



The Drink Tank 182

I also was given a clue about the whole LHC thing and that I might be wrong. If the world was really going to end on October 21st, as my scientific methods have predicted, all of the expiration dates would line up and say October 21st, and since I have a package of pasta that has a 2010 expiration date, I must be wrong. It's hard living in a time of science.

Hey, this cover's been done by Espana Sheriff! I saw it on her site and I knew I had to get it to use as a cover. And here it is! She's got a couple of pieces like this one and that's why she's one of my faves!

And we're having a piece from Mo Starkey and of course, another edition of The Dork Knight. I'm a lucky guy to have so many locals doing great art for us! I really must put together a thing like The Locus Art Book that I reviewed in SF/SF! I could give space to those artists that folks seem to forget about like Espana, Dann, Mo, and Selina Phanara



On the Timeline of Computer Games

I've been studying the history of computers and writing up four sections for our timeline of computer history. The four sections I have: Punch Cards, Games, Personal Computers and Graphics, Art and Music, are all the ones that ain't too difficult to wrap your head around, especially if you're not a technical sort. One section did make me think a lot, and it probably would have been good to go over this in the Games issue. I had to think of no more than 9 moments in the history of Video Games that really changed the landscape. It wasn't easy.

There are a few gimmes, almost all of them in the 1950s and 60s. You could start with the invention of electromechanical games in the late 1800s. Pitch-and-Hit baseball games and the like. I didn't think that was a good idea considering the amount of space we're looking at. So I started with Nim, a game that was played on a computer called NIMROD, which was specially designed for the Festival of Britain. This machine was arguably the first

Arcade Game in that it was specially designed for playing the game. That makes it very important to the history of arcades. It also showed when Ferranti, the company that made it, took it to Berlin to show it off. There's no info on whether it survived, so other than a short mention, it won't be showing up in the exhibit. The same can be said of Willie Higinbotham's Tennis-for-Two from Brookhaven National Labs, or OXO for the EDSAC computer in the UK. We just don't have anything to display!

The first thing that is no doubt in is SpaceWar!. That's the game written for the PDP-1 by Steve Russell at MIT. It was a great game, the first to become truly popular around the world when the paper tape started to be passed around. Was it the first? Nope. Was it the most important game pre-1970? Almost certainly. Do we have kick-ass artifacts to show with it? We've got the machine it was written on and the original source code AND the whole thing is up-and-running. I'd say that makes it all a home run as far as a selection goes.

After that, you jump forward and see that Ralph Baer's Brown Box is one of the most important things ever to happen, but it wasn't the Brown Box that made the impact. Instead, it's the story of Ralph Baer, the technology version of his hated rival, Nolan Bushnell. Baer had been



working on designing video game systems dating back to the late 1950s when he worked for Loral. He delivered his first system, the Brown Box, in the 1960s. It even had a way to connect

up with the fledgling cable television systems to provide shopping and game options. That's way ahead of the curve. Luckily, Ralph is still alive and well and has agreed to provide us with a new Brown Box built to play like the old one. The Brown Box eventually became the Magnavox Odyssey, which was the first successful home video game system. That is what he usually gets remembered for. We've got a lot of objects that he designed (including the games Simon and Merlin) and he's a friend of Arnie and Joyce!

After that there's an obvious next step: Pong and the Rise of Atari. Now, there's a story that's important and there are a hundred ways to approach it. There was a corporate culture which was insane and wild and far bigger than any of the excesses you hear about in the 1990s Dot-Com offices. I heard stories from my Pops that were wild. It wasn't unusual to spend an afternoon in the hot tub with Nolan and a half-a-key and then follow that up with 48 hours of programming in a row. There's the



technological approach, which is OK, but nothing super-special. There are stories about the time they debuted Pong, the story of a new development centre and a series of stories of decisions made that could swing the company on a dime without any notice. It was a strange and wild place to work. The real story of Atari may be the Atari 2600 (or the Video Computer System as it was known) because it really was the machine that put it on the map. That system was the largest user of Microprocessors between 1978 and 1982. It was incredible the number of units they sold (about 30 million) and the length of service of the system (it was not discontinued until 1992). The number of games sold is unknown, but there were more than 900 different games available for the system over its lifetime.

Those are the easy ones. We got those and called a conference meeting with Henry Lowood, the video game expert over at Stanford. I thought this was an interesting idea, but having read his stuff, he takes a much

different look at video games and their meaning and importance than I do. I'd say he looks at them as an academic, which is exactly what he is while I look at them more like an entertainment forum. I guess it's not very museum-y of me to look at it like I do, but it does produce a better result for visitors who may simply be there for nostalgia of those games they played years back. I had set up a recommendation for three things: The Great Video Game Crash of 1982, Shigeru Miyamoto and the Mario Games, and Infocom and their Interactive Fiction games. I thought those covered some very good ground. Mario being the most recognizable video game character ever, Infocom being a major player with a great failure story and the Crash being a big business matter than really allowed Nintendo to happen here in the US. For a second set of icons in the latter years, we had Halo and Master Chief as the major Icon, the Playstation and Sim City.

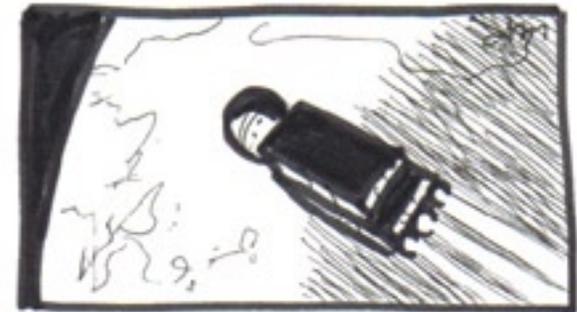
The review was not a success. Henry had other ideas of what was right to present and he had a couple of very good points. He didn't think that Halo was as important as Doom, and in a way he was right. Doom was a significant player in the huge push of First Person Shooters, pretty much invented the machinima concept, introduced level-editors and had a hand in the Congressional hearings

into Video Game violence. That last part is interesting because another of the games I thought about was Mortal Kombat, which had as big if not bigger impact in those hearings and was the last really important thing to happen in the Arcade landscape until Dance-Dance Revolution happened. I'd have loved to have gone with MK, but Doom would do. He also didn't think that Playstation was that important. I tend to disagree because it's one of those systems that really revolutionized the way gamers looked at games. It may not have been revolutionary, but it was the first time you could tell that the future of games were on disks and not cartridge. That might seem like a little thing, but it's a seriously important one. It also started a line of video game systems that sold like no other. He supported the GameBoy as an important step, and I could agree with that, though I wondered about what was more important: the GameBoy or the work of Miyamoto. I'd tend to say the image is the reason for Miyamoto, and the image of Mario as a singular creation outweighs any change in the way that GameBoy brought unto the road trip. It is always Mario that rolled out a new system.

We took Henry's suggestions and I incorporated them into the mix. In these things, you have three periods of design: the outlining phase (where you put together an outline and then

you present it to the staff), followed by the Content Review (once you've filled the outline you go over it with the various curators, and in this case Henry) and finally the design review (where the exhibit designers come up with a plan based on your artifacts and tell you how much over-budget/.space allotment you are. I had to reorganize the document and since the Henry conversation really swayed the rest of the folks, I mostly went with it. I saw that there were a couple of problems but it really was too late to do much. I found some new artifacts, fixed gaps that Henry pointed out, and managed to keep Mario in the mix. I also noticed that we almost completely ignore 20 years of arcade gaming, which made me think that Mortal Kombat was the right choice after all, but the Doom seed had been firmly planted.

So, things like that are what building exhibits is all about. Since I've started my little plan for my own museum someday (when I find a foolish friend with money!), I now know that it's all a beast to deal with all the stuff that goes into it.



**Letter Graded Mail
sent to garcia@computerhistory.org
by my Gentle Readers**

Let us begin with Mr. Eric Mayer!!!

Chris,

Great piece on the end of the world. That large hadron particle collider might offer a good opportunity to gafiate. Someone could just act worried and then...vanish. And fans would shake their heads sadly and say, "Oh yeah, too bad about so and so, he always knew a large hadron particle collider would get him."

Laughing is the only way to keep from crying. I understand...

I kind of laugh when I read the news stories in which the scientists say that they might discover the so-called god particle, might learn what mass is, or explain all kinds of mysteries. Now, while I think this is fascinating and I eagerly await any new discoveries, let's face it, whatever new particle, or field, or property, turns up will be just as mysterious and inexplicable as the ones we already know about. The essential questions of what reality *is* and *why* are unanswerable, I think. But still, looking for answers is exciting.

Like when you open up the fridge and there's that carton from that Chinese place that closed in 2002 and you want to take a bite to see

what it is, but you're not sure the knowledge is worth the experiment.

Then too, maybe there is no end to the descending levels of particles and what-nots. Maybe the universe is infinite on both the macro-cosmic and micro-cosmic.

That's been my thought. The Higgs is a big deal, but the idea that it's the last sub-atomic particle is pretty suspect.

Maybe the Dork Knight oughta think twice about joining that club. That phlegm phellow reminds me of the text adventure game A Crimson Spring which was about superheroes and villains. One of the villains had the superpower to produce fantastic quantities of mucous. (Holy shit, my spellchecker says I know hot to spell mucous. I'm amazed)

Lovely! I want a spin off of him for my FAPA zine. I'll have to talk to Dann.

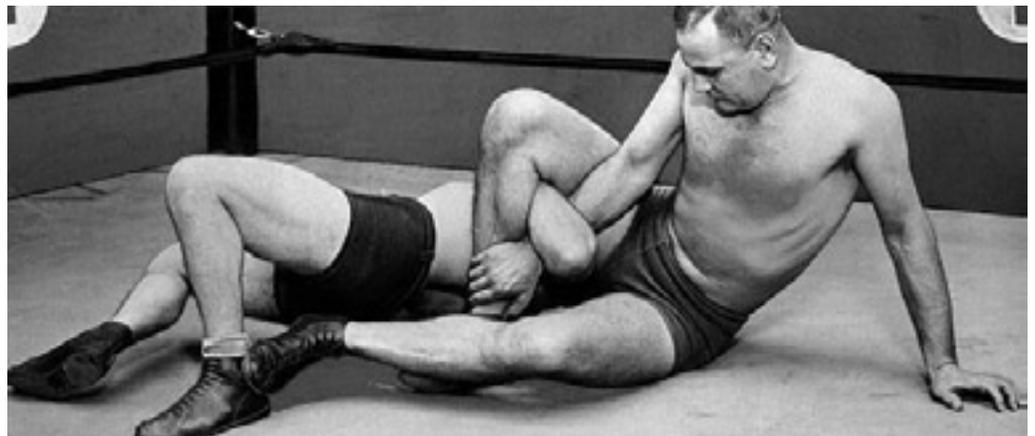
Writing as I do - albeit for a small publisher -- I loathe the idea

of B.S.P. (Blatant Self Promotion). My wife and co-author Mary subscribes to lots of lists to keep up with the industry and I let her handle that

because the endless procession of self-aggrandizing authors pushing their wares, every damn book the best ever, the most thrilling, the highest concept blah blah blah makes me ill.

There's an art to doing it, and I don't mind when some writers give a shameless plug but there's at least some humor to it (Jay Lake is a master of that)

But still, I do engage in a certain amount of BSP. If a call goes out for essays for sites about books and writing or someone asks for an interview I'm there. The reality of publishing today is that publishers demand writers act like traveling salesmen. And writers who are seeking to make a career for themselves tend to go along because publishing has grown increasingly harsh. A new writer might sign what looks like a three book deal but if the first book doesn't sell enough, within two weeks of release, suddenly the deal's off (I know of a case like that).





I've also heard of that exact same thing happening to two other writers, one of whom was actually signed to a giant ante-publication bonus that he was then compelled to return. It was quite sad. I've often said that writing is hustling and if you're willing to hustle to be a writer, there's much more money in actually hustling.

And writers whose first few books don't sell enough are often, in essence, blacklisted by the industry. It's common today for authors to change their names to become publishable again after some poor-selling books. So when publishers

demand that writers SELL SELL SELL most try.

I always wondered why so many writers have so many names these days.

And yeah, it is obnoxious. I have pretty much lost interest in moving to a big New York publisher. (Not that I expect lightning to

strike anymore) They'd want me to become a Willy Lohman and I'd refuse, so what would the point be?

Let us not be down on Willy Lohman, or for that matter, on Uncle Vanya.

But, as I said, I do a little to try to help our sales for Poisoned Pen Press. They demand nothing and put a lot of expense and effort into our books. So I (and Mary of course) do some internet stuff. Always something that has some value in its own right - an essay, for example.

And the internet stuff ain't that bad, I guess. A webpage that puts every review on it in bold letters is a

bad thing, for example, but far less bad than printing it in the book, which I, robot did!

At first I broke down and did some book signings and even went to a small convention and appeared on a panel. But I am just not comfortable pushing myself forward like that. ***You know, I'd forgive you if you came to a con I was at to promote yourself...***

However, I'm 58. I'm not looking for a career at this point nor do I have a writing career to preserve. A lot of those pushy authors are, indeed, egomaniacs who really do think they're God's Gift and should be bowed down to, but I'll bet a lot of others hate doing it but they want the chance to write or keeping writing, and get sucked in.

Very few people understand being an egomaniac better than I do!

As for I roomba...er...robot...It's fair sometimes to call a bad book a bad book. Decades ago there were a couple sf paperbacks I kept on the shelf by my desk only because I found them to be so incredibly atrocious that they gave me hope. If that's all it took, I told myself, then maybe I could get published someday after all. Alas, I was wrong, since I had to first find a co-author. A sad commentary isn't it? ***I've got a few of those. Actually, quite a few of those. Most of the books I own are in that mode, if they're not comics.***

Jeez. That's a subject I could write a book about. Really pisses me off.
And maybe you should!

But at least it distracts me from my anger over the political situation. Best, Eric
Anger over the political situation is a good thing. It saves you from thinking about writers, and that's a big source of ick!
Thanks, Eric!

Lloyd Penney, you're up!

Dear Chris:

Another fast, down and dirty loc! This time, it's for The Drink Tank 181. I have just started my new job at TriAd Graphics/SGS, and there's a lot of downtime in the office, but no time to process the locs I write through the week. Check out my LJ, and see what I got done this week!

Looks like you've been busy, even with the new job!

Eric Mayer is right, the Garciazines are everywhere. I have heard Palin on the radio and television, and I shudder to think that she might become the president of the US, given she seems almost eager for a war



with Russia. Democracy allows for a vote from every voter, but the average voter doesn't seem aware of the world around him or her. Dumb is in, smart is out, and that makes democracy look more like mob rule. I worry about the way the US election is turning out, but now, we've got our election to worry about. Prime Minister Stephen Harper is using Republican-style attack ads to tear down Liberal Party leader Stéphane Dion, and we now have five national party leaders going for our votes, with the recent emergence of the Green Party.

She's got the evil plans on her mind (she's very much a Reagan Republican in a time when we don't need one) and I don't think they'll win unless the Obama campaign really blunders. The Deomcrats have managed to blow elections

they should have won before.

And what's all this I hear about a picture of a duck in a tree causing a massive scandal?

Eric, I stretch out my locs, because I'm both tired and old. And Chris, I am keeping up! Multi-issue locs do the job. I look forward to Journey Planet 2, and my loc on issue 1 you should have by now. (Check my LJ for this day...I have been

busy this week.) I look forward to your take on fandoms and the way more modern generations are approaching fandom. It's not static, but dynamic, and it will change, whether we like it or not.

Yup, we've got it and I'm hoping that we can run it with issue 2 (we may have to wait for issue 3 to do LoCs). It'll be interesting to see what I'm working on when it's finished.

I never did see Howard S. Smith's I, robot, and based on your article, I won't go looking for it, but will just remember well the Asimov book and derived works.

Luck has blessed you with knowledge of it's evil...

So many people saw the end of the world in the launching of the hadron collider at the CERN facility in Switzerland. Oops, sorry, not going

to happen. Let's hope that the world's oceans don't suddenly drain away because of a black hole forming and sucking away the substance of the Earth from the inside.

The whole project's been held back for two months due to some damage, so let's hope we figure out a way to solve the whole Earth Ending thing...

You think you're going to beat the AFM curse? Sure you will. You may be crazy, but you're not self-destructive the way Belushi and Farley were. If the lifestyle doesn't get you, the black hole will? When you hit 34 next month, will you be living on borrowed time? Make it to 34, and hold a party for everyone. ***That's a good point, though I am addicted to sending gold atoms hurtling at each other at nearly the speed of light...***

You're right, Andy Hooper wasn't able to deliver that speech Banana Wings reprinted. Andy had some blood in one of his eyes during Corflu, and he excused himself from delivering it. ***It was a good speech that ended up in Banana Wings too!***

That's all for now...be good, or the hadron collider will get you! It's a modern-day boogeyman. Stay away from doing more backflips and abusing yourself with drugs and stuff, and do more fanzines. See you then. Yours, Lloyd Penney.
Lemme see: more fanzines...Maybe I

am self destructive after all.

Lloyd is thanked, greatly!

Let's go to John Purcell!

You know, Christopher,

Those covers you've been running lately by Brianna SpaceKat have been very nice. So nice, in fact, that I may have to visit her website and contact her for cover art. Her style is definitely distinctive, and very eye-catching. Yeah, I like her stuff too.

I feel very lucky

to have Brianna, Mo, Espana, Dann and all the rest of the folks who do art for me and seldom many others. I'm not hoarding them...but they're mine!

A few things caught my eye in this, your latest - as of this particular moment - issue. Eric Mayer and Lloyd Penney both expound upon McCain's Veep pick of Sarah Palin, and I agree that this was a very risky move for Senator McCain. The more the press



digs (which is already much more than the Republicans did, apparently) the more they find out about her. I dunno. My initial impression still seems to be holding up: no real effect on women and young voters. My biggest concern is how the ultra-conservative wing reacts. If they really rally behind her - and they have done so in the past - that would spell big-time trouble for Obama.

On the other hand, if Fox News keeps playing up her superficial resume resemblance to Teddy Roosevelt - another VP pick who had been a governor for less than 2 years, loved the outdoors, had a big family, and was a reformer - that's gonna piss off lots of independent voters like me. Palin's record sounds like Teddy R's, but that's where it stops. The whole country at that time (1900) knew who Teddy was - a Spanish-American war hero, big-time attacker of government corruption in New York state, monopoly buster, etc. - whereas nobody knew who Sarah Palin was when McCain tapped her as his pick.

Let us hope she doesn't get elected...and comes to me for comfort afterwards!

As my wife posted to CNN's website, "The only Palin I'm voting for is Michael Palin." Makes sense to me. **I dunno...he couldn't even keep cheese in his cheeseshop.**

Of course, this past week's economic turmoil could be even bigger trouble for McCain. We shall see how things work out, and depending on which polls you read, Obama is ahead by a few percentage points. The important stat is that there are still anywhere from 8% to 13% of undecided independent and disenfranchised voters showing in these polls. It gets really interesting from here on out. If one of these guys

stumbles, the other is gonna pounce like a big cat ready for the kill. It could get uglier than it has been already.

I was listening to NPR and they pointed out that McCain has very similar numbers to what Bush had at the same point in the 2004 election. I think these are very different times...

Enough politics. Onward to things of more fannish nature: fanzines!

I have not read Howard S. Smith's "I, Robot" - in fact, never heard of it before - and thought that Will Smith's version of Asimov's tales was mindless entertainment (which is all it

was meant to be) and bore at least a resemblance to Asimov's original storyline. (A brief aside: what is this with guys named "Smith" using the same 'I, Robot' title? Just wondering.) Thank Ghu you've gone more in depth with your review of Howard Smith's book; it definitely sounds like one to avoid.

Let me say that there was more

than one moment where the only reason I kept reading was because it would give me more ammunition to trash it once I was finished.

My favorite robot stories are still Asimov's - he had a flair for them - and those great books, "Adam Link, Robot" by Eando Binder, Karl Capek's 1921 play "R.U.R.", even daddy Gernsback's "Ralph 124C41+" (1911). Oh, there are more, but those are among my top robot stories, even though they are very out-dated. "Bicentennial Man" (Asimov, again) is another rock-solid entry. Thoughtful and entertaining, which is always a good combination. **Still can't stand that movie...**



Barnes & Noble has a 3-for-99 cents book bin? I may have to check that out at the B&N in town. Those prices beat the dollar stores to pieces, and the used bookstores, too!

Once in a while they'll do that with serious over-stock.

If I were you, I would not worry about the Large Hadron Collider killing us all, nor that AFG Syndrome. (And besides, shouldn't that be "AFM" for Agile Fat Man? What's up with that: can't people form a proper acronym anymore?) You do not abuse your body the way that Belushi or Farley did; and I still resent the way that people compare Chris Farley to John Belushi.

IMHO, there is no comparison: Belushi was much, MUCH better, more talented than Farley could ever dream of being. Jack Black is an extremely talented and funny man who has yet to really hit stride. I think he's capable of doing better things.

He was pretty damn perfect in School of Rock. He's about at teh same place that Belushi was when he bit it.

So you feel sad for the County Coroners? Hmm... Riddle me this, Batman: if everybody's dead, then where will those CC's come from - another planet? Didn't think of that one, didja??

Or maybe I did and happen to know that CCs are made out of special anti-black hole materials!

Anyway... Another splendid Garcia zine. I enjoyed it - as usual - and figure you'll have another one out before I hit "send" on this loc. Oh, well. I will probably enjoy that one, too. Take care, young furry feller.

All the best,
John Purcell

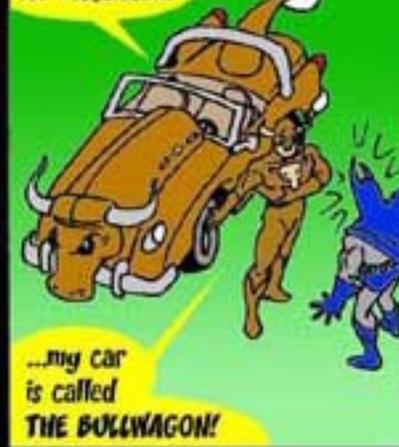
Let me thank you and I hope I'll get another one out before the Fandom on Infinite Earths issues start the first weekend in October. You're a part of the major cross-over article!

Tales of the DORK KNIGHT

Ok, Next, What every superhero needs is a cool set of WHEELS!



for instance...



...my car is called THE BULLWAGON!

Hey! No Problem Dude, I got all that COVERED!



Meet, The DorksVagon!



© 2004 by Dann Lopez

www.dork-knight.com