

# THE DRINK TANK

## ISSUE 181



**Hey, it's another Brianna SpaceKat cover! She's got a distinctive style, don't she? Check out [spacekat.org](http://spacekat.org) to see more!**



**Letter Graded Mail  
sent to [garcia@computerhistory.org](mailto:garcia@computerhistory.org)  
by my gentle Readers!**

**Let us start with Eric Mayer!!!**

Chris,

Hey, you've overwhelmed me. I go over to eFanzines and everything there is a Garcia publication. It looks like the music charts when the Beatles were going strong. I will say that is a terrific cover this time. Has a 3-D look. And a good Dork Knight Strip too. There's something being demonstrated

about humor there...it's funnier without a panel showing the result, don't you think? Maybe the result is funnier in our imaginations, or maybe allowing us to make the little leap to what's coming by ourselves makes it funnier. See, I'm a thinker. No dorks on me.

**Well, it's not easy having this much free time on my hands! I'm not a thinker, but I think you're right on that matter! I'm so glad I've got a bunch of the Dork Knights to run!**

Well, I've always feared Obama would lose to the Republican slime machine. That Palin pick, if you have half a brain, is horrible. But too many voters don't have half a brain. It's as if everyone is laughing and they never notice the hordes of zombies rising up out of the earth.

What's frightening is that we all face serious problems -- this country, the world, all of us -- and ignorance and bigotry and pandering to the lowest common denominator can't solve those problems. How have we got into a situation where the least qualified portion of our society decides (wrongly again and again) what's to be done. As someone put it our current society is pretty much a mob.

**I was shocked to see that the latest polls showed McCain up 4 points, which is strange, but I'm betting that'll even out after the Convention Bump has settled down. I'm still**

**saying it's Obama, but the group McCain caught with the Palin pick votes in great numbers.**

Hey, I like John Coxon's line about salaries and mortgages and paying taxes are things that happen in fantasy worlds. Yeah, but not interesting fantasy worlds. Not like Vance or Tolkien fantasy worlds. Well, the salaries maybe. People still get salaries? Damn! Salaries have been part of a fantasy world for me too for a long time now. Of course that fantasy world, with having to go to the office, was like that Vance book where the characters wore exploding collars around their necks.

**I wonder what sort of benefits package Orcs get?**

Lloyd has inspired me to stretch this loc out, you see. Either that or I'm rambling because I'm tired, or old, or both.

**Lloyd has also inspired me to put out so many fanzines that even HE can't keep up with LoCing them all!!!**

Best,  
Eric

**Thanks, Eric!**

**And now...the aforementioned Lloyd Penney!!!**

September 6, 2008

Dear Chris:

We'll make it fast, down and



dirty...no, I'm talking about a loc for The Drink Tank 180. What did you think I meant? Hm? I know it just arrived, but I have a few minutes.

***Fast and dirty describes the creation of my zines, so LoCing them as such makes sense!***

Journey Planet 1 is a monster zine, and it's going to take some reading to absorb it and write a letter. I hope I can get to it soon, for very soon, my free time will be severely curtailed. Not to worry, for it's due to the best reason possible...another daytime job. On Monday, I start at Tri-Ad Graphics, not far from home, as an agency proofreader for several high-end clients. This is a 3-month contract, so I will also keep my evening job at the Globe and Mail, and fall flat when I get home.

***Congrats to you, old boy! Good get for another gig, which puts more green in the blue. Take your time with Journey Planet. It might be the one zine I've ever been involved with that's actually worth taking a lotta time going over and savoring. The articles for issue two are great too, especially pieces from folks I've never got to work with before, like Diana Glycer.***

A convention is merely an orchestrated opportunity to have fun and meet with friends. It's entirely

up to you what you do with that opportunity. The committee puts together as many opportunities for fun as it can, with feedback from past attendees.

***That sounds about right.***

Here I am, a fanzine reading, late hour on the clock not heeding,

All the tales of stupid fanboys, me they start to bore.

Politics of fandom foolish,  
makes me plan foul deeds so  
ghoulish,

Chris, how about a food ish?  
Better than the dreams of gore,

Write a loc to all your zines,  
and leave those dreams of gore,

Drink Tank and SF/SF,  
nothing more.

And so well you know, I am no  
Poe.

***That's a nutty one there,  
pilgrim!***

Neat artwork on page 3.  
Looks like a watercolour,  
something to put on the fridge  
when you bring it home to  
Mom.

***I was really glad when Steve  
Green forwarded it to me.***

***It's a nice piece that I can't help but love. I really wish I'd had more of a chance to get to know Ann.***

My letter...did you get The Neofan's Manifesto? What did you think of it? Younger fans want in, and they don't want to go through any secret handshakes, and they don't want to be excluded simply because they don't instinctively know who sawed



Courtney's boat, or what The Staple Wars were all about. That is fannish history, but it isn't their fannish history.

***Exactly! There's going to be more on this very topic in the Fandoms on Infinite Earths issues comign up in a month or so.***

My letter mentioned the printing plans with a couple of ad agencies... that's Tri-Ad. Wish me luck on this one, I'm so tired of jobhunting, and I just want to stay in one place as an employee. Working further on the conductor costume, and I've got some leads on hobby shops that might be able to help me with a conductor's cap. That pun is worth at least a quarter... When we get our costumes ready, and we get a photo taken, I'll fire it off to you.

***Yay! Photos!***

You didn't have to wait long for the next Procrastinations...it's here, and loaded onto eFanzines.com. John, a loc is coming Real Soon Now. I'm trying my best to catch up.

***It's a good little ish, too! I can't wait to send John my thoughts.***

Given that Sarah Palin (with that last name, I have to think of Monty Python) describes herself as a pitbull with lipstick, I have to wonder what

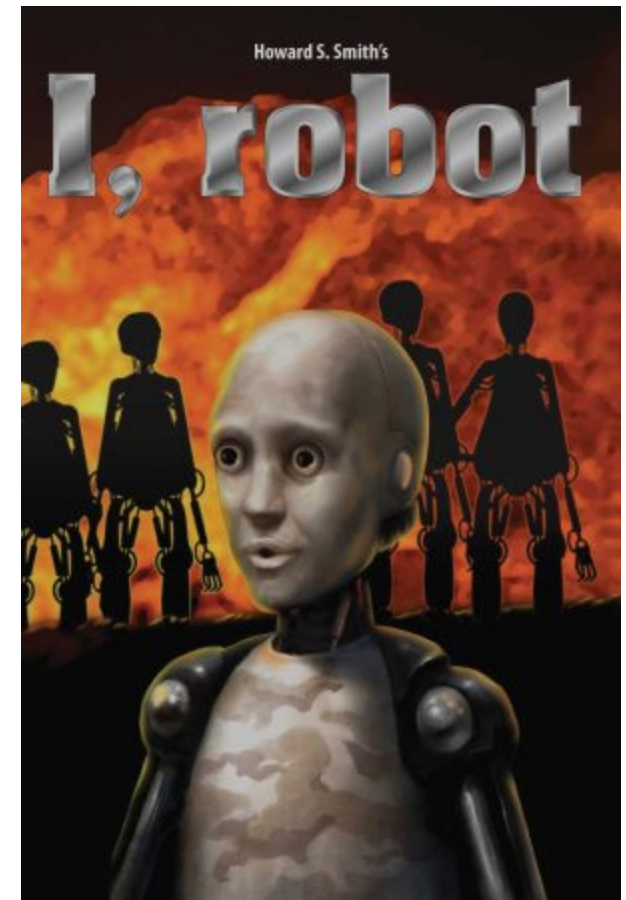
McCain was thinking. The press did a far better job of investigating her background than the Republicans did, and she has some serious baggage. Twenty months of governor, and she's the VP candidate? McCain must have pissed off a lot of better candidates in the party with this choice. You could tell this was meant to try to get the disaffected Hillary Clinton supporters on board, and I don't think that's going to work. John McCain looks to be a good candidate, but Dubya is one millstone, and Sarah Palin will be another. I gotta stop talking American election, because it looks like a Canadian federal election is about to be called tomorrow. We now have five main parties in Parliament, so it's a true circus.

***And didn't your guy just call for new elections next month? That's going to make things very interesting...***

All done, off it goes to yer e-mail, and on it goes to my LJ. I hope LJ will give me all the space I need for my free account...I'm getting my money's worth! Take it easy, and see you next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

***And I shall take it easy...right after I pub four more zines!!!***



**I am Not a Writer: Something of a Review of Howard S. Smith's I, robot**

**by**

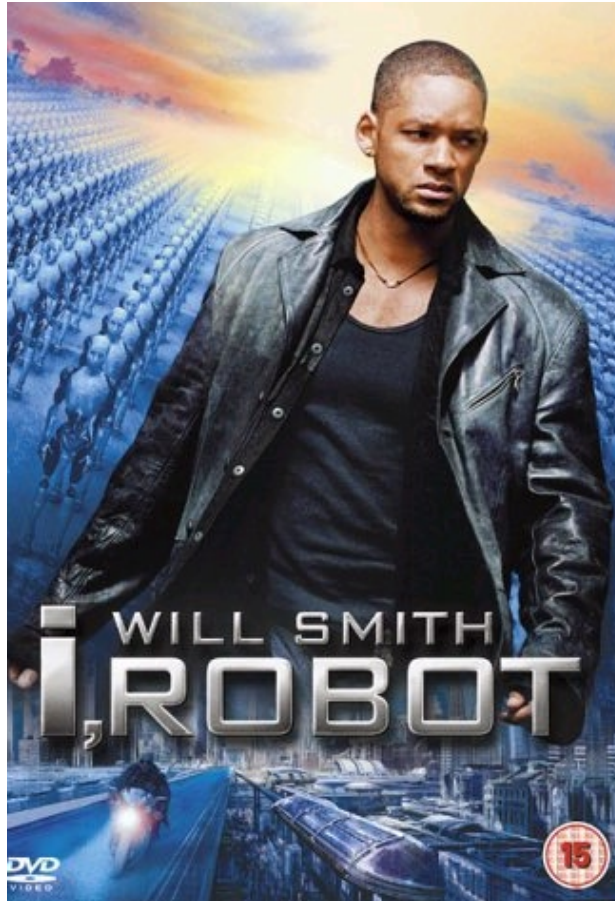
**Chris Garcia**

Ambition makes devils of us all. I think that's true, at least. I mean, I know nothing of ambition so I kinda have to take the word of dead old dudes who had something to say about it over the years. It's pretty much



agreed upon that being ambitious, that working towards some goal some glory, is the thing that will potentially bring you glory (the Horatio Alger version) or bring you to disaster (the E! True Hollywood Story version). I often see ambition in writers who are young (or not so young) who are tired of waiting for their turn. They go to great lengths to make sure they get their shot, that they get the attention of as many people as possible and they turn every eye into a life-long fan, a sure thing in the dollar department. It's a shame. It really is. I've met many writers in the earliest parts of their careers who have turned into nothing more than machines who constantly try to make the impact, to get the deal that'll secure them and allow them to write forever. It really bothers me. The writers who go to cons with nothing else on their mind but meeting the right editors, going to panels to talk about their work and doing it all only so they can further their writing name and career. It's a bad thing. It really is. I understand it's a difficult world to break into, but still, it sickens me.

I came across a copy of Howard S. Smith's *I, robot* and was thoroughly disgusted because it was so obvious that this was nothing more than an attempt to gather that audience and get his writing into the hands of the people. The problem is that he's trying very hard to shine a book that closely resemble the leavings of wampnat. It's



sickeningly bad. I mean, serious, but nothing is more sickening than the way he's working it very hard.

First off, let's take the title. *I, robot*. You might have heard of other stories with that same name. I can think of one thing: the company that produces the Roomba robotic vacuum. There's also this story by Eando Binder called *I, Robot*, one by Cory Doctorow and even one by some chump name of Isaac Asimov. Go figure. Oh yeah, there was a movie starring Wil Smith

and an Atari video game. Why, WHY, would a writer choose such a name for his novel? Well, it could be to create purposeful confusion, which Smith denies in the One-Page Publicity Release that precedes the book. It reads "the title of the book is intentionally similar to Isaac Asimov's classic *I, Robot*, but of different meaning."

OK, reread that last piece. If it's of a different meaning, then why not use a different title? Why intentionally choose a title which is likely one of the most famous in the history of science fiction. It has been used a lot, Asimov wasn't the first as Binder was 11 years earlier than old man Asimov in using it, but no one has used it as a title for a novel. There's a long list of things that Smith's *I, robot* is not related to that he's listed, including an Alan Parsons Project album I had completely forgotten. The entire book is basically a ripping off of Asimov's name. In fact on the title page, there's a note at the bottom: "whether of not you've read the Asimov book or seen the 2004 movie, you'll enjoy this novel." I don't understand why he went to all the trouble to differentiate himself from the Asimov work and the movie and yet he feels like he has to bring it up all over the place. It's obvious that he's trying to both cover his ass and make sure he gets it soaked in: this is completely related to the Asimov story and the film, but not in a way that

either of those producers or publishers could have a legal case.

There's also the matter of the publisher. I know nothing of Robot Binaries & Press, but it's an indie press that has a lot of books, largely in the sciences. It doesn't really matter what else they've published because this book is such a disaster that it would stain even Random House if it had come out with their imprint.

OK, the book is the worst part. It's crap in a way that you really can't appreciate without having read it. I hope you can find a way to read it without having to pay for the damn thing because putting money in the pockets of the publisher or the writer would be directly funding crimes against literature. Luckily, I got my copy without having to fund literary terrorism.

Let me give you just a sentence. "Alpha sat in the leather seat to the left of Isato and started typing away and clicking on the mouse." Take in that one sentence. It's stiffer than the cardboard versions of the cover of I, robot (no relationship to any of the other I, Robots) that I'm sure they envision standing in bookstores around the world. The entire book feels the same way. You remember in Beetlejuice how they say the Handbook for the Recently Deceased reads like Stereo Instructions? This reads

more like a set of instructions for an expensive vacuum cleaner.

The science in the book isn't that bad. I've written a lot about rotobics and AI over the last year or so and this isn't insulting. It's not particularly well-written accurate science, but it's not bad. I have to admit there were a couple of points where it felt like there might be something here that's not obvious. Then I'd come across sections like the all-caps crapsterpiece "YOUR KARATE CAN'T STOP THEM ALL. YOU'RE JUST A MAN."

I kid you not, that's really in there.

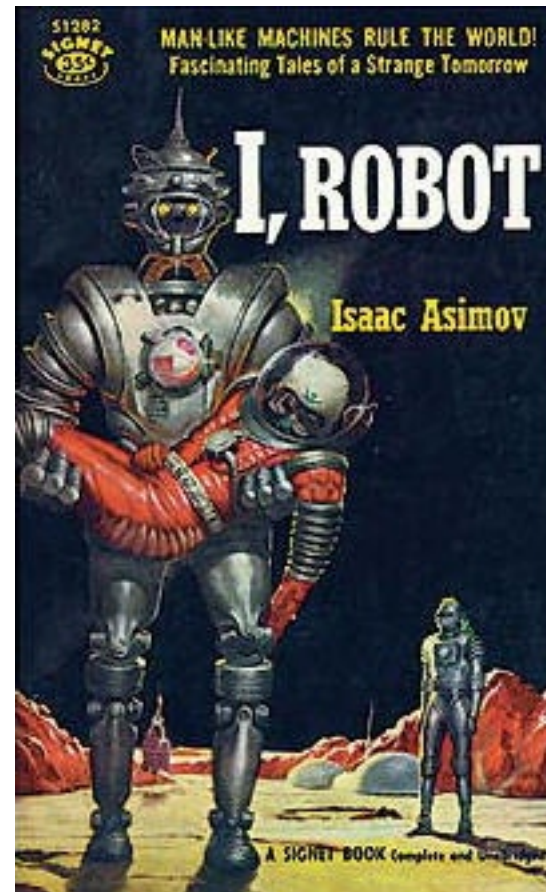
The book goes rollicking all over the world. It's crappy writing that keeps me from being able to envision the sepia-toned map with the dashes across the face of it following a gigantic aeroplane. There's a whole lot of Israel in the book, and everyone knows that Israel is a great setting for stories (see The Texas-Israeli War of 1999) and this book uses every trick it can to squeeze interest out of it. Hell, he evens gives us a

nuclear Iran to make the thing scream "Positively Ripped From Today's Headlines!". Of course, it all feels old hat.

OK, a little praise. They have included a glossary (probably because they think we're either stupid since we bought the book or ignorant because we can't appreciate on the same level as the author. It's a good glossary though. There's a selected bibliography as well which I'd slightly recommend. They list a lot of books that have passed my way over the years and I

can't say that any of them are that unusual (though they include a JD Madden article that I think was seriously over-looked when first released) but it's kind of useful, especially for younger folks.

And on the page opposite the final page of the bibliography, there's a list of people he thanks for their help. John Kemeny, one of the inventors of the BASIC programming language, was listed as a reader. That makes me sad. I love BASIC. I guess





scientists aren't the ones we want making decisions on what's good writing.

Now, if you ever want a way to know if a book is truly terrible, look for an extended review of the book to be included with the book! This is a trick a lot of folks have used over the years. The ones that I really respect are the ones who use reviews they themselves wrote and created a website or magazine to publish them so they could make the claims. I have read several of those books and have laughed and laughed when they finally got outed for their trickery. Of course, it's the bravado I respect in that case, not the actual doing of the thing. The review is glowing in a way that should have tipped me off that this was going to be a true trainwreck, but alas, I just didn't believe. Now, the review of I, robot is from ForeWord magazine, a legitimate mag that's kinda well-respected. No longer by me as they gave this a positive review. When I checked other reviews, I was even more annoyed that folks who I know have good taste gave it a positive spin! What the hell, man?

The entire book reeks of desperation and having a large enough bankroll behind you to make it happen. I get it, it's tough to get noticed, it's tough to make an impact, but it's just more honorable to let the system work...if you're good enough.

Yes, there are quality writers who never make it, but there are also terrible writers who unfairly con their way in, or have others con for them. When you don't know and you try to make up for by putting together a shiny piece and getting everyone you can come up with to rave enough about you and your crap book, that's sad. I knew I wasn't good enough to be a regular fiction writer and I took myself out of the game. I might have been able to go to all the lengths this guy did and get a book out to the world with some tiny publisher willing to sink a little into the game, but would I have been able to live with myself? This is the kind of book that just about screams "Make me a star" and fails in the one area where it needed to succeed: the writing.

The book is awful. Just flat out. I mean that Karate line alone should be enough to get the guy relegated to the depths of the 3-for-99 cents bin at a Barnes & Noble. It's sad to see a book like this get out there and even worse that people seem to be falling for it.



Art from Genevieve (aka Tunaboots!)

# Crash Into Me

# The Large Hadron Collider

There was a furor over the entire opening of operations of CERN's Large Hadron Collider (or, as my buddy Richard said, the Hardon Collider) and the fact that it's a bad thing. Well, the study of what happened right after the Big Bang occurred is an interesting one, I'm not sure that it's as interesting as trying to figure out where all the socks go that get lost in the dryer. There's also the matter of whether or not the Higgs Boson-thing is an actual particle or just some damn dream Mr. Higgs came up with to get his name in science books! I kinda hope they find it so they really won't need to do the Gigantic Hadron Collider.

The Large Hadron Collider is coming up on line, tomorrow afternoon as I write this, with the first real serious collision planned for a little over a month. Actually, it's supposedly planned for October 21st, 2008. That's the day The Computer History Museum is holding its annual Fellows Awards Dinner. It's also the day that I'll be turning 34, which is a major milestone to me. And that being the case, I realise that the Large Hadron Collider will kill us all that day.

Why?, I'll just assume you'll be asking. Well, there are a number of reasons that all come together on my birthday, the first of which is the Collider. There is some theory stating that the collision of such large nuclei could result in the formation of subatomic black holes. Now, even the most conservative scientists

say that these developing is a long-shot, 1 in 50,000,000 or so, but that even if they form, they'll collapse because of something called the Hawking Radiation. In theory, that'll be what saves us, but it's only a theory and it's not provable. Of course, they could also simply stop the experiment, but some claim that once it's started, it's too late.

Now, I'd not be at all worried about the black holes that could form and swallow up the Earth if it weren't for the AFG Syndrome.

In the 1970s, John Belushi managed to become the most respected physical comedian in the English-Speaking World. His style was compared to Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton, which was amazing if you consider the times. He was talented and he was pudgy. Drugs and a fondness for food made him the first major star to get the AFG moniker- he was an Agile Fat

Man.

John Belushi ODeD at the age of 33. That's incredibly young, and it happens to be the age I am right now...up until October 21st at 6pm. Chris Farley, the next guy to get the AFG title also died...at 33. Horatio Sanz is over 40, but he's still alive. He's also never achieved the status (or had the talent) that Farley and Belushi had. Jack Black has lost enough weight that he's not saddled with AFG anymore.

Over the years, I've had many connections to those people

in the eyes of other. First, I've got a passing resemblance to Belushi. It's not as obvious when I've got the beard, but I used to get it all the time. I'd post my picture on a profile and I'd get a ton of people saying "Hey, you look like John Belushi". I don't see it either. When I was in High School, I was a performer. I did school plays, but mostly I did improv with ComedySportz High School League. It was also the peak of Farley on SNL. He'd do all sorts of pratfalls and over-the-top physical comedy, and I admit that I aped him a good deal. Hell, there were few people who could come up with a flying stage death like me. I often did near backflips. It all came from years of watching wrestling and jumping on the bed.

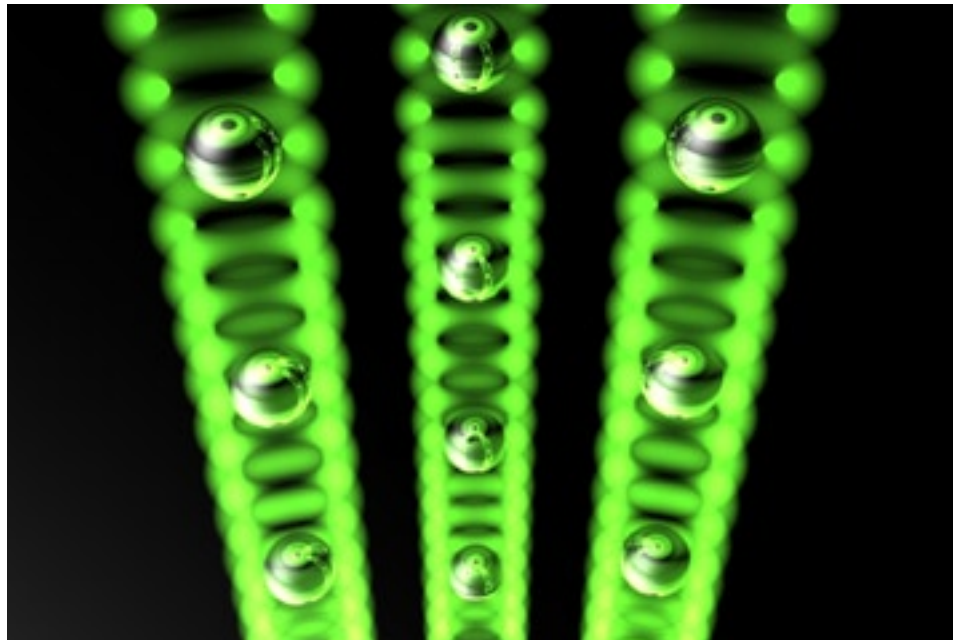
Now, look at it this way: if the LHC turns out to produce a black hole, its effects won't necessarily come across and swallow the planet in a short period of time. In fact, it could

be years, millennia, weeks, or maybe even days before the world would be taken up and crushed into particles before being coalesced into a singularity that would have near-infinite mass (if I understand A Brief History of Time the right way).

Now, since I'm 100% certain that the Universe is an evil hideous bitch-goddess that really wants to make me suffer for crimes I've committed against her over the years, if a black hole were to swallow up the planet on October 21st, the people at the museum would not get to do the Fellow's Awards Dinner, which would mean that the 3 months of planning and pulling 16 hour days for two weeks for nothing. And, of course, the week leading up to the event is always incredibly stressful for all my friends at work, and since it's an incredibly unstressful time for me, I get to deal with pissy co-workers and then, poof, the world ends.

And of course, there's the thing that I'd not get to be 34. I'd go out just like Belushi and Farley...by being swallowed up because of man's hubris and meddling in areas where man is not meant to dwell. I'd only get to make it to 33 and 364 3/4 days old. Not 34. It just makes sense, doesn't it?

Of course, the real people I feel bad for are the County Coroners. I mean, they'll have to issue all those death certificates for everyone in the world.





You know, I don't write about other fanzines as much as I'd like to. I mean, I read tons of them, and though my Locing has become less frequent, I'm still loving getting to read various zines.

The latest issue of Banana Wings, issue 35, is really good and in a smaller size! That alone increases its cuteness by 17%. There's a good piece from Flick about Paper Conservancy and that world is wild! There's a fine CorFlu GoH speech from Andy Hooper, which I understand he wasn't able to deliver (or something like that) and a fine series of pieces from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer. Those two are great.

And I got the latest issue of

The Knarley Knews, the latest BA-rea Fanzine. It's back after a layoff for Henry to relocate out here and then brush up for the California Bar exam. That's a good reason to hold off. There's all the good stuff you expect from The Knarley Knews, and I'm glad it's back. There's a John Purcell article and those are always fun. The LoColumn is pretty spectacular, even better than Banana Wings and there's almost no cross-over in the folks who write. Along with Alexiad, from Joe Major, TKK is a great snapshot of who the major LoCers are...and the ones who get over-looked.

I probably should read more issues of older fanzines too. I typically pick up one every couple of weeks to

put into SF/SF as This Old Fanzine. I've found some great stuff and it's always interesting to see what folks were talking about. I'm slowly making my way through Hyphen, that zine that so many folks loved. I think it's great stuff, but wonder what would have happened if we had the Internet in the 1950s. Imagine what could have been done?

OK, that's this issue. Use your time wisely before the Hadron Collider kills us all. I know I will. I wanna thank everyone for all their stuff (especially Brianna, Genevieve and Dann Lopez) and hope to have an issue with article from folks who aren't me in the soon!

Rock on!

# Tales of the DORK KNIGHT

