



The Drink Tank 421

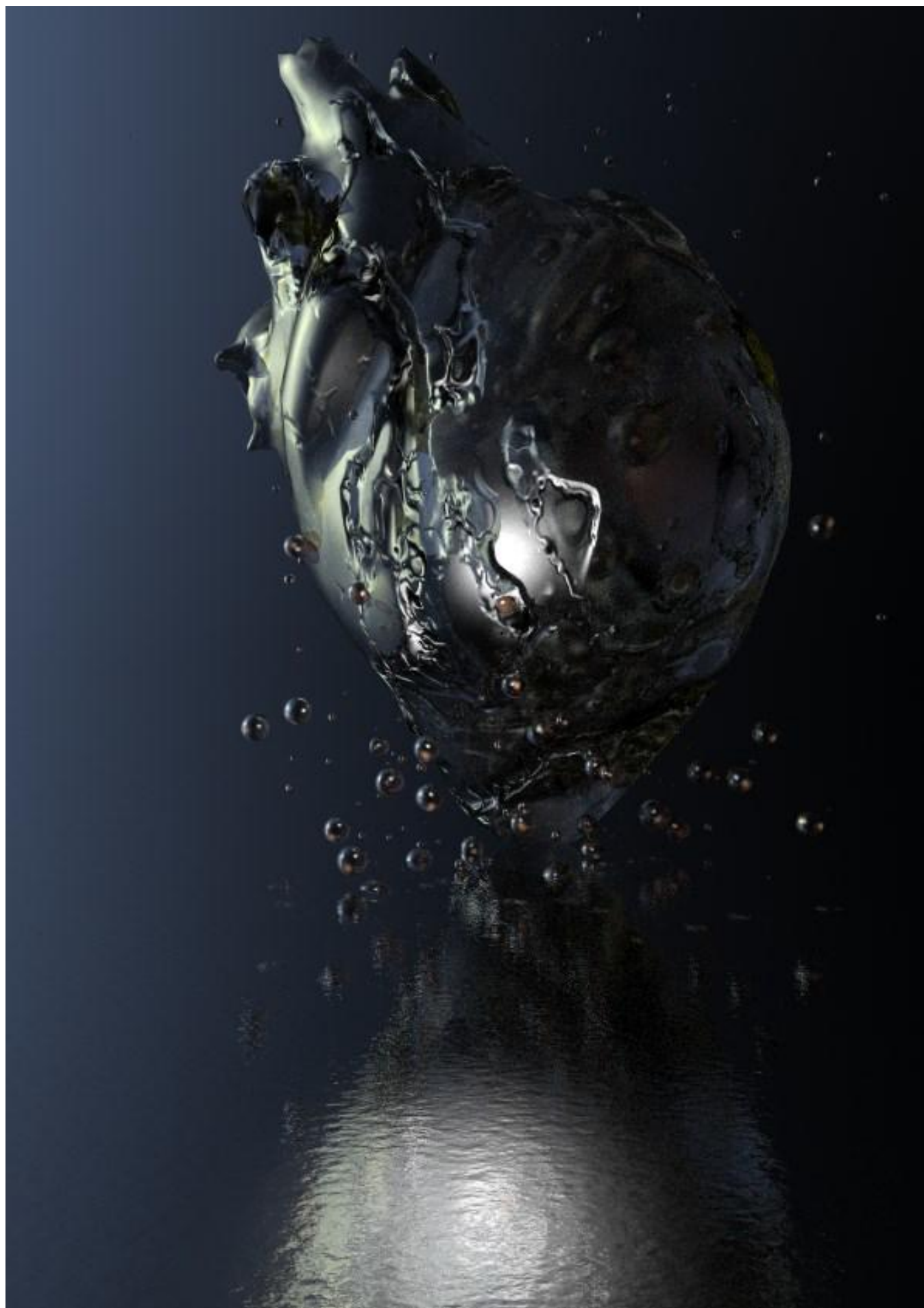


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by Chuck Serface





Editorial by Christopher J. Garcia

It's something like 5:30 in the morning, and I've already been to a wedding today.

Well, to a civil partnership, and it was just as lovely. James Bacon is the only person on Earth I would willingly get up at 3:50 AM to see get hitched.

Technically, it was the second-earliest wedding I've ever been to, the other being a goth wedding that begun at the stroke of midnight.

It's still crazy out there, so this issue is basically a "yeah, we're still here..." issue, with no discernible theming, which is rare, no? We haven't done one of these in a while, so it made sense to give it a spin, see how things shake out. That means this one's all over the place!

Things around here are pretty good, considering. Zooms, like we're all doing, and work, and writing, and kids, and cooking, and on and on and on. There's a lot of art going on around the house: my paintings, Vanessa with her wood-burning, mask-making, and digital work, and the "Boys Live," which is a strange sort of Chris Burden-esque performance piece. That takes up some time, but it's managed to keep us busy!

We're doing more issues this year! There's one on contemporary women writers that will be lovely, and then there's another dedicated to superhero teams." Hopefully in September, we'll focus on audio dramas, audio books, and fiction podcasts. That was spurred by the release of *The Sandman* on Audible. End of the year? That's for Alice in Wonderland, though that might be pushed back to our anniversary issue. We've got to figure that out, plus there are bound to be more!

And now, on to randomness!!!!



Reading from a List *By Stephanie Alford*

Lists. Daunting and overwhelming? Or challenging and entertaining?

A few nights ago, this bait-click headline came across my feed, "[The BBC Believes That Only 6 People Are Bold Enough to Do This Book Challenge](#)." Of course, I clicked because what if I'm one of the six? Doubtful but possible. And, for the record, the BBC had nothing to do with the list.

Then I fell into the world of book lists again. Like this one: [The 2020 Reading Challenge: 52 Books in 52 Weeks](#). Oh, and then I found this website [List Challenges](#) with an entire section dedicated to books.

Hours flew by as I clicked and read and chuckled and I barely escaped list mania again.

Again, because I once read from the list. There's a compendium of lists spreadsheet living on my hard drive. [1001 books you should read before you die](#), "Must Read Space" from [Book Riot](#), "100 Feminist Books" also from [Book Riot](#), "100 Best Picks for SFF" from [NPR](#). My highly organized compendium contains 2,417 books, of which I've read 345. The BBC click-bait list is comprised of 5,068 books of which I've read 12%.

My very favorite list was with a group on [LibraryThing](#). Every month we'd suggest topics and the administrator would pick 15 or 20 and we'd all toddle off to set our reading for the month. It was called "Take It or Leave It" but some people took it too seriously. I left after I was fat shamed and called names by a fellow member because I refused to move [Haruki Murakami's Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage](#) from the challenge which suited me so she could have more imaginary points. And that's when I started thinking about the purpose of reading lists.

Every list is subjective, based on personal interests, best seller data or some other vague agreed upon criteria for the purposes of making a list and convincing others to read from it. Though my focus has settled into the SF/F genre, I have wide and far-ranging taste in readings. There's only one list I hope to complete in my lifetime, that of [Hugo winners](#).

It's easy to get emotionally involved in reading from the list. Somehow, we allow ourselves to let these lists tell us what we should be reading to be well-read. I found myself getting overwhelmed and anxious. There were books I'll never read (hello, *Lolita*), authors I'd never heard of, and those I quit part way through. Everyone in my homey reading group raved about one list or another and fashioned their goals by them.

I found I couldn't. So, I stopped shaping my reading around lists, and found myself much happier. I returned to reading what floated to the top of the TBR pile, the only list being kept now that tracks my annual reading.

My main criticism of any reading list is the lopsided treatment of genres. In the *1,001 Books You Should Read Before You Die*, there are token gestures to SF/F. [William Gibson's](#) *Neuromancer* cozies up with several by [Jane Austen](#). Nearly all of [Margaret Atwood's](#) books are listed but we know she doesn't write SF/F, [just ask her](#).

Some lists will contain all seven [Harry Potter](#) books as individual line items and additionally list the "Harry Potter series" as a different line item, making eight line items for *Harry Potter*. Others will list only "Harry Potter series" as one line item leaving one to ponder whether that really counts properly. I spent a lot of time weeding out duplicates and expanding bibliographies so as to include all books in a series. No wonder my compendium grew to over 2,000 books! It was fun for a while. But again, daunting.

Occasionally, it's fun to see where I fall in whatever list I stumble across. After taking stock I move on. Finding [List Challenges](#) on which users can make their own lists, has made me think about what I would find useful. The data of what I've already read over a lifetime can be sliced and diced in so many ways. For whom would these lists be? Would anyone else get anything from them?

The existential meaning of a list, especially book lists is simply too much to consider. This morning, I lost of track of where I was on the freeway from spending so much brain power on these notions. Which brings me back to I'm just going to make a list of what I read and leave it at that. Then there's no anxiety over what I haven't read, what I "should" read, etc. Which relieves brain cycles to enjoy reading even more thoroughly.



STILLWELL

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Stephanie Alford





THE MEROVINGIAN BY CHUCK SERFACE

S

freely admit that much about the *Matrix* series confuses me, so while I've seen the films, I haven't become so much a fan as an interested observer. Nonetheless, as with literature like *Finnegans Wake* or Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, I find elements that compel me to try harder, to strive toward answering the question, "What the hell are they trying to tell me?" One such element is the Merovingian, whom the Oracle says is "one of the oldest of us," "us" being those who dwell in the Matrix. Why am I so interested in this one character and willing to surf the Internet in search of clarification about him? What follows is a summary of what I've learned and how it answers my question.

First, his name resonates historically. The Merovingian dynasty ruled the Franks from the 5th to the 8th centuries, and that dynasty was noted for large instabilities due in large part to partible inheritance practices, meaning that heirs received a portion of lands and estates. This, of course, led to much civil upheaval, and when their time ended they acted merely as figureheads. The Merovingian page on the *Matrix* Wiki tells us more:

The Merovingian was presumably named after the Merovingian dynasty because it is a power from a distant period in French history, just as the Merovingian himself is a power from a distant period in the Matrix's history who has adopted a French persona. Additionally, the Merovingians ruled what is now France during the Early Middle Ages, a period commonly known as the Dark Ages and popularly held to be a period of barbarism, superstition, and feudalism, and it may be that this name is intended to associate the Merovingian (with his personal army of supernatural beings) with these qualities.

Prior to his current less exalted role as an information trader and, the Merovingian was as an operating system for an earlier Matrix. Once, he was a leader, but now he's a relic of the past, replaced and exiled to the Underworld by "updated" systems such as the Oracle. Indeed, the name of his wife, Persephone, highlights this Underworld imagery, since the original Persephone was the wife of Hades, Lord of the Underworld, of course. There's even an encounter in Club Hel at one point. I love how the blend of historical reference, mythology, and metaphor illustrates the nature of this fascinating character.

Second, the Merovingian believes in causality over choice, claiming, "Choice is an illusion created between those with power and those without." Here then the filmmakers exploit an opportunity to explore free will vs. determinism, since the Oracle, whom the Merovingian derides as a "fortune teller," views into the future based on choices. As with the move from the Dark Ages to the Renaissance to the Enlightenment as a move from religious-based determinism to free will, the Matrix has moved from the Merovingian to the Oracle. Or does the progression move that cleanly? Certainly the debate isn't over, however, since the Merovingian seeks ways to supplant what has replaced him. Although he's deemed obsolete, he still holds power through his leadership of the Exile Programs and his information trafficking. Remnants of the past rarely fade quickly, whether one dwells in the Matrix or in reality itself. Again, wonderful imagery highlights characterization, plot, and theme.

Third, yes, I searched the Internet for discussions on Grail legends related to the Merovingian and the *Matrix* series, and, boy, many populate the landscape. For brevity's sake, I'll mention only two essays, one by Brian Takle and the other by Alex M. Dunne. Takle, if you're feeling bravely up for a big read with much convoluted theory and interpretation, offers perhaps the most comprehensive discussion of all things Matrix at http://wylfing.net/essays/matrix_revolutions.html#hel. About the Merovingian and the Holy Grail, he notes that the Merovingian is the protector of the Grail. He also sees the Merovingian as the Devil, since, as mentioned before he's married to Persephone, and he hangs around in Club Hel. We have all that imagery again. Alex Dunne approaches the issue more clearly, stating that the Grail is the mainframe source code that Neo seeks. The Merovingian is holding captive a character called the Keymaker through which Neo can access the mainframe source code, the Grail. Dunne expands his analysis through a comparison of the historical Merovingian Dynasty and its habit of confronting battles through Knights Templar, much as how the Merovingian of this story confronts Neo and Trinity with his henchmen and not directly. Dunne's essay is here: <http://>



thematrix101.com/contrib/explainer.php.

Finally, how has learning about all these allusions and references helped me to understand why the Merovingian intrigues me? He's pitiable, a remnant of past glory existing in exile, a reviled figure in the contemporary order of the Matrix. Once upon a time, like Satan, he was the shining boy, the favored one, but so long to that. Like the Merovingian kings, he's no longer heir to Christ. We've moved way beyond DOS now. His only real power is not only in possessing the Keymaker but in illustrating to Neo and to us the viewers that we too can fall into exile when new versions of the world move into play. More than one commentator opines that the Merovingian may have been the One, but now it seems Neo's the man of the hour. We all run the risk of such reversals in fortune. As Frankie sings, "Riding high in April; shot down in May." The Merovingian shows us possibilities of personal corruption and degradation from past glories. That, I finally understand, is what has captured my attention. Someone once quipped, "Be a Skywalker, not a Porkins." Similarly, we should always shoot for Neo and avoid the Merovingian. Lesson learned.





Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga by Christopher J. Garcia

I LOVE EUROVISION!!!

Sorry, I had to scream that one. *Eurovision* is that most fascinating experience, where the various nations of the European Broadcasting community each send one act to represent the nation and then folks vote. It's one of the most influential television events of all-time. Without it, there would be no *American Idol*, no *America's Got Talent*, or anything that brings voting into the mix. It's not widely-known in the US, of course, but it's got a following of rabid fans out this way. It's kind of like Aussie Rules Football in that way. I had heard of it when I was younger, specifically in relation to ABBA and "Waterloo," and there was a joke in *Monty Python* too. It took getting to know two of my favorite people on the planet Earth, Kevin and Andy, who started having the annual viewing, and then the good folks of BASFA got hooked.

And so, when I was presented with the fact that there was a Netflix movie called *Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga* that I had to watch and watch it hard.

I am so glad that I did!

Here's the idea, and it's a good one; Lars Ericsson is obsessed with winning the *Eurovision Song Contest* after watching ABBA win with Waterloo in 1975. Along with his friend Sigrid, they form a band, Fire Saga, with the express intent of winning the contest. They manage to get to the *Eurovision Song Contest* via an unconventional method, and end up competing. The thing is, Lars is basically cursed; he's constantly ending up looking like a buffoon, and since he's played by Will Ferrell, it's a good bit.

With that, you can basically figure it out. It's a classic formula, three actually. It's a Rom-Com, with Ferrell and Rachel McAdams as the couple. She's crazy into him, and he is just purely focused on winning. It's the contest film, where there's the competitor who is making things incredibly difficult and is also the one who implicates himself in the heads of the competition (which is also the structure of *Mean Girls* it turns out...) and is the cause of the success of the team. It's also a fish-out-of-water story. It's all of those things in pretty much equal measure.

And it's really funny.

Now, unlike the way a director like Judd Apatow might direct it, it's more about the scenario and the combination of the unexpected and the unusual. While I love a good over-the-top comedy, here it's still kind of absurd, but at the same time, it's playing realistic scenarios. We all know that there are things like *Eurovision*, and what goes on behind-the-scenes must be as magical as the actual performances, and that's what this is tapping into. In that way, it works with the same kind of comedy that the Christopher Guest films do, but here it's a far more conventional delivery.

As always, it's the talent that hammers it home.

Ferrell is always going to be what he is, and here he's great doing what he does. Rachel McAdams, who I usually don't like doing comedy, is flawless in this one. She has emotional range, a fun accent, and delivers the line "the elves went too far!" with such an amazing sense of timing, but more impressively, she doesn't play it up. It's legit coming out of her mouth, and once you can fake sincerity, the world is your toaster.

The real highlight is Dan Stevens, late of *Downton Abbey*. The man is hilarious as Lemtov, the hopeful Russian wedged between Lars and Sigrid. He's hilarious at playing that Russian stereotype, with the added sexual ambiguity to sweeten the pot. He has so much energy in every scene he's in, and he drives a lot of the laughter in the last half of the film.

If you're a fan of *Eurovision* as a musical phenomenon, or just love modern pop music, there's a lot here to love. There's a scene called the song-a-long. This is the biggest tribute to the actual *Eurovision* world because it features former contestants and winners singing this lovely mash-up for a bunch of wonderful pop songs from the last few decades. The woman who does Rachel McAdams' voice, a Swedish singer named Molly Sanden, really kills it in her part of this. There are a TON of familiar folks, winners and pop stars who competed. It's an absolute blast, and more than a little bit of an homage to the world of the modern, post-MTV music video.

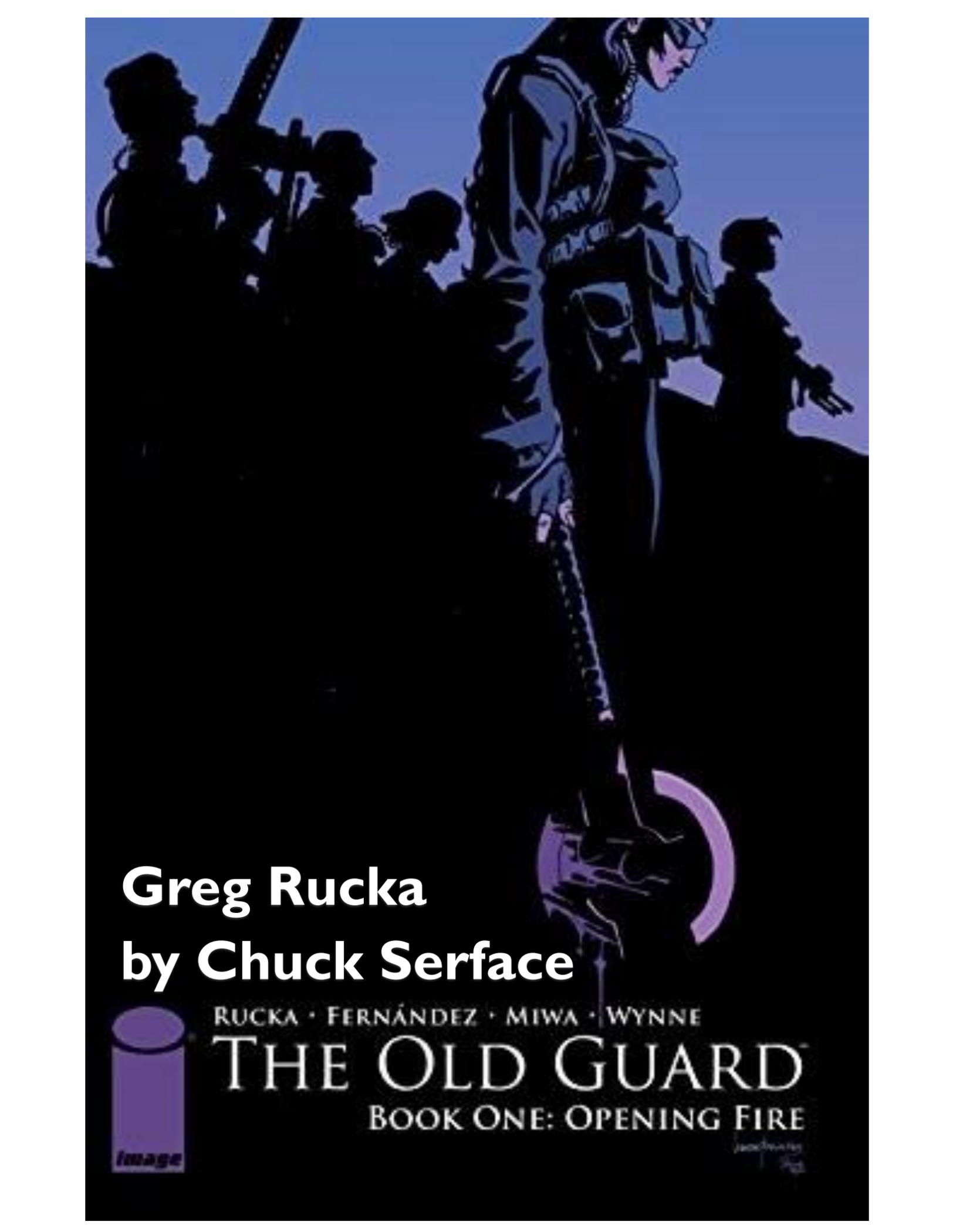
The romantic angle is really strong, and they do a bunch of fun stuff with callbacks. There's a mention early on that leads to an amazing next step. There's a super-shocking moment that is just sort of left there, and then BOOM it's back and makes sense. It's a lot of fun, and it made me appreciate something about *Eurovision* that I had never thought about. *Eurovision* isn't just an international competition. It's a storytelling methodology. There's a path that is so very clear and important to the process that a screenwriter can mine it easily. They obviously loved the form, though at one point there were seven people on the stage, and with Will Ferrell, who shepherded the film, it was a love letter.

Also, every song we see is awesome. I mean they all feel like actual entries.

If you've ever seen a *Eurovision Song Contest*, you'll recognize a lot of the concepts they play with, from how the stage runs, to the announcing, to the way that the participants react to the voting. It feels real, and that makes it more watchable for those of us who get it, even if we know which elements are for storytelling.

Watch it! It's an absolute blast and on Netflix.





Greg Rucka
by Chuck Serface

RUCKA • FERNÁNDEZ • MIWA • WYNNE

THE OLD GUARD

BOOK ONE: OPENING FIRE



Joe Colletta
Art

Novelist, comic writer, scriptwriter, and producer Greg Rucka has been rocking my world since 1999, when I first read his contributions to the multi-title *Batman* arc, “No Man’s Land.” He’s done much writing for DC and some for Marvel, mostly “cape and mask” titles that might not appeal to broader audiences within science-fiction and fantasy fandom. But now that two independent titles from him have been adapted to the small screen, *Stumptown* on ABC and *The Old Guard* on Netflix, people are beginning to understand why we who love superheroes so dearly love Greg Rucka, who’s a multiple Eisner Award nominee and winner.

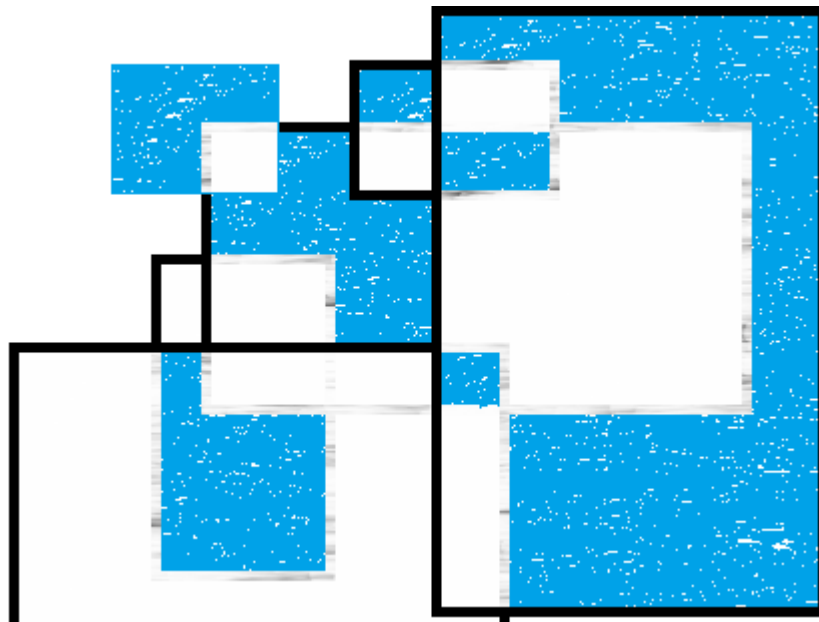
If you adored *The Old Guard* and its strong woman-warrior lead, breadth of characters, historical and political themes, and all-out berserk battle scenes, I refer you not only to the comic series upon which the movie was based, but to other offerings from Rucka that I think will fire up your desire for more.

The Old Guard

I’ve yet to encounter a negative review of *The Old Guard*, either the comic or the Netflix adaptation. What’s not to love? Andromache of Scythia, or “Andy,” has been traveling the world for over six millennia, hiring out her services in various skirmishes and all-out wars, at times being worshipped as a goddess. Through the years, she’s gathered others unable to die -- Joe, Nicky, Booker, and finally Nile -- to join her campaigns. We even meet another who’s lived almost as long as Andy, the Japanese Noriko who becomes the Vietnamese Quynh in the television show. Immortal warriors abound in speculative literature and film -- *Highlander* and Barry Sadler’s *Casca* series, for example. Where *The Old Guard* stands out, however, relates to the diversity of themes and characters Rucka employs.

On Facebook, friends have expressed immense joy about the relationship between Nicky and Joe, both of whom crossed into immortality during the First Crusade, and who share an eternal love despite having been on opposite sides of that conflict. Honestly, I can’t remember ever viewing or reading about any couple so worthy of the title soulmates. The one scene in which both declare their undying love when confronted with homophobic bile will shine for generations to come.

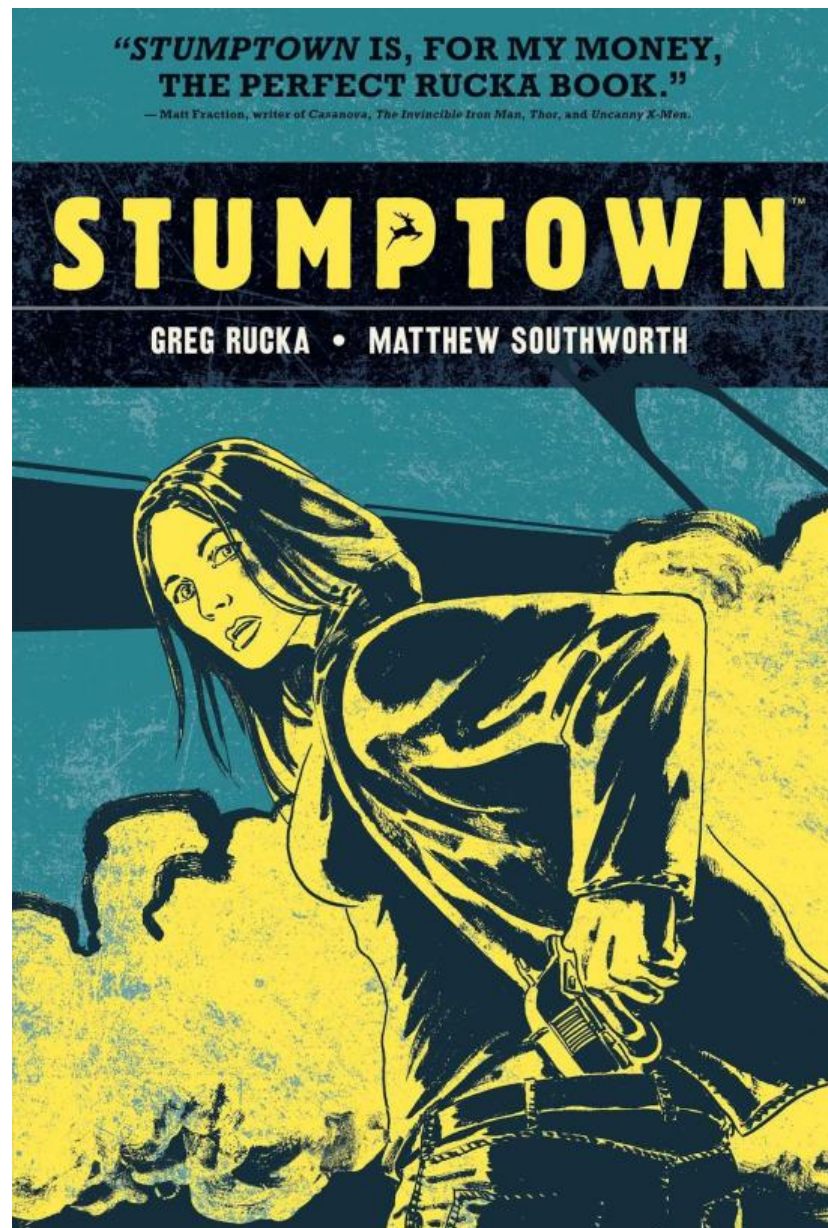
These days, I’m only reading hardbound or trade paperback collections, so I’ve only read the first arc, “Opening Fire.” There are a few differences between the comic and the show, but most are minor with only one that’s particularly huge. I’ll see how that plays out when Image Comics releases the second collection in September 2020.

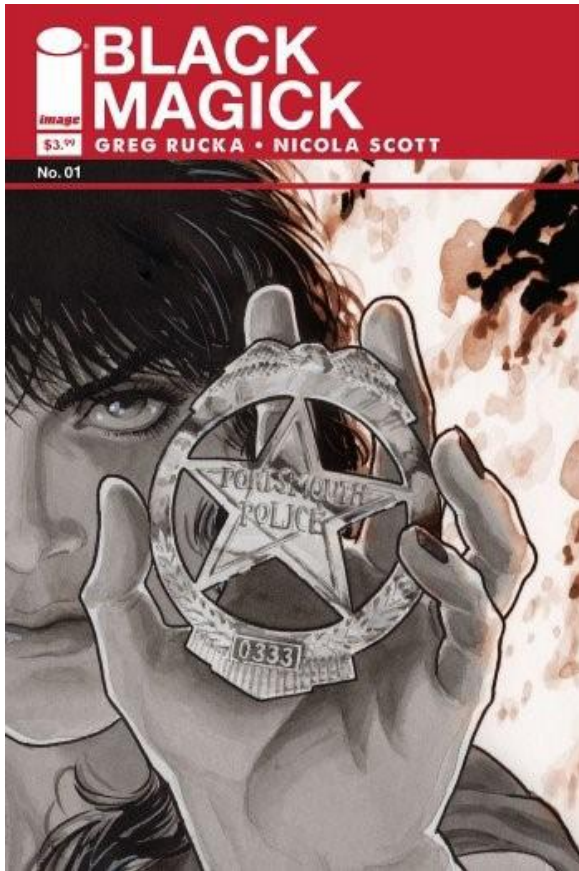


Stumptown

Stumptown on ABC remains one of the few series on a traditional network that I watch, and that's for good reason. Cobie Smulders plays Dex (short for Dexedrine -- really) Parios, a bisexual army veteran who channels her military skills and natural cleverness toward private detecting. Like many private detectives, she's also dealing with issues, specifically alcohol, gambling, and PTSD. Her younger brother Ansel, who has Down's Syndrome, often acts as parent for Dex, and he's clearly the wisest person around. I'm someone with a cousin that I dearly love who approaches the world much like Ansel does, so I greatly appreciate the dignity Rucka has instilled into him, which is nothing new for Rucka when it comes to reflecting diversity, the natural state of our universe.

Oni Press first released the comic in 2009, and four trade-paperback collections have been released to date. Rucka admits that in part he based his concept on *The Rockford Files*. That explains why I immediately fell in love with the story and with Dex. The first volume was nominated for the Eisner Award for Best Limited Series. It's well worth your attention.





Black Magick

Situated somewhere in the Pacific Northwest, Portsmouth has been experiencing a fair helping of occult incidences. Enter Rowan Black, a police detective and a witch with inherited trauma from a family background the nature of which is slowly unfurling throughout the series. The pacing's slow, but this accentuates the mysterious, night-world mood of supernatural neo-noir. Also, slow, however, is the release of each collected volume, but that's understandable given how busy Rucka's has been with *The Old Guard*, *Stumptown*, his projects for DC, and with developing *Black Magick*. Volume 3's slated for availability in February 2021. Rumor has it that I might have pre-ordered already.

While the magic within the narrative springs from fantasy, Rucka and the artist, Nicola Scott, put thought into how they wanted to display ritual and practice, adding a real-world touch to it, and once again Rucka pays respect to diversity, this time within once specific practice, or more accurately many practices within one practice. In an interview with *Comics Alliance*, he states:

One of the things that we [referring to himself and Scott] wanted to do, and I've talked about this elsewhere, too, is that when we talk about the kind of paganism that Wicca is, we are, for the most part, talking about a modern interpretation that stems out of the mid-20th century. It's what we call Gardnerian Wicca. But for Rowan, and for Alex, who's the high priestess leading that ceremony, they're actually practicing a tradition that goes much, much further, that predates Gardnerian Wicca by many, many hundreds of years, if not thousands.

"Accurate" is a very difficult word to use when you talk about Wicca, because one of the beautiful things about Wicca is that the individual's worship is precisely that, it is individual. You're not going to go from coven to coven and find them saying the same things. The intent may be the same, but each person finds their own way, too, and thus interprets it in their own way. We want to be respectful and we want to be accurate where we can be accurate, but by the same token, we're talking about something that's similar but not the same to what many people are practicing today.

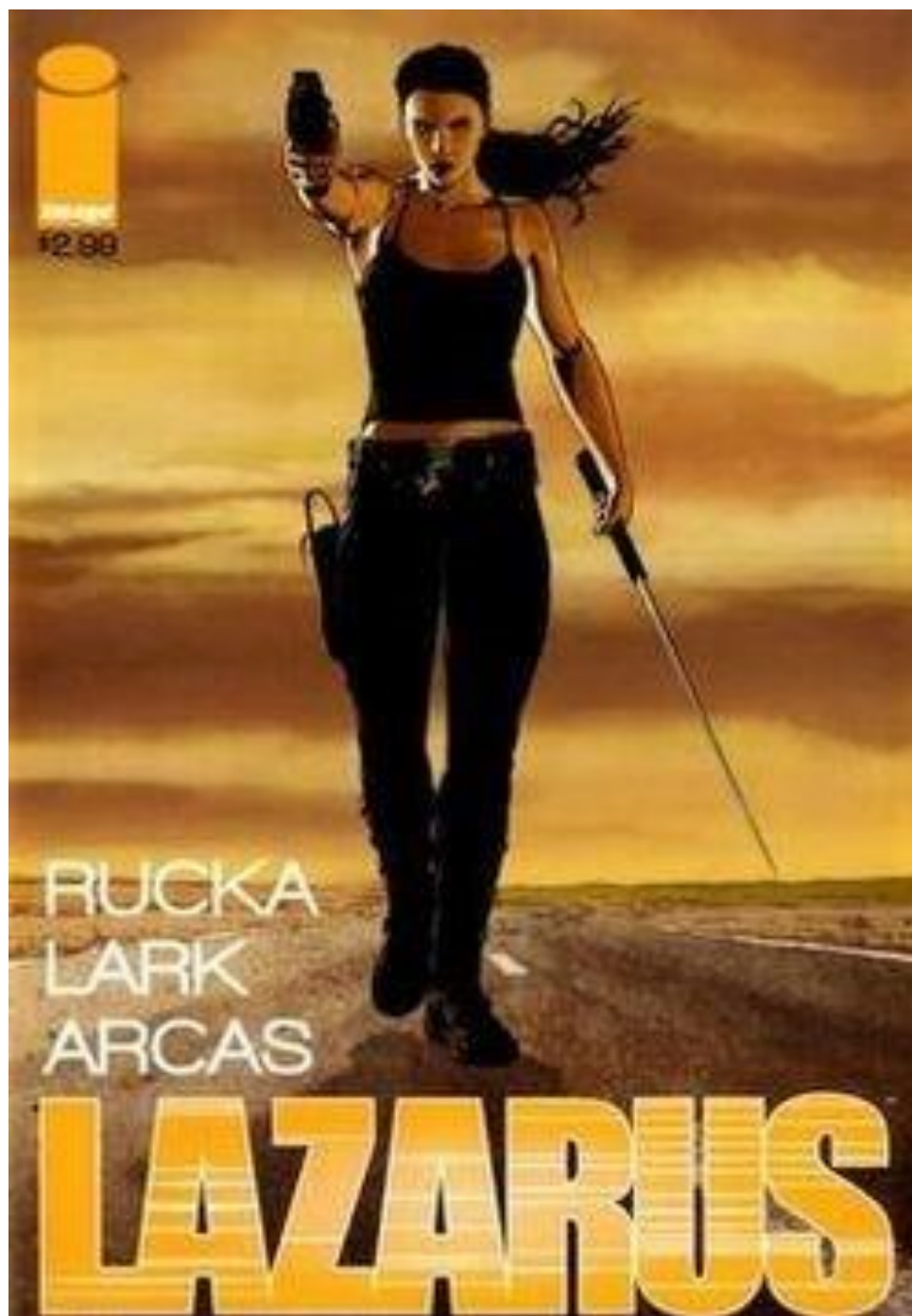
You want it, Rucka's got it. And I've been saving my favorite for last.

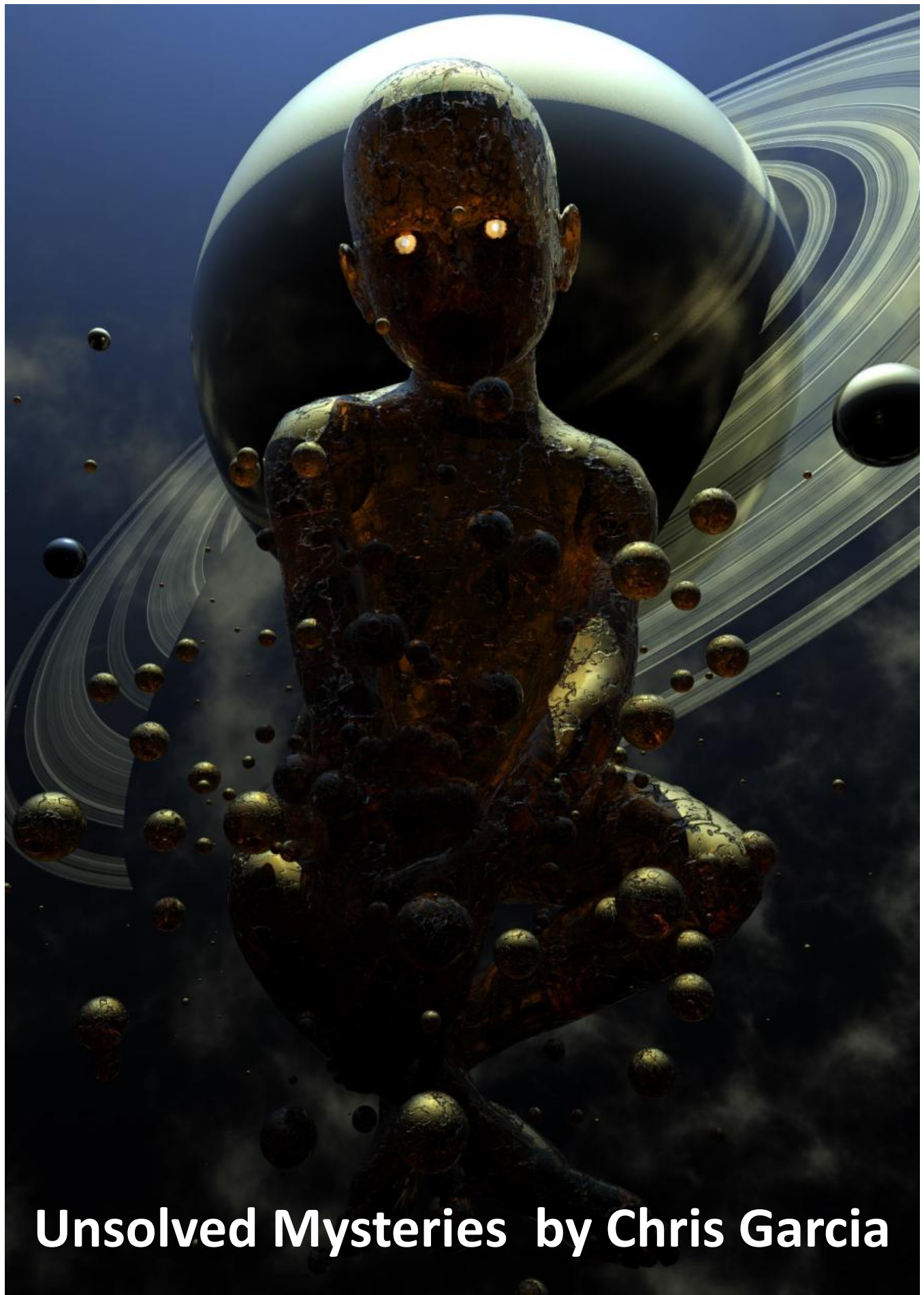
Lazarus

I first encountered *Lazarus* through the recommendation of my good friend, Derek McCaw. A near-future dystopia, this tale brings us into a world divided into sections, each ruled by oligarchic families. Call it hyper-capitalism, feudalism, or kickass action/adventure, and you'd be right with all of the above. The central character, Forever Carlyle, represents her family during conflicts. She's the Lazarus, bred in a laboratory, rigorously trained over her lifetime, and though a member of the family largely replaceable since more versions of her could be produced. Each family has a Lazarus, whether they be cyborgs or . . . we're not sure what they are. Forever's family, Carlyle, dominates roughly what was North America.

In 2015, Legendary Studios purchased the rights to develop *Lazarus* into a television series. The last I heard, Amazon Prime wants to do the adaptation, but in 2018, Rucka said that this was a long way off. If Rucka maintains writing and producing control, we'll receive a ride to rival *The Old Guard*.

Do it, Greg. Do. It.





Unsolved Mysteries by Chris Garcia



has changed.

First off, TV isn't just television-based anymore. The evolution of television has made the computer, the tablet, and the smartphone prime viewing spaces while adding Hulu, Prime, and especially Netflix, to the world of networks.

The thing is, the needs of the viewer have only barely changed.

Viewers still want a lot of content, and often want things they recognize, that have familiar feelings. The new set of video content providers has led to a massive need for production, and the needs of the audience still want the same things: known actors, familiar scenarios, high-production values, and perhaps most essential, clear connections with known interests. The audience still wants a lot of what it's always wanted, only new, polished.

And that is exactly what the new version of *Unsolved Mysteries* provides.

If you were a murder junkie or paranormal nerd in the 1980s, 90s, or very early 2000s, you loved *Unsolved Mysteries*. Hosted by Robert Stack, it was a blend of open-crime stories, ghosts and UFO sightings, lost loves, and so many other open-ended questions that they would cover through interviews, recreations, and narration by the inimitable Mr. Stack. The recreations were stiff (though several significant stars would make early appearances on the show) and the narration was carried by the authority of Robert Stack's voice. That said, they were covering incredible amounts of important material that wasn't appearing everywhere. I maintain that the rise of true-crime internet sites was seriously primed by *UM*, and that led directly to the true crime/paranormal podcast wave, which brought us 'casts like *Last Podcast on the Left*, *13 O'Clock*, *Known Unknowns*, which helped reinvigorate the true crime and paranormal television craze. That sort of influence means that a show will never really die, and after it ended in 2002, it was re-launched using the original cases, added updates to the cases, and then Dennis Farina was made the host since Stack had passed away.

In 2017, FilmRise bought the rights to the series, and then got them on to Amazon Prime, Tubi, and Pluto TV. That revived interest, helped no doubt by the explosion of true-crime podcasts, and especially by the Golden State Killer case. This was a huge success about getting the show back into the public eye, and when that happens, someone starts to get dollar signs in their eyes.

That someone was Netflix.

The growth of Netflix as a TV network has led to a desperate rush to get new stuff produced. The fact that there was a new audience who were obviously loving *Unsolved Mysteries* meant that it was prime for a re-launch.

Now, a funny thing happened between 2002 and 2020. Television got good.

Television evolved more between 1999 and 2010 than any other time in the history of television. *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Mad Men*, *The Office*, *Community*, and the explosion of reality TV all raised the bar incredibly high. Documentary television improved greatly as well, not only because of reality TV, which is basically documentary, but because of the rise of channels dedicated to documentary, and things like UFC pre-shows, all raised the bar to where it is the dominant form of verité documentary. Film documentary has incorporated a lot more animation and effects, but TV has become cleaner, in a way.

Now, with the idea in *Unsolved Mysteries* in the air, it became obvious that they couldn't just do the same thing they had done in the 1980s and 90s. The idea of the over-the-top reenactments, and even the hosted format, all seemed quite dated, so the producers went a new direction, something closer to the verité concept, without narration or hosting. That doesn't mean that there's no editorial direction, but it's realized through editing and some limited animation and text. That gives you a sense of immediacy, almost reportage, and that draws you in to the stories.

And the stories are great.

The first one is the one that has infected the true-crime world which isn't hard, it turns out, because there was already a community looking into the case. The first case is that of Rey Rivera. He disappeared, then was found in a parking garage of The Belvedere Hotel in Baltimore, having apparently fallen through the

roof, which might indicate that he jumped ... or was thrown! This one has twists and turns, a weird list of movies, strange physics questions, and ultimately, a lot of questions. It spent an hour looking and answered almost nothing, but was also fully satisfying. That's the secret of *Unsolved Mysteries*; without a third act, it manages.

The second one will make some television ethicists question. It's the story of the disappearance of Patrice Tamber Endres, and how this relates to her son and her ex-husband, Rob Endres. The way it's presented, it wants you to walk away with the idea that he had killed her, or more accurately, that he had her killed or at least kidnapped so she would be killed. It's really well done, and if you're an in-training documentarian, this is the episode you should watch to learn how to get across an idea without outright saying, "This is what you need to walk away from this with!" It's a good episode, and it's got a villain, but a villain who is willing to let you know what he thinks.

Also, he totally did it.

Count Xavier Dupont de Ligonès murdered his family, then disappeared. That's not proven, but it's obviously what happened. This would have been the B-story on an old-timey *Unsolved Mysteries*, but here it gets full bloom. It's a fascinating and grisly episode, what with bodies being found under their house, and even the dogs being murdered. This is a really good episode, and one that makes you angry because it's obvious that the bad guy is in the wind.

The fourth one looks at the Kansas murder of Alonzo Brooks. This one brings up all sorts of issues, and if you're looking to get mad at local police, this is the one for you, because they blew it all over the place, and quite possibly on purpose.

Next comes the UFO episode. Now, I'd have loved another one or two of the paranormal, getting one that I knew nearly nothing about was a wonderful surprise. Most folks are raving about this one, because it covers an encounter in Berkshire, MA in 1969. This was a significant UFO flap, but it is not as widely known as the West Virginia sightings associated with Mothman, or the Washington, DC flap of the 1950s, or the Phoenix lights. The interviews were fascinating, and probably the most personal. It was so beautifully done. Amazingly well-made, and I've been digging in, and this is the best coverage I've seen of it.

The closer was another murder, and one that seems like it's solved as to who done it, but there is no actual evidence that can be interrogated. A mother killed her daughter, or so it seems, as she disappeared and there's nothing that can be done about it. This is based around interviews with the daughter of the killer, and there is so much anger and sorrow. It's actually a difficult watch, but it's effective, for sure.

Overall, I don't miss the old format. I love the old ones, but these are much better as individual stories. I might have liked even a miniature bit at the end which would have allowed for a short something to be tacked on. The second half of the season is coming later in the year, and I hope it has at least a couple of paranormal things on it.

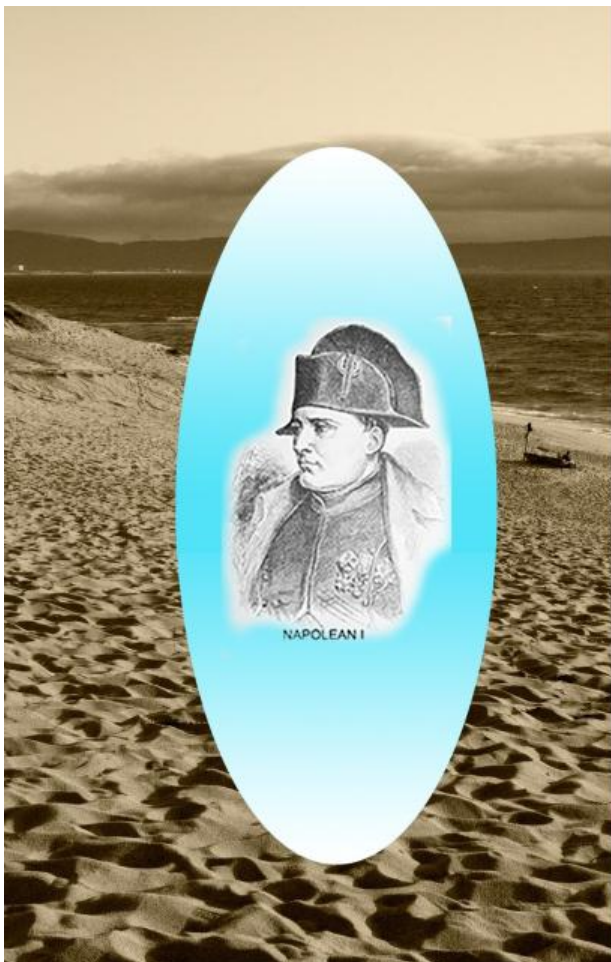
Three Paragraphs in Search of Illustration

by Bob Hole

Heart

rhythm problems may occur and possible side effects include death, destruction, and despair if the Medusan ambassador is unable to mind-meld with James Tiberius Caesar

Salad goes well with any Italian mean except when you forget your visor and you're brushing up your Shakespeare by Christopher Marlowe, which goes well in a graham cracker sandwich with a bit of chocolate that might be one of the things that I like most about all the folderol.



Once, when I was not anywhere near the Tower of London, where I've never been because I had less than one day in London and really wanted to see the Natural History Museum, because biologist, I thought, perchance to dream, of a ghost wandering the parapets at Fort Point, which is under the San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge, at about 1 a.m. it's kind of spooky up there when there's just enough fog, and the spotlights don't reach behind some of the buildings and you have to be careful when you are walking those parapets when stalking the wild ghost, or Confederate spies.



Thinking all the things, and then not really thinking at all, are often the same thing when you get right down to it because they are both as conducive to working through life as each other, and nothing ever goes the way you think it's going to go because once it does then you're screwed anyway and then your program comes on the computer and you can do your thing and the mind starts wandering in a much more constrained pathway which allows you to go forward until the end and then you stop at the end and there's nothing left but to wonder if it's a palpable hit or just death as usual.



Bela Lugosi by Chuck Serface

Lugosi lives on for posterity not so much as an actor but as the personification of his greatest character. When he performed as Dracula, Lugosi spoke for his own personal legacy as much as for his character when he pronounced the immortal line, "I am Dracula." – Biography.com

The very essence of vampiric dread
Had fled the revolutions of his home
And far worse things awaiting man than death.

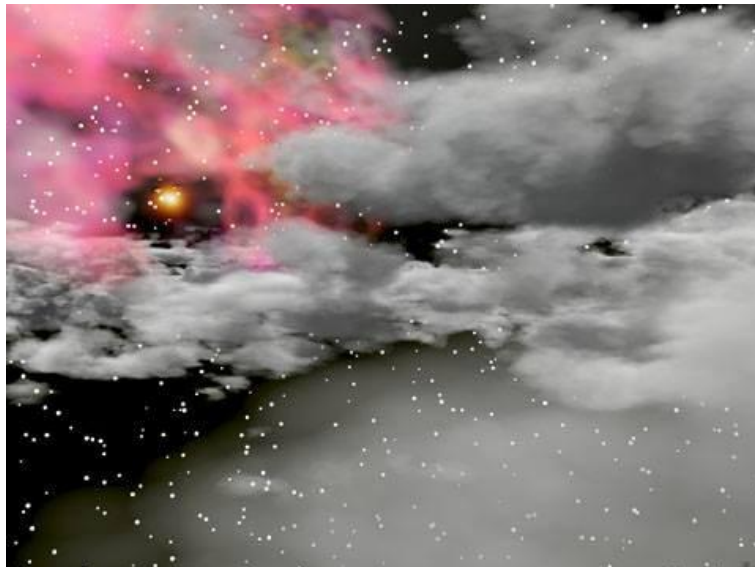
Upon the stage, he stole his viewers' breath
Translating Dracula to flesh and bone,
The very essence of vampiric dread.

But Universal wanted Chaney's breadth,
His thousand faces tinged with frightening tones,
And far worse things awaiting man than death.

Lon's timely ending, rumor has it, kept
Lugosi flush, and soon the world would know
The very essence of vampiric dread.

Now all regard him as the Count who dreamt
About the broken battlements of home
And far worse things awaiting man than death . . .

. . . And only that, a bled-out lifetime spent
Entombed within his one defining role:
The very essence of vampiric dread
And far worse things awaiting man than death.





I Wanna Go To LA by Chris Garcia

I want to get in my car at 11 PM, drive through the San Lorenzo Valley to Highway 1, then down to Watsonville and Gilroy and 101 and through Salinas, King City, Paso Robles, SLO, to Buellton and Solvang for gas, for Cokes, for a Snickers as the late-night truckers and the LA-bound are the only cars still on the road. Then to Santa Barbara, through Ventura, Oxnard, Port Hueneme and into the traffic at 6 AM, stop-and-go and wondering if off the freeway is better, or worse, and staying with it until the 405, and then across to Westwood, the wide variety of breakfast places leaving only one real option.

Denny's

And I walk in and they seat me by a window, looking out on the lightening part of town, students walking across the street at irregular intervals, timed only to avoid the cars. Burger, fries, Coke, a small thing of mayonnaise and ketchup for dipping the fries. Eat it, too slow to pass the time, the minutes, the moment, the hour. Too much time before I can get to my goal, and no real desire to go for a walk, but know I will, when they start looking at my table as if it is a precious space, destined for redevelopment. Stand, collect, pay, leave, wander through the streets of Westwood, the maze of the UCLA student social-science experiment. An hour, pass the same stores, restaurants four or five times, then find my car, no ticket, luck, and drive across to Wilshire, circle for parking, and circle, and circle.

Finally find one.

Walk around the Tar Pits, Le Brea Tar Pits, got thirty minutes to kill, and the statue of the dying mammoth, the scent of the pits, of the city. It's a brief stop, but across, beyond, is the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

LACMA.

Never been, never seen, but know it, the images, the layout, the artists.

Usually need to be the first in the door, but there's the outer works, the Calder, the "Urban Light," antique streetlamps, like terracotta warriors, looming. Too much time spent looking, walking, feeling the Coke, and needing to go inside.

LACMA.

Pay, guide, wander. So many exhibitions, names I know, many I don't. I am really here for one reason, one piece, one experience. The Person: Chris Burden. The Piece: "Metropolis II." A miniature city, but not at all miniature. It is giant in the scale of art, and around it, ramps, roadways, and the buzzing of conveyor belts. The small cars fly down the ramps, the roads, at a dizzying pace, the noise distracting, retracting the room into the sound, the movement, the dazzle. The most important of all performance and video artists of the 1970s and 80s created this monstrous masterpiece of kinetic joy. Stare, trace, follow, dwell. Time to move, to see more,

Picasso

Paik

Al-Hadid

Classic.

Modern.

Contemporary.

Hours around, about, advancing. It's time to go, to drive, again, across to Hollywood, the Roosevelt.

Check-in, up, to my room, a photo for Instagram, a phone call for the Boys, to Vanessa. Check on my appointment, in the morning, and it's on, and directions forwarded. Flop onto the bed, turn on my podcasts, arrange the pillows and nap.

Eyes open, 6:58 PM, starved and slightly rested. I trop down to the lobby, my headquarters on my days of old-fashioned in the afternoon in the days trying to write sitcoms, but now just a place to try and see the to-be-seen. Out on to Hollywood, walk beyond the copyright-infringement brigade at the Chinese Theatre, and over to Hollywood & Highland, underneath the looming elephants, then up to The Daily Grill. Faux old-style dining, steaks, baked potato. There's a small-time television appearer across the way, we do meet eyes briefly, then smile, and back to our meal.

Exhaustion happens, sudden, minutes after the last bite of porterhouse goes down. Pay, lurch across the street to my hotel room, to sleep, hard, heavy, after one last call home.

iPhone alarm annoys at 6:30 AM. Turn on *LA Morning News*, where once my friend Chris was an anchor. Shower, call home, check traffic, pro forma. Tidy up, out the door, to the lobby. Sign, hand over the key, and off. Breakfast – Winchell's Donuts. Sweet red-pink cherry-glazed, coffee, large, and a rainbow sprinkled. Back to childhood, to the days before gluten-free. Satisfied, I look across at the museum, the archives.

Academy archives.

Standing invitation to peruse everything they've got about Ed Emshwiller finally accepted, and I sit down, archivist adjacent, and go over papers, references, pieces of paper with scribbled notation, clipped obituaries, and on and on. There're a few zines, a bunch of photocopies of science fiction covers, stills for avant-garde films, hundreds, many with crop marks. Hours and hours, and yawns arrive, and I've got a night drive. Say thanks, collect my notes, head out, over to Highway 1, up the coast, over to 101, to Pea Soup Andersen's. Soup, naturally, and then to the road, and home.

3 AM.

Crawl into bed,
snuggle up to the wife.

This can't happen. Not now. Probably not soon, not nearly soon enough. It's a dream, one that resembles so many of my other ascents into the City of the Angels, and one that I desperately want.

I Wanna Go to Los Angeles.





On the Job by Chuck Serface

I. Today's Guest Speaker: The Anti-Hamlet

Torn up by buckshot hormones, teenage minds
Can't take in any information, save
That spring consumes itself outside. Ten days
Until school's through! The learning curve defies
My chalkboard stats. A talk on suicide
Prevention must seem strange when kids have made
Out graduation gift lists, and far away
Reside the thousand natural shocks of life.
The teacher snuffs his cigarette, says, "Thanks
For coming," goes back in to finish class.
Halfway removed myself, I almost miss
A girl waiting, whose long-neglected angst
Takes arm and gives me pause, who turns her hands
And shows the stitch-rut scars along her wrists.

II. An Overnight Crisis Worker at Quitting Time

No spring in sight. The wounded morning sheds
Dark, clotted clouds across a winter sky.
Another shift wraps up. I helped a man
Who'd sealed himself inside a plastic sofa
Bag then sprayed himself with golden paint --
The fumes would kill him, but he'd leave behind
A scintillating corpse. Ambivalence
Won out for him, but not for this year's spring.
A slight detour -- I stop for steak and eggs
As served at what we locals call the "Salt
Palace," a restaurant hungry for a sign
Announcing, "Cardiologist on Duty."
I love the grease. It helps build friction in
My veins as blood cells schuss along the layered
Walls, keeps me warm until the bus arrives.
A man sits down across from me, talks on
Addressing no one, rocking on his haunches.
About the time he sees the worker badge
Around my neck, I see the wristband reading,
"Emergency Psychiatric," where he spent
Last night. The flesh around his eyes contracts
And twitches wildly. "God will damn the sinners
To Hell," he says. "But not the two of us,"
I answer. He slowly smiles, sits back, and falls
Asleep. The ride continues on toward home.

Art This Issue

Cover by Vanessa Applegate

Page 2, 4, and 19 by Robin Stevenson

Page 3 and 10 by Kathryn DuvAL

Page 5 and 25 by Michele Wilson

Page 7 and 13 by Jennifer Kloenne

Page 11, 26, 31 by Sarah Meyers

Page 15 by Chris

Page 22, 23, 24, and 29 by Bob Hole

Page 28 by Matthew Appleton

BACover by Chris Garcia



