



**NOTES FROM THE
UNDERGROUND
OCTOBER 2006**

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Notes from the Underground is a bi-monthly newsletter published by Several Unlimited. Dues are \$12.00 per year in the US, \$16.00 overseas, payable September 1. Submissions of articles, reviews, and artwork are welcome. All written submissions should be typed (or very legibly handwritten). Please don't send original artwork by regular mail. The deadline for submissions is the first of every month.

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In Hoc Signo Vincas,
Dee
Editor, *Notes from the Underground*

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Meeting Announcements

The October Meeting (and elections) will be at Jamie Ritchey’s house. The October Video Party will be hosted by Erika Frensley.

October Birthdays

Julie Jay

October 9

Editor’s Announcement

We are exchanging newsletters with the Prydonians of Pryncton as PDFs (via email). If any Several member would like a PDF instead of, or in addition to, their paper newsletter, please email me (Erika Frensley). The PDF of each newsletter is also posted on the Several Unlimited website.

environment. It's actually quite fun, and the hours are pretty good. Greens fees are \$8.50 for 18 holes.

News and Reviews

Jamie Ritchey Nominated for Songvid Award

By Dee Beetem



Jamie Ritchey has received word that her songvids have been placed on the Light My Fire Award ballot in the Gen category. The songvids that have been nominated for this Sentinel songvid contest are:

- ❖ How Far
- ❖ No Matter What
- ❖ Sharp Dressed Man

Congratulations, Jamie!

<http://lmfa.diagonalfiction.com/currentnoms.php>

Fanfic discussed in the Wall Street Journal

Rewriting the Rules of Fiction, September 16, 2006; Page P1

By JOHN JURGENSEN

Amateur authors writing tales about favorite characters are drawing big audiences and landing book deals. Meet Harry Potter's grandparents.

Reprinted from the Wall Street Journal.

She writes about a group of young wizards attending the Hogwarts School. She has legions of readers throughout the world.

Her name is Hannah Jones, and she's 19 years old.

Fan fiction, stories by amateur writers about characters from their favorite books, movies and television shows, was once mainly a fringe pursuit. Now, it's changing the world of fiction, as Internet exposure helps unknown authors find mainstream success. Some Web sites are attracting unprecedented numbers of readers and, in some cases, leading to book deals. They are also feeding the appetites of readers and viewers who can't get enough of shows like "Lost" or "House."

There's a librarian in Rathdrum, Idaho, who spent 10 years posting her writings about a character from Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" online; Simon & Schuster paid her a \$150,000 advance to publish the works as a three-novel trilogy. In Brooklyn, N.Y., a free-lance copy editor has become one of the Web's best-known "Lord of the Rings" and "Harry Potter" fan-fiction writers, and has landed a three-book publishing deal for a young-adult fantasy series. When a comic-book store manager in New Jersey decided to take his first stab at fan fiction this year, entering a contest sponsored by Showtime's "The L Word," he got the attention of a literary agent, who signed him last month. And Ms. Jones will soon have her first book published.

One sign of the growing influence of these authors and stories is that media companies, usually quick to go after people who use their copyrighted material, are increasingly leaving fan fiction writers alone. Mindful of the large, loyal audience the writers represent, many companies are adopting an attitude one media professor describes as "benign neglect." While most professional writers say their lawyers advise them not to read fan fiction to protect themselves against charges of plagiarism, some say they check the numbers of fan fiction stories posted about their work regularly as a measure of their success.

The rise of fan fiction is part of the spread of amateur-created content online, from viral videos to music playlists and blogs. Increasingly, audiences have become used to watching videos posted by other users on sites such as YouTube and MySpace. Reading fiction online is another extension of this trend.

Ms. Jones, who has been writing fan fiction since she was about 11 years old, got her start writing about TV shows and movies like "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid," but took off in the fan-fiction world when she moved into "Harry Potter." The J.K. Rowling series is by far the biggest source for fan-fiction stories on the Web now, dwarfing franchises such as "Star Wars."

Ms. Jones is best known for a series called "The Shoebox Project," which she writes under the name "Jaida" with a writer named "Rave." The story is a prequel of sorts, focusing on Harry Potter's now deceased parents, along with two other wizards, Remus and Sirius, imagining them as teenage wizards finding themselves in high school during the 1970s. Interspersed in the text of the stories are scrawled notes that look like they were written by the characters themselves.

In one critical turning point in the series, Harry's grandparents are killed by Death Eaters, minions of the dark lord Voldemort -- a plot point that mirrors the killing of Harry's parents, described in Ms. Rowling's series. But Ms. Jones says she was chagrined to learn later about an interview with Ms. Rowling where the author told readers that Harry's grandparents had died of natural causes.

The series, which Ms. Jones began the summer before her freshman year at Barnard College in 2004, is up to 25 sections and the equivalent of 600 pages. While Ms. Jones says it's impossible to track how many individual readers her entries have, nearly 5,000 people have signed up to be automatically notified whenever she posts a new part on LiveJournal.com, the Web community favored by many fan fiction writers. Each installment generates hundreds of reader comments and reviews.

Ms. Jones was contacted by Frank Fradella, an author running his own small independent book-publishing company, New Babel Books, who had read her work on LiveJournal. Next month, he's publishing her first print book, a collection of poetry called "Cinquefoil."

Like virtually all fan fiction, "The Shoebox Project" was created without the permission of the author or publisher. Many authors don't object to the fan-fiction surrounding their work, seeing it as a sign of a devoted audience rather than an act of copyright infringement.

Meg Cabot, author of "The Princess Diaries," says she herself was once a fan-fiction writer, writing stories inspired by Anne McCaffrey's fantasy novels about dragons when she was in high school and college. "I never told anyone. I've started admitting it now," she says. She says she was delighted to discover that her books had inspired hundreds of stories by fans.

Although Ms. Cabot says she occasionally goes online to see the tally of "Princess Diaries" and "Mediator" fan-fiction stories, she says she never reads them. Legal advisers warned that if she did read fan fiction, she'd be

opening herself to potential lawsuits from fans who could claim she'd stolen their ideas.

Some authors take a less friendly view of the genre, however. "No matter how flattering, it's still robbery," says fantasy novelist Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, whose vampire works have inspired a number of fan-fiction writers. She estimates that her attorney has sent out about 20 "cease and desist" letters to writers and owners of fan sites. Ms. Yarbro says this has caused some of the writers and sites to take their stories down.

For much of its history, fan fiction centered on the science-fiction and comic-book worlds. While the subject matter of fan fiction has expanded greatly, to include everything from "Desperate Housewives" to the Bible, the genre has several entrenched tropes. Many stories take the form of prequels, imagining the back stories of central characters. Crossover fantasies also have long been a key element of fan fiction, pairing characters from different books or shows.

"Shippers" (the term is believed to be derived from "relationship") are writers that explore -- and often invent -- relationships between characters. A subgenre of this is "slash," which creates gay relationships between characters such as Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock from "Star Trek." Slash fiction is often sexually graphic, and fan fiction's association with slash has made some mainstream authors and TV networks wary of it.

Increasingly, however, media companies, undeterred by the stigma of slash, are looking for ways to capitalize on fan fiction and its large audience. A company called FanLib is working with networks and publishers to create fan-fiction promotions and contests for books and TV shows.

FanLib recently launched a romance-writing contest with HarperCollins's Avon imprint. "We're looking for ways to reach the real core readers," says Liate Stehlik, Avon's senior vice president and publisher. To avoid copyright problems, they had writers create chapters of a novel from scratch, instead of basing them on one particular book.

FanLib's first high-profile project was a fan writing contest earlier this year devoted to "The L Word," a Showtime drama about a group of lesbian characters. FanLib Chief Executive Chris Williams says that 20,000 people registered on the contest site, where one of the show's writers assigned scenes.

The possibility of being discovered was a motivation for aspiring novelist Ervin Anderson, who was one of the seven contest winners and the only male to win. The manager of a comic shop outside Philadelphia called Fat Jake's Comicypt, Mr. Anderson, 35, works on his own fiction at night. He was a casual watcher of "The L Word," but when the contest was announced in the spring, he saw it as chance to get an audience with industry professionals. In the second week of the contest, voters picked one of his scenes, which touched on eating disorders and mental illness. "Being a straight male, I wasn't sure I could compete. But everyone was very welcoming," he says.

With press clippings about the "L Word" contest in hand, he met with a literary agent and signed a contract in July. He's also entered the HarperCollins contest, and has read four romance novels by popular author Julia Quinn to prepare. "As a struggling writer, you've got to take advantage of every opportunity afforded to you. You really never know where your break is going to come from," he says.

At the same time, however, many fan-fiction writers shield their identities online and keep their pursuit secret from friends and colleagues. Meredith Elliott, who works at a theater company in Vancouver, British Columbia, has a following for her writings based on the TV show "House," but has only told her mother about her hobby.

"There's a sense of guilt. I always feel that I should not be using somebody else's characters and should be doing my own writing," she says. "But then I remember I am doing my own writing."

Write to John Jurgensen at john.jurgensen@wsj.com

The roots of the fan fic movement (podcast):

<http://podcast.mktw.net/wsj/audio/20060915/pod-wsjwknd/pod-wsjwknd.mp3>

Websites of the Month

Life imitates Star Trek

http://content.techrepublic.com.com/2346-22_11-33687.html?tag=nl.e138

Tech Republic advertises itself as "Real World. Real Time. Real IT", but they don't hide the fact that they are sf geeks. Here's a photo story they did about Star Trek inspired real technology. I didn't know that a

company actually made a tricorder!

Tales of Future Past

<http://www.davidszondy.com/future/futurepast.htm>

Tales of Future Past is an illustrated online collection of historical predictions about the future, mostly from popular magazines of yore.

David Szondy created this expansive look at how we thought the future was going to be. He pairs photos, drawings and advertisements from previous eras with his own irreverent and interesting commentary, resulting in insights such as, "Why is it that whenever anyone depicts a water planet they always show the inhabitants swimming about everywhere? You don't see people in Venice sloshing about in the Grand Canal. Try that and you'll end up with some kind of rash."

DragonCon Costumes

<http://dalemortonstudio.blogspot.com/2006/09/more-unique-costumes-from-dragoncon-06.html>

Some of the costumes from this year's DragonCon. Check out Pimpin' Vader (an urban nightmare!).



Calendar and Maps

October 13, 2006	Several Unlimited Meeting Jamie Ritchey 4729 Kinglet 713 729-8639
October 27, 2006	Video Party Erika Frensley 4701 Kinglet St 713-729-7211

