

GAMING, COMICS, MOVIES, AND GENERAL GEEKINESS

THE GEEK GAZETTE

AN M. SCOTT PUBLICATION

VOLUME I, ISSUE 3 SEPTEMBER 2006

FREE TAKE ONE

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

Well here it is September once again. The leaves are falling and the Hickory tree in front of my house is making a mess of my yard. Never the less it is still my favorite time of year. There is just so much to look forward to. Cooler weather, and some of the best holidays the year has to offer.

Halloween is just around the corner and after you get your trick or treatin done you and the gang can always sit down and enjoy a round of your favorite horror RPG.

Maybe even a Arkham Horror marathon for you board gamers. Then there are the movies! While horror movies may not be the most cinematically complicated movies around, most of us love a good horror flick.

Soon after that we get to look forward to Thanksgiving. Pumpkin pie, Turkey and of course more opportunities to gather with friends and loved ones to game or talk about games or comics.

Then Christmas/X-mas/Yule, or what ever you may call the winter holiday, will be here before you know it. Which is usually a good time for geeks

to hit Santa up for all the cool stuff they've wanted the whole year. As a matter of fact starting next month, and continuing through the December issue, we will have a feature showing you some of the coolest things that surely belong on any geeks wish list.

This month you may notice a few articles are missing. But don't despair because they will return. However this month we are proud to have our first interview and with none other than fan favorite Jonathan Coulton.

This month we are trying to change things up a bit. The lengths of some of our features have changed, while other features will only appear on a bi-monthly basis. We are aiming for a more even balance between editorials and reviews as well as more diverse articles. Plus we will try to fit in actual product reviews when possible. This month we have Rifts: Ultimate Edition. You will likely see us experimenting with more changes in the coming months as we continually strive to bring you the biggest bang for your buck...so to speak.

Alpha Flight Returns.. sort of.

As any Alpha Flight fan worth his weight in corn chips knows our favorite Canucks were killed in Avengers #16. Now I, like most AF fans, was not pleased with this particular turn of events. In all of comicdom there is really only one high profile Canadian team of heroes, Alpha Flight. While not all AF fans are Canadian, the team was always a favorite and with good reason. They were a little different from the rest of the capes. Which is one of the reasons that die hard fans enjoyed reading their adventures their less than stellar sales notwithstanding. Despite the fact that AF alumni have been popping up around the Marvel U and their frequent Exiles appearances Marvel decided to kill them. But apparently they had a plan.

Riding on the coattails of Civil War creators Michael Oeming and Scott Kolins plan to revive our favorite Canadians, at least in spirit. Come early 2007 Omega Flight will replace Alpha Flight as Canada's premier super team. According to a quote from Mr. Oeming the team will have an obvious supernatural focus, much like the original AF, which is where the similarities seem to end.

While there will be someone in the Guardian suit all the rumors and speculation say it will not be the original wearer. As a matter of fact it has been said there will only be one Canadian on the team. As the teaser image that was released (on the right of this page) shows there may only be one member on the new team that was also a member of the original AF. There have been a few confirmations but the roster is mostly speculative.

Guardian— someone new or a clone in the suite.

Talisman—the only former AF member

Continued page 2....

ARTICLES AND STUFF OF INTEREST

- *Jonathan Coulton Interview*
- *Podcast Quorner: Nuketown Radioactive*
- *All I want for Christmas is ... Everything!*



The new Alpha Flight

Do you have questions or comments you would like to share? Any stories or topics you would like to see covered or added to the Gazette? Then feel free to let us know.

geekgazette@yahoo.com

Download us off the web

<http://geekgazette.tripod.com/>

PRODUCT REVIEW— RIFTS: ULTIMATE EDITION

After a catastrophe activates the Earth's ley lines rifts open to other dimensions. These rifts allow all sorts of beings to travel from their own realms to Earth. Demons, vampires, Dragons, and all nature of alien life forms cross over changing the very face of the world.

Players assume the roles of characters trying to live in a world that is no longer their own. This is the basic premise and appeal of Rifts.

The Good

Rifts is a fabulous and original setting that seems to incorporate the elements of every roleplaying genre. If you want to play high fantasy one night and sci-fi the next you can. Pretty much any style of game is possible with

Rifts. There are countless races (R.C.C.'s), and character classes (O.C.C.'s) for players to choose from. This not only leads to but encourages players to be as creative as possible.

Palladium uses the same system in all of their games which allows players to jump from one system, such as Rifts, to the next, like Palladium Horror, with little trouble. Which is one of the more appealing aspects of the entire system. The books are a great read and even if you don't play the system, the background and setting itself can inspire tons of great ideas to use in any campaign. The books are a great resource for every gamer.

Rifts has been accused of having a large learning curve, but I disagree. An experi-

enced gamer would have little trouble figuring out the system.

While character creation does take some time, it's fairly cut and dry. This approach to character creations results in detailed PC's.

The Bad

The book Rifts: Ultimate Edition is billed as the only thing you need to begin playing, which is sort of true. While you can begin playing with just this book don't expect to get much out of it. R:UE contains only one alternative race, Dragon. While there are numerous O.C.C.'s to start they are very unevenly matched. Making a party with a Ley Line Walker, a Rogue Scholar and Glitter Boy will lead to a party where many adventures will leave one or more members with little to

do. This holds true for enemies as well, some are just too powerful for an average PC to handle. The system uses two different damage systems depending on how powerful the characters/races/weapons which also lends to an unbalanced game.

R:UE also has little information for the game master to work with in terms of enemies. There are no NPC stats, and no monster stats. Instead you will need to buy more books to get these things. None of this information is contained in any single book, but instead spread out over many books. There is no monster compendium, and the game master's book is pretty much a list of equipment, and skills. The book is also not well organized. Part of the reason character

creation takes so long is trying to find all the things you need. This is very frustrating for newbies. Poor organization is probably my biggest complaint with the game. R:UE also doesn't contain character sheets. Instead the back of the book is filled with a product catalog so that you can buy more Rifts books. Which you will need to do if you actually want to get the most out of the system.

The Verdict

All in all a great setting with something of interest for nearly any role-player. Definitely something that should be picked up if you have the cash. While I enjoyed the game, this is fair warning that you will need to invest a lot in books and time to truly enjoy it. Which may be too much for some gamers.

NEWS AND RUMORS

Trying to ride the coattails of the hero craze in Hollywood NBC will be premiering Heroes on Sept. 25th. They say it's Lost with superpowers...hmmm....

Congrats to Paul and Fin @ Yog Soggoth.com for winning an Ennie for best fan site at Gen Con 06...

Our heartfelt condolences to Steve Erwin's family. The Crocodile Hunter passed away after being stabbed through the heart by a Sting Ray on Sept. 4th...

The Ghost Rider is coming!! The Ghost Rider is coming!! Last report it was due in Feb. 07, but they've moved the date on us before....

The cast has been confirmed for the upcoming Dragonlance animated movie. For more details check out [www.dragonlance-movie.com/...](http://www.dragonlance-movie.com/)

Alpha Flight *Continued from front page*

Arachne - Apparently a refugee due to the Marvel U Civil War

U.S. Agent/Captain America - This one makes little sense unless it's Canada's own version, like Capt. Canada or something, because neither Agent nor Capt. A has any business joining a Canadian team

And finally Beta Ray Bill - this is the one I don't get. Not only is he not Canadian but he's not even from earth. Maybe it's because I don't like the character that makes his presence seem wrong but his status on the team has been confirmed.

I'm a little disappointed that Marvel has, apparently, opted to turn AF in to the Avengers Canada and I only hope they don't play up that concept. I've dogged Marvel for having stupid ideas before and they proved me wrong. Let's hope they can do it again.

PODCAST QUORNER

This month I will be focusing on the first podcast that I ever listened to, Nuketown Radioactive.

Some of you may recognize the name Kenneth Newquist from his articles in Knights of the Dinner Table, which is how I came to know of him. His articles led me to his website Nuketown Radioactive (<http://www.nuketown.com>) which he began in 1996. The site contains general geek information, news, reviews, and pretty much whatever else he feels like writing.

In the Spring of 2005, inspired by other podcasts such as Comicology, Geek Fu Action Grip and Evil Genius Chronicles, Kenneth decided to do his own show. Figuring that it would be a nice complement to the website he started the Nuketown Radioactive podcast.

While not strictly focused on roleplaying, Kenneth does discuss RPGs quite

often. But he is just as prone to discuss the new season of Battlestar Galactica, music, his children, job or he may do a board game review like the one for Arkham Horror.

The show is not exactly on a regular schedule, at least not recently. But you can pretty much depend on a minimum of one show per month, more if he has time. Although he says that will change soon. Regardless the show never fails to be entertaining and informative.

Nuketown is a little different from most other geek podcast as there is only one host. While he has had guest on the show that kind of acted like co-host, Kenneth is pretty much a solo act.

As I mentioned before he is just as prone to discuss his life and how it affects his geek interest as he is to discuss those same interest. This difference is one of the things I find appealing about the show. It's a very personal

show.

Nuketown is not just eighty minutes of him cracking jokes and discussing roleplaying or comics. This is one of the other things that sets the shoe apart from many similar podcasts and makes it a little easier to relate to the host. Come to think of it Nuketown is a lot more like an audio-blog, than a gaming/comic podcast in many ways. While this style of show may not be unique in the realm of podcasts, it is rare to find one that is done this well. (I can only think of a few others, but more on them in coming issues)

Also Kenneth doesn't seem to feel obligated to do a one hour plus show. He just gets on, discusses whatever he has planned to discuss and that's it. Shows generally run well under the hour mark, half an hour on average. Which if you are like me and listen to your favorite podcast while driving, a shorter show means you are more likely to finish it

before you arrive at your destination. Plus the shorter format is easier to burn to disc.

The fact that Nuketown is more about general geekiness than any specific topic makes it not only one of my favorites, but a show I highly recommend. I have been introduced to many new and interesting topics or points of interest because of this show. As a matter of fact Nuketown is where I first heard about Jonathan Coulton who we interview in this very issue. Nuketown also introduced me to many of the podcasts I now listen to regularly. He has a pretty good grasp of what appeals to geeks, so the reviews and articles, on both the site and show, are generally spot on and informative.

If you are looking for a more well rounded, general geek podcast this is the one for you.

You can check out Nuketown @ (<http://www.nuketown.com>) or subscribe through itunes.

SURFING THE NET

While surfing the net this month I found a few sites that are definitely of interest. They may not be specifically for gamers or comic fans but they do contain information that could be of use or interest to most geeks.

www.sacred-texts.com/index.htm

This is one of my favorite sites. Basically it's an online compilation of various text ranging from various religious text to the works of H.P. Lovecraft. There are spell

books, books on UFOs, and Alchemy text all in an easy to read format. I have used this site several times for ideas to use in some of my campaigns. Many of the text seem to be quite ancient so if you need the title to an ancient tome this is a good place to start. This site is also a good reference site for writers who want to add an little historical reference to their stories.

www.timewastersguide.com/index.php

This is one of those site you can go on when you have nothing to do. (Just don't let your boss know.) There are reviews for RPGs, and movies as well as a variety of interesting articles. Definitely one to put in your favorites.

www.alphaflight.net/

While the focus of this site is Marvel's Alpha Flight series it is also a great place for ideas in a super powered campaign. Especially if you are an Alpha Flight fan and

aren't we all? The forums are also a good place to hang out and discuss matters of comic geekiness, even if you are not an AF fan.

www.about.com/

This is one of those great sites that most people know nothing about. There is information about nearly any topic, and is very user friendly. Each topic generally has links with even more information concerning which ever topic you are inquiring about.

An interview with Jonathan Coulton

If you listen to geek podcast or read the Geek Gazette you've probably heard the name Jonathan Coulton once or twice. Mr. Coulton is a talented musician that embraces the concept of geek music in a way that is unlike any other performer that I have encountered. His music is funny and serious at the same time. With a sly wink and a nudge he can present you with the most ridiculous of notions in the most sincere way. Unlike other niche musicians Mr. Coulton's music can make you laugh or make you think.

Hailing from Colchester CT, he began his musical career as a drummer in his high school marching band, eventually switching to guitar. His love of music, which he studied in college, and performing followed him throughout college and continues to this day.

His music covers topics as varied as the loyal fans who enjoy it. Whether he's singing about a disgruntled computer programmer, Bigfoot or broken hearts his songs range from the truly geeky to the sincerely emotional. Even the most absurd subject is treated with what Mr. Coulton refers to as a sincere truth. He is a truly talented and imaginative performer who gives a part of himself to his fans with each song and only ask that they listen and enjoy. A true rarity in this selfish, American Idol society where most artist expect much more than they ever give to their fans.

Geek Gazette: From the bio on your website you obviously have a love for music and performing, but have you always had an inclination towards more humorous music?

Jonathan Coulton: Definitely. I loved Tom Lehrer as a kid, even though I didn't get all the jokes. And when I first started writing the funny stuff came pretty naturally. Though I tend to oscillate between funny and sad – I think my first song ever was about a guy who wakes up on a cold rainy day and feels

lonely. Not so funny actually. And my favorite songs are the ones that are balanced precariously on the edge between the two.

GG: Do you think your musical interest and abilities were natural or were you brought up in that kind of environment?

JC: Ah, nature vs. nurture. I'd have to say a little of both. My parents are both very musical people, and I was singing harmony with my family in the car as soon as I could speak. And I remember as a kid using two tape recorders to try and recreate the vocals for That Boy (Ringo's Theme). Actually, it sounded terrible. I do think to be a musician you need to have some innate abilities, but it also definitely helps to have people around you making music.

GG: What artist or bands to you feel had the most impact on you musically?

JC: Answering this question always feels like pulling my pants down in front of an audience. Get ready for the free show everybody. I've always loved The Beatles and their offspring. Though I'm into the sensitive folk singer songwriter vibe as well. Watch this: Dan Fogelberg! Billy Joel! Simon and Garfunkel! And vocals really get me going, which is why I loved listening to old Whiffenpoofs records as a kid. These days I'm very strongly influenced by (read: derivative of) They Might Be Giants, Ben Folds and Fountains of Wayne.

GG: Your songs not only show your talent as a musician but your incredible imagination, where do you get the inspiration for your lyrics?

JC: I'm a geek at heart, so I have this background noise of geeky stuff, both popular culture and actual science. On the stove a pot is simmering and in it are Avagadro's number, some Star Trek episodes, Bernoulli's principle, and all the James Bond movies. I'm often writing about misunderstood characters - I like to

use all this stuff to get a feeling of longing, or a bad breakup, or any kind of bottled-up personality. Monsters who don't get why everybody's running away...

GG: Unlike Weird Al or Adam Sandler the humor and geekiness in many of your songs is very subdued, if you don't listen to the lyrics you could miss it. A perfect example of this is Under the Pines, where you never actually state that it's Bigfoot and Leonard Nimoy. Do you write your songs aiming for this subtlety or does it just come out that way?

JC: That one I definitely kept as subtle as I could. I try to be as sincere as possible, even when I'm writing about Bigfoot and Nimoy getting it on. There's a danger in doing such goofy subject matter, because it's easy to slide into the realm of "novelty songs" (some people would say that I'm there). Sometimes the more direct approach just sounds clunky and contrived to me, and in a song like that the word "Bigfoot" would stick out like a boiled egg in the middle of a wedding cake.

GG: As I am sure you know a large portion of your fan base is the "geek" community, do you consider yourself a geek?

JC: ? chr(89) + chr(101) + chr(115) + chr(46)

GG: Speaking of geeks a great many of us that listen to your music, and several of the podcast that have spotlighted your music are RPG players and comic book collectors Yet, I have never heard one of your songs that focuses on either of these topics, have you ever thought about doing one?

JC: I have, though I don't actually have a lot of experience with comics and RPG. I know: I call myself a geek? I didn't get into D&D because the learning and buying curve seemed like too much trouble, and I'm afraid to even get involved with something like WoW because I know that I would spend all my time on it. It also feels a little gimmicky to me – one of those subjects that can all too easily slip

Jonathan Coulton *continued...*

into the novelty zone. I wouldn't want to write about those topics unless I could find some kind of sincere truth in there to address (not that there isn't any sincerity in RPG and comics, just that it hasn't revealed itself to me yet). Freakin muse – what are you gonna do?

GG: First of May, I Feel Fantastic and Skull Crusher Mountain are three of my personal favorites, which one of your songs is your personal favorite or which one do you love to play the most?

JC: My favorites to play live are the funny/sad ones. I love introducing “I Crush Everything” as a song about a giant squid who hates himself. The audience gets all ready for hilarity, and there are a couple of moments where they feel like they're going to get it, but then it just gets sadder and sadder until everybody's crying. It almost makes the audience uncomfortable, which I find thrilling. Of course Skullcrusher Mountain and First of May are both exciting to play because it's really fun to watch the punchlines hit, especially with an uninitiated audience.

GG: While all of your songs are better than a lot of the music on the radio, you continue to put out mostly humorous, off beat songs, why? With songs like When You Go you obviously have the ability to write mainstream music, why stay off the radar?

JC: Somehow it's easier for me to get at what I want to express by going through the offbeat subjects. I don't know why that is. Maybe I'm afraid of writing about myself, and so I have to do it with a sneak attack. It's also that I can't often get any traction when I start with a premise like “this song will be about a boy who loves a girl.” I need a hook of an idea to hang the song on, and until I have that, I just can't get excited enough to generate anything that I like.

GG: Some of the fan made videos for your songs are pretty good, did you encourage this or was this something the fans started?

JC: I think that I encouraged it – all my songs are released under a Creative Commons license that allows for any non-commercial re-use of the music, so the permission to do it is there explicitly. But I've been overwhelmed by the number of people who have taken up the challenge. All these different styles and techniques, all these people spending hours and hours working on a video for one of my songs; it's incredibly gratifying. And I love the idea that the creative process doesn't stop when I finish a song – obviously the beholder of any piece of art becomes part of the creative process by interpreting what they see or hear, but this goes past that. It's like we're collaborating on something beyond the song.

GG: Your fans are a very loyal group and I've heard it commented that you are the geek equivalent to Jimmy Buffet. Do you see yourself this way?

JC: Jimmy Buffet. OK, I'll take that. I get a lot of labels like “Balladeer” or “Troubadour” and I accept them gratefully. But I'm not going to come up with some shark fin dance that everybody has to do at my concerts. OK, maybe a zombie thing, but no shark fin stuff.

GG: Since Jimmy Buffet Fans are called Parrot Heads, what would you call Jonathan Coulton fans?

JC: JoCoists? Coultonistas? Half-pony, half-monkey monsters?

GG: The internet has become the bane of the music industry, yet you seem to have embraced it. Do you think you could have achieved the following you have with out it?

JC: Absolutely not. Something's happened over the last year, and it had little to do with any of my activities in the real world. I'm well aware that what I do is pretty niche, and not that attractive to “mainstream radio” or “record labels” or “anyone with money.” The internet has allowed me to reach the pockets of people who would like my music. That's an

old story by now, but it's no less true. Whatever success I've had so far would not have been possible without broadband and the mp3 format.

GG: Even if you never get a big time recording deal, do you see yourself continuing to play and produce music for the masses?

JC: I hope so – as long as I can stand it. At some point it may become necessary for me to get some kind of a job that makes money, when I have a midlife crisis and need to buy a sports car RIGHT AWAY. But for now I'm getting so much pleasure out of writing and playing and connecting with people, it's hard to imagine giving it up.

GG: What exactly is a Spizzsink and a Wiffenpoof?

JC: Spizzwink and Whiffenpoof. Both are a cappella singing groups at Yale where I went to college. A little dorky maybe, especially if you've never seen it before – you walk into a room and there's a bunch of college guys dressed in tuxedos singing “Midnight Train to Georgia,” I can understand why you might be a little thrown. But when you're in it, it's such a thrill. It's honestly one of the greatest musical experiences I've ever had, just singing harmony with a large group of people. And you get a lot of tail. I mean a LOT of tail. Just kidding.

If you aren't already a fan of Jonathan Coulton's music but you are interested in finding out more about this talented geek balladeer check out his website, www.jonathancoulton.com.

From his site you can download songs, buy CD's or get on the message forums and rub elbows with other half-pony half-monkey monsters. You can also subscribe to his Thing a Week podcast through itunes and download his latest geeky creations or subscribe to The Jonathan Coulton Project and download the fan made videos to his songs.

THE GEEK GAZETTE

E-mail:
geekgazette@yahoo.com

Or on the web at
<http://geekgazette.tripod.com/>



GAMING, COMICS, MOVIES,
AND GENERAL GEEKINESS

Random Thoughts

Here is a list of what is on our minds during the month of September 2006.

- ◆ Mutants and Masterminds second edition RPG. I love this game!
- ◆ Serenity RPG. 2nd only to M & M 2e
- ◆ Battlestar Galactica RPG. Serenity System+ BSG = Mal vs. the Cy-lons. Oh Yeah!
- ◆ My name is Earl. It's just funny.
- ◆ Peanut Butter & Jelly sandwiches with the crust cut off. Just like mom used to make.
- ◆ Ghost Rider movie
- ◆ Spiderman 3
- ◆ 52
- ◆ Battlestar Galactica season premier
- ◆ Heroes series debut
- ◆ What ever happened to d20 modern Spectaculars?
- ◆ Why isn't there a Pokemon table top RPG? It would be a great way to draw in younger players.

Convention Calendar

If you are like me then going to a convention only get you revved up to attend more. Once a year just isn't enough! So I have put together this list of conventions for the remainder of the year by month. I make no claims that this is a complete or comprehensive list, just all the ones I know about or could find. I will try to add more as I find out about them and hope to have a very comprehensive list by the time 2007 rolls around. If you know of any gaming, sci-fi, or comic book conventions that are not on my list feel free to email the name and website and I will be glad to add them to the list.

September

- Flatcon
September 30 2006
www.flatcon.com
- Buckeye Game Festival
September 28– Oct. 1 2006
www.buckeyebordgamers.org/buckeyegamefest.htm

October

- Charcon
October 7 2006
www.charcon.org
- Fallcon
October 7 & 8 2006
www.mncba.com/
- Oshcon
October 7-8, 2006
www.oshcon.org/
- Gamercon
October 13-25
www.gamercon.com
- Ubercon
October 20– 22 2006
www.ubercon.com

- Uncon
October 23-29 ,2006
Wizards of the Coast Internet convention
<http://wizo.wizards.com/uncon/pages/index.php>

November

- Rockcon
November 3-5 2006
<http://rock-con.com/Rockcon2006/index.html>
- Windycon
November 10-12 2006
www.windycon.org/

** We still need more convention information so if you know of any conventions that are not listed email us the website address and we will be happy to add them to the list**

Set your Tivo

- My name is Earl season premier Sept. 21st.
- Heroes debuts September 25 on NBC.
- Smallville season 6 premier September 28th. CW
- Supernatural season 2 premier September 28th CW
- Dr. Who season premier September 29th on Sci-Fi channel
- Lost season 3 premier October 5th on ABC
- Battlestar Galactica season 3 premier October 6th Sci-fi channel
- Family Guy season premier October 10th FOX