

CLAIMS DEPARTMENT ISSUE FIVE

Welcome to another Claims Department! After two issues in Southern California, this time I'm kicking it a little closer to home with a couple of days in Santa Cruz, also known as Santa Carla in Lost Boys.

The Reason For The Trip

Every once and a while, we'll have friends come in from out of town. Sometimes, it's Kate Kelton from Toronto coming out to work on a movie with us or hang out at a film festival. Other times, it's my good friend Bob Mussett from Boston. And others it's Jason Schachat from SoCal coming up for a con or to hang out with us and sleep on our couch. This time, it was a good friend of mine from college, Janice! Janice is easily recognizable by the fact that she fits nicely in the overhead bin. With an East Coaster in for a long stay, we had an excuse to take a trip over the hill on Highway Seventeen.

Here's a note: Highway Seventeen is a twisty road that leads from San Jose to Santa Cruz. It's not the worst road in the world, but the folks who tend to go across the hill are crazy and they end up getting in a lot of accidents. If you're planning on going over, try to leave after 7 and drive very safe. Try to avoid rainy season too.

OK, now with the simple stuff done, let's get down to it. I went ahead, since Janice was going up to San Francisco with my roommate and I had to work a half-day. I headed to Santa Cruz around noon, when traffic is light and people are still driving with an ounce of concern for their fellow man. By getting there early, I could get us a hotel somewhere I liked and find a nice place for a late lunch. I got into town and found a joint that I thought was most keen. Best Western Capitola By-The-Sea Inn and Suites is a really nice place to stay, and I got a nice suite for a lot of bread, but since I got the room, the rest of the folks picked up all the rest of my expenses. The room was huge, had two beds and enough floor space for the bunch of us to throw down sleeping bags and kick it cheap. I knew that the others wouldn't be around until at least six, so I went to do some shopping and eating. I knew a nice place for a Shepard's Pie, which happened to be somewhat close to a nice place to buy a bunch of books.

Capitola Book Café has been around for a long time. I can remember going there when I was around 7 or 8. It's a nice little bookstore, though they don't have much in the way of used books. Still, I wandered about and found that they had enough science fiction and fantasy to keep me happy. I walked around, got a cup of coffee



It's Almost eerie how much this looks like Janice. Art by Kyme-Chan





and bought a book. In the last five years, I've probably only bought three or four brand new books. If you add up all the used books I've bought, it'd be somewhere in the low hundreds. I carried it with me and started reading as I headed to Aptos.

The Book

I admit it, when I'm buying a new book, I tend to follow the rule of judging a book by its cover. If I'm gonna put out the big money, I want a show piece. Once in a while this turns out to be an awful, awful choice (pretty much any Michael Flynn book I've bought) but sometimes it pays dividends.

This time, I grabbed Michaela Roessner's novel *The Stars Dispose*.

I should mention that I'm not a fan of Historical Fantasy. Typically, the history is good but there's a lot of odd things bubbling that I just don't enjoy. I usually love the history and hate the fantasy. I'm not entirely a fantasy fan to begin with, and by setting your story in a historical setting is a good way to keep me from enjoying your drop. This was one of those cases where I had a hard time overcoming my long-standing hatreds, but fought my way through.

I got a table at the Aptos Brit (as the locals call it) and just kept reading. It started slow, but as I read more and more while waiting for the waiter, I found myself making it through almost Seventy pages! It was bizarre exactly how long I had to wait. When she finally showed up, I was completely OK with it, because she was a delightful lass with that faux arrogance and bitterness that makes a waitress worth having.

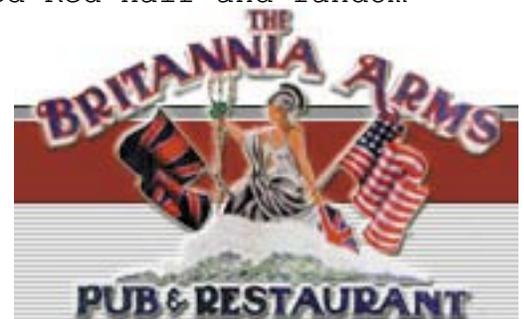
"What do you want?" she asked with a darling angry lower-class British accent that worked with the heavily dyed Red hair and random piercings.

"Shepard's Pie and a whiskey, please."

"What are you reading?" she asked.

I turned the book over and showed her the cover.

"That's a fantasy novel, right?" she said as she took it from my hands.



"Yeah," I answered, smiling a bit, "historical fantasy, takes place during the Renaissance."

"Alright, I got it." She said. "One Shepard's Pie and a glass of Old Potrero on their way."

At times, I've been a whiskey expert, though I'd fallen out of the habit of Whiskey drinking about a year before this. Still, I knew that Old Potrero was a Straight Rye Whiskey made by the same folks who do Anchor Steam Beer in San Francisco. I also knew that it ran upwards of Eighty bucks a bottle. I figured it would cost me an arm and a leg, but I really didn't want to cross the lass. I just kept reading.

The book itself has a strange premise that I got into after a while. A young member of a cooking family, Tommaso, is a young talent,

though he still has a lot to learn. His family has cooked for the Medicis for generations and he is looked at as one of the next great hopes. Sadly, his near ideal situation is threatened with war and plague. Sadly, it costs him much of his family. He is close with the young Duchessa, Catherina di Medici. The women of Tommaso's family are also old hearth magic practitioners, which leads to much strife between various members of the family.

What's amazing is that the tone of the book is so dense, the writing so heavy with amazingly florid prose that I actually missed a number of valuable plot points because I was soaking in the words. There's no question that Roessner is a mechanic and a bit of a magician, but there were points where I stumbled. Still, that's likely my fault.

Tommaso is eventually apprenticed to an artist of the non-culinary world. Some hack named Michaelangelo. He joins a group of boys and serves as the Big M's head chef. He also brings his admiration for the Culinary Arts and begins working in the medium of food stuffs. This portion was great, and I arrived there just as my waitress brought over my glass of very expensive Rye.

"Here's your drink, your pie will be up in a minute"

I held the book in one hand, using the thumb and pinky to keep it open. I took a sip of the Old Potrero and I can see that my slow British waitress knew exactly what she was doing when she recommended the drink. Rich, almost explosive as I took my joy of it. So perfectly

fitting the story. There was amazing depth and rich tones that just hammered me. If I could have afforded it, I would have bought an entire bottle and drank it all weekend while I read. Then again, I'd probably have been too drunk to read by the third or fourth glass. I finished it before my food came, which seemed to be about twenty more minutes. Luckily, she thought ahead and brought a pitcher of water for me.

"Here you go, love." She said as she lowered the steaming mass of potatoes protecting the ground beef beneath.

There is one thing I have to learn over and over again: mashed potatoes are the single greatest insulator in the history of the Universe. There is no method through which any heat can escape from beneath a pile of potatoes, and so, even if the potatoes on the top of the pile are frozen, the inner meat layer is boiling. So, when one does the first dig into a Shepard's Pie, carefully making sure to get a bit of tomato, a tad



of cheese, a layer of potato and some meat, you find yourself cooled by the tomato, heartened by the cheese, annoyed by the lack of warmth to the potatoes and burned by the meat. This leads to the frantic grab for the water, which is comical to those sitting around who have been through this type of thing before. I figured the only way to rectify the situation was to combine the materials into a swirled substance. Yes, I'm a heathen, but it also saved my mouth.

After finishing my plate of swirled mashed potatoes, carrots, beef, cheese and two slices of tomato, I left, dropping a thirty percent tip when I finally headed out. I still had a good portion of the book still left, but the time was nigh that I should make my way off to the hotel and meet up with folks...if I still wanted to catch a bit of a nap. I had a few glasses of water and made my way back to the road.

Heading back, I started to think more and more about the book. There's a certain under-current in it that had my really caught up. The idea that an artist of any type can go about creating beauty in any field is really strange to me. Because Tommaso was a culinary artist, he was able to become a great sculptor. Now, I'm a good chef, though a lazy one who prefers to eat what is set before him than that which I bring to the table, but there's no way I'd have any artistry in the visual arts. I'd imagine there are some pastry chefs who would have a natural ability, but just taking a kid who has grown up entire immersed in the Kitchen Culture and having him be a hot shot arter-type is long money indeed. Still, while I read it, I was really enjoying myself.

I made the hotel about twenty minutes before the friends came rolling in, so my nap was brief. Once they were there, we all thought that a nice little bonfire on the beach was in order. We sent Ryan, my roommate at the time and occasional personal whipping boy, out to get wood and other such important goodies. Janice hit the room and conked out asleep across the empty bed. The rest of us, Jason Schachat (who drew the cover for Claims Department #2), Gen (my loving Girlfriend), Marin (my then-roommate), Natasha (The Russian) and Joker (Best Pal since 1999) all gathered around the TV, waiting for Ryan's return while watching the Simpsons.

After Ryan got back, we all gathered and headed into the cars. The beach was a long crescent of fine sand. I much prefer pebbly beaches, but those are few and far between. We found a place that was in a sheltered area where we wouldn't be bothered by the normal night beach





We Fit 8 People in this room

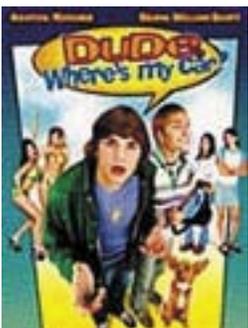
types. Some of the sleaziest people hang around at Santa Cruz beaches after the sun goes down. There was a minor problem with our location: to reach it, one had to make their way down a over-grown ravine about a tenth of a mile. It also dropped about a hundred feet vertical on the trip. So, we all became packmules and made our way down through scrub oak and bay trees and a lot of things with prickles, nettles and thorns. The funniest moment was Janice, 5 foot in heels, carrying a huge load of firewood, tumbled, though caught herself on Ryan, six-four or so, which sent him flying down to clip me in the back of the knees which tossed my feet completely out from under me, knocking Schachat into a bunch of bushes of indeterminate pain factor. All the while Gen, who has an evil streak, was cackling like a mad woman in the back of the line.

Sometimes I wonder what I see in her, and other times I realise it's situations like these where her evil warms my heart.

Anyhoo, the fire got started and we chatted and drank and chatted some more. There was enough light from the fire for me to read by, which allowed me to get about 4/5 through the book by the time the fire started to die. When it was reduced to smoking embers, we stuck around and started chatting, drinking more wine and passing around a box of cigars. We were mostly talking about the ways in which movies tend to suck, even going so far as to categorize them. Now, Janice had snuck off for a while, most likely to indulge a 420 urge. Her end of the conversation was certainly the spaciest, but I've talked to her through the deepest of weed-smoked hazes, so I thought she was totally comprehensible.

All of us were far too drunk to drive back to the hotel, so we went for a swim. Yep, we have always had a lot of bad judgment. We swam for about two hours, sobering up in the cold water and watching the Sun come up. He went back to the fire area, doused the coals and walked back up that damned ravine. This time we all made it without incident. It must have been the availability of light that got us through. Still, it reminded me of portions of Apocalypse Now.

We all got back to the hotel and threw sleeping bags on every available surface. If you're ever wondering how to get folks into every available space of a hotel room, here's the likely places (and some unlikely, where folks can crash: beds, the floor, in the chair, on the couch, in the bathtub, in the closet, on top of the dressers, on two of those Room service tray stands (you know, the ones with the nylon strapping) and standing leaning against the wall. We only had eight people, so we had me and Gen in one bed, Marin and Ryan in another, Jason on floor in a sleeping bag, Joker in the bathtub in a sleeping bag, Janice on the chair, Natasha on the couch. That worked out and we all stayed nice and comfy in our little sleeping nooks until well after the hottest portion of the day had passed.



The Movies

We all woke up around four or five. I slept like

the dead, only with slightly less decomposition. We were all nursing varying degrees of hangovers. Mine was fairly bad. Joker's was fun, as he kept dropping things. Janice was in and out of consciousness all day and night, usually keeping her eyes open for about twenty minutes before they started fluttering down again. Gen and Marin were making life hell for the rest of us. Jason seemed OK, and Natasha doesn't drink, but I think she was having sympathy symptoms. We basically decided that most of the day Saturday would be spent in-doors, save for a late dinner at my favourite restaurant in the whole world. I personally never left the bed until it was time to get dressed for dinner. Joker joined Natasha on the couch and Janice snuggled in with Ryan and Marin on their bed. Showtime had just started a movie, and there was no way any of us had enough energy to change the channel.

The movie happened to be a science fiction film that I had seen before, but not in ages. It's the story of two men who have amnesia over a very specific period who keep coming across people they encountered in the period their minds were dark. They end up finding that they are a part of a giant battle between two opposing alien forces, each of which wants a device that is capable of destroying the Universe. At first, they do not know whether or not they have it or what it is, but once they realize they've had it all along, they must make the right decision on who to trust, or we are all doomed.



Read that again. Think of some stories that it sounds like. Now, give it a title. I'd call it 'The Night the Lights Went Out', but there are hundreds of things you could call it.

Its actual name is Dude, Where's My Car?.



That's right, the Ashton Kutcher and Seann William Scott vehicle marketed as a Cheech & Chong movie for the current generation. Really, it was a Cheech & Chong movie, but there was a science fiction sub-plot that really kinda threw me for a loop. We all just sat there, like lumps with serious alcohol-related issues, laughing our heads off at all the stupid fun.

[One of the sets of Warring Space Agents](#)

And if you go in with any other expectations, you'll be sorely disappointed. The fact is, the movie is meant to be dumb. It's meant to be enjoyed with a bowl of Cheetos and a pipe of herb, as the kids are likely to say. It's that kind of movie, and it's not exactly fair to judge it against films which are taking themselves seriously.

The movie has some real high comedy moments. While everyone remembers the 'Dude-Sweet' tattoo bit from the commercials, there were

RICHARD DREYFUSS JENNA ELFMAN

KRIPPENDORF'S TRIBE



The last undiscovered tribe is about to expose themselves.

actual, well-constructed comedy moments in-between. We get Kristy Swanson and Jerry O'Connell's brother as characters, which made me laugh, but we also got Hal Sparks as the leader of a space cult named Zoltar. Every time he's on screen, he's almost giddy. It's really a great performance from him. Add to that appearances by Andy Dick, Brent Spiner, and the delicious twins (who look little alike) of Marla Sokoloff and Jennifer Garner. It's not a bad movie, in fact, it's a lot of fun if you're in the right frame of mind. Had to take the BAR and been studying for six months straight? Watch Dude, Where's My Car?. Spent your month directing an Ibsen play and trying to wring out every ounce of meaning from every line? Watch Dude, Where's My Car?. Just bought a twomp bag and need something for the background? Watch Dude, Where's My Car?. These are all

acceptable periods where the film could be of great use.

The Science fiction portion of the story pops up here and there, but by the end, you see that the whole shebang has revolved around it. Sitting there, in that bed, we were laughing, some harder than others, and most of us reaching for aspirin once or twice during the showing. Showtime followed it up with another movie that we all had mixed feelings about, and on any other day we would have changed it, but this day we watched it all the way through. This one was Krippendorf's Tribe.

It's a good movie, to a point. I would say it's much more cerebral than DWMC, then again, so is Animal House. The story is a strange sort of film that borders on science fiction, kinda. Basically, the story is that of Dr. Krippendorf, a widower whose wife was the brains and joy of their family and research team. At the time of her death, the pair had just gotten a lot of grant money that the remaining Dr. Krippendorf had to use to save the house. Without having done any research or having been to New Guinea, where their research was to have taken them, The Good Doctor ends up improving a bunch of great, highly sexual lies to keep his grant money and not go to prison. This is where the fun starts.

Once he's started the ball rolling, he has to keep coming up with more and more things to keep the public interested and keep getting grant money. He also has to keep the parents of his dead wife from sending his kids to military school. Krippendorf quickly brings the rest of the family into the fold and has them playing members of the Shelmickedmu Tribe for films and the like. This continues to spiral out of control when another Prof who is hungry for grant money and media attention, joins up and at one point is an unknowing participant in one of the Doctor's little movies.

The big thing here is the casting. A near perfect cast for this film helped it over-come a script that is weak at times and had a few holes in the logic. Richard Dreyfus isn't perfect, but his slow-burn seemed borrowed from Charles Grodin, the master of that art. He's actually a little too unlikable in the role, which I don't usually mind, but here he



needed to be a slightly better guy to bring us in all the way. Jenna Elfman, Dharma of Dharma & Greg, was very good as the attention hungry professor who joins up in Krippendorf's journey. Natasha Leone is excellent as the daughter that the professor can't win over and who is opposed to the whole concept. She's so good at roles where she gets to play something of a misfit with But, I'm a Cheerleader probably being her best work. Funnily, Lily Tomlin hasn't really been this interesting in her characters in years. Until I saw her in I Heart Huckabees, I thought she would have gone out on a series of low-notes, but here she's good as the professor

who is out to get Krippendorf and expose him. Stephen Root, a character actor know for his ability to play a huge range of roles (from the office Drone in Office Space to Jimmy James in NewsRadio) and though he's less than ideally used, he is very good.

All of us continuing to lounge on the bed, we looked at the clock at some point and realised that we all needed to get dressed and head to the restaurant pretty quickly. I hopped in the bath and took one of my famous five minute clean-ups. Just about everyone else did the same. I missed something because when I left Tomlin was complaining about Krippendorf over lunch and when I got back, she was in New Guinea looking for the Shelmickedmu. Everyone got dressed and ready by the time the movie ended, which was a shock. We gathered into our cars and drove across town to my favourite Chinese restaurant, The O'mei.

O'mei

The Long Dinner

When I was a kid, my family had a bunch of family friends. There were the Carlsons and the Takahashis and the Connely-Donneleys. Sometimes, we would take a caravan out to dinner, usually going to places where family-style was the rule. We went to all the places in the Silicon Valley, so

there was only one choice: Santa Cruz.

In the early 1980s, we would head over about once a month or so, eating a lot of great Chinese food. They have wonderful Lazy-Susans on the large tables, making sharing quite easy. The food was good and the place was lovely. We stopped going about 1990, but in late 1999, I started bringing my friends across the hill to the place. It hadn't changed much at all. It was still the best Chinese food, though a little different than I remember.

I was a kid in the early 1980s, so I had no palate for spicy dishes or the like. When I returned, I discovered that the menu was far more than just broccoli beef and sweet and sour pork. There were dishes like Mongolian Beef, Ciu Pui Beef, and Tea-Smoked Chicken Noodles, not to mention various dishes with a distinct European flavour, like Rosemary Potatoes with Chili Oil, Candied Cashews, and more. It quickly became a fave of all my friends, and we made a quarterly visit for more than three years.

About ½ of the reason for the trip to Santa Cruz was to take Janice to The O'mei. She had to experience it before heading back to the East Coast. We all got dolled up and made it across town to the place about 10 minutes before they normally closed.

"Hi, can we get a table for eight, please?"

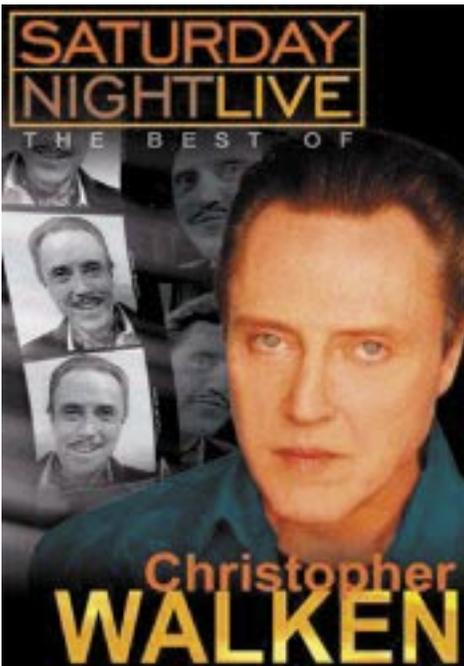
"You're in luck. We're having a bunch of Graduation parties for folks from the college, so there's no problem getting you a table. We're moving in TVs too. Hope you don't mind."



We didn't. They gave us a table in the heart of the back room, right where I had sat when I was a kid. Lazy Susan and everything. Do to all the hubbub going on, we didn't get a visit from the waitress until well after 9:45. We had been chatting more and more about movies, particularly about the two we had watched that afternoon. One of the great things about The O'mei is that the waiters bring out finger plates with small dishes like Candied Cashews and Chili Wheat Gluten for all to share. We had those two and a thing of fried tofu. All were wonderful.

I had brought the book along and read a little piece of it. Good stuff and perfect for dinner table reading. We made our order for dinner around 10:30 or so. She said that the kitchen probably wouldn't have it out for us for at least 45 minutes, so we sat and chatted and I read. There is a good section of the book where Tommaso and Michaelangelo form a special bond, so to speak. Luckily this wasn't an Anne Rice story as it remained relatively clean. I actually managed to finish the book and came to my favourite part: recipes.

Anytime a fiction book includes actual recipes, I always take notice. The recipe for Almond Milk was the first one I tried about a week later. I did a nice Papparadelle with Rabbit Sauce and that really rocked. I have had bad luck with cookbooks over the years, but the ones I've worked on



from novels have never failed me. I put the book down and noticed that it was well into the evening news, meaning beyond 11pm. We were all starving and the opening strains of a Nightline parody came from the TV as we sighted the first waiter with our orders. Saturday Night Live had begun and our food was coming with it.

The dinner and the show were both fantastic. The food went from highly spicy calamari and chicken to delicious and simple prawns and piles and piles of rice. The show was a Best of Christopher Walken episode, which made everyone laugh and laugh far too hard. We all started doing Walken imitations around the table. There were old bits from everyone there, including my two favourite bits of all-time: The Centaur that tries to become a doctor and The More Cowbell skit. If you have no idea what I'm talking

about, go out and buy the Best of Saturday Night Live: Christopher Walken DVD and prepare to laugh yourself stupid.

Now, when we go to The O'mei, we always get a bottle of wine with dinner and with the wait we all had, we had to get a cocktail to keep ourselves occupied. I should also point out that while we did spend much of Janice's visit more or less wasted, we're not drunks! We just don't get to party often and Janice is a party girl, so it's nice to let our hair down now and again. Then again, we do go to a lot of wine tastings..

Anyhow, we had a gay old time at that joint, watching the TV and eating the best Chinese Food in America. The Red Oil Dumplings, something we had never tried, turned out to be the highlight. I just ordered it on a whim. Very well done work that was. We ate four orders, two to start, and two more as chasers. One of my favourite things about O'mei is



the desert menu and the desert wine list. I had the brilliant coffee ice cream thing and paired it with a Port so tawny-rich that no particle could escape it. The smell drove the rest of the table nuts, and half of them had a glass of their own. Even Natasha, normally sober Natasha, had herself a mouthful. Brilliant stuff.

The three of us who were fine to drive, that is to say they had been too queezy from the night before to do any drinking, got us back to the hotel about 1:30 and slumberland called us home quickly. Sadly, there was nothing left for early morning Chinese Noshing.

The Label to the Bonny Doon Riesling we drank



The Music and the Ride Home



We all packed up around eleven am for the final day of our fun. I had failed to realize that we had taken a grand total of five cars, so I was driving alone. We went to the great tourist trap in the world, in my humble opinion, The Mystery Spot.

If you've been to the Bay Area, you've probably seen at least one Mystery Spot bumper sticker. They give them out at the end of every tour, making you feel like the wait (in our case two hours) and the money (I think it's five or so dollars) were worth it. Every state has at least one of these places where they say that the laws of gravity have no meaning. It's a fun time, as they take to you a crooked house where they do all sorts of fun demonstrations. They have a couple of weird trees, including a pair that seem to corkscrew around each other. Janice wanted to go, and even though I'd been there at least five times, I went again and had a lot of fun. We all mocked one another, as we always do, and we enjoyed the sun. We did the tour fast and the agreement was we would all go our separate ways and meet back at my place for a bit of rest and relaxation before we watched a video. I left last and started my way back into town to get some lunch before heading back over the hill.

THIS IS HOW YOU FEEL AT THE MYSTERY SPOT

From The Original Guide to The Mystery Spot. They still display the Mimeo machine

I found a little pizza place that had very standard fare. I ate, got up and started walking back to my car and saw that there was a lovely record store right at my side. I figured I could afford a brief stop and I headed in with thoughts of one or two albums coming back with me. I walked through and found the selection to be almost unbelievable. Everything I'd want, from Sleater-Kinney to Rasputina, and I bought albums from both of them. It was a Streetlight Records location, which is my 2nd favourite San Jose record shoppe. This one wasn't as grand as the one that I regularly visited, but it was nice enough. I wandered around a bit and I found an album that had just been released from a group I had only heard bits and pieces of when attempting to court a lovely lass who will forever be known as The Pointy Goth Chick. The group: The Magnetic Fields. The Album: i.

The Magnetic Fields is pretty much defined by one guy: Stephin Merrit, though he has of cellist Sam Davol, banjo player John Woo (No, not that John Woo...at least I don't think so) and pianist Claudia Gonson. Merrit plays most of the other instruments and does the singing. Every Magnetic Fields album is recognizable by his slightly whiney voice and the variety of instruments that are employed. It's a beautiful thing, though at the time, I only knew a few of their songs.

I got back to my car and popped in the CD. The opening is a cello playing a very simple thing. Then Merrit's voice pops in and it's a lovely little song about a guy and a girl...or at least I think so. 'I die as you walk by so beautiful and strong' it starts. It's cello rock, alright, and



I was into it. That first song was a slow gavotte (or maybe a waltz, I'm not good at telling the difference) that was sweet and simple and lyrical and lovely. I was lulled into a sense of serenity.

Then came the blast...

Not literally, as it's just the opening of a pretty typical power-pop tune. But the lyric, the first words of the song, are so incredible that it nearly sent me off the road.

'So you quote love unquote me'

Wow. That line had me laughing hard, and the entire song, called I Don't Believe You, chronicles a guy trying to tell a lass that he doesn't believe that she's in love with him. It's brutal at times, with lyrics like 'I had a dream and you were in it, the dark of your eyes was infinite, you seemed to be in love with me, which isn't very realistic' and even darker 'You may set your charm on stun, and say I'm delightful and fun, but you say that to everyone.'. It's a harsh song, but it's a great song. It's so well written that I hardly noticed the smoke that had begun to fill my car.



I had no idea what was causing the smoke, but as soon as I fully grasped that there was smoke filling the footwells, I pulled off to the side of the road at a turnout and called AAA. I'm known for having a car that is never bought, but merely gifted to me, so I've never had a new car, only ones that have been passed down. This one was pretty new though, only a 1997. I opened the hood and smoke billowed out. I knew I did the right thing getting the unlimited towing when I bought my membership.

After I got off the phone with the kind Muriel from the AAA call centre, I got back in my car and turned on music again. The next few songs were much different, still bitter, but lighter fare. It wasn't until the song 'I Thought You Were My Boyfriend' that it got excessively bitter. This was the story of a guy who was complaining that his "boyfriend" had strung him along and was only playing. It's a harsh song and it's obvious that it comes from a very real place in Merrit's life.

After about twenty minutes, the tow truck arrived and it pulled me into my favourite service station, where they quickly determined that a plastic

bag had ended up in the exhaust and was causing the exhaust to back up. He fixed it for less than 100 bucks and did it all in about half-an-hour. I rolled into my place with the tune 'In an Operetta', which sounded like it had come from a gentle Operetta itself. It's a lovely song.

The entire album is far different from anything you'll hear elsewhere. At times, it's cello rock, at times it singer-songwriter stuff in the vein of an artsier Elvis Costello. There's a digital vein to it as well, since Merrit loves electronica and playing with drum machines and synths. i and the better loved 69 Love Songs, are both perfect examples of Merrit's musical genius and his outlook towards both music and love. I'd highly recommend either of them to just about anyone.

So I drove home, going back to song 2 over and over again. The weekend was over, there was pizza waiting for me when I got there and I was ready to sleep until the cows came home. Of course, with Janice and Ryan deciding to stay up and drink, it wasn't meant to be.

That's another Claims Department for y'all. Next time will be a look at my days at a hotel in San Jose where I went for no good reason. Send your LoCs, read The Drink Tank on eFanzines.com and other than that, have a nice day.



Many Millions of Thanks to France's Own Kyme-Chan for all of her art. You can find more of her work at <http://kmye-chan.deviantart.com/>. Her work is strange, violent, and at times, very Goth. She was the first artist on DeviantART that really made me go 'Wow!'

The Details

- Santa Cruz, California is the beach town for San Joseans and San Franciscans to head to for the weekends. It's lovely and well worth the trip. Cities down there include Aptos, Capitola and Santa Cruz itself. There are two ways to get there, one via Highway 17 from San Jose and the other via Highway One from SF and points south.
- Michaela Roessner's *The Stars Dispose* is one of the many brilliant Tor Books and came out in 1997. It's got a sequel and there's another Roessner book about Aborigines that is fairly OK.
- The Magnetic Fields are Stephin Merrit's best known band, though he also fronts The Future Bible Heroes. He was just on NPR. You can find out more about all of his bands at <http://houseoftomorrow.com/>. He's also got a couple of operas and musicals coming out soon, which should rule.
- The O'mei has been around for more than twenty years in the same strip mall right off of Highway 1 (which I think is called Pacific Ave. at that point). It's the best place for a sit-down dinner in all of Santa Cruz and is right up there with the best places in Monterey. It's fusion cooking, and there isn't much on the menu that isn't at least good. Try and make reservations for Friday or Saturday nights, and make them well in advance if you're planning on eating there in June as everyone does their dinner there after UC Santa Cruz's graduations, as we've shown.
- The Mystery Spot is good old time family fun. In the 1950s, there were a great many attractions like this all over the Santa Cruz Mountains. There was Santa's Village, The Lost World, The Circus Trees and a few more. This is the only one that survives (though the Circus Trees are now a part of Bonfonte Gardens in Gilroy) and it's a fun time for the little ones. Waits can be long and it's popular with tourists, especially in Japan, India and Germany.
- *Dude, Where's My Car* is on Showtime and HBO every now and again. It's a fun movie and is available on DVD with just enough extras to make me care.
- Krippendorf's *Tribe* is also on DVD and is shown on USA, TNT, and various other cable networks about once a month. It doesn't suffer much from the editing, though it feels a lot longer when you watch it in the commercial format. Still, it holds up to it better than most.
- Janice is getting married sometime in 2006 or early 2007. She's a wonderful girl who has far too many stories about me from college.
- If you're in Santa Cruz, Bonny Doon Vineyard is the best place to go tasting. It's up Highway One a few miles from The O'mei. Their Reisling is fantastic, but I don't think they do a Port, which is a shame because I love Port.
- AAA provides roadside assistance and those great travel guides that tell you what's what around the country. I'd recommend becoming a member.
- The Britannia Arms has locations in Cupertino, Almaden, Downtown San Jose and I think Monterey. The food is good, but far from spectacular.