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An Elegant Evening of Dancing, Performing and Costumes at the Vampire Ball

By Jean Martin
Editor-in-Chief

Having missed the annual Le Bal Des Vampires last year due to my trip to Florida to try and see one of the last space shuttle launches (which I unfortunately didn’t wind up seeing) and to go to several theme parks, I made it a point to attend the Vampire Ball this year. The Period Events and Entertainments Re-creation Society (PEERS) organizes monthly (except for July and December) fabulous themed balls that range from historical and literary to fantasy and scifi. The Vampire Ball, though, is its most popular and biggest one of the year and rightly so. It is also the highlight of the Halloween season where costumes and dancers can celebrate in their most creative and fanciful attire. This is one ball where all time periods and genres collide into one colorful, lively and exhilarating event.

The Vampire Ball is held at the beautiful Alameda Elks Lodge and occupies three floors. On the uppermost floor is an elegant ballroom of wood and velvet where dancers twirl around to vintage dance music provided by Bangers and Mash and singing by Sarah, Susanne, Cathleen and Charles. There is also a stage where the celebrated Theatre of the Vampires performs its yearly mini-play. The mezzanine level houses the tarot card readers (there were three this year) and an intimate circle of chairs where patrons could watch the Bella Donna courtesans perform their historical repertoire. I’d only ever seen them at Renaissance Faires and it was interesting to see
them wearing clothing from different eras.

The basement or Ratskellar is where Goth and Industrial music is played. DJ Dark Moon and Persephone took turns providing music for more freewheeling dancers all evening. The Ratskellar used to have a dungeon-type feel and a huge Victorian-style bar that was perfect for creating a darker and more otherworldly atmosphere. However, it looked like it has been renovated recently and, while it looked much nicer, it took away some of the gothic ambience I liked and associated with the Ratskellar.

I spent my time going up and down to visit each level to say hello to people and take photos of the amazing costumes. I didn’t get to dance until much later, until after the Theatre of the Vampires performed.

This year, for the first time, I was actually a part of the performance! I’ve always wanted to participate in it but I didn’t have the time for rehearsals. Fortuitously, artistic director Cathleen Myers needed some extras and I was able to
wing it with just attending the final rehearsal that day. Christopher was roped in as well. The story, written by Cathleen, and based on the TV show *True Blood* was a hilarious talk show debate between the vampires and their proponents against a Reverend and his wife and other right-wing conservatives. Sookie Stackhouse was portrayed by Ariyana, Charles was Eric Northman, and Gregory was Bill Compton. Reverend Newlin and Mrs. Newlin were played by Arthur and Kathy. These main characters and the entire cast really shone during the performance. Being onstage, I felt the electricity in the air as the skit came to life and as we all connected with the audience. It truly was a lot of fun and I’m glad I was able to be in it. I was one of the goth girls fawning over Eric while Chris held up a sign that supported the Reverend’s cause.

Even though I didn’t get to dance much, I was at least able to do the Congress of Vienna with my Sweetie. I was also able to dance the Bohemian National Polka, which is rarely done at most dances I go to.

All in all, this year’s Vampire Ball was a fantastic and memorable night of dancing, acting, admiring costumes, watching performances and socializing with friends.
By España Sheriff

After two decades of spending Memorial Day weekend at Baycon, this year I headed over to Clockwork Alchemy instead. Organized in just five months and sponsored by Fanime, this new convention could easily go either way, but had the advantage of taking place at the San Jose Doubletree. The Doubletree used to be the home of several cons, including Baycon, and I am enormously fond of it (as I wrote about in issue #30 of this very fanzine) so I was thrilled to go back.

Joe Price was burning vacation time and eager to be on site, so we headed down on Thursday afternoon, unpacked and even had time for a nap before popping over to the Hyatt Regency, a mere ten minutes drive down the Great America Highway, to have a pre-conventions dinner with some Baycon folks. The Doubletree has limited food options, so we took advantage of the dinner buffet at the Hyatt while enjoying the company of Erik Bigglestone and Cheri Stryker, two of the people behind the other new con on the block; Convolution. On our way out we ran into the Beckstead clan, up from Los Angeles to be the Fan Guests of Honor at Baycon, and lingered in the lobby chatting with them and saying hi to the slow trickle of staff and early birds filtering in.

Enjoyable as that was, we decided to head back at a reasonable hour in order to be up early to get our badges. One of the flaws of Clockwork Alchemy was that, for reasons still not entirely clear to me, at-con registration was only available at Fanime itself over at the San Jose Convention Center (although rumor has it that next year this issue may be resolved). So, those of us not pre-registered had to schlep over to the convention center and stand in line for two and a half hours to get our badges. Frustrating as this was, the pre-registration line appeared to be twice as long, I can’t even imagine dealing with that.
On the plus side, Fanime had three shuttles running to their overflow hotels, including the Doubletree, and the badges worked for both conventions. The shuttles ran every 25 minutes or so during peak hours, and started at 8AM, so it was very easy to get to and from the convention center. One of the nice things about this was that whenever we got bored with Clockwork, which was admittedly slow in the daytimes, we could hop on that and enjoy the madness over at Fanime.

When we got back to the Doubletree after getting our badges, Deborah Kopec had arrived with Roy Nakamura and Brandy Sluss, and even managed to get a room across the hall from us, which made for some fun being able to pop back and forth with booze and costumy bits. We dressed up to the nines each night, which was probably overkill given that the evenings up to Sunday were relatively quiet. While there were a couple of parties on Friday, the Fanime policy is not to encourage parties, since that crowd is generally under 21.

During the daytime there were several interesting looking panels, including one by someone from Airship Ventures and another intriguingly titled “Victorian Atomic Power”, but as usual I didn’t actually make it to any of them. The large ballrooms had more active events like the airship races and a shooting galley, where multiple targets were set up for folks to shoot at with nicely modded NERF guns, the kids (of all ages) seemed to get quite a kick out of that.

Outside the main ballrooms there were several fan tables, plus a rather impressive contraption called the Chairway to Heaven, constructed by the creators of the Neverwas Haul. Meanwhile the artist alley/vendor Bazaar area was down on the other side of the hotel, where gaming used to be situated during Baycon. On the one hand, this filled the space nicely in the vendor area, making for a vibrant crowd. On the other hand that also meant that the already relatively small membership (400 pre-registered, but at-the-door sales are unclear) was spread out across the entire first floor of the hotel, creating large empty seeming areas.

There was a programming area in the middle conference rooms, with a room for panels and another with continuous video, plus the Aetheric Message Machine Company which allowed members to send telegraphs to anyone in the hotel. But it all felt rather too cavernous, and it was hard to get a good critical mass going to feel that proper convention effect. Finally, Sprigs (formerly the Coffee Garden), has improved a
lot in terms of menu and seating, but still suffers from the ridiculously early closing time of 2pm, making for another big dead area that folks need to traverse between activities.

Because of this, we ventured over to Fanime several times over the weekend, enjoying the ginormous Artists Alley, which was so big we initially thought it was the dealer’s room (that was next door and equally huge) and chock full of wonderful things. We spent several hours happily looking at stuff, photographing the amazing costumes, and generally enjoying the rowdy energy, and then headed back for somewhat more sedate fun at Clockwork.

In the evenings things picked up a little, mainly due to the extensive music programming which ranged from excellent to probably-also-excellent-but-not-to-my-taste and seemed very well received by the membership. I missed seeing both Unwoman and Lee Presson, but the Sunday night Boom Swing DJ dance was incredibly fun and a nice change of pace to the somewhat slow tempo of the acts I had seen earlier in the evening. I danced until they shut it down and bookmarked the DJs website on my phone (boomswing.com).

All in all I’d call it a success, there were hiccups but mostly pretty minor, so if attendance is increased next year and Fanime resolves things like onsite registration, the outlook appears pretty good. The things that went well seemed to go very well, and the post-convention buzz over on the Facebook group was full of energy and plans for next year from what appears to be a very eager and involved membership.

On Monday we had our last breakfast buffet and hung around for a bit in that melancholy way you do before packing up and swinging by the Hyatt Regency see who was left over there. This worked out quite nicely and we got to see the Becksteads again, Bryan Little and Mette Hedin, Radar Wylie, Bill Taylor and a bunch of other folks, including the Artist GOH Stephan Marteniere.

Over the course of the weekend there were excursions back and forth between Fanime, Clockwork, and Baycon by a lot of people. In addition to the two-con badge we had, Baycon apparently offered some discount to Fanime attendees as well. I hope next year this practice continues and is better advertised, since in my opinion the increase in conventions is a sign of a greater interest in these activities by more people and therefore a good thing which we should see as an opportunity. I know some people disliked traveling between conventions to visit their friends, but frankly I kind of enjoyed this weird floating archipelago of fandom. Hopping from island to island when you wanted a change in your diet felt like being on some weird package vacation to a sprawling fannish resort, each little themed area offering its own unique flavor and attractions.
Potlatch 21 was held in Seattle on February 24-26, 2012. I took Friday off and caught a morning flight to Seattle so I could visit the Science Fiction Museum. I’d been to Seattle many times and was very familiar with the outside of the building, but I’d never been inside. This year Potlatch was back at the Best Western Executive Inn, only a block and a half from the museum, so I resolved that I really would see it this time.

But first I have to mention where I had lunch. Just on the other side of the street from the Best Western, down the block at the corner, is the Tibet Cafe. You can recognize it from a distance because it has prominent signs saying “Sandwiches” and “Espresso.” I had a cup of lentil soup that was nicely spiced, and a tasty and very substantial plate of momos. Also on the menu are, as you might expect, the sandwiches, and also Mexican dishes, which I thought was an interesting indicator of the local Seattle community and culture. Good place.

The Science Fiction Museum is part of the Experience Music Project, or the EMP|SFM as they now style it. I was told by other fans not to get my hopes up. The Science Fiction Hall of Fame is undergoing renovation, leaving only two exhibits, one about Battlestar Galactica and another about Avatar. And to be honest, I’m not much of a fan of either. But the exhibits were excellent and I could really appreciate the thought and care that went into both productions. The Avatar exhibit was like stepping into that world.

To get to the SFM exhibits, I had to go through the EMP Museum, which was not a hardship. The music exhibits are all enclosed so they can play music and videos. As one would expect there were major exhibits on local legends Jimi Hendrix and Nirvana. They were packed with fascinating memorabilia and ephemera, such as Kurt Cobain’s first demo tape, his first guitar, remnants of his touring guitars, and original album art. In the Hendrix exhibit there are pictures of his parents, pictures of R&B bands he played in on his way up, songs he wrote on London hotel stationery, and more. I sat and watched the videos of him playing live at Woodstock (www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IKdQhzx2vM). It was obvious from the beginning that the Experience Music Project Museum was the Jimi Hendrix Experience Music Project, but it’s all good. It was neat to see people young enough to be Jimi’s grandkids amble in and just have to stop and watch until the song was finished.

In the guitars exhibit there was a video screen playing short clips of all sorts of talented guitarists. One of them was Mary Osborne playing electric jazz guitar (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ds0gegDvi1M). Hot stuff. I walked out on the way to Avatar, and one end of the building was a room with a huge video screen, bigger than my house. They started playing the
OK Go “This Too Shall Pass” video with the Rube Goldberg machine (www.youtube.com/watch?v=qybUFnY7Y8w), and I had to stop and watch. It was great to see all the details in the video while hearing it on a concert quality sound system.

Down in the basement there was an exhibit on horror films. It was beautifully designed as a dark forest that divided the space into somber glades, each with a little bench and a video screen showing a scary video from the past. Around the walls were larger screens showcasing the work of great horror directors. In the middle was a long wall of glass cubes, holding gruesome props from Paul Allen’s collection as if some mad scientist had built a laboratory in the forest.

There are two gift shops, a small one for the Science Fiction Museum and a big one for the Experience Music Project. If you want replicas of old sci-fi movie posters, or replicas of classic rock band t-shirts, they have you covered. None of it really spoke to me. I went out into the cold heavy rain and walked the short distance back to the hotel. Overall it was a good experience. Next time I go, I will allow more time. There are some interactive music exhibits that looked interesting.

Back at the con, I joined up with Spike and we went off with friends on an expedition that was anything but expeditious, featuring a rental car that could not parallel park, a wine shop owner selling his surrealistic fiction with book design by the ubiquitous John D. Berry, and an epic dinner. But it was entertaining.

We got back after opening ceremonies, where I heard that Jack Bell was mantled in a Doctor Who scarf made from some of Anita Rowland’s yarn stash. It seems fitting, both in memory of Anita and as an appreciation of Jack’s stepping up to chair Potlatch 21.

The Book of Honor for Potlatch 21 was A Canticle for Leibowitz, by Walter M. Miller. I reread the book before the con. I had some arguments with it, but so did the characters in the book. And that is what really made it work for me: the all too human, contradictory characters, filled with a deep sense of irony. I also read an anthology of Miller’s lesser-known stories (The View From the Stars), which was mostly not at the level of Canticle, but one of them, “The Will”, is excellent and worth seeking out. And at the con, the first program on Saturday morning was a Walter Miller reading. Jack Bell read “Way of a Rebel” (www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/32416). It is set at the beginning of a nuclear war. I don’t know if it is the same war that led to Canticle, but it doesn’t matter. The planetary scale fate of civilization, and human scale personal moral decisions were both among Miller’s favorite themes. And in his best work he ties them together. I do have to say that several of Miller’s stories feature hopelessly unrealistic concepts of future computer technology. In the good stories, and “Way of a Rebel” is one of them, it doesn’t matter. It’s about the people. And in “Way of a Rebel” the computer is kind of charming in its 1950s sci-fi way. I’m glad Jack read it to us.

The Book of Honor Deconstruction featured a wide range of views on the book. On balance it was slightly positive, but there were a lot of good criticisms. I wish there had been time for me to ask about the thing that bothered me the most about the book: What happened to the Native Americans? My best guess for the location of the monastery was that it was (or will be) built on reservation land near Gallup, New Mexico, and I would think that Native Americans would be more likely than any others to survive a nuclear war with their society and

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culture intact. It seems like a glaring omission and I really wonder. On a more positive note, there were fascinating if inconclusive comments about the final third section of the book, which features a stark and tough ethical controversy between very good and decent people. And then something else happens that is completely unexpected and strange and mystical. I’ve read a lot of science fiction that tells us, implicitly or explicitly, it has the answers. And I’ve read a fair amount that tells us why bother because we will never know. Which is why it is so extraordinary that Canticle could be so sad and still so full of compassion and hope.

I skipped in and out of the next couple of panels while I was working on compositing SF/SF (some excuse) and stocking up on interesting books in the dealers room. And somewhere in there I went to dinner with a Seattle fan I’ve known for a long time and his wonderful new girlfriend. But I can tell you that the Blocking Writer’s Block panel was hilariously funny as well as full of sensible practical advice. At least it seemed sensible to me, not that I’m a writer or anything. But based on Eileen Gunn’s story, I would be very careful having any literary dealings with William Gibson.

The Clarion West Auction went well. I was in pretty good competitive form, running up the bid quite high on some items I wanted before inevitably losing to Amy Thomson. But I managed to ace out Ian Stockdale on a fine book that otherwise would have had to go into his home, possibly causing it to explode. Ian, you can read it at my place; it’s safer that way. And I scored on another item I can’t mention until after somebody’s birthday.

That evening I ran into Marti McKenna. Marti and her mom, Bridget, were the first people to welcome me into fandom. I particularly admired their sophisticated and creative style of snark. It’s been too long, and it was great to see Marti again.

In Seattle, even the Best Western has a bar with excellent local beer, and there was a nice small literary scene. Gerry Nordley, whom I’d last scene in Sunnyvale, kindly bought me a pint. I think I already owed him a few for the big help he’s been to me on Potlatch programs, but so it goes. And I had a nice long chat with Jack Skillingshead, whom I had not met before. Which lead to my finding a collection of his short stories in the dealers room on Sunday, and getting it signed. I just started reading it and the stories are wonderfully vivid and intense.

Sunday afternoon, Marci came to the con suite and announced there was a totem pole raising a couple blocks away and she was heading over. I got my coat and straggled over to Seattle Center where there was a large crowd. The totem pole was going up right next to the Science Fiction Museum. It is in honor of John T. Williams, who was killed by a police officer because he was carrying a tool of his trade, a carving knife. The shooting was ruled unjustified. As part of a healing process, the city contributed space for working on a totem pole. Local tribes contributed their labor and donated the pole to the city (thejtwproject.org). And so the first totem pole went up in Seattle in over 100 years. And I’m proud to say I helped to raise it. That was me on one of the ropes, right behind Jerry Kaufman.
Can't We All Just Get Along?
A fan responds to the Star Trek/Star Wars Debate

By Christopher Erickson
Staff Writer

If you are a fan of Star Wars, Star Trek or science fiction in general, no doubt you have heard or even watched the videos posted recently by William Shatner and Carrie Fisher.

Shatner started this by commenting that Star Trek was better than Star Wars due to the relationships, the conflict between the characters and the stories involving humanity before veering off into tangents about special effects (including remarks about the costumes being somehow painted on in 1976) and other unrelated topics.

“Star Trek v Star Wars”
youtube.com/watch?v=5BY NdTHjstI

Fisher decided to do a response that was mostly filled with snarky comments and personal attacks in a rather rambling and somewhat incoherent monologue.

“Star Wars is SOOO Much Better than Star Trek”
youtube.com/watch?v=nU2jqIRjJVI&feature=watch_response

Unfortunately, this seems to be an over-the-top argument between two massive egos. It does reflect the decades-old and seemingly endless argument about which is better. It is one of those friendly rivalry conversations that can escalate into people getting into heated arguments with phasers and blasters drawn at each other. The preferences for one over the other can lead to a bit of elitism between the groups or within the fandom community.

From my perspective, there is no reason to like one over the other. I have more knowledge about Star Trek due to the show being in endless syndication and Star Wars just being a series of movies. I prefer Star Trek as far as what I like, but Star Wars is also one of my favorites. There is no reason that I can’t prefer both while also being a huge fan of Doctor Who, The X-Files, superhero comics, hardboiled detective fiction and other things that I like. It is part of being a fan and having individual tastes.

We should all be able to agree that some things are cool, others not so cool. Above all, we should be able to let other fans enjoy what they want and not judge them for their choices, especially if we do not have much knowledge of their choices.

If I were to try to have a civilized and intelligent conversation about this topic, I would probably break it down to a few simple ideas.

Star Trek was originally conceived to as a “Wagon Train to the stars” as Gene Roddenberry had described it. It was essentially a Western-style show set against a space opera backdrop. It was also sold as a weekly television show with reusable special effects that would help keep the costs down. This helped evolve the concept of the Star Trek “universe” to center on a cast of characters who were explorers, diplomats...
and military personnel at the same time. The drama was meant to be built around the dilemmas that the characters would face each week. Some of the stories dealt with social commentary such as racism, democracy, political structures, and the human experience. The ultimate message was that people (and aliens) can put aside their differences and work together to achieve a common goal. *Star Trek* and the subsequent spin-off shows worked well in a television format because it condensed the stories down to 45 minutes. *Star Trek* had difficulties translating to two-hour movies where the stories had to be padded out and the concepts were hard to translate when using established characters from the show that were known to fans but more average movie viewers may not be familiar with. Character development was less than what you would get in a movie where all the viewers are discovering the characters.

*Star Wars* was conceived as a movie where all of the original viewers were discovering the characters as well as the universe packaged in only two hours. The influences for *Star Wars* were old serial and matinee adventure movies, samurai culture, Westerns and the classic samurai film *The Hidden Fortress*. George Lucas also put in the basic premise of good versus evil and the inner turmoil in making choices. Because Lucas was a filmmaker, he had to boil down these concepts to conversations and present some other scenes that further developed the characters while showing action in a two-hour time span. The magic of the big screen wasn’t translated as well when the movies were made into the spin-off cartoons (*Star Wars: Droids* and *Star Wars: Ewoks*) as well as the Ewok TV movies.

Both franchises featured strong female characters: Uhura, Janeway, Crusher, Troi and Torres in *Star Trek* and Leia and Amidala in *Star Wars*. Both also featured a refined sexiness to the characters despite Shatner’s and Fisher’s sniping. There was also plenty of sex appeal in both shows: Uhura rocking the miniskirt as well as the midriff baring outfit from “Mirror, Mirror” and the Orion slave girls belly dancing in *Star Trek*, Leia’s outfits even before the slave metal bikini and the Twi’lek dancer from *Return of the Jedi*.

Both franchises have also suffered from bloated excessive story telling. The *Star Trek* franchise suffered from the last few years of *Voyager* as well as from *Enterprise* trying to tell the prequel stories before the voyages of Captain Kirk and his crew. *Star Wars* similarly suffered from the prequels, especially *The Phantom Menace*.

Ultimately, *Star Wars* was meant to be a finite story-telling moment (defeat the Empire, redeem Darth Vader) and *Star Trek* was an ongoing voyage (“It’s five year mission/ongoing mission...”). The story telling focus is different for each one and ultimately *Star Wars* is considered a science fiction fantasy akin to space opera whereas *Star Trek* is science fiction aimed at showing how humans interact with aliens and advanced technology. The story telling for each is different and can appeal to many different fans and fans can like both without having to choose a “side.” The ultimate endorsement in my mind is when George Lucas was accepting the Comic-Con Icon award and praised *Star Trek* for bringing “like-minded aliens and freaks into one place.”

“George Lucas Comic Con Award”
youtube.com/watch?v=_Es0JmxvvPM

“William Shatner sings to George Lucas — My Way”
youtube.com/watch?v=MDIBchVxSmE&feature=related
Dolphin Express

by José Sánchez