

The Drink Tank 356

So, this issue is kinda packed! First, I should mention that the cover is from that old disk drive I have saved so many things off of! It's from the amazing Selina Phanara, an artist who I say is one of the best reason to go to Loscon art shows! She's awesome! That piece down below is a Mo Starkey. I'm shocked there is art that I haven't used on that old machine! Wild!

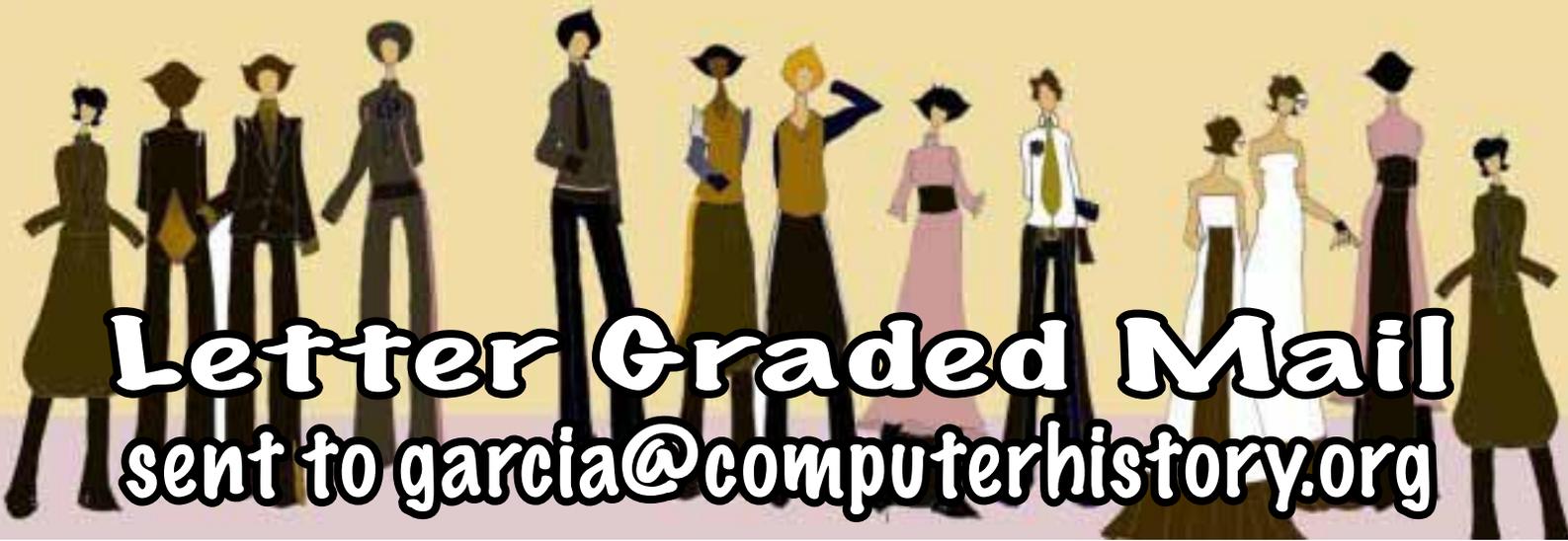
A lot of little things this last week. I got to work on a few zines, and I saw a lot of films and read a couple of books. It was wild AND I managed to visit The Lovely & Talented Linda in Oakland! We hadn't seen each other since WorldCon! LONG TIME! We watched The Great Gatsby, and then a couple of episodes of Borgia, which is not The Borgias (a Showtime show) but a Canal+ show with all sorts of strangenesses. Gotta love European TV that's produced in English!

So, I saw a movie this weekend, and it was a damn good one. The Family was directed by Luc Besson. You may remember films like La Femme Nikita, Subway, or The Fifth Element. His recent stuff hasn't been great, though I haven't seen The Adventures of Adele Blanc-Sec, which I hear is good. He's a big writer and a producer, and in this one, it was more of a Hollywood production than a French film, though it took place in France. It was a Gangsters on the Run story, kinda like a dark humor version of My Blue Heaven. It starred Robert DeNiro, whose recent work has been hit-or-miss, and Michelle Pfeifer and Diana Argon, who I love from Glee. They're all really good, but they're also bad ass! I really liked it, and it had one of the best People talking about Movies in another Movie of all-time!

SO, this issue is about the Hugos (and more LoCs than I've had in YEARS!) and fandom and costuming and such and stuff! Let's just get to it, no?

Art Credits
Cover by Selina Phanara
Page 1 by Mo Starkey
Page 2 - Kate Kelton
Page 3 - Mo Starkey
Page 6 - Squeezer
Page 12 - Kate Kelton





Letter Graded Mail sent to garcia@computerhistory.org

Let's start, on issue 353, with Jason Burnett!

Hi Chris,

I just finished reading Drink Tank #353. Actually, thanks to a technological aberration, I just reading it twice. You see, on my laptop, when I zoomed in far enough for the text to be a comfortable reading size, it meant I was far enough in that the pictures were too pixelated for optimal viewing. So I read it twice: Once zoomed out for viewing the pictures and then once zoomed in to read the text.

Since I've never been to New York City (and hence have never been to any of the museums there), I really enjoyed your pictures. I particularly liked the ones that included the other museum patrons and lent the artwork a real "you are there" quality. I don't often take pictures when I go to museums because of how easy it is to find professionally-taken pictures of the artwork that so greatly exceed the quality of any pictures I'm likely to take, but next time I go to a museum I may try taking a camera again and taking pictures of the museum, as you've done here, rather than of the artworks themselves.

I both love NYC (The Museums, the food) and hate NYC (the people, the bustle) but I had such a great time. I love taking pics of people at museums because they have a weird way of interacting with exhibits!

Jason Burnett

354, with Jason Burnett!

Hi Chris,

Just finished reading DT354, really got into your discussion about the Hugos and the business meeting.

When I first heard about the idea of a Hugo Voting Membership, my first thought was "Don't they have that already - a supporting membership?" But the more I've heard about it and exactly how a Hugo voting membership would differ from a supporting membership, the more I think it would be a good idea. I think it would bring in more voters not just from the angle of being less expensive but also from a matter of perspective. When you're down here in the demographic where the difference between \$20 and \$40 makes the difference between voting in the Hugos or not, you're likely to look at a supporting membership and think "Why should I pay 40 bucks to subsidize a con I can't afford to attend?" and the idea of Hugo voting and receiving the Worldcon publications is buried under the idea of supporting/subsidizing and never really comes to the front of your mind. With a Hugo Voting Membership, on the other hand, the benefit to you the member is front and center - you buy this membership, you get to vote in the Hugos! I think that matter of perception will make a huge difference.

As for the YA Hugo, I think it's a good idea. No, scratch that - a GREAT idea. When I was in my teens (back in the 1980s) you could buy SF in the book section of Walmart and Kmart, everything from Star Trek novelizations to Heinlein and Asimov. Today, the only SF you find in the big box store book section is in YA. THAT'S

what Middle America sees of SF nowadays. And some of it's really good, and some of it's schlock. But I don't think any of it's ever going to win the Best Novel Hugo because of a resistance among some segment of the voters to cast a vote that says "The best SF novel published this year was a book aimed at teens." (I heard some of these voters this year say they wouldn't vote for *Blackout* because they didn't want to say the best SF novel published this year was a zombie book.) Having a YA Hugo would give these books, which are one of the places the next generation of fans will be coming from, a place for recognition.

Take care,

Jason Burnett

I get the desire for the YA Hugo, and I'd like to see more YA recognition from the WorldCon, but I can see the difficulty. The Nebulas are a completely different beast, though they seem to make it work with the Andre Norton. Might have to look into that.

And, now, on issue 355, let's start with Steve Davidson (of *Amazing Stories* fame!)

I loved the Taral Wayne cover!

I was also interested to read the multiple takes on the Hugos; yes, there are issues, but taking away the fan category awards seems so unfannish.

Part of the question surrounding this issue is, I think, the question of whether we are going to ask fans to change for the awards or if the awards are going to change for the fans? Given past history (which is kind of also what this is all about), I think it pretty much a foregone conclusion that the awards need to do the changing. By that I mean at some point we all are going to have to come to the understanding that "fandom" is a state of being independent of the forms used to express that state. John DeNardo, for example is unquestionably a 'fan'. What he does with his fannishness may not conform to some other fans ideas of what fanac is, but that doesn't diminish the legitimacy of his state of being.

Awards for fans and fanac are at least half of the awards' reason for being. Maybe we do need to parse fanac a bit more finely, add a few awards (as an aside to David B. Williams: the length of the ceremony is only a problem for those not up for an award and the fidgeting and any apparent boredom expressed by those who are up for an award is not boredom - it's fear, trepidation, anticipation and excitement). We need to drop this false dichotomy between what is and what isn't legitimate fanac. If a fan does it for fannish reasons, it's fanac. The only real question remaining is - do we want to recognize it with an award?

I both agree and disagree with that take. There IS the concept of legitimate fanac where it applies to Professional vs. Non-Professional work. For example, and I know this is asore subject with some, but a podcast like *Writing Excuses* shouldn't compete against podcasts like *Galatic Suburbia*. They are two different beasts, though some would say that they feel the same. Then you can put them into the same category and have the problem of Pro competing against fan, and that's rough too. And I wish we would have LONGER ceremonies, but with more fun interjected!

I wanted to put a plug in for an idea I had regarding the potential YA Hugos. Yes, I think it a bit problematic to be giving an award for a marketing category. Yes, I think works that would appeal to a younger reader should have an award. Many, many many



of us began this journey because we read something at an early age that inspired us and made us go looking for more of the same. We NEED that to continue. What I would like to suggest is dropping the marketing category aspect of an award and allow works to be nominated for a Gateway award (or some such name): a novel (and/or other lengths) - regardless of how it was marketed - that is accessible to younger readers and will entice them into the genre. Plenty of us read "YA" works as adults and I'd venture to guess that plenty of our younger selves read "adult" works when we weren't adults. An artificial age line ought not stand in the way of recognizing works that will draw new readers (and I mean that in both senses) into the fold.

steve davidson

And to me, that's the best argument. Is it enough to over-come the potential difficulties... well, we'll see.

And now... Warren Buff on issue 355!

Chris,

I'm going to have to disagree with you on the matter of Mary Robinette Kowal's novelette. Audio presentations of fiction are publications of that fiction. The industry believes this. Other awards deal with it without issue (so long as the presentation is widely-available, at least enough to make it publication rather than private distribution).

I believe what people are missing is the distinction between the audiobook and the story it contains. If we had a category for Best Book, allowing all manner of books to enter (novels, anthologies, comics, art collections, non-fiction), and judged not just the textual content but the presentation as a whole (binding, typography, cover art, tec.), would that make ineligible any work of fiction published in book form? Of course not! The story would be eligible as a story, and the book containing it as a book!

So I see it with audiobooks: the work of fiction is published by being recited, recorded, and made available to the public. The story is a distinct thing from the audiobook which contains it. The audiobook is a dramatic presentation, and as such is eligible in BDP, while the story it contains is a work of fiction, eligible in the appropriate category for its word count.

Presentation *is* publication!

(There were lots of other good articles I had strong opinions about -- maybe you'll see an article or two on such subjects soon.)

-Warren

This does bring up a very good point. There is the not-quite explicit concept that nothing should be eligible in two categories (or is it explicit? I haven't done a check in a long time, but I don't remember finding it clearly spelled-out). Oddly, the Best Book/Best Novel argument you put forward maps very well to the Record of the Year / Song of the Year distinction for the Grammys. The problem is they're both given for a single song, one to the artist, the other only to the composer. To me, that's an utter and complete sham of an award and are indicative of why there is so little gleam to the Grammys (that and having so many categories). Maybe it's just me, but I completely interact differently when hearing a story told to me and when reading a story. And, of course, we need to make far clearer distinctions so voters can understand what is what.

and now... TARAL WAYNE!!!!

Loc to The Drink Tank 355, 21 Sept 2013

I had had the vague idea of loccing the issue before last. Something about the fan Hugos. However, number 355 followed right on its heels and I lost the chance. Fortunately, the subject is continued in the recent issue, so I'll just write the letter I had intended all along.

But first, I have to admit that I substantially agree with everything David B. Williams said in issue 355. And

I'm in reasonably close agreement with Aurora Celeste. But while I agree in the main, I have a different take on the details.

A bit of background might throw a little light on the subject of the Fan Hugos. The first fan Hugo was created for Best Fanzine in 1955. The next two, Best Fanartist and Best Fanwriter, were not created until 1967! And no more were created until Best Fancast in 2012 ... 45 years later! Meanwhile, the number of professional and semi-professional categories has proliferated like hamsters. The award committees had not kept up with changes in fandom and the need for new fan categories, and deserve lot of the blame for the current struggle to determine who will control the too-small-number of fan Hugos.

For instance, there is this year's motion by Kronengold and Padol to expand the Fanartist category to include other artistic activities. If the motion is ratified, then fanzine illustrators will be compete in future with metal-working, model making, glass etching, leather work, costume design and possibly so-called "body art." "I Love REH" with a rocket stabbing a heart – why not? Oh ... and let's not forget that the motion specifically mentions making jewelry.

I mention jewelry-making because this is the second year that Spring Schoenhuth, a convention jeweler has appeared on the Hugo ballot. Now, I don't know the lady. I probably ambled in front of her table at the Reno Worldcon, perhaps also at the Montreal Worldcon. I don't question that she loves her mother, is kind to kittens and makes wonderful jewelry. Nor am I suggesting that Spring is behind the motion to officially recognize her art as fanart.

Nor do I want to waste time on the craft vs. art argument. Trying to draw some distinction such as "art" has intrinsic meaning while "craft" has practical application will fail on any number of exceptions. In the past, the argument has actually been about class distinctions – art is for rich, cultured people; crafts are for poor, naive people who prefer a nice chair or quilt to a Rembrandt. Let's empty our heads of that notion right now.

The difference that matters is in that small, three letter word "fan." Whenever Brad Foster or Steve Stiles allow their work to be published, it is a gift to the fanzine editor. The artist is paid nothing for his time and effort except a copy of the zine the art appears in. With today's digital fanzines, the artist doesn't even get that much. When was the last time Spring Schoenhuth gave away jewelry? Or at least lend it on a regular basis to people to wear at cons? So far as I know, if you want to wear the bling it takes cash. There is nothing wrong with this. But it is a business – like writing novels for Tor – and not fan activity. So how is Spring Schoenhuth a fanartist?

The case doesn't seem to be like Greg Benford's or David Langford's, where professional writers clearly write for the non-profit fan press as well.

Spring Schoenhuth is a professional artist and fanac is no part of her business.

I have to guess at the contortions of logic that make her a fanartist, but I imagine the chain of thought goes like this: Ms. Schoenhuth is a fan. She is also an artist. Therefore Ms. Schoenhuth is a fanartist. The logic is similar to that well known adage, Chris Garcia is a fan. All fans sooner or later die. Therefore Chris Garcia is dead.

But the Hugo committees for both the last two Worldcons permitted Ms. Schoenhuth's name on the ballot. They had the power to declare her inappropriate, but did not. Why? Aren't Hugo committees required to read the rules they are trusted to enforce? More likely, they agree that Chris Garcia is dead. It may also be that they subscribe to the mistaken idea that vox populi must have the final say ... and that, if the voters wish to nominate a coal scuttle full of potatoes or a moose on a trampoline as best novel, they may. But I'd love to hear John Scalzi howl on the day it happens.

The fact, is no reasonable person can deny that new categories for emerging forms of fanac like podcasts and blogging are necessary. The mistake over the last 20 years has been that we haven't expanded the fan Hugo categories to keep up. Various arguments have been given to explain this away. One is that the awards cost money. But really ... considering how many have to be made each year, the cost of another two or three cannot be the real reason. More likely the reason was that they were only "fan" Hugos after all, not real ones that matter to most of the Worldcon's members. Unless they are forced to by changes in the constitution, it's unlikely any Worldcon committee will create awards they don't care about.

Best Fancast took care of one problem, at least ... but not until it became such a problem that a podcast actually won a Best Fanzine award. Unfortunately, blogging is still considered a form of fanwriting and eligible in

that category.

Even worse, we now face the possible necessity of shoehorning several completely unrelated kinds of fanac into the single category of Best Fanartist because certain people want what they perceive is their slice of the pie. Those slices will be pretty thin if the Kronengold and Padol motion is ratified, and I predict nobody will be satisfied. It would have made far more sense to create a new “fanart” category for sculpting, crafts and model making.

How about another category for costume making? To avoid a conflict with the costume show, it should carefully distinguish between making costumes and making a presentation in them on stage. That would add two entire new Hugos in the fan categories. Three, if you count Best Fancast from a couple of years ago. Is creating three fan Hugos in 45 years too much to ask?

Spring does show pieces in Convention Art shows as well, which is what she's nominated for. By this same token, if a Fan Artist who showed in con art shows sold pieces, or took commissions, as well as providing free art places, they would be ineligible? This does seem a bit murky, I think. The Semi-Prozine problem is that Semi-Prozine material is, I believe, completely eligible for Best Fan Artist consideration. I could be wrong about that, but that's the way I read it, and in that case, you could have Pro Artists eligible for doing Pro work in a Fan Category, but again, it's kinda murky. I do believe that we're two to three Fan Hugos down from where we should be. One for Best Blog, Best Fannish Presentation, perhaps something for costumes and/or music. I really think we've fallen down on the job when it comes to the Fan Hugos!

Thanks, Tara!



And now, here is Kevin Standlee!

The people complaining that the Fan Hugos are going to the Wrong People and simultaneously complaining that it costs too much to vote and that there should be cheap voting prices so that they personally can/will vote are writing themselves into a corner. If you made the cost to vote \$5, I doubt this would mean that the Right People (by their definition of "Right") would start winning. And continuing to monkey around with the rules to figure out a way to restrict the franchise to just those five or ten people who think Just Like Them is foolish.

You're right there. 5 Bucks would be nice (and they're exactly the people I'd like to see voting), but it would also lower the bar too much and make nomination-buying much too easy. 25 bucks, in my gut, is the point where you're getting the benefit of new voters for whom the price can be daunting (primarily younger voters and folks like me) and still preventing too much nomination buying.

Anyway, people who talk about the cost to vote for the Hugos are missing the point. It doesn't cost anything to "vote for the Hugos." What costs is your membership dues to the World Science Fiction Society. The Hugo Awards aren't some separate entity that attaches itself to Worldcon like a lamprey. The Hugos are awards presented by the World Science Fiction Society. Every member of WSFS can vote on them. To vote on them, you have to pay your membership dues to the World Science Fiction Society to be a member of the club. It's a large club, with thousands of members, but it's a club. Lots of clubs have membership dues. WSFS has dues that (starting next year) are around \$40. For additional money, you can also attend the club's annual big conference. But you can't separate the Hugos from WSFS. I have a lot more respect for the people who are convinced that they should create a Brand New Award for Real Fans to choose. I expect that at most they'll end up recreating WSFS from first principles and at worst they'll simply disappear because they completely underestimate how difficult the task is, but I respect them far more than I do those people who say, "Hey, Hugo, gimme your awards you've spent 60 years building and start doing them my way because I say so."

You've got a point (and I think you're talking about the recent post where the folks were talking about starting an awards to be given away at a large Media con, though I am completely blank on who that was), but let us remember this: if we are all members of WSFS, then we all have the right to whine when our views aren't represented. If you were to ask me if the Hugos are broken, I'd say no, but they are a bit rusty, maybe. They could use a bit of oil and a pass with a ShamWow! The one thing I think we all miss is that the two major aspects of WSFS membership when you aren't going to the WorldCon are Voting in the Hugos and Voting in Site Selection, with The Hugos being the one with the much greater visibility. Let us think of other clubs that give awards - The Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Science or The National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, for example. They give awards and they are much tighter in every aspect than we are. Though, admittedly, both have many other membership benefits.

By the way, note that the cost to join WSFS as a voting member is going down next year. Despite those people who assume that high membership costs are a plot of SMOFS to keep Real Fans (i.e. "people who think just like me") out, WSFS voted to change certain structural issues with its membership pricing to allow the price of a WSFS voting membership to go down by one-third, starting in 2014. Ironically, I've read people (not folks I'd generally consider SMOFS) who fret that \$40 is much too low to keep out the "undesireables," although since an "undesireable" is basically "anyone who doesn't think exactly like me," I don't know how they expect mere membership dues to accomplish the gatekeeping function they so much desire to impose.

OK, I've got to ask: is the O in SMOFS capitalized? On one hand, I really don't understand the Undesireables point. I'm not particularly concerned with who would buy less expensive memberships, I'm more concerned that we manage them properly, have a strong framework so that the categories are obvious and easy to define, something which is clear in some areas (Our Fiction categories, for the most part) and not in others (Best Fanzine, apparently)

Chris, I know you want Strong Hugo Administrators. What do you do when the Strong Administrator doesn't do what you want them to do? Look at your complaint about Mary Robinette Kowal's disqualification in Novelette? That one is at least defensible by precedent, and it was done on technical grounds (wrong format), and yet it infuriates those people who say Do What the Voters Say. Your Strong Administrator would end up making a

whole bunch more infuriating decisions every year, and ignoring the voters at every turn. As long as we're going to have an award where the members of WSFS get to pick the winners, mostly bowing the voters' will must stay a key cornerstone of the process. The way you get the Right People (by your lights) is to convince people who think like you to vote, simple as that.

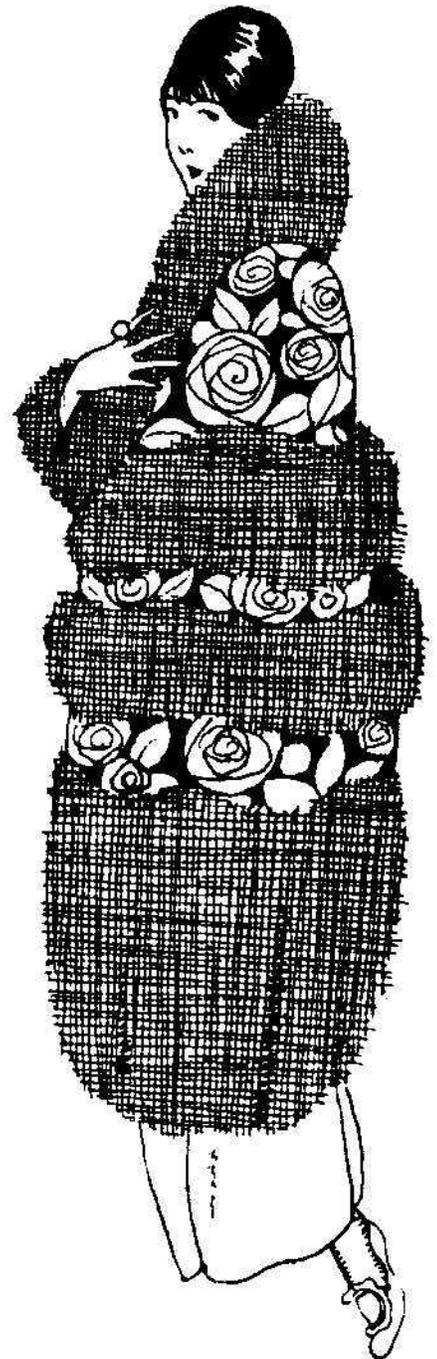
I think you misread my piece (or I miswrote, which has happened) because I think I said that I agreed with the Administrators (though I think they should have informed Mary that they were doing so, which didn't happen) and that it did point to the big problem of not having firm enough definitions. In fact, I did say I was with the Administrators, so I wasn't complaining about her not getting on the ballot (though it's a great story and I'll be nomming it next year). I HATE Vox Popli as a guiding principal, as you are well aware, and typically when I'm bothered by the Administrators, it's by their inaction instead of their actions. There are no other awards of the level of the Hugos (I'm talking Oscars, Tonys, Emmys, Grammys, National Book Awards and that sorta thing) that have it as their guiding principal. They all have the same concept - strict rules first, then let folks vote on things within that framework. You may note at no point do I say we only need The Right People voting, I'd like to see us increase who does the voting, and I'd like to see more young voters especially, but no matter what, Administrators need to manage that like they do in other awards. What happens when they rule the way I don't like? I whine and complain then move on, unless I feel that if it's big enough in my eyes that I start to disregard the Hugos as a valid award. That would take an exceptionally big boobo, though, and we've never come close to that level. Something like a disqualification without an explanation of any sort. That's a point that should be made: a perfectly reasonable personal response to continued dissatisfaction with the results/process/rulings/etc is to discount the Hugos all together. When that strikes a large enough swatch of folks, then you have the problem of 'why do we continue to exist?'. Yes, there are times that Administrators rulings could lead to that, and the opposite is also possible. The key is strong definitions, as I'm always saying, and that's where we're weak.

Finally, regarding Business Meetings: you and others called them dead-ly dull. Well, I didn't think they were dull. This year's meeting had me on edge the entire time, and I was completely exhausted when it was finished. Direct democracy is a hugely messy business. The way you avoid the "boring" business meeting would be to replace it with some sort of WSFS Board of Governors where the mere members of the organization had minimal input. Milt Stevens suggested that the past 11 Worldcons appoint Governors, and that they make all of the decisions. That would certainly remove the confusion and replace it with a group of actual SMOFS making the decisions that mere mortal members were incompetent to make, wouldn't it?

I have to say that would put us more in line with many organizations (things like the AMA, AHA, AMIA, IBC, and the like) though almost all of them have some form of Popular Ratification (which I know we both think is a good idea!) that does actual voting. I think that's a good methodology as it gets those who are closest to the problems and matters to set an agenda that the membership decides on. Direct Democracy is a messy business, and that's why it is so seldom applied successfully!

Kevin Standlee

Thanks, Kevin!



The One True Fandom

by Christopher Hensley

Fandom has always been composed of two kinds of fans: One True Fans™ and Fake Infidel Fans. Between the two there is always an uncrossable line. There is never an agreement about where the line is but woe unto those who challenge the self-evident fact that there is a line, forever dividing the plebian mundanes from the Fannish Patriarchs. The One True Fan™, or “us”, side always includes the person speaking. The Fake Infidel Fan, or “them”, side always includes some other person who makes the speaker uncomfortable. There is documentary evidence of this tradition going back at least as far as that first Worldcon. I'll let you in on a secret if you promise not to tell. The line drawn in 1939 was bullshit. The line drawn in 2013 is bullshit. There is no them. There is only us.

The way we formulate the divide usually takes the form “X fans are not real fans. Y fans are real fans”. Membership in either group X or group Y is always arbitrary. Always. The most (in)famous example is “Literary Fans” versus “Fans of every other medium”. When I was a younger fan and hadn't yet been told I could only like one thing for the rest of my life I used to get my science fiction on however I could. I'd read yellowed copies of Asimov's robot stories. I'd watch science fiction movies (good ones, bad ones, didn't matter). I'd play games. My friends and I used to play “Giant Lizards and Deep Dark Holes” and use “polyhedral random number generators” since both Dungeons & Dragons and dice were forbidden by our high school. This might surprise you but we even watched badly battered bootlegs of anime and raided the comic shops for cheap back issues. We were living on the edge. I don't game as much as used to, I have become more discriminating in the movies I watch, and I've picked up a bad habit of writing for fanzines but I am still involved in science fiction in many different media. That's not to say that all fans are involved in every form of science fiction, or to deny that some fans do identify themselves as “comics fans” or “movie fans” or “literary fans” but to say that we all fit in those neat little camps does not logically follow, because the membership is not mutually exclusive.

Then there is the line dividing “trufen” and “nufen”. Indulging in some smart assery I'll mention that everybody who draws a line dividing trufen from nufen pick the same point in time to draw the division: the point they started being involved in fandom. I picked this example not to be a smart ass, but to illustrate a point. Yes, I do indeed have one of those. What makes us all fans in the first place, what we are really passionate about, is experiencing science fiction. These dividing lines are always drawn to include certain experiences and exclude others. When we do that we are saying that one set of science fiction experiences is valid, and the other set of science fiction experiences is not. All of the science fiction experiences are necessarily valid, because all experiences are valid. All of fandom is a science fiction experience.

The times they are a-changin'. It was true when Dylan recorded it in 1963. It is true today in 2013. The times are always changin'. A good accountant can beat the tax man, scientists are trying to defeat Death but change is constant. The experience of fans who came before me are different from the experiences I have had as a fan. Since our experiences build on each other my continued fannish experiences, while shared with, will be different from those of older fans. Those fans yet to come will also have shared, but distinct, experiences. If the only valid fannish experiences belong to a select few, then fandom will die with them. We must not let fandom die! We spread fandom by helping shape our shared experiences with other fans, and by spreading our own unique experiences as best we can. Fandom is a community with its own unique culture. All culture is that experience that we share, and that limited version of experience we hand down. We must hand it down from 1939, and 1963, and 2013. We are not gate keepers of fandom. We are caretakers of fandom. It is on us to hand it down to those who come, who will hand it down after we are gone from this universe. The future of fandom is in our hands. We want to bring new fans into this experience we all share, but every time we draw an imaginary line we push them away. Only by recognizing the changing experiences, the changing fandom, can we preserve tradition. So it comes around again to Dylan. We must heed the call. We mustn't criticize what we can't understand. Our old road is not aging, it is gone and will never be again. Now is the time to get out of the new one if we can't lend a hand. The times they are-a changin'.



D.A. Pennebaker's Heroes of Cosplay by Christopher J Garcia

FADE IN:

The scene reveals a stage full of Masquerade contestants, and announcements of winners and losers, though the audio is lowered so the names are undetectable as theme music plays.

TITLE - Heroes of Cosplay - San Diego Comic-Con

The audio rises and we hear the announcer speak:

Announcer

And the winner is...

CUT TO: MONTAGE

We see a young man in his bedroom. The room is full of Batman memorabilia. He is sewing a Robin costume. We hear him speaking of his love of Batman and especially Robin. As he explains his love for the characters, we see him sewing his costume, going to school, reading comics, watching DVDs. Eventually, we see him on the floor of Comic-Con, wandering around and taking pictures of people.

CUT TO:

His Masquerade entry. They show him in his homemade costume, doing some karate moves to the 1966 Batman theme. We hear the crowd responding to him, and we follow him off the stage, he stops, panting from his performance, and says to the camera, "that was fun!"

I won't do the rest of it, but in my head, it's perfectly clear. It's not a story of giant personalities competing and sniping at one another and looking professional and impressive. It's a series of small documentaries about the people who Cosplay at conventions. It's not about drama, it's not even about the costume contests, it's about the people who love comics, anime, SciFi, whatnot, and want to do the costumes. It wouldn't be a competition, because the last shot of each episode would be the same - back to that shot of everyone on stage and the announcer saying "and the Best in Show is..." and then cutting to black.

Because it doesn't matter who won. It matters that they did it, that they love what they love, and that they're in the contest. Now, convincing a network executive that this is the way to go ain't easy, but it's so much more real, and so much more human, than anything on the recent Heroes of Cosplay series.

And that's what started me thinking.

I watched the season 1 finale, from Planet ComiCon in Kansas City. In it, there was so much attention paid to the minor bumps along the path to the Masq, and then a major focus on the minor rivalry between one of the sets of Heroes (who were Team LA who did a very cool looking set-up from How to Train Your Dragon) and a local Femme Doctor Who group who were awesome. They focused on how the Who crew had some harsh words for the Heroes people who came to their con and messed with things. Frankly, I'd be pissed, too, though they probably over-reacted. In fact, on one of the Who's blog, she said as much.

And then there was Yaya.

You see, Yaya is, legitimately, just about the most famous Cosplayer there is. She's everywhere and makes a good living at it. I met her years ago at one convention or another. She agreed to do some photos, and a couple of years ago we shot some footage. She was very sweet, and generous with her time. Sadly, in the show, they chose to change her, or maybe in the time between when I last saw her (2009?) and now she'd changed, but she was much, I dunno, colder. At one point, when worrying that they might not win the contest, she says she was worried that she might tarnish her brand.

Her BRAND!

To me, Cosplay ain't something that is supposed to be commercialized, and at no time should any participant be concerned about their BRAND! I understand, I get it, to Yaya it's about her living, in other words, money. I get that, and I don't like it, but I understand. I'd have loved to have heard about how she made her costume in that Finale episode (she was the Red Queen from America McGee's Alice), and about what she enjoyed about the game, about how she connected with it. In the episode, she didn't seem to care at all about the character she was playing; it was all about how she could make an impact on the audience and expand her fame.

And that may not be the fact at all; she might be one of the top Alice players in the world, but we never got that. Instead, we got drama as to whether or not they'd make it with one of their team ill, and then she complained about the work that the judges did. She came off as a bit of a Diva, which is something I've heard about this entire series, and I don't think that's really her. I understand that there is the other side, that sometimes a costume is a costume, and there's no connection between the creator/wearer and the representation; it's just a challenge, and I can understand that (and Aurora explains that whole point beautifully in the next article) but there is something more there as well. You've decided to be a part of a culture, to place your creations in the context of fandom. To me, that's important, because you're still there as a part of a community and not as an advertisement for something more. It's when Cosplaying becomes Commercializing that I object.

And I really hope that's not what Cosplay is about. I hope that Cosplay is about that kid who might not have any sewing skills, but who loves Batman. I want it to be about Team LA making amazing costumes and showing them and doing the best possible performance in costumes from series and such they love. I want it to be about the people who do amazing costumes to challenge themselves and create something beautiful and fun. I want it to be about costumes. Hell, I even want it to be about those who can't seem to put together a decent presentation, as well as those whose costumes might not be polished, but have a real love and passion for the thing they're presenting. To me, that's EXACTLY what I hope Cosplay is all about. That's not what Heroes of Cosplay was about. They turned it in a series about Yaya and how every Cosplayer should be trying to be the next Yaya.

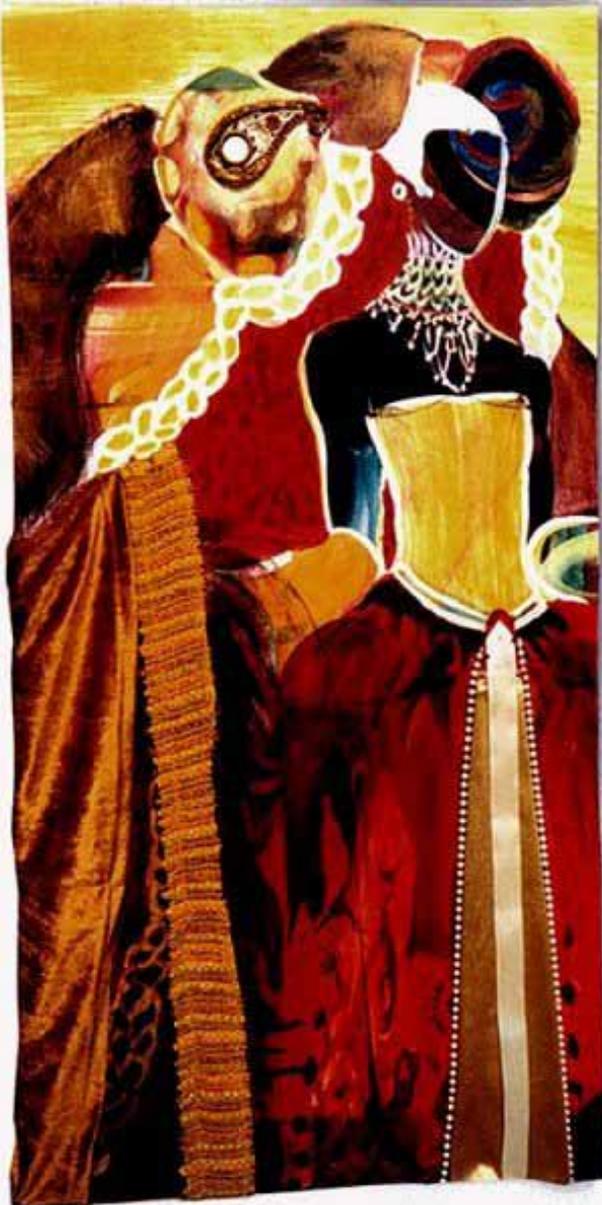
And that's exactly what I hope Cosplay is not about.

Pressure

by Aurora Celeste

I've been thinking a lot lately about just how inadequate I feel as a geek girl. There are days when I feel that I don't really fit in anywhere anymore. My interests are just too divergent. I only play Warcraft and a few select games, so I don't really fit in with "gamer" culture. I don't read comics, although I talk to my husband about his favorites a lot so I have second-hand knowledge. I haven't found an anime worth watching in what feels like years. I try to keep up with tv, but there are so many shows on now that it's hard to know where to begin, and forget catching up on stuff that's been around because even with things like Netflix and Hulu things are region coded and segregated by contracts and confusing things. I do read a lot of books, but since my preference is for YA I feel pushed out of Lit discussions because no one knows the books I know and I don't know the books they do. Fandom nowadays seems so segmented and obsessive in their own little bubbles, and I often feel like I'm on the outside looking in at all of them. And I just don't have the time to immerse myself in one even if I wanted to. There's just way too much out there, and I feel ashamed for not knowing it all or for picking one area above another.

So this is where I confess a secret . . . us costumers, we're COSTUMERS. Sometimes we don't always know the source material of what we're wearing. Sometimes it's just a really awesome design, and the geeking out came



in figuring out how to make something defy gravity or look awesome. Other times we've found a great costume and it led us into a fandom, but only on the surface. And sometimes it leads us to great loves and things we'd never have found if they didn't look awesome.

All of this leads to making me feel like I'm an inadequate costumer, too. I can do costumes, but I'll never be one of those people that immerses myself in characters or minutiae of character/plot details. That means I feel like a fraud whenever people start talking to me about what I'm wearing because I don't remember "that time in season 2 episode 7 . . ." People who costume for the craft and the technical challenge are "fake geek girls" because they aren't *true* fans of whatever they're wearing when they don't pass some litmus test. I'm ALWAYS afraid of the litmus test. Usually it's not even on purpose. People love to geek out over things, so when they see a character they love they want to delve deep into the fandom. I don't blame them for that. But that doesn't make it feel any less like I've failed a pop quiz.

So "fan culture" and I have come to a tenuous agreement. I'm gonna stop obsessing so much over not being able to do ALL THE THINGS and let go of some of my insecurity and "fan culture" is gonna agree that I can costume what I want even if it means I don't know the minutiae of the show or comic or book or game or what have you. I think that's really the best compromise we can come up with, since everyone still gets to love what they are doing and enjoy fandom to the fullest. Really, isn't that all any fan wants for another fan?

[Note: For more interesting Cosplay reading, check out <http://mcgrewstudios.com/pilgrims-and-partiers-removing-the-sting-of-class-differences-between-comic-con-cosplayers/#.UkNYTZWN5FI>]