



POLU TEXNI

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Editorial

Water has not been our friend this spring. Here in the Boston area, we had two hundred year floods within a few weeks of each other, and then had a boil water order that affected two million people. I live next to a cemetery with a creek running through. This same creek runs through Cambridge, MA, where the antiquated water and sewer system requires occasional sewage overflows into the local waterways when rain is heavy. It overflowed its banks, so we were treated to the sight of raw sewage swishing around the gravestones. Then when the floods receded, we were treated to the equivalent of untreated lake water running through our taps. There is nothing quite like showering with the image of e-coli and parasite infested waters running through your head. Or having e-coli and parasite infested water literally running over your head. I guess testing showed that the water was never as bad as it might have been but it still took weeks for the shuddering to stop.

So it may not be any surprise that we received numerous poems about the destructive aspects of water this spring, and that we accepted them. First, we have an article on a webcomic that I was delighted to discover. I was also thrilled that the author of the webcomic featured also has a short about Athena, the patron goddess of this webzine, at <http://dylanmeconis.com/comics/shorts/athens/index.html>. The article and comic has nothing to do with floods, parasites, or sewage. Then you will find our spring poems. I hope our spring poets won't be offended if I say I'm glad spring is over.

(Note: due to the size of the files, I had to post this in two entries. Please look for the spring poems in the next post.)

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There Will Be Werewolves: The Webcomics of Dylan Meconis

by K. Curran Mayer



Some time ago, a friend told me that I needed to check out a webcomic called *Family Man*, which was supposed to be about werewolves but was really about scholars in 1768. I agreed that it sounded cool, but the initial description didn't grab me enough to read it immediately. Eventually, though, I moved into an apartment with wireless, and as my friend went into a new round of enthusiasm over the latest batch of historical notes, I went over to glance at <http://www.lutherlevy.com/>.

And I was hooked.

OK, first I had to wade through the mysterious prologue, with a seemingly injured wolf and a mysterious gun-carrying rider. But when Chapter 1 introduced the main character and his unruly family, I tumbled into all-out adoring fandom.

As my friend had described, the hero was a young German scholar suffering from an acute case of religious doubt and burdened with the sometimes-awkward name of Luther Levy. (And yes, Meconis knew exactly what she was doing when she named him that – he is named after Martin Luther and he is the son of a converted Jew.) There was indeed a looming promise of werewolves, and gloriously geeky historical

background on everything from topiary to academic hierarchy. But somehow none of these things summed up the whole.

For one thing, my friend's description couldn't show me Meconis's highly detailed artwork. I don't claim to know much about artwork, but some of those panels just make me gasp, or shiver, or get all warm and fuzzy.

I've started to follow some other webcomics since then, but haven't found any others that I would even attempt to check on my parents' dial-up. As a person who chronically reads the ends of books first, being so engaged with something in an unfinished serial format has been a major challenge.

After I had read through the first two years of *Family Man* (it was launched in 2006), I had to wait forlornly for the next Wednesday's weekly update. This drove me to investigate Meconis's earlier webcomic, *Bite Me!*

Meconis began *Bite Me!* in 2000 while still in high school. It moved to Girlamatic.com in 2002, was completed in 2004, and appeared in book form in early 2009. But it can also still be found free at Meconis's website: <http://dylanmeconis.com/>.

(By the way, this is also where to find Meconis's store, where she sells the book and other cool stuff as part of the effort to survive without a day-job. The first volume of *Family Man* is expected to appear among the merchandise shortly.)

To my initial disappointment, *Bite Me!* turned out to be about vampires. Usually the word "vampire" is enough to turn me off. Werewolves, now, I can give a werewolf the benefit of the doubt. At least a werewolf isn't, when you come right down to it, an undead bloodsucker. Particularly considering the recent rehabilitation of real wolves in the public eye, it's interesting to see how modern werewolf interpretations range from insane, bloodthirsty wolves to benign shapeshifters with an excellent sense of smell. A vampire, on the other hand, can be saddled with infinite angst and vegetarianism, but it always remains an undead bloodsucker. Yuck.

Fortunately, in *Bite Me!* the word "vampire" is followed by "spoof". The general tone is much lighter than *Family Man*, with a more cartoony drawing style. I enjoyed watching Claire the hyperactive tavern wench and various melodramatic vampires careening through their French Revolution world of guillotines and fondue forks. Not to give any spoilers, but a few high points include sinister chickens, a spoon wielded with unexpected talent, a cameo appearance by Robespierre, and exactly what happens when a Meconis vampire gets a good whiff of garlic.

And then there's our friend Luther - older, wiser, still sarcastic, and indisputably a werewolf. It seems that *Family Man* could loosely be considered a prequel to *Bite Me!*, though in the *Family Man* F.A.Q., Meconis explains that this isn't the intention.

This is easy to believe, because the style of artwork has drastically changed; it's acquired depth, nuance, and drama. So far much of the heart-pounding drama revolves around things like Luther giving a lecture - but I'm not kidding, I really was on the edge of my seat over that lecture. And there always is the ominous prospect of the eventual werewolves.

In *Bite Me!*, Luther's shape-changing abilities fall firmly into the benign category of werewolf interpretation. In either shape, he's arguably the sanest character in the entire piece. However, as noted in the *Family Man* F.A.Q., the world established in *Bite Me!* doesn't necessarily apply. Therefore, we don't really have any evidence for what the



wolves will be like when they do show up. The fans, of course, have observed all possible suspects closely. ("It's the love interest, isn't it? ISN'T IT?") At the close of Chapter II, *something* definitely happened with a wolf-skin in the woods - something much wilder than *Bite Me!* But the wait for details continues.

I'm finding that with Meconis's drawings and sympathetic characterization to admire, there really isn't any hurry for supernatural stuff. In some ways I can even manage to be glad it moves so slowly. It forces me to enjoy the artistry of each new panel, instead of galloping on to gulp down the story's end in my usual fashion.

My favorite panel to savor is the library. In that week's update, all that happens is Luther walks for the first time into a library built inside of what used to be a church.

As shown on my screen, I had to scroll down to see the whole image, past the tops of books seen from above and the arches of the old church. Overwhelmed by the sense of solemn spaciousness that Meconis had managed to capture in her temple of learning, I think I muttered, "Oh God!" Then my scrolling found Luther standing insignificantly in the bottom corner with the friend who was showing him around. There were just two small speech bubbles, as Luther said, "Oh -" and "...God."

Apparently that was really all that there was to be said.