Good News Everybody!

GEEK WEEK 2015
Geek culture is a simple formula when the components are looked at. Medium is not important, as there are geek factions within movies, television, comic books, novels, and most other methods of storytelling. What I hope to focus on is the central element of what distinguishes geek content from others, which is science fiction and fantasy settings (if one disregards the idea that they are the same barring details), with an odd focus of escapism and realistic pessimism.

It’s important to keep in mind that geek culture is no longer considered a counter-culture. It is not a sub-set of peers who enjoy the same material. It is everywhere. Five of the top ten grossing movies of 2014 were considered to be geeky at some point (Marvel, Transformers, and The Hobbit). Now, I have conversations about the merits of Bilbo’s character with my father, who spends very little time discussing movies and television. Star Wars and Avengers are on the lists of many movie goers for this year. Geek is not dwelling in the basement anymore. It’s all around us, and the trend will likely continue for a few years.

We must also remember that content producers are very good at making us forget that we are experiencing something that is not original. I am not just talking about adaption from one medium to another. I am talking about the experience that humans have established over thousands of years of telling fictitious tales. Tropes are the devices and conventions that make up storytelling. Everything about a story is a collection of various tropes into a cohesive narrative that keeps people entertained for a while (and hopefully teaches us along the way). What makes a story unique is the particular concoction of tropes. A shootout in space is very different from one underwater, and writers use this to their advantage.

With this in mind, the pieces of geek content makes more sense. Geeky stories tend to repeat the various elements of other geeky stories. Most superhero stories have clear lines of demarcation between good and evil. Most fantasy (of which I am including sf) stories have vast worlds with a large variety of species, and strange, foreign abilities (whether they be technological or magical). The particular characters may change, and their motivations may differ slightly. Yet, they have a tendency to carry strong resemblances to characters from other stories in geek content.

However, this is not the most important feature of what makes geek content. If anything, they are an effect of splitting genres and lazy writing. The more important aspect is the inherent disregard for our own reality. Fiction, as a rule, creates its own reality for us to peak into. Most genres tend to mimic our own reality with slight variation of the variables (world superpowers, human interactions, societal norms, etc.). Geek content attempts to go in the opposite direction. It subverts all ideas of our reality, and attempts to give us a better one. Most tend to live in worlds where there are less rules, where people have access to strange powers, and where life is more exciting and meaningful(barring NPCs and background characters).

Let’s not lie. Some of us envy the world of Mass Effect, or the wonders of Middle-Earth. Some part of us don’t like our reality, and geek content is mixed just right for us to feel like we are seeing something far removed from our world.

Yet, there is danger in these worlds. Enjoyment of other “realities” is a fine distraction, and can be part of a healthy makeup. Yet, we tend to underestimate the power of our own desire to escape. Reality, when looked at as a whole, can become quite depressing. Spending time in fantastical worlds might seem like a good way to cope with it, but we can see a very clear effect that it has on those who over-indulge. The last time I spent at a professional event (hint: it wasn’t at SunyPoly), there was no talk of novels, movies, or games. We spent time talking about our professional pursuits, and what we had achieved with our work. There was a focus on what we had been able to accomplish to change our own reality. Compare this to the escapist nature of geek content, and the pattern becomes clear. We are either focused on our own reality, or the fake reality we choose.

This is not to say that all geek content will turn you into an unproductive waste of human potential. This is to say that we have far too many people who fall into the trap (especially because of the environment of this school), and that we should be more wary of it. All of us ought to examine the amount of time we spend away from our own reality, and if that time is truly helpful to ourselves. Especially since reality tends to not wait for us to play catch-up.
Parasyte/Parasyte: The Maxim

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Your nose itches and it awakens you. The worm trying to burrow its way through your nose and into your brain startles you and you fling it to the ground. The headphones you slept in snap from their source and the cord whips around wildly. You look down and see the snake coiling into a spring as it launches itself towards your face, blocking it with your hand. The snake then burrows under your skin, leaving no wound, and its shape crawls its way up your arm. You do what your instincts tell you and tie the headphone cable around your arm, cutting off all circulation and this creature’s path of egress.

Congratulations, you are Shinichi Izumi, the protagonist of Parasyte by Hitoshi Iwaaki, and you have just bonded with your parasitic best friend Migi, with whom you will attempt to save the people on Earth from an alien invasion. This 1980s manga and 2014 anime adaptation greatly deserve your attention because it is one of the best written and most intensely gripping stories about what it means to be human ever put to ink and paper. Parasyte is a beautiful assimilation of sci-fi, horror, and action themes that follows a boy named Shinichi who is helplessly thrown into a world of monsters. The parasites, one of which tried and failed to control Shinichi’s brain, come from an unknown source and their only goal is to destroy and eat humans.

What follows is Shinichi’s unlikely partnership with one of these monsters that failed to capture his brain but succeeded in assimilating with the boy’s right arm. Emotionless, cold, and self-serving, like the rest of his “species,” Migi must learn to cope with Shinichi for their survival as a new entity against ‘successful’ parasites who see them as a threat meant for extermination. This series is excellent in several aspects since it rises above mere entertainment and escapist power fantasies like so much feculence in the same genre. Shinichi is always fighting against the odds in his violent encounters and what makes the action in this series enthralling, original, and excellent is that Shinichi is never saved by the usual anime tropes. Some of these tropes being: implausible power boosts, hidden or previously undeveloped talents that only ever emerge in the middle of a crisis, or simply screaming or trying harder than normal.

Migi is a calculating tactician who guides Shinichi through each bloody faceoff and you will be amazed at the wit, intelligence and courage that both Shinichi and Migi display that serves to slice their enemies and develop their characters in inspiring fashion. To spoil the arc of his character’s development is to sour an amazing 64 chapter manga and a 24 episode anime arc. All that can be said is that Shinichi truly undergoes a metamorphosis, physically, emotionally, psychologically, and in the process Iwaaki uses Parasyte to challenge you as a viewer.

Iwaaki uses this medium to raise several deep questions about us as a species. What is our purpose as humans? Is it arrogant to assume we can control every other living thing on Earth? Can they even be controlled if we tried? Where is the line from dominating the planet to coexisting on it? Can we respect something even if it tries to kill us? These are only a few meaningful splashes into the turbulent depth that is Parasyte.

The series is extremely action packed and very well paced, only ever pausing to let you digest the cruelty and decimation parasites inflict before throwing an even more challenging foe at Shinichi’s footstep. The philosophical depth Parasyte reaches is never heavy handed or overbearing like some other classics in anime’s hall of fame, Neon Genesis comes to mind. The questions raised only ever add to the quality of the show by tying in with each character’s development and by stirring your own brain juices.

The anime series is a faithful adaptation of the manga, hitting each plot point to the letter, and it is currently ongoing with 20 released episodes out of a planned 24. Having read the seinen manga and seen 20 episodes of the anime since its Fall 2014 release, it can be said with confidence that the anime only serves to polish the excellent story and make the jaw dropping action sequences shine with unbelievable speed, voracity, and gore. Consume this series now because it has all the ingredients of a sci-fi classic, a horror classic, an action classic, and an anime classic in league with hallmarks like Trigun, FMA: Brotherhood, Hellsing, and Gantz to name a few.

P.S.: There is part one of a two part Japanese live action movie out now, with part two premiering this year, but cramming 32 chapters of story within two hours of cinema never works out. Catch it only after viewing the entire series arc and if you’re a diehard fan.
If the World Should Blow Itself Up...
by Kira Gregory

Authority figures have long been on the receiving end of comedy. Be they officers, teachers, or just plain experts, high-ranking people tend to take themselves seriously, and it’s entertaining and gratifying to see them taken down a few notches. Part of the fun of making fun of them, of course, is our general assumption that authority figures really do have it all figured out. They’re smart, yes but they’re only human. And even more entertaining than scripted pratfalls are the impromptu statements that our intellectual leaders have occasionally been known to make.

Take for example the analysis by Admiral William Leahy of the U.S. Atomic Bomb Project: “That is the biggest fool thing we have ever done. The bomb will never go off. I speak as an expert in explosives.”

Leahy was also the highest ranking military officer in the US at the time. He’s not alone when it comes to misguided expert opinion. Such advice is all around us, and only history shows how wrong it can be.

I remember when I was in second grade. My classmates and I were wondering how we could ever grow up to contribute anything to the world, because all the good stuff, like light-bulbs and TV, had already been invented. Our second-grade philosophy was nothing new. It was shared with the governor of Britania in the year 84 A.D.

“...I lay aside all ideas of any new works or engines of war, the invention of which long-ago reached its limit, and in which I see no hope for further improvement...” - Sextus Julius Frontinus, governor of Britania, 84 A.D.

Why even bother?

“Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible.” - Lord Kelvin, mathematician and physicist, 1895.

“Rail travel at high speed is not possible because passengers, unable to breathe, would die of asphyxia.” - Dr. Dionysus Lardner (1793-1859), Professor of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy.

“While theoretically and technically television may be feasible, commercially and financially it is an impossibility.” - Lee DeForest, inventor.

And what do the critics do when the impossible becomes reality? Do they shy away? No. They keep coming, eager to give their expert opinions on the new-fangled technology.

“Airplanes are interesting toys but of no military value.” - Marechal Ferdinand Foch (1851-1929), Professor of Strategy.

“[Television] won’t be able to hold on to any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night.” - Darryl F. Zanuck, head of 20th Century-Fox, 1946.

“There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home.” - Ken Olson, president and founder of Digital Equipment Corp., 1977.


Next came some confusion as airplanes began to soar the skies, televisions invade living rooms, and talkies take over the cinema (much to the dismay of silent stars). There was also a striking lack of imagination regarding computers and their future world dominion.

“I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.” - Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, 1943.

“Where a calculator on the ENIAC is equipped with 18,000 vacuum tubes and weighs 30 tons, computers in the future may have only 1,000 vacuum tubes and weigh only 1.5 tons.” - Popular Mechanics, 1949

“But what...is it good for?” - Engineer at IBM, 1968, commenting on the microchip.

These predictions fell to the wayside, or should I say, way to the wayside. But maybe we should cut these fellows a little slack the information explosion really was a shockingly unprecedented event. How could they know?

Yet some people did read the signs accurately. Gordon Moore was one astute individual who recognized a trend, and his prophecy came true. Every two years or so, the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles. Moore’s law was first presented in April of 1965, and revised in 1975. And much more impressive than Moore’s law is Vannevar Bush’s As We May Think, a 1945 essay that foresaw the emergence of the information society.

But I digress. This essay isn’t about the wonders of accurate prophecy. What else have our misguided experts informed us of?

“Louis Pasteur’s theory of germs is ridiculous fiction.” - Pierre Pachet, Professor of Physiology, 1872.

“The abolishment of pain in surgery is a chimera. It is absurd to go on seeking it... Knife and pain are two words in surgery that must forever be associated in the consciousness of the patient.” - Dr. Alfred Velpeau, French surgeon, 1839.

Ow. I’m really glad not everyone thought like Velpeau.
“I see no good reasons why the views given in this volume should shock the religious sensibilities of anyone.” -Charles Darwin, On the Origin Of Species, 1869.

“Stocks have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau.” -Irving Fisher, Professor of Economics, Yale University, 1929.

“It will be years not in my time before a woman will become Prime Minister.” -Margaret Thatcher, five years before she became Prime Minister of the UK.

Some people get a chance to learn from their failures. One man whose prophecy got struck down in a timely fashion was Wilbur Wright, and he came to a conclusion that I myself might have made.

“I confess that in 1901 I said to my brother Orville that man would not fly for fifty years. Two years later we ourselves made flights. This demonstration of my impotence as a prophet gave me such a shock that ever since I have distrusted myself and avoided all predictions.” -Wilbur Wright [In a speech to the Aero Club of France (Nov 5, 1908)]

History has given us plentiful examples of comedic expert opinion. It reminds us that prophecy is rarely guaranteed. As Peter Ustinov said, “If the world should blow itself up, the last audible voice would be that of an expert saying it can’t be done.”

Primary Source: The Experts Speak: The Definitive Compendium of Authoritative Misinformation, by Christopher Cerf and Victor Navasky.

Barry Allen is the fastest man alive in the DC Universe comic “The Flash”. He works as a forensic scientist in Central City with the police department and uses his unique skills to help solve cases. One day he was struck by a lightning bolt full of chemicals that spilled over him resulting in him being induced in a coma for 9 months. Afterwards his body started experiencing changes and he was able to run at an exceptionally fast speed. He also begins working with other scientist at S.T.A.R Labs who try and help him understand what has happened to his body while helping him solve the case of his mother’s murder.

I personally did not grow up on being into too many comic heroes but the TV show “The Flash” which was premiered on October, 2014 on the CW network had me intrigued, and I began to watch. Barry Allen is played by Grant Gustin and Iris Allen is being played by Candice Patton, whose chemistry and connection I love on the show and can't wait to see how the show plays their love story. The TV show does a good job on giving a good background story of Barry’s childhood and upbringing for those of us who never really read the comics. Barry Allen “The Flash” is awesome to me and I am not ashamed to say that I am addicted to the show and he is officially my new favorite super-hero man crush.
I'm sure that most of you just like me used to love playing video games growing up. Magnavox led the way in digital gaming; back in the day this console blew the minds of people with this new technology. After the success of the first video game console, everyone wanted to improve upon this revolution. Years later one of the most iconic video game systems ever, the Atari Pong, was released. Everyone at one point or another has played pong. Who would have imagined back then that today, 40 years later, we would be able to play video games with people from all around the world. As time went on, these consoles became more and more sophisticated with their graphics, what you can do during the games, and the amount of people you can play with.

Now some of the classic game systems of the past are household names. Everyone has heard of Gameboys, the original PlayStation, and the Nintendo 64. These systems were mainly made so popular in part due to the iconic characters. Pikachu, Super Mario, Crash Bandicoot, along with many others are names that will instill instant nostalgia. You can't help but recall the days you spent hours in front of the TV trying to beat a level that seemed impossible. These games not only brought people together, they have been known for breaching friendships. We can all recall a time you wanted to kill a friend or sibling for destroying you in a game you thought you were good at. Even us college kids can say that we have spent a little too much time playing video games rather than studying. However, those were the times that brought some of us young adults together. An example of this being a few of my friends and I debating skipping class because we were playing Mario Kart on the GameCube.

Nowadays people consider playing video games to be "nerdy" but I ask why? Even professional athletes who I am pretty sure are not considered nerds play these games. I think that considering these video game lovers to be nerds or geeks is a travesty. I believe that a person should be able to give themselves the title of geek or nerd and not society. Just because you do not share the interest of a person, it does not mean that you have the right to judge them. I hope that this article makes you want to break out a classic video game console that you have been holding on to and have a great time with your friends.
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