

# THE GREAT EAST BAY GEEK GUIDE

Comic books, dinosaurs, dragons, and superheroes—here's your all-star guide to every kind of geek pleasure in our backyard.



**Not long ago**, those kids who loved comic books, fantasy novels, and science facts were the furthest thing from cool. But times have changed: Superheroes and sci-fi rule the box office, and one of TV's top shows features dragons. From video game innovators to fantastical writers and filmmakers, we happen to have some of the greatest geeks in the world living right here in the East Bay—and plenty of places and ways to nerd out. The unthinkable has happened: Geeks have become cool.

## BURNING QUESTION

**Q: Did the container cranes at the Port of Oakland inspire *Star Wars'* AT-AT walkers?**

A: No! Fans speculated for years, but George Lucas confirmed to the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2007 that it's just a myth. *The Empire Strikes Back's* stop-motion animator, Phil Tippett (see page 31), who designed the effects, agrees. In fact, Tippett says the walkers went through stages that wouldn't recall the cranes at all. "At one point in the design, they were going to be big and kind of radio controlled, more like big armored vehicles with wheels," he says. —LeeAnne Jones



# Far-Flung Worlds

FANTASY AND SCI-FI

## GEEK TO WATCH



**Veronica Rossi**  
Author • Danville

When Danville author Veronica Rossi made *The New York Times* 2014 Best Sellers list for her young adult series, she joined some impressive company, including *The Hunger Games* author Suzanne Collins, *Divergent* writer Veronica Roth, and *Harry Potter* scribe J.K. Rowling. Rossi's sci-fi series, *Under the Never Sky*, *Through the Ever Night*, and *Into the Still Blue*, follows teens Aria and Perry through a chilling, dystopian landscape set 300 years after Earth suffers a catastrophic accident. The series has made Rossi into Danville's best-selling author, and may soon make her a household name: Warner Bros. has gobbled up the movie rights to the series. [veronicarossibooks.blogspot.com](http://veronicarossibooks.blogspot.com). —Peter Crooks

“Now ... people all over the world know what language creation is.”



## PROFILE

### David Peterson: Language Inventor

When David Peterson entered UC Berkeley in 1999, he was an English major. His plan was to get a bachelor's degree, transfer to a master's credential program, and teach high school English. But in his second semester, he took a linguistics class.

"It blew me away," says Peterson, 34, who created the Dothraki language for the hit television show *Game of Thrones*. "The homework was problem sets, but not math problems—words. It was awesome. Berkeley radically changed the course of my life."

The HBO series is based on the books by George R. R. Martin, but these include only a handful of words and phrases for the nomadic Dothraki, a group of which comes to be led by the "Mother of Dragons." To expand the language for television, a contest was launched in partnership with the Language Creation Society. Peterson's application—which included multiple rounds of translations, a grammar write-up, recordings, and commentary—was selected by HBO.

Sounding a bit like a mash-up between Arabic and Spanish, the Dothraki language isn't a set of arbitrary words. Peterson constructed it around the culture of the roving warriors who rely on horses for transportation, warfare, and even food. So the Dothraki version of "How are you doing?" is

"Hash yer dothrae chek?" which translates to, "Do you ride well?"

The fifth season of *Game of Thrones* premieres April 12, and fan interest in the language has gone well beyond TV: There is an online language course, Living Language Dothraki, and a Dothraki Companion mobile app with vocabulary flash cards. Peterson has found himself in an unusually high-profile role, and it's led to some celebrity encounters, such as the first time he met Jason Momoa, who played Dothraki leader Khal Drogo. Momoa was with his wife, Lisa Bonet, and Peterson was starstruck. "I grew up watching *The Cosby Show*, and I was bowled over."

These days, Peterson has a very full schedule. He's working on Syfy's *Defiance*, the CW series *The 100*, the sixth season of *Game of Thrones*, and wrapping up work on a book scheduled for an October 2015 release, *The Art of Language Invention*.

As gratifying as his personal success may be, Peterson is most thrilled by the attention it's given his field. He says, "The best thing about what's happening to me now is that people all over the world know what language creation is—and they respect it." —L.J.

*Game of Thrones* characters use the Dothraki language that Peterson created.



## Combat Ready

Learn to shoot an arrow like Katniss or fashion your own Excalibur. **Trackers Earth Berkeley** offers adult classes in archery, blacksmithing, and wilderness survival. (And for kids, there's a Realms of the Golden Gate role-playing summer camp.) [trackersbay.com](http://trackersbay.com).

## Roll the Dice

Fans of role-playing card and board games flock to Danville's **House of Games** for weekly themed gatherings, including Warhammer Sundays, Magic Mondays, and Pathfinder Thursdays—plus an expertly curated selection of games for sale. [h-o-games.com](http://h-o-games.com).

## Light 'Em Up

Founded in 2011 by two trained fencers (and *Star Wars* fans), the **Golden Gate Knights** teach the art of light saber combat. The weekly three-hour class in San Francisco includes choreography, fancy flourishes and spins, film and stage techniques, and meditation. [goldengateknights.com](http://goldengateknights.com). —L.J.

Coming  
Soon

LOST WORLDS ADVENTURES

Hit a prehistoric hole in one at this brand-new, 28,000-square-foot Jurassic-tastic party place. Scheduled for an April 1 opening on the eastern edge of Livermore, it features one of the largest laser tag arenas in North America, black light miniature golf with erupting volcanoes, a 150-kid-capacity play structure, arcade games, and a dino-themed dining area. *lost worlds.rocks*. —L.J.



# Jurassic Giants

DINOSAURS

GEEK TO WATCH



**Colin Trevorrow**  
Director • Oakland



Oakland-raised Colin Trevorrow was just a teenager when Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* roared into theaters in the summer of 1993. Twenty-two summers later, Trevorrow is in charge of directing the dinosaur franchise reboot, *Jurassic World*, which hits theaters on June 12. It's a dream gig for a kid who grew up watching fantasy and sci-fi flicks at the Grand Lake Theatre, and splicing together his own short films at home. And it's impressive to see Universal hand over the keys (and a \$150 million budget) to their lucrative dinosaur kingdom to a young director with only one indie feature—the wonderfully sweet time-travel romance *Safety Not Guaranteed*—on his résumé. —P.C.

OPPOSITE PAGE: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK; DAVID RYSKI; PAT CROWLEY; THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM: PADDY MILLS; COURTESY OF TIPPETT STUDIO

PROFILE

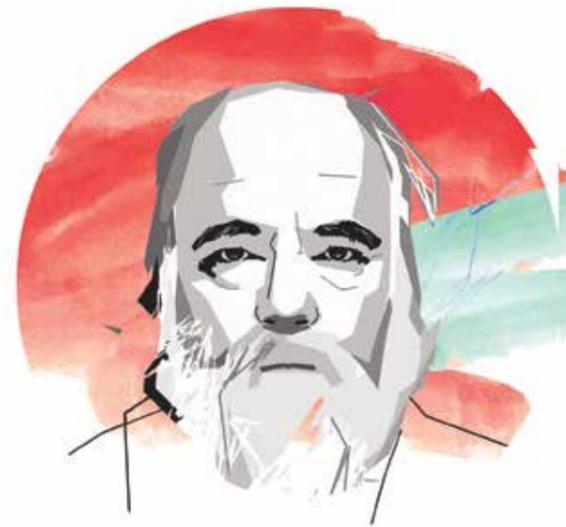
## Phil Tippett: Special Effects Whiz

It's no surprise Phil Tippett has been tapped to make the dinosaurs come to life in this summer's *Jurassic World*. Though he's sworn to secrecy about any new prehistoric beasts, Tippett has serious cred when it comes to large extinct reptiles. He's the guy Steven Spielberg hired to make the dinosaurs for the original landmark blockbuster, *Jurassic Park*, and the movie effects artist has created creatures and special effects for some of the biggest movies of all time.

Tippett, a lifelong film buff who picked his career path at age five after viewing the original *King Kong*, worked on all three original *Star Wars* movies and won an Oscar for his work on *Return of the Jedi*. He left Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic effects house in 1984 to create his own studio located in Berkeley. His first project was a 10-minute educational film called *Prehistoric Beast*.

"I thought it would be fun to show in schools to kids who were interested in dinosaurs," says Tippett, also a lifelong dinosaur enthusiast. "There was one problem—it was much too scary."

Tippett also helped NBC make an award-winning documentary called *Dinosaur!* in 1985, and had created the effects for films including *RoboCop*, *Willow*, and (ahem) *Howard the Duck* when one of



“There was one problem—it was much too scary.”

Lucas' friends called for help on an upcoming dinosaur film called *Jurassic Park*. Spielberg brought Tippett on as an official “dinosaur supervisor” in what would become a groundbreaking movie—not just for its box office records, but for its use of computer graphic imagery in place of models and stop-motion special effects.

“Originally, that film was going to be made much more conventionally, with stop motion and puppets,” says Tippett. “But the deeper they got into production, it became clear that computers had advanced far enough to do the work.”

Tippett's influence on the dinosaur effects in *Jurassic Park*, based on his lifetime of dino study, was profound. He was able to correct novelist Michael Crichton's mistakes, including swapping duck-billed dinosaurs out for faster ostrich-like creatures in a stampede scene. His work on the movie earned him a second Oscar.

In addition to dinosaur advisor duties on *Jurassic World*, he and the team at Tippett Studio are hard at work on *Ted 2*, *Gods of Egypt*, and a ride for a Chinese theme park. *tippett.com*. —P.C.

Dinosaur enthusiast Tippett supervised the special effects for *Jurassic Park*.



GEEK OUT HERE



Free Fossils

Head to **UC Berkeley's Museum of Paleontology** on Cal Day (April 18), the only day of the year this research facility is open to the public for tours. Or come anytime to scope out a few impressive fossils in the lobby, including a freestanding *Tyrannosaurus rex*, a suspended *Pteranodon* ingens, and *triceratops skulls*. *ucmp.berkeley.edu*.

Diablo Dig

While its rotating main exhibit ranges from wedding dresses to model trains, Danville's **Museum of the San Ramon Valley** boasts a fossilized mastodon jaw as part of its permanent collection. It was discovered in Blackhawk Ranch Fossil Quarry in the 1930s. *museumsrv.org*.

Bones and Booze

The **California Academy of Sciences** is light on dinosaurs, but the San Francisco museum does have an after-hours VIP experience with an open bar for adults. Sip cocktails next to the large, articulated *T-rex* near the entrance, and don't miss the “elephant bird of Madagascar” skeleton cast in the Earthquake exhibit. *calacademy.org*. —L.J.

## BURNING QUESTION

**Q: Is there any connection between Mount Diablo and the popular video game Diablo?**

**A:** Yes! David Brevik, one of the creators of the 1996 PC action role-playing game—in which players journey through hell to defeat Diablo, the Lord of Terror—grew up in Danville. In an interview with the website IncGamers in 2012, he said, “I lived at the base of Mount Diablo. Once I found out what the mountain’s name was, I thought that was awesome ... I wanted to use that as a title for a nemesis in a video game.” —L.J.



# Digital Dynasties

VIDEOGAMES AND COMPUTERS

## GEEKS TO WATCH



Shawn and Meg Livernoche  
Store Owners • Alameda

East Coast natives Shawn and Meg Livernoche recently moved west to Alameda and brought their impressive collection of nearly 100 vintage video game machines—Centipede, Donkey Kong, Frogger, Space Invaders, etc.—with them to open Alameda’s High Scores Arcade. It’s a little slice of heaven for anyone who grew up in the age of Pac-Man Fever, when every town in America had an arcade. “I can’t emphasize how phenomenal the response has been. We have original game programmers coming in all the time and thanking us for opening this arcade,” says Shawn. [highscoresarcade.com](http://highscoresarcade.com). —P.C.

“The most exciting time in games has been recently.”



## PROFILE

### Will Wright: Game Pioneer

**One of the biggest-selling PC games in history had its genesis in tragedy:** Designer Will Wright lost his Oakland hills home in the 1991 fire. The process of rebuilding his life sparked an idea that in 2000 became his biggest hit: *The Sims*, a simulation game in which you create people, place them in houses, and oversee and influence their lives. It sold 175 million copies and launched multiple sequels.

Following the 2008 release of Wright’s moderately successful species-creation game *Spore*, he’s been working more under the radar in a hip, industrial office space in West Berkeley, first with think tank Stupid Fun Club and now with start-up Syntertainment. We caught up with Wright on his new projects, the future of video games, and why screen time is good for kids.

**You have a new gaming start-up, Syntertainment. What are you working on?**  
We have one main project, a mobile app called Thred. It runs in the background on your phone and builds a graphic novel of your life. And then it invites you to expand on the story and share it with other people.

**How does that process work? How does it gather information?**

It pulls from your photos, your Facebook

feed, your GPS location. It sees you’re at a restaurant and thinks you’re probably eating. Once you’re in the app, you can edit the frames, choose different filters to apply to the photographs, decorate with stickers, write text, and pull in other photos from the web.

More and more, we’re leaving this data wake behind us: Everywhere we go, everything we do, our devices are collecting more data and have more awareness of our lives. [Syntertainment] is trying to turn that back into entertainment—not to be just science and graphs, but something interesting.

**Since the massive success of *The Sims* in 2000, video games have evolved greatly. What excites you most about the future? And what concerns you?**

My biggest concern years ago was that games were taking larger and larger teams and tens of millions of dollars to create. People were afraid to put money behind an unproven idea, so the only games that got big financing were sequels. There were a lot of people out there with cool ideas that didn’t have an entry into the field. The most exciting time in games has been recently, when they’ve evolved to mobile and web based, (continued on 116)

## GEEK OUT HERE



### Go Retro

Longing for the days you spent playing *Pitfall* on Atari? Thanks to **4Jays Video Games** in Antioch, you can relive them. It sells systems and games—from Atari to Commodore 64 to Nintendo’s original Game Boy—that have been cleaned and tested, and come with a 30-day warranty. [4jays.com](http://4jays.com).

### Multiplayer Mania

Before online gaming, there were LAN parties: Bring your computer, wire it to your friends’, and play away. Berkeley’s **Eudemonia** game store has a pay-per-hour LAN room, with 30 computers and more than 150 classic to contemporary games, from *World of Warcraft* to *Marvel Heroes 2015*. [eudemonia.com](http://eudemonia.com).

### High-Tech History

Depending on your age, the artifacts on display at Mountain View’s **Computer History Museum** may not feel so historic. But it’s a fascinating look at technology, from Charles Babbage’s five-ton “calculator,” to autonomous vehicles, to the increasing complexity and decreasing size of microprocessors. [computerhistory.org](http://computerhistory.org). —L.J.

In *The Sims*, players control individuals and their actions in social settings.



COMING SOON

**FREE COMIC BOOK DAY**  
Mark your calendars for May 2. It's Free Comic Book Day—a massive, worldwide event, started by Joe Field of Concord's Flying Colors Comics in 2001. Field suggested that a countrywide comic book giveaway would be a great way to bring in new fans, and the event has gotten bigger every year since, with up to 50 titles available for free during this year's iteration. [freecomicbookday.com](http://freecomicbookday.com). —PC.



# Comic Combatants

COMIC BOOKS AND SUPERHEROES

GEEK TO WATCH



**Daniel Clowes**  
Artist • Oakland



You've seen his work on the cover of *The New Yorker*, but Oakland artist Daniel Clowes is best known as one of the all-time titans of alternative comics. Using illustrative styles reminiscent of comic strips found in the Sunday funnies, Clowes tells fascinating stories about loners, with a tone that can switch between hilarious and heartbreaking from panel to panel. A good place to dive in is *Eightball*, one of the best-selling indie comics of all time. The first 18 issues of this seminal work—including *Ghost World*, which was adapted into an Oscar-nominated film—are being reissued in a deluxe, hardbound collector's edition on June 7. [danielclowes.com](http://danielclowes.com). —PC.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP TO LEFT: ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL CLOWES; COURTESY OF FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS; MICHAEL CHO; TOP TO BOTTOM: PADDY MILLS; COURTESY OF 20TH CENTURY FOX

## PROFILE

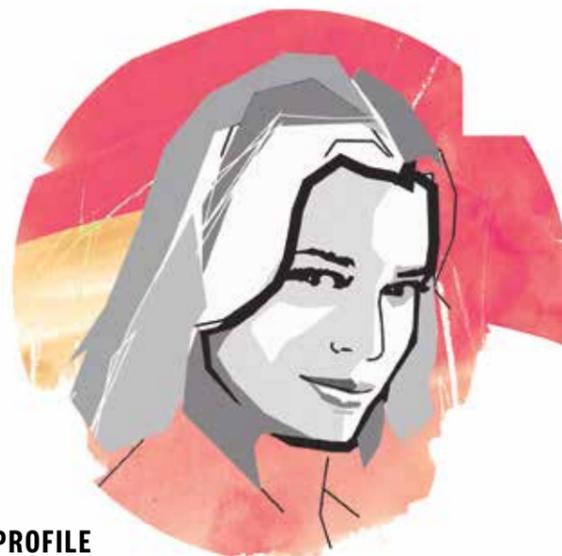
### Rebecca Romijn: Superhero

Berkeley native Rebecca Romijn first earned celebrity status by modeling on the covers of French *Elle* and the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue, but it was her role as the shape-shifting mutant Mystique in the Y2K blockbuster *X-Men* (and its two sequels) that earned Romijn permanent Geek Hall of Fame status. These days, Romijn is juggling her time between raising her twin daughters and starring on two hit shows: TNT's supernatural adventure *The Librarians* and GSN's body-painting competition, *Skin Wars*.

Superhero movies are huge, largely thanks to *X-Men*, which was made more for comic book fans than mainstream audiences. Exactly. That first *X-Men* film didn't receive great reviews, but fans of the comics said, "They got it right—they made it for us." And the studios really started to notice.

I saw you in a hallway at San Diego Comic-Con a few years ago: You were surrounded by fanboys asking you to sign Mystique action figures. Do you still get that kind of attention 15 years after *X-Men* came out? Oh, yes. Mystique will be with me for life.

Your body prosthetics in *X-Men* have to be one of cinema's greatest achievements in



“Mystique will be with me for life.”

makeup. If you were making that movie now, would they just use computers to paint on your blue scales? They could have done it with computers then! The filmmakers didn't want to—and that meant I had to be actively involved in the application process for nine hours to have that makeup put on. It wasn't fun; there were times I thought I was losing my mind. I eventually realized that going through that process helped my performance as a villain: Mystique went through nine hours of makeup torture, quietly creating an evil plan.

*The Librarians* is introducing young audiences to stars of classic TV and cult movies—Bob Newhart, Jane Curtin, John Larroquette. My favorite was when *Evil Dead* legend Bruce Campbell played Santa Claus. All of those people you mentioned have been incredible. I grew up loving them; now I get to work with them. Bruce Campbell was a particular delight and a bit of a good luck charm. We were waiting to hear if there would be a second season of *The Librarians*, and Bruce tweeted: "Santa wants to come back every year." After he sent it, season two was picked up! —PC.

Romijn endured nine hours of makeup application in three *X-Men* films.



GEEK OUT HERE



**Page to Street**  
*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Berkeley author Michael Chabon, inspired Dark Horse Comics to publish the first of an actual comic book series based on *The Escapist*, the hero of a fictional series featured in Chabon's book. And you can now visit **The Escapist Comic Bookstore**, named in homage to Chabon's character, in Berkeley. [escapistcomics.com](http://escapistcomics.com). —PC.

**Cosplay Time**  
Mark your calendar for February 2016, and start planning a winning superhero or fantasy character costume for the third annual **East Bay Comic-Con** in Concord. The one-day fest includes a costume contest, comic book dealers, and celebrity Q&As. [eastbaycomiccon.com](http://eastbaycomiccon.com). —L.J.

**Super on the Screen**  
We'll make this one easy: Stay home Tuesday nights, and tune in to reruns of ABC's **Agent Carter**—which just finished its first season—at 9 p.m. This Marvel Comics show, a spin-off of *The Avengers* series, features Moraga's **Lyndsy Fonseca** in a key role. —PC.

FREDERIC  
BEAUSOLEIL  
*Artiste Lunetier*



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(continued from 33) and away from these specialized consoles that take a lot of hard-core engineers. Creating games is more accessible. Three or four guys can get an app onto the iPhone, and it might be a huge hit.

#### **You're a parent. How old are your kids, and what kinds of games do they play?**

I have an older daughter who's 28, so she grew up when I was doing all these games. I also have two stepsons, ages 15 and 10, and a son who is about to turn five. So basically, I have three boys in the house that have their own iPads and play games all the time. Even the four-year-old. The 10-year-old, who is very much into Minecraft, does so much learning on his iPad. He'll get interested in a subject—maybe it's how to build something in Minecraft, or maybe it's WWII battleships—and then he'll search YouTube videos. He soaks it up.

I had these experiences as a kid. I had certain obsessions, and I'd go to the library. It was a very slow process. Now, there is so little friction between a kid's interests and being able to nourish them. In my experience, the really interesting thing about computers and education isn't that computers are great at teaching kids. It's that they're great at motivating kids. If you can get them interested in a subject, they have plenty of resources to feed it. There is an old quote I love that is, "Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire." And it's really about that.

#### **Do you have any concerns as a parent about video games, such as the amount of time spent playing them or the violence?**

When I was growing up, it was all about, "Stop watching TV and get outside." I've read that before TV, parents were concerned that their kids sat inside all day reading. There has always been some threat. Usually, it's whatever media kids consume that the parents didn't: comic books, rock and roll, video games.

A lot of parents don't see games as kids see them. Parents will look over a shoulder and see kids blowing stuff up and screaming at people. From the kids' point of view, it's a team sport. They're playing Quake or something, and they're actually working as a team with five other people. It's very social and very bonding. A lot of times, I talk to parents who are concerned that their kid is playing something too much. The advice I've always given—and that seems to be fairly successful—is that if they're concerned, they should start playing it themselves. Either it won't be considered cool to the kid anymore because the parent started playing it, or the parent will come to a different understanding, and it becomes a conduit of bonding.

#### **What video games do you enjoy playing?**

There is one I love called World of Tanks, which is a multiplayer game with old World War II tanks. As a team, you drive your tank around and shoot at the other team. It's great because it's like a shooter for old guys. You have to use strategy because you're limited in speed. It levels the playing field between 15-year-olds and old guys like me. —L.J. ■