



CLAIMS DEPARTMENT

I so enjoyed doing the Ditmar issue of Claims Department that I decided to do one with another artist who I believe is under-known. Selina Phanara is an LA-area fan and a lovely person. She works in different forms than many other fan artists, and she makes it all work. I am so glad she sent me so many wonderful images that I could work with.

I can't think of what year I met Selina, but I remember where and when. It was at the LosCon Art Show, so that narrows it down to 2001, 2004 or 2005. She was leading a tour of the art show, and I joined in on it and we went to her stuff, and it was awesome. I've been a big fan ever since.

And what goes better with bright, imaginative art than a weird story about the ways in which movies can completely change your mood. What, you may ask? You'll see!

FRIDAY

I got bit by a dog.

I had to pick up Evelyn and take her over to her Dad's house for the weekend. Gen was in Los Angeles and I had watched her the night before. I slept over at Gen & Evelyn's place, sleeping on the couch with a blanket that might have been a pair of washcloths stitched together. I took two Tylenol PMs, which made sleeping easy. The couch is pretty comfy, so I actually managed to wake up feeling pretty good. So, I dropped her off at school, got myself a lovely trio of Chicken Biscuits at McDonald's. It was awesome. The previous day had been the National Cheese Day party at work, so we were all holding ourselves up in good cheer. Friday's are our happy day typically. We all go out for lunch on Friday, usually 7 or 8 of us, and we have good conversation.



This was no difference, though a couple of us weren't around. Heather, one of the newer girls at the museum, joined us at Don Giovanni's, an Italian joint with really tasty food. We were sitting around and I mentioned that I was seeing Abney Park in Seattle. Heather asked if it was at a Festival. I told her that it was at a con, and she asked if it was Steam-Con. I said yes and she mentioned that she'd be playing at the con with the band Vernian Process. I had no idea she played with them, and the fact that they'd be at SteamCon, where I'll be a speaker, made it even better. I love it when my worlds collide.

Lunch was great and I headed back to work, polished off a couple of little things and then headed off to pick up Evelyn. She was happy to see me, which sometimes doesn't happen. She loves seeing her grandma and dad, and since neither of them drive (Long Story... too long even for an issue of Claims Department!) I had to drop her off. When I went in to pick her up from her other Grandma, there was a pile of Robert Heinlein books on top of the ottoman. I managed to hold my tongue and not say anything disparaging the late Mr. Heinlein, the man whose novels have so often put me in the mood to never read another one. I think I showed remarkable restraint. Evelyn happily jumped up and gave me a hug and we were on our way.

The drive was fast, we were against the flow of afternoon traffic. We were listening

to NPR, which I think Evelyn has learned to completely tune out. This was the California Report, my fourth favorite NPR show, and they were talking about birds. I love birds. As always happens when there's a I want to hear, we got to the house at exactly the moment when the getting got good. That's Bad News Bears.

I walked Evelyn into the house. Evelyn's Grandma, Gamma Donna, has two smallish dogs, and Brian, Evelyn's Dad, has a lovely Boxer. As soon as the door opened, the little dogs threw themselves at me, the bigger little dog taking a nipping bite at my shin, getting mostly pant leg, but managing to get me a little too. The small one got my toe a bit, but he wasn't really biting, more checking if I was food. The little one's awful cute and I petted him a bit after the bigger little dog went away. The Boxer simply head-butted me in the upper thigh. He does that.

So yeah, I was bit by a dog.

AND EVEN WITH THE BITE, I STILL PREFER DOGS TO CATS...BY A LOT

I got to the car and pulled up my leg. I had a pretty bad bruise and the skin was broken just very barely. It hurt, but it wasn't bleeding. I went home briefly and washed it off, put some ointment on it and then watched some TV.

TV always makes me forget if I've been bit by an animal. It was Food Network, so I just laid back and let it flow o'er me like ever so much fun.

I had plans. This was another of those rare weekends where I had nothing going on. The Lovely and Talented Linda was away, off at Lake Tahoe for a Renn Faire with Bella Donna, her Italian Courtesan troupe. She's wonderful, and she gets to sing and she's a beautiful singer. The Talented part of her moniker is well-deserved. Evelyn was with her Dad, There was a party on Saturday, but that was fun, even though it had a set timeframe. Sunday was free all-day. I had no plans but to do some reading, listen to some music, and especially watch some movies. I had set the



number at four, in the theatre. There are a few good theatres in and around Sunnyvale, so I was going to see my movies in them. I rarely get to go to those theatres anymore, I see most of my movies with Linda in and around Oakland. I wolfed down some delightful chips and Southwestern Salsa before I left. I don't really have a table, so when I eat, I have to sit on the floor. It's something of a sad state, but it's what's gotta happen. Small living quarters mean sacrifices. Eating like a civilized human was one of mine.

I watched the Simpsons, it was the episode where Bart discovers a Comet, and checked the starting times of the flicks. There was one that I was excited about that started about forty-five minutes after the Simpsons, so I figured I'd head over there. But I needed real food. I guessed that I could go to Flames right before the movie. They usually moved me through pretty quick, especially if I sat at the counter and said 'I've got a movie in half-an-hour.' They're really good about that since they share the parking lot with the theatres, they're used to it.

Flames is a nice little restaurant that specializes in big portions. You need a builder's permit to bake one of their famous chocolate cakes. Their entrees usually fill me up and can hold me over for most of a day. The prices aren't bad either. They have about 8 seats at the counter, and though there can be long lines waiting for a table, I've never seen a full counter for too long. I walked in and was greeted by a young lady greeter who had chosen a shirt that had a slanty neckline that was immodest on one side and school marm on the other. It

was kinda weird.

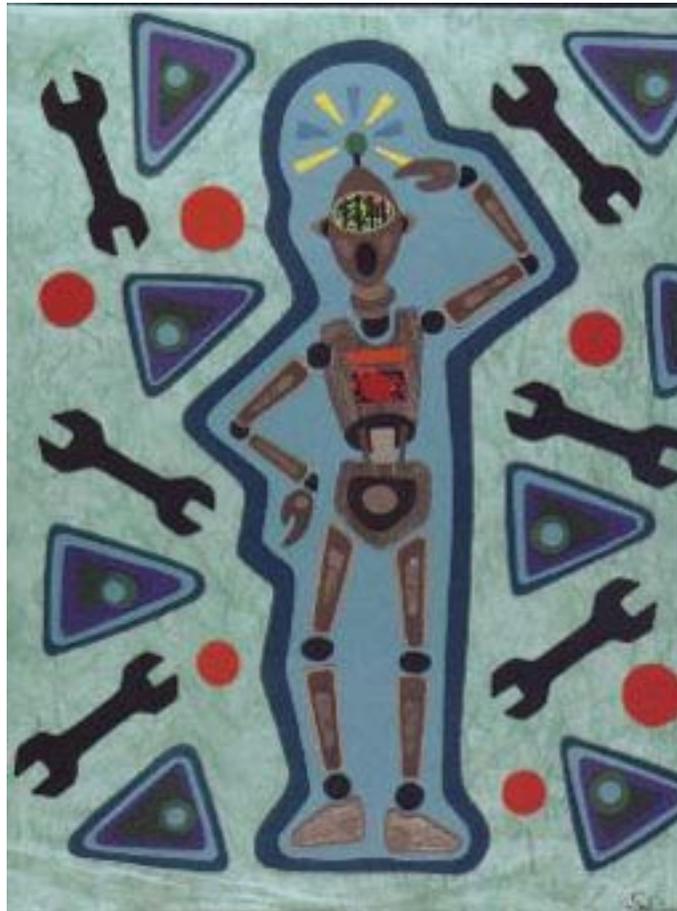
"There's a thirty minute wait." she said, an obvious Greek accent. I wouldn't have been able to place it if I hadn't been listening to interviews with the Greek ambassador on...wait for it...NPR.

"Can I sit at the counter?"

"Absolutely." she said as she Vanna White'd me towards the small counter.

I take a seat right in the middle. There was a girl and her date sitting at the far end. He was wearing a sharp purple suit and

pressed black pants. Tattoos peaked out at his wrist and up his neck. The hair was tight at the sides, pompadour at the front. This dude was cool. His date was awesome. She might have been 4'8 or so. She definitely could have used a booster seat. Her hair was pulled back into a flowing black pony tail with a stripe of red on the side facing me. she wore cat's eye glasses, though they had clear rims and the lenses had horizontal lines. I knew that they were a prescription for severe far-sightedness because I'd seen a girl at camp when I was a kid



who had them. So, this girl had prescription cat's eye glasses and they were far cooler than anything I'd ever seen! She wore a red dress, very tight, showing that she probably weighed all of 85 pounds. It was an impressive look, it really was, but the topper, which I noticed immediately, was the fact that she used key rings and earrings. The one that was facing me was a Ford logo. That's ballsy.

I sat down, and out of my pocket pulled my book. Even if I'm in a hurry, I never forget to bring a book with me if I'm eating alone. Unless I'm bringing a computer to write stuff.

Like I am now. In the Denny's across 101 from my apartment. But this doesn't happen until about 12 hours later than I'm writing about, so I'll shut up about it until page 6 or so.

I had been reading a book on BART between Fremont and the FYDYSYFY meet-ups at the lobby of the Hyatt Regency in San Francisco. It was yet another book in the Kitty Norville series by Carrie Vaughn. She's my hero, a fantastic writer who has managed to drag me kicking and screaming into an on-going series. Robert Jordan never managed to hook me, nor did George R.R. Martin, Piers Anthony or Sir Terry Pratchett. Max Allen Collins' series

KITTY AND THE MID-NIGHT HOUR IS ONE OF THE THINGS THAT KEPT ME SANE DURING MY DAD'S LAST DAYS. I GUESS I LOVE THE KITTY NOVELS EVEN MORE BECAUSE OF THAT.

about the hitman Quarry came the closest, but that's Crime fiction and doesn't count! I'm told that if I started reading Ayelet Waldman's Mommy Detective series, I'll be hooked, but that's neither here nor there. The book was Kitty and the Dead Man's Hand, the 4th or fifth book in the series. The first, Kitty and the Midnight Hour, I read in the hospital while my Dad was dying. The second I read on the road to WorldCon in 2006. The third I read as a sorbet between Hard Case Crime novels. I bought it from Dave Clark and Cargo Cult Books: THE man when it comes to con book-buying. All of them were fun reading (though the second one was the weakest of them). I was on the last couple of chapters, but so far it had been a real blast. Kitty's a werewolf, and a Radio Personality who does a show about the fantastic. That's an awesome combo. She and her boyfriend go to Vegas to get married and for Kitty to do a television show. It was a fun concept, and I was loving the way she played with Vegas movie clichés (what happens in Vegas..., the conven-

tion culture, stupid stage shows and so forth) and the adventure aspect was a lot of fun. I was wrapping it up when the waitress came.

"What'll it be, sugar?" she said. I love it when waitresses go all old-school.

"Chicken Fried Steak." I said.

She smiled, a much younger waitress than I'm used to Flames, but she wrote her shorthand and walked back to the kitchen to drop off the order. I got back to my reading, as the story wrapped up with a far too easy happening. It was like she had a word limit and after getting through the fun and excitement, she had to wrap it up fast. I still thought the ending was gorgeous, brilliantly placed and smartly written.

"You like it?" The waitress had returned.

"It's really fun. I love Carrie's novels."

"I liked The next one way better." She said, leaning on the counter from the other side.

"You've read the Kitty books?"

"Yeah. They're great. I got the first one from my High School Library Junior year and I've been reading them ever since."

"Which one's your favorite?" I asked.

"Kitty Goes to Washington. It's the hottest of them."

I laughed a little.

"I've met Carrie a few times." I said.

"Really?"

"Yeah. At a couple of WorldCons."

"I didn't see her at Con Jose." she said.

"But I was 13, so I wasn't really looking for writers."

She was at least something of a fan. That's always a nice thing to discover.

"She's really nice. I always bug her about when she's gonna get me another book in the series. I had her describe Kitty and the Midnight Hour in five words. She said 'Sexy Werewolves and Talk Radio' and I was completely sold."

She laughed and then turned, picked up a plate from the warming lights and walked off in the other direction. I rarely chat with waitresses, I'm not a regular at too many places, but she was real nice.

"Hey man," the guy across the way called over to me, "could you toss the hot sauce

across?”

I always loved the opportunity to slide a condiment across a counter, so I picked it up, and slid it across the three empty seats to the dude, who grabbed it with a flourish. His date smiled at the bit of play.

“Thanks much.” he said, undoing the cap and dashing it on to his eggs.

A few second later, my dinner was in front of me. I dug in fast.

“You read a lot of fantasy stuff?” the waitress said. I noticed that

her name tag said Jolene. I had to consciously avoid Dolly Parton song references.

“Not that much. I read a lot of science fiction and crime.” I said between mouth-stuffing forkfuls of chicken fried steak and mashed potatoes.

“I read a ton of it.” She said, wiping the counter between her two parties on this side of the restaurant. “The library must think I’m some sort of weirdo. I get a dozen books a week.”

“Who do you read?” I asked.

“I love Robert Jordan, George R.R. Martin, Piers Anthony, Terry Pratchett...”

“Sir Terry Pratchett, actually.” I noted.

“Yeah. I love Discworld. I’ve read all the books at least twice.”

“You ever read Sci-Fi?”

“Some. Dune was pretty good, and I’ve read a lot of the stuff by Heinlein. He’s pretty incredible.” she said.

I was being assaulted from all sides...

We chatted some more. I pointed her towards Christopher Moore, Kurt Vonnegut and Tim Powers. She brought the two books she brought with her to work: *The Bones of Time* by Kathleen Goonan (which I love and read a few years ago) and *Casino Royale*.

“You like Bond?” I asked her as she turned to bring the check to the other couple.

“You kidding?” She said. “I saw *Casino*



Royale 10 times. Daniel Craig is so hot.”

“I’d say the same thing about Eva Green.” The Rockabilly dude said as he was pulling his wallet out to settle the bill.

“Yeah, just my type.” his tiny date said, smiling a 100,000 volt smile at me.

We had a fine laugh.

“What you two going to see?” Jolene asked the two of them.

“The Hangover.” the guy said.

“Me too.” I noted.

“Well, you missed the 7:45.” Jolene said.

“Damn.” I had totally forgotten about the time. I looked at my phone. 8:30. I guess we had been talking a lot more than I realized.

“If you guys can wait, I’d love to see it.” Jolene said. “I can comp you each a cup of coffee and some desert while you wait. I’m off at 9” she said.

I looked over at the guy.

“Sounds good to me.” I said.

“Me, too.” he added.

“I didn’t catch your name.”

“Rick. And this is Elsa.”

I looked at the two of them.

“Rick and Elsa?”

“Just like in *Casablanca*.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“Not at all. And it gets funnier. I’m Rick Blair and she is actually Elsa Lund.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Nope. We met at the Stanford. The Nazis wore gray, Elsa wore blue.”

“It was a pinstriped blue dress, cut at the knee.” Elsa pointed out.

“And those are your real names?”

“I changed mine when I turned 18.” Elsa said.

“And I considered changing mine to Blaine, but I decided that Blair was close enough.”

“You’re dedicated Casablanca fans then.” I noted.

“Seen it about 50 times. Every time it’s at the Stanford we go and see it.”

“Though we spend half the time making out.” Elsa said. “When Conrad Veight starts to lead the singing, I just get so hot.”

Jolene brought back a cup of coffee for each of us.

“What would you like for dessert?”

“I’ll have a piece of Carrot cake.” I said.

“I’ll have a piece of chocolate cake.” Rick said. “Elsa’ll have a piece of cheesecake.”

Elsa smiled broadly at Rick. I can never imagine ordering for a date. It’s just a thing I have.

“Now that you mention it, I’ll have a piece of cheesecake too.” I said.

I sidled over two seats, dragging my cup of coffee with me.

“I love Casablanca. I’ve seen it a bunch of times, almost always at the Stanford. It was a thing that every time I started dating a girl, I’d take her to see the double feature of Casablanca and The Big Sleep.”

“Best double feature in the world.” Elsa said.

“I love the part where the sister tries to jump into Spade’s lap.” Elsa said.

We talked about old movies and especially about old movie theatres. I mentioned I did issues of my zine about old theatres and stuff and Elsa pulled out an iPhone from her bra and dialed up eFanzines! It was awesome. She spent the next ten minutes reading a couple of issues of The Drink Tank. She even laughed a

couple of times! Rick and I talked about wrestling a bit. He was a fan back in the 1990s, the Austin era, and he had been to WrestleMania X which was the best of all-time according to many. I might agree. Jolene got off and joined us, chatting away and stealing bites from our desserts.

“So, you two know Jolene well?” I asked Rick.

“Yeah, Dolly Parton introduced us.” HE said.

“Dolly Parton?”

“We went to her show and I managed to get a chance to sit down with her. We got back there and Dolly was chatting with this sixteen year old and introduced us. Jolene’s not her real name, I think it’s Jennifer or something, but Dolly said, ‘I could see you as Jolene, sweetheart.’ I think she’s her daughter

or something. She really took to the name.”

It was a very good thing that I didn’t make any Dolly Parton jokes.

Jolene joined us

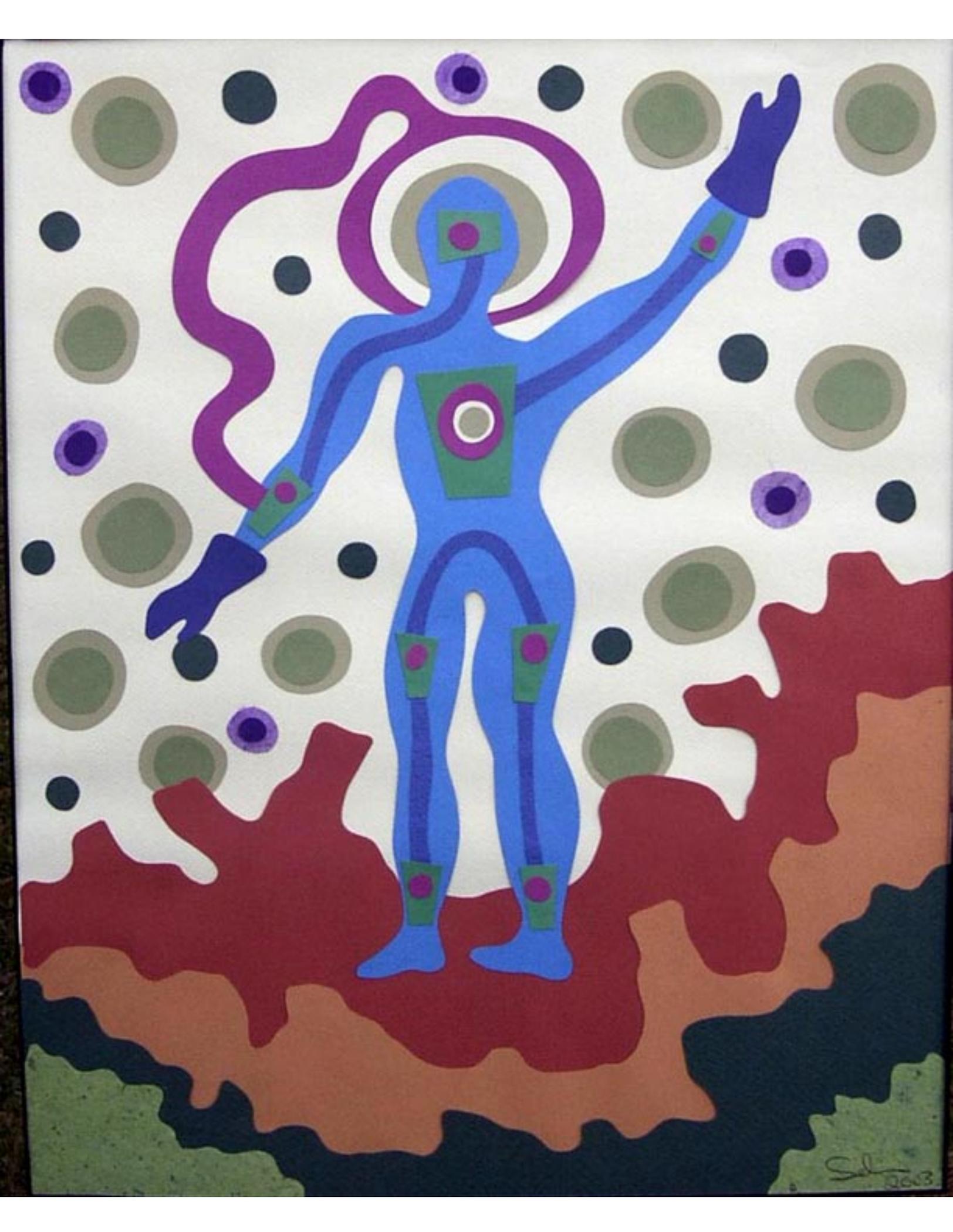
and we sat for a few minutes before we walked over. Jolene just strolled up to the booth, cutting in front of about 20 other people. She said something, the girl in the booth printed out four tickets and that was that.

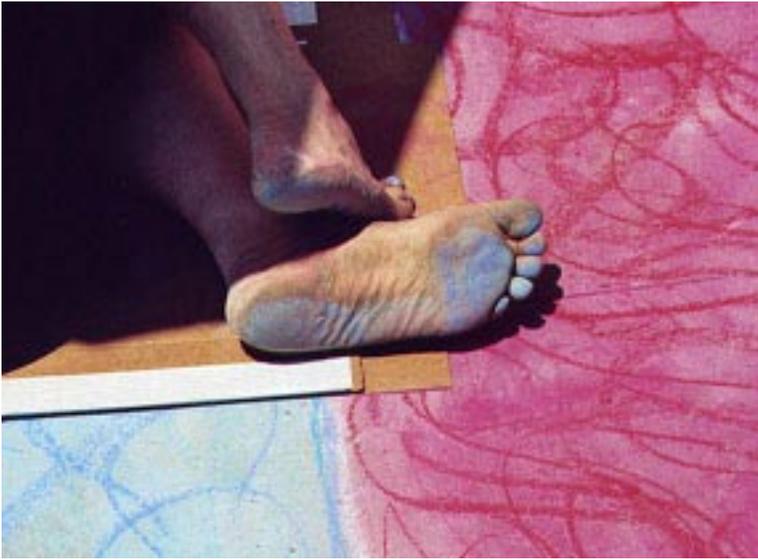
“Those folks come through every time.” Jolene said as she handed us our tickets. I took mine and followed them into the theatre.

I was not expecting it to be in the big dome theatre. I love that theatre. I used to work at the Century 22, so I have an uncommon fondness for it. It’s huge, more than a thousand seats. In the old days, that wasn’t that many, but now, it’s huge. The sound is pretty fantastic, the projection is immaculate. It’s the topnotch kind of theatre that I love. I’ve written about it before and I’ll continue to do so. I can not say enough good stuff about it. The big house is usually reserved for the big movies; car crashes and explosions. This was a comedy, a teen-dude comedy, really, and that seldom gets the treatment of the big screen in the 22. I was really happy.

“You wanna sit in the fourth row, center,

THE BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LOVELY AND TALENTED LINDA AND I IS OUR CHOICE OF FAVORITE MOVIE THEATRES: I SAY THE CENTURY 22, SHE SAYS THE GRAND LAKE THEATRE IN OAKLAND. MINE’S BETTER





an app. It was a fun one, one I hadn't seen. it was Yahtzee. She set it up for four players and we passed the phone back and forth. After a few minutes, Rick pulled a flask out of his jacket and it followed the iPhone. You'd finish your round, pass it off to the next person and then you'd be handed the flask of bourbon. I liked these folks. They liked Yahtzee, they had a rockabilly sensibility, enjoyed and were somehow related to Dolly Parton, and they drank bourbon. Where had they been hiding? Of course, Jolene had sips, though she was too young by at least a year. I was technically aiding in the corruption of

don't you?" Rick asked.

"That's the sweet spot." I said. "You used to work here, didn't you?"

"I did." Elsa said. "Summer of 2003."

"It's 'the classic seat for employees to come and watch a movie from.'" I noted.

"Unless they're looking to get laid." Elsa said, smiling wryly. "Then it's up in the back, off to the side in that three seat row in the very back."

I knew that was true from experience.

We headed down and no one was sitting anywhere near. It was very good. I got myself into seat in the exact middle. Yes, it is traditional to give the best seat to one of the ladies, but I love that seat. The perfect seat for sound and sight. Elsa sat on my left, Jolene on my right and Rick next to Elsa. Jolene had a much bigger bag with her this time. I'd seen the one that she pulled her two books out of, but this was much bigger.

"What's in the gourd, Egg?" I said, quoting Big Trouble in Little China.

"Books." She opened the bag and there were a dozen or so books. I recognized a couple, like Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell and at least two Robert Jordan books. I had never met anyone who carried so many books with her.

"You do like to read, don't you?"

"Well, it's cheaper than the movies and I don't got cable." I hadn't noticed that she had an accent, slightly more Southeastern than Southern California, though I confused the two from time to time.

Elsa pulled out her iPhone and pulled up

a minor. Truth be told, she was no stranger to the bottle, that was obvious, but still.

The movie started and the first trailer had no sound, which was fine since it was for another Final Destination film. I hate that series. I really despise it. We were just finishing the game when the final trailer ran. We also had just about finished the bottle of bourbon. I had only had a few sips, and after that meal, I wasn't feeling it. Elsa had been deeper into the bottle than any of us. She was flying.

"Yahtzee!" she called out as she won the game. We all laughed very heartily.

The Hangover is the funniest movie of 2009. There's been nothing this good in ages. I was at a preview showing of Old School, the movie that really broke Will Ferrell, and it was the same sort of vibe; that everyone in this movie was about to break through. There was almost no moment when I wasn't laughing. The stars were fantastic. Zak Galifianakis, Bradley Cooper, the other guy from National Treasure, and Ed Helms from The Daily Show. There was also Heather Graham, who showed a little bit of boob, Mike Epps, whose part was far too short, and Rachel Harris. A great cast.

The film was filthy. I mean truly filthy. The language was deplorable, there was a fair bit of nudity, both male and female, and the subject matter was wild and dark. There was some great comedy in various areas and everything that Zak said was hilarious. He was great, and Bradley Cooper was also really good, which is kinda weird because he's usually not that great. The way it was written had us

all laughing hard, so hard that I slid onto the floor once, and had to pick Elsa up off the floor twice. There were a few parts where no one but me and Rick laughed, the two of us being in the same demographic, and there were other parts that got giant laughs. I think it might be the funniest movie ever made!

There was a great cameo from Mike Tyson, who was good at some points and not at others. He's not an actor and it showed, but the writers and especially the director understood how to use him. He didn't have to play any jokes, and he realistically got to punch out a dude. That's always a plus. There was a moment where he hilariously reacted to the guys who were trying to put together what they'd been doing all the night before. Which included going to Mike Tyson's house. That's a weird call, but it worked.

I know this ba-

sically reinvented the career of Bradley Cooper in the same way that Old School revamped the career of Vince Vaughn, casting him as comedian again instead of as the action hero they tried to turn him into. I've loved Zak since the film *Out Cold*. It was a lovely film of a similar kind to *The Hangover*, and afterwards, as the four of us were walking out, Elsa talked about how she loved that movie. I think that's what she said. She was a tiny woman who had drank a lot of liquor and was obviously feeling it. I remember those days.

"So, we must do this again." Jolene said.
"Sounds good." I said.

"Swing by the restaurant anytime."
Jolene mentioned.

"You'll find us there most Fridays." Rick mentioned, holding out his hand as I shook it.

Jolene was practically carrying Elsa, and they headed off towards Flames, probably to

get some coffee to try and sober the young lady up.

I got into my car, exhausted. I didn't think I had that rough a day, but I was tired to the max. I leaned my seat back a bit and closed my eyes. I woke up a couple of hours later, the parking lot nearly empty. It was time for me to drive home.

Saturday was going to be a big day, and I slept about 6 more hours, waking up at 9. I knew that the film I wanted to see started at 12:30, so there was no big hurry. I pulled out my Apple iBook and started typing this issue. I was on a roll because I



was already a thousand words into my issue when I got up and took my bath. I was thinking about how this issue should go along, about how I would make the art fit in with the words. That's always the goal, but in this case, I think I had to bend it. I was thinking about Selina's art. I love her art, and it sticks in my mind, which means that it's strong stuff. I love this piece, I really do, and I'm glad I get to run it on this page with these words. I'll say something that fits with it.

OK, I'll come up with something later. I am the Lizard King, I can do anything...and

I DON'T LIKE EGGS. YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE HOW HARD IT IS TO GET PEOPLE TO BELIEVE THAT. ESPECIALLY WAITRESSES. EVERYTIME I ORDER SOME SPECIALTY AT A RESTAURANT AND SAY 'NO EGGS' THEY LOOK AT ME LIKE I'M NUTS

certainly I can crowbar a Doors reference into this article!

So, I wanted breakfast, and to write a little bit of this report (this part of which I'm typing right now, twelve hours after the events I'm typing about have happened) and that meant Denny's. I've often written about writing at Denny's, so I won't go into any more detail than this: it's the perfect place to set a spell and put pixels to posterity while putting away some pancakes. It's what I do. I typed that part where I earlier said that I was typing up this issue. My lag here is slightly better than it was on my TAFF trip.

There is something interesting to report, meaning that this section isn't just some post-modern masturbation. I was sitting, looking over my plate which had been emptied of pancakes, double sausage and toast, and I noticed that the table across from me was doing something with cards. A family, two young girls, a Mom wearing a pink, hard plastic visor, and an older gentleman. The girls were building a pier into the air in the center of the restaurant of the cards. It was a project we'd done with blocks in Physics during Senior year. They were using cards, and had managed to get nearly a foot into the aisle. There's a formula that explains how far you can get, and we had to figure it out and what percentage of the ideal we managed to achieve. My team managed to get 78%, four and a half percent more than Matt Yates' team that came in second. We had a very steady hand.

I was watching it, marveling at the skill with which these girls were working. They'd take a card off the top of the pile, place it at the back, then take another, and slide it under the last, halfway, and then repeat until the last card stuck out beyond the previous end. They were vary smart about it, but the stack of cards on the back was getting perilously close to not weighing more than the

portion that was sticking out. I can't figure it out now, but I'm sure that the equation would say that you had to have at least half the cards on the pile on the steady surface that would keep it from tipping forward. They started to take more cards off and place them on when the waiter came, not noticing at all, and just knocked all their cards off the table. I'm pretty sure the equation for that is (stuff+clueless waiter= disaster.

The poor little girls started crying. It reminded me of Evelyn when she was 4 and I knocked her block castle off of the kitchen table. I had to buy her a special dessert. I took her to Flames and she got a giant piece of Chocolate cake which she enjoyed for the next three days.

Yes, all these things tie together like some freakin' Robert Altman film. It's the life I live and I love it.

OK, back to the day. I drove away from Denny's and headed towards the Mercado 20 movie theatres. Most people who aren't teenagers hate the Mercado...because it's overrun with teenagers. They're loud, they will laugh too hard at the stupidest jokes and they always have their phones on. It's annoying, but they make up for it by paying so much money. It's a fine that must be walked. I had only one shot at this movie. it only had one showing because it'd been out for a few weeks. Dance Flick wasn't exactly the kind of film that lasts in the theatres. It was along the lines of Top Secret!, Hot Shots and Don't Be A Menace to South Central While You Drink Your Juice in the Hood. It was a Wayans Brothers film, meaning there was going to be a lot of jokes that used race as a foundation.

Sadly, those jokes were, with only a couple of exceptions, terrible and poorly delivered. There were segments that had some comedy, but the lead actress was awful, which made the entire film difficult to sit through. On the other hand, the girl playing her best friend was



delightful and pretty as a Big Sur sunset. She was awesome and almost all the funny that was there was because of her. The film suffered from problems that were not present in *The Hangover*. The comedy in *The Hangover* built from intelligent consideration of the situation, like when naked guy jumps out of the trunk. In *The Hangover*, it's shock value partly, but the reaction of the guys who have no idea who he is or how he got there is what's really funny. In *Dance Flick*, when we get a bit like a baby being born right in the middle of a Hip Hop dance set,



we get over-the-top but knowing reactions from those around the scene. It's the problem that we all know what's happening, but if the characters know, it's really not nearly as funny.

I made it all the way through. Of course, it failed the pee test. I didn't have to go to the bathroom once during *The Hangover*, but during *Dance Flick*, a film of less than 90 minutes, I had to go twice. That's a sure sign of failure.

I jumped back in my car and headed off to my friend Sara's place. Her and her husband Bobby, were having an Open House to celebrate the fact that they'd completed the renovations on their new house. You see, once again, I'm reminded that I've done nothing with my life as Sara and Bobby are both at least three years younger than me. These things happen. I didn't actually have the address, but I knew the neighborhood she lived in, and I vaguely remembered the address had a bunch of 2s in it. I drove around and after about five minutes I managed to find a mailbox with a balloon tied to it. That's a sure sign. I walked in and, as

usual, I was one of the first three people there.

The spread was pretty awesome. Sara had made some lovely brownies, a bunch of different dips and most importantly, a Bourbon ice that was amazing. I mean, I could have had a dozen cups of the stuff. I ended up having a few cups, maybe four, but it was wonderful. Rebecca, a girl who used to work with us at the museum brought some Baklahvah from a place in San Diego, which was amazing. I didn't know who I was until I ate a piece. It was awesome. The house

was awesome too. They did a simple paint scheme which gave everything a clean quality. Everything was a primary color, especially the front room, which was an amazing red. All the pals from work came, except for Radio, our events manager and nice guy, but everyone had a great time.

While standing around the dips, I told Sara and her friend, and former CHM colleague Sarah Wilson, that I had been having a surreal weekend, mentioning that I had met Dolly Parton's daughter.

"Dolly Parton doesn't have any kids." Sarah said.

"Yeah, she's infertile." Sara added.

"We know way too much about Dolly Parton." Sarah noted.

I was now wondering if I had been lied to all night. Things were not as they seemed, which is not unusual, but you never know what's what.

The food was fantastic, especially a potato casserole that came out a little bit later.

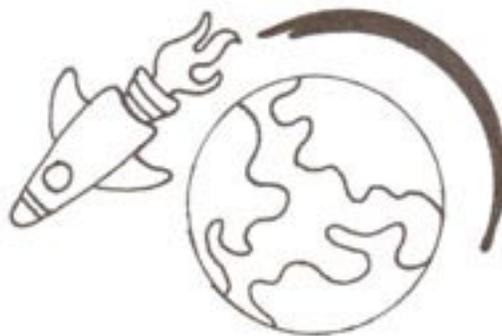
It was all wonderful. They did a Jerk Chicken that was a miracle as well. And a lovely pork loin. All in all, a good bit of food leading to a good party. A bunch of us played some Trivial Pursuit, 90s Edition, which I'm usually a master at, but this time, it wasn't to be. Heather managed to win, playing with Marcin, my friend Jean Martin's ex-boyfriend. He's a nice fellow.

Somehow, I ended up exhausted. I have no idea why. Movie, party, I should have been good to go, but alas, I was pooped. It must be BayCon. It was such a blast that I've been recovering from it ever since. It took even longer than this, two weeks, for me to get back into fighting shape from LACon in 2006, so who knows when my party button will be fully restored.

I headed home. I needed to rest, and since I'd finished Kitty and the Dead Man's Hand, I needed a new book. I had bought Kitty Raises Hell, but when I went looking, I couldn't find it. It was nowhere to be seen. The search of my apartment lasted more than an hour, though if I'd been back in fighting shape, I probably could have done it in 15 minutes. I couldn't find it. I should really put tracking dots on all of my books. That'd allow me to find them. It's bee hard for me to find the books I'm looking for for a while now, so it'd be a nice way of finding things. I ended up picking up a book I had been meaning to get into, but had not been able to work on. it was another Hard Case Crime book, this one set in Belfast during the middle years of The Struggle.

Of course, this was also not to be found. I turned the house over again, completely unable to find either book. I have a ton of books I haven't read yet, literally hundreds, and yet, none of the other books were calling to me. I thought and thought and found that there were three comic books that would settle my literary stomach.

That's right: comic books. Not graphic novels. C-o-m-i-c B-o-o-k-s. They will also be comics and we should all accept that. There's much



OTHER FAMOUS CRIMES OF THE 20TH CENTURY THAT I WANT RICK GEARY TAKE UP IN HIS TREASURY OF XXTH CENTURY MURDER

- THE BLACK DAHLIA-
- THE MURDER OF WILLIAM DESMOND TAYLOR-
- THE SIMPSON-GOLDMAN MURDERS-
- THE MURDER OF JONBENNET RAMSEY-
- THE DEATH OF VIRGINIA RAPPE-
- THE STABBING OF BRUISER BRODY-
- THE CRIMES OF JOHN WAYNE GACY-
- THE CHRIS BENOIT MURDERS-SUICIDE-
- THE ZODIAC KILLER-
- THE JFK ASSASSINATION-

AND FOR THE TREASURY OF VICTORIAN MURDER, I'D LOVE TO SEE HIM DO A BOOK ABOUT THE SHOOTOUT AT THE OK CORRAL.

more to love about a comic book than there is to savor in a graphic novel. IT's my thing. People got made at me when I said that Watchmen was a comic book. It is! Deal with it. ALL the hipsters have been reading comic books for years, even if they think they're graphic novels!

These were all a part of the Treasury of Victorian Murder series that artist/writer Rick Geary has been putting out since the late 1990s. They are the illustrated stories, mercilessly researched, of famous murders. The three that I had were The Best of Chicago, about America's first famous serial killer; The Borden Murders, about Lizzy Borden and her famous whackings; and my fave, The Lincoln Conspiracy, about how John Wilkes Boothe

managed to murder Abe Lincoln at Fords Theatre and then run away in the first great Presidential murder conspiracy. There was no one saying that Booth was a lone gunmen. NOOOO0000oooo.... That's a 20th Century innovation!

The thing about these books is Geary has a very

distinctive art style. It's liney, almost etching-like, but it's clear, simple, lovely. It's not at all sentimental, but it's also not sterile. It plays so well with the non-fiction stories he's illustrating. I enjoy his stuff so much. The history of the murders includes everything from diagrams of rooms and houses to telling the path of bullets. It's educational, amazingly so, but it's also somewhat heartbreaking. There's a book about the murder of James Garfield which examines how medical science was more to blame for his death than the assassin Charles Gâteau. It's told with painful detail and a look at the man which is quite impressive. Geary knows how to find the information and then make the people real, powerful and even a bit personally pathetic. His craft has been perfected in the methods he uses for these comic books.

It's amazing.

Each one takes about 45 minutes to read, and you have to go through again and reinvestigate the drawings of the special locations, the paths that were outlined. There's a ton of research and it rewards the reader who takes his time and plays with the images. It's just fantastic to get such rich material. It made

me forget that there were two missing books that I really wanted to read.

It was about 10 when I finished reading the books. I had turned on the film *Young People Fucking*. I've reviewed it before, in the *Cinequest* issue from last year) so I won't go into it, but the film is delightful. It delivers exactly what it promises with it's title, and is really fun. It made for wonderful reading (and writing) sounds. There are some segments that require me to watch the screen (they all involve Diora Bailes) and they're distracting, but rewarding.

It was getting to be time for sleep, so I slapped on OnDemand and watched *The Firm*. It's John Grisham, it's funny enough, and it put me right out. It was a good night.

Sunday morning is always the right time to go and get yourself something nice for breakfast. I have a lot of places that I like to go, and there's a certain place I enjoy even more than most: *Flames*. I'd just been there, but now I felt like a bit of *Flames* breakfast. It was the perfect time for *Chicken Fried Steak with Biscuits and Gravy*. They do a nice white gravy. I head-



ed in, kinda figuring that Jolene wouldn't be there because few nighters end up working mornings on the weekend. I walked in and another girl wanted my name, but I said I was going to be eating at the counter, so she just waved me over. I made it there and found that Jolene, Rick and Elsa were all sitting right there with a space next to them!

"Well, look what came walking in to the place!" I said, taking the open seat next to Elsa.

"Didn't think I'd see you." Jolene

said.

“Neither did Elsa.” Rick said.

“I thought I was gonna die of alcohol poisoning on Friday.” Elsa added.

We all laughed, especially Elsa. The waiter came and dropped off a menu. He was not nearly the chatty waiter that Miss Jolene



just a tattoo, it was a brand that was then tattooed over to give it that scaly look. For a guy who had a brand down on the back of his neck, I will now never try to fight him.

The movie was about to start, so Jolene and Rick got up and started to the door. Elsa stayed behind.

was. I did appreciate the amount of attention he paid me. He was simply there to take orders and bring out food.

“So, are you going to a movie?” Rick said.

“Nah, I’ve got a couple of errands to run and I was hankerin’ for some biscuits and gravy.”

“We’re going to see Land of the Lost.”

Jolene leaned ahead and said to me.

“I’m holding off until next week.” I said.

“Oh.” Jolene said.

The waiter came back and I ordered and we started chitchatting again.

“So, Rick said something about you being Dolly Parton’s daughter or something.” I asked.

“Dolly doesn’t have any kids, but she treats her nieces and nephews like they’re her kids.” Jolene said. “My Dad’s her cousin. In fact, I met Rick and Elsa the same day I actually met Dolly.”

That made much more sense. We talked about various strange facts, about how the name Jolene isn’t exactly a compliment, though she had earned the reputation more than once. We exchanged stories of a wrong nature. Elsa had the best ones, though Rick and I tied for third. I noticed that Rick’s snake tattoo wasn’t

“I’ll meet you over there after I get some dessert.” Elsa said.

Jolene handed her a ticket.

“We’ll see ya in there.” Rick said, bending down to give her a kiss on the cheek.

I was nearly 2/3 of the way through my breakfast, and the waiter came by and Elsa ordered a piece of carrot cake.

“I’m really not into Will Ferrel.” Elsa said.

“I hear it’s not bad.” I said.

Elsa was wearing matched earrings. They were both key rings with Masons symbols on them.

“Love the earrings.” I said.

“Rick got ‘em for me at the DeAnza Flea Market. I just love them.” she said, smiling broadly.

“The guy’s got taste.” I said.

“He’s been obsessed with the Masonic conspiracy as long as I’ve known him. Has a ton of books about it. He spends a lot of time researching.”

I was liking this guy even more than I had a week ago. It would make him a strange doppelganger of myself...only with serious branding and tattoos. And better clothing.

Elsa got her Carrot Cake, and I was just

I TOOK LATIN IN HIGH SCHOOL. ONE SEMESTER. I WAS NOT ABLE TO GET THE ENTIRE GENDERED-LANGUAGE THING.

about finished.

"There's no way that I'm gonna finish this." She said. "Grab a fork and eat up, kid."

I did just that. It was delicious.

"So, what do you do for a living?" Elsa asked.

"I'm a computer historian." I said, a practiced response.

"At that museum in Mountain View?" She said.

"You know it?"

"Yeah, I went there a few weeks ago with my Dad. he loved it." Elsa said, taking in a bite of carrot cake.

"I've been there ten years." I said. "And what do you do?"

"I thought it showed. I'm a tutor."

"Really? What do you tutor?"

"Latin."

"Latin?"

"Latin," Elsa said. "mostly to Med Students, some high school kids. The Med students pay far better. I can make a hundred bucks a week from them."

"Sounds like easy money." I said.

"Yeah, and they all think they have a chance to score with me, so I get free meals out of them. It's a fringe benefit that I largely enjoy."

We finished off her carrot cake and paid the bill. We got up and headed to the door.

"Damn, the movie's not even started yet." She said.

"Well, you've probably missed the previews." I answered.

She smiled a slightly defeated smile.

"Well, see ya later."

She gave me a quick hug. It's hard to hug a girl who's only 4'8 or so.

I got up and walked out to the car, realizing that I needed music if I was going to be writing this issue of Claims Department. I'd

lost a lot of my music when my computer died, so I put myself out towards the Rasputin Records to find me something new.

What was I interested in? I wasn't sure, but I made my way there with vengeance. I knew that there was a ton of music that I needed. I have no Hall & Oates, no Kajagoogoo, no Frankie Goes To Hollywood. I would need more money if I was going to try and complete my music collection.

Entering into Rasputin, there's a choice you have to make: left for DVDs or right for music. I would normally start in the left, but this time, I needed to go to the right. I turned and found myself standing in front of the section

dedicated to loud, angry music. It was a combination of Sludge Rock, Death Metal and even some Stoner Rock. Looking through the selection, I found about 30 CDs that I'd have loved to bring home. Since I probably only had 15 dollars to spend, and since the average price of the CDs there was 20 bucks, since they were mostly from indy labels that had to try and scrape out a liv-

ing. I did see something shining up at me with the number 3.99 look at me.

I picked it up and found that it was from a band that I was actually interested in. It was Bracer, a semi-local band which does speed metal with an operatic lead singer named Nali. She's a Finn who came to the States in the late 1990s to make her way in the world of Death Metal. The Finns are the legends of the Death Metal scene, with more bands coming from Finland than anywhere else in the world. Nali was a part of a band called Scarred or some such, and before that, she was a legit Opera Singer. That made her the only 50-something that I know of who was ever the lead singer of a Death Metal band.

Bracer does great songs, usually all of



them around some sort of theme. I remember seeing them at a show where they said that it was the text of a F. Scott Fitzgerald story. I heard of them doing a show that one song that lasted nearly an hour. It was much like Jethro Tull's Thick as a Brick, only with loud guitars. Nali's voice is amazing, huge and even without a mic, she can compete with the guitars and bass.

This was a tape of short songs, all with loud, short and fantastically lacy and powerful operatic vocals. The first song made me happy. While I couldn't come up with what the lyrics were, it was called Total Recall, and I got the feeling it had something to do with the film. The next one was called Last Action Hero, and it was slower, more powerful and had an amazing driving bass line that pushed it forward. After that, it was Terminator, and then it was Terminator 2. It didn't take me long to realize that this was all a tribute to the works of Mr. Arnold Schwarzenegger. I was pleased.

The best tune was also the last one. It was called Pumping Iron, and it was about the classic documentary. It was acoustic, with Nali's voice just destroying the world with it's

timbre. I was amazed at the crunch these guys were getting out of non-electric instruments. The drums were tablas, which worked here.

I was writing at home, the classic pose of my generation, better known for kids playing video games. It was me, propped up on two pillows, laying on my stomach, typing at the screen. It was the way I used to play Nintendo. I was nearing the middle of the thing, and the music was blaring in awesomeness. I realized something: if I didn't want to wallow completely in postmodernism, I'd have to sign off. That was a sad realization, but as I sit here, after having taken a step back for a couple of days, I was having a lot of fun writing it, but I figure I shouldn't annoy the readers too much.

I'll save that for The Drink Tank.

NOTE: Possibly the greatest wrestler of the last two decade, Mitsuharu Misawa, died while I was working on this issue, in the middle of a match in Hiroshima. I'm going to be doing a tribute issue of The Drink Tank. I'm hoping that issue will be out around the same time as this one, but you never know...



Accounts Receivable

Bill Wright was kind enough to drop this line about the last issue

Chris,

I've just read Claims Department #10, including publication of my LoC between Ditmar's and Lloyd Penney's. Flattering, that!

Your obituary for the late Japanese wrestling champion Mitsuharu Misawa reminded me of one of the greatest wrestlers of all time, Chief Little Wolf - a name synonymous with the glorious history of Australian professional wrestling since, in 1948, he found refuge in Australia from bigotry in the United States.

His adopted son, David Little Wolf, wrote of him on July 12th, 2004,

"During the war, my mother worked in a warplane factory, and she was singing with the Paige Cavanaugh Trio a couple of nights a week. One of the girls she worked with suggested going to the wrestling matches at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. They did, and as the story goes, Chief caught a glimpse of her, and had his opponent toss him out of the ring, into her lap - certainly a unique method for meeting a girl. They were married in 1946 in Salt Lake City.

"He wasn't a businessman, and he couldn't hold his liquor. I'll wager you could travel over most of Australia, and find people still living, who have a 'Chief Little Wolf at the pub' story. Neither of those things makes him a bad guy, I think it makes him more human.

"One of the reasons he loved Australia so much was, he did not encounter any racial bigotry aimed at him. He could walk down any street, in any city, without any 'celebrity



mania'. He was treated with respect everywhere in Australia. I can't say there were zero encounters, but they were generally in good humour. He was hit a lot with "you're not really Big Chief Little Wolf", to which he would answer....."well, if I'm not, I'm sure having a good time with his wife". Women liked to approach him with "How", which would be very derogatory to a Native American. He was ready for them too. He'd get that huge grin of his working, and reply, "I know how, just tell me when!"

"He loved being entertained. Most entertainers do. He liked all forms of the business. Movies, Musical Comedy, Variety Shows (like those at the Tivoli). He liked the beach. He always remarked how tan he was after a day at the beach. That always got a big laugh.

"He had a pretty good palate too. He loved Italian food (and I think that may be why some galah's in Melbourne thought he was an Australian born Italian). He loved Chinese food just as much. And German, Greek, Mexican, etc.

"Over the years, he had picked up bits and pieces of non-English languages that

served him well. We could walk into a cafe owned by a Greek, Chief could greet him in his own native language, and that instantly opened dialogue, and, our assurance of a good meal. It never failed. Whatever the owner's origins, Chief could at least, say "Hello, how are you?" In those days of 'New Australians', most Australians weren't the slightest bit interested in learning a few words of their new neighbours' native tongue. So, when Chief was able to, at least say "Hello", the recipient was thrilled. This was a big thing to me. I could see the faces of these people change when he spoke to them. It was amazing. I soon learned to do it myself; with my Dad's help, of course.

"He taught me a lot more, most of which I didn't realize I even knew until it came time to use that bit of information, and where I'd learned it.

"To me, he was a real man. To a few generations of Aussies, he's a myth, maybe even a legend. I suppose he was. But, he wouldn't want either one of those titles. He would be content knowing he brought some happiness to the folks who'd paid their hard earned money to see him, and that they got their money's worth. Yeah, he was a real man - a real man of the people. And, he was my Dad."

Back to Bill Wright:

I grew up in Sydney and Melbourne in the post-WW-II era of mass immigration that converted the Antipodes from 'White Australia' egalitarianism to multiculturalism. Whether he knew it or not, Chief Little Wolf was a catalyst in that transformation, but I'm sure the critical importance of what he was doing had never crossed his mind. He died at the ripe old age of 73 on November 13th, 1984, and is remembered with affection; although, regrettably, not by many. He deserves better. America, too, should honour him as one of her greatest sons.

Big Chief Little Wolf was a legend, and this is also the time to give some notice to the entire world of Australian Wrestling. In the 1950s, wrestling was huge around the world. In the US, it was TV wrestling and Gorgeous George, who is certainly the

biggest star ever in wrestling until Hulk Hogan. Big Chief was as big a star in Australia on television as George was on the US TV, that's for sure. I've never seen any of his matches, there are only a few copies of films of him that survive, and I've read that he wasn't great, but he was charismatic. He had Last Row Charisma, or so they say.

In 1964, Jim Barnett brought World Championship Wrestling to Australia and that led to regular televised wrestling, but still, there was always the memory of Big Chief Little Wolf, as was proven by 700 letters sent after an appeal for reminiscences on Good Morning Australia in the 1990s.

