


Disney • PIXAR

WALL • E



DRINK • TANK



When I was in Junior High, during my Pre-Algebra class, we had to take a survey. It was a survey the kinds of which we took all the time. How do you feel about your classes - a) they're too hard b) they're too easy, c) they're well-suited to the level of the students, etc, etc. The last question on the questionnaire was the broadest - How Safe do you feel at school? a) I always feel safe. b) I usually feel safe c) I seldom feel safe d) I never feel safe.

Now, I've always been a bit paranoid, and I'm scared of things that may or may not exist. These are probably bad things, but it is what it is. I marked d) and completely non-ironically.

The teacher thumbed through them, talking to the class about how the information would be used to improve the school. He looked at the last question on what turned out to be my sheet and said "Well, all but one of you marked that you always felt safe. The other person said they never felt safe. You don't have to say who you are, but if I can ask, why don't you ever feel safe at school?"

I didn't even hesitate.

"You never know what's going to happen. A crazy person could come on campus any moment, kill a bunch of kids. There could be an earthquake, or a flood, or a fire."

The teacher looked at me and was silent for a few moments.

"You should look into getting some help with that. It's not healthy" he said, and then we went back to our lesson.

Once again, I wasn't wrong; I was merely unfashionably ahead of the curve.

Another shooting at another school, but this time it was twenty kids murdered by a troubled guy who had access to poorly protected guns. He killed twenty kids, none of them older than I I, and six adults, then himself. Wow. There are no words, though many people, including myself, have been flailing at them ever since first word of the incident leaked out. It was a moment of grief for almost everyone in the country. Every parent's worst dream is that they'll get the call that something's gone wrong, that their child has been hurt, or worse. I don't have kids, but there's Evelyn and I got some of that over the last decade or so second-hand I guess. It's harrowing, it really is, and while we had a couple of close-calls in the BArea over the last few years, there's not been anything like the shootings that we've seen in Connecticut this week.

The reactions to the shootings have ranged from deep sorrow to desperate anger. I basically reacted very much towards the anger end of the spectrum. Look at at the write-up on Donnie Darko, the concept of Jim Cunningham. You can react to any situation on the spectrum from Fear to Love. In this case Fear is Anger, the calls of people to ban guns and general Grrrr, while the Love is those whose hearts were deeply broken. It's strange that that's where my mind went. I was having trouble processing it.

I don't like guns in the world. I just don't. I like sport shooting. I've enjoyed going to the firing range, shooting skeet, and I think hunting is a fine use for firearms, but I just don't believe that we should be able to carry guns out into the world. I know, I know, there are so many reasons that people should have guns, they do prevent some crimes. Not nearly as many as they allow crimes to be committed, but they are used, at times for good. I've heard that the Swedish method for dealing with guns is that they don't give guns to any yahoo, you've got to be a member of a registered gun-club. What I haven't been able to suss out is if the guns have to live at the club or if members may bring them home with them, but either way, it'd be a good start. The guns that the killer used here were completely legally obtained, though not by the person who used them. They were his mother's, and he used them to kill her.

There is a middle ground, but can we find it?

I hope so. The two extremes (Fear & Love?) are Orwellian Control and Intrusion, or The Mythical Old West where everyone has a six-shooter on their hip. I dislike either of those, but the fact is too many people die, too many kids die, too many. Just too many.



Letter Graded Mail Sent to garcia@computerhistory.org

We got a nice note from Jim Mowatt saying he could get *The Drink Tank* onto his Kindle. Awesome! I might start doing a couple of different versions sooner or later. I know I can do ePubs.

December 16th, 2012

Taral wonders aloud if anyone is actually reading any fanzines at all. The volume of letters we get at CHUNGA would seem to suggest that at least some fans are still reading us – the issue we put into envelopes yesterday afternoon has a 14-page lettercol, and I think we cut at least 8 pages more. It probably helps that we typically go like 6 to 12 months between issues, so people have plenty of time to respond. It also likely acts in our favor that we clearly want and solicit as much mail as we can get – letters make up between 30% and 40% of our total content. For the past year, I've been trying to write a personal response to all the mail we get – something now far more feasible since 95% of our correspondence arrives electronically. And we try to observe niceties like preserving bold and italicized text, something you don't do at TDT. People who write letters of comment are interested in reaching a reasonable audience as much as any other kind of contributor, and when their turn in the spotlight is as fleeting as that offered by an issue of TDT, relatively few can hit that mark.

Never found a way to preserve italics and bolds. I have no idea why that's always so hard for me to figure out. Tried the other day and nothing worked. There doesn't seem to be any connection between time between issues and the number of LoCs I get. There've been times when I did one or two issues a month and still got only one or two at most.

Fanzines are a lot like poetry – they are largely consumed by other fanzine producers, just as most poetry is read by other poets. I've made a concerted effort to read and respond to fanzines in 2012, but I believe this is still just LoC #15 for the year. Lloyd Penney had written that many letters by March 1st! And I have the great advantage of having no children in the house, no pets, and no 9 to 5 job to occupy me. How would working people with families have time to even look at a fanzine? If you only had a few hours a week available to read, I think I'd feel bad asking you to spend it reading my comments on fan funds and monster movies.

I don't think I've written to more than a couple of dozen zines. I need to get better at that.

The Fan Writer and Fanzine Hugo awards are a profoundly mystery to me – I last purchased a Worldcon membership in 1996, so it's definitely something I have observed from the outside. But one thing that I've noticed

in the past is that if five talented fans are nominated as Best Fan Writer, the winner is usually the one who makes the most personal appearances at conventions and fannish gatherings. I was nominated for Best Fan Writer every year between 1992 and 1998; I also attended the Worldcon from 1992 to 1993, and in 1995 and 1996. I created the fan program for Magicon in 1992, ran the Fan Lounge in 1993, contributed to daily fanzines, helped conduct fan fund auctions, wrote and produced fannish plays and generally made as great a spectacle of myself as I could. Of course, I was also publishing APPARATCHIK, the 1990s version of a frequent fanzine. But I kept writing and publishing after 1998; what I did not do was continue traveling to Worldcon and other significant regional conventions as I had. And there have been no more nominations for BFW since, although CHUNGA has been nominated twice. All told, I'm a ten-time Hugo-loser, something I think few would guess.

Well, that's a decent theory, actually. I'm a thirteen time loser. I tend to remember that.

I'd love to receive another nomination someday – I'd really like to get a third fanzine title nominated – but I'm not sure I'm still sufficiently oriented toward science fiction and fantasy to attract that kind of attention. I write about history, music, aviation, pseudo-science and travel, just like the average fanzine contributor. Why my work would be of interest to the contemporary Worldcon member is not clear to me. Nor do I feel as though my work is of a particularly exemplary nature. It's perfectly satisfying for me to create it, and I get generally good feedback from the people that read it. But the idea of describing it in superlative terms would just seem like empty hyperbole to me. How can you make a qualitative comparison between a report on a steampunk convention and a review of teenage vampire movies and an article on Nazi pseudo-science? There is no guide to what the "best" fan writing should involve. Setting out to qualify for such a nebulous distinction would seem to court almost certain disappointment.

There is nothing I love more than articles on Nazi Pseudo-science. I don't think science fiction material gets more attention than non-SF stuff, especially by folks who are nominating. I do think that folks who have fan clubs that they're a member of, or a powerful blog (or are Pro Writers) have a leg-up.

I certainly understand Taral's impulse to concentrate on the FAAn awards, and I hope everyone reading this will send in their votes for the 2013 awards, after the ballot is posted in January. I think the FAAn awards are the antithesis of the Fan Hugos, in that they are almost exclusively voted on by people who have received and read the fanzines they vote for. Only a fraction of the Hugo voters have ever seen any of the artifacts nominated for the Best Fanzine award.

I'm already thinking on my FAAn Ballot!

As to the issue of continuing contribution to TDT, I think the entire enterprise ought to drop back to a monthly schedule, which would allow readers a reasonable amount of time to respond and contribute in kind. Taral has admitted elsewhere that he feels many of his contributions to TDT are rather pro forma, and surely this informs his impression of the experience as much as the nature or quantity of response.

True. I'm hoping he'll send things in, even if it's only now and again. Dropping to a monthly would probably make me unhappy. I love doing The Drink Tank. On the other hand, I could certainly see it happening on its own, though.

Phil Dick rivals Verne, Wells and Edgar rice Burroughs for the title of "most-filmed genre writer, and it would be unreasonable for us to expect Sturgeon's Law to spare such cinematic adaptations from its cold equation. Richard Linklater's movie of A Scanner Darkly is indeed one of the more faithful adaptations of his work, which makes sense in that it contains only a few really speculative elements. Almost everything unusual is explained as a an effect of using the mysterious Substance D. Dick admitted that the great majority of the book was based on real interactions he had with people that he invited into his home after his wife Nancy left him in 1970. He indulged his own addiction to amphetamines, stopped working altogether, and fell in love with a young drug dealer who was an obvious analog to the character of Donna in Scanner. The other characters that populate the novel are all based on real people that passed through his life. Dick was not literally an undercover agent, but he felt like he was an interloper in the doomed, nihilistic world of the street kids he fell among. There was another life waiting for him if he ever got his act together and returned to work; and many would say he had only been doing it for "research" in the first place.

It seems inevitable that Dick's use of the undercover paradigm was at least partly inspired by William

S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, in which a Junkie protagonist experiences elaborate fantasies of operating as a narcotics agent. It also shares the image of the drug operation combining illegal drug production, distribution, prosecution and rehabilitation in a seamless circle of misery and profit. But while Burroughs did not envision a path beyond a perpetual addiction supported and protected by the government, Dick saw understanding the conspiracies behind his/our addictions as the key to breaking free of them. The ending suggests that Agent Fred still has just enough of his faculties remaining to reveal the source of Substance D to his anonymous colleagues in the drug crusade, and that its wrath will finally fall upon the parties creating the cycle, rather than only its victims. The whole exercise is only science fiction because it has to be; had Dick tried to publish his experiences as an actual memoir, finding a publisher willing to take it might have been a challenge.

You know, I've never read Naked Lunch all the way through. I've seen the film, I mean, I had to, it was Croenberg! I kinda wish I could have read it as a memoir. Dick was such a strange guy, and the Annual Giant-Sized Annual we're doing is all about him!

Your choices of what 52 films to review have been quite different from mine, but your appreciation of them has been interesting reading.

Looking at my list, It's a weird one, I admit, and it's lacking in anything B-House, which would have been a good thing to cover. There are films that I had on a list I created that I had to cut to get to 52, including things like The Thing, The Thing from Another Planet, and Superman, Spiderman and yes, even Condorman.

Yours in Roscoe,

Andy Hooper

Always good to hear from ya!





SO, I'm a total HoF addict. I love Halls of Fame (Hall of Fames?) and when the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame announced their inductees for 2013 and they're a good bunch, but they also make me think of the bands that aren't in yet, and the ones who could be, but ill probably never end up in the Hall.

RUSH

For me, this was the peak choice of this year's inductees. Hugely popular, especially in Canada, and influential, especially the bass work of a Mr. Geddy Lee. He influenced all manner of bassist, especially a young Mr. Lester Claypool who would go on to form Primus. Songs like Tom Sawyer and Limelight are amazing and they've had 30+ years of quality performance.

Now, before they were in, they were my 4th most lock inductee. The three ahead of them, all of whom I'll discuss, but one of them, KISS, lives in the same vein. They've been passed over because the voters don't respect them musically, which is truly sad. They sold huge, and while they lacked the musicianship of Rush, they were far more culturally important.

Still, Rush is a wonderful and fully deserving choice, and I believe they are the first Canadian band installed.

Donna Summer

She's the Disco Diva, and I was a bit shocked that she wasn't in already. I'm not saying she was a great choice, she's second-tier, but not undeserving. This would be a better choice if the Hall had shown more respect to other woman singer-songwriters. Will Tori Amos ever make it in? She's eligible in 3 or so years, I think. If Donna Summer is in, well, Tori, Alanis Morissette (I think she's eligible in 2018) and Sarah McLoughlin should all make it in.

Public Enemy

Whether or not you think Rap belongs in a Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame (and it does!), Public Enemy is an excellent choice. They got it big a few times, notably with Fear of a Black Planet, and they were musically excellent for much of their time recording. The dynamic of Flavor Flav and Chuck D, the exceptional dynamism of Terminator X, and the extra huge stage show brought new ideas to the scene. Public Enemy really upped both

the artistic and the performance side of way rap was seen.

Now, there are several rap acts that should also be in, most notably De La Soul (whose album 3 Feet High and Rising is on the National Recording Registry) and N.W.A. Snoop Dog will be in someday, and most likely Eminem, though neither are eligible for at least another five years.

Albert King

i'm not a fan of the blues at all, and especially not Blues Guitar, but you can not deny that Albert King deserves to be in. The technical superior of the Four Kings of the Blues Guitar (B.B. comes the closest, followed by Freddy), his record Don't Throw Your Love On Me So Strong was a big hit.

The real key was his time being backed by Booker T. & the MGs. These were the most important of the things he recorded and were easily the most influential.

Freddy King is still waiting for induction (he'll go in soon), but the real question is how long will it take them to put in Stevie Ray Vaughn? My guess is he'll get in in the next decade or so, but they're obviously in no great hurry to induct him.

Heart

One of the best bands of the 1970s and 80s. They first found success in Canada and then they descended on the US and had some great albums. A couple of really crap albums too, but that happened after their peak of about 1981, though their comeback in 1985 with the album Heart. Even though the songs Magic Man and Crazy on You are their biggest songs with most folks, the album Heart from 1985 was the biggest for them commercially.

A great band, but why are they in before Yes? Or Yaz, for that matter. Still, a great band.

Randy Newman

What. The. Hell? There is no way that Randy Newman should be in the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame. That's not completely true. He should be in, but there are a lot of great singer and songwriters who are not in the Hall who should be, like Barry White. WHY ISN'T HE IN?

Now, some of this is the fact that I'm not a big Randy Newman fan, perhaps because I grew up with him as sort of a parody of himself. Still, I've got a place in my heart for Short People.

ON the other hand, the guy who most should be in is Weird Al Yankovich. A Huge seller, a great songwriter, and a transformative talent.

The major bands who should be in the most? The Smiths and The B-52s. The Smiths were the pinnacle of Alternative Rock of the 1980s, launched dozens of imitators over the decades since, and produced some of the best singles of the 80s. The B-52s are the ultimate Party Rock band. They're pretty much the opposite of REM, but in the same way. They had a very long career, a fair amount of it in the underground, and then HUGE commercial success. Weigh Love Shack against Losing My Religion. LMR is a slight break, but still in line with what they were doing. Love Shack is a TOTAL B-52s song. If REM is in, then the B-52s should be in. The problem, of course, is that the Hall don't like non-serious bands, which is why it's doubtful we'll ever see They Might Be Giants and Weird Al in.

My Top Ten Waiting to go into the Hall (who are already eligible)

- 1) KISS
- 2) The Smiths
- 3) The B-52s
- 4) The Cure
- 5) Freddy King
- 6) Weird Al Yankovich
- 7) The Specials
- 8) Janis Ian
- 9) Dr. Demento
- 10) Stevie Ray Vaughn



52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy - WALL*E

Pixar. I could have gone with *The Incredibles*, but instead I went here, largely because of the Oscar and Hugo win for it.

Let me get something out of the way - the story. It's 2805, and the world sucks, it's completely trashed. The Buy n Large Corp. sends everyone off-planet in starships that are entirely robot-driven. Left behind on Earth compactor 'bots (Waste Allocation Load Lifter - Earth Class, or WALL*E) Only one is left, and he's repaired himself from other, broken-down units. He's also become sentient, which is nice. He falls for an Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator, of EVE, who is looking for surviving plants. This leads to an adventure in which WALL*E leaves Earth to one of the ships, where people have suffered from bone loss and are fat beasts because they depend on machines for everything. The autodrive system AUTO has been programmed to keep the people of Earth from returning to Earth, and that leads to him to putting the Captain of the Ship and WALL-E and EVE on lockdown. After that, the Captain turns off Auto, and they go back to Earth, WALL*E has suffered a jolt which turned him back to a normal robot, but a kiss from EVE turns him into his regular self and they live back on Earth which the humans have worked to clean-up again. IT's simple, but it's told largely without dialogue (there's some) but mostly, it's robotic sounds and recorded material, such as segments from *Hello, Dolly*, which is a WALL*E favorite.

OK, WALL*E as a character is apparently pretty old. It pre-dates the development of the film, Andrew Stanton came up with the idea for the movie back in 1994. That's a long time before they started working on most of the movies, and there was a design for a WALL*E-type character dating back to the LUXO Jr. days. The idea of "What if the Earth was abandoned and one robot was left on" is a solid science fictional story. In a way, it's *Blade Runner*, only more limited and a lot further away.

The character designs are really important, and there are few people who do them better than Pixar. Pixar isn't the best because they had the best leadership (in Steve Jobs, John Lasseter and Ed Catmull), but because they've got deep roots and a wise hiring practice. Pixar was basically founded by a bunch of guys by Lucasfilm's Graphics Group. The first hire was Catmull, but there were others, including the legendary Alvy Ray Smith. He'd done ground-breaking work, including work on things like Alpha Channel and Frame Buffers. His work with the legendary SF Artist and Filmmaker Ed Emshwiller led to the film *Sunstone*, one of the most important of all computer-generated films. I'm writing a lot about it lately for the Computer History Museum's blog (www.computerhistory.org/atcm) and Have talked with Alvy a few times. He's a really good guy. The Graphics Group started working with Industrial Light & Magic on various projects, including the *Stained Glass Knight* for Young SHERlock Holmes. After George Lucas' divorce, Steve Jobs, fresh off of being kicked out of Apple, was flush with cash and paid five million for the Graphics Group, leading to it becoming Pixar. Alvy and Steve butted heads and he was gone pretty early in the process. Pixar was originally a hardware company, trying to sell Medical imaging equipment, and they provided short films as tests, which they eventually realised was where the real money was. They made the first fully Computer-Generated feature film, *Toy Story*, and they had an amazing team. One of the

reasons why is that they had the best artists who were supplied with all the tools they needed by many of the best technical people. Pixar IT is just the balls! They hired some great writers, almost universally men it should be noted, who did some amazing works. They were always pushing limits, technologically speaking. They'd try to come up with something new every time. If you were amazed by the way the hair blew in the wind in Monsters, Inc., well that was the point. They'd been working on that effect for ages and that was the advance they had been planning for Monsters, Inc.. For WALL*E, it was the integration of real live actors with animation. They did it, and did it well. As anyone who knows the history of animation knows, there's been Live-Action & Animation integration since at least the 1910s. Princess Nicotine, one of my favorite of all the Trick Films, combined live action and animation, though limitedly. The big ones of the 1940s and 50s included Jerry the Mouse dancing with Gene Kelly in Anchors Aweigh. There was also Who Framed Roger Rabbit, which was the most thorough of the combinations. Here, there was never a live actor interacting with an animated character, they were all shown on screens, but they seemed to make sense.

And there's an interesting point. The spaceship Axiom has been off for 700 years, and the people are all whales being toted about by robotic chairs. We see our people, people of roughly our time, and they look like us. That allows us to attach our feelings of distance to the figures, and to see ourselves in the sloth of the future us. Looking at them, I thought that it was not at all heavy-handed. That's always the fear in films that have stories of robots doing too much for us. You have Robopocalypse, where the robots themselves turn violent, but then you've got this, where we're alive, taken care of, living the lives of bored immortals, sort of, and they are away from their home forever. They so break up, they want to go home.

Sorry, I just love Buckaroo Bonzai.

This is, in a way, a Post-Post-Apocalyptic story. The Earth has been through its period of destruction, at the hands of the Buy 'n Large Corporation. Even the group of robots sent to clean up the mess have all broken down save for the one WALL*E. This is an Earth that has been beaten, we finally destroyed enough of it to conquer it, but at the same time, it's started to support life again. There's the plant, the symbol of life, and that's what the entire conflict is around. We do a lot of stories about what it is like to live in a world that is about to go over the cliff, or about worlds that are destroyed and we are the last ones left, but how many films are there about people who want to get home and who cannot? This is a theme for a very different filmmaker, Wes Anderson. His films are often about characters who have been either forced away from a home-like place and are then trying to get



back. This is most evident in the film *The Royal Tennenbaums*, but also in *Rushmore*, *Moonrise Kingdom*, and my favorite, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zisou*. Here, the world none of the people on the ship have ever known, is where they want to get back to. This is another theme from *Buckaroo Bonzai*, though in reverse as it's the bad guys who want to go home and are being stopped.

One of my favorite moments in *WALL*E* is when we see *WALL*E* trying to figure out where a Spork goes: with the Forks or with the Spoons. It's a simple moment, but it's so cool, it made me laugh. It tells the story of *WALL*E* so well - he's the last remaining robot, he's sentient, and he's a hoarder. His only connection to the past is the stuff, and he knows what things are, to a degree, because of the movies he has seen on VHS, plugged into an iPod. It's a nice touch, showing *Hello, Dolly!*. *WALL*E* is the only one who has any sort of idea what Earth was like, and he's the only one who's lived through the years of the blighted Earth. But he can't tell them the story, save through objects. It's an interesting way to do things.

Character design is so important, and Pixar has an amazing Character Design folks, including my hero Geefwee Boedoe. He worked on *WALL*E*, but not as a designer. The design of *WALL*E* had to do so many things. It had to be able to express emotional context while not talking. Pixar is great at that. The legendary short animation *Luxo, Jr.* shows that they get it. It's a lamp, not an anthropomorphized lamp, but a regular lamp, and they give it emotion. They also have to make him look like something of an everyman. He's blocky, but real. He is instantly recognisable, you can connect with him because you can project on him.

Eve is slicker, from another time. If the people of the future are far fleshier, monstrous, then the robots are sleeker, more futuristic. The Earthers of the past are still us, the robots of Earth are crunchy, metallic, and not at all streamlined. It's a nice switch, and one that allows us to feel that they are two robots from two different worlds. It's a *Romeo and Juliet* thing.

What's great about *WALL*E* is that it's so thoroughly Science Fiction. There are all the markers of SF, from spaceships (they are supposed to look like Dubai or the Tokyo Fun Palaces on the inside, like NASA paintings of the 60s and Tomorrowland concept art from the 1960s and 70s on the outside. It's a cool set of designs. It's got robots of the Not So Distant Future family of designs. The story is one of the classic SciFi scenarios: we've destroyed the Earth, our tools are all that's left. Hell, the idea of *WALL*E*, a robot that is designed to deal with the mess we've made of Earth, is a great SF concept.

Where *WALL*E* is one of the best of all-time is in the area of sound design. The way the robots sound, the ways that the characters talk, the way that the screen humans sound perfect, everything is dead on. Too often, and especially in Pixar films, there's a sense of over-stylization, where the characters sound forced, unreal, distant, but in *WALL*E*, the distance is ideal. It conveys time and distance. It's a brilliant piece of work.

*WALL*E* is a love story. It is a science fiction story. It is a beautiful tale of what is possible, of finding home, or working for your love and your dreams. *WALL*E* is as human a character as you'll ever find, and the film is a work of art!

I loved *WALL*E*. I thought it was the second best of all the Pixar films I've seen (I love *The Incredibles*) and it was one of the best science fiction films of the last decade. It was one of those movies that hits you many ways, and even if the themes of us destroying our environment and the Christianity-type themes are a bit broad, they're done so very, very well. I love this movies and well watch it again and again.

And thanks to Ric Bretschneider for lending it to me!

