EXPLORING OTHER PLANETS:

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF SCIENCE-FICTION FANDOM

by

RENÉE MONIQUE PELTON

(Under the direction of Jay Hamilton)

ABSTRACT

This autoethnographic study focuses on fandom surrounding the show *Stargate: SG-1* and a convention for the *Stargate* franchise. The goal of this study is to give a personal account of the exploration of fandom and highlight the interaction fans have with the show, as well as with other fans. It focuses on the attendance of a *Stargate* convention held by Creation Entertainment, but also draws attention to fan fiction, fan art and simming. Other topics discussed throughout are: fan cultures, researching fandom, celebrity, media influence, stereotypes and media portrayals, and the interaction between fans and the media content they celebrate. This study will lead to a better understanding of how fans interact with each other, the amount of interaction that large media corporations allow between their product and the fans, how celebrity culture is created through fan adoration, and the impact each of these can have on a person's life.

INDEX WORDS: Science Fiction, Autoethnography, *Stargate*, Convention, Fandom

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Thank you to my family and friends who have always stood behind me and believed in me, even when I had trouble believing in myself. To my Mom: Thank you for always giving me every opportunity to become a better person, for teaching me and letting me learn my own lessons, and for never letting me fall alone. To my Dad: Thank for showing me what's it's like to have a Dad. I'm so glad it's you.

To my ever-faithful copy-editor, Rachel, without whom this thesis could **never** have been written: BFF4EAA, totally. To that friend I'll always have: I can't wait to take over the world. And to all the other important people in my life, especially my brothers and sisters, thank you for making me who I am today, putting up with me through so much, and always letting me know I'm loved.

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CHAPTER ONE

Unlocking the Gate

That second glass of wine took the edge off. This third glass may actually lead to me enjoying myself. I still can't believe where I am and I can't believe I paid to be here. I can't believe I paid *that much money* to be here. I can't believe I'm going to have to write a thesis on this experience. I wonder if I should edit out how much alcohol helped me survive. I bet my committee won't want to read about that.

If only I'd known that day when I walked into class that I would end up in the middle of nowhere New Jersey, surrounded by genre fans, drinking. It was such an unassuming day; rainy but harmless. As always, on Friday mornings, it was difficult to drag myself out of bed, but it was a required course nonetheless. I don't think I ever realized a class assignment could affect my life so greatly. It hadn't happened before, and a large part of me hopes it never happens again.

> *"That's a horrible opening paragraph."*
>
> "Thanks, but I have to start somewhere. Plus, that was two paragraphs."
>
> *"It wasn't even raining."*
>
> "Well, no, but I'm allowed a few creative liberties. Such as making you a person, so that I don't seem so crazy."
>
> *"Can I be named Antonio?"*
>
> "No."
>
> *"Then you can't make me a person."*
>
> "Sorry, but I'm making you a person."

"So are you going to keep lying to your readers? First you change the weather, and then you make me a person. What's next?"

"That's why I called it an 'imaginative reconstruction' in my proposal. This way I have the ability to change details around and tell it in a way that expresses what I feel is important."

"Whatever, liar. I think you just have a god-complex."

"Shut up, I'm trying to be creative here. It's important that I tell my story in a well thought out and interesting way. I need to be able to focus on what I want to say, how I want to say it, and exactly what I want to present."

"Interesting? Well thought out? The first two paragraphs don't even begin to discuss the topic. You should try to be clearer."

For clarification's sake, this whole thing started with class presentation. It was one of those the-teacher-is-tired-of-teaching-so-let's-make-the-students-present-each-subject class projects where you sign up for articles and then each of your colleagues presents a topic to the class. It's supposed to be invaluable experience at giving presentations, but it turns into invaluable experience at doing anything else while looking like you're paying attention.

It's also never really an exercise in signing up for a topic that piques your interest. Maybe the first five people to get the list can claim that, but I always get it at the very end when the only topics left are the ones people either don't want, or don't understand. This is how I got stuck with fandom as my topic; my choice was between fandom and something including the word hegemony. I decided fandom sounded more fun. No, I had no idea what it was.

"Nice, come right out with it. No suspense or build up. Just go straight for the jugular."

"I don't want some long drawn-out introduction. I just want to make clear that I was in a class and had to research fandom for a presentation. Readers don't need to know more than that, right?"

"No, but you could put a little more of that 'thick description' in there. Make it something people would want to read."

"I'm trying to be descriptive. I guess it's coming across as slightly more sarcastic towards the class I was in than descriptive. I'll work on that. But, I figure that giving the least amount of information about the class itself while still getting across *how* I discovered the topic would be best. Then, I'm going to tell a little bit about what fandom is before I tell why I was interested in it. I think the readers would have to know what fandom is before they can understand why I was so intrigued."

"I think you need to give your readers more credit. They could probably follow you if you started in a different place."

"Well, I don't know who they are, and I don't know what meaning they're going to create from this. I think they should know a little bit *about* fandom before they start to think I'm crazy for studying it."

"So you're starting here because you're uncomfortable with the topic? You don't want people to think you're strange?"

"No, I just don't want them all to think that I was into all of this 'fandom' stuff before the class. I didn't know anything about it before then."

"So you're uncomfortable with the topic. You don't want to be labeled a 'fan.'"

"I guess so. Yeah, I don't want to be labeled a fan so if I start here they can't dismiss me or my ideas because I'm one of 'those people.' 'Those people' were frightening."

"You are frightening. How can you be so uncomfortable with your topic?"

"I'm hoping that will be explained somewhere throughout this story."

I don't get it. Why do they flock? It's just an actor. A television actor at that—not even 'movie star' status. I mean, sure he's hot, but he's not the kind of gorgeous that is worth that kind of adoration. You'd think Brad Pitt just walked through the door the way these people swoon. I just don't understand what's so special about actors. I have friends who are actors. My roommate was one for years. They're just normal people like everyone else.

It's no wonder they need body guards with fake plastic sci-fi weapons to protect them. If I was an actor and came to an event like this I'd probably have five follow me around, just in

case. These people seem kind of scary like that. And they're talking again; this conversation is

becoming cyclical. If I hear one more person talk about, "How cool is it that they'll just hang

out with the fans in the bar?" I might scream. Or maybe I should just have another glass of wine.

It's funny that being here makes me second guess everything I've studied and thought

about fandom in the past year. I look back at my eager first-semester graduate student self who

jumped into that class project with over-achiever stars in my eyes and I want to go back and

scream, "WAIT! Pick that topic on hegemony." I know it sounds like I truly despise this topic,

but that isn't true. Even sitting here, in a bar surrounded by 'fans' being horribly uncomfortable,

I'd have to say I'd do this over again. It is quite the experience—even if I do feel like I'm

exploring some other planet.

> *"I would too."*
>
> "You'd what?"
>
> *"Have the bodyguards follow me around."*
>
> "I'm not sure that'd help too much. It turns out the body guards are really just über-hard-core fans who end up being paid to come to the convention. They had attended so many they were recognized by the people who ran security and offered a job."
>
> *"That's a pretty sweet deal."*
>
> "If convention attendance is your thing, I guess so. I know I can't believe how much money I paid to go—to get in free, if you'd attend anyways, would be pretty sweet. Also, getting to hang around one of the actors that you so wonderfully adore, yeah, that could be someone's dream job. Personally, I'd kind of like those three days of my life back if possible."
>
> *"From what you've said, your liver probably would too."*
>
> "So, I drank a lot the nights I was there. It's not like I got tanked in the morning. It was merely drinks at the bar and it was always after all the events were over. Never before at least 10pm. That has to count for something."
>
> *"No mini-bar?"*

"Actually, no. The hotel was one of the worst parts of the entire trip. It was a Crowne Plaza and it was supposed to be great. For the price I paid per night, it should have been. In the end it just became the icing on the proverbial cake that was this entire convention. It seems that Secaucus, New Jersey is kind of like reaching the sixth layer of hell—even without all the genre fans hanging around."

"*Do you really have to bring Dante into this?*"

"I really think from there on in to the rest of New Jersey, must have been lower hell."

I should have known when I first started researching fandom that this experience would be slightly surreal. I'm confused as to whether I'd do this again, mainly because of what I've learned about the people in the fandom world, what I've learned about myself, and what I've learned through the fandom world. All three have impacted me in drastic ways, and I'm still trying to figure out whether they balance out as mostly positive or negative.

As I said, I didn't actually know what fandom was at first. After signing up for the topic that day in class I went home and did some research. The academic articles alone made me stop in my tracks. I really wouldn't have guessed fandom was what it is from the label.

Fandom is Trekkies. It's the people who go to Vegas and get married by Captain Kirk impersonators on the recreation of the bridge of the Enterprise. They are the people who stand outside the theater in the freezing cold, dressed in a wookie outfit for a week in advance of the next Star Wars movie. They are the crazies who spend too much time watching television, and identify with the characters of the shows as if they were their personal friends.

I really couldn't understand how people gave this topic serious academic attention. How do you analyze the behavior of these zealots who take television too seriously? And after that, how do you write an article about them without using the word zealot? It was a surreal

experience to see the way these academics handled the topic without doing the one thing I can't

help but do here: make the fans come off as strange.

"Do you have to keep calling them names?"

"I haven't called them names yet. This was the first name."

"You called them, 'those people', already."

"That's not a name, that's a…descriptive statement. Plus, I'm back to the whole I-didn't-know-about-this-before-the-class thing. If I don't impress upon the reader now how horribly awkward my entrance into fandom was I don't think they'll get why it took so long for me to make it my thesis topic.
        Deciding on this topic was a big deal for me. I had to get past a lot of stereotypes and find answers to a bunch of embarrassing questions before I felt comfortable enough with myself and the topic to think of putting the two together."

"But you still have these issues. Like you just said, you make them come off as strange. Your entire first chapter is pretty much you justifying your interest in the topic and making the fans out to be weirdoes."

"And that's why I bring this up. I know that a lot of personal subjectivities are coming through here. I'm trying to portray these because the intellectual and emotional sides to the experience I went through are important. My story has value outside of myself.
        I think it's important to get across different things I learned throughout my thesis-writing experience. For instance, I realized during the entire process just how much effort it takes to make something that is uncomfortable into something that is comfortable."

"But you're not comfortable with this. That's apparent."

"Right, but it was cyclical. At first I was having lots of issues that I had to get over to use fandom as my topic. At one point, I got over them; then I went to this convention and now I have them again. That's what this experience did to me. I've finally learned that embracing a stereotype may actually be good for your sanity. I was open-minded, and then I went to the convention. I came back and I decided to close it again."

"I don't think you're supposed to admit that out loud. That's against every anti-stereotype thing that people try to do. Surely you can't be that closed minded."

> "I found out that I could overcome a stereotype to the extent of being able to justify *why* people participate in fandom. It was an interesting revelation that I was not expecting. Learning I couldn't personally find the evidence in my own experience to uphold my justification—that hurt my ego a little and was disappointing. Accepting the fact that under the right circumstances I'll willingly embrace a stereotype, consciously and wholeheartedly, merely to be able to make sense out of what I've experienced is a difficult thing to come to terms with.
>
> It's hard to accept that sort of reality about yourself. I started looking seriously into fandom because it intrigued me. I wanted to understand how and why the participants did what they did, and I wanted to know what it was like to practice in that realm. And, I think I learned more about how comfortable I am with myself in particular situations, how much immersion is enough to overcome stereotypes and to regain them, and how different other people can be from anyone else I've met before."

This really should be a television show. My entire trip through the fandom world could work as a mini-series plot. If I ever become a writer this will be an episode. I'm sitting in the bar, looking around at the genre fans and wondering where to start while drinking excessive amounts of alcohol to try to tame the awkward vibe that seems to follow me everywhere in this place.

I won't have anything to write about if I don't at least mingle. This is about personal experience, which seems to imply some sort of one-on-one interaction with the other people who are attending the event. I'm sure I'll have lots to talk about and tons in common with them. I mean, we have all been watching the same television show for over a decade—what else could possibly provide a stronger basis for friendship? There are a few people over by the pool table that seem to be close to my age—I'll start there.

When I started watching *Stargate* I was in high school. My parents were fans of the show, pretty much anything on the SCI-FI channel, and being the teenager in the house meant that I did not get to decide what was on the television. It was one of my favorite shows right away. Mostly because it had Richard Dean Anderson in it, and I had a pretty big crush on him when he played MacGuyver. Although he is much older now and liked to shoot guns rather than

save the world with ordinary household items, I started watching. It also helped the situation at home a lot as well because arguing over the television is never a pretty sight.

So, I started watching. After I started college, I didn't follow the show as much—a mere college student without the means to afford anything more than basic cable. Then along came this amazing invention called TiVo. When my parents had the ability to record the shows they enjoyed and watch them without commercials, they jumped all over it. This also meant that whenever I came home I could spend a couple of hours in front of the television and be caught up on my favorite shows. Thus, I stayed up to date with what was going on in the world of *Stargate.*

Again, I never thought that an innocent interest in a television show would bring me where I am today, and allow me to meet the people I am meeting, but it's funny how things like that work out. They're nice. Really, not any different than the few people I had the chance to interact with earlier today. They're nice people who just seem to love *Stargate* and want to meet other people who love *Stargate* as much as them. Maybe I got the wrong impression while listening to the questions they asked the actors earlier today. It is the first day. Maybe I'm just feeling so awkward being here that I'm not really grasping what it is that is really going on. I really need to try and fit in.

I'm in their environment, I need to adapt and change to fit their settings. That's what I've entered after all, the "social and cultural environment" of the fan.

> *"They have their own environments?"*

> "According to Cheryl Harris they do. Like the convention and where they meet online to talk and stuff."

> *"It sounds more like a zoo attraction."*

"Zoo attraction, another planet, whatever you need to call it to grasp how outside the normal realm of my world it was. But the environments are important, especially when I was first learning what fandom was. I explored a bunch of different environments on the internet which eventually led me to attending the convention.

It was, in my own way, like exploring different planets. Each different section of the fan world has its own rules and language that the participants adhere to and each one took some trial and error to try and understand even just the most surface part."

"Isn't that what some of these academic articles are on, though? Couldn't you just read them to get a grasp on the different aspects and rules in different environments? You'd think there'd be some sort of guide somewhere."

"The academic articles usually took the role of negating past research or analyzing the implications of behaviors—not so much mere description or how-to information about fandom. There were, of course, definitions and things of that sort that helped my discovery, but my participation in fandom was quite different than I expected."

"What do you mean by negate past research? Why would someone want to do that?"

"It seems that, on the topic, much of the past research lead towards creating the impression that fans were pathological in some way, and that their pathology was what led them to participate the way they did. Much of the newer research looks more towards normalizing or at least removing a lot of the personal biases from the research. Some even promote fandom in different ways, which is really more of a backlash against the past pathological ideas. That and the author of the book was an avid and active fan."

"So when these other researchers were critiquing the fans did they go with the same these-people-are-scary approach?"

"No, the researchers didn't just out and state that the fans are frightening, they 'other' them."

"'Other'?"

"Yeah, it's from Said's *Orientalism*."

I don't think I've ever stood out more in my life. And, as much as I love attention I don't think this is a positive thing.

One of the very nice people I just met began showing me her artwork. It is really very good, she undeniably has talent. But, all of it is related to *Stargate*. I put a lot of effort towards not smirking as I looked at the sketches of Richard Dean Anderson and other actors in various poses and settings. I'd never imagined them in one of those western saloon photo booth type poses before. It's new thing for me.

I'd read about fan art, but had never seen it in person or in front of the actual creator. I'm glad I was able to keep a straight face. Fan art was one of the many different 'fan environments' I had discovered during my immersion into fandom. I was aware of conventions, as well as a few other forms of "fan culture" that have occasionally made it to the media: online groups and discussion boards and fan magazines. But when I was first discovering the world that is fandom, fan art is one of the outlets I had never seen before. I also didn't know what filk music, "simming" or fan fiction was either.

I have to admit that a part of what drew me to this topic at first was the ingenuity of the fans. Who knew that media viewers are so creative and have so much time on their hands? The more I read the more I was shocked. I went from not knowing that people draw and paint their own pictures of a beloved television show to learning that they also write their own songs about it and play role playing games to simulate characters on the show. How had I never heard of this?

Wondering aloud, I asked if the fan artist ever did anything outside of *Stargate*-themed work. The little crowd hushed. I needed to backtrack. Was that the wrong thing to ask?

I have to try to explain myself—a difficult task after your third glass of wine—"I mean, you're very talented! These pictures are amazing. I'm just curious if you've ever done something else and tried to sell it? I'm sure people would pay for portraits and stuff, you're so

talented." There were far too many compliments in that statement for anyone to take it in the wrong way. I must have covered whatever genre faux-pas I may have made.

"*Stargate* **inspires** me, which is why I draw it. You can't be inspired by just *anything*. Plus, I've had people buy these. Some people *appreciate* this."

Shit.

Apparently there was not enough praising, or maybe there was too much, and now I just look like an ass. Lovely. I kind of feel like an ass too. I didn't mean anything offensive by my comment, but rather meant to praise her art. I guess that *innocently* insinuating that the "rest of the world" could appreciate her art if the subject matter was different seemed to be the only thing she took away from my comment. Thank God the subject just changed. I think I'll just sit back and listen for awhile.

> *"You're not making any sense. That whole "Orientalism" thing was about the portrayal of the East in the West."*
>
> "Right. That the portrayal of the East had an underlying purpose to it—Like Said says on page 273…"
>
> *"Thank you human citation machine."*
>
> "Shut up. Like I was saying, on page 273 Said states: 'My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence — in which I do not for a moment believe — but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting.' That's what I meant."
>
> *"So you're saying that these other researchers had an underlying ideological issue with the people they're studying? But they're supposed to be objective. Right?"*
>
> "That depends on their epistemology and theoretical framework, but the overall stereotype with research is that yes, it's *supposed* to be objective. The problem though, is that these researchers publish their findings, which have their own ideology laced throughout, and it's accepted as objective research. That gives the negative, biased, opinionated research salience as truth."

"So an epistemology is?"

"How you know what you know. I'm a constructionist. Possibly even a radical constructionist."

"Which means…"

"That in essence, there is no essence to be said."

"Very deep."

"Ha. Thanks. It's basically saying that the knowledge we have of the world and the people and things in it comes from our interactions with other people. This includes the space, time, and geographic place these interactions take place in, as they have just as much influence on the interactions, and the meaning made from those interactions."

"*Okay, so meaning comes from other people?"*

"No, it doesn't come from other people but our interactions with them. We create meaning, and to create this meaning there must be someone there to make it."

"So, meaning is dependent on people being around."

"Yes, nothing is intrinsically meaningful, but made meaningful through the creation of shared realities that hold meaning to those interacting in them."

"And now you'll have to explain the whole 'radical' part of this to me too since you're in such an explanatory mood."

"Okay, well, I'm not a *true* radical constructionist. I'm just kind of an idealistic constructionist. Basically I believe that people can create without outside interference."

"You mean to be original?"

"I mean complete originality. That's originality without the interference of other people or our own personal history."

"But, how is that possible? We always have our personal history with us… you can't detach from that."

"I can't tell you how, just that I think it is. Or, I at least hope it is."

Listening is working better. I keep interjecting small comments here and there of a slightly frivolous, amusing, and kind of ditzy nature, and I seem to be winning my favor back with the crowd. The crowd grew, during my self-induced silence, to include some of the convention "security." Dressed in full costume, they are now the main attraction as the other fans began quizzing them about how they were lucky enough to get that job, and how awesome it is to meet the actors personally.

Lucky may be a matter of opinion—but the security guards are certainly not shy or modest. They seem to have absolutely no problem explaining how they got where they are. One of them has just been to so many conventions and met the same security people at each event that they eventually were like, "Hey, I've been in security before, you need more people?" Then they were hired. This was a common theme through each of their stories.

> *"Were their stories very interesting?"*
>
> "Not really, as I said, they were a lot of the same. Most of them have normal jobs that they have to take off time from to attend the conventions. Although one of the ladies talked about how she had to threaten to quit in order to make it there. She found this job to be more important than her other job that merely lets her pay rent."

I think that maybe I'd never really heard of any of the fan spaces I kept learning about because I would never have thought to look for them.   I've never been struck with the idea or desire to write a song or draw a picture about my favorite television show or actor. I've also never participated with my favorite television show beyond watching it on television.

In fact, I haven't been too interested in television in quite awhile. I used to watch it a lot in middle school and high school, but once I started college I never found the time. *Stargate* was the only show that my interest really stayed without throughout that transition. I guess that's why I find it so intriguing that other people found the same value in a show I like.

As I said, I never had the urge to participate with a program beyond just watching. So I never would have fathomed "simming" as a character in my favorite show. I've always been pretty content with the product coming from my television. All of the fans actions beyond passively watching the show, seemed bizarre—just the way the media had always portrayed these people to be.

> *"Never had that desire, huh?"*
>
> "What? Had the desire to write a story using the characters of my favorite television show? No. It was a new thing for me when I tried."
>
> *"You tried?"*
>
> "Yes, it was part of the whole 'immersion' into fandom. I thought maybe if I tried to do some of the things that the fans do I could understand a little more about *why* they do it. So I wrote a couple of stories. And it wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be. The people who read them were very kind in their comments."
>
> *"So you not only wrote a story, you posted it online for other people to read?"*
>
> "Yeah. But you won't be able to find it because I didn't use my own name on it. I wasn't very comfortable with the idea of having my own name attached on much of what I tried in the fandom world so I made up my own online persona. I got a separate Gmail address and everything."
>
> *"Let me get this straight. Once you actually figured out that fandom was going to be your topic you 'immersed' yourself in the online fandom world, but were still so uncomfortable with the topic that you didn't ever put your real name on anything."*
>
> "Pretty much, yeah. I also joined a bunch of Yahoo and Google groups that are email discussion forums about the show, the romantic interests of the main characters, and such. I thought that stuff like that was all fans did so to understand any part of fandom I needed to do all the basic things to get a feel for it. I'm not sure if it's a flaw or not, but when I go about learning something I want to know *everything* about it—or as much as I can. So I tried the writing and the groups and I even created a character for the simming forum that I joined. Simming was by far the most surreal of the different fan environments that I tried, well, besides the convention."

So, bizarre really is the best word to describe it. A part of me, as I said, didn't really

believe that people participated in stuff like this. Or maybe I didn't want to believe that people

did this because the idea of it was so uncomfortable and awkward. But, another part of me was

intrigued with the idea of people actively creating material using their favorite media programs.

Talk about the media having an influence on someone's life! The idea of a television

program impacting someone is one of the reasons I started studying the media in the first place.

I watched a lot of television as a child, and look back fondly on the shows that shaped my

generation—I can see how much particular shows influenced my life, and my peers.

I remember in middle school when my family was forced to move outside of the town

that we were going to school in. We ended up getting a P.O. Box to have a local address so that

we wouldn't have to change schools. This was a huge deal because the town of Fort Mill had a

ban on MTV. *Beavis and Butthead* was the popular show of the time and was only on MTV, and

when I moved I suddenly had a few more friends that liked to come over and hang out on

Wednesdays when the show would air. Television actually improved my middle school social

life.

I've also grown up watching television with multiple networks and seeing first hand the

large part the media plays in current events. Now, I can look back with a critical eye and analyze

what I saw on television during certain events, like the Columbia disaster, the Oklahoma City

Bombings, Columbine and Desert Storm. I was just like many other people across the nation,

glued to my television set to glean whatever information possible—especially during Desert

Storm because I had a family member serving overseas.

It wasn't the actual events that changed my life, because I didn't experience any of them

in a personal way. My experience was mediated through television—and this mediation had an

effect on me. It moved me to tears over my uncle who was in Iraq and the children in the daycare in Oklahoma; it made me a little more frightened to go to school after seeing one boy in Colorado mow down his classmates; it showed me a glimpse into the reality of war, and it taught me to turn to television when I needed information.

But, even through all of this, watching television was still a passive act. I learned from the television, I enjoyed what I watched, but I never took what I saw and did something with it. That is why fandom intrigued me. Fans go beyond passivity.

When I first pictured fandom in my head, I saw someone sitting for hours in front of a canvas looking back and forth from their television screen to their canvas desperately to capture their favorite characters in an acrylic likeness. And, that may very well be happening somewhere. But I was just starting to learn what it meant for a fan to create.

I remember being so uncomfortable with the topic of fandom that whenever I researched it I would turn my computer to face away from the door. That way my roommate could not see what I was looking at should she happen to walk into my room.

> "I now understand why one of my roommates—who happened to be a total bitch—thought I was so strange. She used to make fun of me every Friday night when I didn't have plans to go out because I'd be excited to sit in front of my television and watch a new episode of *Stargate*. She used to call me a geek, not in a playful tone, but in a condescending you-don't-have-a-life tone. That same tone sounded in my head while I was sitting there and talking to those people."
>
> *"What, you looked down on them? Thought they didn't have a life?"*
>
> "Not exactly. But I did start thinking, 'Why the hell are you here? You don't have some other excuse like I do. Isn't there something else you could've done this weekend?' That wasn't the most non-condescending tone I've ever used."

I even erased my internet files and search history each time I would look something up about fandom, or visit a fan site, because it seemed so wrong. No one would ever believe I was

just looking it up for class. They'd always think in the back of their minds that I was one of "those people."

"Those people" are now standing in front of me describing how they bought their uniforms from the MGM costuming department. I thought they'd get the costume for free as employees. The get-up includes everything except the fake plastic sci-fi weapon, a.k.a. zat, which one security lady had specially made form a particular piece of redwood. It was hand carved specifically to go with the uniform and fit in the holster.

The security guards also seem to be full of all kinds of important fan information. It happens that one of them owns their own *Stargate* costuming business. So we could get our own off-world gear from him. They wouldn't be "official" but they'd look real since he based them off of the MGM costumes, and he works hard towards accuracy. "Sure, I'd love a business card."

As I grabbed the card I notice a necklace that one of the security people is wearing. It's a sterling silver charm in the shape of the earth symbol on the *Stargate*. It is very nice in a "you-are-wearing-a-symbol-from-a-television-show" kind of way. Taking the risk at making another major fan social faux-pas, I went out on a limb. "I love your necklace, how the heck did you find a charm like that?"

This didn't seem to be the wrong thing to ask at all. Point for me! "A lady I know specializes in *Stargate* jewelry. She comes to the convention in Vancouver every year. I think I have a card of hers around here too." I got someone talking and I'm getting *another* business card. Who knew I'd walk away with so many cards that would tell me about even *more* things I could buy that were *Stargate* related.

"Erased your internet files? HA! I think that you've now sufficiently portrayed how awkward you were about all this. Strategically erasing any evidence of online exploration of fandom from your computer… that's another level of disturbing."

"Thanks, I appreciate that. But as strange as fandom is and as uncomfortable as I am, it's an interesting concept to consider. The fans don't only sit on their couches and watch the program. They watch it, then they go online and talk about the show, and then they make stuff using the characters and plot, and then they create an entire online world merely for the further enjoyment of their favorite television show. It's a level of activity that goes beyond the demands of the medium."

"The demands of the medium. Television doesn't demand anything."

"It demands your attention, but in a passive form. You sit, you watch, you comprehend, you tune in again. The most active thing in that process is turning the channel, and buying the products that are being pitched in the advertisements.
        But, they don't necessarily *want* you to be active. It's not an active medium. The most activity they want is for you to go and buy the sponsor's products. The fans don't do merely this. They take it further than the owners and creators want. They take someone else's product that is not meant for manipulation and they turn it into something for their own enjoyment. They go from watching to interacting to creating."

"And then they go to conventions that revolve around the show and freak people like you out."

"Pretty much, yeah. But the convention really only highlighted the extent of the fans interaction with the show. Or at least the *perceived* interaction with the show and how much people are willing to pay for that connection. And it's an obscene amount of money—for very little value.
        I've never seen such a poor quality product for such high prices before, and these fans just ate it up. It makes me wonder if they knew any better, had experienced better production value, than what they were given at this convention. I really think I could have done better with a projector, a fog machine and a flash light…in a barn."

"What price are we talking here?"

"The 'Gold' tickets went for $369. That's just to the convention, not the hotel room, or anything else, and they weren't even as all-inclusive as they touted them to be. They were missing two actor's autographs and a workshop that was added to the list of events after they set the price of the ticket.
        What they got for that price was to be first in line at each event; a 'Gold exclusive' dessert party and breakfast, 'non-rushed' autographs with all the

guests—except those two that weren't added—the 'Friday night Cabaret', a 'free gift' when you arrived, and all this stuff they pitch as if it's great- like a wristband to not wait in line, and reserved seating."

"That seems like a lot."

"Yeah, well, most of it's a joke. Not that it doesn't happen—it just happens for everyone else in exactly the same way. The 'Gold Patrons' are just two feet closer to it all."

"What is that, like $50 a foot?"

"More like $100 per foot closer; and there wasn't anything to see there worth anywhere near that much money."

NOTES ON CHAPTER ONE

Dante, Alghieri. (1314) *The Inferno.* The Inferno is the first cantica in the book *The Divine Comedy*. In this cantica Dante lays out nine layers of hell. The sixth layer is the City of Dis and is the capital of the underworld. It marks the passage from upper hell into lower hell.

Geertz, Clifford (1973). *The Interpretation of cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc. In his first essay Geertz discusses Gilbert Ryle's ideas of "thin description" and "thick description." He states that thick description gives a more round and full context to a situation and allows for more meaning to be understood. Whereas "thin description" is a much more surface description that omits details important to meaning making. (pg. 7).

Harris, C.(1998). Introduction Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity. In C. Harris, and Alexander, A. (Eds.), *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (pp. 3-8). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton. According to Cheryl Harris fandom is defined in part as the, "…social and cultural environment…" of the fan. It is a very broad definition of fandom, yet reveals the

important aspect that the social world that is created plays in the entire subculture of a particular fandom.

Jenkins, Henry (1992). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.   Pg. 7

In the introduction Jenkins lays out his own personal involvement in the fan world and how he views other fans as, "…active collaborators in the research process." He also discusses the past media attention to fandom that he calls, "sensationalistic" and accuses of, "fostering misunderstandings" about the subculture.

He also states his expectations of his book clearly, "I want to participate in the process of redefining the public identity of fandom, to use my institutional authority to challenge those stereotypes, and to encourage a greater awareness of the richness of fan culture." I believe this statement alone shows that his account of fandom will be biased in some ways because his goal is not merely to discuss fandom, but to make others aware of its positive aspects.

Said, Edward (1979). *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

In this context Said's ideas on 'othering' are salient. The idea that there are purposes and values behind decisions that are made when portraying another culture, or subculture, are important to the fandom discussion due to the stereotypes that have been built through the media portrayal of fans.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

CHAPTER TWO

Dialing the Gate

It seems that everyone who has been to conventions before keeps talking about

Vancouver. So, going for broke with my new-found confidence in my place in the group, I ask

the nice security woman about it. "Vancouver. That seems to be what everyone is talking about,

how is that convention so different?"

"Vancouver is where they film *Stargate,* as you know, and at that convention you get to

have a tour of the set and they usually hold it during filming so that most of the actors can make

it out to appearances. It really is absolutely amazing."

"Sounds like it."

Good to know that this convention is not considered the epitome of the convention

network. I'm not impressed so far by the set up or the guest list—and that's all beyond the

production issues.

> *"Were these people enforcing anything other than who gets to be near the actors?"*
>
> "They were the doormen, the people who pointed where you needed to go and they were also the bouncers at the exclusive Gold patron dessert party and breakfast thing. Those were supposed to be very special events because you were able to meet the stars up close. It depended on which day it was, but the actors that attended the convention that day would go around and meet everyone individually at these exclusive events.
>   And there was, of course, a way to spend money while you were there as well. They called the dessert party a silent auction, and the breakfast party a silent auction for charity.   So, as the 'superstars' mingled around with the fans and their bodyguards, the people who were not being given attention could do what attendees do best—spend money."
>
> *"Of course."*

"I don't think there was actually one event the entire weekend that didn't involve spending money. It was the center of the entire convention."

"So, all that interaction that the fans think they're getting with the television show by attending the convention wasn't interaction as much as it was a way to give money to the show?"

"They don't even give money to the show—or the people who own the show. It all goes to the company that is putting on the convention, Creation Entertainment, who pays for the rights to the logos and other necessary copyrights to hold the events. I'm hoping they pay out the ear for the rights because that's the only way they could even begin to justify asking for as much money as they do, for how weak this convention was."

"Couldn't you have done something less expensive?"

"Yes, I could have. I didn't even spend more money than I thought I would, but I also didn't buy anything at the convention. It was, in the end, my own choice to put down the money to go to this convention. But somewhere between my desire to experience something new, my need for a thesis topic, my expectations of what my money should buy, and this convention—there was a disconnect."

"Did you attend either the breakfast or the dinner?"

"At first I was going to, and even tried to buy the GOLD ticket which would have been more expensive, but the day that I went to purchase the ticket it was sold out. So, I had to go for the ticket that was a step down and didn't include the dinner or breakfast. Had I spent the full amount on the GOLD ticket I think that I would be unhappier about the whole experience than I am now right now. Plus, I drank quite a bit and I don't think I'd have made it to the breakfast thing that was at nine am."

Production value throughout the fan world doesn't seem to have much salience as a concept. I learned this the first time I started to Google different fan activities. I had started the search with fan art, and learned quickly that even small sketches in which the characters were barely recognizable could be praised.

I was initially shocked when I found so many hits for fan art—some pitching fan videos, and others showing fan paintings or sketches. I was overwhelmed by the amount of material on the internet and the number of different pictures and videos. A lot of it was terrible. The videos

were usually decently put together thanks to editing software that is slightly more difficult to mess up, but even those weren't entertaining to watch.

I especially couldn't understand the people that put their real names on their artwork. I was shocked at how many people commented and praised the "artists" and supported them to make more, even when they were really terrible works of art. I am aware that the value of art is something that varies from person to person, but I like to think I'm an open minded person when it comes to art; I can appreciate anything from modern art to classical as well as tribal and new age creations. But I honestly had a difficult time finding value in much of what I found. Some of the artists even had their *own* fans. It just seemed so awkward to wrap my head around.

I felt the same when I started looking up other topics such as fan fiction and role playing games (RPG), or 'simming'. I couldn't understand any of the descriptions of what simming was since you can only interpret "…pretend to be part of the show…" in a certain variety of ways and none of those transferred to what I knew of the internet.

I read through a few different rooms on the *Stargate* RPG site I found and still didn't quite get how everyone interacted. What I did learn was that the fans that did this were strict about the rules, and about sticking to "canon." "Canon" meant sticking to the "real" world of the show. For example, you can't give your character wings unless he's an alien because that would be too "fake."   Yeah, fake.

> "I actually created a character on one of the sites. It's pretty funny because the site I was on is no longer there because the content was removed, 'upon request of MGM'."
>
> *"So the company is against people doing this?"*
>
> "I'd say so. It is taking copyrighted material and doing whatever you want with it. The fans on the site put a disclaimer about how they don't own any of it, but in the end even that isn't really respecting a copyright."

"True, but back to the simming thing… which character did you pick?"

"Well, I didn't pick any character in the show—there were a lot of people on the site and those were taken by the administrators of the site. That's why I had to create a character. That's right, I actually had to create a character and *apply* for them to be accepted.

My character had an entire interview session with one of the administrators who played the character of Teal'c. We're talking a multiple post conversation, all in narrative form, and from two different perspectives in order to create this scene between the two characters. The interaction was intriguing and a little confusing."

"What was your character's name?"

"I called her Dr. Madeline Lassiter. I made her an intercultural communications specialist so I wouldn't have to look up any science words and so I could stick with ideas I knew well. I also gave her an extremely rough life. It was fun making it all up and then justifying why she should be hired at *Stargate* Command. Not fun in an I'd-do-this-everyday kind of way, but more of an I'm-being-accepted-into-something kind of way. Plus, I didn't actually try this until I was doing a lot better with the topic of fandom and I felt more comfortable with my decision to study it."

"Okay, so what happened after your character got accepted?"

"Nothing. I set up my personal quarters—basically described what they'd look like and posted a few things in different places to try and get some interaction with other people, but nothing happened."

"They ignored you? You were ignored by the fan people? You're such a loser."

"I think it was more that they didn't know who I was. I didn't participate in the chat or anything else on the site so they didn't let me in the group. I had only really started simming a month before I left for the convention and I definitely didn't touch it after the convention—I was in de-tox, or something of the sort. However, it was good that there wasn't much interaction because I would have messed up other fans storylines on the site. But, I think I learned a lot from the interview session about how it was set up. I'm not sure I could seriously pull off contributing to a narrative about a mission or anything else."

"…A narrative about a mission?"

"Oh yeah, they can assign you to a *Stargate* team and send you to another planet and then it's you and the other three team members having a dialogue about what's going on. They also have strict rules about the base clock and keeping

posts within certain times that would be apropos to the base clock—and not going out of canon.”

“Wow, that's a lot of rules for a role playing game.”

“Yeah, a lot of rules, and also a lot more effort than I'm willing to put into something that's supposed to be merely for entertainment value.”

I sip from my glass. I am apparently out of alcohol again. The conversation continues on about the Vancouver convention, and one of the security people promises to bring pictures down tomorrow night to show how great it is. At least now I understand all those reunions yesterday; people go to these conventions repeatedly and see each other every time. The security lady is also going to bring down her favorite fan fiction, a piece that her friend wrote, so she can share it with the fan artist girl. That's very thoughtful of her.

Fan fiction is one of those things I discovered that I really enjoyed about the fan world. Besides the fact that it was easily accessible and doesn't *require* interaction with other fans beyond them posting a story and you reading it, it was a really interesting concept for me. I learned a lot through fan fiction and it was a large part of how I came to terms with my topic.

When I first Googled fan fiction there was one dominant hit: www.fanfiction.net. That's correct, an entire site devoted solely to archiving every possible type of fan fiction out there. There were so many different choices and options, I'm pretty sure that you could find almost any television, movie, anime, magazine, comic or anything else you could name.

I found fan fiction to be just as awkward as everything else in fandom. What I started to read was basically a narrative form of a television show. At first, I looked at fan fiction about *The Simpsons,* which is a cartoon, and seems inappropriate in narrative form. I looked at *The Simpsons* because it's one of my favorite shows, and I had originally wanted to use it as my

thesis topic. At this point I was still learning about the fan world, and hadn't even considered focusing my thesis on *Stargate*.

I looked up a few different stories and found that they weren't all written the same way. Some were in the first person view of a series character, some were omniscient narration, and some were even written in script format. But all of them were still very strange to read.

I switched shows because I thought that maybe, just *maybe*, the reason why it was awkward was because *The Simpsons* is a cartoon. I went over to the *Stargate SG-1* stories because I knew the show's characters, and it seemed to have a large following on the site. What I found there intrigued me. The stories were a little less awkward, perhaps because it's not a cartoon or perhaps because the people there were simply better writers. But I realized what fan fiction allows people to do.

It allows fans to play out the plot in whatever fashion they want. They can take any characters in any situation and make them do what they want without restraint or complaint from the people who actually write the show. It's a freedom that I never realized people took with media texts, but it now seems like such an obvious thing to do.

One of the first stories I clicked on was one in which two of the main characters, who have been dancing around each other for years —romantically speaking—got together. Their little side plot was one of the things that I always watched for in new episodes. This story, though, was actually engaging and interesting to read. I'm a sucker for a good romance.

The next few stories were not as good. Some of them were so horribly thought out that I couldn't quite grasp the point. Others had so many spelling mistakes that I couldn't get past the first paragraph. Some of the authors just really sucked at writing. Then there were the ones that were good, that pulled you out of your surroundings and when they ended made you look up and

go, "Oh, that was just a story." The first day I found the fan fiction site I spent over an hour just

going through different stories.

"Fan fiction was a big deal for me. It's where I learned the most about fandom as well as where I 'met' a lot of people. There were a lot of people on fanfiction.net although not all of them wrote stories, some people—like me at first, only read and commented. Others were 'lurkers' who came and read stories without ever commenting. Authors hated those."

"Why?"

"It was unspoken that the point of writing stories is to get feedback from others on your writing. People who just came, read, and never gave any feedback didn't further the purpose of the site. At least, that's the vibe I got from a few discussion in the author notes."

"How do they know whether or not people read the story and not comment? It sounds like they just assume that there are a lot of people reading them. Then when there are only a few comments, to feel better, they complain about how people don't comment."

"I thought the same until I posted a story. To post you have to make an account on the site that has a section where they keep your 'stats'. It tells you how many hits your story has as well as how many comments. For instance, my one story that was quite long received around 47, 000 hits but only 308 comments. I know that it doesn't mean 47,000 people have read my story—but at the same time it does imply that more than the 308 people who commented on it have looked at it."

"47,000! Isn't that a whole lot of hits?"

"I guess so—but I haven't been doing this long so I'm not sure what a normal amount of hits on a story is… however, other stories I posted had between 165-1400 hits. So, I think that people just really like my one long story more.
　　All my writing ended up being classified as angst. I chose to write about the one theme from the show I could write well—the romance between the two main characters—and I tried to be happy and romantic about the characters getting together. In the end it came out as these tragic, slightly cynical, and full of angst stories where they do get together but it's rather forced or random. That was because I sucked at writing the part where they actually couple up. It tested the limits of my writing ability and what I was comfortable with."

"So what did the fans have to say about your genius writing?"

"A lot of the comments were like, 'great story-looking forward to the next chapter' in various ways and with various forms of poor grammar and internet speak. Then there were some constructive discussions on how out of character—or not—the main characters were in my story, where they hoped I was going with it, what else they wanted to know about a certain plot line and things like that. Also some people pointed out different details that I missed like a last name being spelled incorrectly and minor things like that. But none of them were ever negative. In fact, some were extremely nice."

"So there were no negative comments, and then what? You base your next story off of the comments that were left?"

"I would usually respond to each person with a short, 'thanks for the feedback' if they had logged in to make the comment. It helped while getting to know people on the site, and encourage them to keep commenting. Also, I would get personal messages that were also comments, just not put on the public board for the story. The personal messages often started a dialogue between me and the other person and let me get to know them in a very surface manner. One girl and I started editing each other's stories before we posted so that we could try and catch mistakes. It only happened twice, but it was cool to interact with someone on that level. She was from Sweden I think."

"International fan fiction writing?"

"There were many people from different countries. That's another thing that people used it for—since there was a lot of peer reviewing, a lot of people who were learning English would write stories and have them edited by native English speakers to learn grammar and slang. It worked because *Stargate* is shown in over 100 different countries. It's been on for 10 years and has more episodes than any iteration of *Star Trek* and *X-Files*. That's a lot of material to work from—and a lot of people who have seen it. That's also a lot of fans. Did you know that there has actually been an increase in the number of people who are studying Egyptology since the show came on?"

"WHAT?"

"Well, I don't think that they can claim any type of direct correlation. That information came from the promotional material the SCI-FI channel sent. But it's interesting to consider, because they think there's a link. I guess the show could help someone figure out what they were interested in."

"Okay you've gone from international fan fiction writing to people picking their life's work because of a television show. That's a bit much to process at one time."

"Welcome to my exploration of fandom. It's a lot of stuff to explore, even more to take in, and still even more to process. Even after everything I've done and read on the topic, I still don't think I can fully understand this small window of the fandom world. I know that there is no way I'll ever actually understand the motivations and mind set of the fans who participate. I can make a guess at it based on my knowledge and experience—but in the end I can't do what I set out to do. I can't make a place for myself in the fandom world."

"I think you are. By writing this you are making a place for yourself even if it's not a popular one. I'm sure they don't like being called 'frightening.' But you're telling your own story."

"I'm sure they don't. I hate that it comes across as offensive. I know it is, and that if I read the same thing about me, or something I was actively interested in, I would be upset. But, part of the whole autoethnography idea is telling what I feel and think and being confessional about it. So, here it is. Me, my inner thoughts and workings on display for anyone who takes the time to read, read into, and interpret."

The crowd breaks up with the promise to meet down here again tomorrow night. The Gold ticket holders have to get up early for the celebrity breakfast tomorrow—if I had paid an extra three hundred dollars to go to this I think those waffles would have to do my laundry to make it worth that price.

I nod my agreement and say my goodbyes. Walking back to my room I wonder, if it took me three glasses of wine to get through tonight, how many will I need tomorrow?

NOTES ON CHAPTER TWO

Sci-fi Channel Media Kit from Season 7.

There was a lot of interesting information in the Media Kits I received from the SCI-FI channel. It was very interesting how they promote the show to people who have never watched it or are unaware of what happened in the past season.

CHAPTER THREE

Stepping Through the Gate

I love Manhattan. But, as soon as you get on a bus out of the city the quality of everything goes downhill. I've never struggled so hard to get luggage off of a bus in my life. Well, except for that one time in Italy when I had to deal with two giant suitcases on an overnight train from Florence to Paris. But I *knew* that was going to be difficult. I didn't realize getting to Jersey was going to be an event. It's been a very long event involving multiple buses, drivers who don't know which stop corresponds to the names on the Port Authority brochure, and driving to the middle-of-nowhere-industry-world. Luckily I'm staying at a Crowne Plaza so I can at least expect good service there.

> *"Therein lies the problem with going out of order. Now it sounds like you're going somewhere else when you're just at the same place you were already talking about—you're just talking about arriving there. Plus, you've already told us that the hotel sucked."*

> "Right, but this part is just what I was thinking before I showed up. I had high hopes for the hotel before hand."

> *"Ah, how naïve you were."*

> "And I thought you were the one who was saying that I should give the readers more credit? That they could follow me even if I started somewhere else?"

> *"Yes, we are pretty smart—I'm just saying be careful. Don't be confusing."*

> "Thanks for the warning."

I can't believe the bus drops you off half a mile from the hotel! As much fun as dragging my luggage behind me while walking down a road without a sidewalk and wearing heels can be, I don't think it's the safest activity in the world—especially not in the middle of nowhere New

Jersey. Also parking deck looming up ahead that I have to go through looks rather sketchy; the hotel is behind that.

I should have expected something of the sort but I was still unprepared to see the people in full *Stargate* costume start coming out of the hotel just as I was walking in. I'm still too entirely amused by the fact that I am actually here. I may be here a little late, and slightly worse for wear, but I'm here. Now for normal hotel things: check-in and register.

Why would any hotel have a convention start at two o'clock and have check-in start at three? I'm sure the look I gave the bell hop was kind as he looked at me and rudely stated that the storage room was full. Being the irate customer is really not my style, seriously though, they had to know this would happen. With as much money as I am paying for my room they can find *somewhere* to stick my suitcase!

Thank God for the nice people who found themselves in the same situation and offered to stash my book bag in their car. I definitely didn't want to give the angry looking bell hop my laptop and, according to these fans, I need to experience my first convention day without baggage. Nothing should ruin the experience. They should know; it's their third convention and they come every year together as a grandmother/grandson bonding experience.

There are many different meanings to 'without baggage.' Does that include stereotypes and expectations as well? If it does, then I'm screwed. There's no possible way I can experience my first day here without baggage. The entire thesis experience up until now has been riddled with baggage—making fandom my topic, trying different things in the fandom world, and my own personal insecurities with actually writing a thesis.

I'm not talking about just my topic here; I'm talking about the insecurities that are even more personal than that. Will I be able to actually complete a thesis? Will it be any good? Can I

write this in the way that it *should* be written? In the end will I look back and wonder what the

hell I was thinking? In ten years will I be unhappy that my name is attached to this? Can I get

enough material from a convention to write an entire thesis? Can I really do this?

These are the insecurities that haunt me as I walk through the hotel and start this

experience. The last thing I want is to look back on my thesis and wish I had done something

else or done something differently. Or to look back and see yet another paper I wrote to

someone else's specifications. That would be one of the most heartbreaking things, especially

with the work that has gone, and will go into this.

"Was it the bodyguard people?"

"Yeah, but I didn't know that when I was walking up. I figured they were just
fans who thought it was appropriate to walk around dressed up. It was an
interesting way to start the weekend. It took everything I had not to laugh. Had I
known exactly what the weekend was to bring—I probably would have just
turned around then. Isn't higher education wonderful?"

*"You seem to have some sort of healthy disdain for your topic, and graduate
school in general."*

"It's not that I dislike graduate school, it's that six and a half years of higher
education in a row is kind of painful, even when you don't know what you want
to do with your life.
        The reason I'm not trying to hide my disdain for certain parts of my
graduate experience isn't because I know that my thesis committee will read this
and get a student's perspective on the process, or anything slick like that.
Actually, I'm afraid that they won't like that I talk about the classes or the
program with such an irreverent attitude. But, I think it's important to the context
of my experience.
        I went into this convention knowing that I'd have to write a thesis on it.
On top of that I'd been researching the topic for the past however many months in
a town I didn't like, surrounded by people I didn't like very much, in a program
that ignored the existence of my emphasis area because it's not one of the
departments."

"Ignored your area?"

"'Mass Media Studies' is outside all of the main departments and the people with
this emphasis are thrown into a void that you have to pull yourself out of. No one

is there specifically to help you, so you have to find people who know what they're doing, and then learn as much as you can and try to help yourself. I like the town a lot more now—it's definitely grown on me, but that's partly due to the fact that I found some people in it that didn't make me want to eat bark rather than hang out with them. That helps a lot."

"Eat bark? This is something you have to elaborate on. That's pretty harsh."

"I'd rather not go into it, but if you insist. I had a hard time my first year in graduate school because I tried to separate my social world and my work/education world. Not that the same people weren't in both, but I never truly realized how integrated they could be when you're in a new town and doing something so specific. At Clemson that was never a problem because it was always just work for a class—two years going towards a specific goal is quite different and the experience affected me in a way I wasn't expecting.

I figured it'd just be more school; I'm good at school. Honestly, it really hasn't been that difficult for me either. But I never realized how much effort can go into a single project. I guess you could look at four years of classes as all going towards a degree, but it's not the same when you hit the wall. Being annoyed with the project you're working on or facing another night at the coffee shop, or one more all-nighter to work on the same thing that you've been doing for what feels like forever is hard.

That requires learning a different level of persistence. Especially when the end is in sight and you don't want to do anything anymore. When your only motivation becomes getting out of school, persistence is difficult."

"I'm sure the topic didn't help the situation at all."

"It really wasn't that bad in the beginning. It's only started after attending the convention that the topic has been wearing on me. I assume that's normal since it's something you look at everyday with, like I said, all that work looming in front of you.

But, once I made it my topic and wrote my proposal I was a lot more comfortable with it. Honestly, it was all because of this one book that seemed to normalize many aspects of fan culture that I felt I could seriously study it. It was Jenkins's book called *Textual Poachers*. I read that and a lot of the fandom activities seemed rather normal."

"Wow that must have been a powerful book. Like, parting the red sea kind of powerful."

"It was very informative overall, and told a lot about the different aspects of fandom. It was a kind of introduction as well as in depth look into the world. Everything he wrote was in a very inclusive manner, if not defensive. He would rant every once in awhile about other people who had written about fans, and how they had shown them all to be crazy."

"I don't get it. It may just be that you have issues.   There are entire books out there that say fandom is normal and yet you're so freaked out about it?"

"There are many fans out there who participate. It's a subculture that has a lot of people in it, and all of them participate despite the stereotypes against it. Jenkins is an academic, and also a fan, which had the ability to write a book speaking from the perspective of both. It's really interesting and it helps to balance out the other negative literature about fandom."

"Isn't that what you're doing here?"

"You're misunderstanding my purpose here. I'm not trying to tell people what fandom is or explain why people participate in it. That's what this literature is about. That's what Jenkins book does—with other side notes about the subculture and how people interact and participate. What I'm doing is telling a story about my own experience in the fandom world. A very small part of the fandom world."

This is a ridiculously long line. The woman who just walked by is wearing a red bra and a shirt that's completely see through. I'm frightened; my sense of style is frightened. Luckily I've reached the registration table before I can fully comprehend everything going on around me.

I find it interesting, with as much money as I paid for the ticket to the convention, that the program for the weekend is a crooked, very poorly photocopied, and hurriedly folded piece of plain paper with an advertisement on the back that is illegible because the photocopy quality is so poor. I expected something more professional than that. I know it doesn't take too much effort to make a decent looking schedule and put it on some cheap cardstock. I'm not getting a good feeling about the production quality of this event.

"Hurriedly folded pieces of paper?"

"Oh yeah, they were ridiculous. We're talking regular photocopy paper, not even a little bit of card stock or something that would look slightly more professional."

"Okay, Ms. Paper Elitist. Do you think that's poor production or just apathy?"

"I'm not sure but I'm guessing a little of both. It caught me off guard that the people would be decked to the nines in *Stargate* attire while the actual convention

was done poorly. But that's before I learned that the guards buy their own costumes, and are fans that attended too many conventions. The people who run the actual convention seemed a little less intense. They were more worn out and annoyed to be at yet *another* convention."

"I don't think you can blame them. You can hardly be around genre fans for a weekend without being annoyed; if they are around them more often then I'm sure it's all that much more annoying."

"I cringe even imagining going to something like that again. At least they were getting paid to be there."

"What about the vendors there? Did they seem as irritated?"

"I made friends with the one vendor that was not with Creation Entertainment. It was not put together in the way that I thought conventions would be. I was expecting there to be a lot of presentations or displays showed a lot of different *Stargate* paraphernalia or other cool things related to *Stargate*. According to John, that is how most conventions are, but with Creation Entertainment they don't let outside vendors in easily. They like to keep their money in-house."

"That seems a little sketchy."

"It is. It's extremely sketchy. It also makes for a very boring convention because there aren't a lot of things to look at. Each table display is either exactly the same thing, or has a Creation Entertainment symbol on it. John's table was really the only one with anything different from what everyone else was selling. He had autographed pictures of a lot of different celebrities, action figures, and DVDs— which were ripped off and burned—and other random *Stargate* related things."

I can't help but laugh at my ticket, although it keeps getting me very strange looks. I received it in the mail a couple of weeks ago and I never looked at it; I just tossed it into the bag I was going to be using for the trip. I paid $182 for the 'Preferred Weekend' ticket to this event, which is a lot of money on the college budget, but was half the price of the ticket I originally tried to buy—which was convenient because I bought a ticket to the workshop on Saturday morning as well.

I'm laughing because the ticket, which is hailed as a "collector's item" by Creation Entertainment and has the amazing privilege to hang around my neck for the entire weekend on a

lanyard, has the word preferred spelled incorrectly. Oh yes, that's right. It's "PREFERED" in big bold block letters. What makes it even more amusing is that everything else that uses the word preferred in the schedule, and the signs around the convention hall have the word spelled correctly.

"You had an informant?"

"He was a nice guy who had the only table selling stuff that was outside the 'convention hall' specified for the vendors. Creation Entertainment put him outside the convention hall because he was not with the company. It was interesting that the company would make the decision to ostracize a vendor like that. John said they were very unfriendly about it all."

"How did he become your informant? Was there some cloak and dagger journalism digging?"

"That was my social skills coming out to play. They were amazing. I chatted him up the first day I was there and kept running into him throughout the weekend. Whenever I'd run into him we'd talk about all kinds of different convention things. He was very candid about it all.

At first I was very nervous about telling people that I was at the convention to write my master's thesis. But John didn't seem to have any kind of problem with it. This was a good thing since I was able to get a lot of great information about the convention, the company, and how the 'memorabilia' world works from him.

For instance, did you know that he can get signed pictures for free from different actors and then sell them at events for about $10-$15 each? He can also get different DVDs and other programs off the internet for free and sell them for $20-$50. Basically his overall message was that if the fans think it has to do with whatever they come to the convention for—they will buy it at a price that is at least over 300% profit for him."

"That's insane."

"No, what's insane is the one fan who bought all the banners from the convention. At each auction he would just keep upping the bid until he out priced the competition. I only caught him purchasing one of the banners but he paid over $1300 for it. He spent $1300 for a single banner. There were at least 5 others as well, so in total I'd guess he spent at least $4000 just on the banners with one or two signatures on each."

"Auctions? Was that part of the events calendar?"

"Yes it was. I told you everything surrounded the activity of spending money. Even getting an autograph or a photo was made to cost money. The actors were only supposed to sign certain things, like photos or clothing—not a napkin or piece of regular paper. So, buying an autograph usually meant buying a photo of that person as well.

Personally, I did not have the time or the desire to purchase individual pictures of the actors so I just had them all sign the ticket that was in my lanyard. You know the ticket that said 'PREFERED'. I thought that between the misspelled word and the fact that I refused to buy something to be signed, it just seemed appropriate. I did win a picture of Teryl Rothery during a trivia contest and had that signed by her."

"You're quite the winner, apparently. You took part in a trivia contest?"

"Well, I didn't 'take part'. Basically they set those by having three people come on stage and answer questions from the audience. But apparently the fans are not on the same side as the other fans. It becomes part who-knows-the-most-obscure facts, and part how-long-can-we-make-this-damn-contest-last. It really is rather painful. But, I have to say that no adults really participate in it—it's mostly the kids that were under 16.

However, if one of the questions cannot be answered by the three people chosen to be on the panel, the question is turned over to the audience. Then, if you know the answer you win a prize. Someone asked a question about my favorite episode that I've seen over twenty times and I was able to answer it.

It was this one episode that my parents and I have dubbed "The Fruit Loops episode." The plot is that two of the main characters get stuck in a time loop and start doing all kinds of crazy things because they know that after the day is over it will all go back to normal. I think it's my favorite episode because the concept is amazing. Just think of all the things you'd do differently if you knew that they'd have no consequences. I'm not sure I'd know where to start.

Anyway, I knew the name of the planet in that episode when nobody else did. I won a prize and picked the photo of Teryl Rothery. I got it signed for my Dad because he's a big fan of hers."

"That's sweet."

"I'm a good daughter."

The other people in line didn't find it so amusing that their ticket was spelled incorrectly, but the lady that worked there found it pretty amusing. I mean, seriously, spell check could have prevented that. I wonder how many people had to proof the tickets before they were sent

out and missed that detail. It has to be embarrassing to be the person who messed that up, although it doesn't seem like anyone else would have actually noticed.

The friendly lady behind me in line just informed me, as I was about to put my other tickets in my purse, that the appropriate place to store your tickets to other events like photo ops or workshops is actually in the plastic lanyard holder behind your main ticket. Yes, that is quite convenient, but no, I'm not sure I needed that woman to stop me and explain it quite so forcefully to me. She made me nervous, and I really hope my assigned seat isn't anywhere near her.

I'm slightly nervous to enter the main hall. I'm not sure what to expect but the idea that my thesis research has begun is intimidating and exhilarating at the same time. The insecurities return full force as I stare at the guy in full costume waiting to check my lanyard and wristband. I know that in the end this will probably end up as a blip on the radar screen that is my life, but so much seems to be relying on it. It is my ticket to graduation. That's a lot of pressure to put on a single event. I can do this, though, I know I can.

It seems like so long ago that I was stressing out about what topic to do, and how I wanted to approach it. I was stuck on *The Simpsons* for quite awhile because I had already exerted a lot of energy in putting together a proposal for another class. I also loved the show. It's one of those shows that have been on forever, and no matter how many episodes you see you can always find one that you haven't seen or you've forgotten. It was my one show that I watched religiously throughout my undergrad, and I thought that picking something I found that entertaining would make for a wonderful thesis. Although I can now look back and know that the original proposal was a horrible paper, it took me a couple months to let go of it without wanting to look back and cry at the effort that was being wasted.

The convention hall seems a little outdated. The giant flowers on the carpet are in the standard hotel theme and lean more on the yellowish-brown side, and I'm pretty sure that there is significant water damage to the ceiling on the right. Three giant chandeliers with large pieces of glass missing adorn the ceiling in a very symmetrical pattern down the middle. Many rows of chairs fill in the space in front of the stage with an aisle going through the middle of them.

"So it took you awhile to let go of the energy put into another paper?"

"Yes, although in the end it was better that I had a different topic—I'm not sure I can enjoy *Stargate* the same way as I used to. I'm glad I didn't do that to *The Simpsons.* Plus, I was able to take that summer after my first year and really read in-depth and put together a thesis proposal I was happy with. I started to understand fandom a lot more over the summer, especially after I started immersing myself in the different areas.

It was good that I started to understand and participate in fandom before the convention. I think it is important that I had a point in time when I could actually justify fandom. I normalized the behavior during my reading and experimenting and I don't think I would have the same understanding now if I hadn't."

"Understanding of fandom? That just seems rather impossible after everything you've already said."

"Well yes, in a way—but more it was an understanding of myself. To me, it's a big deal that I have the ability to understand something to an extent that I can rationalize it, against my own feelings about it. That's a very interesting thing to learn about yourself as well as being an interesting thing to take into account in other interactions.

The literature on fandom did a good job making it less frightening because most of the recent stuff focused, first and foremost, on the stereotypes and then went into a specific area of it. You can't address fandom as a topic without addressing its media portrayal. Jenkins says it best:

'The fan still constitutes a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternately the target of ridicule and anxiety, or dread and desire. Whether viewed as a religious fanatic, a psychopathic killer, a neurotic fantasist or a lust-crazed groupie, the fan remains a "fanatic" or false worshipper, whose interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of "normal" cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality.'

"I know what he's talking about and I'd have to say that you can't expect to be able to take the 'fan' out of 'fandom'. There is a reason why it is named they way it is. If it didn't actually embody a few of the aspects of the 'false worshipper' then it wouldn't have that word as a root."

"I think that's also slightly his point. But he's trying to show the extreme to which the portrayal has been used. I may not have had the greatest experience at the convention but I certainly don't think any of the people there were pathological because of their interest in the television show. And although I could argue that a few were out of touch with reality, it's not reality in the sense of I-can't-buy-groceries reality but the reality of interaction within the media. Jenkins even makes a point about that, talking about how the fan and reality cannot be separated because the fan subculture isn't one that someone can interact fully within."

"Well that makes sense; they do have to have a life outside of being a fan."

"It's a subculture on the outside of our everyday that circulates around media texts and what fans do with them. So, the subculture is one of media fans, where as before I speaking specifically about the *Stargate* fans and the convention I attended. With literature you have to be a little broader."

Cheryl Harris who edited *Theorizing Fandom* supports Jenkins claim that what's already been written is more about the pathology of the people rather than what the fans do and why they do it. And there's a lot more out there about fandom. Another book I enjoyed was *Fan Cultures* by Matt Hills. He talks a lot about how difficult it is to try and lump together groups of fans and talk about them all in a broad theorizing manner. Also, he says that because fan cultures are so diverse there isn't a 'singular definition' that can define them and that the context of the particular fandom is important in understanding the culture of that fandom."

"So he's basically saying that even the fan culture cannot be studied outside of the fan culture. Doesn't that create some sort of dilemma in the whole 'researching' thing?"

"Well, if you're trying to quantify some aspect of it, sure, but if you're trying to understand the culture then no. The context of whatever show, game, or movie that is the focus of attention is just as important as the people who participate. I'd have to agree. That's why I tried to immerse myself as much as possible, because the convention, although an isolated event, really can't be taken completely out of context of all the other fan practices in *Stargate*."

Wow, that's not where this operations ceases being kind of ghetto. The stage for this thing is just like all those stages from our high school outdoor "events." It's flimsy and easily

collapsible metal stage with stairs on each side. The back drop is a big screen with a banner on

each side with pictures of the actors who are coming to the convention and from either side of

the stage is a black curtain that looks like it's held up by, yes, those are white plastic pipes held

together in place by duct tape. It gives a very finished and professional feel to the entire event,

really it does.

"Duct tape? You have to be exaggerating now."

"I wish I was. There was definitely duct tape being used as support to the curtain rods. I know I keep saying how shoddy this operation was, but I don't think you get it. It was horrible. Besides the set-up—that was mediocre at best—the technical stuff was always messed up. During the fan videos they had to stop frequently to fix the computer."

"They played fan videos? Now I know you're joking."

"Not joking. Instead of actually making their own videos or getting videos from MGM they would get fan videos from the internet. They were, as I was informed later by a well meaning fan, videos that I didn't want to miss because they could only be seen at the conventions. They had been taken off the internet and if I missed one the only way to see it would be to contact the creator directly."

"Wow, what sort of fan extravaganza was in the videos?"

"It's basically a music video with different clips from the show behind it. The art is all in the editing, for instance, having things blow up to the word, 'communist' during Billy Joel's 'we didn't start the fire.' They started the convention each day with a video, but because the first actor was running late that day they played most of them back-to-back until he arrived. So, each day when the convention started they showed a video they had already shown."

"That sounds extremely repetitive."

"It really was, especially because people in the crowd found it okay to shout to the technical people which one they wanted to see and the 'We didn't start the fire" video played three times. After the first time this happened I just started showing up 10 minutes late each time.

"Did it work?"

"Most of the time it did. I caught the end of a few videos a couple times but I know I'd seen them all. How you ask? I knew because the lovely tech guys didn't

know how to turn off the projector to change the video and just showed us the files where the videos are kept on the computer. That way I knew they were all played already."

"So you're now ripping apart the technical aspect of the operation as well? You're mean."

I feel like I need to write all these details down. However, I'm hesitant to pull out the notebook and start scribbling. I'm thankful now, that I took that doctoral level course my second semester. Is it sad when you actually stop to appreciate your own foresight? I took the doctoral level course because I knew after my first semester of methods and theory that I didn't want to do a quantitative thesis like most people would be doing.

Numbers and I have never been the closest of companions, and although I do quantitative research everyday, or maybe *because* I do quantitative research everyday—I knew I wanted to do a qualitative thesis. So, when picking my classes for my second semester I tried to take classes that covered topics in qualitative research, or some other field that I didn't know much about. I ended up in a critical, cultural, and naturalistic methods course.

"I can imagine you in that class. I bet you were over-eager and trying to impress. I can see you working extra hard, you're such a geek."

"I did work extra hard. I still had some of those first-year graduate student stars in my eyes. Taking the doctoral course didn't help either because I felt like I was trying to keep up with the Ph.D. students. Now I know that was kind of ridiculous. But then, it was a big deal to prove to myself that I could make it through that class."

"Of course it was. You're just strange like that."

The reality of the whole qualitative methods idea just hit me with force. It may be the duct tape holding up the curtains, or it may be the scary 'snack bar' at the back of the hallway serving cold chicken fingers, old French fries, and messed up looking pita wraps, but somewhere

in between the two the whole 'experience' aspect has come full circle. I can now appreciate the

stories of other qualitative researchers a little more because there's so much more between the

words and behind the story that must have happened to them.

I'm not sure if I'm the alien, or everyone around me is the alien. But I definitely have

found my way to another planet. A planet that's full of genre fans. Genre fans that are very

energetic about being here and 'living' the *Stargate* experience. I'm just the academic girl here

using the event to get a degree. I'd have to say I'm the odd one out in appreciating the splendor

of the convention. I think if I'd have stayed home and researched fan fiction I'd have a

completely different view of the whole fandom experience.

I could appreciate fan fiction, the ingenuity and creativity—even though it was a little

strange. An entire event revolving around the perceived involvement of fans in the show that is

really just a way to get people to a remote location to spend a lot of money on things that are

related to their favorite show, I don't appreciate as much. It just seems a bit ridiculous overall,

but maybe that's just because I'm more comfortable being in the comfort of my own home,

behind my pen name and walls of anonymity and not spending any money.

NOTES ON CHAPTER THREE

Jenkins, Henry (1992). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New

York, NY: Routledge.   Pg. 5

Again, this is mentioning Henry Jenkins slight backlash attitude towards previous accounts and

images of fan culture. He focused specifically on the particular media portrayals that

have already been created and discusses the pathology that is represented through these

portrayals and how that gives an inaccurate image of the fan.

Later in the chapter there is a mention of class issues. According to Jenkins the

make-up of the fan community is mostly that of white, middle class women.

Harris, C.(1998). Introduction Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity. In C. Harris,

and Alexander, A. (Eds.), *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity* (pp. 3-8).

Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.

In reviewing past literature on fandom, Harris comes to the same conclusion that most fandom

scholars have. That the older literature was purposeful in creating a specific image about

fandom, and fans and that a different approach to the understanding of fan culture is

necessary.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Other Side of the Gate

Qualitative research was a path I had not explored before—now I understand why they'd

called it intense and difficult to do. My undergraduate faculty was small and mostly quantitative

so I had not been exposed to much qualitative work.   The small amount that I was able to see in

my required courses was very interesting, although it only scratched the surface. This class took

a much more in depth approach to qualitative methods.

I chose to take the doctoral level qualitative methods course, rather than the master's

level course, because I like challenges. Well, that and it's always kind of fun to talk about that

Ph.D. course you're taking, I am admittedly a geek who feels kind of special saying she's taking

a doctoral level course. I had a chance to look at the syllabus for it before registering and

realized that this course took to heart something that I find imperative in my life: that experience

is important.

> *"You feel special being in a doctoral class?"*

> "I was always one of those kids that was a grade ahead or in the special program
> when I was young. Growing up I thought that it was important, and getting to
> take this class I wanted to take made me feel that again. I call it the 'gold-sticker'
> feeling. It's when you feel kind of special and excited, with a sense of pride that
> makes you smile.
> It also helped me because at the time my older sister was in a Ph.D.
> program, and although we don't compete—that's really not my style and we're in
> completely opposite fields—being able to talk about the Ph.D. class I was in did
> give me some sort of equal footing rather than just being in my lowly master's
> classes. Also, it gave me a glimpse into the world of the Ph.D. class that helped
> tremendously when trying to decide if I wanted to go directly for my doctorate
> after my master's degree. I've decided to get some real world experience, by the
> way.
> That class gave me an insight about my expectations of getting a doctorate
> and the reality of it. Once again, an example of how experience is important."

"Experience is important? Are you trying to make yourself sound open-minded and deep?"

"Well, not particularly, but if it works out that way I won't be too upset."

"Ha, whatever, I see through your games. Go ahead and tell me all about how you think you can't know something until you've done it."

"But that's true. I've been in college long enough to know that all the stuff I've learned in classes, although informational and great for critical thinking, doesn't really have any practical use unless you can actually apply it. You can't apply it without some sort of experience in doing such. So, experience becomes the key to using what you know.

Also, I've had a lot of teachers who have gone straight through school and have never gone into the 'real' world.   I always found it interesting listening to them talk about the practical realities of a workplace they've never experienced. It kills their credibility."

"That was very well done. It was almost believable."

"Um. Thanks, I think."

I'd spent 6 years in college reading about things in books, mostly about people and theories and how people related to the theories. I hardly had any practical experience in doing anything, and this was *doing* research methods. This was also something other than coding and plugging numbers into a machine. The doctoral level qualitative course was extremely difficult for me.

The different assignments and readings opened up a world of research that I'd never been exposed to before. Oral histories can be considered research? You can write in narrative form? You're allowed to be subjective, descriptive, and not have graphs? Even now I feel naïve and inexperienced looking back and knowing I was unaware of the different forms that research could take. I also learned from this just how much my undergraduate degree skimmed over a large side of the research that is out there by its focus on quantitative methods.

For the first time in school I found something really difficult, that made me doubt myself and what I had always thought, and it interested me. It also made me slightly insecure, as even now, writing this, I find myself unsure about my ability as a writer to make something worthwhile and benefiting the qualitative research world.

I probably should have known then how vulnerable I'd feel when actually performing the whole qualitative researcher role. Even the books about autoethnography that explicitly talk about how intense and revealing it can be never made me understand what I'd be walking into. Each little thing that I find ridiculous or nit-picky about this entire event seems to show me something else about myself.

For example, when I learned that the kind people who are stashing my back pack went directly to the vendor room bought the new shirts as their first act at being at the convention I found it interesting. Learning that and then realizing that the first thing after buying the shirts was going to the bathroom and changing into them was quite disturbing. Am I just a snob who can't imagine wearing a shirt from that convention room without washing it thoroughly? Or is it because I couldn't walk around in a shirt that said, "I've ascended, have you?" without feeling ridiculously stupid? They seem to have no problem with it, so it must be me. Add yet another insecurity to ever growing list.

> *"So, you've got issues. Lots and lots and lots of issues. I'm sure there are other people out there who have just as many issues."*

> "But really, is that me just being a snob? I don't know why but the thought of putting a shirt on that has probably been in a box for God knows how long, has been to other conventions where multiple people have picked it up and touched it, and then just throwing it on… it brings out the OCD in me. I'm kind of strange about dirt and germs.
> So, yes, I do have issues, and insecurities, and everything else that comes along with them. At the moment though, my biggest issue is the idea of turning in this document that outlines all these issues of mine into my professors."

"Suck it up! They're on your side at least."

"They are, thank God, but research is intimidating enough to turn into professors and have it 'graded.' It's even worse when your purpose is to contribute to the wealth of knowledge that is already out there written by people more versed in the field and who have been doing this for years. It overwhelms me at times that anything I write would ever be held up next to some of the research that has already been written on the subject."

"Well, they had to start somewhere. I'm sure if you went back and looked at some of their early research it wouldn't have quite the same flare as what they are producing now."

"No, probably not. It helps to know that other people have gone through and survived this process before me. I shall overcome."

"It may be true, but you don't have to say it so dramatically."

"I'll say it as dramatically as I like."

If it hadn't been for that one assignment in that doctoral level course, I would have my handy-dandy notebook in hand jotting things down like crazy. That assignment? We had to go somewhere and take field notes. I'd never done anything like that before, and no amount of reading about how-to take them, or listening to someone else describe their experience taking field notes could have prepared me for what happened. I felt so insecure just sitting there in the Barnes & Noble coffee shop watching people and taking notes.

I was so sure that someone would catch onto what I was doing that I kept trying to not move my head when I started looking at people. I also had a huge problem with taking down too many details. I wasn't really sure how many minute details my mind could come up with merely from small amounts of notes so I ended up using around thirty pages of a notebook to write notes in and realizing later, when I was attempting to expand those notes, that they didn't really have very far to go because they were already so detailed.

One of the notes the teacher made was that I needed to learn to trust my memory. It's the one comment that I wrote down at the top of my field notebook for my thesis, and I can picture it in big bold letters across the top of the first page as I deny myself from pulling out my notebook so early. I have to trust my memory, and trust myself. I need to experience this, not just try and jot it down.

"Sounds intense."

"It was. I've never read that much in my life."

"It was a lot of information to take in?"

"There was way too much. But the class was amazing. The professor was big on experience, as I've said so rather than just read a bunch of different articles about how to do certain research methods; we actually had to do them. It's one of those things that let me feel somewhat comfortable going into the convention. I'd done something similar on a much smaller scale for that class."

"Sounds useful. It wasn't just a bunch of theory like other courses then?"

"Well there was theory, a lot of theory, but that's because you can't look at anyone's work without looking at the theories they used. But in that class I was introduced to Ellis & Bochner. I'd heard of them before in other classes, but I didn't really understand what they were saying because it's not something I could grasp in a quick overview. They do a lot of work with autoethnography and the different ways to approach the research. This is a 'confessional' autoethnography according to Ellis & Bochner because I'm confessing my tale of the event I attended and my own personal feelings about it."

"You are confessing some of your deep dark secrets."

"Yeah, I am. And it's funny, but each consecutive part of this thesis makes me more vulnerable than the one before it. Telling people how I think and feel about what I experienced is kind of like letting someone read my diary. I put a lot of myself not only into the story, but the writing and execution and every part of this, and then people are handed a copy to judge. It's nerve-wracking.
    I think it's because of the reflexivity in the writing. To not only tell the event, but look back at it and analyze it and explore the different feelings and thoughts that accompanies each aspect of it means that I'm going over and over my own actions, thoughts, and emotions repeatedly and that makes me feel like an idiot when I don't like or don't understand what I find.

"You're just insecure about everything."

"Well, I find writing to be a very personal thing. I rarely share what I write with other people. Once it's out there I can't control the meaning that is made from it. I can't control the messages that people take from my writing and I can't keep it from being taken out of context. When it's something I've created, something very personal, it's difficult to lose control over it like that."

"I guess I can understand that a little, you put this much effort into something and you don't want someone taking away from it something you didn't intend."

"True, but I'm not naïve enough to think that I know or understand every message that could be construed from this. I know what I want people to get, the certain points I've harped on over and over, that I want people to walk away with—but even then I have no control over it once it's gone."

I'm not sure why the door guy hurried me in. I'm only twenty minutes late to the first event and there doesn't seem to be anyone here, or anything happening. I count maybe seventy-five people in their seats, and probably another fifty were behind me in line. There seem to be way too many chairs in here for the turnout their having. I'd think at least all the Gold seats would be filled, but it looks like even those have a lot of holes in them. Maybe it's some convention thing I am unaware of where the first few events suck worst than the rest, so you just show up late. Like when people show up late to the movies to miss the previews.

I never understood that though, because I enjoy the previews immensely. Even though I never go to the movies, I like knowing what is coming out soon. Previews are kind of like sampling the movies without having to sit the entire two hours through them to find out if they suck. Sometimes it backfires—because the trailer was just very poorly done. But sometimes it saves you eight dollars. I think my crash course in qualitative methods gave me the same sampling.

I realized after experiencing a couple of the different forms of qualitative methods that I found a lot more value in qualitative research than the quantitative side I 'grew-up' in, so I knew

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it was worth my while to look deeper into the qualitative world. I really believe that life has too

many nuances, and people are too different to just lump them into the same numerical categories

and make assumptions from that, as qualitative methods does. And all the different methods of

qualitative research are quite different and there are some that, after my brief view of them, I

wouldn't attempt or agree with either.

Qualitative methods showed me that there are people out there that understand that those

categories don't explain the meaning behind a person or their actions, but merely point out a

characteristic or two of the people. I identified with this idea because I hate labels, and

qualitative methods acknowledges that although a particular label may fit, that no one has the

same experience and the categories cannot account for personal experience.

The categories also couldn't explain the projector sitting on a table in the middle aisle of

all the seating in the main room, or the fact that this low level of technological savvy is deemed

appropriate for a presentation of this nature. The projector is taking up most of the room and

propped up to point at the screen by something that looks like books. This upscale convention

center doesn't even have projection capabilities. I'm thinking its hay-day was really sometime in

the 1970s. Or, maybe that's why we're in Secaucus, NJ.

The day starts with a fan video. It's an interesting and unexpected way to start the

convention, but seems to go over well with the crowd. I was expecting more people, and from

looking around, so were they. Over half of the Gold seating is empty as well as a lot of the

Preferred seating and just empty chairs beyond that…a lot of empty chairs.

That's interesting since the Gold tickets are sold out. Maybe there is some unspoken

convention rule that people don't show up at the very beginning? Does fashionably late work in

the convention world? The fan videos continue since the first presenter of the day, Dan Payne, is

running late. I've only seen a few fan videos on the internet before and they were pretty

decent—but it's a different experience when that one lady in the front screams every time

Michael Shanks is on screen. That is probably going to get annoying before the weekend is out.

> *"Did you keep running into extremely hyper and excited fan people or something?"*

> "No, they meant well, just came across a little overzealous at times. But they were like that on the internet as well. I have to say that I've never seen people get so worked up over certain topics. For instance, there's this thing called slash fiction. Which is when characters get together, but rather than being a heterosexual relationship it's a homosexual relationship. It's a huge part of the fandom world, and sometimes in the fan fiction lists that I subscribed to, you know the Yahoo and Google groups I told you about, they can get into hefty discussions on the merits of certain pairings."

> *"Wait, they have discussions on whether this male character should get with this other male character or this female character, etc?"*

> "Yeah, sometimes it's just should he be with the girl or the guy. Sometimes it's whether or not certain scenes meant certain things, and other times it whether or not the show should even be interpreted in that way. But what I always found to be the most interesting is that the argument against the two male leads getting together was usually that they weren't '…written that way in the show.' But, when what the fan fiction authors are doing is rewriting the characters into something else for them would it matter if they wrote them gay? It was like some of the fan fiction writers and readers were willing to manipulate the text, but only to a certain degree. Beyond that it was considered too far off from the show."

> *"Did you read a lot of this?"*

> "Not a lot but I did try and find a few stories that I could work through and enjoy. Most of the stuff I found that I liked was fem fiction. Basically slash but with two women. There were some really amazing authors that wrote slash, and once again there were a lot of really horrible writers that tried as well. It seemed to be the theme. I was always weeding through the bad stuff to get to the few stories that are very interesting and well written."

> *"Was there research on this? Had people found it before and theorized on it?"*

> "Oh yeah, a lot of the different fan practices were mentioned somewhere in the research I found like filking, simming, fan fiction, and the different online groups. What I didn't find was a lot of information on conventions. Jenkins had some descriptions in his book, but not really many first-person personal experiences.

That's how I found my gap that I wanted to fill; the reason why my research is meaningful. I found the hole in which I wanted to insert my work."

It's a good thing that I decided against taking notes a little while ago since I just learned that I left my trusty little notebook that I purchased specifically for the occasion upstairs in the room. Luckily I grabbed like three extra copies of the very poorly made program and the printing is light enough that my pen shows up over it. And Dan Payne has arrived and staved off the booing for the fan video that skipped in the middle and ceased to function. I don't know who this guy is or what he does, but he definitely is fun to look at.

The person who introduced him is apparently the guy who owns Creation Entertainment. If the company is as large as it likes to tout it to be on the internet having the owner here and emceeing as well is a very personal touch. That or it's not that large of a company. The emcee has fulfilled his job and has enlightened me to why I don't know who Dan Payne is, he's an extra who has played a bunch of different roles—most of which require him being in a mask. If I were the director I'd put him in a mask too. You can't put an extra that hot in the scene or else you'd distract from the main characters.

It seems that he is doing some sort of self-descriptive stand-up comedy routine.   It's a little bit of description about past things he's done, a little bit of listing of parts he's played on *Stargate,* rounded out by jokes the entire time. He's great on stage, though. Very engaging with the audience and although some of the jokes seem to land on the more sexual/slightly crass side of the spectrum it doesn't seem horribly inappropriate for the audience. There are a few kids but not too many. There really isn't much of an audience at all.

Moving onto the question and answer part, it seems that questions are hard to come up with for the extra. The fans that trail to the stage to ask questions seem to ask questions more about what does he think the character he played would do rather than what he thinks about

anything. It just seems like they don't really differentiate him from the characters he plays,

which doesn't seem right for some reason. Is the actor merely the sum of his characters? If

that's true it's kind of depressing.

Apparently Dan Payne has brought along an episode of a television show he's been

working on in Canada and they're doing a screening right now as a 'special event'. It's about a

dysfunctional family where the sanest person is the teenage daughter who also happens to be the

narrator. He's the happy but ridiculously dumb father figure. Oh, good, just what television

needs—yet another show about how cool it is to be a fun and idiotic parental figure. Wait- I've

heard this plot line before…oh right, in every single other comedy television show that is on the

air right now. Maybe they just don't already have those in Canada.

"I got bored really quickly. I thought that it would be much more interesting to
listen to the different actors' discussions about things that had happened on set, or
about the other actors who were better known, but in the end I just felt bored. I
don't find any magic in the behind the scenes information or how a certain
episode was made, much less what an actor thinks that a character would think or
do in a specific situation. It just seemed pointless to listen to the questions and
answers. He's just an actor, it's just a television show, they were only on a
television set, and there isn't much more to it than that.
        I think I'm this apathetic about it because it's what I want to go into. I
understand, at least in theory, how it works and I've been on a couple sets. It's
just another place, and although it can seem so familiar because you see it every
week on your television, in the end it's just a place.   The real magic for me is in
the direction, and the editing. How they take multiple takes of a certain scene and
piece that together with all the other ones to come up with the finished product."

"They didn't address that at all?"

"Not at all. It was all a lot more gossipy stuff about the main characters and
different stories about things that have happened on set that were amusing. For
instance, Dan Payne told of multiple practical jokes that he and Chris Judge have
played on each other or on others, and another time when he was buried alive in a
scene. All of it was very entertaining, but in the end not very substantial. But I
think that's where my expectations were a little too high."

I think I just met a friend. Lonnie seems really sweet if a little over excited about getting to be here. But she's my age, and very nice. She didn't even seem to be very turned off or worried when I told her why I was taking notes. I have to admit that I was quite worried about telling people that I'm doing research on this, but she didn't have a problem with it and actually asked questions about how I could use something fun as a thesis topic. Hopefully everyone feels so open to it.

"I actually didn't meet anyone who was turned off when I told them I was there for my master's research. I expected someone to dislike the idea, but it never happened. One of the very kind people who worked with Creation Entertainment as a side job actually gave me her card. She's a therapist, and she said that she had all kinds of stories about different conventions and people and would love to chat with me sometime about all of it if I thought it could help.

Everyone seemed to be just as kind as her when it came to helping me. Just like John, who told me all kinds of inside stuff about the convention, the people who I told wanted to be a part of the final product in some way."

"That seems nice, to have people want to help you with it all. That's very rainbows and unicorns of you."

"Thanks. I'm trying to be overly sweet when describing the people who were being nice to me. It was nice at first to feel like the people around you aren't looking at you like an outsider merely because you're there for an extra reason than why they are there. But, it became a little overwhelming when my friend, Lonnie, started going a little overboard with her help.

She would ask me things like, 'Would talking to [insert actor's name here] help you with your research? I'm sure that if you told the people who run this thing that you're doing research they'd let us talk to him.' It introduced an entirely different element that I was uncomfortable with—that she thought I had some sort of position of power, and that if I actually held that power, she could piggy back off of me to get closer to the actors.

I had neither power, or any way to get her closer to the actors, but she was rather persistent with her questioning until I finally got the chance to explain that it's not so much about doing certain things or interviewing particular people, but experiencing the convention. She didn't get that at all really, and after the first few times of trying to explain it I became rather frustrated and decided it didn't matter if she didn't totally understand what I was doing.

I do have to add that the reason why I felt so comfortable with everyone around me not being bothered by what I was doing was because on more than one occasion I actually had to stop and explain what a Master's degree was. It was a

question I was unprepared for since I live what a Master's degree is everyday. It was enlightening to know that there are people out there who truly have no idea what it is and why someone would want one.   So, in a way I was comfortable in their ignorance of the implications of what I was doing."

"That seems rather wrong; that you would be comfortable in the fact that they didn't quite understand what you were doing. Doesn't that bother you?"

"It would if I hadn't tried so hard to make them understand."

I'm glad I have this little handy dandy program. Why? Due to the program I know now that there is supposed to be a set change and convention hours before the first silent auction. That's a good thing to know because I was a little worried that this slightly ghetto set up that is going on with the stage would be pretty much it on the way of production. Glad they have a set change.

Right. 'Set change' = drag a collapsible table on stage. I wonder why they had to clear out the entire room to do that? I was actually kicked out by one of the full-costume body guards for them to drag a table on the stage.

There's one more actor who's going to speak before the special "Friday Night Cabaret." Alex Zhara. Yet another person I don't really know, but I'm guessing he's probably in the same boat as Dan Payne as an extra that has done a few different parts over the many years that *Stargate* has been on.

He seems like a very nice guy.   A very patient guy. I think you'd have to have a lot of patience to go to conventions like this repeatedly. The same people who asked the questions last time have returned to the microphones to ask exactly the same questions again. I hope this doesn't become a trend. I don't think I can handle hearing, "Can you tell us which episode your character would pick as his favorite and why?" too many times in a day or I may go crazy.

There is this one girl that has now asked three questions, and I have to admit that she fits

the stereotype of 'fan' that I have in my head. She's a big girl, probably in her thirties who

doesn't look like she's bathed in the past week. I know that sounds very mean of me, and quite

stereotypical but really, she doesn't seem to be put together at all and she is definitely

overzealous about this whole 'asking questions thing'.

Convention hours are now over to give the staff time to get ready for the Friday Night

Cabaret. Alex Zhara's appearance really didn't seem to be any different than Dan Payne's.

Much of the same questions, a little bit different story about how he made it as an actor, and how

he came to work on the *Stargate* franchise stuff. But, essentially pretty much the same. I'm

hoping that tomorrow's more 'big name' actors have a little bit different of an approach, or else

tomorrow is going to be a very long and patience demanding day.

> "I remember reading the descriptions of this event online and being enthused
> about the different things that were going to happening while I was there. I
> remember writing my thesis proposal and putting in the different quotes from the
> website that talked of a much more fun and interactive experience than I've had
> so far, or should expect. I find their translation from 'website hype' to reality to
> be seriously lacking something that the amount of money I paid to attend this
> thing should have covered."
>
> *"I hear the ring of false advertising charges in there. However, I don't think,
> 'Buy a ticket to come on out and spend money idolizing people who are only
> important because you idolize them. Really, just come spend money.' Has quite
> the same ring to it."*
>
> "The money thing really bothers me, though. Having an entire event centered on
> spending money, that costs a lot of money to attend, is admittedly an ingenious
> way to make—a lot of money. But, at some point that capitalistic standpoint
> begins to lose its charm. Not so much the greed of the people making the
> money—more power to them because they found a niche market and are making
> a killing—but the people who attend. Most fans are not upper class, or the kind of
> people who would have the disposable income to come to an event such as this.
> The attendees seem to be people who would have to save up to come to a
> convention. In fact, the first person I met—the boy and his grandmother had said
> that they save money year round to be able to have fun here. I find it disturbing
> that an event such as this is something that they save for, only to come and buy

'collector's items' and get autographs from television actors.   To put it bluntly, I find it sad."

"Where exactly to do you get off being this judgmental about what other people find entertaining?"

"Do I have the right to be so judgmental of what other people find entertaining? No. Do I feel right talking about class issues when surrounding fandom? No, it makes me rather uncomfortable because in my opinion, many of the people who attended this event and talked to me, if I had to label, I'd classify as lower-class. Why? Partially because I had to explain what a Master's degree was multiple times, partially because of assumptions I'm making on their appearance, and partially because of different conversations that I had with people and the topics that they surrounded. Do I feel like an ass for putting anything of the sort into writing? Yes. Does it change the fact that it goes through my head when I think of the event? No.

"It does seem wrong to write in print."

"That I felt like I was surrounded by lower-class people spending money on frivolous things? Yeah, that's a little messed up. But the fact that it's completely politically incorrect doesn't negate the fact that I felt like that or that it may have been true."

"But like you said it, makes you feel like an ass. That's not good."

"I would like to think that it's like some elitist middle-class thing that makes me uncomfortable in situations like that. I wish that was what it was. I feel like an ass because the people I met there were kind, excited, and fun people. But, they reminded me of friends of mine from my hometown.

I went to a small school in what could, when I started there, be considered a rural town of sorts. It's grown a lot since then and the school has changed a lot as well, but the one thing it always had plenty of were examples of the economic divide. I went to school with extremely rich kids, and quite poor kids. My family was more on the 'quite poor' side rather than the 'rich'.

I think the reason why I feel like an ass, and feel uncomfortable discussing this is because it not only reminds me of an uncomfortable position in which my family used to be, but how many of the people I know from high school are currently in the same position. I guess in the end they remind me of what I could have been had I not received the opportunities I have.

That makes me feel like even more of an ass to say. I don't think I can get around feeling like this."

"Maybe you're not supposed to."

The Friday Night Cabaret is actually just Alex Zhara and Dan Payne playing out a role playing thing that they put together, as they admit, about ten minutes before this thing started. Once again the production value of this convention comes to light. They are quite funny to listen to and definitely seem to spend a little too much time around each other.

I think I'm going to earn some participation points. They are 'casting' for the roles of different people in their little play they are putting on. I might as well try—that is what I'm here for isn't it? It's definitely an interesting take on the show, they changed all the names of the characters to something almost similar but not the exactly the same name because that would be 'copyright infringement' so the part that I'm 'auditioning' for is for Major Silk Garters, rather than Major Sam Carter. And the sexual humor reasserts itself again.

I didn't get the part, damn. The show is rather entertaining if not a little inappropriate for some of the audience. Like the three women who have gone through one part because the actors wanted to see which one could do the best fake orgasm, seemed a little wrong when there are children that are at least 7 sitting in the front row. But, if the part calls for it, then I guess it must be done. I have to say I didn't realize how fiercely the women would fight for that opportunity.

Apparently the next step in the night is to meet in the bar for drinks. It was announced on stage by the actors themselves. I find it interesting that the actors would just hang out with the fans. I mean, if I was an actor and came to something like this I'd probably hide in my hotel room as quickly as possible after any appearance. But, it does give me a great opportunity to meet people and interact with the fans, and I could definitely use a drink.

NOTES ON CHAPTER FOUR

Hills, M. (2002). *Fan cultures*. London: Routledge.

Hills discusses the different aspects of particular fan cultures and the possible results of

attempting to lump different fan cultures together for research purposes.

Ellis, C. and Bochner, A. Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as

Subject. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y (Eds). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The idea of a "confessional autoethnography" is that the focus of the study is the

researcher's personal experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

Exploring other Planets

The celebrity breakfast happened this morning. I was able to get the full recap from my friends from yesterday. Apparently it was great because each of the big stars that are going to talk today, like Teryl Rothery, Jason Momoa, Joe Flanigan and Carmen Argenziano each came around to the tables and talked to the fans individually. They also had waffles, which were amazingly good according to my sources.

Right now the big thing is the fact that we're in line to get pictures taken with Cliff Simon. Everyone seems really excited about it. I asked my friend Lonnie what to expect once we're in the room.

"Well, you basically take off your badge, and anything else you don't want in the picture and you get in line. Then, when it's your turn you walk up and smile! They don't let you talk to the person because that's what the autograph session is for, but you can make an impression anyways.

"I once had Michael Shanks tell me that he liked my shirt as he autographed my picture."

"Wow, that's very cool. So this goes quickly then?"

"Yep, very quickly."

She wasn't kidding. I've never been sped through something so quickly before. I barely had time to set my purse down and get my lanyard off before I was being snapped at by the worker who needed me in place. I'm not even sure I was smiling.

> "I looked ridiculous in that photo. I was slightly hung over, and I look like I was falling over to the right and I wasn't even smiling. I'm not sure the photographer

even looked to see if it was a decent shot. But, I guess with that many people milling through and getting photos you can't make every shot a glamour shot."

"How much did you pay for the picture?"

"It was about thirty dollars. For that price I should at least have looked good in it. What I found funny was that Cliff Simon was in like a cotton long sleeve Hanes shirt. I thought he'd be dressed a little nicer. I think my standards were just set way too high. The most often used phrase in this paper seems to be 'I thought there'd be... or I thought they'd do…"

"You did seem to walk in with a lot of expectations."

"I never thought of them as expectations before. It all comes down to what I think I should get for the amount of money I spend. I should have received a lot more than I did for the money I spent. The projector should have been at least attached to the ceiling and not propped up by books and walked in front of every five minutes. There should have been nicer schedules and more vendors, something to do that didn't involve spending money, and maybe a restaurant within walking distance of the hotel.

I never even thought of stuff like that as expectations. They were just supposed to *be* there."

"Well, aren't you such a pampered little princess"

The workshop that I'm attending today wasn't included in the Gold ticket package. It's supposed to give us the inside scoop on the casting of *Stargate* straight from the source—the casting director. The woman presenting is actually the casting director's assistant, not the director.

There was a short explanation of the casting process that helped me understand how certain people are chosen for specific parts. For instance, when they get a script the casting director goes through and figures out which parts need new actors, and then makes a list of people they want to fill the part. The list usually includes people like Nicole Kidman; actors who would never actually show up in something like *Stargate*. By putting that on there it indicates what type of actor the director want for the part. Then the script is sent to agencies who distribute

it to actors who show up at the casting call. It's interesting to me that they use big names to

specify the look of the person they want.

> "I went into this hoping for more behind-the-scenes information.   That is what I
> was looking for from the actors. I wanted something substantial about how the
> show is put together. The casting assistant gave a little of that, so she gets credit,
> but most of the time she was simply name dropping—and being friendly but
> slightly spastic."

> *"Slightly spastic? I do believe spastic is a relative term. Was she spastic like
> some sort of caffeine-hyped college student, or in a more where's-my-next-fix-
> coming-from way?"*

> "She was more the caffeine-hyped college student.   She would go on random and
> difficult to follow tangents. She spoke quickly and rarely tied her topic to the
> topic at hand. Then when she talked about other aspects of the casting process,
> she didn't have a lot of tact."

> *"Tact doesn't seem to be your strongest suit either."*

> "Thanks. But what I mean by a lack of tact is that she tended to bottom line her
> statements. They were delivered in a very politically incorrect manner which
> made it uncomfortable during certain parts of her lecture. For example, when
> talking about filling a specific part she had no issues discussing how certain actors
> don't understand the casting call and how she has had to look at people and say
> things like, 'We don't want a black guy. Sorry.' Which I understand—in context,
> but it just seems like such a wrong thing to say to someone."

> *"It is rather un-PC. But at some point you must get tired of people trying to fit a
> part that they obviously can't. I think that would get extremely tiring after
> awhile."*

> "I understand that it's necessary and she probably deals with a lot of stupid people
> everyday who try to convince her that although they are six two and white they
> can be a black teenager. But honestly, the first few times that she bottom lined a
> particular role she just sounded crass. When I think about it I understand, but my
> initial reaction was to be offended."

> *"Maybe you've just got a thin skin for that kind of honesty."*

Much of what she's saying about the show she already talked about briefly yesterday

when she was pitching the workshop to the crowd. She is quite the character. It ends up that she

wanted to be an actress and ended up as casting assistant. Oh, the irony.

Her job, according to her, entails receiving stacks of headshots and resumes, filing them under the different types of people they are—old man, young girl, fat man, etc.—and then pulling people's headshots from the different types to fit the part they're trying to fill. She sits down with the casting director and sifts. Then there are phone calls, auditions and watching the audition tapes then working with agents to get contracts signed or moving on to the next choice if that first doesn't work out.

And that's all she has to say. Now it's time for the question and answer portion of our evening—a traditional part of the convention, much like spending money. It's a way to make the attendees think they are participating in the show. There may be some purpose to it but getting answers to relevant questions doesn't seem to be the main point.

Every event has a question and answer section. The length of the question and answer session is proportional to the amount of money that you spend to attend. The actors had about a half hour, and this girl has an hour and a half. The ticket to the main convention was expensive, but the ticket to the four hour workshop was sixty dollars alone. Proportionally, this means a longer question and answer session. I don't think the crowd of thirty-five can come up with enough questions to fill that much time.

I have to give the fans credit because the questions for this Q&A session are more interesting to me, partly because the people can't ask about why a particular character did something. The main question is why certain actors haven't come back, the big taboo topic of *Stargate* casting, and why Dr. Weir was a completely different person between two seasons. Also, where was Lieutenant Ford after the first season of Atlantis?

That's a big deal because the guy who played Lt. Ford couldn't handle the whole 'television series' format and schedule. Because of this, it changed the plot of the show which

then had to write him out, and write Jason Mamoa's character in. Changing the actress that plays

Dr. Weir between seasons caused chatter online asking why that actress stepped out and the one

who now plays that part stepped in. Once again, it's all gossip but I find this to be more

interesting than listening to the actors because it's giving insight into the process.

> *"So this whole fandom thing revolves around the actors, right?"*

> "Wow, it's amazing that you picked up on that. It's not like I haven't mentioned that a thousand times in the past couple chapters."

> *"I have a point here, go with me. So, if fandom revolves around the actors, and the actors wouldn't be idolized if it weren't for the fans, then…"*

> "Then the fan's idolization creates the celebrity culture in which they indulge, and without the fans the actors would merely be regular people with regular jobs that are on television."

> *"You may have skipped a few logical steps in the middle there but, essentially, yes. It implies that the fans are, in fact, the ones with the power in the situation— and yet they are the ones that are being exploited."*

> "That's very true. They do have the power. If they chose to stop the idolization of these actors, to not spend the money, and to give up the whole 'fan' routine then yes, the rest of the cycle would shut down. It's the same with poorly produced shows on television.
>   If people would stop watching it, the show would lose ratings and be taken off the air. But people don't realize the power they have. They come, spend exorbitant amounts of money to buy things that continue the cycle, make other people rich, and don't actually give them any substantial interaction with the object of their adoration. It's a slightly depressing, ingeniously capitalistic process that seems to run off of the ignorance of the masses."

> *"If only ignorance was painful."*

Apparently part of this workshop is to actually act scenes out. That caught me by

surprise. It said it was a workshop about casting, and that we'd get 'real scripts' as souvenirs.

But I'm not so sure about getting on the collapsible stage and act with anyone who is sitting in

this room. Can I get a monologue please? She has no monologues. Oh good, I'm acting out a

tense little scene where the guy asks the girl out. It's the perfect scene to do with my new friend

Jimmy.   He's my new and very awkward friend Jimmy.

> "I've taken acting classes before. The one benefit of an acting class is that everyone in there is at least comfortable with the concept of being on stage. Jimmy really didn't seem comfortable reading the script, much less reading dialogue between two people and doing it in a manner that didn't require staring at the page. He was a nice guy, if a little socially awkward, but he took direction pretty well."

> *"Oh, he took directions well? Did you just hop right in there and help him out?"*

> "Well, he seemed a little lost. And it took some coaxing but I got him to read his part five times through and to make as much of it extemporaneous as possible in the time we had. I also had him follow the stage directions and stop my character from leaving. In the end it was pretty amusing to try and put this scene together with that kid. It was obvious that he had never done anything like that before."

> *"Wait, you enjoyed yourself?"*

> "Yeah, I've always liked acting, and as much as I didn't want to go up on that collapsible stage, doing the scene wasn't so bad. I was more worried about the stage physically collapsing than acting this scene out in front of the fans. Plus, he wasn't a bad kid, just an awkward one; he wasn't a big fan of being in front of crowds."

So, the souvenirs from this $60 workshop were the scripts we read, and *Stargate* patches

that you can buy in the convention hall for $5 each. The scripts were just photocopied pieces

that were sent out to the different acting agencies.   I think that maybe, just maybe, I would rather

have bought the patch and not woken up as early this morning.

I'm glad the Tylenol I took has kicked in. It's time for the main event and the room is

definitely much fuller than it was yesterday. They even had to open half of the convention hall

to add more seating to the back of the room. It's good to know that all those people who bought

Gold tickets didn't just spend the money and not show up.

> "I was taken aback by the number of people attending on Saturday. It was easily double the number that had been there on Friday. All the seats that I thought would be overkill were definitely needed."

"Where did they all come from? Was it like one big bus of genre fans or something? I can just see this group of buses coming from New York City bearing sci-fi fans."

"That's very dramatic of you, and that's quite the scene to imagine. They probably came from the city because the convention was billed as the New York *Stargate* convention and as being 'minutes from Manhattan' according to the Creation Entertainment website. It ends up that it took place about 25 miles from the city and in another state altogether.

That should have warned me ahead of time that Creation Entertainment embellishes on their website. They use words like 'celebrity' and 'superstar guests' to describe the television actors, and say there is time to take 'paparazzi style pictures' or have 'tantalizing desserts'.

My favorite part is their description of the Gold weekend package; 'complimentary admission' to the 'exclusive for Gold patron' events. As if the price of their ticket isn't paying for the event and that Creation Entertainment is just so friendly and happy to serve that they just let you in for free."

"Wouldn't that negate the entire point of the weekend?"

"What, you mean to spend money? Yeah, it would. There is nothing complimentary about it, and the misleading adjectives are advertising tactics to sell the convention. Personally, I think Creation Entertainment makes it sound more ridiculous—but that's probably since I've been to a convention and experienced exactly what they mean by each phrase.

It may have been those advertising tactics that gave me some expectations that lead me to believe the convention would be better than it was. I didn't really think the actors were celebrities, or that I was getting in anywhere for free—but rather that the company took the convention more seriously and would give, at least, a feeble attempt to live up to their advertising.

Another fan video hits the screen. My analysis of the schedule shows a pattern to the guests. The day starts off with the minor characters—actors with cameos every once in awhile—then leads up to more important characters. The character played by one of the two headlining actors here today died on the show three years ago.

Michael Shanks was supposed to be the headliner for this convention. In fact, it was one of the reasons I picked this convention—other than the fact that it was the only one in this country near the east coast around the time that I wanted to do my research. Yes, there were

other factors in the decision, but it was disappointing to learn his appearance was cancelled. I

think Teryl Rothery is fantastic, but Michael Shanks is really fun to look and someone I wouldn't

have minded getting a photo with.

Jason Momoa takes the stage. He's one of the main characters from *Stargate Atlantis* and

he seems ridiculously uncomfortable here. He's doing the usual 'about me' section of the

presentation and admits that this is one of his first convention appearances. That makes the

whole drinking-while-on-stage thing make a little more sense. Wow, he's not even through the

entire 'about me' section and he's calling for another beer.

I just don't see the constant drinking lasting long since it's only three in the afternoon

right now. And, once again, the very same people ask the very same questions. That's really

getting old.

> *"So you weren't the only one there indulging in a little liquid anesthetic to hang out at the convention."*
>
> "Nope, but he was at least being paid to be there. He came on stage with a beer in hand, called for two more while he was on stage and continued to drink throughout the day. He also had five body guards with him at all times. This I remember clearly because after he started hurriedly going through the line for autographs to be done faster—reeking of beer and being rather unsociable with the fans who were trying to make conversation—he was outside of the hotel when I left to get dinner surrounded by five people in *Stargate* uniform, and was in exactly the same place when I got back, but apparently quite drunker than before. There is something to be said for using alcohol to make an awkward situation less awkward. It just seemed unprofessional of him."
>
> *"Right, says the girl who got pretty lit that same night."*
>
> "Yeah, but I haven't finished with the day yet. And luckily for me I wasn't working, on stage, or within reach of a microphone during the time I was intoxicated."

Wow, Teryl Rothery is drinking on stage as well. Is this a common thing? It seems just slightly unprofessional that the actors come and drink on stage, but maybe it's just me. Her calling was definitely acting though; she eats it up when she's on stage—quite the ham.

It cracks me up how she refers to herself as Michael Shank's stand-in repeatedly. She does it just to get all the people here to cheer for her and yell at her how they don't mind it's her instead of him. I'm not sure she needs her ego stroked anymore than it already seems to be. She is definitely a unique character.

This convention needs rules. Rule number one would be a limit on how many times you can ask the same question to an actor. There have now been four actors on stage and the same people have asked the same questions each time. This is so thoroughly annoying I can't stand it!

This session is also taking forever. My ass in numb because of these stupid chairs, and it'd be great to break some of this up or have a five minute intermission somewhere in the middle. It's also rather annoying how many people keep getting up to leave. I'd do the same, but they are all coming back—the photo op session for some of the other actors are right in the middle of this 'discussion' time. That seems like very poor planning.

> *"What, people were going to notice if you left and didn't come back?"*
>
> "Well, no, not necessarily, but to get the autographs of the actors you had to be in your seat when the row was called, and I still had the thoroughly obligated feeling going on since I was there for my thesis. It just didn't seem like it'd be right to leave."
>
> *"You're such the model student."*
>
> "Thanks, but when you've got everything else to worry about and you're not sure you'll have enough material to even write a thesis with, it seems necessary to stay at the convention itself. I now have way too much information and not enough time or space to write about it. It'd be pretty nice to be able to just say, 'I felt awkward so I left for a bit and took a nap in my room.'"

"But then what would your committee think? God forbid you be anything but the model student—you little overachiever."

The actors have finished and are now lined up across the back of the room giving autographs. With as many people as there are in the line waiting to get autographs it's going to take a couple of hours, at least. So, in the meantime they have something to entertain the audience.

This may be my favorite part of the entire convention. It's time for the costume and talent contests. I fought with whether or not to dress up and try to win something, but in the end I couldn't overcome the stereotypes enough to even consider being okay with the idea of dressing up. But I have to say there are some pretty well put together costumes showing up.

"I couldn't have done it. As much as I'd like to think I could be open minded enough and could have stood on that stage next to the other people in costumes, I couldn't have. It's the one thing that I realized before, that I was not comfortable enough with myself to do something like that in an environment I was going into that was so unfamiliar.
There weren't that many people who entered anyways. Only about twelve overall and one of those was one of the body guards who worked there—the one who owned the costume business. I can't help but wonder what he'd buy with the gift certificate if he won it. What didn't he own already?"

"You couldn't have done it? Like at all, even just to suck it up and be the good student and stand on stage dressed up for a few minutes?"

"Honestly, the one thing that made me hesitate at first was the fine print on the Creation Entertainment website that said that any picture taken that weekend by their photographer was fair game to put on the website and that by attending you gave them your permission to use your image on anything they'd like.
I had a dream/nightmare that I had dressed up as one of the characters and that the photo of that followed me throughout the rest of my career. I somehow became known as that 'sci-fi alien girl' to other people…and then I woke up. Knowing my luck in stuff like that, that would be exactly what happened. But really it was, again, my own insecurity that prevented me from participating—and I thank that insecurity profusely for rearing its ugly head when it did."

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One of the bodyguard people has even entered the contest. I'm not sure that's very fair seeing as they buy their outfits from MGM. Also making an appearance is this mother nature type looking woman, a girl in fatigues, and a young girl dressed up as a prior that is, honestly, a really well put together costume, and two people with regular clothes and green hats on with a wrist band on. I know which episode they're trying to channel but I don't think they get the point of the whole 'costume' part of the contest.

The girl in the prior costume really does have the best costume and according to audience applause it's between her and the bodyguard guy who apparently enters every costume contest at each of the different conventions he goes to and works. I think that the thirty something year old guy should concede to the fourteen year old girl. "Give it to the prior!" Yeah, I just yelled that and got applause. And I've apparently got clout because they just gave it to the prior. The other guy seems extremely disgruntled about the decision.

Jason Momoa is officially plastered. I have now been waiting over an hour in the line to get autographs of all the people from today, which in itself is a little excessive. I had time to go get dinner, and watch television before my row was even called. And now that it has been called I've been standing here for what feels like forever, waiting patiently.

However, Jason Momoa is not quite so patient. He has left the table he was sitting at, beer in hand, and is walking down the line hurriedly signing people's memorabilia and continues taking sips of beer in between each fan. He is definitely drunk. I wonder if it's just because he's so uncomfortable here.

Lonnie has shown up again to inform me how excited she is to be going to the celebrity dessert party. I bet you twenty bucks Jason Momoa doesn't even make it in the room. The man was stumbling. Apparently she is a huge Carmen Argenziano fan. That's why she's so excited

because she came to the convention solely to meet him. I really am happy that she can be so

excited about meeting a particular person. I don't think I could really get that hyped up about it

unless it was, I don't know, MacGuyver---but even then I would want to meet the character and

not the actor. Which I know is impossible since he's not real—the character, not the actor.

"So her sole purpose of attending the convention was to meet this one actor?"

"Yes. The nineteen year old girl paid three hundred and sixty-nine dollars to me a
sixty-four year old man that she fantasizes about. If that's not slightly disgusting
I'm not really sure what is."

*"There does seem to be something particularly off about that. But, that's what
celebrity does to people."*

"I just wonder what her thought process on that is. Does she like his character on
the show and that's why she can't wait to meet him? Does she attribute the
character's traits to the actor? Has she e-stalked this man enough to feel she
actually likes him as a person and that is why she wants to meet him? What
benefit does she get from just wanting to tell him how amazing he is to her? How
does she find this man, who could be her grandfather, sexually attractive?"

*"Stop asking me. I have no idea. Shouldn't you have asked her these
questions?"*

"Oh, I would have loved to, but I learned really quickly that questioning
anybody's love for a particular actor or character is a faux pas of major
proportions. Luckily, I didn't have to learn that one first hand, but I watched this
girl get shut down by another fan the day before."

*"Well, I guess that could seem rather accusatory and condescending coming from
someone who is supposedly there because of their love for the show."*

"I guess I was the strange one who wasn't there so much for the love of the show,
but for the necessity of graduation."

Conveniently enough John is hanging out in the lobby on a couch by the elevators. I

think he's hitting on me. Well, if "You should come back up to Jersey and visit me." Isn't a line

from someone you met a day ago then I'm not really sure what is. That makes me slightly more

uncomfortable when talking to him. Now I have to wonder how much of what he's told me is because he wanted to and how much is because he wants to get in my favor to hit on me.

> *"I don't think that matters. His motivation for telling you what he did isn't instrumental in how you learned what you learned. He told you."*

> "I'm not saying that it matters either. But something in me just doesn't like the fact that he told me because he was attracted to me. And trust me, I know that I'm sounding presumptuous, but an email from him after I got home solidified the fact that he was attracted to me. I wish he'd just have been friends with me without the hitting on me part, I think it just makes me feel awkward because I wasn't on the same page at all."

He seems to be saying the same thing over and over again. More about how the fans get ripped off by Creation Entertainment, and he seems particularly bitter about it despite the fact that he's doing the same thing. Oh, he's still not too pleased that he can't be inside the convention hall with the other vendors. Right, being the non-Creation vendor kind of makes him a vendor outcast at the convention. But he has a point.

By not being in the same place where the other vendors are he usually catches the fans on their way out and after they've spent most of their money. So he doesn't make nearly as much money here as he does at other conventions. I don't think it's that bad though because they stuck him in the hall, right where everyone walks by multiple times a day. People can go an entire day and not even walk into the vendor's room. Well, if it's a big deal to him I've got nothing to say against it.

I'm supposed to go back down to the bar for drinks again tonight, just like last night and a large part of me just wants to go back up to the hotel room and sleep. It's almost eleven, I'm exhausted, and that dessert party should be over any minute.   I need to just crash and let everything process. I also need to interact and get the entire convention experience, so hotel bar it is. The couple of drinks I had at dinner should make this rather bearable tonight.

The same crowd is in the bar as yesterday. There are a few more people who have made their way over because of the few actors who decided to come and drink as well. And yet again, the main line overheard in *every* conversation is "I can't believe they are so cool to just come and hang out with the fans…" Again, more wine is necessary.

"And again you're back to the drinking to make everything okay."

"Well, when you're stranded in the middle of another planet there has to be something that will make you able to handle where you are. Consider it like an oxygen tank."

"Right, but this didn't end up well for you did it?"

"Not particularly. I didn't do anything stupid, or anything I regret. I was just a little more tipsy than normal, so I was slightly more outgoing than my usual self."

"You're pretty outgoing as it is."

"I had too much wine. I remember having the same conversations with the same people as I had had the night before, which is one of the factors in why I kept drinking. There's a gap somewhere in the middle, but it's very brief and very blurry, but that's when I realized how much I'd had to drink and stopped. I may have talked in a British accent for awhile, was unkind to a fan who groped me, and said 'fuck' rather loudly when I tripped once, but those really were the most embarrassing things I did and I'm okay with that.

I also know that I was overwhelmingly impressed with a card trick Colin Cunningham could do, as well as tried to explain my thesis to a table of people all in costume who kept having me define the words I was saying. I eventually just made my way back to my room and slept. That was pretty much all that happened."

"I feel like you're leaving something out. Are you trying to make yourself sound better by not giving the full story?"

"If I was I certainly wouldn't admit to it."

CHAPTER SIX

Back through the Gate

Thank god for the bottle of Advil in my travel case. It's officially the last day of the convention and I don't have anything to do until about noon. There are two actors today and one other person who is apparently the Editor in Chief of the company that puts out the *Stargate* comic series. I'm sure my hangover will make this day go much quicker. Everything ends after your row makes it through the autograph line around 4:00ish. That' means I've only got four hours to go until I can take a nap.

Cliff Simon is a pretty funny character on stage. His humor is less sexual than the previous actors and he's definitely not drinking. But if he was it would be even more awkward seeing as its only noon. Well, maybe if it was a bloody Mary. He's had a very difficult life. That certainly gives a little more perspective to him as a person rather than just a character. I like that.

I think I've gotten used to the cycle. Actor goes up. Actor talks a bit about themselves. Actor then runs out of material. Actor takes questions from the same thirty people that ask questions every time but seems new to the actor because they didn't have to sit through the other actors. Actor thanks fans. Actor gives autographs, Actor leaves. Rinse and Repeat.

> *"So it only took you two days to figure out the pattern huh? That's amazing. By the time you had to leave you were used to what you were doing."*

> "I don't think I really ever got used to what I was doing. Not while I was at the convention, and even now, writing this, I'm not used to it. I'm not very comfortable with it. But, understanding something, doing something, and being used to it are very different things. I'm not sure I'd want to get used to the convention attendance, it was a little too left field for my tastes. The autoethnography thing? I like it a lot.

I spent a lot of years in higher education being told that my own personal opinion or view on a situation, although important, is in fact arbitrary to the research hypothesis. Here its given validity. Well, validity may be the wrong research word, but my opinion is out there and is allowed to be and all by itself is revealing of what I'm studying. I could get used to that.

But then, there's the amount of work that goes into a project like this. Admittedly, after writing this and knowing that I would rather do qualitative research than quantitative, the idea of getting a Ph.D. seems ridiculous to me.

I've never done something that has been quite so personally, intellectually, and emotionally taxing than this research and writing this paper. I'm not sure I could even imagine getting used to doing this as a job."

Joe Flanigan has the same personality on stage that his character does in the show. I wonder if that's an act for the fans or if he does that without knowing? Then there is always the possibility that he pretends to be this other person for a couple years and aspects of his own personality seep into the actual personality of the character. Or vice versa, which is a little less logical.

Q &A has started, and thus the cycle continues. I can't even begin to describe how thankful I am that this day is close to over. Besides the hangover, that was really not that bad, and trying to explain to a few people I met last night that I was not British and didn't remember their names—it's just nice to know that the experience is over. It's not complete by any means, as there is a very long paper to write about it, but the 'experience' part of it is over. And I'm not sure anything other than 'experience' can quite cover it.

I somehow managed to get through the entire weekend without spending more than $5 at the convention itself. A feat that was ridiculously difficult to accomplish because that was, as I've said, the main point of coming to the convention. Food on the other hand definitely cost me much more than I was expecting. But, I guess that's what you get when you have no other option than the hotel restaurant. Would I go through this again? That's a good question, which I

would probably have to say yes to. If nothing else I've got enough material for a thesis and half-

way decent party stories for the rest of time.

> *"So there will be no clever part at the end where you tie your entire paper together into the title and discuss the whole being on another planet thing again?"*
>
> "No, I don't have anything like that to finish with, although it is a good idea and I did feel like each experience through fandom was a planet in and of itself. Ultimately, I think that a lot of what I went through emotionally and intellectually while at the convention was a direct result of my purpose for being there.
> Sure, I'd watched the show for a long time, and sure I had tried for the three or four months before hand to participate in the fandom world. But, in the end, I didn't have the passion for the subject matter or the actors. I just had my passion for learning and a degree that needed to be completed.
> I was always the alien in the situation because I was never coming from the same place as the people who attended the convention. I now understand that, and I'm okay with it."

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