

Claims
Department
Issue 6
First For
FAPA



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WELCOME TO CLAIMS DEPARTMENT ISSUE 6 NOW WRITTEN WITH FAPA IN MIND!!!

FAPA. As soon as I started writing Fanzines, I knew that I wanted to be a part of FAPA. The classic, the oldest SF-Fanzine APA and one of the three oldest APAs in existence (though one may be gone now with the New Orleans Hurricane). I'm happy to be a part of y'all and this is my zine that I plan on making a part of every FAPA mailing.

Claims Department started a little over two years ago as an idea to write about a Movie, a Book and a CD that I came across while having one of my regular adventures. I did five of them on their own and they were a lot of fun. Sadly, I had some troubles with an artist who said I could use her work so long as I let her do the cover. I foolishly agreed and she never delivered the cover. I asked her if she'd let me run it without one, and she said OK. That was issue 4, a total of three and a half months late.

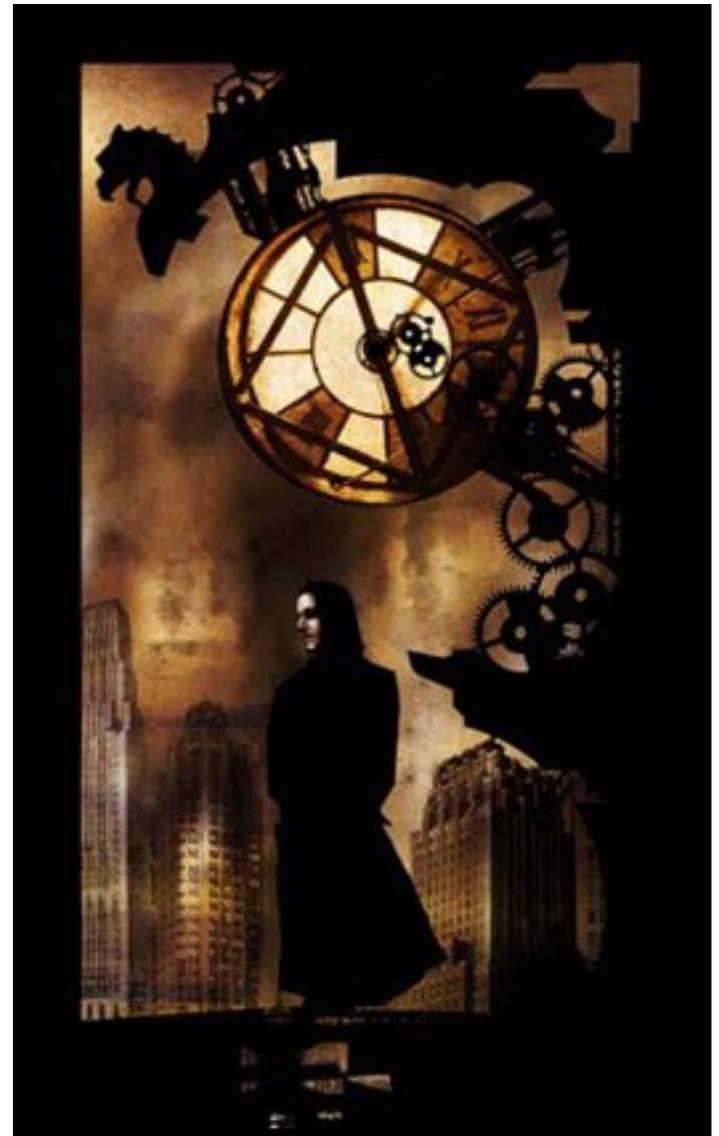
So, after mailing Issue Five out to my regular list, I decided that joining FAPA was a good idea and I decided that sending CD out to y'all would be the plan of record. From here on out, there'll be two versions of Claims Department. The first will be the full verion that all the FAPAns will have with their mailings. It'll have the full text and the mailing comments. The second will be printed (maybe 10 copies) without the mailing comments and sent to BASFA and a few folks on my regular mailing list (like Lloyd Penney and Peter Sullivan). That's also the one that will end up on eFanzines.com.

So, that's my plan. So here, for your enjoyment, is the first FAPA issue of Claims Department.!

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BayCon: And The Livin is Easy

BayCon is the largest of the San Jose Area Conventions. OK, that's not true, Anime Expo dwarfs us, as does WonderCon, but the largest SF convention is BayCon. 2,000+ every year come and party like it's 1995. I've been going off and on since the beginning and this story begins in 2004, shortly after they had asked me to be the Toastmaster for 2005. I was in a strange mood that weekend, knowing that I'd be watching everything that goes down and realising that I'd have to find a way to top it with my performance for the next year. I was also in



the mood for some SteamPunk.

Anyone who has read a fair amount of my work will know that I'm a huge fan of Alternate History and SteamPunk in specific. I've even done a full issue of The Drink Tank Presents all about the Madness and Mechanics! In that part of 2004, I was looking for more material to read and enjoy and found that BayCon was the best place for finding the books I couldn't locate elsewhere. It was also a great place to find a number of things to suck the life from my bank account. The First day I bought only three things: A Very Bad Pizza, a CD and a Book that I had heard of and had yet to read. The second day, I bought 4 books (including a 25 dollar Vonnegut book that I had not planned on buying) another CD, and two DVDs. Sunday, I bought a cloak, which set me back about 100 bucks. Monday, I bought almost 25 books. All told, I spent a month's rent in the dealer's room. I have no self-control.



I always take a couple of extra days off following a con. There's just no way I can function properly after so little sleep and so much excitement. I took off four days, and since I didn't stay in the hotel during the con, I figured a while away with my new playthings was just what I needed. Figuring it was a good time for it, I sent myself to the Arena Hotel in San Jose.

The Arena Hotel is one of those places where you can get a room for a mere 59 dollars a night. It's small, as are the rooms, but they are well appointed. They have good sized TV with RCA inputs so that one can plug in their portable DVD players, which I did, and they also have a CD player in every room. The beds are big and puffy, but not so puffy and to make you feel like you're sinking into a cloud. Best of all, the whirlpool tub. That's right, for less than 60 bucks a night, you can have an in-room whirlpool tub



and all the comfort there within.

A great place to settle for a couple of days, further draining my supply of money, but no matter, one can not put a price on piece of mind.

Living right around the corner from the place, I figured I'd be good for two nights at the hotel, still leaving a two days for me to putter around the house. As I came in to the lobby, completely without reservations or any such thing, I noticed that there was a lot of repair work going on.

"Hi, I'd like a room." I said, slightly coughing out the dust.

"Ah, you heard about our special." The slim, sliming, slightly less than subtly made-up woman behind the desk said.

"Excuse me?"

"Since we're going through some remodeling, we're giving two for one nights all month."

"Well, I'll take that then!" I said, smiling. Saving money appeals to me in all its forms.

I headed back to my place and gathered a bunch of things. Since it was less than a block away, it was easy. I grabbed the Portable DVD, a lot of CDs, a few books, and my cheap old lap top and a few pieces of clothing. I headed back over and got my room, right on the second floor with a perfect view of the parking lot. I was also right down the way from the room where they served the free light dinner and breakfasts. That was an added bonus. I set up shop in the room.

The First Book

I had grabbed a few books, but the one that I was most interested in was by a Brit that I had heard off but never managed to read. At BayCon, Howard Hendrix and Annalee Newitz both talked about a dude name of Paul diFilipo. He was the founder of RiboFunk, a subsubsubgenre of Science Fiction with Genetic Engineering at its heart...or hearts as it would be. He had written three short stories in the SteamPunk vein that were all sorts of wild. I picked up the book from the good people at Cargo Cult Books. Settling into the giant bed, I started reading the first of the three stories: Victoria. This one sets the stage quite nicely.

Victoria is the story of Queen Victoria and her replacement. Her replacement happened to be a salamander-type creature that a scientist created especially for the flesh trade. The creator is then asked

to provide her so that she can take the place of the actual Victoria who has skeedaddled and is nowhere to be found for her Coronation!

This is a combination of comedy and sexy strangeness. It's just so good. These types of stories are great, and it is a traditional naughty SF story (usually done with a robot in the place of the Salamander) that fits brilliantly with the SteamPunk World. I was so pleased with it I postponed my first Whirlpool bath long enough to read the second of the stories.





Hottentots is the type of story that you read once in a while and it makes you worry. It does this to me because it makes me realise that there are people in the world that have the kind of brain that would allow them to think up stuff like this. Basically, it's a story of a Lovecraftian Monster coming to attack.

Plus, there are Hottentots.

It's a strange story, and one that I don't know if I love or not. There's some brilliantly obtuse prose, with all the trimmings of 19th century scientific fictional verse. It's a fun little story, but it's easily the weakest in the collection.

I could hold back no longer. I had to hop into the tub. I put on a CD (Mahler's Titan) and fired up the jets. I didn't put the book down, though. It was time for reading in the whirlpool, which actually made

the story Walt & Emily work slightly better.

The tub was perfect and I let myself come up to temp before I started reading. The story of Walt & Emily is about as strange as you're gonna find. It's one part time travel, one part fever dream fantasy, and one part historical oddness. The basic premise starts with Walt Whitman coming to visit Emily Dickinson. Now there's a party I'd wanna attend. The group that Whitman is with are trying some experiments and end up sent back into a world where there is no time.

Oh yeah, they also run into a form of Allen Ginsberg.

This is a very different story from Victoria, with all sorts of shining prose and a touch of poetics that add just the right amount of the weird to the proceedings.

And reading it in a jet-pool tub with the sweet sounds of Dead Can Dance swirling around me made me smile. The relaxation of the body really opened up my reading centre and I just drew it all in. I think I read faster than any of the others, and by the time I finished, about 1 in the morning, I was ready to catch a little sleep. The entire book had taken me one solid day, which was blazing fast reading for me. More than 200 pages in less than 12 straight hours of reading is unheard of for The Christer.

After I finished the book, dried



myself off and got into the warm pajamas (because I was blasting the air conditioning), I slipped off to sleep and in a rare

display, I managed to go out of consciousness before I even noticed that I was tired.

The Next Day

I've never been sure why, but I always wake up ahead of my alarm. In this case, I had mentally set one for 10 am so that I could get the free breakfast downstairs. I woke up at 9:40. I managed to get dressed and down there in time for the rubbery french toast and awful bacon mixed with the sublime sausage. One link of the sausage was enough to rebuild me after the terrible rest of the breakfast. But what did I expect for nothin'?

I headed back to my room after watching the news about all the folks stuck in traffic. It was a nice morning and by the time I got back into the room, it was nearly 10:30. I figured it was time to start working a bit, so I got up and dug around the small bag for the CD I hadn't listened to yet. For me, on the days when I am off of work, something as simple as listening to a CD I bought but haven't heard yet is work. I think I took a brief break and had some water because it was too tiring a task for a day such as that. Putting the CD into the Player, I found that it was just about Perfect.

The Music

I settled into the bed with another book, this one of short stories by some old-timer, and the



sound of Rasputina came over me.

If there was a group that could be called SteamPunk, it's Rasputina. They claim that they are members of the Ladies Cello Society, which is good, though I understand that they have added a gentleman to their ranks to play

percussion and other such trivial instruments. As of 2005, the band consists of Melora Creager, the lead singer and the main writer of their songs, Zoe Keating, a very accomplished cellist, probably even more so than Melora, and Jonathon TeBeest, the aforementioned drummer. It's an interesting group with just those three, but they've also used many other folks as well over the years. Kris Cowperthwaite was a member for a number of years, but she



left for other pastures.

A little bit cello, a little bit Metal, a little bit electronica, Rasputina has spent most of the last decade playing amazingly complex music that the Goths all seem to like. And why not? With songs like Transylvanian Concubine and The Little Piggies it's easy to see why the great Moping masses might love them.

The album was Cabin Fever, a 2002 release that I picked up in the Dealer's Room. How could I have passed on it? It has a chick in a corset on the cover! I love corsets!

Anyhow, the opening song of the album is the perfect announcement. Gingerbread Coffin is exactly what Rasputina has been doing for years, taking great Cello work and mixing it with drum machine (and live drum) work and making rock 'n roll out of it. It's such a great song. They follow it up with a song called Thimble Island that has a distinct Indian flavour.

There are times when Rasputina is more traditional, using the cellos in a way that almost seems like their cello teachers would have approved of. On Cabin Fever, they seem to have struck the best balance of all of their albums. The Remnants



of Percy Bass is the first song that comes to mind. It's a very Victorian type of story. State Faire is also along those lines, but when the pendulum swings back, it goes far to the other side.

Rats is basically the story of how the Pope declared Rats fish when there was a South American drought. IT's full-on M-E-T-A-L, loud and angry and awesome! AntiqueHighHeelRed-DollShoes is also a loud and fast tune, every bit as Speed-Cello as anything that Apocolyptica ever put out. I love them because they can go between both extremes so fluidly.

Perhaps the strangest thing on the album is PJ + Vincent & Matthew + Bjork. It's basically a funny little piece about a potential double-date between PJ Harvey, Bjork and Two footballers. It's funny and strange and more than a little brutal. It's a nice little break and whoever is doing the imitation of Bjork is brilliant.

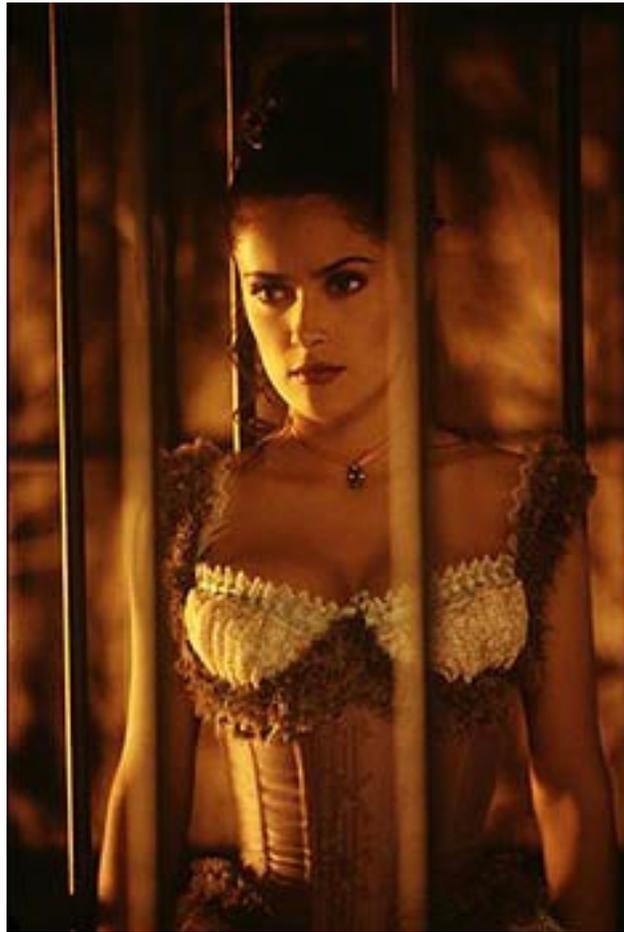
Cabin Fever folded up and I settled in to watch a little TV. Daytime TV is one of my greatest comforts. Jerry Springer, Montel, afternoon news, it's all gold-

en. I was flipping around when I came across HBO. They were just about to start a movie, and it was one I hadn't seen, though I kinda wanted it that way. I snuggled in under the blankets and set myself for the fury that was Wild, Wild West.

In the younger days, Wild Wild West was a TV series featuring Robert Conrad. It served as the inspiration for the greatest series Fox ever cancelled too early, The Adventures of Brisco County Jr. Some yahoo got the idea to make a feature film version of the series. The first hint that it was going to be done was in 1992, when then names attached were folks like Mel Gibson and Kevin Kline (who ended up being in the 1999 version anyhow). It went through directors and writers and ended up with Barry Sonnenfeld directing and Will Smith in the lead. They had worked magic together in Men In Black just two summers before, so they gave it a shot.

From the get-go, there were problems, like Robert Conrad bad mouthing it even before he saw a script because they turned down any of his help. The casting of Will Smith didn't help. He was just starting to peak as a giant star after ID4 and MIB, but he would be playing a Black Man as an agent of the Secret Service in the 1860s. HmMMM...

As far as the quality of the



movie goes, it was a mess. From the start there are script issues. It's as if everyone basically decided to find a script for another spy movie and then try and adapt it to the Steampunk genre in general and then crowbar in the Wild Wild West World in specific. It's muddled and hair-brained and awful.

The performances aren't great either. Will Smith mugs and big faces his way through much of it and Kevin Kline seems to have taken to think-

ing about baseball to try and get through the whole thing. Only the ravishing beauty of Miss Selma Hayek does any good to keep my interest, and she only barely managed that by showign a lot of cleavage and a lit-





tle ass.

Kenneth Branagh is both a blessing and a curse on Wild Wild West. He's got the look and sound down as the evil professor, but he can't keep his lid on when it comes to overplaying it. He does provide some of the only interesting moments, but at times he's chewing the CGI.

Oh yeah, there's lots of Computer Generated this and that. The most famous of the CGI sections is of the Giant Mechanical Spider, but honestly, it's all crap. It just hurt a movie that was already bad enough, but since it was on HBO, I had to watch it.

After the movie was done, I puttered around a little, mostly reading and spending some time writing articles and reading eFanzines.com pieces. It was a good time, but then I realised that it was time for din-din. I grabbed a book and headed down.

The Other Book

Dinner was bad. I mean just awful, except they had tamales and red beans and rice, so there was something for me to eat. The book I

grabbed was a book I had been meaning to read for a while, but it wasn't until I sat down on the couch in front of the dining room big screen that I put myself to it. The book was *Perdido Street Station* by one China Mieville.

It's hard to think of China without noting the unusual world in which he mind seems to live. His stories have featured bizarre bits like roaming streets and socialism in extremis. Still, he's utterly readable. I started in on *Perdido* and realised that it was 600+ pages of book to get through. I would tackle it and tackle it hard (though I didn't officially finish it until three days after I got home).

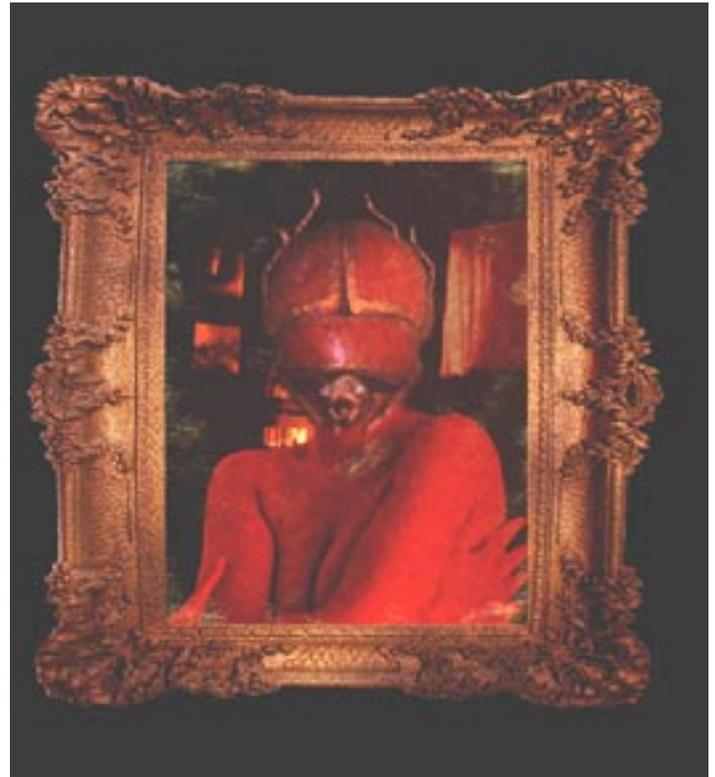
The book focuses on a scientist in a world where science and mag-



ic and genetic engineering all just about the same. It's a world full of dangerous types and brutality. The world is called Bas Lag and the city where we are stationed for the story is New Crobuzon. New Crobuzon is basically the darkest, most vile image of London (or Manchester, maybe) you could draw from a century's worth of dark fantasy written about London (or Manchester).

The characters are full and as twisted as the dark streets. Isaac is a scientist who is approached by a Garuda, part-bird, part-man, all symbol) to help him to fly again. Isaac works on it, and still manages to find time to schtup his Khepri girlfriend. By the way, Khepris are these giant scarab-headed women who happen to make out out of their spit. They get entangled with a bunch of evil, transdimensional beasts called Slake Moths and somehow end up working with a Giant Sentient trash pile.

As you can tell, there is no shortage of ideas in Perdido Street Station. In fact, China seem positively full of concepts that he must explore quite deeply. At times, China's writing is so fluid you can overlook the massively troubling images of death and bodily fluids. At other times, he's a pneumatic drill of a writer trying to pound his



characters and the concepts he has hung around them into serious servitude. It's a fine line, but it's beautiful in the conflict of the prose and the plot.

It all ends nicely, but there are issues of another kind. After the entire book is over, I was left guessing why we were given certain images and characters when it seems that there's no where else for this story to go. I felt that a series was inevitable, which to me is a serious sin. I just wanna make my way through one book, put it down and get on with my life.



Up and At Them

I fell asleep reading Perdido, and when I woke up, it was just a couple of hours until I had to check out. I set up the CD player with Rasputina again and ran myself a hot whirlpool tub so that I could relax before I had to go home and relax there. It was a tough life, but what are you gonna do?

And so, after I got out, I headed home to spend the next few days wrapping up all the loose ends, like answering the 500 emails I had received since I stopped answering for my BayCon Break. The best of rest was over and I packed up and moved out.

That's all for this go 'round. I'm most interested to see what folks have to say. Next time, there'll be mailing comments to follow the massive chunk of writing and a lot more strange fun. Next time I'm going to write about my trip to Hemet and Perris, CA, where I had Thanksgiving, watched a lot of TV, played with my old dog, listened to a lot of music, thought a lot about writing zines, and fell down a mountain. That's right, down a mountain.

'til then!



Art and Artist Listings For Claims Department Issue Six

Cover- The Blasted Machine by J. Cathryn Feinberg

Page 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 by Sigu

Page 3- Dana en lineas by gabriellelele fou

Page 4- The Alchemist by Elderreich and Steam Powered Pistol by Evile

Page 11- Steam-punk Old Fashioned Portrait by SanchezFrance

Page 1- Rivet Nouveau and

Page 9- Utterly Riveting by Jem Yoshioka
jem@kaonashi.org
<http://midnight.koanashi.com>

Page 10- Perdido Street Station by Zach Willms

Page 10- Perdido Street Station 1: Lin by Lestat (aka Brian)

Much of the layout was done by M Lloyd in Adobe inDesign and later proofed and fixed a bit by Jay Crasdan. This version will eventually end up on eFanzines.com. Make sure to read The Drink Tank and SF/SF on eFanzines. They're both good fun. See you next time.

The Whos-Whos and Whats-Whats About This Issue of Claims Department

- The Arena Hotel is located on Santa Clara Street in San Jose, just on the other side of the Railroad tracks from the San Jose Arena (aka the HP Pavilion. Rooms are comfy and reasonable. You can find out more at <http://www.pacifichotels.com/arena/>. It's got my highest seal of approval.
- BayCon is the biggest of the Bay Area Science Fiction Cons and is always a hoot, even when I'm not Toastmaster. BayCon.org for more details.
- You can find The SteamPunk Trilogy at Amazon, and it's well-worth seeking out. I believe that diFilippo received either a Nebula or a Hugo nod (though not a win) for one of the stories.
- Perdido Street Station is everywhere. If you enjoy it, or can at least handle the icky parts, you may want to pick up Iron Council, his most recent Arthur C. Clarke Award winning novel. He also got a Clarke for Perdido. He did another book called The Scab that I haven't read, and one called King Rat which I kinda enjoyed.
- Don't go looking for any other Cello roock unless you've already found Rasputina. Other groups in the genre include The Magnetic Fields (See Claims Department Issue # 5), Apocolyptica (Claims Department Issue 2) and Darling Violetta (Never done one on them. I really should think about it). They were featured on an episode of Buffy The Vampire Slayer. Great stuff. They tour a lot, so they may be coming to your town.
- Wild Wild West was terrible, as I said, but if you must see it, it's on DVD and VHS. It's typically found on HBO at weird times. I've also seen it on TNT and TBS, I think. Selma Hayek is pretty to look at, but you get a better view of her goodies in Frida, which is probably her best role over all. Will Smith has his moments, especially as Ali. Kevin Kline is perfect in A Fish Called Wanda and can usually be counted on to give a really good performance. Kenneth Branagh is best when he's doing some dead English playwright's stuff. He was also good in Swing Kids.
- The art featured here was mostly found by scouring deviantart.com and writing for permission to use their pieces. These artists, and others who declined, are all a part of the best art resource in the world. I've found more fantastic artists off of DeviantArt than anywhere else. True, not really fannish, but it's stuff that I enjoy.
- Christopher J. Garcia is available for weddings.