



THE  
DRINK  
TANK

Mo Starkey is a hero. She saw this wonderful painting in Planet 51 while at Gallifrey and Jean Martin took a photo and Mo touched it up for the cover. I have the best friends!

I am happy to report that M is out of the hospital! SaBean and Jay brought her home on Monday. It's still not the best of news, they say that she's going to have to have surgery in 6 to 8 months, once she's gained some weight back, and then she'll have a fairly long recovery from that, but it's good news for the first time in a while. SaBean's been pretty flipped out, which is always hopeful. She's been through a lot this last year or so. It's looking like they'll be settling into Santa Barbara County pretty much permanently, which makes me happy.



art from Genevieve

**Tom Becker is a damn nice guy. He's the current lay-out dude for SF/SF, and he's in charge of the upcoming Potlatch in Sunnyvale, the land of my living! Here's an article on that self-same convention, coming to the Domain Hotel!**

### A Place Where Readers and Writers Meet on Common Ground

Tom Becker

**potlatch** n. [Chinook Jargon, fr. Nootka *patshatl*, giving.] **1.** a ceremonial feast of the Indians of the northwest coast, marked by the host's lavish distribution of gifts. **2.** *Northwest:* a social event of celebration. **3.** *Contemporary:* a gathering devoted to the discussion, creation and appreciation of modern speculative fiction. **4.** *California:* a place where readers and writers meet on common ground.

I missed Potlatch 1 in Seattle in 1992 (and Janecon the year before), spending time instead on other distractions like moving, getting married, working 20-30 hours a week on a Worldcon, and shipping a product at work. Then I heard that Potlatch was coming down to the Bay Area and I got involved. The history page on the Potlatch web site says Tom Whitmore was the chair, but what I remember was that Debbie Notkin ran it. Most of the meetings were at Debbie's house.

Any committee that would let me on was a pretty loose affair. There were

all sorts of characters on it, such as Jeanne Bowman and Alan Bostick. Loren McGregor (who was in the Bay Area at that time) and Debbie were the voices of reason, the stabilizing influences when people got overly dramatic. Except that we all looked up to Debbie, while any time Loren said anything, no matter how wise and diplomatically stated (and he really was quite good), several people would jump on him. It was explained to me that he was a very divisive personality.

But however wacky it was, the committee worked. People came up with a lot of great ideas and made them happen. There was a strong commitment to creating a Bay Area Potlatch that would have its own personality. One of the ideas was to have a Book of Honor. The first Potlatch in Seattle intentionally did not have a Guest of Honor. They wanted Potlatch to be about science fiction, not celebrities. We liked that idea, but we wanted something to celebrate, something to bring together the readers and writers at the con, something we would all have in common. Obviously it had to be a book. We discussed what kind of book. Someone, I think Debbie, said the Book of Honor should be a book that everyone knows about but not many people have read. I still think that is brilliant. It very quickly lead to the realization that *Frankenstein* would be perfect for our first Book of Honor.

And so it happened. At the con, we had a Book of Honor panel, with a bunch of people on it. The one who stole the show was a retired community college English teacher, a fellow named Art Widner, who really knew his stuff. Since then every Bay Area Potlatch has had a Book of Honor, and the tradition now has been taken up by Seattle and Portland.

One of the primary reasons Potlatch was started in Seattle was to help support the Clarion West Writers' Workshop. Every Potlatch has a benefit auction. The money raised in the auction goes to scholarships for students who would otherwise not be able to afford to go to Clarion West. I've always liked this aspect of Potlatch. It's an investment that pays off as each new Clarion West graduate creates more innovative and high quality science fiction for me to read. And the auction itself can be a lot of fun, especially if the auctioneers know what they are doing. At Potlatch II, Jeanne Bowman brought along a friend of hers, who she met at Harbin Hot Springs, a clothing-optional spa in Sonoma County. Jeanne was occasionally working there as a masseuse, and Ellen Klages was up there writing a book about the place. We met Ellen at Jeanne's place, and I think she came to a party at our place, and she said she'd like to help with the auction. What I didn't know at the



time was that she was seriously into stand-up comedy and had a real talent for it. So she shows up at the auction and starts helping to auction stuff off. Initially everyone's asking "who is that person" but then they'd start laughing and soon they were saying "Look! I got this fabulous Freddie Baer t-shirt for only \$100." Fast-forward to now and Ellen is not only the all-time champion auctioneer for Clarion West and for the Tiptree Award, she is a damn-fine writer with a Nebula, a Locus, and a bunch of other awards she's earned. And to think I knew her back when.

For Potlatch II I signed up to do the local guide, which we decided would be called the Native Guide. As part of my research I went up to Berkeley a couple of times and walked all the streets around the hotel, making maps and notes about local restaurants and useful shops. I was visiting with my folks, who live in Berkeley, and my mom told me she'd had the weirdest experience. She was driving downtown and saw someone who looked just like me, but she knew it couldn't be me because I wasn't in Berkeley, I was down in Hayward. I had to explain that actually, it was me, and I was sorry I hadn't seen her. Anyway, my mom is way cool and it wasn't a problem. She actually joined the con, not that she is very much into science fiction, but she wanted to support us and see what it was like.

Another fun thing I did for Potlatch was design a logo and the souvenir tote bags. The logo is an actual California Indian artifact. I liked it because it looks kind of like a propeller. Not that it actually was one. If the California Indians made propeller beanies, they would have made them out of basket-work, not carved them from stone. It was some kind of ritual object that just happened to resemble a propeller. There was one other similar ritual object I had an image of, but that one was more bulbous and, um, life-like. It was interesting, but not the sort

of thing that could be printed on souvenirs.

I think the Potlatch II tote bags are the only tote bags, and the last Potlatch souvenir that was designed by someone other than Freddie Baer. Freddie is a wonderful collage artist, and once she said she'd be willing to design t-shirts for Potlatch, it would be silly to try to do anything else.

Yes, it says Potlatch II, not Potlatch 11.



Potlatch II was the only one to use Roman numerals. I'm not sure how that made it more authentically Native Californian, as opposed to the Arabic numerals used in the Pacific Northwest.

Potlatch II really was a great con. Even when things broke down, they worked out great. For example, we had nowhere near enough beer for the consuite, so Pat Murphy went to the nearest liquor store, bought some beer, and carried it back to the hotel. I guess nobody in Berkeley thought there was anything unusual about a woman carrying a couple of cases of beer down the sidewalk.

Chris would like me to explain what a Potlatch is like, so let me go into a few details. Potlatch is designed to

foster discussion among its members. It is a fairly small convention, typically about 180 people (although we wouldn't mind if it got a little bit bigger), so it is possible to get to know most of the people there.

Potlatch has a single track of programming, so everyone has a common experience. I remember one Potlatch were something came up in a program, and one of the panelists said

“that reminds me of what so-and-so said in the previous panel.” It's really great to get a bunch of interesting people together and start having them drawing connections between things you'd never thought of that way before. Another rule is that nobody gets to be on more than one panel (except for readings and working the auction). Each panel, instead of a moderator, has a ringleader who recruits the other panelists and organizes the panel. Potlatch programming recruits the ringleaders and will help them, but generally tries to stay out of the way. The idea is that if we want really good panels, we should ask the experts, not try to tell them what to do.

Potlatch always has some informal programming that members organize

at the con. Seattle calls it nano-programming, the Bay Area Potlatches call it Algonquins, named after the famed literary round table lunches at the Algonquin hotel, featuring the likes of Dorothy Parker. Organizing an Algonquin is simple. There is a bulletin board with ideas that people have posted. You can sign up to join an Algonquin, or post an idea for one of your own.

Potlatch has a writers' workshop, modeled of course on the Clarion West workshops, but they take only a few hours instead of weeks. The writers send in their work ahead of time, and then meet to have it critiqued, usually at lunch time on Saturday, the same time as most of the Algonquins. This way the writers can participate in the workshop and not miss any of the program. We like to look for interesting connections between the writers' workshop and the rest of the convention. One thing that was a lot of fun was having a panel where the writers' workshop participants critiqued a story from the Book of Honor.

Potlatch has a small but very high quality dealer's room (if you like books).

In the evening, most people like to hang out in the con suite. Private parties are rare. The exception is some fans like to organize a whisky tasting, and if there isn't enough space for

them in the con suite, they'll move to another room. The con suite always has good coffee and appropriate snacks for keeping your blood sugar from crashing. In the evening they'll have good beer, some wine, and a variety of interesting treats. It's not lavish, but it's good for sustaining conversation, which is what Potlatch is all about. Except I have to say that back when Jane Hawkins worked on the Potlatches in Seattle, the variety, quantity and quality of chocolate in the con suite was mind boggling.

The Seattle Potlatches usually have a dance DJ'ed by Andy Hooper. Andy's musical tastes are very eclectic, but when he wants to get everyone up and dancing, he knows exactly what to play. For Potlatch 10 in San Francisco, we found a hotel with a fabulous old ballroom, so I thought it would be great to have a dance like the Seattle Potlatches. It didn't go too well. Part of it is that the Bay Area fans are not as much into dancing, part of it is that I'm not Andy, I don't have the one song to rule them all, and in the darkness make them boogie.

Potlatch is always located in an urban area with lots of interesting restaurants within walking distance. This is part of the secret master plan to get the members to have fun and converse with each other, including at mealtimes. Also, the people who volunteer to work on Potlatch tend to

like interesting food. For Potlatch 18, coming up at the end of February, the hotel is in Sunnyvale, in an area jam packed with Korean, Japanese and Indian restaurants. The committee has been applying itself very seriously to researching the local eateries, and we're going to have a really good restaurant guide. Which I'd better get back to laying out. I hope to see you at the con, if not this Potlatch, maybe the next one.



***There are some people you only see at WorldCons. It's a shame, as you meet 'em, you start to chat, and you don't see them again for a at least a year. Such it is with Daniel Kimmel, a fine film critic, a former prof at Emerson, while I was there!, and all-around nice guy who I met at the Seattle NASFiC in 2005. I'd been hoping to get some words out of him for a while, and when I realised he was going to Boskone, I figured it'd be worth asking if he'd review it. Actually, I got two for one, as he also threw in an annual Boston event that I myself am terribly fond of!***

#### **DISPATCH FROM BOSTON**

**by**

**Daniel M. Kimmel**

This was my big SF weekend with both Boskone and the annual 24 Hour Science Fiction Film Marathon taking place. As in past years I was forced to split the difference, attending Boskone on Friday and Saturday and then the 'thon (as we veterans call it) on Sunday and Monday.

The 46<sup>th</sup> Boskone was held Feb. 13-15 at the Westin Waterfront, a spiffy newish hotel far away from everything. It's next door to one of the area convention centers but otherwise feels like it's in limbo. Boskone has been here for the last few years, but

this year it was moved to a newer, smaller part of the hotel. Apparently the hotel had a better client for the space Boskone had been using, and made the con an offer they couldn't refuse.

As it turned out it made the convention compact (albeit on two levels separated by the lobby) and unexpectedly cozy. The con was given a largish display area in the basement, although it had windows on one side to prevent it from seeming too gloomy. They used the space to house the art show, the huckster's room, the kid's area, the con suite, program ops, the information desk, the freebie racks, and even some demonstration areas for programming. It worked because although the room didn't get noisy, there was always activity going on, ranging from a combat display from the Higgins Armory to Tom Easton's weird and wonderful electrical medical devices from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. On Friday night the area also served as a locale for a birthday party for Jane Yolen (everyone invited for cake) and then the traditional art show reception that featured a dessert table that would have put many weddings to shame. One of the concessions the con got from the hotel was a food waiver for the con suite, and there were a variety of pastries and cheesecakes with enough on hand to sate even the most crazed sugar

# RALEIGH NASFIC 2010

junkie.

Two flights up (by escalator) was registration and the fan tables, surrounded by all the program rooms, and the autograph area tucked into a corner. Montreal and Australia (the next two world cons) were there, as were Reno in 2011 and Raleigh for 2010 NASFIC, both bids without competition now that Seattle in 2011 has been forced to withdraw. (The souvenir book had a two page Seattle ad, probably the last to appear from the ill-fated bid. One can only hope they live to bid another day.)

Programming ranged from the serious to the fannish, including two panels to help people mark their Hugo nomination ballots, a session on the pharmacy of the future, and plenty of opportunities to hear the authors in attendance. Jo Walton was GoH and NESFA Press issued a new book by

her at the con, Lifelode. Also released was Call Me Joe, the first volume of a planned set of books containing the short works of Poul Anderson. There for the release were Greg and Astrid Bear, Astrid being daughter of the late Anderson and Greg being the Hugo and Nebula winning author. Not from NESFA Press, but also released at the convention was James Morrow's new book, Shambling Towards Hiroshima. Guests at his Saturday night party got a free copy as well as a Godzilla wind-up toy.

Con chair Lis Carey seemed happy that her con was running so smoothly. Of course it all could have gone to hell in a hand basket Sunday when I headed to the Somerville Theatre for the 34<sup>th</sup> annual Boston Science Fiction Film Festival.

The marathon began with the traditional showing of "Duck Dodgers in the 24<sup>th</sup> and a Half Century" and featured three premieres this year. First up was "Alien Trespass" which will be opening in a few weeks. It's an affectionate spoof of movies like "It Came from Outer Space" (also on the schedule, in 3D!) that should appeal to fans of '50s SF movies but may have a tough time reaching a wider audience. Eric McCormack stars with Robert Patrick and Dan Lauria on hand as well. Less successful was "Ray Bradbury's Chrysalis" which padded what was, at best, a "Twilight Zone"

episode to nearly ninety minutes. It was the one film that the audience turned on, cheering every time it looked like it was coming to an end. The surprise discovery was “Alien Raiders,” a direct-to-DVD release previewing two days early, taking an “Assault on Precinct 13” style plot to a supermarket and putting aliens into the mix. Carlos Bernard (Tony Almeida on “24”) stars. Director Ben Rock did Q&A with the audience and stayed for the rest of the ‘thon. He also brought severed thumbs to give out, an odd item connected to the movie.

Also unspooling (as we say at “Variety”) were revivals of “Repo Man,” “Logan’s Run,” “I Married a Monster from Outer Space,” the 1951 “The Thing,” “Killer Klowns from Outer Space,” “Runaway” and “Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan” which had everyone in the audience shouting along with William Shatner, “Khan!!!!!!”

Now it’s back to the mundane world. At least until Lunacon next month.

- Daniel M. Kimmel

**Note: Boskone info’s at [nesfa.org/boskone](http://nesfa.org/boskone). Everyone I know who goes has a great time.**



***The big news of the last week has been that I've been writing fiction again, which is a bad thing, as it's obvious that it's all going to turn out to be crap, but I'm enjoying writing a Crime Novel that's turning out to be a lot of fun.***

***I'm hoping that I'm going to be able to write more on it, but I've got myself stuck.***

***I'm also listening to MC Chris!***

***Anathem: The Audiobook  
by  
Christopher J Garcia***

It was an audio perfect storm. I had to take Evelyn to buy 25 dollars worth of books at Recycle Bookstore. It was her Christmas gift and I'd never managed to take her to the store to buy her the stuff. I let her loose in the cooking and pets section and headed to the audio section myself. I was wanting to listen to some short stories on CD. There were a bunch of collections that I'd seen for sale, but while I was looking for one of them, I saw that the audiobook of Anathem, Neal Stephenson's big deal novel of 2008, was available. It was tagged 35.98, which was high, but I knew that usually audiobooks of this size were usually in the 70 dollar range. I picked it up and took it to the counter. I really couldn't afford that. I really couldn't afford the thing, but I knew I wouldn't be able to find it for cheaper, so I took it.

Evelyn got her 25 dollars worth, but for some reason, it came to 30 more or less and I couldn't say no to her. So, I was about to take it back to the shelf when I noticed that there was another sitcker on the bottom of the box. It said 19.98. I took it to the counter and handed it to the guy, who saw the 19.98 pricetag and not the other one. He rung everything up and I

made sure to get out of there fast. I ran into the car and I set the disks on top of the seat next to me when I turned on NPR, as I usually do in the morning on Saturdays so I can listen to Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me. I tuned in to KQED radio and it was a pledge break.

There is literally nothing I hate more than pledge breaks. I pledge, every year, but there's no button you can press that'll make them go away. At least on TV Pledge Breaks, you get really good material that is specially made. I hate pledge breaks, and I have said that I would never listen to them as long as I am a member of KQED. Now, I had no idea that pledge break was coming, and last time, when I knew one was coming, I had bought a couple of new CDs, but now, at exactly the moment I needed something to take my attention off of 88.5, I had purchased something that could last me through the entire pledge period.

And thus, for two weeks, I was owned by Anathem.

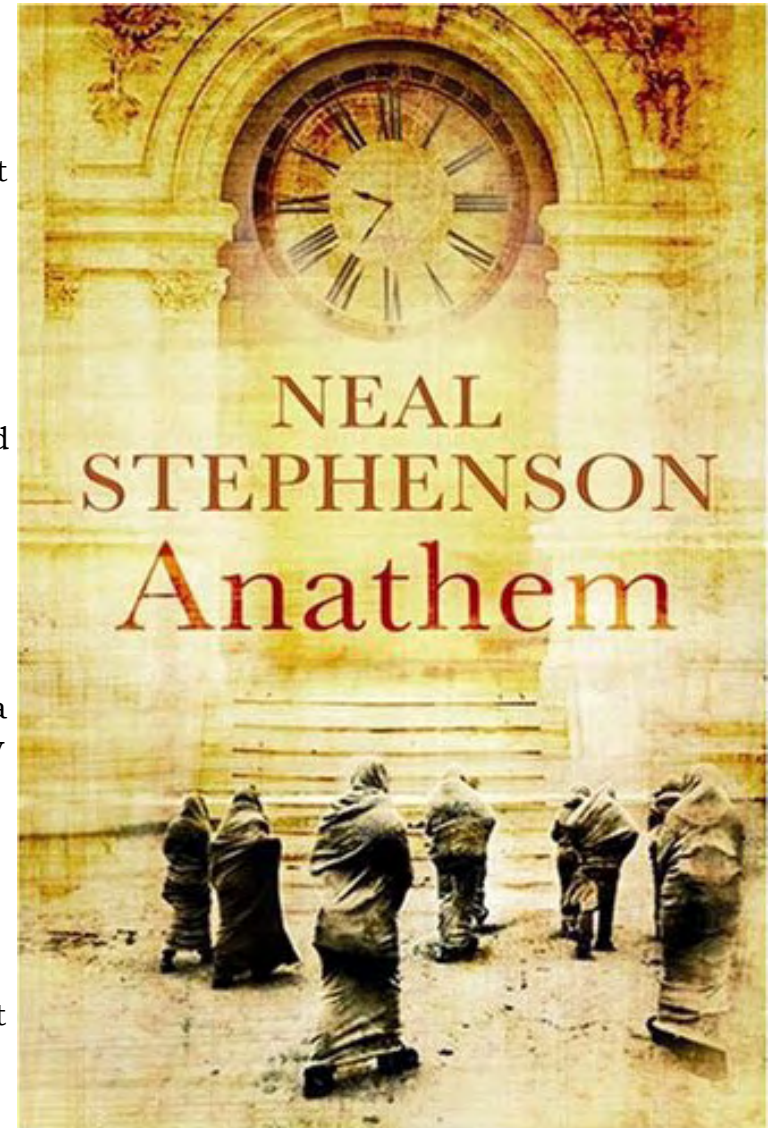
Let me start by saying that I love audio books. I think they're wonderful combinations of stories and performance, a kind of performance that is nearly as difficult as contortionism or the high wire. You have nothing but your voice, as complex an instrument as any, and you must break along different lines, knowing when to play straight, and when to jar the readers. It's difficult,

but good readers can make bad text into great listening. It's amazing. Anathem had a fine reader, William Dufres, who knew how to make the text ring.

And maybe I should talk about the text. At BASFA, I joked that Neal couldn't decide whether to rewrite Dune or A Canticle for Leibowitz and in the end, split the difference and wrote Anathem. There's a lot to be said about World Building, and boy-o-boy did he do some rather impressive world building. Anathem takes place on Arbre, an Earth-like planet with strict guidelines between a secular power and a monastery tradition. Stephenson's world was technologically advanced, and of course, we follow a non-technical portion of it. There were multiple worlds and strange interactions. The story is an adventure story, but at the same time it's a rip-roaring tale of science fiction.

It'd be impossible to say that it also had the genuinely true feeling of a Dan Brown-style thriller. It was lovely, full of life and full of excitement, all punctuated by the performer really getting into the text.

The world detail is vast, which leads to one of the big problems,



especially when you consider this is something I was listening to in the car. The world the Fraas were living in had massive information and philosophy behind it, leading to Stephenson giving us long, detailed, and jarringly stationary discussions. It grinds the plot to a halt, sometimes for the better



part of an entire CD.

I should also mention that the entire thing is 28 CDs, I think a little more than 34 hours. That's a long time. It also meant that I did 34 hours in my car over the 2 week period in which I was listening.

So, Anathem bounds at times, and I found myself doing a bit of Driveway Listening because things were so good, I didn't want to turn off the car and go inside. The problem with listening to an Audiobook in the car is that you're listening to it during a period when you're doing something. It's not like reading, when you have to set aside time, it's actually using time that is usually wasted to nothing. It was a very effective way about it.

I thought Stephenson's story was a masterpiece. I thought the way he threw in all that philosophy weakened it, quite a bit at times, and that there was good novel buried among the dialogs and head-trips, as it were. What might have been a 95 or even a 97 scoring novel turned out to be a 85 scoring novel because there was so much of that. I probably never could have read it because those pages would have just killed me.

And so, 34 hours of Anathem wasn't a loss, but it also wasn't a big win. It was a good story, a couple of strong characters, and a great reader doing a great job with text that could have lulled me to sleep at points.



Art by Genevieve

### ***Now Bobby Schaetzle wraps it all up with the fourth article about his relationship with Music!***

So between The Metro and MySpace and Amazon and iTunes, it's not like last week was the first time I'd ever employed the use of the Internet in the pursuit of new music. Before last week, however, every piece of music I'd ever acquired had been brought to my attention through more-or-less "real world" channels: a song played in a movie or on the radio, a friend copied music onto a tape or a cd, a good band played some night at a club... But last week, the real world never even came into play. For the entire trip, from discovery to critique to decision, I took the information superhighway, avoiding surface streets entirely. [Sorry, I get a sick kinda pleasure out of taking bad metaphors too far.] Here's how it happened.

A couple weeks ago, MySpace Music "launched". From what I hear, it wasn't so much a launch as it was a contractual obligation. While I've never been a big Myspace fan, having an endless catalog of free streaming music to listen to at work sounded pretty awesome, and I wanted to check it out. I'd actually been playing with Pandora a bit for the last couple months, but grew frustrated with it pretty quickly. It's a good idea and everything, it just doesn't actually seem to work that

well. I'll notice that songs are often flagged with the same properties, but don't actually sound anything alike. Plus, you hear a lot of the same tracks over and over again and it's rare that you'll hear more than one track from the same artist. I've certainly found good songs on Pandora, but I like to buy albums, and I'm not going to buy a whole album just because I heard one good song. If it's an indie group, you can usually find a few more tracks on their Myspace page, but that requires a lot more attention than I'd really like to give my background music while I'm trying to work.

So when MySpace announced they'd signed a deal with the major labels for ad-driven content, it piqued my curiosity. The articles I'd read online mentioned that you'd be able to build your own playlists; throw in a halfway decent recommendation engine and that's enough to kick Pandora to the curb. But let's not get ahead of ourselves, first they'd have to find a way to organize all that new content that didn't suck. That's why last week, while slacking off one day at work, I spent some time playing with their new search/browse interface. I won't lie, it mostly sucks. There's too many things that suck to list, but I will mention a couple things I thought were okay. First, browse pages have this 3 column layout that's kinda cool; one column is for unsigned bands, one is for indie,

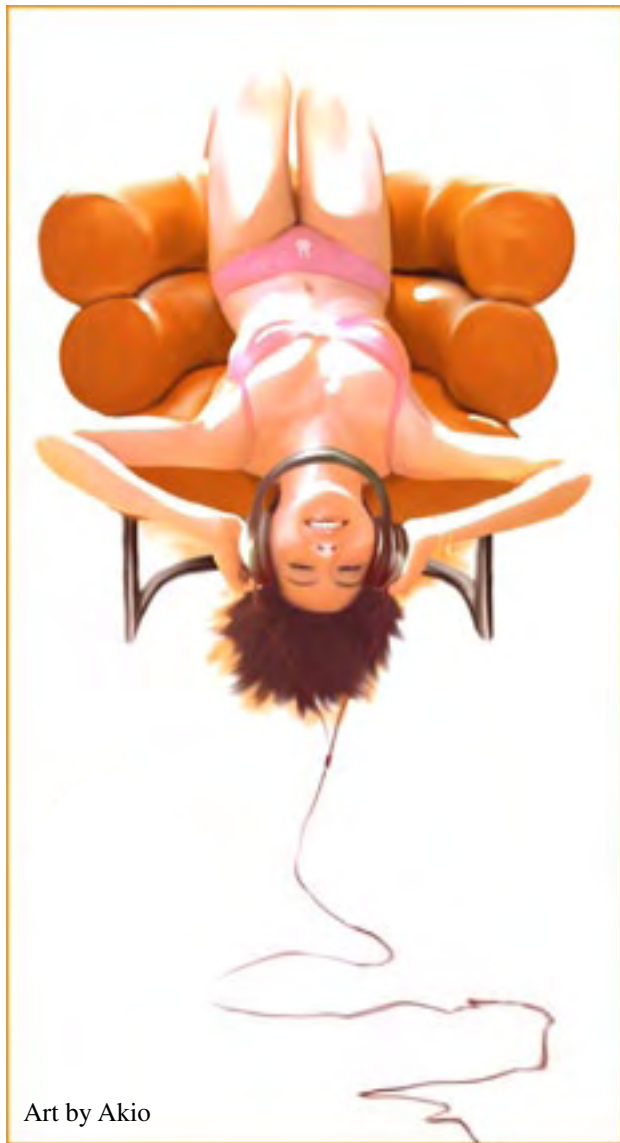
and one is for major labels. The genre dropdown has a lot of pretty specific genres, too. As for search, one cool thing that you can do is refine by the 'sounds like' field of a band's profile.

The morning I was playing with this stuff, I'd been listening to the new Portishead album (which is a little disappointing, btw), so I typed "portishead" into box to see what would come up. One band near the top of the result set was 8mm, whom I recognized as a regular suggestion on one of my Pandora stations. I clicked into their page and listened to what was there, but it was a little too mellow for midday listening. The next band I tried was called Bitter:Sweet, whose claim to fame is that one of their songs got used as the title music for Lipstick Jungle. While I don't think you could pay me to watch the TV show, the song works pretty well. Even though their Myspace offering included only a mere six tracks, I was able to loop through them probably a half dozen times before I needed to switch over to something else. [I should note that this isn't an absolute indicator of quality; sometimes music can be easy to ignore without actually being



art by Carolina Aleveres

good. Most people can tell the difference, though.] I tried out a few more of the search results before giving up on the Portishead query and moving onto some other types of music. Most artist pages still only had a half dozen tracks available, though, and such short playlists require way too much manual involvement from me as a user while I'm trying to multitask. Thumbs down on MySpace Music for now, but word around the campfire is that it'll get better.



When I came into work the next day, I found that something about Bitter: Sweet had stayed with me, so I returned to their Myspace page for a refresher. Sure enough, I still liked what I heard, so I jumped over to the band's homepage hoping to find more. They

have one of those band websites that's 100% Flash and just plays their songs in the background while you browse. Normally those sites kinda bug me, because I'm usually just looking for tour dates or something. On this occasion, though, all I really wanted to do was minimize the browser and listen to the music, so it actually worked pretty well. After looping through the offerings on their website a couple times, I started feel like maybe I actually wanted to buy the album. There was only one problem...the band had two albums, and there was no merch table guy around to tell me which one to get.

I did a little searching around, and discovered that I could listen to both albums for free, in their entirety, on last.fm. What sucks about last.fm, though, is that their player forces you to advance each track manually. The demands that puts on the user is pretty much a dealbreaker for any kind day-to-day use. Plus, even if I had the time to sit there and babysit the website, I'm not sure I would want to. When I'm trying to figure out if something or someone is important to me, often the best way to do that is to try and ignore it. I feel like a good deal of the great music that I've run into out there has found a way to work itself into my subconscious whether I wanted it to or not. Regardless, even though last.fm isn't quite adequate for long-range music scouting, it came in pretty

handy for the purpose of selecting a Bitter:Sweet album. When I got home that night, I decided to buy their first release, called *The Mating Game*.

I'm sure the last.fm guys would have preferred that I bought the album through them, but I didn't even consider it. I don't even know if they let you download music directly or not. You'd expect that I would have bought it from iTunes since there's a history there, but I didn't do that either. As it happens, my cd-r drive had been acting up, and that meant I wouldn't be able to do the old burn-and-rip to pull the DRM crap out of Apple's downloads. How insane is it that a malfunctioning piece of computer hardware in my home PC would have any bearing on which music store I shop at? Give us like 30 more years of device integration and you'll start seeing all sorts of crazy shit...like when you go shopping for a new toaster you'll have to make sure it's compatible with the brand of jeans that you wear. I'm only half joking about that too.

Anyways, if don't have a cd burner and you won't put up with Apple's DRM, you either spend a buncha time looking around online for a tool some guy in Finland coded to strip it out, or you do what I did and go to Rhapsody. First time caller, long time listener...I was actually pretty pleased with the customer experience they had to offer. The interface was simple,

the tracks were clean, and the downloads were quick. I think they would have even let me listen to the music there first (meaning I coulda skipped last.fm), though it appeared there was some sort of monthly limit on that. Oh, and The Mating Game is pretty great, by the way. While I definitely see the Portishead connection, Bitter:Sweet is a lot jazzier. The title track sounds like what might happen if Combustible Edison was asked to compose a James Bond theme. The real treat on the album, though, is a song called Dirty Laundry. It starts out with these orchestra hits reminiscent of the opening to What's the Difference off The Chronic, but instead of hearing an angry Dr. Dre on the vocal track, what you get is something more like Jessica Rabbit. If any of that sounds good to you then I advise checking them out on their MySpace page, or their homepage, or last.fm, or Rhapsody.

And that's the story of how I found my first album using just the Internet, all the way from discovery to acquisition. It went well enough that I'm sure I'll do it again, but there's still a lot of room for improvement. Record companies, if you want to sell me something, here's how you do it. First, I want a recommendation engine that doesn't suck. I'll admit that I'm mostly out of my element when it comes to AI, but I've always felt that the like-minds-think-alike approach isn't all that

effective unless the user base is really homogenized. For instance, I really like Jurassic 5, but I'm pretty sure that going out and asking Jurassic 5 fans what other shit they listen to wouldn't be very productive, because I'm sure most of them have way broader tastes in hip-hop than I do. Then you got something like the Music Genome Project, which tries to do real, qualitative analysis. That's a great idea if you can actually get it to work, but frankly I think those guys are underestimating the complexity of music criticism. I also don't know how they expect it to scale as the borders of the popular music landscape continue to break down.

A good recommendation engine will go a long way towards giving me a short list, but there's still no substitute for actual human judgement. If I'm trying to figure out if a band or album is any good, the first thing I want to do is listen to their three best tracks. At this point, all I'm trying to do is decide if I want to hear more. For that, three is the right number, because any more

than that and the opportunity cost starts to go up, and any less than that doesn't provide me with a large enough sample size to form an opinion. But doing this just one band at a time isn't good enough either; I need to be able to take a bunch of these three-song sets and queue them up into one big playlist that I can then listen to while I go do something else. After that, the next thing I'll want to do is listen to full albums of full tracks of my favorite stuff from the playlist. Ugh, I don't know why so many sites are still monkeying around with this two minute sample bullshit. Like, why any band would ever even want someone to hear just two minutes of their best song is



art by TheMick

beyond me. What if some guy came in shopping for a portrait that you painted? Would you just show him the left half? Not that streaming audio is all that expensive, but the sound quality doesn't even have to be that great; it just has to sound like the song I'm thinking about buying. Last but not least, I need to be able to listen to the album multiple times. I'll say three would be the absolute minimum. Listening to music isn't like going to the movies or playing a video game; replay value is the number one quality I'm interested in when I'm searching for my next purchase. How do you quantify something like that without being able to listen to the album multiple times?

So, if you give me all these things I'm asking for, can I say that I'll never steal music again? Probably not. The real key to getting me to pay money for music is to put the albums I love in front of me for a price, before someone else has the opportunity to put them in front of me for free. When the Peacemakers come out with a new album, I'm willing to pay for it before I've even had a chance to listen to it, because that's how much I love Roger Clyne's music.

Here's the thing...great music is worth paying for, and music that sucks doesn't really matter to me either way. It's not about the money; I get more than ten bucks allowance now. And even if it were about the

money, it'd be hard to, in good conscience, complain about the price. Hell, since I was a kid, everything seems to have gotten more expensive...gas, food, movie tickets...while music has actually gotten cheaper. So what's it really about? Well, the reality for me is that there's a lot of music out in the world that might be worth listening to, but just isn't worth buying. If I were walking through a record store and saw the new Fountains of Wayne album, I'd pass right by without giving it a second thought; but if a friend offered to drop a copy of that same album on a cd he was burning for me, I'm positive I would take it. I might even listen to it a few times, but not too many. You know, just enough to find a couple tracks worth remembering the next time I go to make a mix tape for someone.



art by  
Genevieve

***This issue is over! I wanna thank Daniel, Tom and Bobby, along with Genevieve, Leigh Ann, TheMick, Akio, Carolina, Mo, Jean Martin, and all the rest. I also wanna say thanks to all those who have been kind enough to send me notes on various things lately. I have to admit, my life is a little busier than usual going into Cinequest this year, but I'm expecting a good turn out of issues over the next couple of weeks.***

***Also, if anyone is going to CorFlu, I'll be a part of the auction, raising funds for TAFF. I'll be bringing a bunch of stuff, including a run of Hyphen that should fetch a pretty good price (I'm hoping 10 bucks plus for each issue) and I'll be bringing the scarf to get more photos of folks wearing it. I hope any of you thinking of coming to CorFlu will consider bringing some stuff along with ya to auction for TAFF!***

***I'll be doing the Q+A for the movie Wake at Cinequest. The movie features Bijou Phillips and Dannie Masterson (who'll be there and a part of the Q+A) and it should be good stuff for a Wednesday night.***

***They also launched the website for this year's Windycon, where I'll be Fan GoH! It's a good site and they added James Blaylock, one of my five favourite authors! It's just more proof that I'm a lucky boy!***