

The Drink Tank Issue 85



Issue eighty-five

I've always had that island fantasy. I love the island of isolation from the rest of the world, when you'd finally have all the time in the world to do those things that you've always wanted to do. Of course, if I had a full complement of books and music and DVDs and some miraculous source of power, then I'd be happy.

A fair portion of this issue will be dedicated to islands and all the wonderful and awful things that they represent. There will be no Desert Island picks, but there's an article that will talk about the best movies and TV shows about islands.

So enjoy the issue with my friends M and Judith writing articles that should be very interesting

Why An Island?

by
M Lloyd

What is it about islands? All of the most beautiful places on Earth are islands. Tahiti, The Bahamas, Iceland (and seriously, it is beautiful) and Hawaii. I've spent time island-hopping in Greece and done a little of it around Sweden and Finland. I love these islands, and many more that I've spent time on, but I have to wonder why they always seem to hold me so tightly. Jay might have hit the nail on the head the



other day when he said I had a thing for water.

When I was younger, I used to go to various places on Cape Cod and to some of the small islands off of the Northern Peninsula of Michigan. I learned to swim when I was less than a year old, so I was always being taken places where I could swim and Mom and Dad could spend some time in the sun. I can remember sitting on some beach (it might have been Ibiza) and looking out at the water and thinking that I could swim anywhere if I just had a good night's sleep and a little backpack with some snacks.

About a month and a half ago, I was in Denmark. I hadn't been there in years and I enjoyed myself on the beach for an afternoon. Looking out over the water, I realised that I could live in Denmark as long as I was near the water.

Helsinki, while lovely and near enough to good water that it's easy on me, still isn't Iceland, where I spent a wonderful week at a mud-spa and met many wonderful people who were more than happy to play cards and talk shop, even if I had no idea what their shop might be.

Now that I think about it, maybe that's another reason that islands are so wonderful. The people on islands have had to adapt to the fact that they're stuck on the island with a finite number of people. Far fewer places to disappear on an island, so they tend to be nice. Many of the islands I've been to have understood that they have to make the tourists feel welcome, but even with that, they still treat everyone right. Maybe it's that isolation (and really, even an island like Cuba has a certain isolated feel to it) that makes people nicer, more real, more colorful.

Here's what I know: when I have the kids that are currently trying to claw out of my belly, I'm takin' 'em to every island I can think of, just to see if it's genetic.

***this rather emo story
was submitted ages ago
and I'm just getting to
it. Sorry Judith!***

My Island by **Judith Morel**

There've been times I've wanted to do it; just pick up everything, convert all my stuff into money and get myself an island. I've got enough money to do it if I manage to hit a strong auction market. I only once looked into it seriously and I found a place off the coast of Maine that was more than four miles off-shore and more than two square miles with heavy trees and the highest point being a plateau more than one hundred and fifty feet above water level. The whole set-up was less than three million. Why would I consider it? Because I've spent so much of my life having to figure out ways to avoid one thing or another.

Putting a body of water all around you is a good way to keep out



all of the issues you've had. When I was a teenager, I had a minor issue with men. You see, I liked to have sex with them, often with many in a short period of time. At one point, I was juggling five men that I'd regularly entertain. An island would keep the men at bay, except for the brave and virile men who'd make the swim. How could I possibly deny them?

When SaBean and I started fighting during the 1980s, I wanted isolation because everywhere I went it seemed that SaBean would pop-up. I wanted to go to an island, make myself

scarce. If that sounds like an over-reaction, think about this: between 1989 and 1992, SaBean and I got into a half-dozen fist fights. I once pushed her off our porch so that she fell into a mud puddle. She once tackled me and sent me sprawling into a stand full of dresses in the Mall. The two of us had scars, both physical and mental, that would have been easily avoided if I had my own island.

Later in life, every break-up would lead me to staying in my apartment, acting as if I had no

possible way out. I'd put myself in seclusion and just imagine if I had that island in the stream where I could go and keep all others away.

When I think of all the difficulties I've had to face head on, I realise that I'd be so much better off if I had a locale where I was master and the only thing I had to lord over was the land itself.

After that, there'd only be one thing I'd have to worry about: if being four miles off the coast of Maine was far enough away from the world to keep the bastards at bay.

Art Credits: Our cover was done by Kerry Roper. I love the touch of Abstract Expressionism in it mixed with the obvious Pop Art influence. It reminds me of a lot of the earliest Rauschenberg works. Page 2 features Pablo (aka dubpulse) and his piece called Island. Line Island Drawing (that one up there) is from an artist name of Ryan Ford. wb_skinner gives us the blue island photo on page four. John Allen, a fine artist, did the piece called Female Line on page 5. Page 6 is all about Queen Heart by the artist Queen_Heart. Funny that. You'll find Landscape by Stone_Flaura on page 7. Sadly, I lost the info from the folks who did the art on page eight. They were kind enough to send it to me, but I don't have the info. I know the Pennyfarthing at the end is from the Prisoner Series. Someone Lost a Heart is by bionic7.

The Girl On Her Island

by
Kath Swan

Sweetness. That's what I called her. Her real name was Fasia, a half-Persian girl with eyes like some exotic stone. I lived in the same building with her after my first divorce and she would bring over strong coffee and sit and we'd talk about things for hours. That's why I always called her Sweetness. When I met her, I had a very young daughter and a lot of spare time. I would spend days and days at home, sometimes laying on the couch until the Kid would cry and I'd get up, take care of that and lay back down. Fasia would knock on the door and even before I reached it, I'd smell the coffee. It was strong and when I'd let her in, we'd sit and talk about everything, we'd laugh, we might turn on the TV and make fun of whatever was on.

Sadly, Sweetness wasn't sharing her own happiness; she was making up for her own lack of happiness.

She'd laugh and smile and eventually she'd leave. Once in a while we'd fall asleep on the couch after having laughed our way through Saturday Night Live. She'd go home and there she'd sink back into what she normally lived: a life too quiet. She had a job that involved forwarding mail sent to various small companies of no reputation. She'd get a huge bag of mail and



then she'd make sure all the checks were removed and forwarded to the right people. She used to represent some of the early video porn houses and she'd get cheques for orders of thousands of dollars. She used to laugh that whenever she would see an envelope from a Reverend, they were getting porn tapes.

But she did all this alone. She didn't even have to call people, she just forwarded the mail, went to the post office every day and dropped off a few

packages. That was her human contact aside from me.

Fasia once told me that she had lived in Detroit for years, that her family had owned a restaurant that served the best kufte and kabob in the US. I asked her why she didn't go back more often and she mumbled something. Here was a woman who could say every line of Hamlet with marbles in her mouth and make every syllable distinct, and when I mention her family, she mumbles.

One afternoon during the hottest summer I'd ever have the displeasure of experiencing, I went down to the Super's office to get a loaner fan. He was an old guy, probably about sixty-five, and he shuffled when he walked.

"You know that Fusia woman who lives down the hall from you?" He asked.

"Yes I do." I said, sweating too much to make more conversation.

"Strange woman. Locked herself in her apartment. Hasn't come out for days." He said.

I wondered why that was, realising that she hadn't come over in about a week. I wondered how she was taking her mail to the post office. Later that day, I discovered that she had FedEx stopping by to pick-up her things. I wanted to go by and knock on her door, but I know that even if I had, she'd either not have answered (I certainly wouldn't have on my couch days)

or she'd be uninterested in talking. I waited another week before I made a bold step.

I called her.

Fasia's phone number was so easy to remember, alternating 7s and 9s, that I had seen her dial it once and never forgot it. I picked up the phone and it rang five times.

"hello." she said. She sounded small and tired, far different from the girl who had stayed up late with me, laughing so hard she woke The Kid up.

"Safia, it's Kath." I was concerned but tried to play it off. "I was hoping you might want to go come over and have dinner with me tonight."

She didn't say anything for a long time.

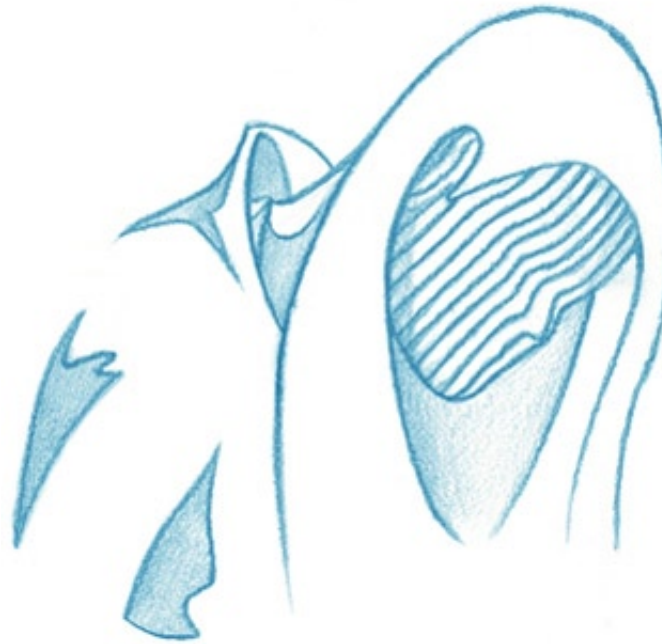
"OK." she said and hung up.

I had to run to the store and get groceries, and by the time I got back, Fasia was sitting beside my front door, her knees pulled up to her chin.

"hi." she said, hardly louder than the silence that she interrupted.

I put the groceries down and gave her my hand. She took after a moment and I helped her to her feet. I gathered the groceries and we walked in.

She was a wreck. She seemed to be clean and didn't smell like many of us do after spending long periods moping in the house. She took a seat on the couch and I went in to look after The Kid who was sleeping like she had



spent all afternoon crying like a banshee, which she had. I fixed up some bangers and mash, set the plate in front of her and we sat down and ate.

"I was wondering why you hadn't come around lately." I said.

She didn't respond, just kept eating as if she hadn't tucked in for ages. She did look thinner.

After another ten minutes or so, and two more servings for Fasia, I tried again.

"The Super said you'd been in your apartment for three weeks. That true?" I probed.

"Yes." she said, after a long pause. "I've had to think. Think and cry because of my thinking."

I knew where that was coming

from.

"Anything you wanna talk about?" I asked.

She told me. All of it. I had to get up and take care of Christa a couple of times, but she stayed there, crying and then saying the rest of it. She'd had a rough childhood, but the worst of it was the fact that she'd acquired a case of poor little rich girl. She worked because it gave her something to do and still allowed her to mope around the house when the whole thing got to her again. She spent nearly a year never leaving her old apartment. She'd even had a girl she would visit and make coffee for, but she moved after she had her year of seclusion.

Her father had died several years before, leaving her a fair sum. Her mother had ignored her, angry that she had left home and not come into the family business despite a talent for cooking she would share with me over time. By midnight, she was laughing telling me the hell she had been through before she left Detroit. I broke out a bottle of Irish Creme and she ran to her apartment and made coffee for us. We drank until four when we fell asleep on the couch.

After we woke up, she was in a good mood (unlike the Kid). The Little Brat played with the kitchen set her Dad gave her that Christmas and Fasia made breakfast.

"You had the choice of anywhere

on Earth, anyplace you wanted to be, you could be anywhere you wanted. Where'd you go?" I asked.

"You ever been to Catalina Island?" she said.

"My Dad takes us there every year or so."

"You know the other Channel Islands?"

"Of course."

"I'd go to one of those, set up a little house, start a garden and just stay there on my own."

We lived on the same floor for the next three years and she only fell into the depression really bad one more time. She moved after the service she was providing started to get too expensive. She sent me a card from Florida.

California was too expensive. Found a little place, an island in the middle of a swamp. It's Heaven.

Can't fault a girl for gettin' her own.

The Island of The Smokers

by
SaBean MoreL

Well, Mr. Garcia, you've finally done it. Not you in particular, but the you that you represent: those evil, cruel-hearted conservative bastards! Smoking is banned from bars, it's banned from clubs, even a lot of Casinos, Indian Casinos where one could stab an endangered tiger if one wanted to, have said that you can't light up.



It's YOU, Mr. Christopher Garcia, that did this to all the smokers.

What I'm saying we all need to do is leave the United States of America, from a new country on some island with the right climate to grow tobacco (And no, Mr. Garcia, it will not be us over-throwing Cuba like you'd want us to!) and we'd pass laws saying that smoking was legal in bars, in homes, at boxing matches and even on the sidewalk. We'd make it illegal to sue tobacco companies for your illness even though it's printed right there on the package: smoking will give you cancer. We'd make sure that cigarettes and cigars were sold for fair prices and that they'd be of higher quality. We'd make it legal to grow your own and smoke that, if you like, without government hassle.

Yes, Mr. Garcia! We'd do all of that when we form the United States of Smokers!

Rebuttal

Do not pin this one on me, sister! It was the Al Gore Democrats that passed the law in California and started the movement around the country. Some of the most powerful debate against it was by Republican Senators.

I, for example, was annoyed no end by the ruling because I was a regular cigar smoker and my favourite breakfast place, Bob's Surf & Turf, had a bar area where they'd serve food so I could light up and smoke my Macanudo after a hefty meal. That was Heaven (even though I've given up cigars, mostly, I still remember those being incredible times).

Now, do I think that the health benefits of banning smoking in some areas are worth it? Yes. Offices, movie theatres, sports arenas, hospitals, etc, they should be smoke-free. If a restaurant is owned by all the folks who work there and they choose to make it a smoking restaurant, that should be allowed (which is the only exception to the bar rules made in California.

I'm totally for smokers getting some rights, but I do admit that the Goreians did an OK job.

See You On The Island: The Best (and Worst) TV Set on Islands

Christopher J. Garcia

There've been a lot of island TV and film done about islands. There's one on right now that has people scratching their heads. I've always enjoyed it as an idea because it seems so limiting, but usually gives you strong outcomes. Here are my picks for the best TV about Islands (with a little mocking of the worst)

Five- Gilligan's Island

Yes, it was stupid that they had a scientist on board and they somehow couldn't muster enough wood to patch up the boat. Yes, I understand that they would have been without power, but still, they could figure out a way to make coconut creme pie without a proper oven!

The appeal of the show was the whacky comedy mixed with the characters that were over the top. I also do not doubt the power of two factors: one of the greatest theme songs ever and the fact that two of the girls on the show were very easy on the eyes. Tine Louise was one of the most beautiful women I'd ever seen was I was young and watching the show.

While its watchability is almost nil nowadays, it's fun to see all the cliches they manage to pack into each episode. If you can think of a gag they did in vaudeville, they did it on Gilli-



gan's Island.

Four- Wings.

What! Wings? Are You serious, I hear you cry. Yes, I am.

The show that's been described as too bad to sit down and watch but not bad enough to turn off is set on Nantucket, that kooky little island off of Massachusetts. Almost the entire series took place in an airport on an island, which I believe may be the only series I can say that about.

The series was average in just about everything except casting. Time Daly and Steve Weber were great as the brothers who own the small airline. Crystal Bernard and Amy Yasbeck (oh how I love thee!) were both perfect in their roles, but it was the pair who would go on to future fame that most folks remember.

Thomas Hayden Church played Lowell, the dumb mechanic. He was so good at playing the part that it might have branded him for life with a brutal

typecast, but no, he broke out by leaving Wings and getting his own show, Ned & Stacey, and then doing movies including his brilliant turn in Sideways that should have won him an Oscar. Sadly, it did not.

The other guy was Tony Shaloub. He's been around forever, but folks really discovered him playing the abstract foreigner on Wings.

Three- Lost

What! How DARE you put Lost at number three. I'm just not as big a fan as I should be. I like what I've seen, but it's not a show that I've gotten sucked into.

Lost is Twin Peaks gone tropical, which is a good thing, and it's got a tangled mythology that makes my head spin, but it's also beautifully shot and well-paced and has hints of all the good things that story-telling should do. The cast is beautiful, especially that Evangeline Lilly girl, who is breathtaking.

The way they tell the story is what makes it really interesting. They have the issues on the island to deal with and then they go into flashbacks, which even though they take things off the island still manages to make them seem more isolated. Maybe it's the fact that people from the island keep popping up in each other's flashbacks.

I fear that Lost will continue the slow ratings slide that's been going on

over the last couple of months.

Two- Hawaii 5-0

There's no cop show that I have as much love for as H5-0. That's not true, because I loved *The Streets of San Francisco*, but there's no cop show that didn't feature Carl Malden that I enjoyed nearly as much.

Jack Lord was the man and everything that man did was cool. I can't place my finger on it, but even when shows like *Sledgehammer* came on, I'd always feel like people were biting specifically from *Hawaii 5-0* and Jack Lord in particular.

The weird thing is, other than *Wo Fat*, I can't think of a single bad guy on the show. While I can go on for days about the various villains on the various cop shows over the years, Danno and Steve McGarrett were the only ones who were really memorable to me.

The show ran from 1968 through 1980, an almost unheard of length of reign for a cop show. Most burn out after four or five years (and the two best of them, *Hill Street Blues* and *NYPD Blue* both managed longer but fell off considerably toward the end) but H5-0 was the rare one that could transition from the 1960s and last all the way through the 70s, a time of great TV change.

Number One- The Prisoner



If you asked me to name my ten favourite television programmes of all-time, I'd have no trouble at all listing them. 10- *Greg the Bunny*, 9- *Grey's Anatomy*, 8- *Parker Lewis Can't Loose*, 7- *Cupid*, 6- *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 5- *The State*, 4- *The Simpsons*, 3- *SportsNight*, 2- *Twin Peaks*, 1- *The Prisoner*. There's no argument in the fact that as terrible as some of the shows on that list may be, there's no question that *The Prisoner* is the greatest TV programme ever.

The Prisoner led to *Twin Peaks* and that led to *Lost*. It's one of those shows that messes with your head by mixing a reality and a fantasy and a science fiction set of themes in a single show.

The show has a single voice, which is so rare. The series was all about Patrick McGoohan. He is *The Prisoner* and every aspect of the show has his stank on it in a good way.

The show takes place in a mixed-

up island called *The Village* (and in the *Simpsons* parody it was called *The Island*) where McGoohan's character is number 6 in a world where they are all sorts of strange things including a weird hierarchy that gives people numbers.

Between the bizarre setting, the terrifying white balloons that bounce around and the general mood the show invokes, there's no way that you can watch *The Prisoner* and truly get it. And that's the point. Television is all too often cut and dry, but *The Prisoner* is a chow that leaves you with questions that are never really answered.

Yes...I've seen the last episode, but it only answers the real questions to people who are willing to go through the research and philosophy to force it to make sense. Still, it's an amazing, if ponderous, piece of work.



Personal Updates

by
Christopher J. Garcia

I wish I could say that everything among my little group of friends that has spread out across this great country of ours (now that M and Jay are back in the US and ready to have the babies) but there are issues now that we're all dealing with. My Dad, M's kids, SaBean being let go by the ballet (well, the entire company's combining with another small dance company actually), and worst of all...Judith's got a new man. That just stings. Ouch, baby. Yet another of the the Good Ones has gone to relationshipville.

The worst of it at the moment has to be Mike's sister Mary. She's sixteen and she ran off, and according to a note she left for her parents, she's gone to meet some guy from MySpace in Texas. That's a suckbomb right there. Kath and Mike are heading back to Austin to try and find her. Judith's been doing computer recon (and I know how to nav MySpace pretty well, but Judith practically mind-melds with the beast) and SaBean, now free from gig, has agreed to do some of the leg-work with Lexi's friends in Evanston.

I love MySpace, but there needs to be some sort of protection. Yes, it's idiot kids doing idiot kid stuff, but still, it's so much easier now. At least the guy she's going to see isn't 40.



The Brawl by SaBean MoreL

I've never written about the greatest fight that Judith and I ever had, but when I called her yesterday she mentioned it. I had totally forgotten about it.

The year was 1989. George the Elder was on the throne in the White House, Chris Garcia was a Freshman in High School, I had discovered that I could get my H for free for the right services and the Giants and As would meet in the World Series. It was also the last time my Dad was really healthy. For the first two-thirds of the year, Dad managed pretty good, even going for long hikes and doing a long snow-shoe trip around Tahoe. This was good news, but around the house,

there were issues.

You see, Judith was at the peak of her bitch powers, and I was at a similar (though completely justifiable) peak. The two of us would almost never talk, though if we ran into each other in the kitchen, there might be a strong word or two masked so Mom wouldn't stop whining at us.

It was a fine day in Summer, probably early July, right after we'd gotten back from Catalina. I was sitting in my room, watching TV. I had gone out the night before and had borrowed one of Judith's jackets. She had left a twenty in the pocket and I quickly grabbed it and turned it into a more spectacular kind of fun.

When I got home, I left the jacket in the kitchen and went up to sleep. I had just woken up and Judith was in my room with fire in her eyes. It was afternoon and I'm betting she had just returned from her last sexual conquest. Her hair was still mussed and she was spitting fire.

"Who the fuck said you could wear my jacket? And where's my twenty bucks?" Judith was foaming.

"Get the fuck out of my room!" I screamed at her.

Judith is a strong girl. When she wants to she can put a hurt on you. She when she bent down and grabbed me by my hair, She had me on my feet with one yank and she threw me against the far wall. If you've ever been

yanked from your bed, you know that you go into survival mode. I bounced off the wall and landed on my knees. Judith stalked towards me and I speared her in the gut with my shoulder. She tumbled back and I ended up on top of her. I only threw a couple of punches before she managed to knock me off. I think I grabbed a book I had on my nightstand. I threw it at her and it ended up giving her a black eye. She didn't like that. She kicked my

ass hard. She grabbed me and started punching me. I tried to get out of the room and she kicked me in the back, I flung forward and ended up sliding down the stairs. I wasn't hurt, but Judith was worried. She stood at the top of the stairs seeing if I was OK. When I started to get up, she looked like she wanted to come and get me, but she just spat on me and stormed back to her room, slamming the door.

Mom came by and saw me. I

stormed upstairs and went into my room. I was hurting bad and I decided to empty my stash. It helped. I barely noticed the pain in my shoulder. Judith had the black eye and I had managed to give her a cut right across the part of the neck that connects to the chest.

Yeah, I forgot about that one, preferring to remember the time I tackled her in the Mall. That was really incredibly wonderful.

Another Place that I tend to write for is Fanboyplanet.com: Your source for geekery. What used to be Brian's Books in Santa Clara is now Fanboy Planet. Comics Here's the first ad for the store. I get a discount. Shop there!

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I haven't done one of these Fake Comic Articles in a long while, and this thingee that I wrote was a lot of fun, so here it is.

Fear Not, Comrades: The Last Days Of CommieComix

First Appeared in Once Upon a Dime, October 1999

In the summer of 1986, six men and three women snuck back across the border from Finland into Russia with a load of Macintosh computers and three ImageWriter printers and a color photo copier with enough ink and paper refills for a decade. The six men, Gregor, Ivar and Misha Kvasov, Pietr Alamanov, Mikhail Voltan, and Alexandre Mashkov were all former printshop boys in Leningrad. The six of them were often disciplined for printing items for friends during work hours. The Kvasov brothers in particular were known to print posters and fliers for bands around Leningrad and in early July 1987, they'd been suspended from work for running ten thousand fliers.

Voltan had been dating a woman named Maria Saarinen. She was an ethnic Finn whose family had come to what was then St. Petersburg. With her last name and a little bit of cunning, she had managed to cross into Finland in the early 1980s and managed to legally obtain a Finnish passport.



This allowed her to freely pass between Finland and the USSR with almost no problems, enabling her to serve as one of the most active smugglers of small goods. She had been bringing across foreign records, books, VCRs and videos, and even comic books.

Maria's long-time friend, Natasha Sariban, was only nineteen when she was introduced to Kavsov brothers and she was already a talented artist. She had been exhibited around Leningrad and had a small show in Moscow of her sculptures. Natasha's best friend was a twenty-one year old painter named

Anna Levitan. She was in several of Natasha's art classes and though she was not as talented as Natasha, she was well-liked.

By the middle of July, the group were very interested in getting a private press going. Maria, who had been going back and forth between Helsinki and Leningrad, had said that she could get a hold of many pieces they would need for starting their own press. Maria left for Helsinki and the others crossed over and joined her in transporting the large number of pieces across. The total cost of the equipment was nearly fifty thousand dollars. Most of the money had come Maria's stores, though the Kvasov boys had managed to gather a few thousand dollars through side-work they'd done while working at the print shop.

While American and British comics were often found in the Soviet Union, and there were many State-approved comics (often illustrating traditional stories), there were few super heroes. Natasha had done many drawings based on characters she had found in the comics that Maria had brought across. The first character she created using the MacPaint programme on the Macs they had brought across was Hammer. She was a girl hero who would fight for the KGB, often bungling her tasks and covering them up. The satire was strong, and Mashkov and Voltan were very concerned with

the content, but they did much of the polish and Anna did the colouring. After the inking and coloring, the comic was run off on the color printer and three thousand issues were released: half in the USSR and the other half traveling back and forth with Maria to Helsinki.

The reaction was immediate and huge. The first issues sold-out quickly, raising enough capital to keep them going to further issues. While the initial issues had no press name indicated (according to Ivar Kvasov this was to avoid arousing suspicions), they settled on CommieComix for the later issues.

The runaway success of *The Hammer* led to three other comics by the end of 1986. *Tales of the KGB* was a Three Stooges style comic about bungling KGB agents going about their days. They printed five thousand issues of each edition and were selling them for the equivalent of 10 US dollars each. This title earned them their first international recognition in an edition of *Comic Book Retailers Monthly* where they reviewed the seventh issue as a comedy classic.

The second book was a more traditional SuperHero title called *The Cold Warriors*. This was a team of five heroes who fought evil capitalists in far off countries. While the subject matter would certainly have pleased the Powers That Be, the comic sold poorly in comparison to the other issues and



most were sold in Helsinki. Many made their way to the US and England and were the only CommieComix that received regular international coverage.

The third title shipped in December of 1986. It was a comic titled *December Man*. While the few remaining issues are highly prized, it was nearly ignored when first released. Natasha decided to do the art freehand and it was a black and white title that was far more personal than anything else done. The story covered the Bolshevik Revolution from the point of view of a young man in Kiev who is charged with collecting letters from loved ones

on the lines. Only a few hundred were printed and all of them were shipped off to Finland. a smaller run on lesser quality paper was done in 1987, but it failed to gain a following. The initial version won three Aarnos, the Finnish comic book award.

By mid-1987, CommieComix were printing issues in English, Finnish and Russian. The English issues were the most popular by far, since the first issues had all been done in English. Sales in Finland increased, especially for *The Cold Warriors*. Tales of the KGB did raise questions, but the slow committee process the KGB relied on meant that the group had moved on to other means of distribution and were therefore difficult to stop.

By January 1988, CommieComix had grown to seven titles each running bi-weekly and each having print-runs greater than twenty thousand copies. Maria had bought a professional press just on the opposite side of the border with Finland and they'd taken to printing the issues there. Every Monday night Mashkov would drive out to pick up the issues for distribution in Russia and drop-off the art for the next issues.

While the art was certainly a step down from the work of Levitan and Sariban, the artists and writers hired would have a profound effect on later Russian comics. Visaly Renchankov and Aleksander Mor, two sixteen year olds at the time, took over art duties

on Hammer and would go on to found Uncommon Wealth comics in 1992. Yuri Kasparov, a pseudonym of two unknown Leningrad women, would briefly take over Tales of the KGB (Russian edition) and later become the driving force behind the C*A*P*T*I*V*E Comics movement that started in the Moscow Rave Culture. Victor Lebedev would leave Leningrad after doing much of the lettering for the later CommieComix and moved to Berlin where he started one of the first Comics Websites dedicated to Russian comics.

“Lots of talent late in the game,” noted comic curator Dennis “Wizard” Reel, “but they never caught the spirit of the originals.”

While the climate surrounding the Soviet people was thawing, the Kvasovs weren’t happy with the attention that was being drawn and left for Finland, establishing themselves with a group of Russians there. They would become the force behind the Finlandization of CommieComix. While the others remained in Leningrad, the openness at the time allowed for greater exposure. While it was not uncommon for collectors of underground literature to have copies of CommieComix in Moscow, Kiev and Minsk, Hammer and Tales of the KGB became well-known in parts of the nation away from the population center of the country. They increased their runs again, and with the new Finnish printing capacity, they



were easily able to print more than fifty thousand copies a week.

By 1989, each of the original nine were millionaires, raking in roughly a hundred grand a month in sales. While the Kvasovs were living in Finland, Levitan and Sariban left for England. This left CommieComix with stronger connections to the mainstream of English language comics, but it also left the group without the strongest artists they’d been using. Saarinen found several other artists, and they began producing lesser quality comics, but they were still selling good numbers. By 1990, they were do-

ing ten titles a week of a total of thirty different titles a month.

In 1991, with the break-up of the Soviet Union, all of the original participants in CommieComix spread out from Russia. Ivar Kvasov and Maria Saarinen stayed in Helsinki. Levitan and Sariban stayed in the UK until August of 1998 when they relocated to Denmark. The rest all found their way to the US, settling in Oakland, CA. They continued producing CommieComix until early 1993, when the American based Kvasov brothers started K-mics Comics and Levitan began focusing on her fine art career again.

Saarinen left publishing altogether and began working on a special courier service with Ivar between St. Petersburg and Helsinki. They married in 1996 and had a child a year later.

Pietr has found the most work in comics, acting as a translator for both Marvel and DC into Russian, and later drawing a comic strip that shows on the web. Pietr and Ivar collected a number of CommieComix titles and released them on the web in July of 1997. A print version done by Lubov Comics sold well in Russia, but never found a market in the US.

Recently, rumors of a reunion between the original nine have accelerated. In recent months, Levitan and Ivar Kvasov have made mention of starting up the label again. the domain CommieComix was registered in June.

Letter Graded Mail

sent to garcia@computerhistory.org

by my Loyal Readers

With an LoC in the Style of Lloyd Penney is John Purecell.

Well, it's time for moi to play catch up, so in the immortal words of the Great One, Jackie Gleason, "And away we go!"

Are you calling me Fat?

#82: Totally loved your acquisition tales of the Baycon ribbons. I remember getting some of these ribbons back in the 80s, maybe as early as the late 70s, at cons. These are always fun conversation pieces and collectibles. The one I would love to have is the "Fanzinista" ribbon, and since my wife and daughter are CJ majors, they would probably love to get the "I hide bodies" ribbon. Very funny stuff. Thank you for sharing the poop about your ribbon collection.

I was thinking at BayCon about all the ways to possibly review it. Then I realised that at work, I go over all events through Material Culture, so it just made sense. I've got a tonne of the Fanzinista ribbons that I'll be bringing with me to CorFlu (and WorldCon)

"Baseball and SF": Ages ago, I read and reviewed a book for *Rune* titled *The New A-toms Bombshell*, a



science fiction novel completely based on baseball. It was so long ago that I read it - it was something like 1978 or 1979 - that I forget the actual plot, but I do recall that the AToms team home stadium "floated" over Lake Michigan, or something like that. There were some pretty cool skiffy elements in the novel, and I do remember enjoying it quite a bit. I may have to look this one up again.

Was that a Jack Haldeman book? He wrote a lot of Baseball SF (or maybe it was Joe. I can never keep those two straight).

Man, there's been a lot of material recently about pro wrestling in fanzines. The latest *Vegas Fandom Weekly* has a big article in it by Arnie, and you have written extensively about

it in the past. As you know, I used to watch AWA stuff as a kid, and recently my son and I have begun enjoying the shenanigans of WWE stuff, but not all the time. It's pretty crazy stuff, and the special effects are getting just as wosers as going to a Kiss concert. What a combination here: science fiction, wrestling, and rock 'n roll. No wonder the babes are hot.

Arnie's been around the wrestling world longer than I have and his stuff is really good. I love the WWE, but the AWA will always have my heart. I miss Nick Bockwinkel and Ray The Crippler Stevens, Jimmy Snuka and Dick The Bruiser.

I love programming items that incorporate sf and silliness, and 'the Match Game' that Baycon had sounds like something I would hve enjoyed. Anybody videotape the game? If so, I'd like to see it.

I don't remember seeing anyone doing video, but there are lots of photos out there. It was one of the best reviewed parts of the con.

#83: Family has always been a great source of material for my fan writing, as you and any other readers of my zines know. Depending on what I choose to write about, it can be either crazy, funny, straight reportage, or sad.

And typically, it's a little bit of each all at once.

The one thing that I can say about all the articles in this issue that ties them all together is that sense of belonging that comes from being in a family. All of the trials and heartaches and successes are part of the experience, and these elements form my personal belief system about why we love fandom so much. This is our “Family” and we love everyone in it.

Damn straight! One of the best responses I got on LJ was from an LA fan named Selina. “I don’t know you but we are fans. That means we are family. That means I will think of you and send my very best, that means I’m part mexican too, thank you, would you like a little of my Greek? ((you be you and you will be okay))”

That rocked.

I believe you when you say that this was a very difficult issue to write, but I am positive that by doing so helped you get through these recent events. I missed out on saying goodbye to both of my parents because I lived so far away; they were in Utah, and I was in Minneapolis when dad died, Iowa when mom died. Even distance doesn’t make it easier, and I have always felt guilty about not being there when they died so that I could say goodbye. Funny how we always desire closure of some sort even when there’s nothing we can do about the

circumstances surrounding a loved one’s death.

All in all, Chris, this was a sobering issue, and revealed a side of you that probably a lot of us fanzinistas haven’t been aware of. Thank you for sharing.

It was a way emo issue, but it was also one that allowed me to realise that I don’t want to do another one like that again.

#84: So you’re not going to be mayor of San Francisco. Too bad. Make the voters pay one way or another for their oversight.

Nice article - with even nicer illustrations - about waitresses. At one point in my life, while living in Des Moines, Iowa, I was a part-time waiter at a Baker’s Square restaurant. Did a good job at it, too, getting nice tips in return. At one point I was even being considered for a position as head waiter there; did a trial run in that role on a couple Sunday afternoons. That was alright, but you make more money as a waiter instead of being the floor supervisor, so I respectfully declined. Still, it kind of made me feel good.

I was so happy to find those illustrations for the article. I love the one who’s showin’ a little ass. That was a nice one. I saved three articles for later issues.

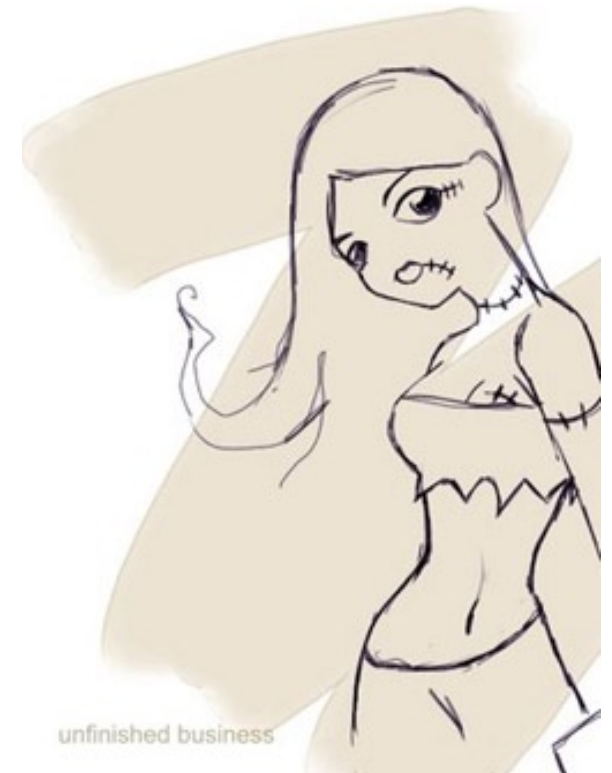
And with that, I come to the end

of this catch-up loc. *Weird Travels* just began on the Travel Channel, and it’s now time for my Friday night fright watching. Take care, and see you next time on the e-zine front. (My next couple of issues are in production, so get those loccing fingers ready, bud.)

I love Weird Travels, especially when they go places I’ve been to. I’m fully ready to LoC buddy! Just put ‘em up and I’ll knock ‘em down!

All the best,

John Purcell



*I am Ninja, He is Ninja, She is
Ninja Too! Ask a Ninja*
by
Christopher J. Garcia

Ask A Ninja: Question 19



The interweb has become a cauldron of inequity! But more important than that, it's the home of Ninjas. That's right, after hundreds (or perhaps millions) of years undercover, they've finally stepped forward and are making waves on this connection of wires we call web. Whether it's Robert Hamburger's Ninja Homepage (realultimatepower.net) or any of the other Pirates vs. Ninjas pages, they've exploded, often with a Chuck Norrisian force behind them. Yet, the best of them only recently became available to the masses who weren't trained in the arts of invisibility and Ass-Kickery.

In November, a couple of guys started a site called Ask A Ninja (askaninja.com) and it quickly gained a huge following via YouTube and the episodes, soming at nearly the same speed as issues of The Drink Tank.

Now that they're up around 22 episodes, plus several specials, they've become a massive hit doing good business in their store.

The format is simple, after a great punk song by Neu Kilter (who are apparently a real German band), the Ninja asks a question that a loyal viewer sends in. They're probably

fakes, at least most of them, but they're funny. The best of them is "Hey, I've gotta work real late tonight and since I won't have a chance, would you mind returning Ghost to the video store for me?" The ninja replies "Sure, after I kill you!". The other great one is, while talking about the ancient Ninja Art of

Excuses he says that he's busy preventing "Zombie Tupac from releasing another album from beyond the grave." That made me laugh harder than anything. Then there's the one that Evelyn likes "Is it possible for a ninja to create a shuriken so large that they themselves can not throw it?" And the an-

**Britain Asks A Ninja:
What is the best way to
begin a strongly worded
message to a retailer
who has wronged you?**

swer “Well, the answer to that is easily Maybe?”

They're also not afraid to take on issues. I know that sounds funny about a piece of fluff web-bit, but it's true. The entire Net Neutrality thing (which has got a lot of Republicans and Democrats on the same side for one) was addressed in a brilliant bit called, simply enough, Net Neutrality. In it, the Ninja talks about how the Internet Service Providers want to make people watch Robin Williams' cousin make bacon juice when people want to watch the Girl at Hot Dog On A Stick make lemonade. Trust me, it's makes a lot more sense than you think. They then say that the ISPs want to put the Girl at Hot Dog On A Stick behind a wall made of the shredded First Amendment. He also claims that Vint Cerf invented the Internet so that people could watch people in funny hats could make things that people like. It's the best reasoning I've heard for the net since I started working at the museum. I'm down with Ninja Logic!

So, that's all for this issue. When's the next issue? That's a good question.

I'm doing the 48 Film Festival next weekend, so I'm not sure if I'll get out an issue next week. I might, but I don't know. I do know that if I say I'm not going to do an issue that I'll end up doing an issue, but if I say I'm doing one and I miss doing it, I'm a liar who should be strung up by his thumbs!

In other news, a good guy by the name of Dave Bryant dropped off a big box of Gallery, an APA for artists. It looks like most of it is from the 1990s, but there are folks like Taral Wayne included, which is always a plus. I'm going to be going through the box over the next few days and seeing if there's anyway I can use some of the art in future

In other news, I'll likely have another giant report on the big 48 Film Project and I'll also have more to say about the Next Big Project, which I'll officially be announcing in the next month or so.

I'm also hoping that I get a chance to do some shopping, since I know that I really want a big batch of videos, but yet I can't seem to find the ones that I want.

And there's always wrestling. Too much wrestling.

I've got Falls Count Anywhere (on fanboyplanet.com) and another article to write.

And then, I gotta write The 13th Step: The Complete Guide to Falling off the Wagon. Here's a preview: Step Number 13: Have a self-destructive period which even Daryl Strawberry would say is completely excessive!

