



Serenity Found: More Unauthorized Essays on Joss Whedon's Firefly Universe

Jane Espenson (Editor / Contributor) , Jacob Clifton (Contributor) , Michael Marano (Contributor) , P. Gardner Goldsmith (Contributor) , Alex Bledsoe (Contributor) , Shanna Swendson (Contributor) , Lani Diane Rich (Contributor) , Eric Greene (Contributor) , more... Ken Wharton (Contributor) , Leah Wilson (Editor) , Geoff Klock (Contributor) , Orson Scott Card (Contributor) , Bruce Bethke (Contributor) , Maggie Burns (Contributor) , Evelyn Vaughn (Contributor) , Natalie Haynes (Contributor) , Nathan Fillion (Contributor) , Loni Peristere (Contributor) , Natasha Giardina (Contributor) , Corey Bridges (Contributor) ...less

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A lot has happened since *Finding Serenity*. We learned River's secret; Mal took on the Alliance. Our favorite crew became Big Damn Heroes. And the Browncoats proved that hard work, passion and a little fan coordination can do the impossible. *Serenity Found* takes the contents of *Finding Serenity* even further, exploring not just the show but the events of the film as well, to create an anthology that's even more thought-provoking, fascinating and far-thinking than its predecessor.

* Acclaimed science fiction author Orson Scott Card lauds "Serenity" as film sci-fi finally done right

* Writer and comedian Natalie Haynes reveals the real feminist savvy of the "Firefly" universe: the girls get the guns and the gags

* Pop culture critic Michael Marano connects damaged, ass-kicking River to the other weaponized women of the Whedonverse

* Multiverse executive producer Corey Bridges explains why the world of "Firefly" is the perfect setting for an MMORPG

* Mutant Enemy's visual effects wizard Loni Peristere relates what he's learned from Joss about telling stories, and tells a story of his own about Serenity's design

* Television Without Pity recapper Jacob Clifton frames "Serenity" as a parable about media: how it controls us, how we can control it and how to separate the signal from the noise

* And Nathan Fillion, "Firefly" and "Serenity's" Captain Malcolm Reynolds, shares his affinity for Mal and his love of Mal's ship and crew.

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Teo 2050 says

[Espenson J (ed.) (2007) (07:06) Serenity Found - More Unauthorized Essays on Joss Whedon's Firefly Universe

Introduction :: Jane Espenson

01. Catching Up with the Future :: Orson Scott Card

02. Mars Needs Women: How a Dress, a Cake, and a Goofy Hat Will Save Science Fiction :: Maggie Burns

03. Girls, Guns, Gags: Why the Future Belongs to the Funny :: Natalie Haynes

04. River Tam and the Weaponized Women of the Whedonverse :: Michael Marano

05. I, Malcolm :: Nathan Fi

Cari says

Confession: I am an unabashed, flailing Firefly fangirl. I quote both the series and the movie on a regular basis—at length. I've made friends with coworkers at new jobs simply by wearing a Serenity t-shirt that led to hours of debate over lunch. I preemptively cry while watching the movie as it approaches *that scene* (you all know the one of which I speak), and it takes all my willpower not to bawl like a baby when it actually happens.

In short, I'm strangely emotionally invested in the 'Verse in the way only the truly crazed can be. But in the land of Whedon, it's not like I'm alone.

To balance all that out, I'm also a huge lover of culture studies and pop culture analysis, and being (somewhat) analytical myself, I can recognize when even my favorite fandoms have their failings. Like with this series of essays: some were fantastic, most were pretty good, and a couple were bad, boring, and/or out of place. Here's my personal breakdown, and any pieces not specified by name are worth the read, not just the time to type out my opinions of them just to be ignored by the masses.

For me, there were three standouts. *I, Malcolm*, written by our dear Nathan Fillion, whose perspective on the show from the inside is priceless and whose sense of humor shines through excellently in his essay. *Signal to Noise*, analyzing the importance and potential of media ("Can't stop the signal," anyone?) by Jacob Clifton is a concise, brilliantly conceived piece of work. (Also, I knew the style seemed familiar as I was reading, but it wasn't until the biographical note at the end that I realized this was the same Jacob from TwoP who wrote the *Doctor Who* recaps I so adored while I should have been working.) And then there was *Mal Contents* by Alex Bledsoe, examining Mal's character arc in conjunction with his all-too-human flaws, because while Mal may be a hero, first and foremost he is a human being, with all the weaknesses and strengths that implies.

Scattered amidst the middle were pieces like *Mars Needs Women* (Maggie Burns), *Girls, Guns, Gags* (Natalie Haynes), and *River Tam and the Weaponized Women of the Whedonverse* (Michael Marano), which approached the ‘Verse from a more feminist standpoint, either blatantly like the first two or more subtly, perhaps even unintentionally, in the case of the last. Don’t get me wrong; all three of these pieces contained fantastic analysis of *Firefly* and science fiction overall. Unfortunately, I just didn’t care, because...I just didn’t care. I’m a woman, but I’m so sick of the feminist cries I could punch myself in the face. To each their own.

Earlier I said there were bad essays within these pages. In retrospect, that was a lie. The writing in all of these was of high quality, and I found most to be quite engaging. So there was nothing I curled my lip in disgust at, but I’ll admit to skipping the vast majority of *The Virtual ‘Verse* by Corey Bridges. I made it about a page and a half into this presentation of the *Firefly* MMORPG before skipping to the next essay. Not because it wasn’t good but because I just didn’t give a damn, not being a player (or even a casual gamer in other arenas) myself. Nothing against Bridges’ work; it just wasn’t my thing.

Curse Your Sudden but Inevitable Betrayal by Lani Diane Rich was well-written, amusing, and shared many of my feelings regarding the fate of poor, loveable Wash. On the other hand, she writes from a very personal perspective (the entire focus is on her and her husband as they maneuvered through their Whedon addictive), and in a book full of detailed, sci-fi geek analysis, it seemed very out of place. I liked it, but the entire time I was thinking, “One of these things is not like the other.” Don’t skip it, but it is a little jarring.

Overall, *Serenity Found* is a worthwhile read. I’d recommend it more for the hardcore *Firefly/Serenity* fans (you know, those of us still mourning Wash’s death every September) than the casual viewer, as it would probably start feeling pretty repetitive and/or ridiculous after a while.

Lorraine says

Again, another entertaining and thought provoking read. A look at faith, at River Tam and the Weaponized Women of Whedonverse, how feminism and comedy thrive in Whedonverse and how the Captain and the Doctor are co-heroes. All of this and more topped off by I Malcolm: a look at our dear Captain Tightpants by none other than Nathan Fillion.

Both of these books are edited by master storyteller Jane Espenson (*Buffy*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Dollhouse*, *Gilmore Girls*, *Ellen*, *Warehouse 13*, and of course *Firefly*)

Myra Symons says

I love Serenity and the firefly series. I got into it because of my nieces encouragement. I was pleasantly surprised at how deep the analysis of the series and the movie was. Most of my reading is of books of a spiritual nature, I was really surprised at how deep it all was. I tend to think of secular stuff as secular but there is a lot of spirit to Serenity.

I am going to really enjoy our annual browncoat meeting where we screen Serenity because I know more where to look for the technical stuff, that I never noticed before. I expected to like the book and pass it on to

my lovely niece, but I did not expect the idea of parting with the book to be so very painful.

I would recommend this to any fan of the firefly series and the Serenity movie. It will definitely expand your understanding of the verse. Now I am probably going to need to obtain at least 2 CDs.

Stephen says

If you are a Browncoat, you will love this book. There are a couple of clunkers that veer into academia style but if there is one particular thing about the Whedonverse (at least the Whedonverse before he went all Marvel) it is that there seems to be endless room for analysis, speculation and odes to the distinct and deep characters who inhabit the various galaxies therein.

Zoe Zuniga says

i have watched the series twice of course and am a bonified groupie. I am kicking myself for having missed them at the 2007 comic con lecture series.

I am always impressed with great visuals. The extras on the CD show how the space ship set is one continuous set for each of the two levels. the color schemes go from very warm for the companion's sex shuttle to very cool for the cockpit.

The fusion between Chinese and American culture is delightful and the costumes, Mandarin swear words, cowboy boots space ships and horseback riding all fit together nicely.

this is not the santized star trek future where everything is proper and polite but one where the dialog is gritty and the situations believable.

Kat Duarte says

What is there to say? Anything that takes me back into the world of Firefly and gives it serious consideration gets my vote. Never has there been a fictional world populated by more extraordinary men and women. And Jayne. Well...Jayne.

As a fan, Nathan Fillion's short essay "I, Malcolm" is the one you'll most likely read first. Next, Orson Scott Card's "Catching Up with the Future" might catch your eye.

For those who are science fiction fans, but not yet Browncoats, as fans of Firefly are known, well, first of all, where have you been? Second, please read Maggie Burns' essay "Mars Needs Women: How a Dress, a Cake, and a Goofy Hat Will Save Science Fiction" and you might begin to see what all the fuss is about.

As a writer, I especially enjoyed "Firefly and Story Structure, Advanced" by Geoff Klock, which carefully dissects the multi-layered plot of the episode "Out of Gas." (Those of you who love interweaving of stories like those on "Lost" and who aren't yet hooked on "Firefly," I recommend you watch this episode. Then go back and watch all the others, or better yet watch them all in order and keep an eye out for this one.)

A wide range of topics is covered in the nineteen essays (I'm counting Jane Espenson's introduction as one) and the quality of writing is high across the board. Not all of them might strike your fancy, but if you sample a few, you may find yourself reading this collection from cover to cover as I did. If it leaves you longing for more, there's always the first book of essays *Finding Serenity...if you haven't already read that as I have. Cover to cover.*

Richard Derus says

The Book Report: Eighteen more essays about the moral, political, and ethical underpinnings, implications, and effects of the late, lamented "Firefly" TV series.

My Review: Last collection had yummy-yummy Jewel Staite, aka Kaylee, writing about her favorite things in each episode; this collection has the slurpsome Nathan Fillion reflecting on being the Captain! For that alone, it's worth the price of admission!

But wait! There's more! Loni Peristere (also a beauteous hunk of man-flesh, maybe Joss is a switch-hitter?) All the men in the 'verse are so toothsome!), the f/x wizard behind the whole Whedonesque world, talks about the amazing and exacting Creator in terms of inspiring the best work from Loni and his minions, an essay that made me even angrier at the business-sound-but-aesthetically-idiotic cancellation of "Firefly". Then one Geoff Klock pulls apart and analyzes the brilliant, brilliant episode "Out of Gas", in search of storytelling genius and its telltale markers; there are many, and they are important for anyone interested in storytelling craft to study in depth. This essay makes that process almost easy, which is in itself a feat of storytelling.

Bruce Bethke's essay, "Cut 'Em Off At The Horsehead Nebula!", goes into the whys and wherefores of the SFnal aversion to Western tropes invading "its" territory, rooted in the pulp origins of SF, and its early competition with Western pulps for writers and readers. One can still hear nasty, condescending echoes of the war, which SF **won** and could and should drop, in the covert critical reception of "Firefly" as a damned Bat Durston story. Read the essay, I ain't explainin' that one. Too long, and also it pisses me the hell off.

My personal favorite essay is "The Bonnie Brown Flag", relating the "Firefly" underpinnings to the American Civil War's myth of the Noble Losers, the Gentleman Planters following the Bonnie Blue Flag. It's poignant, it's well crafted, and it's quite nicely argued.

The only essay that's a real flop is "The Virtual 'Verse", which was a waaay premature ad for the dead-in-the-water MMORPG of "Firefly" that was, at that time, being touted as forthcoming. Well, it never forthcoming, and the essay looks like what it was: Blatant product placement. Ptui.

But then comes what I think is the most important essay: "The Alliance's War on Science" by Ken Wharton. Ten pages of keen observation on the nature of political propaganda masquerading as science. Again, if all you read is this one essay, your purchase price will be fully amortized. The subject is ever-more important, and this essay will sensitize you to the issue like never before.

Just like "Firefly" would have, had it survived intact to this good day. Next best thing is buying BenBella Books's essay collections. And, of course, reading them with the starved passion of a jilted lover. Or is it just me...?

Kevin says

Because one collection of essays about a TV show canceled after half a season is not enough. There are some interesting takes in this collection. A few veer a little too deeply into academia, but overall it's an interesting read for a Firefly/Serenity fan.

Lani says

I always want these 'essays on pop culture' books to read like intelligent conversations you have on the couch with your friend after drinking and watching an episode or two. Instead they often lean more towards the academically dry and pompous. I felt like this book struck a better balance than others I've read, with a few exceptions.

I found the interview/essay from the special effects designer was particularly enlightening, and some of the analysis was well-argued without getting hung up in trendy philosophical babble. I learned things about the series, and realized just how smart it sometimes was. I liked the analysis of scifi tropes found in Firefly, complete with an explanation for the history of classic scifi versus the Space Western.

Overall, reading the book made me want to rewatch the series, so I suppose it was a win.

Sandy says

This book was all over the place. It's a collection of essays about Firefly and/or Serenity by 18 different authors. A few of the essays were entertaining. A few of them were really educational and/or interesting. But several of them were just a painful slog to get through. I felt like an English lit teacher, having to read through several kids' term papers. Overall, there was a disappointing lack of humor in the essays, considering how funny Firefly is (and, to a lesser extent, Serenity, too). I'm giving it just two stars, for "Not That Shiny"

Ryan Mishap says

One of the things about punk rock that I like the best is the general belief that being "fans" isn't enough, or even the antithesis of how one should be punk (or live in the world). Beyond just DIY, the anti-fan ideology tells us we are participants. Given this background, I refuse to let people call my zine a "fanzine" or to reduce myself to a punk rock "fan" as so many columnists for the big punk mags seem to wind up as.

I am a fan, however, of Firefly, probably the best TV show ever created. I know, you may think that isn't saying much, but it was really good story telling--and that is what I care about the most, regardless of format. At any rate, I can't get enough, so I actually read this fan essay collection.

Some cover philosophies on the show, ideas about freedom, the lack of identifiable people of Asian descent

though supposedly the future was an amalgamation of the U.S. and China, and more. So, they aren't all fawning, and it was surprising to see how people viewed the stories and characters--in two instances at least, different authors viewed characters completely opposite from each other.

The only reason to get this, however--because it isn't really worth reading unless you are obsessed with the show--is for the essay where the author juxtaposes Star Trek Enterprise with Firefly and for the fictional letters sent from a Fox executive to show creator Joss Whedon. Those are gold.

Emily Ross says

I liked this audiobook, and I preferred it to the previous *Finding Serenity*.

However, it was a bit of a drag, and it felt like at least half of the essays had nothing to do with Firefly or Serenity. Like, I purchased this audiobook to listen to a book about Serenity, not Stargate or Buffy or Battlestar Galactica or Criminal Minds, even if I like half of those programmes. It was a bit of a letdown.

Chris Collins says

I don't geek out on television shows or movies to the point that I read essays about them. This is the exception. It was interesting to read people's perceptions and personal experiences and see what they took away from Firefly/Serenity based, in no small part, on each person's filter. For me, Firefly/Serenity was libertarian porn. For other folks, it was a feminist piece. While to others, it was, well, let's just say, I don't share their filters, so I didn't, for example, see the nameless Operative in Serenity as a neo-con Christian zealot. You can be a "believer" and not be a theist. Clearly, this guy was that "we can make Heaven on Earth" type of the early American Progressive movement. That's what Miranda was, after all. A mostly well-intentioned, yet wholly wrong, central government trying to perfect humanity. Still, it's interesting to see what other people took away from a mutual interest. Even if those folks are 180 degrees out of phase with yourself.

Landi Diane Rich's piece was touching. Maggie Burns' piece was interesting. Feminist characters aren't men who pee sitting down or are unrelatable uber-beings, who knew? Clearly, not most screenwriters. Bruce Bethke's and Orson Scott Card's pieces were illuminating. I had no idea about the history of Bat Durston or that Star Wars was so far behind the curve when compared to written sci-fi at the time. I mean, sure, I knew it was twelve pounds of derivative in a six pound bag, but still. Evelyn Vaughn's piece was informative. The post-Civil War west setting was obvious in the show, but it was an interesting examination. And, of course, the best essay was Nathan Fillion's (and the best bit in the book is at the end of his essay). All in all, a decent read. Well worth the time if you're a fan of Firefly and Serenity. If you're not... what's wrong with you? Seriously.

Ben says

Here's a fitting companion to *Finding Serenity*. Published well after the movie *Serenity* came out and the Firefly universe has more or less stopped creating new adventures, this book is a more holistic contemplation of both Firefly and Serenity. It has some really interesting reflections on the characters (especially the one on Book), an exploration of the foundations for science fiction that were laid down by pulp magazines and

corny American westerns, and kind of a sad essay plugging a Firefly game that has seemed to collapse completely.
