



# **The Drink Tank**

## **CDXXXVI**

# Okay

, I admit it; sometimes I make mistakes.

This is no shock to 1) anyone who has lived with me, 2) Anyone who has zined with me, and 3) my children. Go figure.

I had hoped to have a section of the occult issue (which you can read at <https://claimsdepartment.weebly.com/the-drink-tank---series-deaux/issue-435-the-occult>) about the great film dealing with a fake occult subject matter, *Dragnet*. Sadly, I did not get to write my article, because life (and have I mentioned I got a true-crime book deal???) and other stuff got in the way. This, of course, was after I'd both forgotten to write said article for the cults issue, way back in February, and then had asked folks for a piece for the zine, which the fan-omenal RJ Johnson sent in an amazing essay for!

And thus, this is a make-good!

I love *Dragnet*, a comedy that is peak 1980s, is one of Tom Hanks' final funny movies, is incredibly well-written, and has a magical theme song by the incredible Art of Noise.

And then there's what this editorial article is all about: "City of Crime."

So, the late 1980s were a strange time for both films and music. There were new approaches to genre that were being tried in movies, specifically comedies. The idea of rebooting older dramatic TV series as comedy feature films was in the air, and *Dragnet* was a perfect example of that.

And then, there was rap.

Rap had hit the mainstream a few times prior to 1987, the most important being "Rappers Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang, and "Rapture" by Blondie. We had started to see artists

bubble up, such as LL Cool J, The Beastie Boys, Run-DMC, Kool Mo D, Sir Mix-A-Lot, and the earliest stuff from Public Enemy. There was also a somewhat sad tradition of movies, sports, and TV shows taking to rapping as a gimmick. This was especially noticeable in the legendary song *Super Bowl Shuffle* which is a camp joy to behold.

And thus, "City of Crime."

Now, the *Dragnet* soundtrack is actually really cool, but the film needed something that could be played on MTV, and appear on, and hopefully top, the *Top 20 Video Countdown*. Now, we all know that MTV used to play music videos, though it had always aired shows and specials as well, notably *The Young Ones* and *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, as well as wrestling specials and such. The one this is that you never knew when videos were going to play except in the shows like *Yo! MTV Raps* or *120 Minutes*, where you knew the genre you were going to get. The main video blocks didn't give you an idea, but if you could get a video on the *Countdown*, you knew it would be seen, since it was





one of MTV's most popular shows. It was on right after school got out for me, so I always rushed home to see it.

Movies tried to use the show for promotion, and it usually worked. *Dragnet* was a big deal, Dan Ackroyd and Tom Hanks were both big comedy names, and the 1950s show itself was seeing a rebirth of sorts on cable. I used to watch it fairly regularly, I think on the early version of *Nick At Nite*. It was the perfect time to bring the property back. The 1980s were in many ways more about 1950s nostalgia than creating stuff to become nostalgic for (though they managed to), but they needed the youth draw.

And thus, the music video for "City of Crime."

Now, as lame as listening to Hanks and Ackroyd rapping might sound, they did some stuff with it. One of the best examples of the use of rock-rap combination was the 1986 Run-

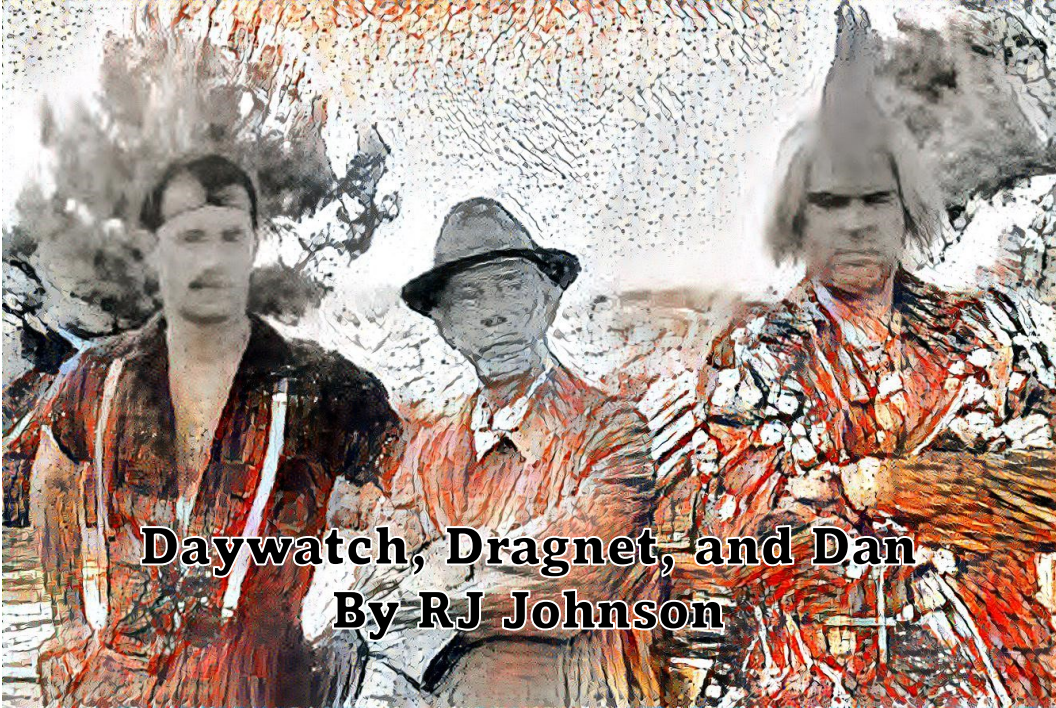
DMC/Aerosmith collaboration "Walk This Way," which was a massive hit on the *Countdown*. This song took that route, with wailing metal guitar riffs played by Pat Thrall, Alameda's own guitar legend. The performances by Ackroyd and Hanks are actually done in character, with Ackroyd doing his Friday voice, which is hilarious as he manages to make it sound legit. The story is about Pep and Friday dealing with P.A.G.A.N. -- People Against Goodness and Normalcy. It's funny, and the video is everything that was wrong/right with 1980s musical videos: short-skirted women dance, we have punk-rock dressed young men playing heavies, the stars are clearly having fun, dancing, and doing some mugging -- it's so much fun!

The film is great, and the video is something that speaks of the times. I highly recommend both. Click the pic to see!

In other news, Alissa, Chuck, and I all lost the Hugo for Best Fanzine with *Journey Planet*, but still, we're gonna keep at it!







## Daywatch, Dragnet, and Dan

### By RJ Johnson

The 1980s belonged to Dan Aykroyd. However, he was doing such an outstanding job of being other people, we didn't notice at the time.

Starting in the 1970s on *Saturday Night Live*, Aykroyd wrote and performed in sketches that stood apart with his singular portrayal of people like Irwin Mainway and his line of hazardous Halloween costumes; Yoruk Festrunk, that wild and crazy guy; Fred Garvin, Male Prostitute; his eponymous station manager opposite Jane Curtin in their "Point/Counterpoint" spoofs; and even an unnamed character like the Super Bass-O-Matic huckster. They were all unforgettable thanks to Aykroyd's dedication to character.

After he left *SNL* he went on to portray Vic Zeck (*Neighbors*), Clifford Skridlow (*Doctor Detroit*), Austin Millbarge (*Spies Like Us*), and Steven Mills (*My Stepmother Is An Alien*), along with Elwood J. Blues, Louis Winthorpe III, and Ray Stantz. Their magic was not that they were funny characters but that they were fully realized characters who were put into funny situations. The laughs followed naturally for his characters even though we more often committed to memory the punchlines delivered by John Belushi, Eddie Murphy, or Bill Murray.

In a world of comedians wanting to be leading men, Dan Aykroyd played interesting people that just happened to wind up in the spotlight. His commitment to character is why the 1987 film version of *Dragnet* succeeds.



The movie's opening demonstrates this. The voiceover narration, delivered by Aykroyd in perfect homage to its late creator, writer, and star, Jack Webb, describes the City of Angels, its denizens, and their circumstances in a style as simple and clean-cut as Detective Joe Friday's haircut. No subtle double entendres; no tonal slyness; all we get are the facts. The comedy comes from the juxtaposition of a phrase such as "Those who have it, enjoy it. No matter how they got it." spoken over a tight shot of a license plate reading "KEPT" which then pulls back to reveal a candy-apple red Rolls Royce convertible driven by a young, stylish brunette.

After the opening narration, the title credits roll and the style difference highlights the problems that this version of *Dragnet* has. The credits are set to a remake of the original *Dragnet* theme done by Art of Noise. As much as Joe Friday is a cop rooted in the world of the police procedural, the credit music tries to connect the movie to then-popular cop and action shows like *Knight Rider*, *Airwolf*, and most notably, *Miami Vice*.

The possibility for great storytelling and great comedy found by juxtaposing Friday's 1950s by-the-book style with modern police and societal norms exists. And when the movie focuses on the characters as people, the possible is made manifest. At one point Friday is chided for his smoking (and unfiltered Chesterfields at that!); in another, Tom Hanks's Pep Streebeck takes Joe to where they serve the best coffee in town. The coffee is found at a strip club and Joe, while a stripper dances in front of him, grudgingly agrees with Streebeck that it is good coffee. I want to believe that Joe Friday would enjoy discussing police procedures and good coffee with Dale Cooper. But I digress.



As with much of Aykroyd's comedy, when the movie draws from the details of the original *Dragnet* style we are re-rewarded with depth and richness. The scene where Friday and Streebeck meet with Roy Grest, and we learn about the 3,000 gallons of stolen trichloronitromethane and the pseudohalogenic compound cyanogen, which when they are mixed properly in the exact ratio, they form a liquid fertilizer... it's funny in the same way that people laughed when Jason Nesmith walks into the bathroom in *Galaxy Quest* and sees three Klingonesque fans standing at the urinals. The comedy comes from the accuracy of the depiction fans recall.

Like *Galaxy Quest*, *Dragnet* is a fan-service movie. It was just made about 15 years before that notion became popular for a fandom that might not have been more than Dan Aykroyd and his fans. And also like *Galaxy Quest*, *Dragnet* doesn't skimp on the quality of its cast. Not only are Aykroyd and Hanks outstanding actors, but Christopher Plummer, Dabney Coleman, Elizabeth Ashley, Henry Morgan, and Alexandra Paul all play their parts spot-on. While we may remember Coleman's lisp or Plummer's odd giggle, those were mannerisms of their characters. Alexandra Paul has the most difficult part in many ways: playing a character who became referenced in the story as "the virgin Connie Swail" without sliding into simple, broad caricature. Connie and Joe share a fine romantic chemistry which allows for comedy from other sources, most notably Streebeck's running commentary about the two of them and his guesses at their romantic interactions.





Integrating Jack Webb's "House of Exposition" procedural writing with a *Miami Vice* visual and musical modernism could've been

interesting; I enjoy Art of Noise and have nothing against remakes. But like the tonal jump-cut in the opening, other attempts to pair the two contrasting styles turned out about as palatable as when trichloronitromethane and the pseudo-halogenic compound cyanogen are combined in the proper ratio to form a liquid fertilizer.

When Friday and Pep Streebeck engage in broad, physical hijinks such as a car chase with Emil Muzz in Jerry Caesar's limousine or the chaos at the P.A.G.A.N. festival in the San Gabriel Mountains, the movie becomes tedious. There is humor in these scenes that still works, but again it comes from character and not spectacle: Detective Streebeck threatening Muzz with a desk drawer and Joe Friday meeting the virgin Connie Swail after rescuing her resonate much better for me.

A few years after *Dragnet* came out William Goldman wrote *Hype & Glory*, a wonderful juxtaposition of his experiences being a judge at Cannes and at the Miss America Pageant in the same year. Like many of Goldman's works of nonfiction, he reflects on the business of movies. One thing he notes is that the 1970s were the end of producers securing money to make the movie they wanted without studio execs butting in. Come the 1980s, mega-deal movies took over, and it stopped being about telling a story and became instead packaging a product. *Dragnet* would've been a great movie in the 1970s; it was still a great movie in the 1980s when it wasn't overburdened with pointless spectacle devoid of character moments. The story of Detective Joe Friday, working day-watch out of robbery and meeting the virgin Connie Swail was quite impressive, bordering on spectacular, and didn't require embellishment. All it needed was just the facts.