

The broken

Prose Poetry Photography Art Music



A Rimbaud redux • CERN and the 2012 Prophecy • Reasons not to drink red wine • The Sputnik generation speaks out • Answering the unanswerable: How's it hanging? • WW2 POWs, escape!

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Cover Photo/Illustration

Front—Andre Russell: “Well, there isn’t much to say about me. I’m working on my self-esteem by trying to do things that I’ve always wanted to do. I’m also trying to keep my rants to a minimum, though I think my ability to rant is probably my god-given talent. I’m basically a homebody. I like to read, draw, write and look forward to painting. Being a homebody is problem, according to some people, but I have to disagree. With today’s technology, I can listen to Terence McKenna for hours on end, and he’s dead. What I’m trying to say is that the modern hermit isn’t isolated. Some people actually choose isolation.”
andre.russellcontact@gmail.com

Back—Mouki K. Butt: Mouki K. Butt is an illustrator, animator and music maker. She currently resides in Vancouver. Mouki is a square, who is easily confused when the lines between the hip and the nerdy become blurred.
<http://minorepic.net/~mouki>

Visit *The Broken City* at www.thebrokencitymag.com to view and download issues, and read submission guidelines.

The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its summer 2010 edition: Still Life, Fast Moving. In this issue, we’ll be examining the collision of nature and infrastructure in a knock-down, drag-out detonation of metal and plant life.

California band Granddaddy sang about “mud and metal mixing good” in “Broken Household Appliance National Forest.” More often than not, nature and progress are at odds with one another, but once in a while, cities and the environment do come together in a weird symbiosis.

Do you have a secret plan to erect a fort in the woods and fill it with modern conveniences? Is there a rusting dryer on your front lawn that’s more a piece of artwork than garbage? Are you imagining a short story about a race of mole men that live in the sewer beneath your apartment building? Surely, you have some poetry about a flower!

We want to see work that’s about cities, nature, or the amalgamation of the two. Please send your poetry, fiction, non-fiction, comics, art, photography, music/book reviews to thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com.

Deadline is: June 30, 2010.

Nothing that fits the theme? Send something anyway—there may be room for non-conforming work too.

Letters

This is a joke, right? Seriously? You're telling me that geeks and nerds are cool? I'm not laughing. I don't know what to make of this. Is this some sort of exercise in creativity—to take something and turn it into its opposite? It must be. That's all it is, right?

You see, my life is one big dilemma. It has been a dilemma for as long as I can remember being alive. My problem is this: I don't fit in, to anything—not properly, anyway. Biologically speaking, my genes have literally converged from the four corners of the planet. I think this symbol of physical multiculturalism that I am, manifests itself in real life in the form of the ultimate oxymoron, such as this issue's topic.

What I'm trying to say, is that being a nerd or a geek requires a certain look. You know, you see the reality shows. Models have that look called “not you.” This is where I fit in, and this is the point where everyone says, “boo fucking hoo!” But it's true. Though I may be a nerd in spirit, and my soul is consumed with wonder, I apparently don't look like a nerd. And so, my life has spun me into a world of someone else's desire and design. Who exactly, I don't know, but it's safe to say that I've gotten away with being at parties or gatherings that I shouldn't have if I actually had to open my mouth in order to try to get in. This was never the case; apparently, I had the look. I say “had” because some things fade with time. Never, at these gatherings, could I speak about free will, about society, about the hypnosis of life, about the depth of the characters in *Watchmen*, because nobody read it and watched the movie instead. No, discussions were always about things that I didn't know anything about, because I read and because I don't watch TV or listen to the radio non-stop.

Incidentally, I recently awoke from a dream in which I had spent my entire life researching free will, but came to the conclusion too late in life that in researching behavior, one researches the physical mechanisms of behavior, and consequently, because every mechanism, if understood, by definition must be deterministic, free will can never be discovered in this manner. I had wasted my life searching for something that I should have been living. It was a nightmare. Perhaps this is why I've been drawing more and reading academic articles less?

But I digress. No, my most recent source of inspiration was at the Fan Expo in Toronto. My excuse for being there was my sister, brother in law, and the most convincing one of all, my *Star Wars*-infatuated son.

Maybe being a nerd or a geek is cool right now, if you look like one. But that's not the case for me. Oxymorons do not get on in life—maybe in Hollywood movies they do, or as literary characters. But I don't see it; or, rather, I'm not living it. I guess as a nerd or a geek I'm just not good enough. And where does that leave me now and after the fad has run its course?

I recently ran into my old roommate from university. He jokingly referred to me as the hot chick that no one talked to. The joke is that I'm a guy. What's funnier is that nothing has changed. Nerds might be cool right now, but if they don't step up to the plate, it will all be for naught.

Sincerely,

Closet Nerd (suspected to be cover/feature photographer Andre Russell)

Dear *The Broken City*,

I was just surfing the Internet and discovered that you published my submission... but I was never notified about this! Could you take a moment and explain your notification practices to me?

Dear contributor: If you've submitted something for a particular call, you can expect to be contacted by The Broken City within one month after the submission deadline—either to be informed that your submission has been accepted, or to be let down gently if it hasn't. You'll be contacted via the e-mail address you used to submit. In the case of acceptance, if we don't hear back from you within a week, we'll try contacting you again, then once more another week later. If you didn't receive our e-mails, there's a good chance they ended up in your spam folder. We suggest that all submitters add thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com to their contacts or safe-senders lists.

my ex-lover in the streets of rimbaud's Romance *Vincent De Freitas*

with her smile of jubilation,
she laughs a sweet, soft francophonic
symphony—beneath the dying moonlight,
and decaying trees of the promenade.

july nights, she releases herself
into the breeze, mingling with the exhaust
of taxis, under the red lights in the heart of the city.

drunk
on freedom,
the wine of repressed
desires feasts upon her lips. and because she struck me
as absurdly naif,
I fell in love with the sonnets of her
ignorance.

mais elle
n'est pas dix-sept ans
and now in her priviledge of wisdom
she condescends to speak to me,
to tell me
she is grown.

Vincent De Freitas, born in 1989, is a Toronto-based poet currently attending York University. He has been previously published in the Steel Bananas anthology, "Gulch: An Assemblage of Poetry and Prose." He first fell in love with poetry at the age of eight, when faced with "The Highwayman," by Alfred Noyes; it has been a slippery slope ever since. Vincent currently resides at the restaurant at the end of the universe with his imaginary pet snake, Trouser. Don't Panic.

Red Wine Hangover

Guy Wilkinson

Upon waking, she became aware of the warm body beside her. She laid still, listening to the vaguely animal sounds of undisturbed slumber. Her empty stomach rebelliously joined the chorus, but it didn't wake him. His white shirt was hooked on the bedpost. There was a purple stain over the pocket. For a moment, she couldn't remember his name. She swung her legs over the edge of the bed. She felt hung over and unclean.

With her feet on the ground, Karen felt steadier—almost anchored—though it takes some substance to face reality, and she was feeling liquid still, ethereal. She tiptoed to the door, and only when she reached it, did she glance back over her shoulder at the trespasser in her bed. Tousled sheets hid the faceless figure. From beneath that bundle, two legs protruded, and one pale, outstretched arm. Three thin limbs, black-hair matted. By what idiocy had she allowed those tentacles to entwine with her? Karen couldn't bear to look at him now. She left the room, closing the door behind her.

A lengthy shower nearly rejuvenated her. She stepped out of the bathroom, peering around, and found herself still alone. She fixed breakfast—yogurt and tall glasses of grapefruit juice. When she finished, she stayed at the table, waiting.

She was inclined to blame it on Adam, her boyfriend—supposedly. Had he shown up as promised, this perverse affair would not have occurred. But to be honest with herself (and always, she strived to be

honest with herself, as there was no shortage of others willing to lie) she had to face the fact that the responsibility was hers.

Except for, perhaps, that despicable wine. She'd had no tolerance for it.

She'd sat there for too long, in a Moroccan nightclub with a flirtatious staff, waiting for Adam. Of course he'd have a good excuse; he always had a good excuse, when the fact of the matter was that he didn't care. She'd ordered a drink, of course, vodka and soda, which she sipped more forlornly as time went by and her resentment and frustration grew. The swarthy waiter with the brilliantined hair was always there when her glass got low, smirking at her along with the bartender when they thought she wasn't looking. She despised them for their goatishness. They would never understand. It was not always coquetry that led a woman to drink alone. Across the room, a solitary male sat, pouring wine from a half-litre carafe—no object of curiosity, he, eliciting no sidelong glances.

Karen consulted her wristwatch before ordering another drink. One more, and then... But after an hour she hadn't moved, and she was feeling not quite sober anymore. She was feeling dulled, betrayed. She should have gone home, but there was a sense of it being too late for that now; she was too far gone, too miserable, to sit alone in her apartment. Suddenly, a sensation of shadows winging over her—a bearded man in a black

blazer, standing beside her, grey eyes behind silver-rimmed glasses, peering liquidly down at her. "Hi," he said. "I notice you're alone, so, I'm sitting alone as well; I thought I might, or perhaps you might like, to join me?"

"I'm meeting someone," Karen answered automatically.

First, he went pale, and then, in what amounted to a delayed reaction, he flushed a salmonish pink. He apologized incoherently and walked stiffly back to his table. Karen looked around in embarrassment and caught the barman smirking.

Now the room was filling up, though she'd given up monitoring arrivals. She leaned forward to sip from her glass. She grimaced; the soda had gone flat. Just then, a boisterous group bustled in, claiming a long vacant table in her vicinity. Karen stirred her drink with a green plastic swizzle-stick, prodding absently at the wedge of lime that was disintegrating in the alcohol. The group's conversation—their volleys of laughter—assaulted her, made a mockery of her solitude, which it seemed to her she had just been beginning to wear comfortably. They were evenly paired, this pack—a suit for each skirt. There was something about their numbers that made Karen antagonistic toward them, and the feeling intensified each time one of the men stole a glance at her, each time two women leaned close to whisper. Karen distrusted the whispers of others, though she recognized it as a vanity,

like shyness.

Now the waiter was hurrying past, a tray of cocktails trembling in the balance. He set it down shakily at the party's table, and immediately their volubility increased, like a gaggle of gradeschoolers loose on an outing. Karen was aware of the unaccountability of her annoyance; they were, after all, merely enjoying themselves. She glanced down at her empty glass.

She was attempting to gain the waiter's attention, to signal for her bill, when her line of vision crossed another's—the man who had previously asked to join her. She'd forgotten him. He had a menu in his hands, but he was studying her. His glance dropped immediately. She sensed his embarrassment despite the distance. She too lowered her eyes, to her empty glass. She felt empty too. Gathering her belongings, she rose and crossed the room to his table.

His name was Bill. He was new to the city, a teacher at a college for adult education. He had not as yet, she gathered, struck up any acquaintances. Until he gradually grew more at ease, he had a tendency to mumble, and a marked aversion to eye contact. He was undeniably formal, a bit cold, a bit stiff, but with a sense, Karen saw, of dignity. And, he was gentle and deferential. This did not displease her, and the air of loneliness that enveloped him seemed easy for her to dispel. He persuaded her to sample the wine, and though she didn't care for it, she saw it pleased him to accept.

She may not have appreciated the wine, but she reaped its effects to the fullest. The soft blue lights overhead seemed to

blur, and her voice grew smooth and velvety. The din of her neighbours became background noise and faded; she heard every third word Bill uttered in the lull of ephemeral music. Couples rose to dance and he glanced wistfully at her; she rose in turn, feeling fluid in her limbs. He escorted her to the floor and led her through a waltz, moving woodenly, overscrupulously respecting her space, when she only wanted to be held. There was nothing sexual in it—she only wanted to sway to the music. When the dance ended, he let go of her quickly, and they returned to their table. The carafe was empty; Bill signalled the waiter. A misplaced sense of decorum made Karen protest, vaguely, to which he responded by touching her forearm, saying, "Please, it's not often I have reason," shaming her into subservience, and another glass of wine.

The night from then on was a blur. She remembered the waiter uncorking the wine, the blunt green bottle in its white linen shawl, Bill sampling, then nodding, the liquid swirling into polished glasses, toasts (to what?), the clink of crystal, laughter, wine-induced clumsiness, leaning in for a toast—she'd bumped the table, spilling his glass on his pressed white shirt, watching the stain spread with widening eyes, then helplessly laughing, and he'd helplessly laughed, and she'd fussed, and he'd shrugged. He seemed pleased by her folly; he had a chance to prove his kindness, the evenness of his temper. When they danced, she could feel the dampness against her. And then her light-headedness, lightness, frivolity, then leaving, the bumpy ride home in his car,

the radio playing, her head on his shoulder, parking two wheels up on the sidewalk, unlocking her apartment door, welcoming him to her sanctuary, peeling off the stained white shirt, his moonlit skin, tense and trembling, the thumping heartbeats, the hesitation, the breath and hair and fingertips, the yearning, fumbling, clutching, straining, the moaning, increasing to climax, a sudden stickiness and collapse.

* * *

She was making coffee when he appeared in the hallway, blinking without glasses, bare-chested, his black hair tousled. He looked around as if lost, saw her, and came in to join her—or to not be alone. He was paler than ever, with bloodshot eyes. "Morning," she greeted, keeping close to the stove, glancing at him over her shoulder. "Coffee?"

"Please," he croaked, sagging into a chair. He put his head in his hands. Karen could imagine each one of his ribs: feral, like a wolf. She kept her back to him, staring out the window as the coffee percolated. It started to drizzle, and very quickly to pour; the rain came beating against the glass.

As she took a seat across from him, he reached out to stroke her arm. She almost did violence to herself, with the effort it took not to jerk away from him. They drank their coffee in silence, a silence Karen pretended was not uncomfortable. "I shouldn't have driven last night," he said. It was his one regret.

There was a knock at the door. "Oh God," thought Karen. If it was Adam... She jumped out of her chair. As always, it seemed, she was

left without choices.

It was only her neighbour, Caroline, the blonde Cleopatra from across the hall, sailing in like false sunshine, insisting the earth should cease to revolve. "Karen, sweetheart," she cried, "you've got to help me! The man of my dreams just called, and like an impetuous fool I've invited him over for lunch. But my refrigerator's empty, and I'm not going outside in this weather! Be a dear and spare some groceries, whatever you have, I'll pay you back, I promise. I should have suggested he take me somewhere but all I could think was I have to get this gorgeous man alone! You under— Oh! Hello."

Like a barefoot ghost, he'd padded out of her bedroom, twisting the buttons of his wrinkled shirt—his red-stained shirt, that she... Caroline's eyes widened, then narrowed. He stood there, like a child, his mouth open and nothing to say. "Caroline, this is, this is... Bill," said Karen. "This is my neighbour, Caroline."

"How do you do?" he said stiffly, extending a hairy hand, which Caroline observed for a brief second before accepting. Bill seemed unaware of any reluctance. He turned to Karen. "Is it okay," he asked, "if I have a shower?"

"Yes," she answered. "Yes of course." She could feel herself sinking.

She was grateful for the opportunity to bury herself in the refrigerator. She rose with a handful of items, which her neighbour appropriated with some impatience. "Who's the wolfman?" she asked.

"Oh..." Karen felt ashamed, for everyone involved. "It's not what you think."

But it was less than a joke to Caroline; it was nothing. "He doesn't seem your type," she said. "And what's happened to Adam? Don't tell me you've gotten rid of him?"

All Karen could do was deny it. She felt six years old.

She was sitting at the table when Bill returned, towelling his hair. He smiled at her. "Where's your friend?"

"She had to leave."

"Well, thanks for the shower. I needed that." She said nothing. He was buttoning his shirt again, tucking it in. "Listen," he said, "what about lunch? Let's go out."

"No," she replied. "I mean thanks. I couldn't eat a thing."

"I see. Well, what if we..."

She didn't allow him to finish. She said, without raising her eyes, "I think you should go."

He stared at her, surprised.

"I don't understand," he said, his voice clicking. "Have I done something to offend you?"

How quick he was to assume it. Karen sighed. "Look, you're a nice enough guy, Bill" she said. "But we spent a night together; it doesn't mean I plan to spend my life with you."

Again, silence. She watched him stumble to gather words. "But last night was... it wasn't just... you said you had fallen in love with me."

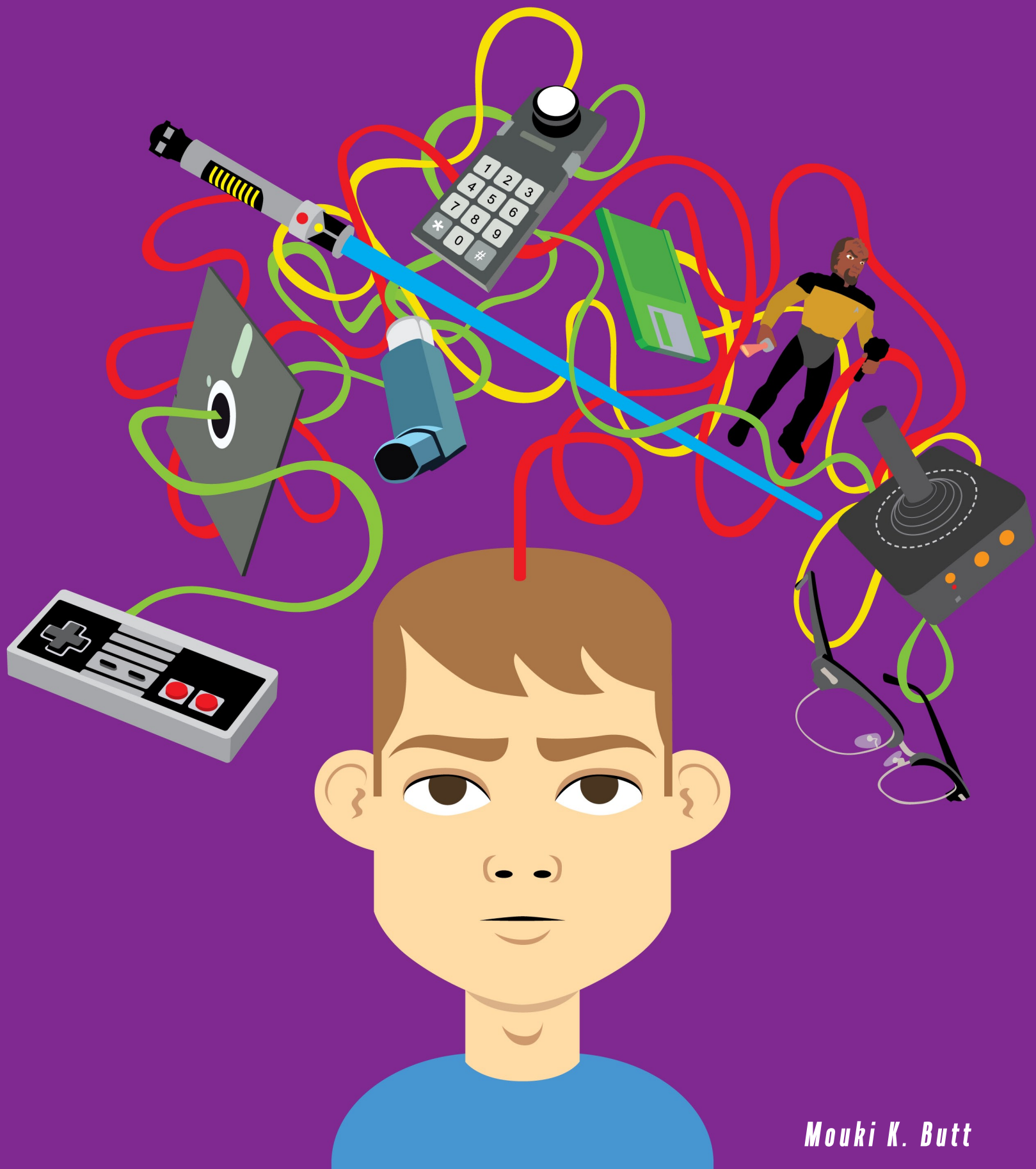
That caught her by surprise. She had no memory of it. And yet she didn't doubt he was telling the truth. She felt herself falling, a sensation of plunging. Her eyes closed for the briefest instant. She had to force herself to speak and her answer was plain. "I was drunk."

He stood there, staring at her, saying nothing. Then, wordless, bloodless, he turned away. Karen didn't move. A few moments later he emerged again, his car keys and wallet in his hands. He didn't look at her. She heard him putting his shoes on. She heard the door slam closed behind him.

She sat there, feeling sorry for herself—and for him. After a time, the phone rang. She rose to answer.

It was Adam.

Guy Wilkinson was born in 1958 in Liverpool, England, the fifth of eight children of an English father and Vietnamese mother. At the age of four, he emigrated with his family to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and grew up on the Canadian prairies. After living and working abroad, in Krakow, Poland and London, England, Guy returned to Canada, earning a BA and MA at the University of British Columbia. He now resides with his wife and three children in Port Coquitlam, BC and teaches literature at Langara College in Vancouver. He has had stories published nationally and internationally.



Mouki K. Butt

The New Hip

Gilbert: "I just wanted to say that I'm a nerd, and I'm here tonight to stand up for the rights of other nerds..."

Lewis: "Hi, Gilbert. I'm a nerd too. I just found that out tonight. We have news for the beautiful people. There's a lot more of us than there are of you... Any of you that have ever felt stepped on, left out, picked on, put down, whether you think you're a nerd or not, why don't you just come down here and join us?"

-*Revenge of the Nerds* (1984)

Bully For the Brave Lads!

Juleigh Howard-Hobson

Not only is it unhip to be cute and write up a novel formula like it's a recipe, but it's beyond passé to write about tunneling out of Germany. Let's face it, as genres, both ideas suck. And, come on... the whole plucky WW2 British chaps thing? It's so dead. Nobody cares. It's not even retro, it's just... old.

This, of course, makes it kinda hip-because-it's-not-hip. You don't believe me? Check out those 20-something chaps in England with their kippers and khakis...

Recipe for the Classic WW2 Prisoner of War Escape Novel

While this sort of word soup is a treat, it's not cooked up much anymore, which is a real shame. There's a pleasant chewy texture and a hint of bully beef in this kind of stuff. I mean, we all know there's nothing like a well stewed tunnel collapse or a forged ID card being discovered under a floor plank to make your readers forget their troubles... and come back for more!

Sure, the ingredients are a little tricky to get these days, but, as with all authentic, traditional creations, they are all key. Don't substitute if you can help it—it's worth it to obtain the real things. One taste and you'll be saying, "Mustn't grumble, old chap, we'll finish digging by Christmas!"

INGREDIENTS

- 2 supporting Axis characters (German, preferably... although you can use Italian in a pinch). Of these, one must be the commandant and one must be vaguely sympathetic to the escapades of the Allied prisoners
- 1 prisoner of war camp (this must include at least 9 huts, 2 yards, wire fencing, assorted background prisoners and a full complement of cold-blooded guards)
- 5 main Allied characters—two English, two Scots and a Yank. Of these, one of the English must be an officer, and none of the Scots may be
- 15 various risky situations*

DIRECTIONS

Place the POW camp in a cool spot.

Add the Axis characters; let them set up.

Place the Allied characters in the camp. Fold them in carefully, under the jurisdiction of the first ingredients.**

Mix thoroughly to blend, making sure that every piece of the POW camp is completely saturated with the 5

Allied characters and the 2 Axis ones.

Add the risky situations.

Stir the resulting plot rapidly until interesting incidents arise. Let any dust settle.
Divide into 15 chapters, making sure to allow for one risky situation in the beginning of each.
Place between two stiff boards, bind.

Makes one 50,000-word novel.

[To make a dozen short stories, subtract 3 risky situations, and add 6 enigmatic titles and a half dozen dryly-witty ones. Divide into 13 sections (12 stories and a non-titled prologue), place and bind as above.]

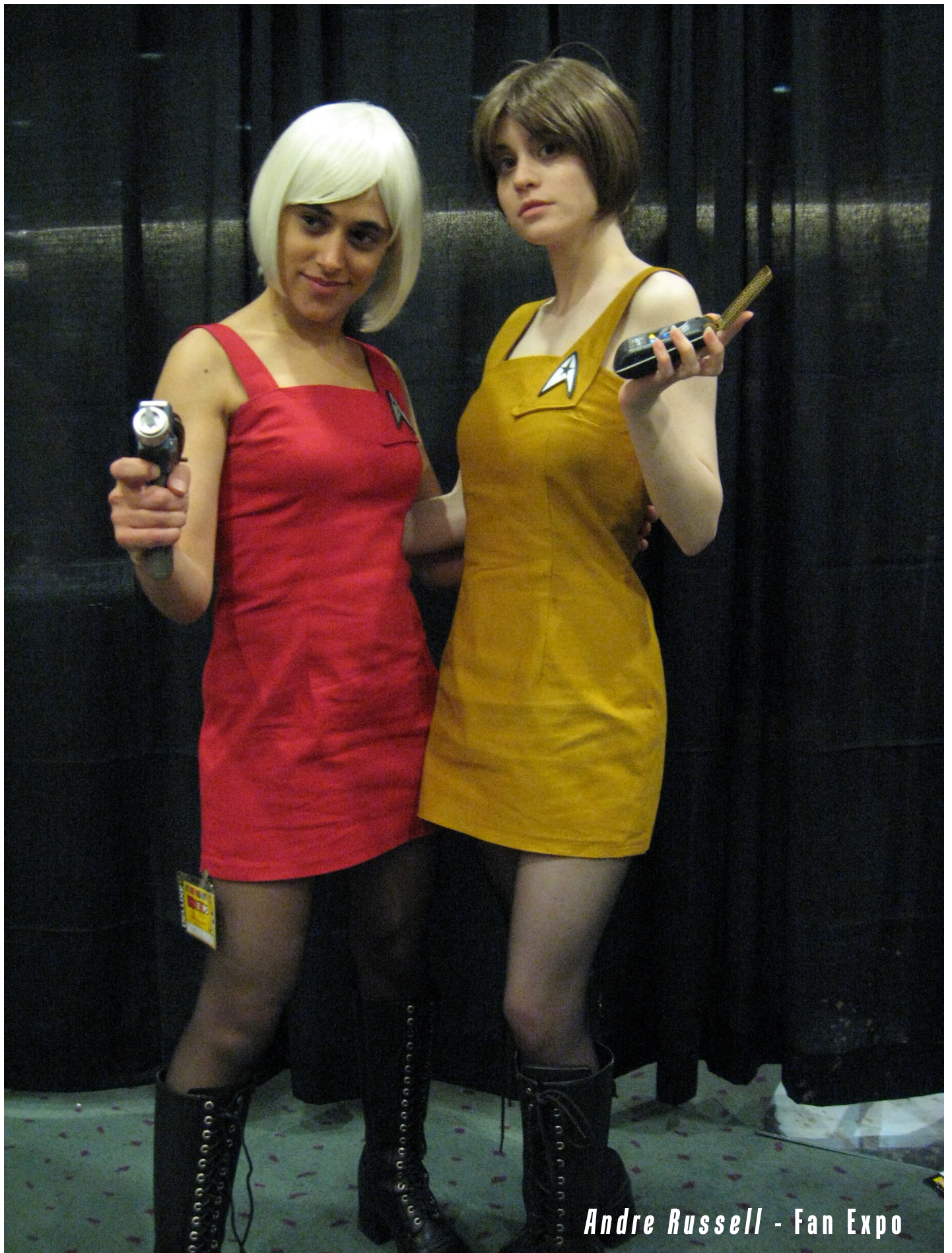
*one situation should include a wristwatch, half should include snow, and at least a third should have barking dogs.

**the Axis ingredients must float about on top for the recipe to work.

Juleigh Howard-Hobson is a widely published essayist, short story writer and formalist poet. Named a Million Writers Award "Notable Story" writer, she has been nominated for both the Pushcart and the Best of the Net. Her work has appeared in Key Hole Magazine, Aesthetica, The Loch Raven Review, Going Down Swinging, The Chimaera and many other places, both in print and in cyberprint.



Andre Russell - Fan Expo



Andre Russell - Fan Expo

Swingly

Patricia McCowan

I ride my bike into the schoolyard and do wheelies while I wait for Mark. The school is deserted and dead quiet, the sky is as bright as blue Kool-Aid, and it's day one of summer vacation.

Pedaling hard, I pull up on the handlebars like they're the reins of a bucking bronco and yell, "Sayonara, grade seven. Hello, summer of '73!"

The front wheel slams back down and I do figure-eights, thinking of the day ahead: Mark and I will ride our bikes to The Comic Cavern, browse around until Larry, the owner, gets pissed off and kicks us out, ride to Mark's house, eat the humongous corned-beef sandwiches Mrs. Thorvaldson always makes us, read comics in Mark's room, argue who's better: Captain Marvel or The Green Lantern, get Cokes from Mr. Thorvaldson's basement bar fridge, ride around until supper. Repeat for rest of summer.

Man, I swear we've been dying for this day since September first.

I pop another wheelie and see Mark coming around the corner on his bike, slow-poking along. I ride out to meet him.

"Hey, man, what took you?" I pull in front of him, make him put on his brakes.

"Tyler!" He squints at me like I've interrupted him in the middle of *Star Trek*.

"It's already after ten. Loser Larry's probably had his third coffee by now. He'll be nice and edgy when we take our sweet time checking out all the comics." Larry's more fun to bug than a poodle behind a fence.

"Didn't know it was a race. Slept in. It's summer, you know," Mark

says, pushing a hand through his big pile of red hair, making it even bushier than it already is. We've both been working on growing our hair rock-star long, but his grows wide instead.

"Yeah, it's summer, so let's get it started." I pedal off. I don't know what's chewing at his butt this morning. Mark's usually Mr. Get-Along-With-Everyone—especially me.

The Comic Cavern's up on Henderson near the Redwood Bridge—about a fifteen-minute ride. We always take the back route along Brazier to avoid the traffic. The closest thing to traffic here is moms lumbering off to Safeway in station wagons stuffed with little kids. The kids make peace signs at us from the back seats and the moms wave, or if they're cranky, call "Single file, boys!" out their windows.

We're not even half way to the store when Mark pulls beside me, saying, "I'm thirsty. Let's get something to drink."

"What? Didn't you just have breakfast?"

"So? It's hot. Come on, Tyler. I'm really thirsty. It'll only take a minute. 7-Eleven's just ahead anyway," he points like a tour guide.

"Really? When did that get built?" I joke, standing on my pedals to keep up with him. We've only ridden by the place about twelve times a day for our entire lives.

Mark gives me the finger. "Shut up. It's my treat."

"Oh, okay. Since you're asking nicely." Not enough dough was going to be my next argument against stopping, since I only have enough for the latest *Green Lantern*, but Mark headed that off at the pass. Thorvaldson's always

got the bucks. Fine, if he wants to blow good comic cash on drinks, who am I to stop him? He could lighten up, though.

We wheel into the 7-Eleven parking lot. The only car there is this cherry-red Camaro.

"Man, nice ride!" I say, but Mark doesn't notice. He's fussing with his bike, leaning it carefully against the window.

A handlebar-mustached guy in a tank top and Wranglers comes out of the store. I elbow Mark and whisper, "Check it out."

Groovy guy gets into the car and tears the plastic off a fresh deck of smokes the way villains in cheesy late-night movies rip blouses off bad girls. He tosses the plastic on the ground. He fires up the car and a smoke at exactly the same time, backs up without looking, and boots it out of the parking lot, tires squealing.

"Whoa, Marlboro Man!" I say.

"Yeah." He's busy staring into the store.

I lean my bike against the window, too, and follow his look. "Hey, Marley Becker works here now!" Marley used to babysit me when she was 'Marlene' and I was a kid. She was a great babysitter, really lazy.

"I know she does," Mark says, like it's old news.

"I wonder what happened to the old dork who's usually here." I go to launch into an imitation of the guy's nasally voice, but Mark's already pulling open the door, ignoring me, so I just follow him. A bell dingles above us.

Behind the counter, Marley doesn't bother looking up from her magazine. The way she's standing there, she could be crowned Miss

Boredom 1973.

"Why, 'afternoon, Marley," I cornpone. Since I knew her before she moved up in the world to convenience store clerk, I figure I can talk to her even though she's about 17 now.

She turns a page and looks up, switching her slouch from one hip to the other. "Hey bozos. How's it hanging?"

"Ha," I say, trying for cool even though what she's just asked is totally embarrassing. I thought only guys said that to each other.

Then Mark brushes past me, walks right up to the counter and announces, "Hanging swingingly, Marley."

I stop dead in my tracks. *Swingingly?*

Marley's feather earrings sway in an invisible breeze as she looks at Mark. "That so?"

"It is. So."

"Swingingly?" Her plucked eyebrows shift up a smidge.

"Uh... sure."

I catch sight of Mark's toes curling in his sandals. The coolers stocked with Freezies and Fudgesicles are humming so loudly it's like they're trying to pretend nothing's happening.

What is happening?

I flash back to the weird way Mark said, "I know," when I said Marley worked here. How did he know? Has he been coming to 7-Eleven without me?

Seeing him now, lock-jawed and frozen in place like a *Star Trek* alien in a force field, I figure he hasn't. Not unless he's suddenly into spazzing out in front of older chicks. I knew we should've gone straight to The Comic Cavern.

Time to save the day. I plant myself tight beside Mark and shatter

the terrible silence with, "So anyway. We're just gettin' a couple Slurpees."

Swift.

But it works. Marley shifts her semi-attention over to me, and Mark lurches away from the counter like a too-small fish cut free from a line. "Actually, nothing for me, thanks," he says, backing away.

"Nothing? But Mark, you were the one who wanted—"

"I'll go watch the bikes." And he's out so fast I can practically see Roadrunner puffs of smoke behind him.

I turn back to Marley. Her eyes have tracked Mark out, the look on her face saying... something, I think. Well, no way I'm about to up the weirdo count to two by bolting after him. "Um, okay. Just one Slurpee, I guess. Extra-large," I add, trying to sound more business-like.

Thankfully, Marley resumes her slightly-livelier-than-zombie service mode, asking, "Flavour?"

"Wild cherry. And banana. Please."

She goes to work. She's actually kind of neat to watch, the way her hands can pour everything and push the right buttons while her eyes can just stare into space. I notice for the first time that her eyes are a cool greeny-brown colour. They're kind of pretty, even. Is that what Mark—

The door *ring-a-dings*. I'm thinking Mark's gotten up the nerve to come back, but no, it's just some old lady. She goes to browse the magazines.

"Sixty-five cents," Marley says, planting the drink down on the counter.

"Right." I reach into my pocket. Wait. I remember I only have cash for one comic. No way I'm wasting that to

rescue Mr. Swingingly. "Um... " I look to the window, where Mark's helpfully having a heart-to-heart with his bike. Wishing I was wearing a t-shirt saying "I Have No Idea Who That Guy Is!" right about now, I turn back to Marley, and point over my shoulder. "He's got the... I'll be right back, okay?"

Marley sighs and picks her nails. I guess that means 'okay'.

I push open the door. *Ring-a-ding*. Mark's chanting, "I'm an idiot, I'm an idiot."

"No kidding. But you're an idiot with the dough. I need sixty-five cents. Your treat, remember?"

"Oh. Right." At least money makes Mark snap to attention. He pulls a tidily folded two-dollar bill from his back pocket and hands it over. "Is she laughing at me?"

"Only on the inside, man. Be right back."

I slide-stop to the counter and fork over the money just as the old lady from the magazine section puts her purchase down. *True Confessions*. There's a whiff of cigarettes mixed with peppermint coming off her. Without thinking, I look over. Her wrinkly eyes laser back at me. "You'll rot your teeth with that ridiculous drink," she announces.

I mentally count all the ways I'd like to kill Mark right now. I grab the Slurpee and the change Marley's holding and sprint out. "Thanks, Marley," I call.

Mark's sitting on his bike, gnawing on a thumbnail. When he sees me he pulls his thumb out and says, "Give me a sip, man, I'm dying."

"What? After all that? You said you didn't want—"

"Tyler!"

"Okay, okay. And here's your change. Now can we please get to The

Comic Cavern?" I grab my bike and swing a leg over.

Mark sucks in a mouthful of drink and looks at the money in his palm. He spits out the straw. "A buck twenty-five? She short-changed you, Tyler!"

"What?"

"Sixty-five cents, I gave you two bucks, there's only a buck twenty-five here, should be a buck thirty-five," he rattles off.

I cannot believe him. "What, so now I'm supposed to trot back in there and ask Marley for a *dime*?"

"Yeah! It's my money."

"It's *your* money, so *you* go get the change. I'm not going back in." I sit on my bike seat, cross my arms.

"You should have counted the change." He pockets his cash, like I might rob him. "Don't you know anything, Tyler?"

That blows it. "Oh, yeah, I know something! I know if a girl asks me how my *dick* is, that 'swingingly' is a dumb-ass answer!"

Ding-a-ling. True Confessions Lady walks out of the store, so we clamp our mouths shut, breathe at each other like prizefighters until she passes. Mark's gripping the drink, I'm gripping my handlebars. Then his face transforms, eyes widening, mouth opening, like a poison is kicking in.

"Is *that* what it means?" Mark's arms drop to his side. The Slurpee sloshes. "'How's it hanging?' means my dick?"

If I'd managed to get a sip of our drink, I'd be choking on it. "Oh, man! Are you shitting me? That's why you're an idiot."

His face goes blank. Do I have to walk him through it?

"What did you think it meant?"

"I don't know! Just, 'How's

it going?' I guess." Mark's eyes move around like he's doing a conversation replay in his head. "I mean, after I said it I started to wonder, but..." He glares at me, suspicious. "Are you *sure* that's what it means?"

"Of course it means your dick, you dork." I point to my crotch and make an up-and-down motion, miming length. "How's it *hanging*?"

Mark clutches the Slurpee with both hands, the truth taking hold. "Oh, God. Marley Becker was asking how my pecker was hanging."

I laugh. I can't help it. His worried, red face looks out from that frizz-ball hair. "Swingingly!" I burst out, bending over my handlebars it's so hilarious.

Something explodes against my thigh, soaking me. The Slurpee cup falls empty at my feet, ice chips spewing. "Hey!"

"You're the dork!" Mark yells. His face crumples up, like he's trying not to cry.

And then it hits me, harder and messier than the Slurpee: Mark has the hots for Marley Becker. That's why he's been weird all morning. Nothing to do with me. Everything to do with Marley. Holy crap.

Mark's looking away, but I can tell he's waiting for me to say something. What the hell am I supposed to say to this?

"So... are we still going to The Comic Cavern?"

Stupid, but it's all that comes out of me.

"Oh, shut up about that already! Who cares about your lame comics?" Mark gives a quick swipe of his eyes, then shoots me this cold look.

"Grow up, Tyler."

Grow up? As if I'm the embarrassing one? As if I'm the one

who screwed everything up? My mouth opens.

Before I can say a thing, Mark gets on his bike and blasts off, back wheel spitting grit. Marlboro Boy.

"Come on, man!" I call, but he gives me the finger—again—rounds the corner and is gone.

Ring-a-ding. I turn. Marley comes outside.

Oh, God, did she see what happened? Now it's my turn to stand there trapped in stun mode. The smell of wild cherry and banana wafts off me. Please, please let her not say anything about my wet pants.

The corners of Marley's frosted lipstick mouth tilt up to a near smile. "Your friend's funny," she says. "Swingingly."

"Yeah." I nod like a bobble-head dog on a dashboard. The less said about that the better, I figure.

Marley reaches out her hand. For a flash of a second I think she wants me to hold it. But she says, "Here's his dime. You grabbed the change so fast you missed it."

"Oh." I'm suddenly afraid to touch her. My hand's sticky. And Mark and I were just talking about dicks and peckers maybe ten feet away from her. What if she heard through the glass? "Keep it," I say.

She laughs. It reminds me of when she was my babysitter. "A dime. Wow. Okay, Tyler," she says, curling her fingers back around it. "I'll tell him you said so if he comes back."

"Cool." I'm pretty sure Mark won't be back. I don't even know if I'll be back.

I sit on my bike and watch Marley shove Mark's dime down into the pocket of her jeans. Her hips sway their way back into the store. She takes her place behind the counter again and

flips through a magazine, like Mark and I were never there.
I don't want to be here. I get back on my bike and
start pedaling, the melting Slurpee ice crunching under
my wheels, and ride away from the 7-Eleven. Screw my

wet pants, screw Mark, I'm going to The Comic Cavern.
The rest of the summer hangs ahead of me, nowhere near
swingingly.

Patricia McCowan's stories have appeared in the anthologies Dark Times (published by Ronsdale Press) and Cleavage: Breakaway Fiction for Real Girls (published by Sumach Press) as well as online at Short Story Library. Other writing has been published in The Globe and Mail, print and online versions of Maisonneuve Magazine, and in the Toronto Small Press Group's Fevered Spring Almost Instant Anthology. She is working on a novel about a history nerd's fear of the future. Patricia McCowan lives in Toronto with her husband and two daughters, but grew up in Winnipeg, the Slurpee capital of the world!

Desktop Hymn **Joel McConvey**

The line
of the screen
is echoed//

eleven times over

across this surface of light:

Eye
I stare into every hour
and make an offering
a swaddled baby
laid into your depths

Bubble, box
Universe:
Repository of mind

Sorcerer of sound and archival data

The plains of your
planes, windows
folders and tabs

track changes

from matter to pure
end program.

Joel McConvey is a Toronto-based writer, critic and producer. He has written for newspapers, magazines and Web sites, including the National Post, The Walrus, Eye Weekly, the CBC and Cinema Scope. He is currently developing a TV series and interactive art project about creativity in the wilderness.

Dashboard Saints of America

Laura Notarianni

What does it mean to be a dashboard saint in America?

A little piece of plastic Jesus bobbing its head back and forth

wafting in car fog... coughing on the stench of 66 cigarettes snuffed out in an ashtray. A clay little mold

with the fingerprint of a first-grader. Happy Birthday to the best father in the world. That you old man? Your boots at the bedside. Dirt on the floor. Spit in the sink. Cum on the couch cushions.

The ones I sit on. Rest on.

Eyes closed and dreaming.

Skip, skip, BANG. We hit a speed bump, and whiplash I'm up again.

Ain't one thing's changed except for the blood on the tires.

Particles of carcass clump in rubber crevices, warm rice pudding—grandma style.

It's still hot. Hot, hot.

Hot leather interior. Hot like beans flaming in the pan, and onto my tongue. Kill my taste buds for the stretch of the I-35.

I wish I was high.

But I'm not.

And there's sweat on my lip. Sweat on my chest. Sweat in all them private places, I don't like to sweat, but I do.

Feedback screeching from the radio, the AM. The dashboard doctrines of Sunday morning. I wonder what the preacher and his wife did last night. Or what he and the deacon did before comin' on home to his wife's casserole.

A little peach cobbler "à la mode."

Here's your wine spritzer Dear. Spike it with alkaline and make him choke. Oh. OH OHHHHH!

And Oh how the angels sing on high. Sweet pocket praises to the one and the holy, our heavenly father.

And so we pray.

Pray for the able and the Aryan. The moral and the monied.

For the status quo. And the dosey-doe...

And for smiles.

The ones we make even when we don't mean it.

Sun in my eyes and I squint.

Through the slits, I see the big plastic head bobbing back and forth. I see his painted-on smile, his bleach-white teeth and a hellish yellow halo.

Probably made from that penny an hour, Taiwanese table paint.

The toxic kind.

Laura Notarianni has a degree in Film Production and Screenwriting from York University. She has worked as a writers' assistant and a script coordinator for television drama, and recently joined the Toronto based film and television production and distribution company Temple Street Productions. She was published for the first time in the summer of 2009 in ditch magazine, and is currently focusing on authoring a series of children's picture books, and working on rewrites for a short indie film that's presently in development. Laura likes to abandon convention when contributing diary-like prose to a house blog that she keeps with her roommates at <http://wearebabeshearusror.blogspot.com>, under the pseudonym "Lola."

Shuttle watching for a Sputnik child

Edward McDermott

It was 12 hours before the shuttle's expected launch time. I guided my boat into the anchorage just off the ICW, at the closest point to the launch pad. There were only two boats there before me, and for a few moments, I thought that I'd made some mistake. So few were there to watch what could possibly be the last nighttime launch.

I remember coming home from school as a child to learn that the Russians had sent their Sputnik into space. The first artificial satellite circled overhead, emitting a faint radio beep. With binoculars, you could see it in the sky.

Walter Cronkite reported President Eisenhower's reaction to the news. His comment that the U.S. had more colour television sets didn't wipe out the defeat, or wash away the concerns. I found it all fascinating. I started a scrapbook, read everything I could about rockets and satellites, and dreamed one day of going into space. Yuri Gagarin beat me.

When J.F.K. pledged that the United States would send a man to the moon within a decade, he put into words the dream of a generation. First the Moon, then Mars, then Jupiter and the universe. Mankind had its new 'New World' and it twinkled overhead on a clear night.

My scrapbook grew fat as Redstone rockets carried men into space and then into orbit. By the time of the Apollo missions, I'd grown into a man in university. Still, I would watch the live broadcasts. I saw the grainy images of that "one small step."

In 1974, my entire office ran outside to stand in the streets and watch, as a 747 carried the mockup of the shuttle on its back. The Sputnik children who'd watched *Star Trek* forced the government to rename that mockup the Enterprise. We had a dream far loftier than mountains.

Somewhere in the last thirty years, that dream has died. Perhaps it only slumbers and waits. Satellites abound. Space stations have come and gone, and come again. China has joined the list of nations that have sent a man into space. And across all that time, the shuttles have blasted from the pad. They have carried telescopes and science projects. They have carried teachers.

The shuttles grow old. They are scheduled for retirement in a few years; no replacement ships are expected before then. The torch is passed but there is no new runner to pick it up. Will mankind return to the moon? And go to Mars? Perhaps. Perhaps not in my lifetime.

At two in the morning, I climbed on deck. The anchorage—which could hold a hundred boats—had only a corporal's guard anchored and waiting. With binoculars, I watched the lights on the gantry, lights that made it look like a Christmas tree. Helicopters circled above us.

Then the world grew bright, as if the sun had risen. Endeavor flew into the sky on a plume of fire. It pierced the clouds and left behind its glow. After that, with the rocket already out of sight, the sound arrived—a noise that grew and grew, like thunder but sweeter and more tuneful. I stood and watched, as I had wanted to for 30 years. Time and life had always been at odds with the dream.

Watching the shuttle blast off, I felt that I had become part of that adventure—that dream. I stood for all the Sputnik children who had watched before me. I watched for all who had wanted to see but had never gone.

I am from the generation of the baby boomers, the generation of Woodstock, of protest, of Peace Core, and disco music. I am also the generation of the Sputnik and the space race, and the dream of a new frontier.

Born in Toronto, Edward McDermott has pursued a professional career during the day while taking writing courses, joining writer's groups, and writing at night. When not writing, he spends his time sailing and fencing. He's currently sailing his boat in the Caribbean.

Is CERN Fulfilling 2012 Prophecy? Black Holes and the God Particle

Martin J. Clemens

Miniature black holes, cosmic rays, God particles, time travel and maybe even the end of the world: These are part of the myriad doomsday events and predictions being levied against the European Organization for Nuclear Research, otherwise known as CERN. Some of these predictions are superstitious fear mongering, some are misinterpretations of facts and others are the foundation of pure ignorance... or are they?

The above list is actually more of a to-do list for CERN researchers than a prophetic outlining of end-of-the-world phenomena (with the distinct exception of that last item). In fact, CERN's nuclear physics department—the team heading up the construction and operation of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC)—is hoping to do exactly what the Doomsday-ers are warning about. They want to create a few miniature black holes, they want to reproduce the effect of cosmic rays on earth-bound particles, and they want to shake hands with this so-called God particle (otherwise known as the Higgs boson particle).

Quick, everybody run for the bunker, before we're all sucked into oblivion by CERN's crackpot scientists!

Or... pick up a few science journals, browse a few reputable physics websites, have a look at the Wikipedia entry on the LHC project, and I assure you, you'll find out a few things that may be both surprising to you and much less disheartening than the fear mongering agenda would have you believe. You'll find that this collection of the greatest minds in nuclear and astrophysics is not actually

funded and controlled by Doctor Evil and his spandex-wearing henchmen.

They have taken, and will be taking, every possible precaution in the planning, execution and control of the potential dangers of this project. They have calculated the effects of these various phenomena to a degree that most of us laypeople can't even comprehend. They know—with as much certainty as is theoretically possible—exactly what will happen should they be able to create a mini-black hole, they know precisely what dangers to expect from creating Higgs boson particles, and they want to assure us that they know what they're doing.¹

Some of these learned men, however, do not agree with the public position of CERN officials; some of these respected and intellectually powerful men are quite nervous with what is about to happen along this 18-mile underground proton race track on the Franco-Swiss border in Geneva.

The most obtuse point I wish to make here, is that there is no high-level government conspiracy in this particular issue—no one trying to create some planetary weapon or universal ray gun to supplant our galactic enemies on the grand stage of the universe. The science is simply too complex for government egos to manipulate. The truth of it is, CERN is in the business of expanding our collective knowledge through honest and transparent research, not political conspiracy and arms dealing.

* * *

I'm not the sort to speak highly of the infallibility of men, whether for

religious purposes or for scientific ones, and herein may lay the most profound problem we, the inhabitants of this spinning blue ball, will face in the cumulative history and potential of our species. Are we smart enough to contain and control the powers that created the universe?

It is a fantastic and amazing thing, that human evolution has brought us to this point of understanding. That we can understand and observe the particle components that contributed to the creation of matter in our universe is an achievement worth celebrating on a most fundamental level. It is an achievement we should all share, especially if our greatest minds are able to create and study the fruits of that labour.

But what if they're wrong? What if, as renowned physicists Dr. Holger Nielsen, from the Niels Bohr Institute, and Masao Ninomiya, of the Yukawa Institute for Theoretical Physics, have postulated, there are unseen effects and forces at play—forces that could prove disastrous for the project, for humanity and even for Earth itself? Think that's unlikely? Well, in the name of science and technological advancement, I give you Chernobyl.² Unlikely or not, it can be and usually is the simplest and most innocent oversight that causes the greatest human suffering in the name of science. That is, when our collective brainpower isn't already focused on human suffering, à la Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

* * *

Physics is the study of stuff,

weird stuff, stuff that makes up the stuff we can see and the stuff we can't see. Quite often, that stuff holds the potential to both create and to destroy, but in the case of the physics being studied via the LHC, it's stuff that isn't well understood and which can all but erase our existence under the right circumstances.

Black Holes: these massive and terrible (or beautiful) intergalactic consumers, caused by the collapse of giant stars, feeding on the wastes of galaxies, are arguably the most powerful and destructive force in the universe. And you may now be asking, why, exactly, these scientists want to create that force here on Earth. It's all in the name of progress, and is basically an exaggerated case of just-because-we-can-ism. They want to study the decay rate, and in turn, confirm or deny the existence of Hawking radiation (the invisible stuff said to be emitted by full-sized black holes, in a weird sort of self-regulating strangeness), and in all fairness, the black holes they're talking about are both microscopic and expected to decay in a fraction of a second.³

There's always a "what if?" What if their cute little pet black hole doesn't behave as expected? What if it doesn't decay? What if it has some heretofore unknown property that makes it the biggest mistake ever conceived of by man? Well, we may never find out, because if this part goes wrong, the results could be catastrophic, to the degree that the black hole could devour the entire planet in the blink of an eye, as well as everything else in our galaxy, and ultimately wipe our existence off the

radar of anyone or anything in the universe.

Next: the Higgs boson particle, which, for lack of a better term, is the God particle mentioned above. In an effort to dispel any misunderstanding of that unfortunate name, coined by popular (or unpopular) media, we aren't talking about revealing the power of God, we're talking about understanding a small part of how matter came to exist following the Big Bang. I'm not in a position, intellectually, to give you a run-down of the physics of Higgs boson particles, since this is the stuff of cutting-edge physical science, but I can offer you a somewhat diluted explanation of what the science means in everyday terms. It is believed that Higgs boson particles are the root of all matter in the universe, that they have, in effect, created everything we can see and touch in our reality (hence the unfortunate nickname). The process by which these particles create matter is highly complex, and, I might add, entirely theoretical at this point, since they haven't yet been proven to exist.

A fairly easy to understand explanation of how the Higgs bosons work—as found on the Exploratorium Web site—is as follows:

"Imagine you're at a Hollywood party. The crowd is rather thick, and evenly distributed around the room, chatting. When the big star arrives, the people nearest the door gather around her. As she moves through the party, she attracts the people closest to her, and those she moves away from return to their other conversations. By gathering a fawning cluster of people around her, she's gained momentum,

an indication of mass. She's harder to slow down than she would be without the crowd. Once she's stopped, it's harder to get her going again."⁴

In this explanation, the Higgs boson particles (the crowd) begin to cluster around the particle of matter (known as Higgs clustering), providing mass to that central particle, (the celebrity), which in turn lends its collective mass to any other particle coming into contact with it. It is this study of mass that intrigues CERN's physicists, and through it, they hope to confirm certain portions of String Theory.

* * *

We may have already seen some of the repercussions of this endeavour, as Nielsen and Ninomiya have attempted to demonstrate through independent mathematical theories. There may be a temporal paradox occurring, suggesting that the LHC is capable of creating a theoretical vehicle for time travel.⁵

On the surface it seems entirely fantastic, and even a little more like science fiction than science, but as Nielsen points out, recent LHC setbacks—deemed sabotage by some media outlets—point to a partial corroboration of his theory. The LHC construction project, like many other mega-building projects, has been plagued with accidents and technical setbacks, and Nielsen contends that these setbacks may actually be the result of a temporal effect, reaching backward through time, to prevent the creation of Higgs boson particles.

He suggests that there seems to be some future force that is seeking

to protect its own existence from the possible cataclysmic effects brought on by the Higgs boson experiments:

“While it is a paradox to go back in time and kill your grandfather, physicists agree there is no paradox if you go back in time and save him from being hit by a bus. In the case of the Higgs and the collider, it is as if something is going back in time to keep the universe from being hit by a bus.”

I don’t for a second pretend to understand the extremely complex mathematical theory put forward by Nielsen and Ninomiya, but their arguments have been supported by others in the field of theoretical physics. Nielsen’s chief point is simply that we (meaning the science of physics) do not understand the ramifications of creating such a particle, that there could be and likely is some unseen effect or attribute of the particle that could be catastrophic:

“Since LHC will produce particles of a mathematically new type of fundamental scalars, i.e., the Higgs particles, there is potentially a chance to find unseen effects, such as on influence going from future to past...”

In pursuit of answers to this predicament, Nielsen has suggested a relatively simple test for determining

whether there is any appreciable impact of a backward-causation effect. It’s essentially a card trick, but it seems that CERN officials have rejected the idea of restricting experimentation based on the outcome of a card game.⁶

* * *

So, when physicists disagree about the potential dangers involved, what should we, as bystanders, believe?

Nielsen suggests that the LHC project will remain “jinxed” as it moves ahead, and that the backward-causation effect may become stronger, more aggressive and/or deadly as we march ever-closer to the creation of these particles. It isn’t difficult to see that through mankind’s ingenuity and dogged determination, we will achieve our goals on this front. One viewing these events from the outside might be given cause to wonder if this determination will ultimately be our undoing.

The timing of events here seems coincidental as well. The commencement of LHC testing was slated for mid-September, 2009. The “jinxing” of the project caused, apparently, a number of setbacks which pushed that start-up date to mid-November 2009. As the schedule

of experimentation begins, the pursuit of Higgs boson particles and of miniature black holes could extend into the future, as far as mid-2012. Even as I type that number, I am struck with a foreboding feeling.

The year 2012, of course, is significant in the ancient Mayan calendar, as a time of great change and transition for the world. Some claim it’s the end of the world, others claim it will be a time of ascendance and transformation for humanity. Others yet pass it off as just another apocalyptic fantasy, derived from pseudoscience and presented as a means of control over the populous. In light of the above, however, I’m given to pause and wonder if there is some merit in the idea that there will be a great transformation of reality at the end of this wild and wonderful roadway.

Is there any reason to fear the work of honest science? No, not intrinsically. Is there cause to rally against CERN and their groundbreaking research in the name of scientific advancement? Probably not. Is there any connection between the LHC experiments, focused on God particles and black holes, and the end of our world at the close of 2012? I guess we’ll just have to wait and see.

¹ See The safety of the LHC: <http://public.web.cern.ch/Public/en/LHC/Safety-en.html>

² For information see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chernobyl_disaster

³ Detailed commentary on the effect of miniature black holes can be found at: <http://physics.aps.org/articles/v1/14>

⁴ See: <http://www.exploratorium.edu/origins/cern/ideas/higgs.html>

⁵ Story via New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/13/science/space/13lh.html?pagewanted=1&r=1>

⁶ Holger B. Nielsen’s proposed test is outlined here: <http://arxiv.org/abs/0707.1919>

Martin J. Clemens, the owner and author of Paranormal People, is a seasoned investigator in the private sector, trained in statement analysis, evidence collection, photography and videography, covert surveillance, and reporting, among other such useful things. This, coupled with a love of science, meta-physics and psychology, is what makes an amateur author and otherwise unassuming man pursue the weirder things in life. “Natural cynicism, a critical eye and an honest desire to reach the truth in our world, are the only things setting me apart from anyone else.” www.paranormalpeopleonline.com

This issue, *The Broken City* put contributors through confessional: “What is/was your most geekish or nerdy obsession?”

Guy Wilkinson: The fear of turning into a giant insect. Or consider, in turn, the situation of the unnamed narrator of Sartre’s “Erostratos.” In this obsession, one is bogged by complexity. Startled by ingenuity. And then there’s Treblinka. Srebrenica. Or perhaps that’s not it at all. Perhaps it’s really those mawkish ’70s love songs one can’t get out of one’s head—“Precious and Few,” by Climax, for example, or even Debbie Boone’s “You Light Up My Life.”

Martin J. Clemens: *Star Trek*. I’ve been a Trekkie (in the closet) for many years, though I don’t attend *Trek* conferences, I’m not able to recite the Klingon dictionary, and I don’t dress like a Romulan. The show, and actually the entire culture of *Star Trek*, seems to me to be a working social model of fairness, compassion, accountability and self-motivation, and I find that underlying message to be a worthy model—one our society should strive for. I for one would welcome the ideologies and methodologies of Kirk, Picard, Janeway and their United Federation of Planets. How about a United Federation of Humans?

Edward McDermott: As a teenager, I made a scrapbook of newspaper articles about astronauts and cosmonauts, following every mission on the radio and on TV as they happened.

Juleigh Howard-Hobson: Arranging cookbooks. I can’t seem to find the ultimate solution. If the baking section includes bread and cake cookbooks, should a cookbook about decorating cakes go there too? What if it’s an old one—shouldn’t it be sitting with the other vintage cookbooks? Or, since it’s an American cake decorating book, should it go in the American section? What if the author was born in France, but decorated in America? I spend far more time arranging these books than I do cooking. New acquisitions can cost me hours—nay, days—of absurd angst.

Patricia McCowan: When I was 13, my best friends and I co-wrote a steamy romance story starring Mark Hamill of *Star Wars* fame. I recall he was pantless at one point. We just couldn’t get enough of him from watching the movies and reading articles in *Tiger Beat Magazine*. One of my co-writers lost the notebook containing the story and we were terrified it would be found and gleefully shared with the entire school, thus guaranteeing eternal junior-high humiliation. Thankfully, the lost notebook was never found, as far as I know. But sometimes I wonder.

Mouki K. Butt: As a child, I was obsessed with top hats. I wanted one very badly, but was unable to find one anywhere (my search was limited to my parents’ closet and the local SAAN Store). I tried to fashion one out of black construction paper, but the result was less than aesthetically pleasing. Eventually, I did spot what appeared to be a perfect top hat. It was part of a magic kit for kids. I feigned interest in magic and was able to convince my parents to purchase the kit for me. The hat, which was made of thick rigid plastic, turned out to be more of a prop than a wearable hat, but I tied it onto my head and paraded around proudly. I was hip.

Andre Russell: Xena, the Warrior Princess. I think that’s actually understandable. What I mean to say, is perhaps that doesn’t really fall under geekish. Maybe perverted, but a healthy perverted, I think. Okay, I’ve got it! When I was in grade four, I tried to make my own laser. I had this electronics kit that I really new nothing about, except how to attach the battery to the light bulb. I used cups, funnels, lenses and even cups with water, all for the sake of making a beam of light. Well, I didn’t succeed, but to this day, I have grandiose ideas for projects to complete but never even start, except for one. I can truthfully say that I bought all the parts; I just have to put it together. It’s a solar-powered PDA charger. The sad part is that while shopping for Christmas gifts, I saw one for sale at Wal-Mart. I almost bought it.

Laura Notarianni: There’s a chain of clothing stores called “Northern Getaway” (for children) and “Northern Reflections” (for adults). As a child, I put the clothing from this franchise on a pedestal. When my classmates were wearing tearaways and band shirts, I was clad from head to toe in cotton pants and fleece vests imprinted with cartoon rodents and honey bees dressed as ballerinas. These clothes were considered expensive for my working-class parents, so I’d wear them until they faded or I outgrew them, which never took long. I quickly graduated to Northern Reflections. And I even wore the jewellery: painted wooden animals looped around string; it was the coolest, I thought. Shopping there was an experience. It felt like the Rainforest Cafe, but for clothes.

Vincent De Freitas: Tolkien. Consider me in love with everything Tolkien wrote, from *The Hobbit* onwards (*The Silmarillion* just feels like too much of a textbook for me to enjoy). Between mounds of schoolwork, reading, badminton (does that also count?), I still find time to skim through a favourite chapter of either *The Hobbit*, or the *LOTR* trilogy.

Joel McConvey: I own seasons one through six of *Magnum P.I.* on DVD, and will consider my life unfulfilled until I own all eight. After a few beers, it is not unusual for me to mount an impassioned and by now well-rehearsed argument that “Did You See the Sunrise?” a two-part episode that kicked off season three, is among the greatest moments that television has ever produced. A few years ago, I took a trip to Vietnam. I told people it was because I was interested in learning about the history of the war, and because I really like a good bowl of Pho. The real reason was that Magnum was in ‘Nam.



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