

Orion

THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE OF TIME AND SPACE • ISSUE #6 • OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2006

THE RISE OF WEBCOMICS



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

DEATH AND TAXES TAKE A HOLIDAY

A TROLLORDS TALE BY SHAINBLUM & MIREAULT

MURPHY'S LAWYER

MARK SHAINBLUM'S LITTLE PIECE OF MIND

HAPPY

So here I am. Missed a couple of issues. Dropped below minac. Sorry about that! It won't happen again. Pause. Three beats. Okay, yes it will. Inevitably. Let's just live with it and move on.

Things are good these days. As I think you all know by now, Andrea and I are pregnant!

Yes, that's a bald-face lie. Andrea is pregnant, I'm fluttering around uselessly on the sidelines, holding her hand as doctors wave magic, Jack Kirbyish ultrasound thingies over her body and tell her that – no worries, this 16-foot needle we're going to stick into your abdomen won't hurt one bit! Really! She's five months along as I type these words. The amniocentesis was four days ago, and the express results have ruled out any chromosomal problems (which the blood tests had scared us about) and have informed us that we're going to have a *daughter*. I'm going to be the father of a baby girl! I can type the words, I can say them out loud. I can read stories to my wife's bulging belly, and feel my daughter's gentle kicks and bumpings, but it's still a wondrous fantasy, less real than the science fiction novel I'm currently reading. I'm floating. A little exalted, whatever *that* means.



This moment of happiness was not brought to you by Wal-Mart

I'm also starting a new job. As I type these words, it's still a Friday and a weekend away. By the time you read them, it will be part of the past. You're talking to the new Communications Officer

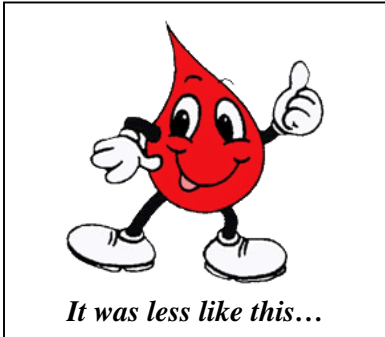
at McGill University's Faculty of Science. It's a real dream-job for a science nerd like me, and for once, the science fiction background really helped!

My story in *On Spec* was also published last week, just in time for Con*Cept. I read from it and got a fabulous response. People even laughed at the supposedly funny bits, which is a good sign, I suppose.

Now this is weird. The text on the next page was written months ago, after I had some serious problems after a bit of supposedly "minor" surgery went awry. I was in an entirely different head space at the time, completely at odds with my rather elated mood at the moment, but the feelings I expressed were legitimate, and I see no reason to ditch them. Just keep in mind that everything worked out in the end, and that things are good now. I've also had some much better interactions with the health-care system since then, so take it all with a grain of salt.

BLOOD

We talk about blood a lot in comics, SF and fantasy: *Blood of Dracula*, *Dragon's Blood*, *Blüdhaven*, *Betrayal of Blood*, *Blood & Glory*, *The Books of Blood*, *Blood of the Fold*, *Harry Potter & the Half-Blood Prince*... need I go on?

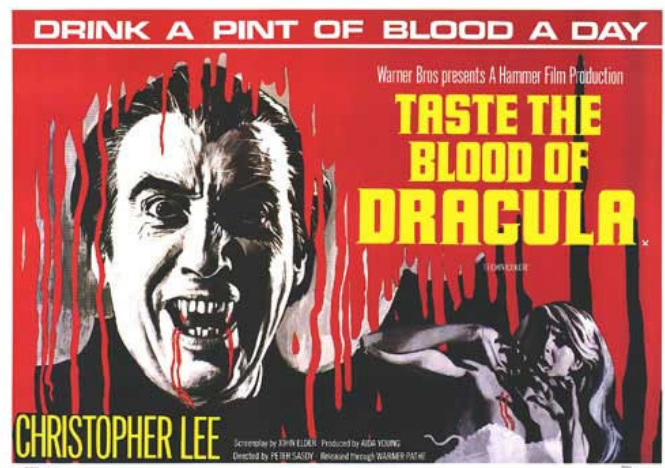


Y'know what? Blood is really not that interesting when it's your own, staining your own shirt, and turning the whole right side of your body purple with subcutaneous bleeding. Yuck.

I say again... *Yuck!*

It was pretty stupid and unnecessary, all things considered. (DISGUSTING MEDICAL DETAILS AHEAD. PLEASE SKIP IF YOU'RE EASILY GROSSED OUT.) One day in

1989 I noticed a small swelling in my right armpit. At the time I was working as an admitting clerk at the Jewish General Hospital here in Montreal, and I was suffering from that dreaded form of sympathetic hypochondria which afflicts healthcare workers. You just can't help it, when a dozen or more cancer patients a day pass through your cubicle, you start seeing the Big C in every pimple and every strange freckle on the back of your hand. A lump under my arm freaked me right out (and yes, men *can* and *do* get breast cancer), and I ran to my doctor at the speed of sound. He assured me that it was nothing, probably just a blocked sweat gland. "Leave it alone," he said. "The cure would be worse than the disease." I breathed a sigh of



...and more like this.

relief and put the issue out of my mind for the rest of the 20th century.

Flash forward to early 2006. All of a sudden, my little "nothing" was transforming itself into a painful, tennis ball-sized "something", and both me and Andrea started to get worried. I went to my dermatologist, who referred me to a surgeon. My "blocked sweat gland" turned out to be a tumour after all, but luckily, a non-malignant lipoma, a benign growth made up mostly of fat cells. Whew! All clear, right?

Umm, no. The lipoma was causing me discomfort and -- the doctor told me -- in a few rare cases such benign tumours can mysteriously become malignant, so he still thought I should have it removed. It would be day-surgery under local anaesthetic, I'd be in and out in an hour and probably be able to go to work the same afternoon. Piece of cake!

That was the plan, of the "best laid..." kind. Over two months passed between my first visit to the surgeon and the actual procedure. I honestly don't remember if we discussed my medications at the first meeting, but I'm pretty sure we didn't. And even if we did, there was no follow-up. On the day of surgery there was no real preparation, no standard pre-operative checklist, nothing. Frankly, I didn't even notice at the time, because I was minimizing, thinking of this surgery in terms of the minor biopsies my dermatologist would sometimes perform.

Wrong! No one ever asked me if I was taking blood thinners like aspirin, and I never told them. And, yes, I'd been taking daily low-dose aspirin for over a year, after a discussion with my GP, not for any particular health reason but because some studies seemed to prove that it was a sensible thing for a man over 40 to do. Sensible, that is, because it reduces your clotting factor and, theoretically, reduces the likelihood of heart attacks and strokes.



Aspirin is your friend, except when it's not.

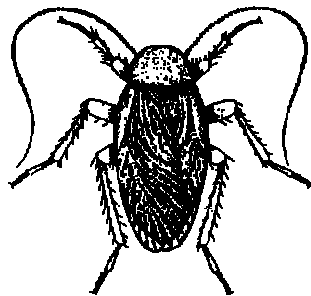
turn your skin paper-thin, but I take an inhaler called Pulmicort, and most studies show that inhaled steroids aren't absorbed into the bloodstream that readily. And in any case, what does thin skin have to do with bleeding?

Anyhow, the procedure dragged on and on, and got more and more intense with every passing moment. I could've lived very happily without ever knowing what having my own flesh cauterized smells like. On top of all that, the xylocaine anesthetic wasn't working very well, and every few minutes I'd suddenly feel what was going on and the doctor would have to freeze me again. The surgical nurse was nice, but she was green and very nervous, and was oddly stumped by ordinary medical jargon. The first time she asked what the doctor meant when he asked for more "xlyo", I chalked it up to nerves. By the third or fourth time, I wanted to scream "He wants **xylocaine**, for God's sake! Are you sure you went to nursing school?"

However, you *need* your clotting factor when someone slices you open with a scalpel, otherwise you're an artificial hemophiliac, incapable of stopping your own bleeding. You're supposed to stop taking aspirin at least a week or two before any kind of surgical procedure, but no one told me to, and I simply didn't think of it. Once the procedure started, my surgeon couldn't understand why my skin was -- and I quote -- "old-lady thin." He blamed the steroid inhalers I take for asthma, but that's just weird. Oral, pill-form steroids like Prednisone *will*

And while all this was going on, the surgeon who had booked the operating theatre after us kept demanding to know what was taking so long, which stressed out my surgeon even more. It was like a bad British medical comedy, blackly humourous but really slapdash from the point of view of the person getting sliced and diced. When the procedure was finished, I was practically booted out the door. I dressed myself as the other doctor and his patient barged in, and then drove myself home, where I proceeded to get violently ill a couple of hours later. Bleeding, chills, trembling, nausea, the works. Andrea called the doctor and he told us to come back to the hospital right away. We took a cab, because by this time I was incapable of driving. When we got to the doctor's office he took one look at me and confirmed that I had a hematoma, which *Webster's* defines as "a mass of usually clotted blood that forms in a tissue, organ, or body space as a result of a broken blood vessel." He then proceeded to (very apologetically) poke and prod it so forcefully that I think I fainted for a few seconds. A couple of days later I started bleeding¹ again in the middle of the night and ended up in the emergency room -- unnecessarily, as it turned out, but that's another story.

If you have any doubts about how badly the Quebec healthcare system has deteriorated since the previous provincial government slashed and burned it, consider this: When I got to the emergency room, everyone agreed that I was in fairly rough shape, and it was serious enough that I should have multiple blood tests and be assessed by a hematologist, just in case I was suffering from some rare bleeding disorder. So I wasn't a hypochondriac looking for attention, I wasn't an ignoramus who wandered into the emerg at 3:00 a.m. because his tennis elbow was bothering him. I had an acute problem which they thought needed to be treated post-haste, and yet I spent *22 hours* in the emergency, mostly just lying around and waiting, with my wife sleeping in a chair next to me. The doctors, nurses, ultrasound technicians and other staff were polite and helpful when you could actually get them to stand still for 10 seconds, but communication between them was so terrible it was frightening. The hematologist was absolutely wonderful, and she convinced



"One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that he had been admitted to a Quebec hospital..."

that I should take an intravenous medication to restore my white blood cells, but it took the emergency staff almost seven hours to actually follow up on her order. Earlier, when I arrived at the hospital, the surgical resident insisted that my surgeon was out of town, when in fact he was nine flights upstairs doing paperwork in his office. When my surgeon found out I had waited in emergency for almost a full day, he showed up in a complete lather, demanding to know

why no one had contacted him and why had I bothered to come to the emergency room in the first place. (Ummm, because he told me to come to emergency if something bad happened in the middle of the night?) He also seemed convinced that I had refused the medication the hematologist had prescribed, when all along I was trying to convince someone to give it to me. It was all very Kafkaesque.

And by the way, this is not a critique of so-called "socialized medicine." I'm very grateful for our single-payer government health insurance plan. It worked very well for many years, but it has been hurt in recent times by mismanagement, skyrocketing costs and deteriorating facilities.

¹ To be perfectly accurate and gross, a hematoma does not bleed, it drains. Only fresh wounds bleed.

Nevertheless I *still* wouldn't trade it for the blood-in-the-water private system south of the border (nor, for that matter, for truly socialized, centrally controlled healthcare like they had in the old Soviet Union). I'm lucky that I currently have supplementary health insurance with my current job, but as a freelancer I had no coverage except Quebec medicare, and this whole debacle would probably have bankrupted me under a private system. We're easily looking at ten to 20 thousand dollars for all the medical care I've needed over the last month. That said, the healthcare bureaucracy in this province *does* need a big shake-up.



Gabriel's interpretation of Canadiana. Unfortunately, the strip is on hiatus for the moment because of Sandy Carruthers' professional commitments. Which is why there are no Canadiana episodes this issue.



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ANGLOMAN AND CANADIANA ILLUSTRATIONS BY GABRIEL MORRISSETTE

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WEBCOMICS FEATURED ON THE COVER

Top row

Penny & Aggie by T. Campbell & Gisèle Lagacé
www.pennyandaggie.com

Eira by Nairohe and Jason
www.eira-manga.com

Roswell, Texas by L. Neil Smith & Scott Bieser
www.bigheadpress.com/roswell

Butternut Squash by Ramon Perez & Rob Coughler
www.butternutsquash.net

Bottom row

Canadiana by Mark Shainblum, Sandy Carruthers & Jeff Alward
www.sandycarruthers.com/canadiana

City Yarns: Say it in Slugs by Mark Rudolph
www.webcomicsnation.com/orionpakks/say_it/series.php

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BERNIE MIREAULT

SMELLY REALITY AND ANTI-GRAVITY

***Note:** This article was written for Hour, the Montreal arts and culture weekly newspaper, sometime in the early 1990's. I think it's a fitting introduction to the only comic story Bernie and I ever collaborated on, "Death and Taxes Take a Holiday", a backup story starring the Trollords characters created by Scott Beasderstadt and Paul Fricke, two really great and creative guys. It was published in Trollords #15 in 1992. Special thanks to Scott, Paul and Bernie for permission to reprint the story.*

By way of backstory, the Trollords are three... well... trolls, all brothers, who have cheated Death. Yes, that's Death with a capital "D". They're supposed to be dead and they're not, and Death is none too pleased with this. He spends most of his time chasing them, Coyote vs. Roadrunner fashion, with the same kind of results.

Bernie Mireault is the kind of guy you could learn to hate all too easily, aside from the fact that he's impossible to hate.

He's too damn talented, too damn nice, too damn secure in his manhood and in his artistic vision. Back in the mid-80s his frantic, overstressed colleagues in the comic book business would often drop by his place just to hang around, hoping some of his serenity would rub off on them.

Mireault's first published comics work was *The Jam*, which began life in 1985 as a six page back-up feature published by Montreal-based Matrix Graphics, a now-defunct alternative comics publisher. It was quickly followed by the first comic book he could truly call his own: *Mackenzie Queen*, a sorcery and spaceships sitcom of sorts, set in Montreal, New Brunswick and outer space.

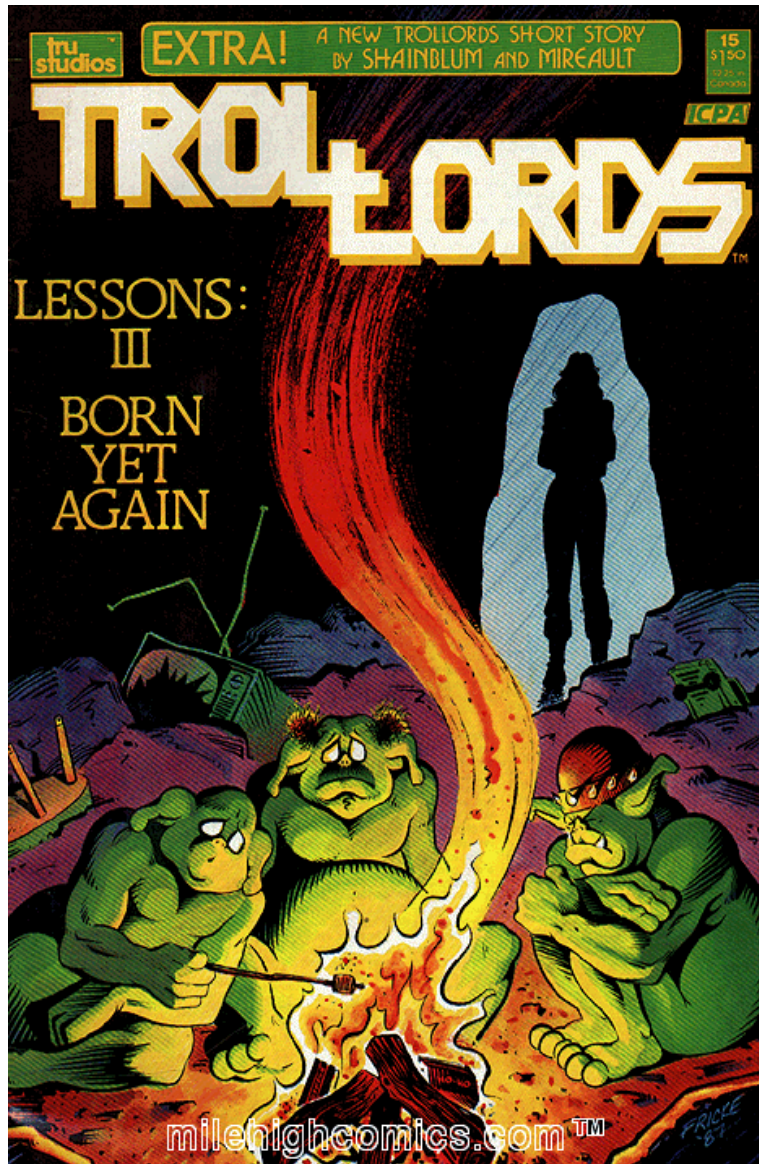
Over the years Mireault has also made a name for himself as a first rate comic book colour artist, sought after as a collaborator by big-name US comic artists and by Digital Chameleon, the industry's leading computer colour firm. He left the Winnipeg-based company after only nine months, however, frustrated by artistic restrictions and by Winnipeg equally.

It is *The Jam* which remains the artistic core of Mireault's work, and the basis of his emerging reputation as one of the most original cartoonists Montreal has ever produced. Published by five separate comic book publishers since 1987 --currently by the prestigious Dark Horse line-- The

Jam was originally conceived as Mireault's take on the gritty urban vigilante genre that was just becoming popular in the mid-80s.

Filtered through his unique sensibilities however, The Jam quickly became something very different: A good-natured, slice-of-life dramedy that could just as easily tell stories about deposit soft-drink bottles, job-hunting or anti-gravity machines. All set squarely and unequivocally in Montreal, no less.

"I go more for the everyday, mundane, smelly reality than an idealized sense of beauty and heroism," he says. "Look carefully. You might recognize your own house."



The original cover to Trollords #15

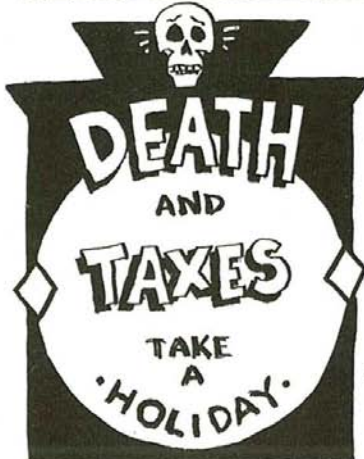
I'M CORRUPTION.

CANCER.

ENTROPY.



FOR 14 BILLION YEARS I'VE CARRIED OUT MY ASSIGNED FUNCTION, AND IF IN 14 BILLION YEARS NOBODY PARTICULARLY CARED FOR ME, MAYBE EVEN HATED ME ... TOUGH!



WRITTEN BY MARK SHAINBLUM. DRAWN BY BERNIE MIREAULT.



Trollords © copyright 2006 by Scott Baderstadt and Paul Fricke. Story © 2006 by Mark Shainblum and Bernie Mireault.





THE HOME OF KELLY NUGROWSKI.





AND SO... AFTER DECADES OF LOBBYING THOSE STUPID CONGRESS, WE GET IT! ONLY I DON'T GET TO GO BECAUSE THEY ONLY WANT ONE TRADEMARK PER TYPE OF PRODUCT, AND FOR DRIED FRUIT, THEY PICKED THOSE OBNOXIOUS, ARROGANT, UGLY RAISINS!



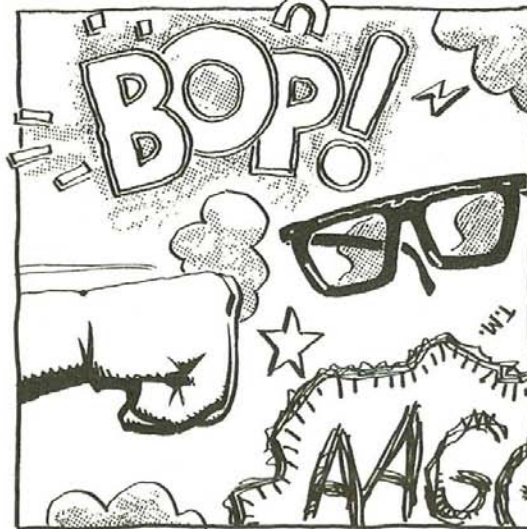
...WE'LL GET YOU INTO THIS PARTY, THEN YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN. C'MON, GUYS! LET'S MOVE IT!

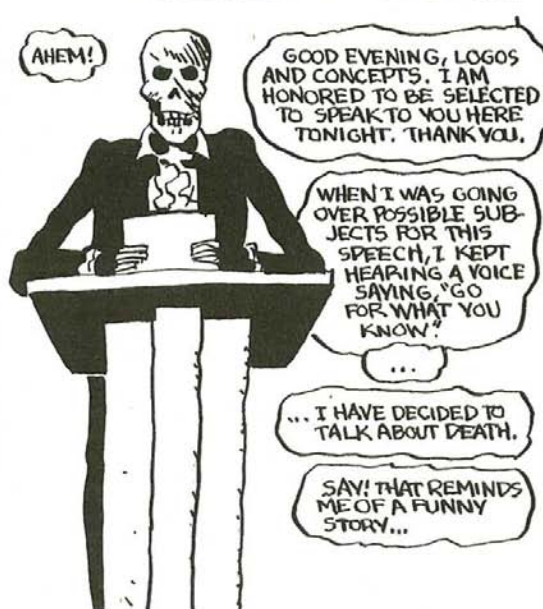
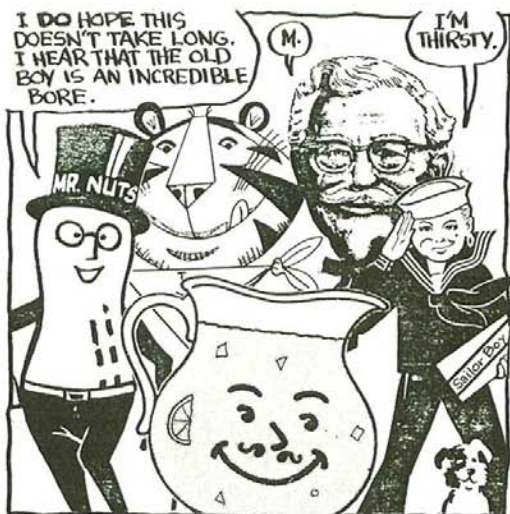
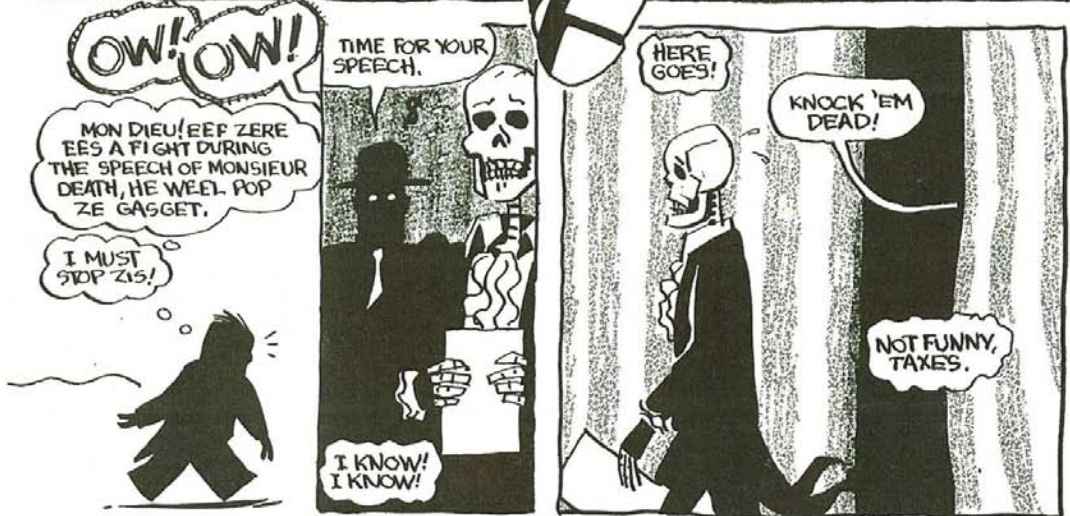


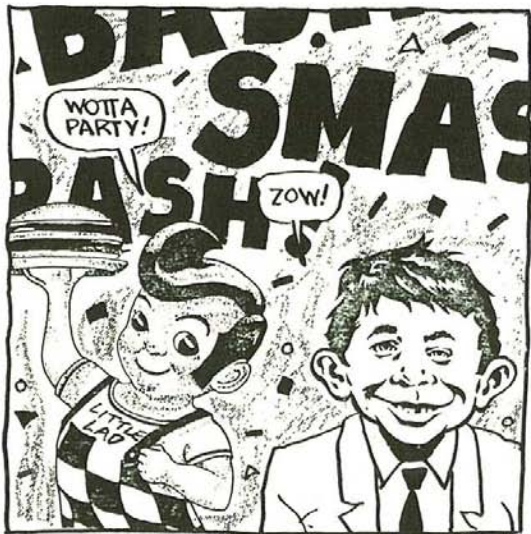
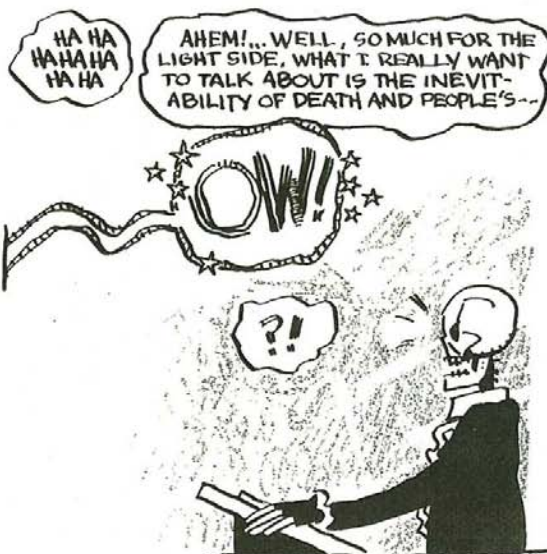
B-BUT WE HAVE NO INVITATIONS! H-HOW CAN WE GO?



BIPH BIPH BIPH BIPH









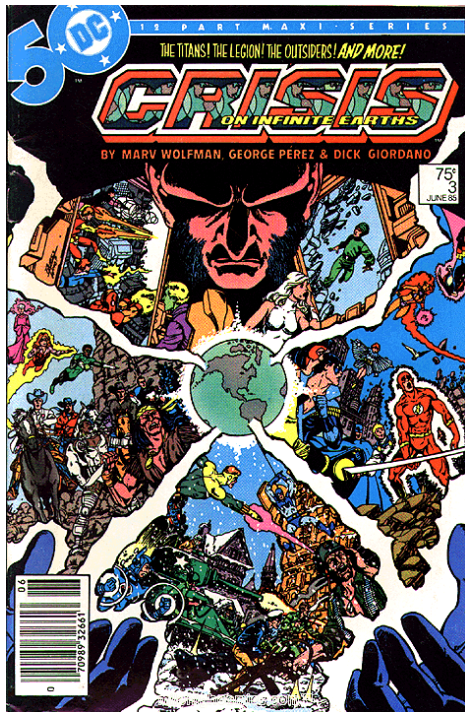
MEDIA WATCH

REVIEWS AND OVERVIEWS OF THIS AND THAT

Comics

CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS #1-12 INFINITE CRISIS #1-7

Okay, I'm not the fanboy I once was, and even when I was the fanboy I once was, I wasn't a big fan of these massive, cross-company apocalypses. Much as I remain a great admirer of Marv Wolfman and George Perez, I found the original 1985 Crisis on Infinite Earths to be a poorly thought-out hodgepodge, less a single story than a series of loosely connected vignettes.



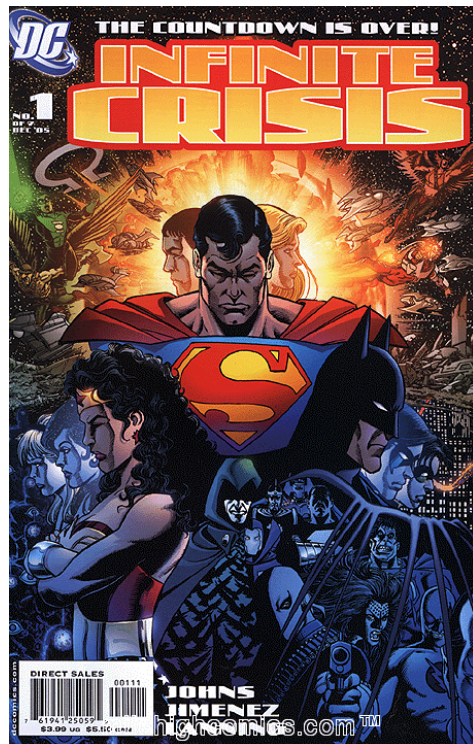
I understood the rationale behind cleaning up DC's disjointed continuity, but I felt the execution left a lot to be desired. In particular, the total lack of a central point-of-view character left the reader completely rudderless, awash in a never-ending torrent of time, place and personality jumpcuts. This undermined the impact of major plot twists, including the deaths of iconic characters like The Flash and Supergirl. Throughout the series' year-long run, you couldn't escape the feeling that Wolfman and Perez were vamping for time and simply making things up as they went along. It didn't feel planned or controlled, and the villainous, Multiverse-eating Anti-Monitor (perhaps the lamest super-villain name since Paste-Pot Pete) simply didn't live up to his billing. He was such a weak-beer copy of Darkseid that I always wondered why Wolfman didn't simply use Darkseid as the villain of the piece. Darkseid finally finds the the anti-life equation and is using it to destroy the Multiverse. Next! The series would have ended up in the same place, and it would have had a lot more impact for long-time DC readers. Even Wolfman's own terrifying Trigon character from the New Teen

Titans had far more personality than the tofu-evil Anti-Monitor.

Moreover, despite all the hype about using the Crisis to clean up DC's convoluted continuity, the company seemed woefully unprepared to actually follow up when the time came. It's easy to forget now that the original Superman and Wonder Woman series trundled on for well over a year after the Crisis, and actually followed up on several Crisis plot points.

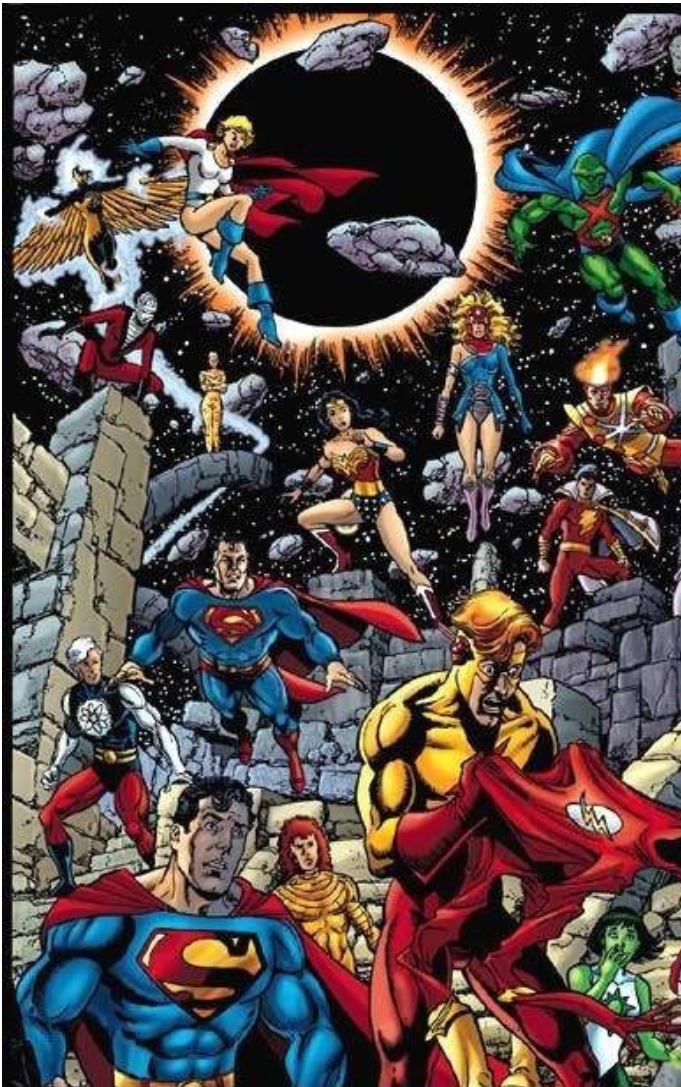
Far be it from me to play continuity cop; I believe telling a good story trumps corporate continuity every time, but from a strictly commercial point of view, DC's delays in implementing the changes the Crisis foreshadowed were difficult to understand. I hope the delay was due to corporate reluctance to make major changes to the Superman series before Julie Schwartz's retirement, or unwillingness to summarily dump journeyman creators like Curt Swan. However, I suspect that DC's leadership simply hadn't decided on a post-Crisis direction and were improvising like crazy. At first, it seemed pretty clear that Wolfman and Perez were anticipating that DC would stick with the established, Earth-1 version of Superman, whom they were trying to return to his original, Last Son of Krypton roots. I mean, why go through all the Sturm-und-Drang of killing off Supergirl if you were just going to retroactively erase her from DC's history a year later?

If DC's post-Crisis readers were confused, the company's editors didn't seem any clearer on the concept. Editors argued with one another about whether their characters had already met one another, knew each others' secret identities or even remembered the events of the Crisis itself. Long-running characters like Wonder Girl, the Huntress and Power Girl still existed, but suddenly found themselves bereft of personality and backstory. Contradictory editorial fiat flew back and forth, and chaos reigned. Basically, DC's post-Crisis continuity was still a mess, but now a thread had been pulled and a dangerous precedent set: The Crisis was not a one-off event that changed things and then re-set them in a new, fixed pattern. Newton was dead, Heisenberg ruled, and the history of the DC Universe became gooey and infinitely malleable. John Byrne's new Superman overwrote Julie Schwartz's old Superman, but then Tim Truman's relaunch of Hawkman several years later overwrote whole chunks of Byrne's own continuity. If a multiverse of parallel Earths was confusing, how much more confusing was a single mega-continuity that contradicted itself from issue-to-issue and series-to-series?



As an aside, the Crisis (and the subsequent relaunches of Superman and Wonder Woman) felt a little bit like the manifesto of a reformist religious movement. We no longer believe in the Weisinger/Schwartz Superboy-Bottle City of Kandor-Giant Key-Arctic Fortress Superman (the Orthodox Church of Superman) we believe in them Byrne/Wolfman Antarctic Fortress-Slightly Less Omnipotent-Beard Growing Superman (The Reformed Church of Superman). Early Islam, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormon Church purged Jewish and Christian holy texts in the same way, editing out personalities and stories that they were uncomfortable with and completely reinterpreting others.

Which brings us, 21 years later, to The Infinite Crisis. To date, I've read seven of the eight issues of this series. And yes, I'm hopelessly, utterly, totally confused. The art is pretty, the writing is – at best – not dreadful, but I still can't figure out exactly why this series exists or what is trying to accomplish



Church of Supeman, and now we're suddenly being thrown an entirely new catechism (The True Reformed Church of Superman?)

Hey, at the atavistic, fanboy level I love this continuity stuff as much as anyone, but from the artistic and the commercial point of view alike, it's an out-of-control algae bloom that's choking the ecosystem it lives in.

If the original Crisis was a hodgepodge, this is a total mishmash. On page 1 of issue #1, I found myself in the middle of an ongoing storyline with no explanation, no hooks, no way in for someone who hadn't read all of the lead-in, tie-in and crossover material DC has been pumping out for the last year. Three pages into the issue I was utterly adrift in a morass of references to events that took place somewhere and somethen else. I felt lost and dumb, like a newbie, and was almost unwilling to continue reading. I can only imagine how a completely new comic book reader would have felt.

Frankly, I'm at a loss to explain why DC would even want to open the Crisis continuity Pandora's Box again. Most of the current crop of comic book readers were in diapers when the original series was published, they've grown up with the Post-Crisis revisionist DC Universe. Those of us who were around then have had time to accept the doctrines of the Reformed

NEW AVENGERS #1-18

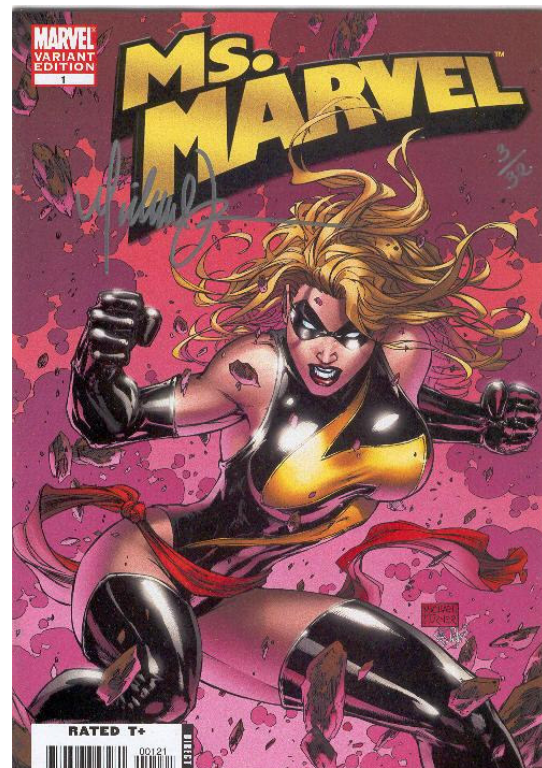
The New Avengers was one of those titles I kept hearing about, but had completely lost track of, so when the opportunity presented itself, I read eighteen solid issues of the series in one sitting.

I liked it enough to keep reading obsessively for, perhaps, four or five hours. Brian Michael Bendis is a snappy, witty comic book writer, and he entices you to keep turning pages. Frank Cho is, well, Frank Cho. Hyper-realistic and cartoony all at once, a master of facial expression and anatomy.

Oh yeah, anatomy. Is it just me, or has the sexual objectification of superheroines completely stepped over the line? I mean, since the 1940's they were always sexy, scantily clad and ridiculously buxom, but it's somehow different now. As Revolution SF writer Joe Crowe wrote in a recent piece about the furor over the new, lesbian Batwoman. "Really, the braver stance for DC would be not to make her just as mega-hot and masturbatable as every other comic book female."

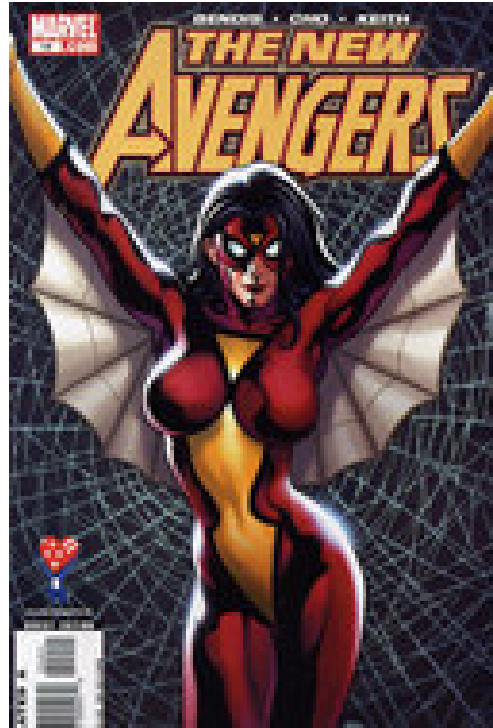
Masturbatable. There's a word. I mean, do we want heroes or porn stars? Because, if it's the latter, there are plenty of places to get it.

Just compare the images below. Need I say more?



Is this even the same woman?

Who knew that multiple cosmic transformations included breast and thigh augmentation?



Uhhh... Ditto.

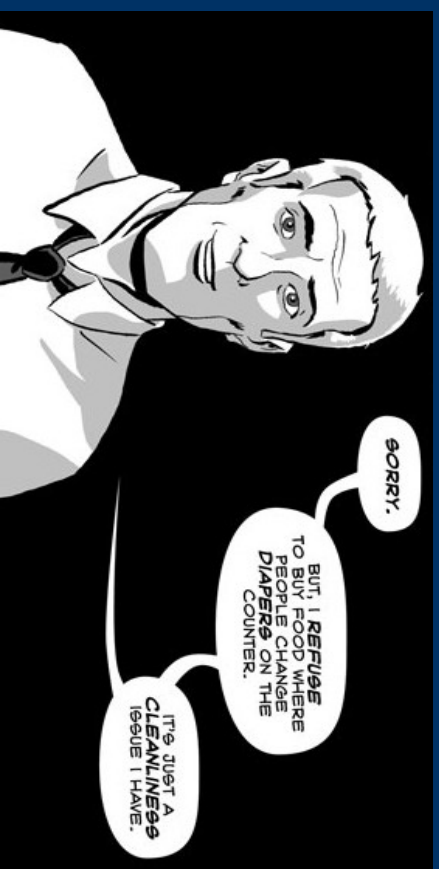
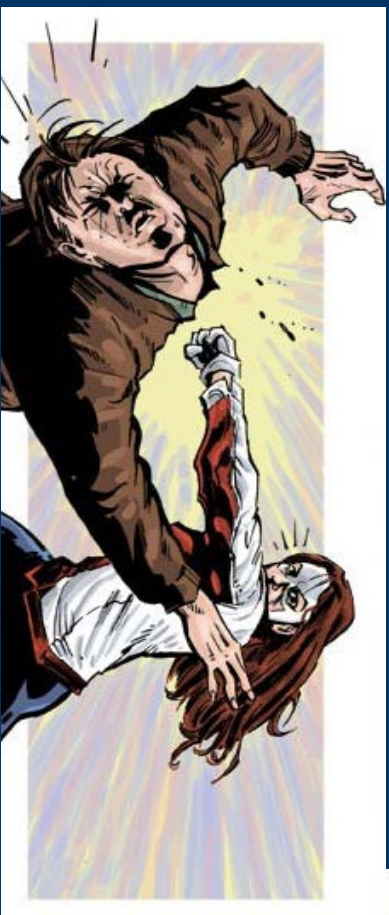
WEBCOMICS 101

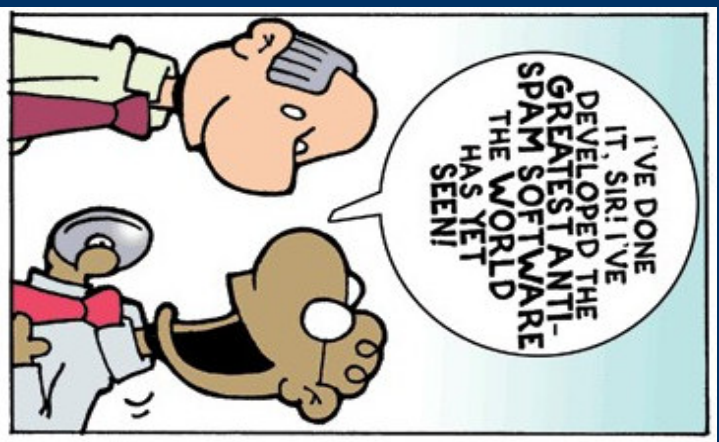
The following is a Powerpoint (actually, OpenOffice Impress) slideshow I presented on a webcomics panel at Montreal's Con*Cept SF and comics convention, Oct. 13-15.



No, not the webcomics panel. I have no good shots of it. This was the "Comics and BD and Manga, oh my!" panel. From R to L, René Walling, Comicopia's own Niall MacConaill, yours truly, and that guy I've know for years whose name I shamefully forget all the time.

WEB COMICS 101

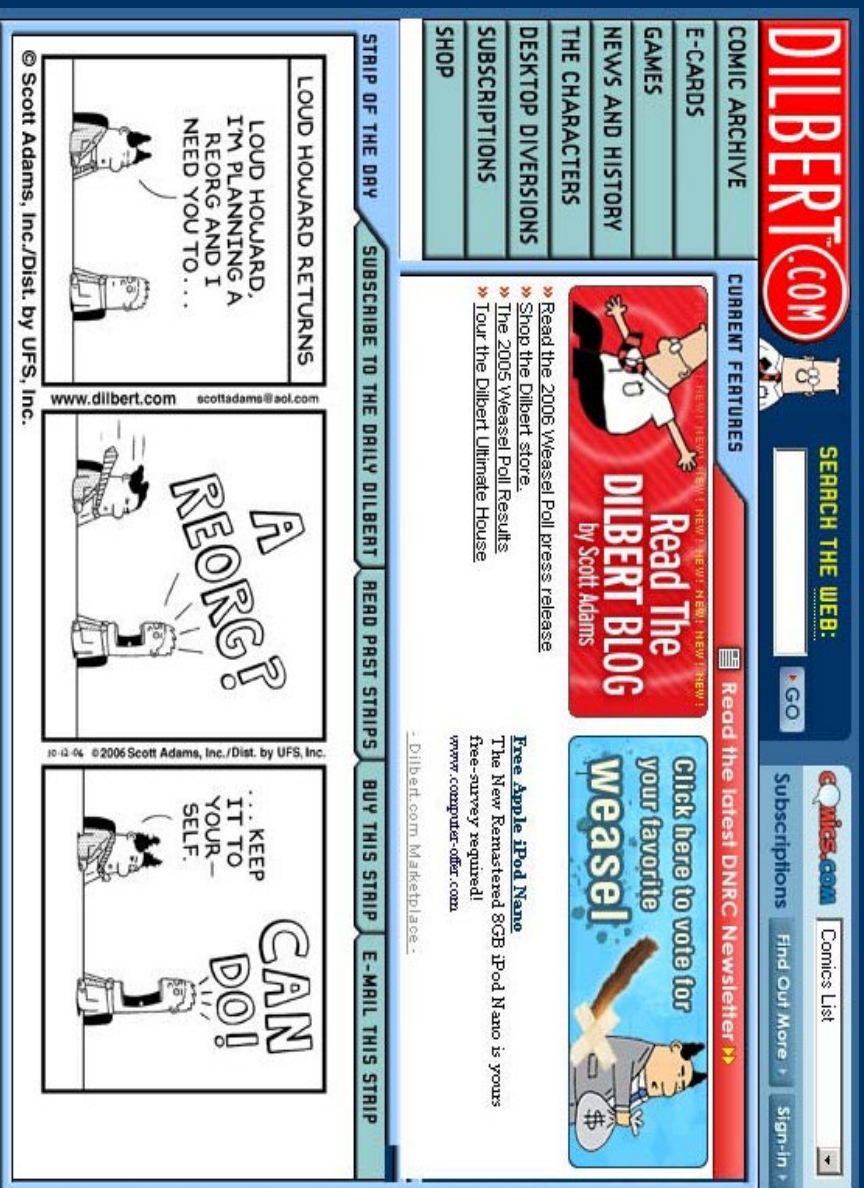




Webcomics, also known as *web comics*, *online comics* and (rarely) *womics* are comics published on the Internet.

The precise definition of a webcomic is difficult. Many traditional newspaper strips, comic books, graphic novels and editorial cartoons are also available on the web.

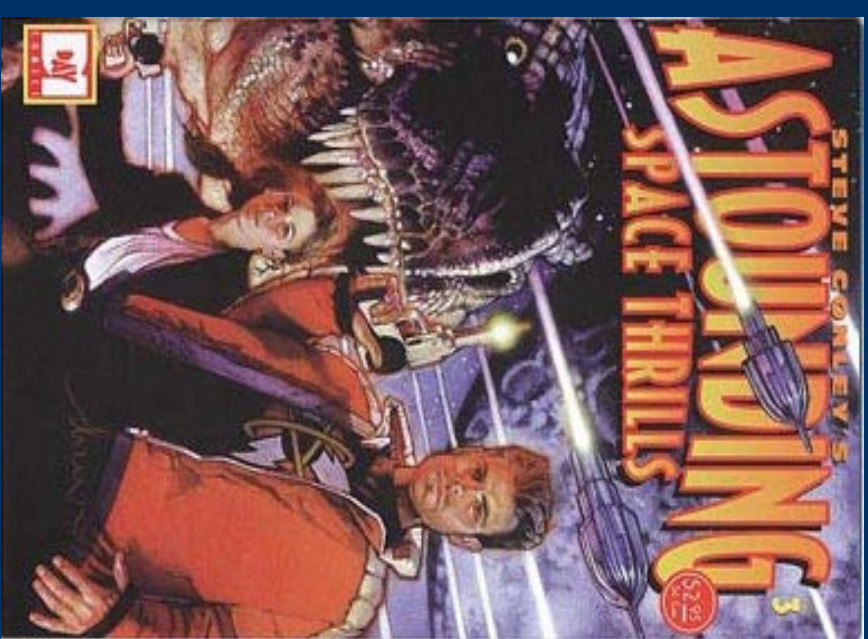
While everyone would agree that the Internet version of *Dilbert* is a comic *on the web*...



...people generally speak of "webcomics" as comics which appear *primarily* or *exclusively* on the web. They may or may not be specifically formatted for web publication.



Which isn't to say that a webcomic can't *become* a traditional print comic book.



Steve Conley's *Astounding Space Thrills*, which debuted in 1997, was one of the first.

The rise of webcomics has almost completely eliminated the traditional barriers to entry. It's now so easy to create and publish a comic that thousands of would-be creators have taken the plunge.



From "Say it in Slugs" by Mark Rudolph
www.webcomicsnation.com/orionpakks/say_it/series.php

Which is good...



From **Penny and Aggie** by T. Campbell and Gisèle Lagacé
www.pennyandaggie.com

Still good...



From **Butternut Squash** by Ramon Perez and Rob Coughler
www.butternutsquash.net

Still more wholesome goodness...

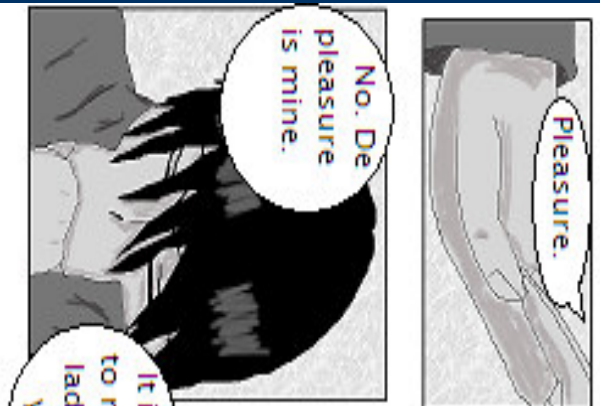
However, as
karaoke bars,
amateur night
at the comedy
club and most
of YouTube
prove,
barriers to
entry do
sometimes
serve a useful
social filtering
function.



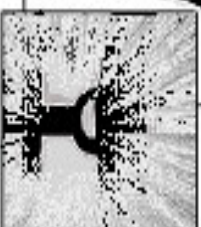
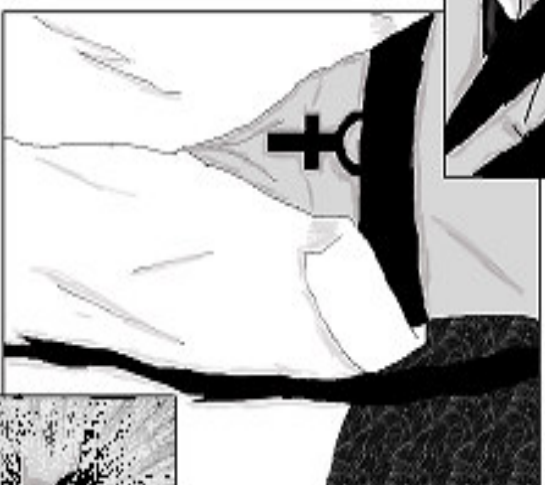
Case in point #1



Son of the Devil



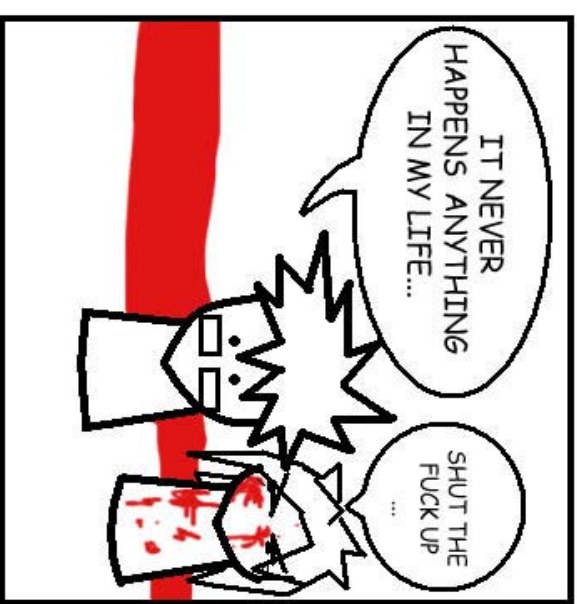
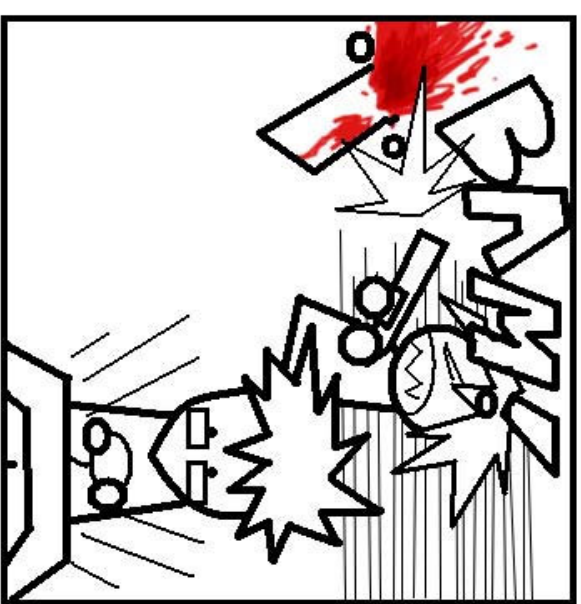
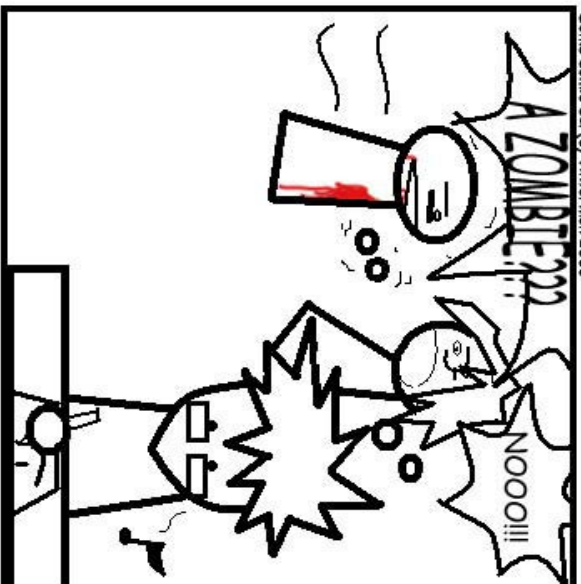
It is rare to meet a lady like you.



Lucida Lournes

[2]

Case in point #2



Case in point #3

Like blogging, podcasting, music sharing and video uploading, the existence of webcomics dissolves the traditional barriers that once existed between professional and amateur artists.



From the
democratic
point of view,
everyone's a
winner.

However, in
economic
terms, we
have to face
that dreaded
evil force...

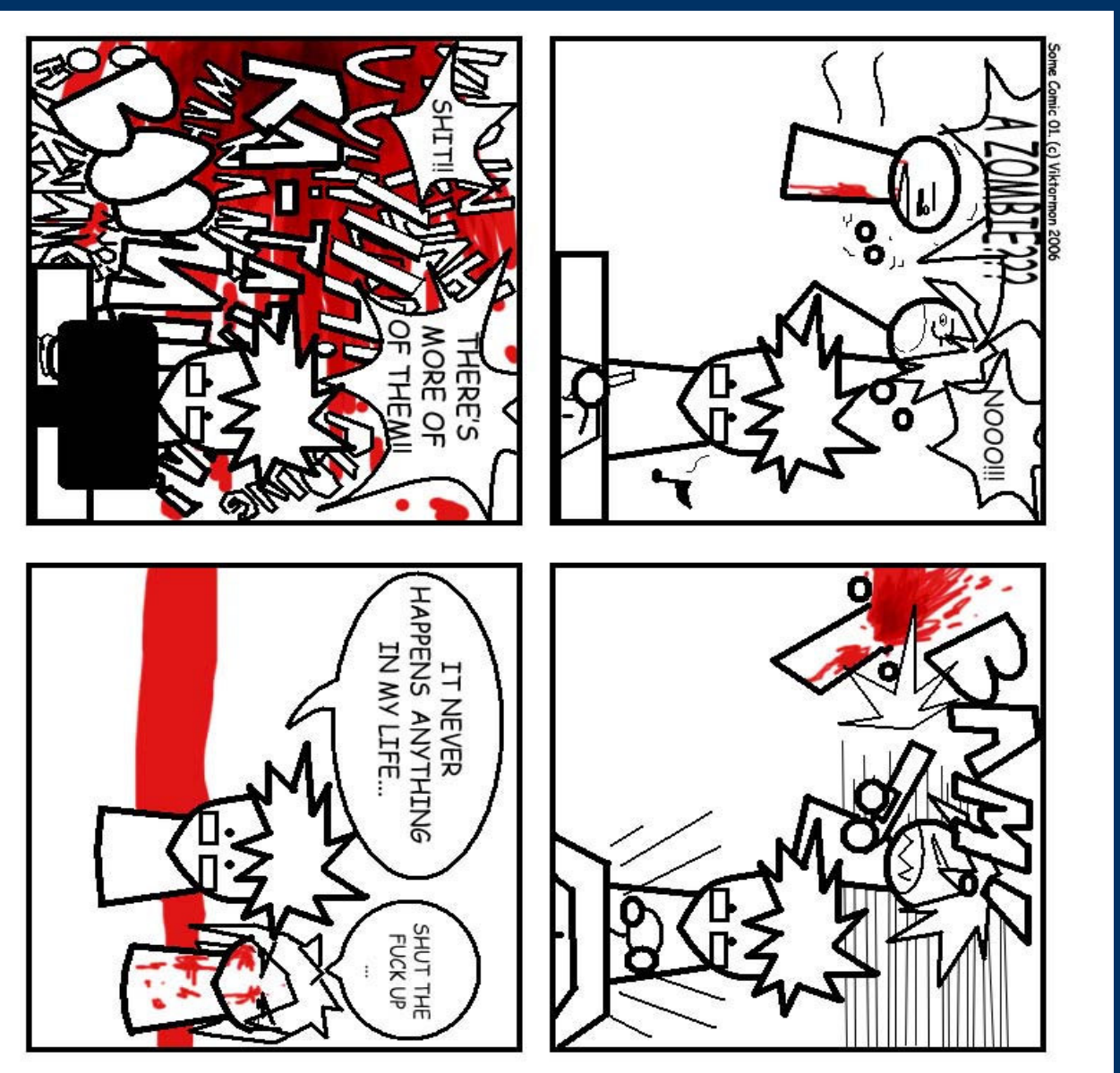


COMMODITIZATION

Mothers of a much less enlightened era used to warn their daughters, “Why buy the cow if the milk is free?”



We can ask the same question. Especially when most of the animals in the herd are sickly and unimpressive...



Several different public webcomics websites have been vying to become the Flickr or the YouTube of the webcomics scene.



www.comicgenesis.com

For some reason, many of them have weird, dot-commie names that have nothing to with comics, and look stupid in your web address.

(He said, editorializing...)

The screenshot shows the Smack Jeeves website in a browser window. The browser's address bar displays "http://www.smackjeeves.com/". The website header features the "SMACK JEEVES" logo in a stylized red font, with the tagline "PROUDLY HOSTING OVER 3000 ONLINE WEBCOMICS!". A navigation menu includes links for HOME, SIGN UP, HELP, CONTACT, FORUMS, and a SEARCH box. On the left side, there are links for Home, Register, and Log In, along with a "Log In" form containing fields for "User Name" and "Password", and a "Remember Me" checkbox. Below the login form is a "Donate" section with the text "Real Donations. Real Rewards." and "Donators Donator Comics", accompanied by the "SMACKJEEVES" logo. The main content area features a "Featured Donator Comic" section with a large image of a character and the text "half/asleep". Below this is a "Ye Olde Smack Jeeves News" section listing recent updates: "New: Hot Comics List - October 10th 2006 by Admin", "Milestone Mania - September 16th 2006 by Admin", "Minor Optimizations Made to... - August 26th 2006 by Admin", and "New Board: Creative Corner - August 22nd 2006 by Admin". Navigation buttons for "HOT COMICS", "MOST POPULAR COMICS", "NEWEST WEBCOMICS", and "MOST RECENT UPDATES" are visible. At the bottom, a "Most Recently Updated Comics on Smack Jeeves" section highlights "Breakbeat's Rhapsody" by "The Dragon", with details: "Last Update: October 12th 2006", "Popularity: 19 fans", "# Comics: 38", and "Rating: 4.91 / 32 votes".

www.smackjeeves.com

One, DrunkDuck.com, was just purchased for an undisclosed (but large) sum by Platinum Studios, a company headed by former Malibu Comics publisher Scott Rosenberg.

The screenshot shows the DrunkDuck.com website interface. At the top, the site logo features a green duck character and the text "Drunk Duck The Webcomics Community". Below the logo is a navigation menu with buttons for "Browse & Search", "News", "Forums", "Store", "My Controls", and "Create a Comic!". A sidebar on the right contains a "Featured Comic" section for "Blip" with a preview image and a text description. Below this is a "Most Read Stories" section with a list of comic titles and their authors. Further down is a "Most Read Strips" section with another list of titles. A central "Update" section features a cartoon duck and text about site improvements. At the bottom, there is a "New Users Register Here!" section with a login form and registration instructions. A "Sponsor" banner for "Like Star Trek? Try fighting 700,000+ players" is visible on the right side of the page.

DrunkDuck Member Login!

username:

password:

Forgot your password?

New Users Register Here!

Not Registered? Signup for a FREE Account!

Registered users can:

- Comment on comics!
- Create their own comics!
- Vote in polls and contests!

Use the forums! [Sign up!](#)

Like Star Trek? Try fighting 700,000+ players - Win \$5,877 cash/prize - Free Massive Strategy Game - Win \$5,877 cash/prize - Free Massive Strategy Game - Win \$5,877 cash/prize

Blip

Although new, Blip has charged out of the gate and is quickly becoming a favorite. K lives what is a relatively normal life (with its good, bad, and creepy moments), but seems unaware of the strangeness under its surface... including the very special surveillance she is under. Likable, funny, quirky, charming, a bit disturbing! Blip has an undeniable special something that makes it an entertaining comic.

Read it now: [first page](#) | [latest page](#)

Most Read Stories

LAST 7 DAYS

- Charly the Vampire
- The Gods of Arkhean
- Lola
- Rainbow Carousel
- Gumming Court

Browse all

Most Read Strips

LAST 7 DAYS

- Grog
- Eljai and Azur
- No Need for Bushtio
- Rent
- basketess
- supernations

Browse all

Recently Updated Stories

- Untogether
- Some Place Like Home
- Alone
- Pokemon return from the Nexus
- Dragon Legend
- Milksman

Recently Updated Strips

- Some Fern Chaos
- Adventures of Taki and Konoa
- Such a Simple Life
- Final Fantasy VI The Real Fantasy
- SpiritWorld

Update

OCTOBER 11, 2006 - 7:42pm

Hey everyone, Just letting you know that we have some nice improvements coming to DrunkDuck soon... expect them in a couple of weeks. Nothing HUGE, but we've been listening to your responses and have some planned adjustments we hope will make a lot of people happy!

Also, [Cowboys and Aliens](#) has added some really

From The Duck's Bill

CLICK TO VIEW THE TRAILER

VIDEOGAME

Comics Needing Comments

- Mercoland
- Dime380 RETRO
- Quilting Time Comic
- The Adventures of Captain Bob in Outer Space
- Master Squid and Quibby

DrunkDuck Member Login!

username:

password:

Forgot your password?

New Users Register Here!

Not Registered? Signup for a FREE Account!

Registered users can:

- Comment on comics!
- Create their own comics!
- Vote in polls and contests!

Use the forums! [Sign up!](#)

Most of these sites offer free hosting, comics management tools and unlimited bandwidth, usually in exchange for running ad banners.

Though there's good stuff on these sites, it's almost impossible to find in a sea of... of... well... crap.



Some webcomics sites, most notably **ModernTales.com**, operate more like traditional publishers. They exercise editorial control, accept only some strips for publication, charge subscription fees, and pay their creators.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the ModernTales.com website. The browser's address bar shows the URL <http://www.moderntales.com/>. The page header includes navigation links: [modern tales professional webcomics](#) | [comics](#) | [blog](#) | [forum](#) | [subscribe](#) | [log in](#). Below the header, there is a navigation menu with [RSS Feeds: Comics](#) | [Blog](#). The main content area features a comic strip titled "SHT" by Gene Yang, with the text "Free strips & ongoing series". Below the comic, there is a section titled "You'll Have That" with a paragraph: "You'll Have That follows the lives of Andy and Katie, a newlywed couple in their twenties, as they try to figure out life together." and a link for "MORE FREE SERIES & STRIPS >". To the right of the comic, there is a sidebar with a section titled "American Born Chinese nominated for National Book Award" by Joey Manley, dated October 11th, 2006. Below this, there is a section titled "Xeno's Arrow Now on Longplay!" by Shaanon K. Garrity, dated October 2nd, 2006. At the bottom of the page, there is a "Graphic Novel Review" section with a list of titles: NYC Meets Vol. 1: Lets Electrify Urban Brazil; Conan: The Tower of the Elephant and Modern Tales strips; Elsewhere on the web: Night Trippers; Elsewhere on the web: La Perdida; La Perdida; Elsewhere on the web: The Ticking; The Ticking; Elsewhere on the web: The Fate of the Artist; In Brief: Ordinary Victories; Elsewhere on the web: Scott Pilgrim & the Infinite Sadness; East Coast Rising by Becky Cloonan; and a link for "...more".

Some professionals band together into online comics collectives, in an attempt to maintain a distinction between professional and amateur work. **Keenspot.com** started out that way, while the more recent **Chemistry Set** site is a funky, postmodern approach to the same idea.



www.chemsetcomics.com

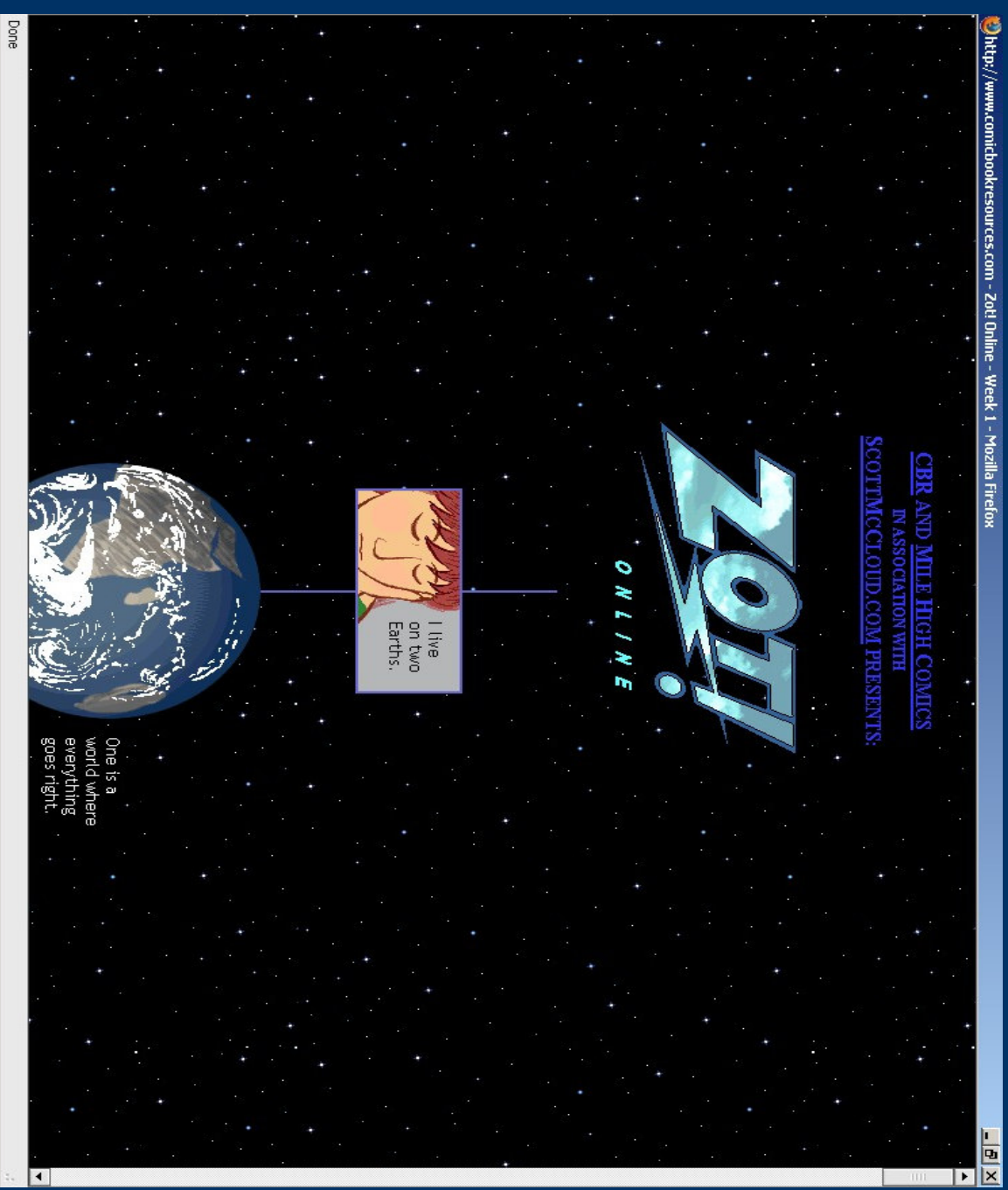
Some pre-existing publishing companies like Bighhead Press have also branched out into webcomics.



Established comic book writer Mike Baron has created two series for Bighhead.



Some of the most interesting webcomics have been created by people like **Scott McCloud**, who have tried bold experiments with layout, neverending scrolling pages and other innovations that only the web makes possible.

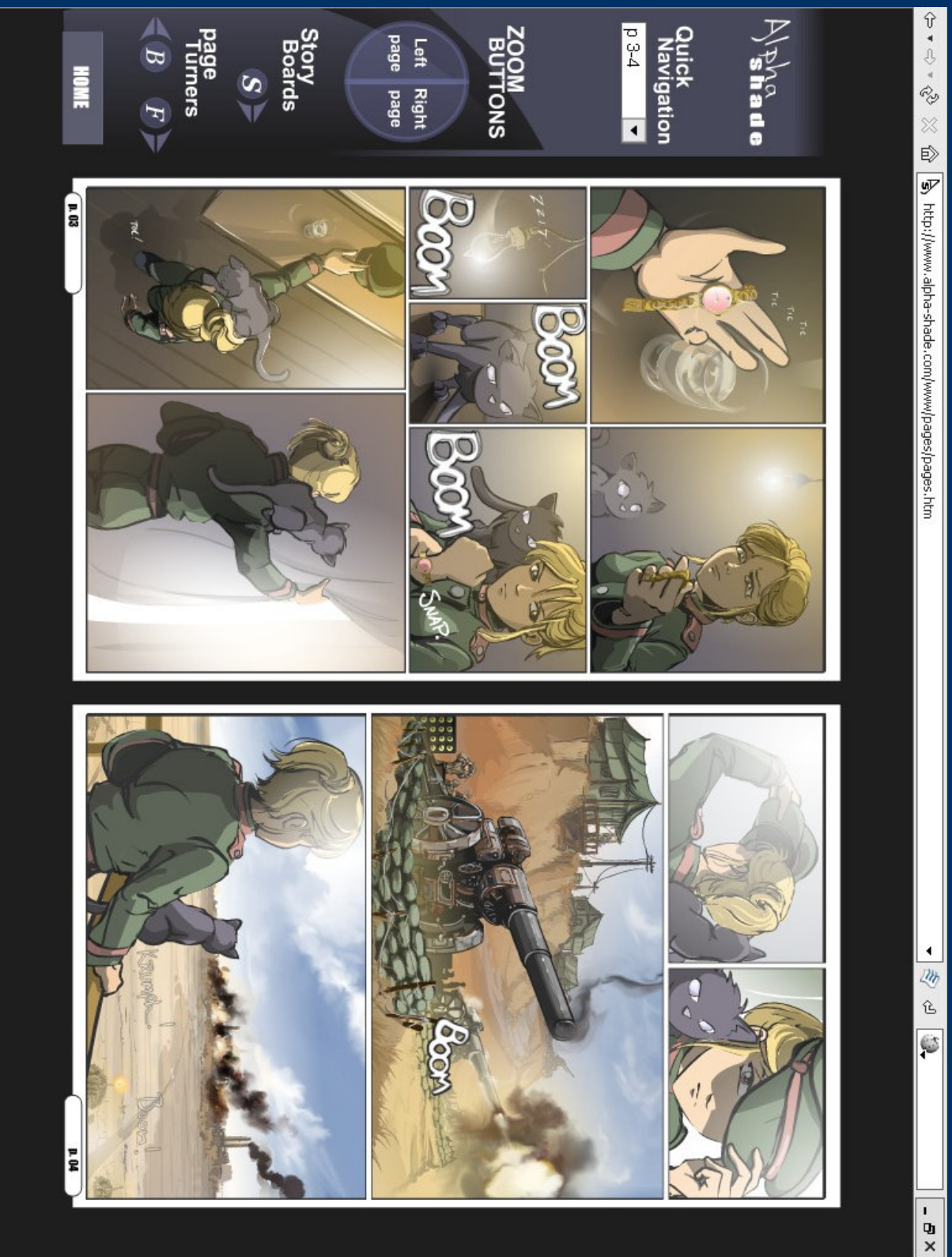


However, if you play too much with the traditional format of comics, when does it stop being comics?

Most experiments with adding sound and motion, for instance, have been failures.

Done





Chris and Joe Brudlos make innovative use of web technology to lay out, produce and publish their successful **Alpha Shade** steampunk series, at www.alpha-shade.com.

**NEXT ISSUE: Webhosting software
scripts, and my favourite webcomics!**

