

2014

Wandering the Web: Subcultures: Steampunk Websites, A Guarantee of Unique Amusement

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Recommended Citation

Teague, Patty and Montgomery, Jack (2014) "Wandering the Web: Subcultures: Steampunk Websites, A Guarantee of Unique Amusement," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 26: Iss. 2, Article 41.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6726>

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Wandering the Web — Subcultures: Steampunk Websites, A Guarantee of Unique Amusement

by **Patty Teague** (Home Delivery Coordinator, Warren County Public Library, Bowling Green, KY)

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Column Editor's Note: *Several years ago, as our musical group Watersprite began playing at an outdoor festival near Nashville, Tennessee, I could not help noticing several people in rather unique costumes wandering in the crowd. During our break, I approached them to find that they belonged to a subculture called "Steampunk," which one member of the group called "a serious lifestyle choice." Being fascinated with subcultures and alternative lifestyles since the 1970s, I explored the Steampunk phenomenon and discovered that this movement started as a genre of speculative science fiction that takes its inspiration from the outdated 19th-century steam powered machinery, as well as Edwardian and Victorian culture, and turned it into a literary vision of a post-apocalyptic world, where steam and the complex machinery it powered have returned to prominence in an alternate version of history. It is also a social reaction to modern mass production, anti-individualism that seeks to return to handcrafted, individually reengineered products that feature exposed gear work and attention to elaborate styling. — JM*

This vision has inspired an entire movement in aesthetics, art, music, fashion, literature, cultural events, and movies that reflect an encompassing lifestyle which has spawned its own community. Though Steampunk as a term did not emerge into mainstream culture until the 1980s, some of its thematic roots go back to the 1920s with movies like **Fritz Lang's** silent sci-fi masterpiece, "Metropolis," and even to various 19th-century novels by **Jules Verne** and **H.G. Wells**. Other visual media expressions include 1960s television's pseudo-western, "The Wild, Wild

West" and films like the Japanese animation classic "Howl's Moving Castle," as well as movies like "Hellboy," "Brazil," and "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen," to name a few. All of these expressions elaborate the dark, often anachronistic, claustrophobic, yet romantic vision of Steampunk. In my travels, I located a local individual who is currently active in the Steampunk movement and known to be an authority. Even more special is the fact that she is professionally associated with our local public library. These are her recommended sites and annotations.

General Steampunk Information Sites

www.steampunkbible.com — An online outgrowth of a print book of the same name, *The Steampunk Bible* attempts to index Websites, artists, authors, and makers who are significant to the Steampunk community.

www.steampunk.com — A blog chronicling all things Steampunk. This blog covers Steampunk in popular culture and media, such as television shows and fiction, a resources Website list, guests, jewelry, every aspect of Steampunk.

Steampunk Clothing

www.clockworkcouture.com — This is a retail clothing site with reasonable prices.

www.steampunkemporium.com — Another clothing site providing more traditional period piece clothing for everyone, especially accessories for both men and women, and it also has a sales page.

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Accoutrements and Accessories

www.museumreplicas.com — A Website of purchasable replicas of historic items and articles, including a Steampunk collection. This site goes further than just clothes, into weapons, jewelry, gadgets, and décor items.

www.blondeswan.com — This is a site almost exclusively dedicated to hats of all kinds, of high-quality construction.

Music

<http://www.steampunk-music.com/> — This would be the online music magazine for Steampunk. Their tag line says it all — “the Sound of a World that might have been.”

<http://www.abneypark.com> — Abney Park formed in Seattle and is a tasty blend of industrial and world music with Steampunk-flavored lyrics.

<http://www.thomasdolby.com> — Yes, that **Thomas Dolby**. After blinding us with science, he kept going with atmospheric music. His latest work is music for an immersive multi-player game, “A Map of the Floating City.”

<http://www.clockworkquartet.com/> — The members of the **Clockwork Quartet** vary in age from 13 to 28, according to their site which began as a multi-media project, with a graphic novel, art, and music. They specialize in ballads of an alternate England, tales of love, and revenge.

www.professorelemental.com/fr_home.cfm — Hip-hop Steampunk. “Cup of Brown Joy” extols the virtues of tea and the pleasures of being heavily caffeinated.

Boot-strap Creativity

Early Steampunk was much characterized by personal creation of gear and wardrobe to project the desired appearance.

<http://www.instructables.com/id/Steampunk/> — All sorts of different creators from around the world display their work and give step-by-step instructions that the reader can follow to make their own Steampunk devices and accoutrements.

Public Events Associated with Steampunk

<http://www.craftster.org/forum/index.php?action=tags;sa=showtopics;tag=steampunk#axzz2cf2n11YA> — Craftster also has people posting their Steampunk creations with pictures and instructions.

Gatherings of like-minded individuals.

www.anachrocon.com — Held in February in Atlanta, this is a gathering of around 1,000 Steampunk people, with informative panels and space to socialize in Steampunk fashion.

www.steampunkworldsfair.com — The World’s Fair, if it were Steampunk, which is held once a year in May in New Jersey.

And Finally

www.facebook.com/SteampunkSteampunk.com — Amusing feed of Steampunk tidbits, memes, couture, hairstyles, on a social networking feed, to keep your Steampunk spirits up and protect you from the daily monotony. 🐼



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to assist with this. They appear to have a robust support mechanism with the development of a “Library Publishing Toolkit.”

The next panel was moderated by **Bob Nardini** from **Coutts** and focused on vendor services to self-publishing. **Michael Levine-Clark** (**University of Denver**) began the session by asking, “How radically will the scholarly book publishing landscape change in the next five years?” As it is now, librarians rely on others in the publishing and distribution sector to assist them with vetting content. The peer-review process, publishers, approval vendors, and eBook aggregators all have a hand in pre-selection of what libraries eventually acquire. The explosion in self-publishing is bound to have some effect on this. Will libraries want to provide access to self-published books? This is a trend we simply cannot ignore, but there are questions. If there are “good” academic books being self-published, then how do we find them? Scholars’ attitudes towards self-published materials may be changing, and if so, how will we change with them? It seems that niche scholarly areas could benefit from self-publishing opportunities. Another question raised is how to deal with established scholarly authors who write off-the-wall books on topics outside their established areas of expertise. An example: an electrical engineering professor who also publishes materials on holocaust denial.

Matt Nauman from **YBP Library Services** presented next. He noted that the heyday of the vanity press, while not totally over, is forever changed by the huge increases in self-publishing opportunities. He observed that self-publishing may be more about networking rather than book publishing, and that we need to monitor this and listen to what our customers want.

Joyce Skocut from **Ingram** presented next. She illustrated that self-publishing is indeed part of a huge iceberg where mainstream publishers represent only the tip. A number of famous authors started out with self-publishing. Many talented writers never can break through the rejection piles of the big companies but turn to self-publishing as an alternative. A number of successful self-published authors go on to get recognized by larger publishers once they have established a following. So why do authors opt for self-publishing? **Skocut** outlined a number of reasons. More control over the finished product, the ability to control marketing, direct use of social media, delivery faster to market, and design control issues all make self-publishing attractive. Of course the flip side to this is the author has to do all or much of the work, or employ author services companies to do pieces of it for them, which can be expensive.

However, with no publisher contract to deal with, the author makes all the money and can retain all the rights.

Skocut then went on to discuss librarians’ concerns about discovering these hidden gems. Vendors should work with their customers to determine criteria and expectations for both library collection development goals and end-reader interests. One concern is that a title might be discovered too late, but as one public library director was quoted, “If the work is good, it’s never too late to promote it.” In order to develop regional and subject profiles, better metadata needs to be collected earlier. She also mentioned a product called IngramSpark that her company was making available to independent publishers and self-publishing authors. While academic libraries are developing self-publishing support programs for scholarly works, public libraries have been a bit slower to go in this direction. However, a good example of a project developed by a public library was described. **Williamson County Library** in TN published a children’s book that helps “sell” the library and the proceeds go to the Friends of the Library.

Deb Hoadley was the final presenter of this panel. She serves as the eBook Project Lead for the **Massachusetts Library System**. She discussed some of the challenges and opportunities presented when trying to put together a system-wide eBook collection. A particular challenge she mentioned was restrictive licensing that makes it difficult to obtain access to certain kinds of content.

The next panel was moderated by **Mitchell Davis** and included **Bob Holley** (**Wayne State University**), **Eleanor Cook** (**East Carolina University**), and **Leslie Lees** (**ebrary**), who discussed “Finding Balance in Humanities and Social Sciences Acquisition.” **Bob Holley** began the session by again reiterating the vast numbers of self-published titles that are being produced each year. **Bob’s** remarks focused on academic subject matter that had niche interest, was highly collectable and important but hard to find in mainstream sources. An example he gave was the memoirs of Vietnam veterans. He outlined the advantages and disadvantages of going the self-publishing route for these kinds of scholarly works. He agreed that libraries to this point have not been able to easily identify these kinds of materials for acquisition. **Eleanor Cook** built her comments on **Bob’s** and agreed that, generally, academic libraries have ignored self-published materials except within the purview of special and regional collections. Within that area, self-published works are quite common and sought after, since many genealogical materials are published in this fashion and they are a linchpin of regional collections. Another dilemma faced is when identifying faculty authors for local recognition. Many libraries hold such events and tend to recognize publications that are peer-reviewed and/or

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