

A SCANNER DARKLY

EVERYTHING IS NOT GOING TO BE OK



DRINK

TANK



But who's counting? Actually, I am, and I am at a watershed.

No doubt, you have been counting along with me, and have also realized that this article makes the 99th that I have written that has been published in Drink Tank. At an average of more than 1,000 words in every one, over the years I've written a good-sized novel for this fanzine. Not only that, but since I first appeared in the pages of Drink Tank – with issue 153 – my pieces have appeared in almost 100 of 175 subsequent issues. That works out to almost 60%. When you think about it, that's a rather astonishing statistic ... although, I admit, not as astonishing as actually publishing those 175 issues of Drink Tank. Kudos to Chris for that. But my own statistic is astonishing enough for me. I've only surpassed the magic number 100 on a single previous occasion – that would be the amount of cataloged art I've drawn. However, you can see how easy it would be to exceed a paltry 100 drawings over a 40-or-45-year period of time...

There is a story behind how I came to write for Drink Tank. It begins with Arnie Katz, who was publishing Vegas Fan Weekly at the time. I had just begun writing locs to VFW, alerting Arnie to the fact that I had not fallen entirely off the fannish map. He told me about Chris Garcia, the editor of a digital fanzine that Arnie said I should download from eFanzines. I must have looked, but the urge to inundate Chris's zine didn't come over me immediately. It wasn't until issue 153 that my casual interest in Drink Tank grew. Frank Wu invited the deluge, by innocently asking if he could conduct an interview of me about my art,. Of course, I agreed – it was a little as if Kevin Costner had been asked if he wanted to produce, direct and star in a Razzie Award-winning movie. I provided a glut of material to Frank's questions that I imagine neither he nor Chris expected. Nor did the glut stop with the two-part interview. I contributed something more for issue 161. Then I sent material for the next two issues. Then for issues 173 and 179. Then for the next six consecutive issues! Ever since then, it's been a rare thing for more than three or four issues to go by without my byline.

Yet all good things must end. So Jean Luc Piccard told us when Star Trek the Next Generation wrapped up it's 8th season with the episode of that name. Wouldn't my 100th contribution to Drink Tank be as good a place to end as any?

Before I try to answer that question, I want to review my reasons for writing for so many issues of Drink Tank in the first place. My first appraisal of DT was that it wasn't exactly a model of the sort of fanzine that I most admired. That would have been a zine more like *Banana Wings* or *File 770*, which are noteworthy for humour, stylish writing and topical issues. Drink Tank's strengths lay in the area of popular culture, and Chris kept up a schedule that made everyone else seem like a sluggard. I thought this was not a bad thing. Pop cult I can take or leave, depending on the subject. Chris' pieces on commercial wrestling, for instance, gathered no eye-tracks from me. I skipped over some of the comics articles too, but on the very next page my interest might well be captured by an article on pre-war issue stamps with Adolf Hitler's face, or on the plastic dinosaurs we used to play with as kids, that had their names molded on their tails. It was a rare issue that had nothing to hold my interest.

Drink Tank possessed one other, more important attraction. Since Chris published approximately three times a month, I could write as much as I wanted and never build up a lengthy backlog of unpublished articles. I don't think Chris ever exceeded three in his queue ... or ever took more than a six weeks to clear it out.

Looking back on it, it seems as though 2005 was the crucial year in which I began writing for fanzines again. As 2007 turned to 2008, the pace of my writing accelerated. From modest beginnings three years earlier, I had grown to writing for most issues of virtually any fanzine that seemed even half-way suitable. Out of the running were some perzines, of course, or zines dedicated to fandom in Sydney in the 1930s, or others that specialized in filksongs or the Elvish language. But, even with a large number of genzines to choose from, I sometimes found it difficult to decide what to do with a newly finished piece. A fanzine that came out three times a month was exactly what I was looking for...

It must be said, also, that not everything I write is a gem. A harsh critic might even dismiss much of what has appeared under my name in Drink Tank as dross. I concede that many of my articles have been minor efforts, and that some – originally written for some other purpose – were not intended for large numbers of readers either. For those, a fanzine like Drink Tank seemed to order. A lengthy discussion of the causes of my protracted boredom, or a detailed examination of my lack of anything to write about might be too metaphysical – or self-indulgent – for *Challenger*. A fanzine such as Drink Tank, on the other hand – a medium that was just as ephemeral as much of my fanwriting – was perfect for my throw-away pieces.

In defense of my writing, I hasten to say that some of the pieces that found their way into the pages of Drink Tank were among my favourites.

Consequently, my relationship with Drink Tank has been quite satisfactory for several years, now.

For the last year or so, however, I have felt a growing need to re-prioritize my fanwriting, and my relationship with Drink Tank as well.

For one thing, I'm not sure the Drink Tank of today is quite the zine it was, a few years ago. It probably hasn't changed in any obvious way, nor is it easy to point out what seems different. It's likely that a good deal of the "change" has more to do with me than with Chris's zine. What I cannot deny is that when Chris began his "52 weeks of film literacy," I didn't enjoy Drink Tank as much. From being a pop cult zine, it had become a film review zine in my eyes. As a reader – and not just contributor – I found, too, I had no interest in reviews of old movies that I saw and lost interest in ages ago. I found too, that Chris's taste in films was usually at wide variance with my own. From my point of view, many of the films he reviewed were worthy only of oblivion, but there was Chris's review ... brimming over with enthusiasm about the irredeemably bad.

Well ... each to his own. But I was finding less in Drink Tank to enjoy than I had before.

I had other reasons to be dissatisfied. The lack of a regular letter column, for one. On several occasions, Chris has said that it didn't matter to him if people wrote locs or not. All well and good for Chris, but I dote on feedback. Chris can go to cons and seems to have a bazillion friends to slap him on the back and stand him to a beer and bathe him in a lavish flow of camaraderie. That's not me. I sit at home and type. Locs are the lifeblood of fandom to me, and Drink Tank was lamentably anemic.

Of late, there has been a letter col in roughly every other issue. It attracts a very small coterie of regular letter hacks – between them, Lloyd Penney and Eric Mayer probably write most of the locs to Drink Tank. Browsing through the last few issues, the only other locs I found were by Warren Buff, Andrew Hooper and myself. I'm sure there have been other loccers, but nobody's name comes to mind. Why does no one else seem

to write letters? Don't they care? Does the "Tweet and Twitter" generation find any coherent thought longer than 140 characters too much of an intellectual challenge? Or is the problem actually that nobody reads Drink Tank?

What a revolting thought! How many people do read Drink Tank? According to the list kept at eFanzines, DT falls well short of the number of downloads of Earl Kemp's über-popular sercon zine, el. In fact, el stomps it into the ground. Greatly to my surprise, el stomps into the ground every other fanzine in the top 50. It's a bloody wonder Earl hasn't won at least one Hugo for Best Fanzine. Nevertheless, it's significant that Drink Tank is at least in the top 50. Only a couple of other zines outscore it, and most of the 50 rank below Drink Tank. The only conclusion is that either Drink Tank is a popular zine, or that not many people are reading any fanzines. As time goes by, I increasingly suspect the latter is true. However, at least nobody has told me, "I don't read Trapdoor;" or "I never download Askance."

I have been told by people that they don't download or read Drink Tank, however. That probably comes as no surprise to Chris – you can't please everyone. I only mention it because it suggests to me that I'm not getting through to some of the readers who I'm desperately trying to reach. Instead, I'm reaching an unknown audience that never write locs. For me, it's not a favorable trade-off.

Then too, I've started my own short, frequent fanzine. Broken Toys is not even in eFanzines' top 50, alas. It can only be my fault ... for never writing long, tendentious articles about Hugo Gernsback's career before *Amazing Stories*, or on the development of Nordic themes in Gordon Dickson's *Dorsai* novels. That, however, would be a much higher price than I'm willing to pay to gain more readers. With any luck, though, maybe Broken Toys will get nominated for a FAAn ... or at least a Faned. Them's my kind of readers.

Whether or not Broken Toys can fulfill my ambitions, having a regular zine of my own has provided a



vehicle for a great deal of short, topical material, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future ... at a time when I may, in fact, begin ratcheting down the amount of fanwriting I do.

The scale of my fanwriting has reached ridiculous proportions. Putting it in perspective, this year alone, I will have written more than 100 articles that run anywhere from a few hundred words to over 10,000! In addition, I wrote more than a dozen other pieces that, for one reason or another, I don't intend to publish. As well, I've written more than two dozen locs, some that could quite as easily have stood alone as articles. While I would be playing the drama queen to say the pace is wearing me out, there's no question that slaving away at the keyboard has cut into the time I spend drawing – by almost 100%. It seems that I hardly ever sit down to draw any more, except when persuaded by bribery. I've decided that this is not a very good idea in the long run. Moreover, whatever demon has been driving my fanwriting seems less motivated of late. The thought has entered my head that perhaps I should write a little less, and ... perhaps not write quite the same sort of thing that has been the mainstay of my fanwriting for the last several years. Prediction is a mug's game, however, so I'll say no more.

All this soul-searching has led me to the brink of making a decision – should I make my 100th piece for Drink Tank my final bow? If so, it goes without saying that I'll make my final bow a memorable one. I don't have any ideas at this point, but ... I wouldn't spoil the surprise if I did. Be clear on one point, though – I'll stick to whatever decision I make. I've no doubt that Chris will have no problems in chugging out Drink Tank two or three times a month without me. And, regardless whether I'm a contributor or not, I'll continue to follow it. It may be that few readers will even notice my absence.

But, I haven't made a decision. The crux of the matter is that friends who I unburdened myself to have all suggested that I hang in there. They say that a Hugo-winning fanzine is a good place for my writing to appear. They remind me that nobody other than Chris can keep up with the pace with which I write.

Perhaps. I might not slow down my writing, after all. I may still have unpublished material left over, even with producing Broken Toys every six weeks or so. And point taken about what Drink Tank's Hugo means in terms of readers. However, I couldn't help notice that whatever magic Drink Tank performed for Chris and for his cover artist, Mo Starkey, it hasn't done it for me. Nor – if my name hasn't popped up on the Best Fanwriter short list by now – do I see any reason why should in future. It seems to me that idea that Drink Tank is good exposure is not entirely sound. Wanting a Hugo is probably a poor reason for anyone to fanac, anyway. Lots of people aren't nominated for Hugos, but – like the Duracell Bunny tied to a mimeo crank – they go on fanacing... As will I. It's only a question of where, and how much.

So... assuming that you are really there, what do you readers think? Good riddance to me, if I want to go? Don't go, because I'm the soul and spirit of this fanzine? Do whatever I bloody want, just stop whining about it for gawd's sake?

So write. Write even if you've never written a loc before. Write especially if you've never written a loc before. You might find you enjoy it, and start loccing other fanzines, which would do everyone a favour. But write to Drink Tank first ... I don't promise that I'll count votes to make up my mind, but you never know what felicitous combination of words might sway my decision.

If you want to read all previous 98 articles, download the issues they appear in at eFanzines.com.

Issues 153, 154, 161, 162, 163, 173, 179, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 197, 198, 205, 211, 212, 214, 226, 227, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 230, 231, 235, 236, 238, 239, 242, 243, 244, 249, 250 (twice), 251, 253, 254, 256, 257 (the entire issue), 259, 260, 261, 263, 264, 266 (twice), 267, 268, 269, 270, 275, 276, 277, 280, 281, 284, 285 (twice), 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 293, 294, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 304, 305, 308, 312, 314, 316, 317, 320, 321, 322, 323, 325, 326, and 328.

One of them is a repeat of the same article that had appeared only two issues before, but you'd have to ask Chris about that...



It's kinda weird to be talking about an article in the same issue, actually appearing one page before the words I'm typing, but sometimes you gotta. There's a lot to Taral's article that brought questions to my mind. The big one is what happens after article 100. I hope, STRENUOUSLY hope, that Taral keeps sending stuff, because to me, he's one of the best writers in fandom. For the last several years he's been on my annual Best Fan Writer ballot along with the likes of Claire Brialey, Mark Plummer, Niall Harrison, Liz Batty, Guy Lillian, Lloyd Penney, James Bacon, and John Coxon. He's a helluva writer, no question, and having him in the pages of the Drink Tank classes up the joint a bit. But what of the rest of what he says.

52 Weeks ends with the final issue of 2012 much like it began in the first issue of 2011. It has been a strange obsession, and it may be that Taral's 100th piece coincides with that issue. Here's hopin'! So, after that's done, what does that mean for The Drink Tank. The answer is, of course, I have no idea. Maybe that's the ultimate problem. I'm not the kind of editor that has an editorial vision beyond "what I get and what I write will be what's featured". Some would argue that I have no editorial vision, and that's one of the reasons to have James on-board because he DOES have vision I certainly do not possess. Will there still be film material? Of course, there's always been movie stuff in these pages. Will we spend more time writing about fandom? Well, have we ever completely abandoned writing about fandom? Will there be more wrestling? Probably. I love writing about wrestling. I do figure, since James and I are likely to start on another endeavor soon after New Years and I'm also launching Klaus At Gunpoint, my Film Journal, that we'll slow down a bit, perhaps as slow as 2009 levels (glacial by my standards!) but it's going to go on.


On the Hugo matter, there's a sticky point. Taral's probably had more articles in more zines than anyone else over the last few years. It's rarer that I get a zine with no Taral content than almost any other writer, including myself. Especially myself. His stuff is top-notch, and yet, he's not ever made the ballot as a Fan Writer, despite having pieces so frequently in The Drink Tank and all over the place. Mo's cover here, and on other zines (let us recall that she's not a wholly-owned subsidiary of The Drink Tank Corp.) earned her a Hugo, and The Drink Tank won in Reno. Why us winning and Taral not even on the ballot. The first thing I can think of is the idea of The Extras. The Work forms the first part of what gets people on the ballot. Excellent writing, even without the Extras, can get you on the ballot. Best example of that is Claire Brialey. The Extras, things like being a member of a large fanclub or fan community (like SMoFs or Fanzine Fans, Etc.) and being well-liked within that group is an excellent Extra to have on your side.

And on the matter of how many people read The Drink Tank, the truth is, I don't know. el, one of my all-time favorite zines, gets a lot of readers, largely because of the porn connection, it would seem. Earl's also won a Hugo, for Safari's issue Who Killed Science Fiction, but why el hasn't ended up on the Ballot is a bit of a mystery for some, but I get it in a way. There's only been two zines that live on eFanzines.com zine that's made it onto the ballot: The Drink Tank and Journey Planet. Yes, several other zines that are also posted on eFanzines.com have made it, notably File 770 and Argentus, but they're both primarily thought of as printzines. And maybe so is Journey Planet, though it's not had a print run the last couple of issues. The site might just not get that much readership from the wider fandom. It's an idea...

I don't have the over-whelming desire for eyes. The big difference between my fanzine works and what I see a lot of blogs doing is that I make zines for little reason other than I love doing it. That's probably the biggest problem. When I look at blogs, I see so many that are almost entirely based around getting as many eyes as possible, where the only thing that matters is being as widely read as possible. That turns me off. I can't explain why, it just doesn't feel fun. At least not my concept of fun, I guess. There was the title of the greatest art exhibition of the last two decades, the Stuckist exhibition We Just Wanna Show Some Fucking Paintings. I guess I just wanna put up some fucking zines.

As for the repeated article, well all I can say is I don't have great attention to detail...

On 99 Down, 1 To Go - by Chris Garcia



Letter Graded Mail Sent to Garcia@computerhistory.org By Our Gentle Readers

Let us start with a look at issue 331 on Eternal Sunshine from Eric Mayer!

Chris, Just a brief note on issue 331 ref your essay on the Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. I appreciated it because it's another movie that was fascinating but that probably mostly went over my head. I watched this one with my nephew, at his insistence. It was the night of my father's funeral so perhaps not the best time. But what's interesting is that I disappointed him afterwards when we talked about it. He figured I didn't really get it. You see, he was sure it was about the inevitability of love whereas I -- maybe because I am older or just naturally gloomy -- went for the second explanation that you offer.

Maybe we're both just jaded by the world...

My nephew expected the rerun of the romance would be wonderful and cynic that I am I told him, no, they'll make the same mistakes again. So I am thrilled to see that my interpretation was viable. I ought to send the issue to him and say, see, see!

And how often have we all made those same mistakes again and again, especially when we tell ourselves that we won't. And yes, you SHOULD send him the issue!

Best, Eric

Thanks, Eric! And now a bunch of issues looked at by the recent LosCon Fan Guest of Honor (along with Yvonne) Lloyd Penney!!!!

Dear Chris:

Hey, two cons together, and we miss you! November was a great time. And now, back to the reality at hand...am I ever behind with Drink Tanks! Five issues at last count! Issues 328 to 332. I am going to try to get through at least some of them before the evening is out. I may not have much to say, but I will say it.

And it was great to get to hang out with y'all TWICE!

328...I cannot sympathize with Taral here, for we've never owned pets. I had gerbils when I was a kid, but it wasn't the same. We enjoy everyone else's pets, and go home without, just like being uncle and aunt, leaving the nieces and nephews behind, thank goodness...

I'm allergic, so I'm lucky that way, but Linda's cats have been giving her troubles over the last couple of weeks with the scratching of her face!

More than 13 lives for a Time Lord? This newest technicality will prove that Dr. Who will not only go through time, but also the generations. It celebrates its 50th anniversary next year, and there will be Whocons in most cities, including Toronto.

I'm going to Gallifrey One in LA (at the LAX Marriott) this February! I'm psyched.

I never saw The Iron Giant. So many movies I never saw, and don't even care to rent the DVD. Time is

precious for creating, so merely consuming doesn't have the appeal it used to have. I am finally revealing my inner grump.

As far as I'm concerned, you're lucky to have never seen it!

329...Hey! There's three Neos on the cover! (Not the first time you've heard that, and it won't be the last.) Let me know if you'd like the font. The first time I saw Hugo Weaving was as Agent Smith, and I have liked him in everything else he's done. He's been a great senior elf, and I might see him again shortly.

I remember watching it and going "Where have I seen him before." and then realising he was in Priscilla: Queen of the Desert.

Great local on incontinent cats. Even more of a reason why we don't have our own cats, but will happily cuddle with someone else's. I never saw a full episode of Briscoe County, but wouldn't mind the DVDs. Same goes with Legend, with Richard Dean Anderson and John DeLancie.

The Matrix...saw the first two movies, but not the third, or The Animatrix. Keanu Reeves left Bill and Ted behind to make his mark on Hollywood, but instead I think it kicked his ass, gave him the Matrix movies and Johnny Mnemonic and others to give him something to think about, and last I heard, he and Alex Winter may reunite for Bill and Ted, all over again. And, this could have been a real career. Guess not.

Don't bother with the third... or the second for that matter. I can not wait for another Bill & Ted's!

330...Nope, not a thing about the Donnie Darko movie. Originally, I thought it had Johnny Depp in it, and it was about the mob. Shows you what I know.

The local...Sandy came and went, and left billions of dollars of damage in the US, and some in Canada, too. People died here, as well. We saw, it went through Toronto, tore a lot of things up and down, and then it left. We just looked at it, and thought, you can't possibly have any doubts about the effects of global warming.

331...Guess what else I didn't see? Jim Carrey is America's greatest rubber-faced fartsmith? From...Scarborough, Ontario, Canada. You can borrow him, but you can't take him away! Mike Myers is also from Scarborough, and you can't take him away, either. Same for Keanu Reeves, too. There's a theme here...

I'm pretty sure he's an American now. I mean, he played the Grinch, which is as American as they come!

And looks like I am going to catch up! 332...I never saw Sky Captain, either...but I wanted to. And, if I can get the DVD, I still might. Man, you got to cons this year! The museum must be used to you taking lots of time off. Either that, or you work the weekends to make up for it.

Believe it or not, it's a tough film to find on DVD. Not sure why, but it was a real joy to finally get to watch again.

Yes, you do get an occasional nut. I am going to wisely leave that sentence alone, and by itself, and back away slowly...

You can save more than we can, but I think London in 2014 is within our grasp. We don't need any more disruptions in employment, and I think we will be able to go. If we don't save enough, we burn a little more off the credit cards. This will be a once-in-a-lifetime event for us, and it will probably mark the end of our Worldcon travels, so we want it to be a biggie. Unless Montreal decides to bid for 2017...

I'd love a Montreal bid, and it'll be tough to save for England, but I'll make a game try!

I should have given you more for five issues, and I didn't. I am up at 5am each morning to get to work for 7:30am, off work there at 3:30pm, get downtown for 5:15pm, get the work at the Globe and Mail done, and home for about 8pm if I am lucky. Complaining that I had not enough work, complaining that I have too much. I am still looking for the right balance, but the paycheques help make up for it. As you can see, not much time left for catching up with fanzines.

I will try my best to keep up, but here you are with five interesting issues. You've never produced an issue that wasn't. When are we going to get together again? Might not be until London in 2014, unless another California convention asks us to come and join them. Loscon 39 was a great time, want to go back, don't know how. Many thanks, and keep putting them out.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Thanks, Lloyd!



52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy A Scanner Darkly

This is the third-to-last edition of 52, and it will also be the shortest. That's not because there's nothing to say about the film, but because the message is so easy. It's PKD. As always, he saw further than the rest of us, had a better idea of the reality of the situation we would be facing in the future because he lived so far out of it. Here, in a world of drugs and paranoia, Dick captured a world that was just crying out to be adapted by a filmmaker who understood *The Outside*.

Richard Linkletter is that filmmaker.

Story: the hallucinogenic drug Substance D is the hot drug around the country. Bon Arctor is assigned to infiltrate the Drug Underworld. He ends up living with two others, sitting around and taking Substance D all day and talking. He ends up meeting the supplier, Donna, who is an old fashioned Cocaine addict, in a nice twist.

When Arctor is at the police station, when he is called Fred, he wears a Scramble Suit, which completely changes his appearance and basically turns him into another person. All the Substance D basically makes Arctor lose his mind, and in particular, in what his real identity is. There are twists and turns, Donna, who's a cop too, ends up bringing Arctor into a rehab center called New Path, where Arctor gives up his identity and then finds that the Blue Flowers from which Substance D is made come from the Rehab center and at the end puts one of the Blue Flowers in his shoe. The plan all along was to get Arctor legitimately addicted to Substance D and get him undetected inside New Path since he'd literally be addicted. They only hope there's enough of the detective left in Arctor that he will know to bring back evidence.

That's also almost word for word the plot of the novel. This is the first time that an adaptation of PKD's work has been so loyally adapted. *Blade Runner* was not nearly *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, and it's a also a rare case of the film taking a much different route and absolutely becoming a better piece. *Total Recall* was so different that it might as well have not been based on *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*. *Valis*, which I remember seeing when I was a kid, was significantly

different, and while *A Scanner Darkly* does move a few things around, it's so loyal to the source material.

There are so many filmmakers who are influenced by PKD. Michel Gondry (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*), David Cronenberg (*Scanners*), Terry Gilliam (*Brazil*) and the amazing Spike Jonze (*Being John Malkovich*, *Adaptation*) are just a few, and Linkletter is another. His break-through piece was one of the strangest movies of the 1990s: *Slacker*. He would follow that up with wonderful films like *Dazed and Confused*, *Before Sunrise*, *School of Rock*, and *Waking Life*. *Waking Life* was an important step. It returned, subject matter wise, to the concepts he explored in *Slacker*: mostly plotless, lots of talking among a group of people, flowing from one to another seemingly without order, and taking place in the course of a single day, as well as using Interpolated Rotoscope techniques on top of life footage to create a distinct form of animation. There's a lot of argument, at least there was at the time, about whether or not the technique was really animation. There were folks who called it tracing, which is sort of what it was. It was animation without character design, which gave it an Un-real Reality, which was cool.

In *A Scanner Darkly*, it is perfectly suited to the subject matter because the entire concept is one of Un-real Reality. Arctor/Fred is almost completely lost in the Un-real, which is as important a concept as there is. It's amazing that we the audience are able to connect with Arctor because he's not sure who he is, so how can we be sure? That's a tough road to write in a film, not so difficult to do in novels. Here, Linkletter uses the imagery, along with a healthy dose of dialogue that doesn't necessarily do anything but enlighten the concepts that each character are processing in the various states of hallucination. OK, they're doing more than that. but there's a significant portion of the film that feels *Slacker*-esque. It's a film that may not be driven by people sitting around talking, but it is a film that gives the audience a whole lot of background and informs us of where the questions that we should be mulling over live.

The ultimate thing here, as it is in Dick's novel, is the question of what is Reality, and exactly how much does our perception of that Reality effect the reality that really is Reality. There is a Real, it's a strong theme in this work if you look at it Structurally. The Reality is that the Cops sent in Detective Fred to get addicted to the lie that is presented by Substance D. THEY are the Reality, and what they unleashed Arctor/Fred into is only his reality, and they are betting that Reality is a strong enough attractor that Arctor/Fred will not be totally lost to them. Sound familiar? It's very similar to a reading of *Eternal Sunshine*, no? Another reading, perhaps a bit more Formalist, is that there is no Reality; that once you've started messing with the fabric of the comprehension of Reality, you've permanently rendered it reality. The Mind is the only thing that can create what is real, and the fact that he grabs one of the Blue Flowers he finds between rows of corn is to give it to his 'friends' so they can get Substance D again.

There is the interesting point. The 'friends' in New Plath that he's taking the Blue Flower for are cops, in there waiting to get the Blue Flower so that they can take down the entire network of New Path and it's Substance D trade. Completely glossing over political over-tones, of which there are many, one has to wonder about what this ending says. If it's the idea that in the end we are serving some Greater Purpose, even if we don't know or understand that, then that's a very dark reading indeed. It's ultimately a reading that suggests nothing so much as Predetermination and that all human endeavor is really just cog-work in a machine we have no control over. Or, perhaps, it's saying that there is a goal, we all have it built into us, and we're working towards it without our knowledge. Perhaps it is every choice we make that makes it possible for this goal to be met. This pushes the Predetermination to the side, but it also highlights something that I really find interesting in the film: we are making choices, and every choice we make puts us further and further in to the grip of things we can not understand because we're so fogged-over from the choices we've made. We are always led towards those goals by an unseen hand, but we ultimately make the moves of our choosing in response to those stimuli.

Then there's the real dangerous reading. He put the flower in his shoe because he wanted the

false reality. He wanted to get himself caught up in the world of Substance D. It's barely supported by the text or the imagery, but it's there, I couldn't ignore it. He takes it for his friends, but he's only tied to them through Substance D, as far as that version of him understands. That's a key idea. The Powers that Be put him out there to get addicted to Substance D, a plan that worked, because they knew he would get hooked and while he may break from reality, the draw of the drug would be enough to keep him going for it. That reading, that we are powerless over our addictions, is a very AA reading, but it's also one that is very true, I've known enough folks with dependency issues to say that. That reading, that he was taking it because though he'd already been through the withdrawal he still needed Substance D, isn't just a 12-Step reading, but it's also a great justification for the idea that it doesn't matter what Reality is, it only matters that we can create and live in our own. How dangerous is that idea? Well, it's the source of all wars of faith and culture. The Matrix dealt with the same issue, that it may be better to live in the lie than to accept the truth, but here it's much more dangerous because we are creating the lie for ourselves, and as long as we live with the idea that there is a Reality, even if we reject living in it, there's nothing dangerous in that. If we reject Reality in favor of the reality we build for ourselves, well, that's scary.

A Scanner Darkly is a very good, innovative and powerful film, but I can't think of another film where the acting and particularly the set direction, costuming and make-up, meant less. Keanu was flat, to a degree, but it was entirely covered over by the processing. Robert Downey jr. and Winona Ryder were both exceptional, but it was actually a bit flattened by the way that the rotoscoping took them. The guy who is one of the great Over-Actors of the last century, Woody Harrelson, was muted just enough. Still, the script shows through, the dialogue is great, the cinematography is probably pretty standard when you consider how little of it we actually see. It's a smart vision, powerful, Hugo and Oscar-nominated, but it's also got the problem that it plays with the vision so thoroughly. This is the theoretical End Game of the computer effects film, no? It completely takes every image and repaints it with the computer. Our experience of the film passes through the machine. Fits, don't it?

I can not recommend A Scanner Darkly enough for people who like thinking science fiction. Getting used to the animation may take a bit, but once you do, it is all worth it!

