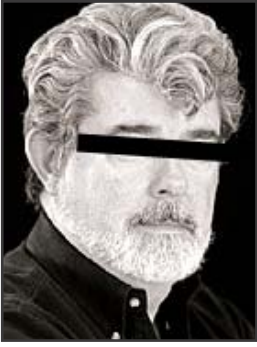


CROK #1

Spring '08 - Pon farr



An Alert Nerd Zine



Hi everybody!

Boy, I bet you're as surprised to be reading this as I am to be typing this! When I got the "E-Mail" asking me to write this fake introduction to the debut issue of

Grok: An Alert Nerd Zine, I didn't even know what Alert Nerd was! Also, I did not know I had an E-Mail address!

See, every morning, my assistant Monroe (who is VERY good, by the way—hey buddy, he's transcribing this right now, HA!) brings in a stack of paperwork for me to read and sign. I had noticed the odd little funky phrases at the tops of some of them, with the weird @s all over the place and the ".com" thingees. But I just assumed it was his typing shorthand or something. Hey! It takes all kinds.

Come to find out, I have an E-Mail account, with which to send E-Mails, to other people with E-Mails! And these E-mails are sent to people through some device known as the InterNet. I'll admit—I'm not so square that I haven't heard of the InterNet. Why, just the other day, when I asked Monroe where he found that funny video of the dog on the skateboard (HA!), he said, "YouTube," and I said, "What are you

talking about," and he said, "You know, the InterNet." And then I pretended I knew what he was talking about, even though I felt very old and confused.

All I really know now about the InterNet is that it has E-mail and funny videos of dogs on skateboards, and you can't get to it from the dashboard of a '57 Thunderbird. Don't bother—I already tried it!

Wow, computers are really something, aren't they? Apparently I pay millions of dollars annually to a bunch of nerds in a building someplace who use computers to make Jabba the Hutt and Yoda and stuff. This blew me away! What happened to the puppets and the models? I gotta get out of this office more often.

Oh, this is kinda funny...I sent Steven a funny E-mail I was sent that had this picture of a cat in it, and on the picture, it said, "Use the Force, Kitty," which about made me spit Sprite through my nose. He wrote back and was like, "LOL," which made me feel old and confused again. Monroe tells me it stands for "laughing out loud." Why not just type that? I don't get things sometimes.

Many happy returns, suckers!

Your pal,

Fake George Lucas

Grok: An Alert Nerd Zine

Editors: Sarah Kuhn, Matt Springer, Chris Stewart

Contributors: Sarah Kuhn, Sarah McKinley Oakes, Ivan Sian, Ken Simon, Jeff Stolarcyk, Matt Springer, Chris Stewart

Special Thanks to Ivan Sian for Personal Ads from the 24th Century

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Are you really reading the masthead? You NERD. We love ya, but still--DAMN. Move on already. It's so boring down here. When in Hollywood, Visit Universal Studios.

E-mail us: alertnerd@gmail.com

Read our blog: <http://www.alertnerd.com>

Daddy's Little Ewok

By Matt Springer — Page 2

Dogs and Cats Living Together

By Jeff Stolarcyk — Page 4

Nerd Pick-Up Lines

By Ivan Sian — Page 5

The Opposite of Filking

By Sarah McKinley Oakes — Page 6

One Con Glory

By Sarah Kuhn — Page 7

Barfleet Academy

By Matt Springer — Page 16

The Tygress Theory

By Ken Simon — Page 20

Give Judy My Notice

By Matt Springer — Page 23

Slashdance

By Chris Stewart — Page 25

For the longest time, I had a canned response whenever the subject of my as-yet-unborn children would come up.

"They won't even know *Star Trek* exists until they're in their twenties," I'd insist. "*Star Wars*? They'll see it when they're old enough to vote. My kids will grow up in a geek-free environment, and they'll play football and lead cheers, and become Homecoming Kings and Queens. You know, unlike their father."

Then, of course, I actually had a kid, and it took me all of three weeks before I couldn't help myself, and I let the womp rat out of the bag.

"Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away, there was a boy named Luke Skywalker," I whispered to my newborn daughter, during one of the rare moments when she was in my arms, awake, and not screaming. I told her the whole damn story of *Star Wars*, like she was hearing a bedtime story.

Now she's almost two, and she's got a Luke Skywalker figure that she flies around the house and calls "Super Luke," and she also got her paws on my Krypto toy which she calls "Super Dog," and every once in a while, I point at Batman and she knows who he is.

So there goes that plan.

Pon farr is sometimes known as "the blood fever," or as Wikipedia puts it, "Vulcan males go into heat every seven years...becoming violent, and finally dying if they do not mate with someone with whom they are empathically bonded."

This seems a fair description of parenting to me, inasmuch as everything you feel is more than you ever thought you could feel—truly, the blood fever.

If you want to know purest terror, watch

helplessly as your kid falls from the upper level of a jungle gym at a neighborhood playground. I already can't bear the thought of my daughter leaving the house without me or her mother, because she'll either fall off more playground equipment, or meet up with some brat who won't share his toys, requiring me to find that brat and slap him around because HOW DARE YOU DENY MY CHILD ANYTHING SHE WANTS YOU HEARTLESS LITTLE SON OF A LITERAL BITCH.

Then there's the "gaga" moments, where you find yourself just staring at this perfect creation, glassy-eyed and grinning, maybe glancing over to the mother of said creation to share a moment of, "Wow, our genes are way more awesome than either of us will ever be."

It's that fever, for better or worse, that put Luke Skywalker in her tiny hands, and drove me one afternoon to even put *Star Wars* on the TV, even though she was less than a year old at the time, just to see if she'd show any interest. (She didn't.)

There's a strange impulse I've noticed amongst geeks, and it's this: We all sorta want the people we love to love the things we love. Even when we marry non-geeks and come from non-geek parentage, when our siblings know William Shatner as only "that old guy from that legal show," we persist in the delusion that we can convert these sensible, normal people into frothing nerdy maniacs like ourselves.

When I first started noticing girls, I would pronounce oddball requirements for hooking up with Young Matt Springer; there was a time when I imagined my dream woman would know all the words to "American Pie," like I do. (I'm not really making that up, as much as I wish I were.) In college, I sat down beaming with pride to watch "City on the Edge of Forever" with my girlfriend, knowing it would send her careening into my arms for baptism as a born-again Trekkie. When she didn't in-

stantly fall for *Trek*, I assumed it was something wrong with her.

Now I know it was something wrong with me—this need for the people I care about to share my joys. It's an innocent thing, in most cases, and it's even kind of touching, because it demonstrates how much you love someone, that you want them to be so deeply involved in your own passions. At the same time, it's also an asshole thing to do, more than a little self-centered and narcissistic.

It's a little weird to admit it, but that's really deep down why I want my daughter to watch *Star Wars* with me and read comics someday: I want her to love what I love, as much as I love it, and then maybe find her own things to love.

And if she doesn't become a geek? That's probably for the best. She can leave her old man to read old comic books on Saturday nights while she hits the town with her friends, and I can fashion a homemade Batman costume to wear when I leave the house a few hours later, to break in through bedroom windows and threaten all the guys at her high school with castration if they go anywhere near my daughter.

What's likely is that she will join the ungeeky ranks of most of my family and friends—my sisters, who know more about *Days of Our Lives* than they ever will about the DC universe; my mother-in-law, who gamely went to see *Superman Returns* with me and didn't even complain when she liked it more than I did; and my wife, who calls my toys "*Star Wars Barbies*" sometimes.

Maybe that's the real definition of "pon farr": Loving someone unconditionally, even if they don't know all the words to "American Pie." Sounds about right to me.

• *Matt something something something*

BIOS

Sarah Kuhn lives in Los Angeles with a geek husband, an extensive Buffy action figure collection and way too many comic books. She has written for a bunch of nifty publications, including Back Stage, Geek Monthly, IGN, StarTrek.com, and Creative Screenwriting. She is one third of the mighty Alert Nerd collective and also blogs about stuff at Great Hera! (greathera.typepad.com)

Sarah McKinley Oakes writes children's books, and is hoping that soon she will not have to add "in her spare time" to the end of that statement. She grew up in Washington, DC and now lives in Los Angeles. She recently got engaged while floating around in zero-G.

Back when the Internets was young, vibrant and paved with gold, **Ivan Sian** contributed insipid, drunken rants to IGN Sci-Fi. But after them thar webtubes imploded, he moved along to greater heights, submitting even more infrequent articles to the gone-but-not-forgotten Entertainment Geekly. Now that Ivan is older, he's a little less drunken, but no less insipid. Ladies love him, girls adore him, even the ones who never saw him, he's Ivan Sian.

Ken Simon is a librarian. Google will only make him stronger! Before becoming a librarian, he was an information technology guy. And before that, things get murky, but there was something about quitting law school and feeling very, very relieved. Writing and acting are his first loves, and he wants to visit them more often.

Matt Springer trims his toenails far less often than he should. Despite this disgusting factoid, he has managed to eke out a living in this workaday world, finding gainful employment as a magazine writer and editor, a marketing/PR flack, and a janitor. He is one of three points on the Alert Nerd triangle and has published his first novel, *Unconventional*, through Alert Nerd Press (press.alertnerd.com). He also blogs at Pop Geek (popgeek.org). He lives with a toddler and his beautiful wife in Orlando, FL.

Jeff Stolarcy is a horror buff, a comic geek, and a gamer, who supports his hobbies as a freelance writer and educator. He lives with his wife near Scranton, PA, and yes, he has been to all of the places they mention on *The Office*. Jeff writes the weekly "All My Issues" column for AnotherCastle.com and blogs about irrational geekery at ConditionalAxe.com.

Chris Stewart was rescued from a life of crime by Matt and Sarah, who put him to work reviling films at Daily Sci-Fi.com. He continues to orbit the world of freelance writing while working in the videogame industry in Vancouver. He also runs Proton Charging, a Ghostbusters news site and one of the earliest blogs evar.

You've already read these magazines!" my wife shouts, waving a stack of Denny O'Neill Questions in my face. "Why do we have to keep them?"

"It's. The. Denny. O. Neill. Question. Series."

"What does that even mean?"

That's when the shouting starts.

On a quiet street in a quaint neighborhood, there's a small Cape Cod with boxwoods lining the walkway and a garage door that maybe needs a new coat of paint. It's a lot like the house next to it, and the house across the street, but inside the house, a vicious struggle goes on, a secret war that's raged for years. See, I'm a geek – comics, movies, music, all of the usual suspects—and I managed to marry a cheerleader. It sounds like something out of a John Hughes movie, but adjusting to one another sometimes has an Eli Roth tone to it.

See, regardless of what Paula Abdul and her rascally anthropomorphic cat tell you, opposites don't attract. The realization that a music video can lie takes a horrible psychic toll, and not just because Paula Abdul's trustworthiness is called into question. If there are two things that any self-actualized geek knows, after all, it's that;

- 1) the docking bay for the Death Star tractor beam is number 327, and...
- 2) an attractive geeky girl that actually reciprocates your fumbling affection cannot exist.

Coming to terms with that sad inevitability means casting aside all sorts of fanciful notions (like Valentine's Day cards that read "ALL MY BASE ARE BELONG TO YOU"), and it certainly means that you can never play the "Amok Time" music to spice up an amorous encounter. All that's left for the geek male is to wander in a metaphorical

Nod, forever exiled from the dream of some ideal onanistic pairing, grimly urging himself forward in the hope that opposites might, just this once, attract. Like in the song.

While I was busy worrying about getting first chair in the wind ensemble, the teenager who would grow up into my wife was busy being prom queen. I read *Batman*, she read *Cosmo*, and she listened to country while I was glued to the college radio stations or the Philadelphia jazz station I could just barely pick up. That was 12 years ago, and we didn't even know each other at the time. We met in college, dated for years, and finally tied the knot, both sure that the other would finally change.

Neither of us was so inclined. I kept trying to get her to listen to The Attractions and she kept trying to destroy, sell or give away my 20-year run of Uncanny X-Men. She complained about the two or three hours a week I played videogames, although writing about games was my job. The best we could manage was a fragile detente, during which we would look at each other and sigh, "I love you, but how am I supposed to live with you?"

The answer is pretty simple, it turns out. A sense of perspective and willingness to compromise are all it takes. While we don't have any interests in common, we each have things we like, and we each like some of those things way more than we should. The first hurdle is accepting that my interests might not be her interests, but that her passion for them isn't any less valid because of it. Everybody's a geek for something, after all. Those of us who fly the geek flag more openly than others might lose sight of that, surrounding ourselves almost exclusively with like-minded, geeky friends who feed our notions about what is hip and cool and right. The key is not fighting over why there's a box of 20 year-old comic books in the attic, but respecting that they're precious to your part-

ner for the same reason that your treadmill or scrapbook or herb garden is precious to you.

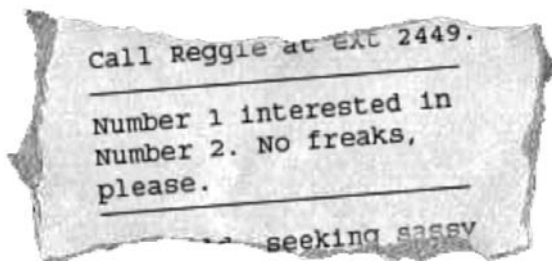
Once you've stopped trying to remake your spouse in your image, have a frank discussion about the best way to make the house livable for everyone. Define rules on game playing, how to determine what takes precedence when *Supernatural* and *Grey's Anatomy* are on at the same time, and what happens when the number of long boxes in storage reaches critical mass.

Be open to each others' interests. It's one thing to mutually respect that you each don't like the other's hobbies, but every once in a while, an exercise in bridging the gap can be healthy. Watch a Lifetime movie; play *Guitar Hero* together. You might learn a little bit about why she likes what she likes, and vice versa.

Living with a non-geek isn't always an exercise in frustration. Yes, you may seem like opposites, but there's some sameness under those opposite qualities. When tempers flare and things get thrown, take a deep breath and look for what you have in common, Paula Abdul be damned.

It'd be a lie to claim that everything is peaceful in the quaint Cape Cod now, but there's much less shouting than there once was. Vic Sage is still in my attic, behind a cardboard tab marked Q, but I did donate some impulse-buy comics I really didn't want to the library to make some space. And now my wife and I are going to make some popcorn and watch *Bring It On III*...and make fun of it together.

• Jeff Stolarczyk believes in commas.



Nerd Pick-Up Lines - Part One

By Ivan Sian

How about I buy you a drink so we can make First Contact?

Your avatar doesn't do you justice.

You'd rate 1000 Diggs in my book

Phasers set to...stunning!

Are those space pants? Because your ass looks like it's from Ceti Omicron V.

How about we make some beautiful fanfic together?

You had me at Qapla'.

Is that a Tribble in your pocket or are you happy to see me? Oh wait, that really is a Tribble in your pocket.

Come with me if you want to live.

You're so mint condition, I'd wrap you up in a mylar bag and store you in a longbox.

Your father must be a Level 14 Thief, capable of making difficult saving rolls against your eyes.

Would you like to have pizza and play WoW? What, you don't like WoW?

CON'T Page 19

The Opposite of Filking

When it comes to geek pick-up strategies,
pon farr still reigns supreme

By Sarah McKinley Oakes

We can probably all agree that *Star Trek* has had a pretty big effect on the science fiction/fantasy culture. It gave us Spock ears, a whole language to learn by heart, and a cute hand signal with which we can identify one another.

But the greatest gift *Star Trek* has given us is a way to walk up to someone at an SF/F con and say, "If you don't have sex with me, I'LL DIE!"

The fantasy side of the nerd world has it easy. "Hey," a guy might say. "A sorceress just cast a spell on me. Now I have to have sex right away!"

"Normally I wouldn't do that," a girl might explain later, "But my body was temporarily possessed by the Succubus Historian-*nila!*"

"Oops," they might both add, "You know that haunted house in the *Buffy* episode where she had to keep having sex with Riley? Suddenly our hotel room was just like that!"

And of course there is always the old standard: "But on the other plane where our souls dwell and we have exciting quests and fight dragons, we are married!!" (This actually worked on me when I was 16. Shut up.)

But without pon farr, the science fiction arena offers far fewer strategies. Sure, there's all the free love preached in so many of Heinlein's books (and Spider Robinson's, in a far creepier way), but discussions in which you agree that maybe he was right about Certain Things take forever, and I for one have never been able to say "drink deep and never thirst" with a straight face. You can move towards cyberpunk and claim to be a sex-bot, but that gets disproved so easily, and can cause embarrassment. And trying to recreate the under-ocean orgy in *The Diamond Age* means a lot of props and teamwork, and is frankly dangerous.

But pon farr. Pon farr's perfect.

"What's up with him?" "Pon farr."

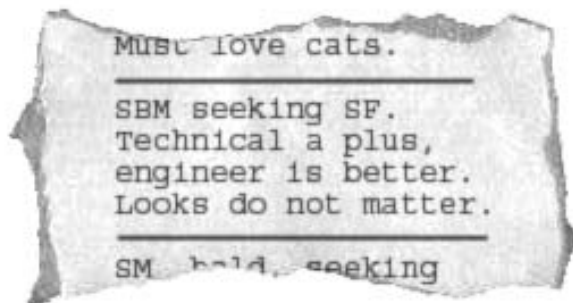
"What're you doing tonight?" "Pon farr."

"Oh, wow did you see Billy last week?"

"No, why?" "Pon farr."

Of course, pon farr is only supposed to hit every seven years. But it's amazing the weird time loops one can get stuck in during the months between conventions, or even over the course of an evening. With a little creativity, you can get *Star Trek* fans to save your life several times in a single weekend.

• Sarah McKinley Oakes would really like to save Captain Jack's life.





By the time I was 16, I had already gone through three Glory Gilmores. She was six inches of garishly-painted plastic with 31 points of articulation, the queen of my action figure kingdom. And yet, she kept getting lost.

Original Glory was a victim of the neighbors' dog, her plastic head gouged with teeth-marks and drowned in slobber. I hated that fucking dog.

Glory II was snatched from my lunchbox by Melissa Perkins during fourth grade recess. Melissa—who usually spent all her time making ugly “friendship bracelets” out of embroidery floss – decided it would be a good day to practice her latent kleptomaniac, and made a successful grab for Glory just as I was about to bite into my Hostess cupcake.

Glory the Third...oh, this is a sad one. Andy Oppenheimer, who was second chair to my first chair clarinet, gave me Glory the Third for my fifteenth birthday after hearing about the untimely demises of Glories I and

II (we had a lot of time on our hands because the band director was always trying to get the goddamn trombone section in tune). Now that I look back on it, I think maybe he liked me a little bit. Unfortunately, I was going through a rather short-lived phase of “maturity” and donated my entire action figure collection to Goodwill. I only hope Glory the Third ended up in a good home.

Of course, there was one final Glory.

The Last Glory was found by me in a super-discount bin at Lee's Comics my first year of college. She was \$2.

I gave her a place of honor in my dorm room and she presided over my milk-crated CDs and sluggish Mac Classic II for almost four years. Until the last semester of senior term, when I finally broke up with my boyfriend Curtis, aka Cap'n Douchebag. The Cap'n was a self-described “male feminist” who knew three chords on the guitar and claimed that not washing his hair was an act of rebellion against the patriarchy. We shared a love of

beat-up sci-fi paperbacks and almost nothing else. After I dumped his ass, he used the key I had stupidly given him to sneak into my room and liberate *The Last Glory* from her perch. Even though he didn't understand me at all, he somehow figured out that she was one of my most valued possessions.

It's been seven years and I've been basically celibate ever since. It's not that Cap'n Douchebag ruined me for all other men or anything. It's just that I can't be bothered. My generally irritated demeanor hasn't changed much since college and it's pretty tough for me to find people I like enough to even be friends or friendly acquaintances with.

Truthfully, I want my *Glory Gilmore* figure back way more than I want to ever have sex again. OK?

Luckily, I may have a chance at the former very, very soon.

In addition to wishing for the return of *The Last Glory*, I have wanted a great many things in my life. Telekinesis. A decent *Star Wars* prequel. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* seemingly endless supply of well-fitting leather pants. But right now, I'm wishing harder than I've ever wished before for something simple, something perfect and pure.

I'm wishing that Braidbeard would shut the fuck up.

"...but the biggest *problem* with the second season is they've introduced all these new characters and we're supposed to *care*," he enunciates nasally, eyes goggling at me behind his aggressively hip clunky glasses. The source of his nickname—a scraggly beard, carefully arranged into three unkempt braids—swings back and forth wildly as he gesticulates. "It's the fucking Tailies on *Lost* all over again. I'm like, 'Why should I give a *shit*?'"

I nod weakly, organizing my expression

into as vague a shape as possible. I could try to argue, to engage in an active discussion about this issue, but I am just too fucking tired. Besides, listening to the sounds coming out of other people's mouths is not Braidbeard's strong suit.

Unfortunately, it looks like I'm going to have to sit here for a while, the unwilling audience for his dissertation on *Why Everything Sucks*. As journalists covering GinormoCon, Los Angeles' annual assemblage of all things geeky, we're currently wedged into a pair of rickety plastic chairs in the depressingly-lit Media Holding Area, waiting for the day's round of interviews to begin. Braidbeard and I have journeyed all the way from the foggier climes of the San Francisco Bay Area for the opportunity to walk the con floor and exchange publicist-approved soundbites with the talent on display. I write for an ever-shrinking genre-focused glossy, *Mammoth Media*, while he pens a column for entertainment website *CinePlanet.com*. We met on the incestuous Bay Area junket circuit, and now he seems to think we're friends. And I guess we are, sort of, except that I can't stand him.

"...and I just *knew* they were fucked when they cast *her*," he continues, apparently not discouraged by the sight of my eyeballs rolling back into my head. "She's what I like to refer to as a *show-killer*..."

"I think that's what everyone refers to her as, B," interrupts a booming voice.

My eyes snap back into their rightful position and I smile wearily at the voice's source, Mitch Caplan. Mitch is Braidbeard's *CinePlanet* colleague, a genial 6'2 mountain of a man whose wardrobe consists almost exclusively of swag. Today, he's sporting a *Firefly* baseball cap and an XL t-shirt that proclaims "I Think I Love My Wife."

"Hey, Julie," he says, settling in next to us. "You going to any panels today?"

"A couple this morning," I say. "I have to miss the afternoon stuff cause I have a

one-on-one."

"Very nice. And who are you talking to?"

"Jack Camden."

"Oh my *God*," Braidbeard hoots, breaking into an overly-loud cackle.

"What?" Mitch shoots me a puzzled look. "I've talked to him before. He's cool."

"Don't you *know* how Julie feels about Jack Camden?" Braidbeard asks, a smug smile plastered all over his pasty face.

Figures. Over the two years we've known each other, the single biographical fact that Braidbeard has been able to absorb into his minutiae-stuffed brain is my burning hot hatred of Jack Camden. I take a deep breath, preparing to expound on my well-worn theory about why the existence of a B-List TV star is representative of everything that's wrong with popular culture. And, you know, the *world*.

"Look," I say, "*The Periodic Seven* is almost a perfect show, right? Really well-written, doesn't take itself too seriously. They know how to move stories along without sacrificing character development. Reasonably faithful to the source material and the cast is great. Except for Camden. He's the one sour note. If the show was the *Star Trek* universe, he'd be *Enterprise*."

"I dunno, I think he does a lot with a pretty thinly-written part," counters Mitch. "And his chemistry with Claire Yardley—like, anything with their characters together is pretty awesome."

"But see, at the core, casting him in that role was just so...*wrong*," I argue. "That character is supposed to be a nerd."

Ah. Therein lies the heart of my argument. Three years ago, an established genre TV producer reinvented the old *Periodic Seven* comic book as a show that's gained a fairly devoted cult following. He made a few tweaks to bring the story into the modern age, but the basic premise and spirit re-

main the same: team of young scientists gains superpowers when their lab is destroyed in a chemical explosion and awesomeness ensues. Camden plays Travis Trent, the character who's supposed to be the most bookish and socially-challenged of the team. Even though my favorite of the Seven was always Glory (who, by the way, is perfectly portrayed by the lovely Claire), mild-mannered Travis ran a close second. And for me, Camden has just never fit. Prior to landing the role on the show, he was usually cast in cheesy romantic comedies as the nice, clueless guy who doesn't get the girl in the end. His face is geometrically perfect, a ridiculously chiseled composition of sharp cheekbones and gleaming teeth, but there's something empty about it. He has no character, no soul. And Travis Trent is supposed to have soul.

"So they tinkered with that characterization a bit, so what?" says Mitch. "It's not like the source material is fucking Batman or something. Like, ten people read the original comic."

Braidbeard grins and jerks his thumb at me in what he probably imagines to be a charmingly "jaunty" gesture. "She was one of 'em."

"Oh, brother," Mitch throws back his head and roars with laughter. The effect is not unlike Sabretooth baring his gigantic fangs. "I thought you had *taste*."

"Yeah, yeah...I know it wasn't exactly Marvel's finest work to come out of the late '80s..."

"Third-tier *at best*!" shrieks Braidbeard.

"But," I continue, ignoring him, "If you go back and actually read it, all the stuff that makes the show great is in there: the strong characters, the weird little plot twists. And I always felt, like...a connection with Glory Gilmore."

"Dude," groans Mitch. "*Dude*. Do you even remember what her stupid powers were? They were like a really, really bad Jean

Grey rip-off. What was it...biokinesis and...something with telepathy?"

"Biokinesis and psychoempathy," I say through gritted teeth.

"Oh, right, so basically she could only move, like, *living* things and she could sense your emotions if you were standing right next to her." Mitch starts roaring again. "She was an even lamer version of Counselor Troi."

"I sense danger...AND HACKY PLOTLINES!" Braidbeard is practically aerobicizing out of his chair.

I sigh and slump back in my seat, defeated. Again: too fucking tired. If I were feeling more on top of my game, maybe I'd expound upon the other reasons I loved Comic Book Glory so much. Like me, she had a strangely voluminous mane of jet-black hair that was neither wavy nor straight, but somewhere in between. Also like me, she tended to be in a constant state of annoyance about *something*. As an overly-morose 8-year-old, I got really crabby when, say, my mom wouldn't let me wear my kick-ass red Converse high-tops every single day. Glory, meanwhile, was always getting pissed at her teammates for making various mutant messes around the Periodic Seven HQ. Only when Glory got pissed, she could throw your ass against the wall *with her mind*. I always thought that was pretty cool.

"Alright, so anyway: you hate Camden," says Mitch, grinning indulgently. "Why'd your editor give you this assignment?"

I shrug. "He really wants something on *Periodic Seven* in the next issue and we've already covered Claire and most of the supporting people. And I wanted to come to the con, y'know?"

After a whirlwind morning of panels and roundtable interviews, I'm starving and slightly woozy and my notebook is crammed with such scintillating tidbits as

"Eliza Dushku excited to be here" and "Dan DiDio claims 1) love of fan feedback, 2) no more dumb crossover events." I settle into my tiny rental car and inhale a dense block of granola and dried fruit purporting to be an "energy bar." I'm headed to the rarefied air of Beverly Hills, to the Four Seasons, to Jack Camden.

Though all con happenings are situated in Downtown LA's cavernous convention center, Camden's publicist has insisted we meet at one of the city's ritziest hotels, perhaps to enforce the notion that he is actually a celebrity. I arrive in a fairly speedy 30 minutes and steal away to the hotel's plush bathroom, where I attempt to bunch my unwieldy mass of hair into something that resembles a bun. Said hair, the hair that is so much like Glory Gilmore's, refuses to be tamed by razors, scissors, or the industrial-strength ponytail elastics I buy in bulk at Target. As it is set against ghostly pale skin and light blue eyes, I have occasionally been informed that I appear slightly vampiric, and should therefore wear more velvet and engage in goth-y role-playing games. I prefer to think I'm rockin' an Aeryn Sun kind of look.

I duck back out into the lobby and find Jack Camden's publicist, a smile-y blonde named Lois. As she whisks me up to his room, I activate the persona I think of as Schmoozer Julie, aka Schmuzie. Schmuzie loves to talk about the marine layer near the San Francisco Bay, the fact that she's been working for *Mammoth Media* for about three years now, and what a pain going through airport security is these days – who even wants to fly any more? Schmuzie expresses astonishment over LA traffic and agrees that GinormoCon is bigger than ever! No, Schmuzie hasn't seen that particular film, but she's heard good things. While Schmuzie chats with Lois, I retreat to the back of my head and go over my interview questions. Most of what I've got is pretty standard – I'm not planning on pulling any Vincent D'Onofrio-style interrogation tactics on Camden. I mostly just want to get this over with.

Finally, the elevator dings, Schmuzie agrees that this is the best season of *Periodic Seven* yet, and Lois ushers me into a room decorated in such neutral shades, the furniture almost blends into the walls. Jack Camden is sitting on a beige and taupe striped couch, coffee-colored hair flopping rakishly over his stupid forehead. He's wearing a ratty Dr. Strange t-shirt, pseudo-distressed \$300 jeans, and blinding white sneakers that look like they were only recently liberated from their factory box. Oh, and of course, the gleaming smile that's launched a million vomit-worthy Mary Sue fanfics.

"Jack, this is Julie from *Mammoth Media*," says Lois. "She's a big fan of the show."

"Hi, Julie," he says, shaking my hand, grin still firmly in place. "Nice to meet you. Are you covering the con?"

"Uh, yeah," I say. "It's, you know...fun."

"Well, I'll just leave you two to chat," chirps Lois.

The door clicks behind her and I push the red button on my tape recorder, glancing down at my notes.

"So how did you land this part?" I ask, leaning forward and cocking my head to one side, miming genuine interest. "I know they did a huge search for Travis..."

"I auditioned and it's just one of those things," he says, shrugging. "I guess it was meant to be." He flashes me a bullshit smile to let me know that that concludes his extremely well thought out response, thank you very much.

"Didn't you have to do a chemistry read with Claire?" I ask. "She mentioned something about that when I interviewed her last year."

"Oh, yeah," he says, eyes rolling upward to focus on the eggshell-hued ceiling. "They made us read together and, like, do that whole thing where we almost make out. But I mean, I thought Claire was pretty

cool right off. We kind of bonded over being really into comic books when we were kids. Only she actually grew out of the hobby."

This is one of Camden's stock responses. I've read that line in countless magazines and websites and I've never really bought it. Camden is one of those pretty people who always tries to claim he was "such a nerd" in high school, but I just can't picture actual pimples blemishing his smooth visage.

He gifts me with another smile, this one containing a hint of condescension. "You know," he says, "I've talked about this stuff in a ton of interviews. Isn't there something else you want to know about? I'm gonna be playing some gigs with my band..."

Oh, brother. No, Jack Camden, I do not want to hear about your fucking fake "band" and how music is your real passion. And even though I told myself I was going to stick to softballs in the name of getting the fuck out of here as quickly as possible, I decide to give him a little of what he wants. Different questions? Fine. Let's call him on some of those "nerd" claims.

"Uh, OK, how about this?" I say. "What exactly were your favorite comics growing up?"

"Well, all the usual suspects: the Batmans and Supermans and X-Mens and such. But actually, what I really loved were some of the weirder ones, like good ol' Dr. Strange here," he says, gesturing to his shirt. "The Silver Age *Secret Six* was a big favorite. And y'know...I feel like it sounds fake and cheesy, but I actually really dug the *Periodic Seven* comic. I was one of the 10 people who read it."

OK, name-checking *Secret Six* was a nice touch, but Camden obviously doesn't know what he's playing with here.

"ReaaaaaIIIIIIIIIIly?!" I say, as if this is the most fascinating thing I have ever heard. "What was your favorite storyline?"

"Well, I dug Travis' big identity crisis and turn to the dark side, of course," he says. "But actually, I think the best arc they ever did was with Glory Gilmore – you know, Claire's character on the show? There was a whole thing in issues #10 through #14 where her powers went away temporarily and she had to cope with being...well, regular, for lack of a better word. It was kind of this amazing metaphor for feeling...lost, I guess."

Wait...what?

He smiles his "That's it" smile yet again, but my brain has suddenly stopped processing regular thought. Instead, it's stuck on an interminable loop, a squeaky hamster wheel containing one thought and one thought only: that is *no one's* favorite storyline.

Well, no one except me. Most of the geeks that actually read *Periodic Seven* consider it a low point in the book's fairly limited run, a broody and indulgent thread that mired the series in unnecessary angst. But I loved it. My crabby little self felt Glory's pain.

"So, uh...can I tell you about my band?"

I nod mutely, silently freaking out over my suddenly discovered commonality with the world's lamest person.

Later, I attempt to recuperate from the bizarre, possibly disastrous interview by shutting my generic Holiday Inn hotel room's stiff, mud-colored drapes and flopping onto the bed.

What the fuck was *that*?

Could it be...could it be that Camden somehow knew about my love for that particular plotline and mentioned it to fuck with me? Maybe he found my MySpace blog?

I mean, it's possible.

My cell phone buzzes and I flip it open, scanning through my texts. One from the editor, one from Braidbeard about how the new *Spider-Man* movie footage "suxxors," and one from Mitch.

already had whedon sighting. coming 2 party 2nite?

Damn, I almost forgot. I almost let dumb-ass Camden distract me from my mission. I text back in the affirmative.

Mitch, Braidbeard and I have plans to attend a con-related bash thrown by the folks who maintain A Gathering of Elements, the big fan message board for the *Periodic Seven* show (sadly, a lot of the assholes who post there don't seem to be aware that it was even based on a comic).

I snap my phone closed and dig the palms of my hands into my squeezed-shut eyes until I see amorphous blobs of green and blue. At least for tonight, I will banish this whole Jack Camden weirdness from my mind. I have to be on my game at this party. Ready. Alert. Prepared to finally reclaim what was taken from me seven years ago.

The party is being held at the Holiday Inn bar, so I change into a short black t-shirt dress and some knee-high boots and head downstairs. A glamorous cardboard sign with the words PRIVATE PARTY! has been affixed to the bar's entrance, where a couple of volunteers are checking in attendees. "Hey there, Julie!" Barb, aka Camdenfemme57, waves me over. Barb is one of the board's mods, a matronly, middle-aged woman who's never met a muted floral print she didn't like. Despite her rather mild exterior, Barb is mostly known in the *Periodic Seven* community for her extremely pornographic fanfic, most of which features Travis Trent paired with the team's other male members. "Great to see ya, kid," she says, handing me a "Hello, My Name Is..." sticker. "Hi, Barb," I say, slapping the sticker across my right boob. "I meant to tell you, I really enjoyed the lat-

est chapter of *Forbidden Passion*. You described all those positions very, uh...detailedly."

"That was my aim!" she beams. "I've been trying to finish the next chapter, but it's gonna have to wait 'til the kids are back in school."

"Looking forward to it," I lie, heading for a small table in the back, where Mitch is already seated.

"Heya," he says. "I need a beer. You want one?"

"Eh," I say. "I don't really drink."

"That's right." He snaps his fingers. "No drinks, no dates! You are one crazy mofo."

"What?!" I splutter indignantly. "I date. Sometimes." (I don't.)

"No," he grins. "I may not have heard the anti-Jack Camden spiel 'til this morning, but I know I've heard the anti-dating spiel." He affects a snotty, high-pitched tone that I guess is supposed to sound like me. "No matter what, people will always, always reveal their inherent lameness. It's awkward and uncomfortable and a waste of my fucking time."

OK, that does sound a little bit like me.

"Whatever," I mutter. "Go get your alcohol."

"Alright, Miss Teetotaler," he says. "A Coke for you."

"Um, wait, have you seen the uh...auction list?" I ask.

"What, that memorabilia thing they're doing for charity? Isn't it all crap, like the glass Claire drank out of in episode 47 or whatever?"

"There's actually something I'm interested in," I say, casually examining the tablecloth.

"I think they have it at the check-in table," he says. "I'm gonna get the drinks, but you knock yourself out. Win that glass!"

I get up and scurry over to the check-in table, then oh-so-nonchalantly examine the clipboard containing the list. Most of it is, indeed, crap. But situated between an autographed cast poster and a lunch date with one of the show's PAs is what I'm after.

GLORY GILMORE ACTION FIG., ca.1988. MOC.

Ah. New Final Glory. Come back to me.

She's listed seventh, so I've got a while to wait.

I head back to the table, where Braidbeard has now joined us.

"So," he says, "How was the big interview?"

"Oh, yeah!" Mitch grins. "Was Jack Camden the unapologetic dick you were expecting him to be?"

"Ya know, I really don't want to talk about it," I say.

"Whatevs," smarms Braidbeard. "But you might want to know: there are *rumors* that a few cast members might be showing up here tonight."

"What?!" I say. "This is a fucking fan party. Why would they come here?"

"Just what I *heard*," says Braidbeard, shrugging.

"Hey, the auction is starting," says Mitch, nodding towards the front. "You ready to get your glass, Julie?"

"It's not the glass I want," I say lightly, drumming my fingertips on the tabletop. The caffeine is making me all jittery. Goddammit. This is why I don't drink. My system is way too delicate.

Still, I have to keep myself occupied until Item #7 comes up. Somehow, I manage to down three more Cokes.

And suddenly, time has passed with lightning speed and there she is, up front, her painted form as garish as ever. A tuxedo-clad volunteer holds her aloft. "This is a Glory Gilmore action figure from THE ORIGINAL COMIC BOOK," bellows Mr. Tux. "She is mint-on-card, folks — MINT-ON-CARD. Starting bid, please?"

OK, I don't want to be the starting bid. The starting bidder always looks too desperate, and therefore usually ends up a loser.

"A dollar!" someone yells out, and everyone laughs.

"Come, now!" admonishes Mr. Tux. "Did I mention the MINT-ON-CARD part?!"

"Ten dollars!" comes a voice from the back.

OK. Time to enter the fray.

"Twenty dollars!" I yell, pointing into the air as if I am giving a particularly rousing speech.

"Thirty!"

Uh-oh. Better go big.

"Fifty!" That should shut 'em up.

"Sevenny-figh!" someone slurs drunkenly.

I gulp. I gotta do it.

"One hundred dollars!" I scream.

That's not that much for getting back a piece of my soul, right? I can eat ramen for a couple weeks.

Silence. Crickets. I won! I won! I am triumphant! Take that, you motherfuckin' *Periodic Seven* comic haters! Take, that Mr. Tux! I showed you! I sho—

"One-fifty."

The voice come from the back, cool and modulated. Kinda smirky-sounding. Kinda...douche-y. Oh, no. It can't be. I turn around as if in slow motion, imagining the Bionic Woman sound effect accompanying me all the way.

It is. It's...

"Jack Camden," breathes Braidbeard.

In the geometrically-perfect, \$300 jeans-wearing flesh.

Another round of silence. What do I do? *What do I do?* Glory Gilmore is slipping away from me. Again.

"One-seventy-five!" The crowd gasps. I gasp. Mostly because the person who just said that is...

"Braidbeard," I hiss. "What are you doing?!"

He looks at me very seriously, his mouth set in a firm line. Even his scruffy braids look solemn. "We're winning this," he says.

"Two hundred."

"TWO-FIFTY!" Now Mitch is getting in on it. "Julie," he says urgently. "We're gonna get this for you. We know how much you love bioempathy...Jack Camden can't possibly love it as much as you do."

"Frakkin' right!!!" yells Braidbeard.

"Biokinesis," I mutter.

"Three hundred." Camden. Of fucking course. He's located us in the crowd and is looking our way to see if we'll challenge that. I can't tell if he recognizes me or not, but there's definitely something unpleasantly smug in his expression.

"Three...uh, twelve," says Braidbeard, suddenly looking a tiny bit unsure.

"Three-thirty!" says Mitch, for good measure, even though he doesn't actually have to top Braidbeard's bid for us to win.

"Five hundred dollars."

"Argh!" cries Mitch.

"FRAKKIN'-FRAK!" screams Braidbeard.

"Buh," I say.

We are defeated.

Things seem slower now, kind of like they're...underwater. This is probably because I've decided I don't fucking care about upsetting my delicate system and have been downing vodka tonics ever since our crushing loss.

Things begin happening in Blur Time. I feel like I'm floating away, outside my body, watching Drunk Julie (I guess this would be Drulie, not to be confused with Schmuzie) experience the world.

I watch as Mitch and Braidbeard try to convince Drulie to leave the party, only to have her get a little belligerent on their asses.

I watch as Camden's dumb band takes to the stage, much to the delight of the fans. As he wails away on a passable version of "Surrender," Drulie can't help but rock out a little. She kinda digs this shit. No accounting for taste, I guess.

I watch as Drulie slinks up to the edge of the stage, where Camden has propped his newly-acquired Glory Gilmore figure against one of the speakers. Wait, what the fuck is she doing?

I watch as she reaches and reaches, as she liberates Glory from her perch, just as Cap'n Douchebag did all those years ago.

And then she runs like hell, away from the party, away from "Surrender," away, away, away.

I watch as Barb, Mr. Tux, and some lame-ass "security" people chase Drulie down

and start yelling, threatening to banish her from their stupid message board FOREVER.

I watch as another figure arrives on the scene, an extremely blurry figure with floppy hair and razor-sharp cheekbones and blinding white sneakers. He's telling Barb to calm down, just chill, everything's OK. He seems nice.

I watch and I watch and then everything blurs into more floaty nothingness.

Ow. Ow. Fucking ow.

I crack one eye open. Pain. Light. Lots of light. Way too much goddamn light.

Also, insides not feeling so good. I roll over in bed and scramble for something, anything, some kind of vestibule. I throw up into what I think is a wastebasket. I wipe my mouth on the back of my hand and stare blearily at the unlucky container that has just received the contents of my stomach. Brown, plastic, Holiday Inn-emblazoned. Somehow, I have made it back to my room.

I sit up gingerly (ow) and slowly open my eyes all the way, trying to bring my surroundings into focus. The muddy drapes are slightly cracked, allowing the offending light into the room. It shines way too brightly, illuminating the blank TV screen, the tangle of sheets, the bolted-down nightstand.

And perched on said nightstand, nestled in the folds of a crumpled Dr. Strange t-shirt, is a still mint-on-card Glory Gilmore.

Oh fucking *shit*.

TO BE CONTINUED...

• *Sarah Kuhn swears that this is a work of fiction. She is very careful with her action figures.*

Barfleet Academy

By Matt Springer

A master of the con hook-up scene takes us inside his favorite nerdy dalliances

I've been going to cons since I was but fourteen years old, and yet I didn't really do the whole con "thing" until I was in my early twenties. I was more into the cash-cow media cons, where TV performers (usually Star Trek actors) are trotted out in front of a crowd of the leering unwashed, and you pay your \$20, and you get to see them in the flesh and maybe get an autograph.

The idea of a con run by fans, for fans, with days of panels and nights of boozy partying, was wholly new to me until my early twenties, as was the seemingly ready availability of casual sex with girl geeks.

My buddy Dave and I did more than our share of getting loaded at cons, both during my single days and into the early days of my marriage. As part of a Midwestern Star Wars fan club, Chicago Force, we loved to throw parties in our hotel room—chaotic binges of drinking and awkward conversation fueled by punch bowls filled with frozen juice concentrate and vodka stirred together. Our parties always had outlandish themes—we built a paper mache Jabba, created a mini-swamp for Dagobah, and poured ten large bags of Styrofoam peanuts onto the floor to represent Hoth. (The hotel staff LOVED us for that.)

We live in different cities now (Dave in Austin, me in Orlando) but I still hold fond memories of drunken stumbling in hotel hallways, usually lasting into the pre-dawn hours.. <-Kinda mean.

Dave was also quite the accomplished con cocksman, racking up a not-insignificant list of convention hook-ups. I wanted to quiz Dave on the whole con sex scene--how it works, his favorite stories, the dirty secrets and more. Shockingly, he readily agreed. Sadly, he refused to reveal the secret of his little maneuver at the battle of Tanaab, but whatever else he was doing, it clearly worked for him.

What was your first sci-fi convention experience, and as part of said experience, did you get laid?

My first Sci-Fi con was in 1987, one of those cheap conventions where you just hang out for the day, peruse vendors and there's little more of interest. I was a 16 year old zit-faced uber-geek wearing a United Federation of Planets pennant and I'd hardly even kissed a girl by that time; perish the thought of actually swapping gravy with one.

The first real geek-oriented convention I went to would have been WindyCon in 1999. I didn't actually complete sexual congress with anyone, but I did spend about 3 hours doing some massive out-making (in the bathroom where we kept the ice & booze) with that tall leggy brunette who was overly thrilled that I was a "con-virgin." Though I don't think that being a "con-virgin" will definitely get you laid at a convention, it definitely gives a person extra points in that direction. I mean, it reminds me of hanging out with my friends at gay bars, in that all the "regulars" are totally scoping for n00bs because they seem "cleaner." That'd probably be a good scam for a guy: to go traveling to medium-sized cons around the country, constantly claiming to be a con-virgin.

I don't remember her...take me through the process. How do you go from "Hey, I'm a con virgin" to "Hey, let's swap dirty spit in a hotel bath-





room full of 2-liters of Sprite and vodka"? In other words...do you remember your first time?

Hmmmm...I'm trying to remember how it went down. I'd only remember her if I saw her. She was tall, had that straight, long dark parted in the middle geek-girl hair. I don't even remember what her costume was...some typical fantasy wench thing, I think. I made out with her again the next year, but only on the first day (we were both totally drunk walking around room parties and we just ducked into a doorway for a few minutes) but we didn't mess around after that. The next time we saw her she was like in a full leg cast (does that ring a bell?).

Anyway, I don't remember what the conversation was really. That first con, a lot of people were asking about us since we were new. I think that was the thing that sparked her interest...like I said, she was pretty thrilled that I was untainted geekmeat. I'd like to have a more interesting story about how we connected while talking about Heinlein novels and just knew we had to rub our naughty parts together. I'm sure it was something like that, but I can't remember exactly what.

So that was 1999, right? That was the first WindyCon after Episode I...and it's 2008 now. How many conquests total? Break it down for me.

Con-quests or conquests? Total since 99' or total evar?

Con-quests, I think I've only actually docked my rocket in 4....probably had Clinton sex with 3-4 others and made out with 3-4 more than that. I'm sure there are regular con-dudes with many more scores. But rare was the con (outside of Star Wars Celebration) that I didn't at least do some drunken suck-face.

If you want to know how many actual conquests I've had in my life...I have no fucking idea. Prolly near 100. My Chicago years were really slow though....since most of the time I was actually dedicated to a significant other.

Yeah, I was thinking specifically of "con-quests." Man, that's fucking clever. So we're talking between 6 and 8 sexual encounters of varying levels of intimacy at science fiction conventions. Just for starters here, any of them stand out? I have a few specifics in mind I want to ask you about, but you tell me first, sweetheart.

Yeah, the Yeoman Rand chick at ConVer-gence....that chick was a fucking wild-cat! She was a professional whore too, not in the getting paid sense...but in the sense that you could tell that she was used to

going to nerd-conventions, picking out the guy (or guys) that she wanted to skrog...and skroging them while her husband was off doing whatever. I don't think I talked to her for 10 before we were upstairs knockin' the boots.

All the other chicks were just nice girls that I connected with on a geek-level and with all of them we talked for quite a bit and got to know each other (while drinking). They were all pretty down to earth with the whole "what goes on at con stays at con" thing. With that said, two of them busted my balls the next time I saw them about not contacting them afterwards.

I think my favorite of all your conquests has to be the "Yeoman Rand chick," AKA the beer-cute girl wearing the note-perfect replica of the Star Trek: Original Series yeoman costume. Walk me through that encounter to the best of your recollection. I want to get into the nitty gritty of how you move from "hey, how's it going, nice costume" to shagging Yeoman Rand in a Minneapolis hotel room. This may be the part that interests me most.



Sadly, like I said, it was probably the least geek-oriented pick-up of the lot. She could have been at a Firefighter's convention, a singles bar or a Bulls game and just worn the right "uniform" for the occasion, picked out a guy and nailed him. She was just a horny costumer who picked Convergence as her hunting ground. I don't think the subject of Star Trek even came up. Sorry, but besides the actual sex and the fulfilling of some costume fantasy it was rather lame for a good story. Unless you want me to embellish...but then it'd just be like a lame Penthouse Forum letter.

Of course, on that Convergence trip, I remember Yeoman Rand, and then I remember Pikachu. To my memory, they're like polar opposites, in that Yeoman Rand was some kind of primal geek fantasy come to life, and the Pikachu girl was dressed in the large yellow costume of a Pokemon. Yet, you had sex with her. How does THAT happen?

The second one happened because I was blind-fucking-drunk. I do remember she was one of those "cute in da face" girls, and that she was a legitimate geek and had many cool-points in spite of the Pikachu costume, which, I remember she had a good sense of humor...she said she picked that costume because Pikachu is round like a ball "and so am I." If you recall, the same thing happened with that chick from CapriCon. I had no intention of banging that chick, but we sat in her room for a couple hours doing shots and talking geek. Any spacedock* in an ion storm my brother...any spacedock in an ion storm. * Not referring to the Urban Dictionary definition.

We touched on your favorite geek sex at a con...do you have a least favorite, one that was just an abhorrent experience?

I don't think I can qualify any of them as a least-favorite. Certainly nothing abhorrent. I think I'm like most nerds, in that I'm so thankful if any chick gives me any attention it's hard to put it in the negative. Seeing some of them a year (or a con) later has been negative, as I've had some of them give me the "stink-eye" for hanging

with a different geek-girl (or maybe not being drunk/desperate enough yet to give them the same time I gave them when we hooked up). Sadly, one of the problems for geeks of both sexes is that we confuse attention, sex and love for one another. Everyone craves some of each, but when you look for all three simultaneously at a huge drunken costume party...well, you're in for some disappointment.

Why did you seek out geek women to hook up with at conventions?

Well, the formula is definitely there...I'm a male, there's alcohol, the place is swarming with girls in slinky, slutty costumes. If you put all three simultaneously at a huge drunken costume party...well...I would definitely say we're in for a good time. Casual sex wouldn't be as popular as it is if it weren't a thrill. As long as everyone plays it safe, and no one mistakes the pon farr for something other than pon farr...then I don't see nothin' wrong with a little hack'n slash.

Would you ever date a geek (I know you're married, but hypothetically)?

Ironically, I haven't had any serious relationships with geek-girls. I mean all of my significant others had some geek in them (3x weekly at least), but weren't hardcore geeks like you find at Con. I'm a bit of an attention-whore myself, so I think that the chemistry needed for a long-term relationship wouldn't necessarily work for me and a true geek-girl. We'd probably step on each other's toes. Plus, one dysfunctional member of a relationship is plenty (unless you're hanging out with the Polys).

• Yes. That's Matt to the below.
Chug! Chug! Chug!



Nerd Pick-Up Lines - Part Two

By Ivan Sian

If I could rearrange the alphabet, I'd reduce the number of available letters. Did you know that there are only 12 letters in the Hawaiian alphabet?

Stay on target, not far now.

Hey baby, I can see the two of us have chemistry. No, really, do we have Chemistry together? I need last week's notes.

Haven't I masturbated to your MySpace profile before?

My name is George. I'm unemployed and I live with my parents.

I find your lack of a drink... disturbing.

Size matters not! Judge me by my size, do you?

How about we get outta here so I can blog about this later?

Heaven must be missing an angel...and by "Heaven," I mean the popularly accepted vision of Heaven and not some antiquated notion like Valhalla. Not that you couldn't get into Valhalla, it's just that you'd have to have been slain in battle and you don't look like that kind of girl. Not that you couldn't handle yourself against Surtur, the Fire Demon, but that's not typically...oh, forget it.

• Ivan Sian never needs pick-up lines, as women never seem to enter his parents' basement.

hot, positronic action.

Single Klingon seeking female for bloodwine-soaked opera and battle. Must love cats.

1986: Geek

Tygress and I made out on the front steps of her apartment building on a hot San Fernando Valley summer's day. I was a walking contradiction then, an introverted high school senior who liked nothing better than getting up on stage and performing for an audience. Too quiet to qualify as a drama geek, too generic to qualify as anything else, really. There was no place for me at the Breakfast Club table; I was not a Jock, a Nerd, a Criminal, or a Basket Case, and I'd have made a really ugly Princess.

Tygress and I didn't hook up in some sweaty, stage makeup-smudging, costume-wrinkling encounter backstage during the school play. We didn't meet cute when I caught a forward pass at the big game and accidentally knocked her over, muddying her cheerleader uniform. No, we met when I plunked my telephone handset down onto a modem the size of a small Humvee, dialed into a computer BBS, and decided that anyone calling herself Tygress would have to be, well, pretty damn *rawr*.

This, in 1986, was weird. This was a kind of geek that had not yet been invented. I met my girlfriend on the *computer*!

Ours was a lasting and deep relationship of, eh, about three weeks. OK, truth is she really *was* pretty *rawr*. Our song was by Huey Lewis: "The Power of Love," baby! But I broke up with her when she insisted that she'd gotten a major contact high at the Oingo Boingo concert. She stumbled around like a drunk, crashing into me over and over again for an hour. Clearly, I was mature, she was not, and I had to make my escape. I decided to give her the break-up speech on the way home from the concert. Instead, I wimped out and dumped her over the phone the next day. Yeah, mature.

But at least we'd had some quality alone time. Lesson learned. Cause and effect: geek out online, learn how to french!

1988: Non-Geek

I signed up for my Unix account at U.C. Santa Cruz in 1988. So cool – I could have e-mail and, uh, do stuff! But when I set foot in the computer lab, I froze, dumb-founded. Three or four people sat in the lab, their complexions enhanced by the green and amber glow of dumb terminals. They stared holes in their screens, typing in short, intense bursts. Occasionally they simultaneously cheered or groaned, or commented across the room to each other, staccato remarks that seemed wildly out of context, made *no sense whatsoever*.

What. The. Hell.

They were, like, playing some kind of *game*. Live. Over the computer! See, I was hip to being a square, the kind of square that traveled through mazes in *Adventure* on my Atari, running away from duck-billed dragons. If I wanted two player, then I'd hit the Select button and make it a two-player game, by god. These multiplayer gaming people, staring into the ASCII void, speaking in tongues – this crossed the line. I'd never be like *that*.

But what's this? A live chat room on something called the Internet. Hey, why not? I logged in, and typed in a font somehow timid and quavering, yet still reliably monospaced:

Hello?

Someone called Q came to my rescue, inviting me into a friendly channel and explaining how things worked. And it wasn't long before I learned that Q was a girl. A girl from here in Santa Cruz! And before I knew it, she'd invited me on something called a food run. Well, why not? Food? Good. Running? Well, not so good, but if I was running toward said food, then OK. Besides, these were people who did things like I did, such as uh, chat on the computer. And this one was a girl. And she asked me to come along!

My mind filled with images of beautiful

women lined up in front of keyboards, one after another, stretching to the horizon. They all looked like Tygress. Each of them typed... typed to *me*, asking me out on a food run to Denny's. Their faces glowed with the essence of mozzarella sticks, each one waiting for me, the boy who was so geeky enough for them — but not so geeky as to play those weird multiplayer games.

The sodium lamps in Denny's parking lot cut through my dimly lit fantasy. I took a deep breath, opened the door — and my radar cut through the grease in the air, locking onto the food run group. They had that certain afterglow, still green and amber. Or maybe it was just that they were trying to digest fried food. But there they were, one girl and seven guys. They greeted me warmly.

"So," Q said. "What is your major?"

"Sociology."

"Sociology, eh?"

"Yep."

Somewhere in the kitchen, a deep fryer bubbled. A moon rose over my hammy.

They went back to talking about Stuff I Didn't Get. They were all computer science majors or engineering students. Me, I knew how to log on and chat. Wasn't that enough? I pasted a vacant smile on my face, which I stuffed before excusing myself.

Meeting girls on the Internet? What was I thinking? Clearly there was no future in *that*.

1995: Testing the Theory

Law school is hard enough when you're *not* holding your bruised, bleeding heart in your hands.

Instead of getting married, Leah and I were breaking up. I found out after class: she didn't love me anymore, and she told me over the phone, a pay phone in the hallway right outside the lecture hall.

My eyes were screwed shut, but I was sure that a crowd of people had gathered around to take in every terse word of that breakup call. My classmates, yes, they would be shaking their heads and wondering how such a loser would ever become a lawyer. And my professors? They'd be deep in contemplation, planning to use the Socratic Method to help me reach the conclusion that nobody wuvs me.

It's OK, I told myself as I hung up the phone. It's OK, I thought as I zombied my way across campus, through Sproul Plaza, past the guy singing show tunes into a Mr. Microphone. I lurched aboard the line 51 bus to Oakland, heading home. It's OK. Except that it's not, because I'd driven my *car* to campus. Shit.

Leah and I had hooked up when I lived in Indiana. Our early, furtive make-out sessions had turned into a two year relationship, renewing my faith in the Tygress Theory:

Computer + Chat = Nookie

Except that now I saw that it could be so much more. Strike the *nookie* variable, replace with *love*.

When I decided to move away for law school, I knew that in time Leah would come to California and join me there. But no, now it was over. So I did the logical thing. Broken-hearted, I tried the Tygress theory again.

And again and again.

I chatted with a charming, brilliant grad student, a single parent with a precocious kid. We even hit it off when we met face to face. But I was damaged goods: I scared her away when I tried too hard to be New Daddy.

I met another girl at her apartment. She had a tiny room, and the only place to sit was on her bed. My heart raced: the warmth of her body was only inches away. Her hand gently reached out and touched...her keyboard, upon which she spent the next two hours flirting with people in a chat room while my eyes glazed over. See, I'm so mesmerizing in person

that I must have intimidated her. Yeah, that's it.

And oh yeah, there was this other girl named Kelly. I knew that she lived nearby, well within the trajectory of my rebound orbit. We'd had some friendly online chats before Leah dumped me, then we kind of fell out of touch. When I tracked her down and tapped out my sob story to her, she sympathized. Then I typed something flirty and suggestive. She didn't really respond, so I tried again.

She suggested that I take it easy.

I was abashed: I knew how to turn on the charm online, but she wasn't buying it.

Kelly and I did decide to meet eventually, as friends. Not a date, not anything, just friends. She met me outside her dorm. She had her sweater on inside-out. As we walked upstairs, she told me to ignore the electric hotpot in the bathroom: it had just melted, and she'd thrown it in the tub to let the plastic puddle solidify.

Kelly was pretty cool.

She and I hung out a couple of times after that. We saw *Il Postino*, and afterwards, she said that she loved hearing Pablo Neruda's poetry read aloud in the movie. A few days later, we walked around Lake Merritt. We bought overpriced sandwiches for lunch and completely embarrassed ourselves in public by throwing tomato slices at each other. Later, as we ambled around a bookstore, she followed me down one of the aisles and stepped on my heel, giving me a flat tire.

Meanwhile, our online chats dwindled to brief exchanges about where and when to meet.

But all the while, there were Vanessas and Christinas, Bethanys and, uh, Pookie47s. I was hunting for Tygresses online, and the hunt was taking over my life.

One brisk spring morning, I found myself on an airplane, Indiana-bound. I was on my way to see Leah and either get back together, or get some closure.

It was just like old times, except completely not. We talked like a couple but we weren't a couple. We laughed and joked and avoided the issue at hand. The first night, we lay in platonic rigidity in the same bed – for a while, until I decided that I had to get out of there Right Now.

Luckily, my friend Julia had offered to put me up if things got too weird. I called her and told her I was on my way. And not even an hour later, I was on her futon and she was kissing me, kissing me.

Julia and I had met online, too! Yay, Tygress theory. Yay making out. Yay everything. Fuck this. I got out of there and went back to Leah's place. We stared at the ceiling together all night long.

On my last day with Leah, I found myself ambling around a bookstore again. A book leapt off the shelf into my hands: *Pablo Neruda: Selected Poems*. Hey, it's the poet that Kelly liked so much.

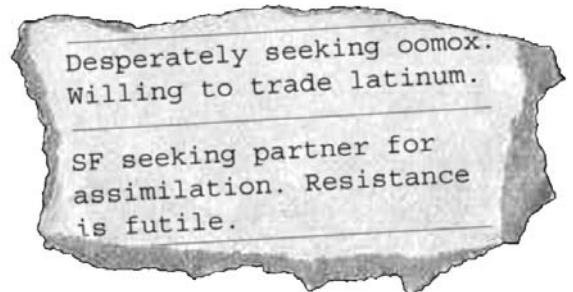
I paid for the book, thankful that my flight was only a few hours away. Leah and I were over, case closed. I wanted to go home, away from my landlocked past, away from this mess.

Flying west, staring down at farmland carved into geometric shapes, I thought of the Neruda book, snug in a suitcase in the belly of the plane. I thought of inside-out shirts and melted hotpots, and of hanging out with Kelly while she gave me flat tires.

Yeah, that could be fun.

I think I'll call her.

• Ken Simon lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Kelly. They met online, but fell in love face to face.



So. Judy.

I know it's been a while since we've spoken—what, a couple weeks, at least?

I still feel like I owe you one last conversation, some attempt at explaining myself as best as I can.

We're over, Judy. I'm letting you go.

That can't come as a surprise. Even after all we've been through, one just has to have some kind of instinct about these things. When I was eight, and Becky Clevinger grabbed Billy Six's hand instead of mine, I was pretty upset—what's a synthezoid androgynate got that I haven't got, anyway?—but deep down, I knew that moment would come.

Just like we both knew this moment would come. We're through.

Actually, no. I take that back. I didn't know this moment would come, because honestly, I never thought we'd get this far.

I remember like it was yesterday. You were working in that crummy gift shop at the Spice Mines of Kessel; I was just another tourist, killing time on a business trip to Seti Alpha VI, waiting for the next Zeta beam back to Earth Colony. You tried to sell me a magnet; it said something like "I Went to the Spice Mines of Kessel and Got Addicted to You," and it was terrible. I bought it anyway, because I wanted to talk to you.

After that, it was mostly fun and games; we were really good at dating each other. Friday nights in the Holodeck cruising the Mutara Nebula on silver wings of dust, Saturday mornings curled up in our sleep unit watching virtuvids, Sundays...actually, Sundays sucked. Sundays meant dinner with your family.

Your mom was a sweetheart, and Elroy

was alright, but your dad was a true asshole. It wasn't my fault that Yoyodyne kept trumping Spacely for all those big multi-planetoid accounts, but Georgie boy made it seem like somehow I was personally trying to destroy him. Frankly, I think he managed to destroy himself just fine without my help. Every week there seemed to be some new crisis, some silly sitcom mix-up that would paint him in absolutely the worst light.

I'll never know what your mom sees in him. I don't know what your DOG sees in him, let alone your mom.

When you told me you were dying...I lost my shit. Absolutely.

I can't defend my actions during those first few weeks—I know I cheated on you, multiple times, with women both real and synthezoid, human and...not so human. Whether it was the smooth slide of a woman's flesh against my cheek or the hair-speckled ridges of a Salt Monster's hand seeking pores from which to extract sodium, any touch that wasn't yours pushed me farther away, which was exactly where I wanted to be.

I know you never did forgive me, but the mindwipe helped, and soon enough, my shit was together again, and you were blissfully unaware.

Which made the note you left for me one bleary Tuesday night all the more touching. At least, it was touching for me, who would remember the cheating for the rest of his life, if not for you, who had the knowledge of said cheating digitally extracted from her neurons by a back-alley unlicensed brain tech. The way your hand must have shaken as you scrawled out the message—the tear-stained ink, the pathetic hum of glowpaper nearing the final stages of its life—it made my heart break.

Sometimes I wonder how I might have reacted if you'd come right out and asked me

your question over fried Sleestak at the diner up the skypath. Would my heart have broken just the same, or would I have burst into unwanted laughter?

The idea you proposed was ludicrous, and yet there was something I still wanted in you, even in the end—your sunken cheeks devoid of any rosy glow, your once-brilliant white hair hanging stringy and faded below your shoulders, pink skirts and jumpers traded in for whatever bland greys they'd hand out to you each morning at the treatment center.

You were always better than I deserved. Even as you crumbled, you towered above me—I felt the collective drag of all the horrible things I'd done to you pulling me toward an inescapable conclusion, your irrefutable request:

"Keep me. Let me stay with you. I want to come back, someday, and be in love again."

That's what you asked in that letter. And that's what I could not refuse.

The soultechs at the lab, when they do this, they are meticulous about walking you through the process. How it's totally harmless to your loved one, how the fundamental cellular structures of the human body are both absorbed and supported through their patented process, even the procedures one could expect should a time come when an awakening would be deemed appropriate.

They can talk all they want, but there's nothing to prepare you for a couple of grisly workbots showing up on hoverboards with a giant wooden crate filled with...well, with you. With Judy.

When they snapped that crate open, it chilled me. I tried to be kind about it, to respect the promise I'd made to you, but I found myself unable to sleep. I'd sit up nights with my face lit only by the sickly white glow of your eternal slumber, sometimes wondering why it was you there instead of me, and other times dragging my

exhausted carcass out into the night to find any kind of feeling at all, just to remind me I was the one moving and living.

It reached a point where it was gonna be you or me, and it's my name on the lease, so that settled that.

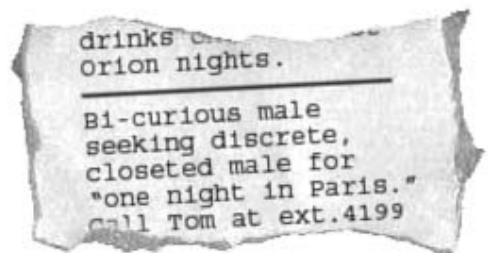
This is farewell...again.

The Lucite tube in which the soultechs encased your physical form—right now covered with fingerprints and the residue of some weird condensation that appeared on the outer shell every morning—will be uninstalled on Friday. At first, I was gonna place you into storage, see if your parents wanted to take you over to their place, but then I thought about what a drag it would be to actually call George and Jane, and I said, you know what, fuck it—if they'd wanted you in their living room, smiling beatifically down upon their pets and one-night-stands and the mailman, they'd have sprung for the procedure in the first place.

I'm not ruling out a scientific breakthrough in the resurrective arts, but I just can't keep carrying you around forever; you're too heavy, and you loom too large. I'm ready to move on with my life and your death

So goodbye, Judy. Take care of yourself..or rather, since that's currently impossible, I hope the garbagebots take better care of you than I ever did.

• *Matt Springer's one bad hushyomouth*



Check the writer bibles all you want...

Being a well-adjusted human being is pretty simple—it's all about empathy. Two dudes want to hump? No problem, because who doesn't want to hump, right? Like to do a little late night creative imagining about your favorite characters, you know... sexy creative imagining? Who am I to tell you "no", after Chris Carter talked Agent Scully into a pony tail and out of her blouse in the *X-Files* pilot episode. And let's not get sidetracked into thinking that this is a geek thing—we all know there are some very unhealthy Victor Newman obsessives out there that like dreaming up their own daytime stories.

But I'm here to make a confession. Try as hard as I can, I can't get behind slash fiction. So to speak. Tentacle porn? Knock yourself out. Cross-dressing cosplay? Hold up, let me get my camera. I have even managed to find peace with furies, if only in a la-la-la-I-can't-hear-you sort of way. But enlightenment dies choking in the steel grip of my inner geek whenever I hear tell of my favorite characters being positioned by amateur writers, like a young child making Scarlett and Duke bump hip joints in the tub while Snake Eye's wolf watches. Which is a completely fictional analogy, by the way.

This personal revelation would never have come to light if it weren't for two things; the Internet and Google. I've come to learn that for as long as someone could sit at a typewriter, they could bang out some short stories about Spock banging out Kirk. With the exception of booklet trading at conventions, the proliferation of these non-canon unholies was low. Then came the Internet, and they gathered. Then came Google, and I started finding them. When. I. Didn't. Want. To.

For the record, I actually don't have any problem with the dirty Grandpappy of slash (as any sweaty pairings between two or more characters) fiction, the Kirk/Spock stories. Since the earliest ones used pon farr as a rationale, I could overlook it. I

mean, c'mon... the Vulcan seven-year itch is upon the poor guy and he's trapped on a planet with Starfleet's raunchiest bachelor. What else can he do under those circumstances? Or what about that mirror universe. Pan-dimensional bi-curiosity could abound and who's to say otherwise?

The question is begged then—what then is my problem? Continuity. I have stood up—in a packed theater on the opening day of the Planet of the Apes remake and yelled, "What the fuck!" and that was an official production, with money and actors and sort of a script. Don't think I won't raise a stink when I see a bad, sweaty, panting idea. And I mean that. Don't. Because I'm about to.

My first dance with the slash devil was when I was looking for recommendations on a good Sherlock Holmes reference guide. One careless click and I had my recommendation, which was being made on the basis that one particular book was really helpful in trying to keep any well-intended pairing of the world's greatest detective and his chum faithful. The event left me so stunned that I apparently went to Amazon to order the Sherlock Holmes reader companion and ended up with something from the Oprah bookclub. Don't buy books dazed kids.

Most readers of the Sherlock Holmes series forget a very important part of the stories. They're set in Victorian England. Oh sure, they think of it every time Holmes and Watson hope in a hansom cab or can't get an MRI scan, but they forget when they see two men living together in an apartment and unarguably spending all their time together. It was Victorian England. The two genders were so divided socially that the men would often gather, either in a social club or local pub, just to not hang out with the womenfolk. Different times. Doesn't mean Holmes was looking to slip his tobacco in Watson's slipper. If you know what I mean. I mean man sex.



Unlike it's texty cousin, which can languish on the net practically forever, slash art tends to weed out the bad, meaning the technically challenged, no matter how well intentioned will always disappear in time, while others, like this painting from The Theban Band carry on. And yes, I'm fine with it—Jack's a total omni-slut and everyone knows it.

Besides, Watson was married, a couple of times, and Arthur Conan Doyle barely had them kiss. So, it's not even pastiche to have several pages detailing some elementary-my-dearing. I'll bet most of them don't even have a mystery beyond, "I say, have you seen my pants?"

"So one night as Watson and I lingered with our after-dinner brandies in our sitting-room, I finally made my irrevocable offer in a low but clear whisper. 'Sleep with me.'"

M*A*S*H got the hairy palm treatment as well, I discovered one day while looking for a plain old M*A*S*H site. Having watched all eleven seasons of the series, I think I managed to pick up on one very important fact. Hawkeye and BJ were getting laid regularly. They were outnumbered by nurses, who cycled through the camp regularly. What more is there to say?

"Their lips met again. Hawkeye's hand slid behind BJ's head, holding it in place as he tilted his own, slanting his mouth over BJ's and deepening the kiss. Overhead, the rain pattered against the metal roof of the hut, creating a cosy, almost romantic, atmosphere."

Don't even get me started on the writer that thought they could add Frank into the mix. And there's a special place in fanfic hell for the writer that took Loretta Burns and Erin Hunnicutt (those would be the kids of the characters), moved twenty years ahead, and had them fool around. No, I'm not kidding.

And it goes downhill from there. Name a series and someone is defiling it right now. And not in a George Lucas sort of way. More like a geek John Waters kind of way.

The *A-Team*, *Sportsnight*, *The Magnificent 7*, *Darkwing Duck*... Oh look, *Queer As Folk* slash fiction. Only, that would make some sort of sense and could reasonably be called just FICTION. And then there are the movies – did you know someone wrote *Hardcore Logo* slash fiction? Well, they did. Remember that Colin Farrell movie, *Phone Booth*, where he never leaves a New York phone booth for two hours? Well, someone got some improbable jollies out of that one too.

Then there are all the crossovers. The crossovers may be the main reason I can't do as I do with our plush costumed friends, and just ignore it all. Inasmuch as I am fine with the concept of slash fiction, and could possibly agree to disagree with the content of slash fiction, the crossover is the recombinant factor that means there will always be new, fresh, even more horrific assaults on my fanboy sense of decorum. Just like the flu will mutate for a few months in some pig somewhere, then return to try and kill us yet again, the crossover slash keeps me up at night, and not in a good, thinking about ponytail Scully sort of way.

Because I know, that somewhere, somehow, someone, someday, will decide they want Mrs. Hudson to give Frank Burns a massage with happy ending. And when that day comes, God help us all.

• *Chris Stewart will admit that naming a character BJ is just asking for trouble.*

NEXT ISSUE
IN
GROK
SECRET ORIGINS

WE'RE LOOKING FOR
CONTRIBUTORS!
TEXT AND ART!
alertnerd@gmail.com

Coming Summer 2008!