Not afraid to express his opinions, Taral called this "The Ugliest Hugo." He explained: "Every Worldcon designs its own Hugo Award, the only constraint being that the traditional chrome rocket must be included. Most years, the award is tasteful and restrained." This year's Nippon was the first Worldcon in Japan. "I don't know what anyone expected, but it surely wasn't this -- the rocket sharing honours on a tacky base of Mt. Fuji with Ultraman. Ultraman is a cheesy kind of superhero giant-robo from Japanese TV in the 60's. It's the equivalent, say, of George Reeves as Superman on American TV at about the same time. But whereas a veil of forgetfulness is mercifully being drawn gradually over the memory of Reeves, Ultraman seems to have become the de facto spirit of Japanese science fiction. Taral compared representing science fiction with Ultraman to "representing *The Dispossessed*, *The Foundation* Trilogy, and *Bladerunner* with a statuette of Mighty Mouse."

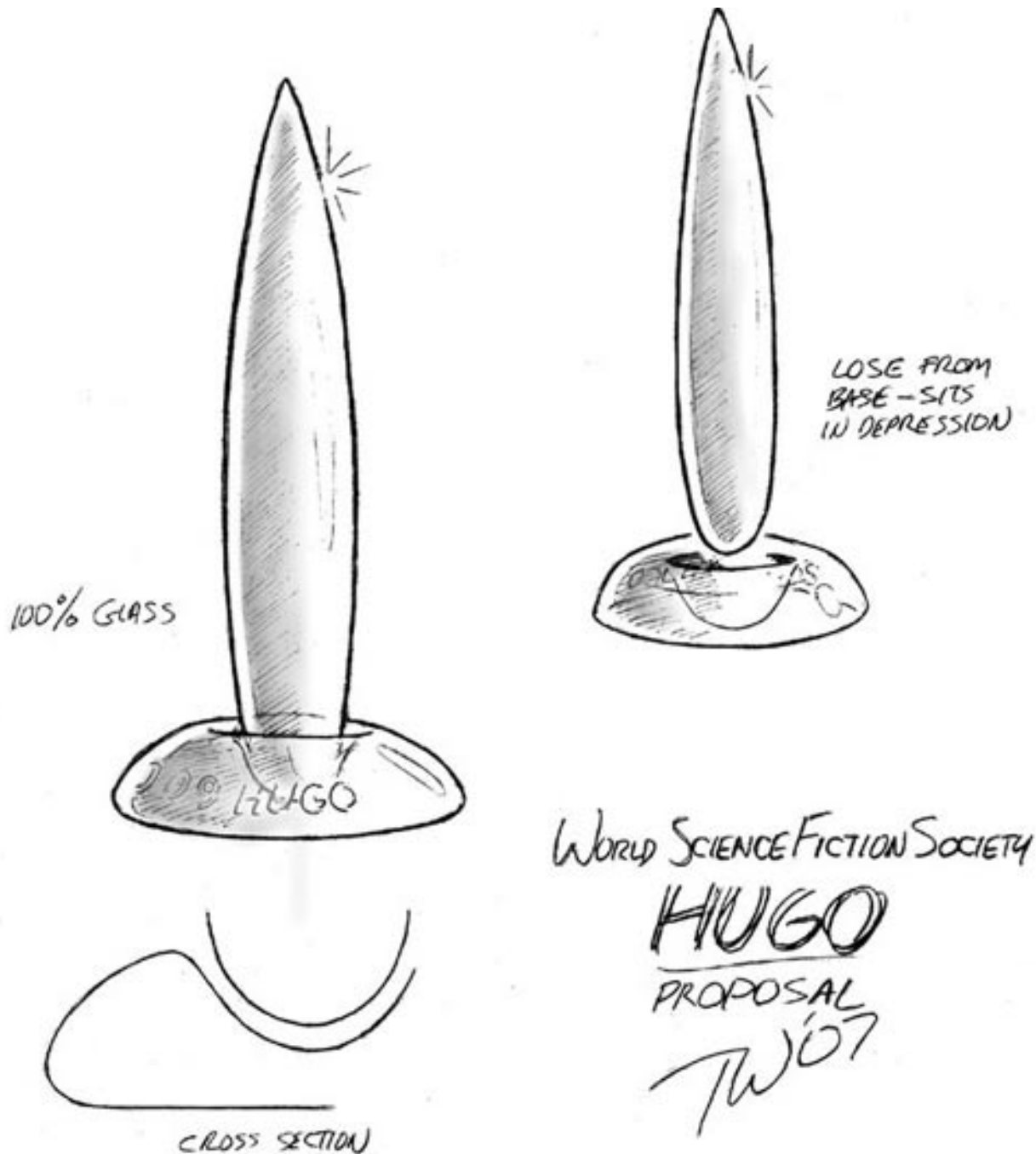
Personally, I was pleased, partially because I grew up on Ultraman, and partially because I won one of the

artifacts. But I do agree that Taral has a point with his "Mighty Mouse" logic.

Taral also said, "Someone I know suggested that had Nippon chosen Astroboy instead of Ultraman, it would have resonated with far more North American (and probably European) fans." Thus:



But Taral cleverly suggested an alternative design for the Hugo. An elegantly shaped glass rocket:



It is a beautiful design, but, alas, not allowable under the World Science Fiction Society's Constitution, which demands the traditional metal rocket ship design.

One final note before proceeding to the Interview Proper. A wonderful article about Taral entitled "I, Fanartist" appeared in the Summer 2005 issue of *Challenger*. [<http://www.challzine.net/22/22taralw.html>] I highly recommend that article, and have tried to cover new ground in the present piece.

Interview, Dart the First

FW: The article about you, "I, Fanartist," came out in 2005. What have you been doing since then?

TW: It sometimes seems that nothing remarkable has happened since, but that can't be true. If I search my memory, there's the appearance of my long, heavily researched article on *Red Dwarf* in *Banana Wings* last year. (I did a related cover for it as well.) Then early this year I finished production of a collection on CD Rom of Mike Glicksohn's *Energumen*, *Xenium*, major one-shots, and other great material. More recently, I began a gallery on a web site called *FurAffinity*, where anyone can view something like 200 examples of my artwork and a lesser assortment of fan writing.

(The gallery can be found at <http://>

www.furaffinity.net/user/saara/)

FW: Please tell us more about that photo of you and Paul Wilson. His dad, Robert Charles Wilson, was one of the first friends you made when you came into fandom in 1971. Do you have any funny stories about them?

TW: The tricky part here is telling some story that doesn't embarrass the subjects... unacceptably. Both Paul and his dad are somewhat easily mortified too. For instance, do I tell about the time Bob bought a rare 78 rpm vinyl recording of Louis Jordan and broke it right after... only to find a second copy of it in another store the same day? Or the time Paul rode a motorized cherry picker? Or should I relate the time Bob and I covered Victoria Vayne with pink crazy foam? On the whole I think I'd be safer keeping all that to myself. Tight lipped, I am...

FW: Taral, you've done artwork after famed fanartist Bill Rotsler, copying his style. Then you asked him to autograph it. And only after he signed it did Rotsler realize that he hadn't actually drawn the piece. Is there more to the story?

TW: The story was pretty much complete in itself, though doubtless it could be expanded upon for comic effect. So there he stood, talking

to a friend next to him while he negligently signed his illo in my copy of *Simulacrum*. Then suddenly Bill does a double take worthy of silent film, and says, "Hey, wait a minute! That's not mine!" The mind boggles that I ever missed the opportunity to write it up. But there's nothing more to the incident, really. He went right back to talking with his friend and ignored me.



I can add that the illo in question wasn't the only fake Rotsler I ever drew. In fact, I had mounted quite a campaign of pastiching fandom's pre-eminent fanzine artist. The culmination was a fake sheet of Letraset I made up, using a sheet of the real thing for details, and a large number of imitation Rotsler figures of several types, complete with exclamation points, balloons, and other items useful in making up your own Rotsler cartoons. It wasn't a real

sheet of Letraset, of course. It was printed on paper and you couldn't rub it down on anything. I inserted the sheets in one of my two issues of *New Toy*, I think. It must have been a brilliant stroke, because a lot of people wrote to me about it. In fact, someone in the UK once asked if he could reprint the sheet in his zine a few years later.

Maybe it was just as well that nobody understood my true intentions in making that fake Letraset. It was taken as a tribute to Bill Rotsler. Nothing of the sort. I never liked Rotsler's art. The thought behind his illos might be witty, but the draftsmanship was elementary. Any idiot could draw that stuff, and I set out to prove I was just the idiot to draw it. I finally confessed this to the British fan who'd asked about reprinting the Rotsler Letraset. Perhaps my confession was why in the end he never did. So now the cat is out of the bag. Everyone will hate me. But there it is. In my opinion it's good in a limited sort of way, but I still don't care all that much for Bill Rotsler's artwork.

The mercury gag will be too obscure at this point for almost everyone. At the time, *Twiltone* paper was becoming hard to find. In the great tradition of hoaxes past, Victoria and I were spreading the story that *Twiltone* paper was

going out of production because the bleaching process involved mercury, which couldn't be entirely recovered from the extra-absorbent paper. It sounded very plausible, and it took a lot of people in. I've found it repeated earnestly by other faneds over the years. But it's a complete load...

FW: *The furry art genre was largely the creation of people such as you and Marc Schirmeister, as well as the artists of self-published comics like Albedo, and Cutey Bunny. You were even Guest of Honor at the third furry convention, around 1991. Where did the idea of furry fandom come from? Do you think it's changed or morphed into something you didn't envision?*

TW: The conventional date for furry fandom's birth is 1984. That's the year Marc Schirmeister mailed out the first *Rowrbrazzle*. There were furry fans before the funny animal APA, of course. Some of them insist furry fandom existed years before. But though many of the faces in 'Brazzle had been hanging around SF cons going way back, there was no sense of them being a separate community for funny animal appreciation. They would have described themselves then as comic book fans, animation fans, manga and anime fans.

Rowrbrazzle grew directly out of Vootie. Reed Waller and Ken



Brazzle cover by Mike Kazaleh

Fletcher had started the earlier apa for underground comic sometime in the 70's, before Reed became famous for Omaha the Cat Dancer. Quite a lot of the contribs were about funny animals, but not exclusively so. With *Rowrbrazzle*, though, the word furry appeared to describe the adult funny animal genre for the first time. The practice of calling the fans "furries" followed close behind. So that's where it comes from.

Why is it popular though? Who knows? It wasn't a very large group

to start with. Maybe a few hundred, tops, if you included gamers and chat lines. The first furry convention (in LA) no doubt began the growth, and the introduction of Furry Muck opened the fandom to exponential expansion. But that doesn't really explain what its appeal was to so many people. One thing is clear though. Most of the increase in membership was from quarters no one expected. I won't go into details, but the fandom seemed to attract what has been called sexual outlaws -- guys who liked leather and growing long fingernails, eye shadow, and bondage, or had unhealthy relationships with critters stuffed with fire retardant fluff. Furry fandom also appealed to Internet role players, who evidently just saw it as another flavour of fantasy gaming. Many of them also brought their costuming skills with them, creating yet another mode of attraction.

The result was a fandom that rapidly evolved away from its original roots in the b/w funny animal comics of the 80's. (Comics, for example, like *Albedo*, *Captain Jack*, *Usagi Yojimbo*, *Critters*, *Dreamscapes*, *Cutey Bunny*, and *Omaha the Cat Dancer*). Now it was a haven for almost any sort of role players, Goths, totemists, anime fans, gamers, or the polymorphically perverse who were seeking a novelty. All you had to do was make up some sort of alter ego (or avatar). Anything

would do. A polka-dot squirrel-cougar with wings? Fine, welcome to the club...

Had furry fandom—as-we-knew it morphed or evolved into something we didn't envision? A few years ago a number of furies from the American east coast visited Toronto. I didn't know them very well, some not at all. They were here to visit some bondage friends and hang out at the local gay bars. But they wanted to meet some of the local furies. They asked me and another fan named Ken to meet them for dinner in a chop suey house down the street. They probably hoped to freak us out with their dog collars and leashes, but Ken and I managed to keep poker faces. They sure as hell freaked out the waiter and other diners in the restaurant though. At the end of the evening, while they loaded up the car with their bondage gear, one of them turned to us and said something like this:

"I know you guys aren't gay, but you know, you're so cool you might almost be furry."

Us furry? I was one of the earliest members of the fandom and a noted artist. And Ken ran one of the first furry chat lines. And we were *almost* furry...

So did the fandom evolve in unexpected ways, then? What do *you*

think?

FW: *You'll be Fan Guest of Honor at Anticipation, the 2009 Worldcon in Montreal. That's quite an honor. How did you get invited to do that? Any special plans you have for the convention?*

TW: I didn't do nuthin, honestly! A couple of years ago I began to have a bit more interest in SF fandom, and began to write more. That seemed to lead to more illustration specifically for fanzines (not just sending the editors whatever furry art seemed innocuous enough). Next thing I



knew I was scanning old fanzines to CD Rom. Whether any of that led to the invitation or not, I couldn't say. But it was just about the last thing I expected. The invitation was made informally five or six weeks before the Tokyo Worldcon, through a phone call from Catharine Crocket. Then Eugene Heller (the bid chairman) offered the formal invitation by e-mail a few days after that. We talked matters over by phone, and I formally agreed by e-mail. Afterward was several weeks of waiting, trying not to think about how inevitably [the opposing Worldcon bid by] Kansas City would win. I wanted to encourage people to vote for Montreal, of course, but how could I? The bids aren't supposed to make their choices known.

One funny encounter was with a friend here, who was determined to vote for KC. I could only suggest she might kick herself if she voted wrong and found out later why she ought to have voted for Montreal. She shot back that even if Bob Wilson was going to be GoH, she's still vote for KC. I didn't know whether to be more chagrined she hadn't guessed it was *me*, not Bob... or that it wouldn't matter anyway.

I'm told the primary reason I was selected was that the concomm made a firm commitment to having a Canadian fan guest. (Too big a conceptual step

for Torcon III apparently.) That would have narrowed the choice quite a bit I suspect. In fact, I was told there really wasn't another choice.

FW: *Your drawing style is very clear, very efficient. The lines are strong but don't show unnecessary guesswork or scribbling. Your sense of anatomy is really good, too - it feels like your people have real elbows and knees and butts. Yet despite all this, you didn't take any art classes. Where or how did you learn to draw?*

TW: Practice can take a lot of the credit. If you make mistakes long enough, you begin to notice them. I was scribbling tanks and fighter jets from a very early age, and loved the comics. The gene seemed to run in my family. I think my mother could sketch a little, though rarely did. She encouraged me when I was a little boy. But I don't recall her with pencil and paper after that. My uncle on the other hand, was much more artistically inclined. He drew and painted his own Christmas cards for example. He built model kits too. Unfortunately it was just something he did in his spare time, as a hobby. Uncle had no interest in pursuing his talent seriously, and let's face it, you don't become Max Ernst or Walt Kelly by dabbling. It takes a lot more commitment than that.

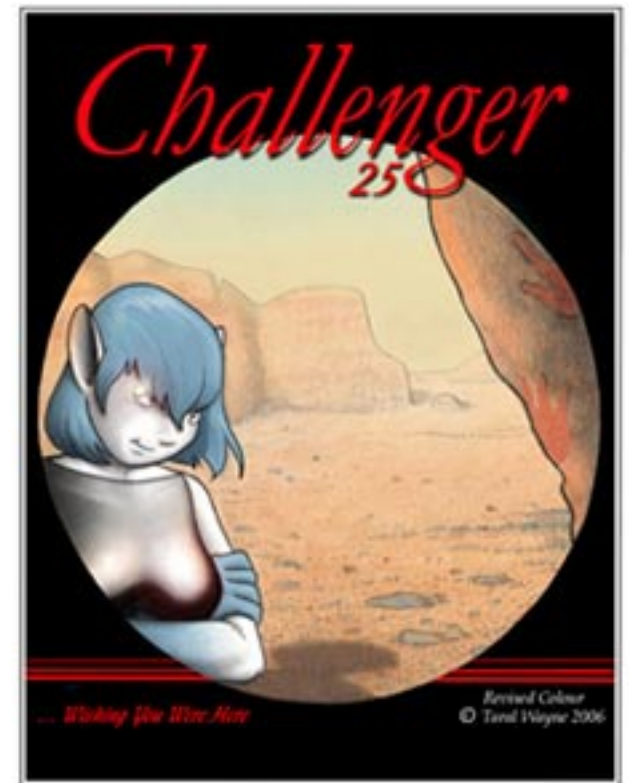
In grade three or four, I guess, one of the schoolteachers said I had talent and should go to art school. My mother looked at her and said, "No, I want him to earn a living". I was my mother's son, and readily agreed. Little could I guess that I was going to spite her, many years later. (But in her defense, once it was obvious I was a lost soul, she never pressed me to give it all up for gainful employment.)

I had the gene then. And I practiced, practiced, practiced. But where did I learn the tricks of the trade if I never went to art school? I attended the best school of all. I read the funny papers and comic books. I was almost omnivorous. *Sugar & Spike, Donald Duck, Little Lulu, Jerry Lewis Comics, Batman, Magnus Robot Fighter, Archie, Wendy the Good Little Witch*, it was all food for the muse. Pretty much everything but Marvel. I was giving up comic reading by the time Marvel became a force. Feature cartoons and animated films like *Pinocchio* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* were delicacies in my diet. I ate on a regular basis from the trough of TV, mostly, relishing early shows like *Ruff & Ready*, and *The Bullwinkle Show*. There was a continuing round of new discoveries over the years. I wish I had known of Will Eisner's *Spirit*, *The Freak Brothers*, Walt Kelly, *Asterix* or Herge's *Tin Tin* earlier, but I had to find them late. Well into middle

age, I still discover new inspirations – Hayao Miyazaki's brilliant films to name one.

And that's where I learned everything I know.

FW: *And that's where we'll end the story for now. Next week, in the second and final part of this interview, I asked Taral to discuss a few of his art pieces in more detail.*



Letter-Graded Mail
sent to Garcia@computerhistory.org
by my loyal readers

Let's start with a brief note from my man Steve Green!

Hi Chris,

Brianna Flynt and Frank Wu cover much the same ground in their articles, albeit from slightly different perspectives. Personally, I'd have been much happier if Fred Phelps and his gang of hatemongers had hit a wall of public disgust, rather than legal action; unfortunately, abhorrent as his views are, they are scarcely confined to the walls of his so-called church.

Very true. They hit a serious wall of public disgust (at one point they were showered in urine tossed by a passing car if the papers are to be believed) but they keep it up.

Once again, many congratulations on winning TAFF. Whilst it's highly unlikely Ann and I will be at Orbital (I'm not a big fan of Eastercons, as I believe I've mentioned here before), we look forward to catching up during your grand tour of these isles.

-- Steve

I'll make sure we get a chance to hang and chat.

And now...Peter Sullivan!

Well, I've updated the chrisfortaff website for the second time this evening, so time for a turbo-loc. I'm

writing this before the detailed results are out, so anything I say here may be making me look foolish within 24 hours (as opposed to the more normal making me look foolish within the next few months, which is entirely to be expected and even normal).

But I always

felt that you had a reasonable chance, in that I perceived you as the "fanzine fans' candidate" standing against three "convention fans' candidates." In fact, potentially even stronger than that, in that you've always been, in both word and deed, a proponent of "big tent fandom." Heck, there's not many people who could get away with missing Corflu due to a prior commitment to toastmaster a costumers' convention. Don't sell yourself



short!

Well, I still think that Christian was the best candidate and that any of us would have been a good choice. I typically sell myself exactly right while most others give me far too much credit.

I'm sure you'll be inundated with trip advice from previous TAFF delegates from both sides of the Atlantic, and they'll have a much better idea than me how to structure your limited time. I don't know if a Britrail

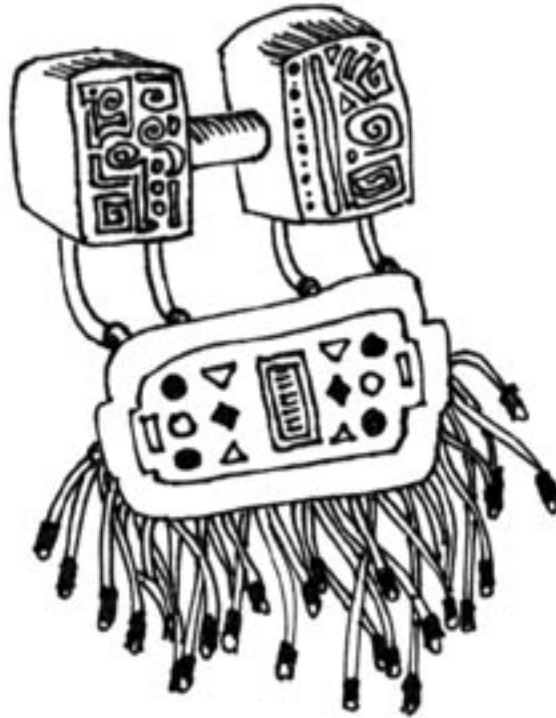
pass might be worth looking at for getting about - the website seems fairly coy about revealing a price, probably because they can tell from my web browser that I'm in England. Trains are probably the best way to get about - you get to see the countryside, and although Brits famously don't talk *to each other* on trains, they can easily be brought out of their shell by talkative Americans.

I've looked into a Britrail pass and I'm going for one of the flexible passes (I'll be buying a first class pass, but personally covering the difference between First Class and Standard) and I'll get to roll around the country. I've never done a lot of train riding, so it'll be fun!

As I've said before, we have not just crash space but a real guest room available here, but given the limited time you'll have to get around, I would fully understand the principle of "the better offer." In any case, I'll see you at Orbital.

You best better believe that I'll be staying with ya for a night or so! Orbital will be exceptional!

If you do come up this way, I can't really think of anything especially fannish to show you, unless we can persuade Ian Williams out of hibernation to show us the spot in Sunderland High Street where The Gannet *used* to be. For film fandom, I guess I could take you to see the world's most



famous car park in Gateshead ("Get Carter"), but I believe they may be knocking that down before you arrive. ***Damned urban renewal!!!***

I believe that it is traditional for TAFF to ask the guest convention for a free membership -- although not quite 100% traditional for the convention to agree. Might be worth asking, though. And remember you can start asking Suzle for TAFF funds right away, so no need to hold back on booking that flight.

I'm very lucky to have a great set of folks who are lookin' out for me. Bug and Suzle hae taken care of a lot of things already and I'm glad to

say that I have a lot of stuff already taken off my plate to think about. The easy stuff, finding a cheap flight, Britrail pass and such, is all I have to worry about!

The chrisfortaff website marginally beat out www.taff.org.uk with the news, but only just. And Dave Langford did have rather more pages to update than me...

Remember, in the world of the internet, it only matters who gets to the news first! You did a lot of work on the site and it was a nice little piece of work and it will forever be an important part of the future of TAFF races!

The one that really brings it all home is <http://www.taff.org.uk/taffhist.html>, already updated to include Chris Garcia at the end a long line of past TAFF greats. Starting with Walt himself, Vinϕ, LeeH, Ron Bennett, Atom, Langford, the Nielsen-Haydens, and more recent names as well. I really ought to end this with a fannishly sarcastic "My ghod, what have we wrought?" Unfortunately, I seem to have something in my eye...

The names on that list are amazing. I have had much fun chatting with the Moffatts at LosCon over the last couple of years and they won in the 1970s. There's Dan Steffan, one of the best fan artists ever, and so many others. I'm not worthy! I'm not worthy!



Fannish Memory Syndrome

Steve Green

To the Quality Hotel near Walsall, for another three-day episode in British fandom's most successful soap opera, Novacon.

It's been a major factor in my life for more than three decades. As I wrote in the latest instalment's first progress report, "Saturday, 5 February 1977: the day everything changed. I'd wandered into the Andromeda bookshop on [Birmingham's] Summer Row (never a wise move: back then, Rog Peyton could scent spare change at fifty paces; he's now down to forty-nine). I can't recall if I was already aware of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, then at the top of its game, but it can't be a coincidence that I turned up for a barnstorming gig by co-president Brian Aldiss thirteen days later.

"More crucially, I learned that

Birmingham was the venue for these weird gatherings of like-minded individuals, *conventions*, and whilst the first of these I experienced firsthand – Fantasycon 3, two months short of my seventeenth birthday – was reassuringly non-interactive, I'd soon handed over my membership fee for another event in the city centre, Novacon 7. My life has remained intertwined with the UK's longest-running regional sf convention every since.

"After running Novacon 13's alternative programme in the bowels of the Royal Angus Hotel (leaving in our wake scenes of decadence and destruction unknown since Caligula's Rome), I actually found myself chairing Novacon 14. This instalment proved so successful, the following two had to quit Birmingham and relocate to Coventry."

Now, you might think I'd have learned my lesson back in those dark days of Thatcher, Reagan and the first TAFF War, but no: this November saw

me back in the chair, a mere twenty-three years after my first gig, juggling both a celebration of the seventieth anniversary of the first British science fiction convention (in the opinion of many fans, myself included, the first *true sf con*) and our sub-theme, the UK's accelerating shift towards becoming a surveillance society (a nod to our guest of honour, Charlie Stross). The latter was emphasised by Iris, our inflatable eyeball, which floated up the ceiling during our opening ceremony and hovered over the weekend's proceedings until Rog Peyton finally auctioned her off on Sunday afternoon.

Running a convention is like premeditated murder: months in the planning and it's all over in a flash. One moment, Ann and I were enjoying a pre-con committee curry with Charlie and his partner Feorag; the next, we were heading back to our room after the traditional "dead dog" beer tasting, sliding down the adrenalin roller-coaster and wondering which fannish black hole the intervening seventy-two hours had disappeared into.

Needless to say, much as I reckon we did a solid job, I immediately vowed never to take it on again. Better pencil a gap into my 2030 calendar, just in case...

[Heading above adapted from a photograph taken by Ian Sales.]