



*This is ALCHERINGA #1, and an Obsessive Press publication #65, from Jeanne Gomoll, for ANZAPA. *2018 Jenifer St., Madison, WI 53704 USA. 608+241-8445. All contents © 1982 by Jeanne Gomoll.*

ALCHERINGA NO. 1

Having missed two deadlines before I realized that Derrick was going to give me more than one chance, it is now or never. Well I could do the fannish thing and go into a long explanation of why I missed the previous two deadlines, or be even more fannish and skip all that. Another fannish thing I could do would be to blame it all on John Berry for having suggested that I join ANZAPA in the first place. But I think that what I really want to do is to introduce myself politely, perhaps explain a little why I have named this zine Alcheringa, and then—after I've seen a mailing—get involved with the apa's conversation.

I was born in the very middle of the North American continent, a place some of us cheerfully call the icebox or the oven, depending upon the season. To be precise, I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which is situated on the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan and has a reputation primarily as a beer-manufacturing and farm-machinery-manufacturing city. It is not what you'd call a really cosmopolitan town. In fact there's a joke about Milwaukee. What is the difference between Dannon Yogurt and Milwaukee?, goes the joke. The answer is that Dannon Yogurt has an active culture. But it is an interesting city in some ways. There are lots of extraordinarily good German restaurants, and the annual folk fair shows off the still very-much-living German-Polish community that predominates in the area. But it's not a place I wanted to live for my whole life. I may not have been allowed even if I had wanted to stay, anyway. I detest beer. So after finishing two years of college at a commuter college near my parents' home, I left for Madison.

Madison is a smaller city, of maybe 3/4 million people, as compared to Milwaukee's 3 million. But it is the state capitol and its primary activities are government and the University of Wisconsin. My reason for moving to Madison was the latter and after having won my degree in Geography, spent 3 or 4 years editing JANUS and living a marginal economic existence, I went to work for the former--along with al-

most everyone else in the city, it seems. At present I work for the Department of Natural Resources of the State of Wisconsin, specifically in the Bureau of Parks and Recreation as a Graphic Artist II. And now, after almost ten years in Madison, I call the place home and feel more comfortable here than I ever felt back in Milwaukee.

It's a very pretty town. Situated among a group of glacially created lakes, but primarily between two large ones, Monona and Mendota, Madison is an isthmus city. The capitol building is exactly in the center of the narrowest part of the isthmus and the business district grows around that point. This arrangement makes for ideal conditions for planning mass transit, and indeed Madison's bus system is probably one of the best in the country, but the arrangement is also an ideal one for getting new-comers lost. We usually don't even bother using such silly terms like "north", "south", "east" or "west" in Madison. The use of these words can even manage to get a long-time resident lost, but that's always fun for a joke. All this happens because the isthmus is laid out in a northeast-southeast line and since the city was a "planned city" of the late 1800's, most of the streets reflect that orientation. (And those that don't merely add to the confusion.)

Its atmosphere is far more cosmopolitan than Milwaukee's, due primarily to the University and government activities. I find it an exciting city to live in—sort of like a miniature version of San Francisco: Lots of movie theatres, active theatrical groups, varied shops and restaurants, and especially, a somewhat transient, but very interesting, cross section of residents.

And that's why I thought I'd call this zine Alcheringa. And you thought I was introducing myself! Alcheringa is a word I came across in Kylie Tennant's novel, *RIDE ON STRANGER*, meaning "the Spirit of the Place." I'm assuming that I'm going to get involved in a lot of conversations in which comparisons between Australia and the Midwest part of the USA are going to be central

—and given my inclination, anyway, to like to talk about places and people as being importantly connected, this seemed like a perfectly good title.

Now, I'll start on the introduction business. Alcheringa connects to that too, in that I wish that I could have been a geographer in the old sense of that word, in which geography was more the art than the science of describing the landscape and the connections between communities of people and animals and plants to that landscape. Nowadays, geography is much more the making of computer models to discover the optimum number of service stations or laundries for any given type and size of population. Boring, and far more dependant on statistical familiarity than on subjective skills. I discovered that geography had become much more of a science than an art in my third year of college, and went on to collect my BA in Geography with some regrets. Then I decided to postpone the acceptance of a fellowship to the graduate program here at the UW to Urban Planning, until I was sure I wanted to continue. Well I never did go back, and instead tried to start a little magazine with members of a feminist reading group that I belonged to. That didn't work out, and a little while later I joined a local science fiction group because it was considering the possibility of starting a little magazine of their own. Publishing something—anything—greatly intrigued me. I didn't know anything about fanzines at that point, and in fact had mostly given up on science fiction through most of my college years, but discovered the former and rediscovered the latter during the next year.

Within a couple months I had gone from being the staff artist to the co-editor of JANUS, and after four years of that had learned quite a lot about drawing, publication, and writing. It was the combined experience from those years together with my Geography degree that landed me the graphic artist position with the Department of Natural Resources one and a half years ago. Since then, the fanzine has become a cooperatively produced and edited magazine involving six to eight members

of the Madison SF group, and has changed its name from JANUS to AURORA. It remains a feminist-oriented, mostly sercongenzine.

Since graduating, I've found all sorts of things to take up my so-called spare time, many of them springing from involvements with people in the local SF group, but others not. I work on the annual convention, WisCon, though my activity there has been less apparent with each year. This year, for instance, I only did a bit of the scheduling, and designed and laid out the program book, which was done Ace-Double style in honor of one of our Guests of Honor, Terry Carr. What took up most of my time during the two months prior to our convention in early March, was typesetting and laying out "The Cacher of the Rye," by Carl Brandon. Terry Carr had given me publication rights to this book which he'd written in the late 1950's under the hoax-name, Carl Brandon. The hoax has since been revealed, and Terry gave me a substantial introduction to "Cacher" telling the whole story of the Brandon hoax and a complete bibliography of Brandon's work. I'm in the process of selling copies of the book through the fan press now. (\$6.00 plus postage--\$1.00 US, \$1.50 outside-US) The process of learning how to typeset and actually publish a book was incredibly interesting, and seems to be part of the progression of publishing I've gone through during these years in Madison. First, there was a very crude, xeroxed apa that I unknowingly "re-invented" as some college friends moved out of town and we tried to stay in contact. We called that FOMA. Then there was the mimeographed, and then offset and then better quality offset JANUS. With each "advance", I found it more difficult to go back and use the former production style. And so it is with this "advance"! I find that I've stopped using press-on letters for most of my freelance design work now, preferring to rent time on the typesetting machine. Difficult as it will be, however, we won't be able to afford typesetting on AURORA though, and I'll have to go back to mere typing there (and here). I'd like to do more publishing projects of that kind though.

As I mentioned in the last paragraph, my income is supplemented by some freelance design work. Mostly this consists of stationary, business cards, ads, and some illustration; and my advertisements are entirely word-of-mouth. But even so, I get enough work to keep me constantly in deadlines (as if the AURORA deadlines weren't enough). This last month I've done a whole bunch of signs for the local YWCA on a "trade" basis. Since I work out in their gym three times a week and swim in their pool another three times, this works out very well for me. That activity is one that is definitely not connected to the SF group, since being a jock is not and has never been very fannish. Right now, though, my swimming and weightlifting (and as it gets warmer, my biking) is probably more important to me than fandom. Exercising is a relatively new activity for me, beginning last summer. But once I began, it rapidly became an adiction. A new obsession.

At times, I've used the term "obsession" to describe the intense manner I tend to get involved with activities and people. I've even named an apa-zine (OBSESSIONS, for A Women's Apa) and my press for it. My history of obsessions has included, and in some cases, still includes, science fiction & fantasy, Robert Heinlein, reading, academia, feminism, publishing, the anti-war movement, producing a Madison Monopoly Game, various good friends, Arthur Rackham, conventions, maps, Ralph Vaughn Williams, drawing, cooking, neatness-to-an-irritating-degree (according to some past roommates), movies (and lately, especially Australian-made films), technical pens, Martian jokes, biking, swimming, weightlifting, James Tiptree, Jr./Alice Sheldon, and dead cat/unicorn jokes. Some of these are or were more passionate obsessions than others, and some, like Heinlein are no longer even slightly interesting to me.

At present, I live alone in an upstairs flat—a quite comfortable apartment with a huge kitchen, office, and bedroom—which is only a 10-minute bike-ride from my office downtown and

a couple blocks away from the shores of Lake Monona. The neighborhood is quiet and lower middle-class residential. I've had my own apartment for almost 3 years now, and become more and more fond of the lifestyle as time goes by.

I do not own a pet, and have been experiencing some difficulty remembering to water the plants.

So, hello there.

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Sometimes it feels as if I live in a Philip K. Dick novel.

Take last Friday, for instance. It was 3:00, only an hour and a half before quitting time, and my boss, Jim Treichel, rushed into my office and apologetically interrupted my inking of the Kickapoo river delta map. It turned out that we needed 25 8½"x11" frames right away for the 25 certificates of honor that I'd produced earlier in the week for Forest Rangers Management Trainee program. (Even that sounds Dickian enough, but that's not unusual at all; it gets much worse.) It further turned out that the only place to get 25 frames at that late time-of-day was at a new shopping center in the suburbs, called "Shopko." A car-owning co-worker was convinced to drive me to Shopko, where I bought the 25 frames and waited at the check-out counter. I noticed a bunch of very crazy looking people off in the far end of the row of check-out lanes. A man was dressed in full tuxedo; several shapely women were dressed like ballerinas with sparkly, net costumes; and two normal looking people were holding porta-pack video cameras. Several of them were gesturing at the area in which I stood. Determined not to get involved in any kind of weird publicity stunt, I moved down four cash registers, and waited my turn there. As I paid the bill and picked up my parcel, the tuxedoed man rushed up to me with two of the costumed women fluttering and smiling behind him, and the two camera people recording the whole scene. "Congratulations!" he said. I looked blankly at him, gradually realizing that he was talking

to me. "Congratulations!" he yelled, even louder this time than before, and smiling as if trying to display his whole dental structure. "You are the millionth Shopko customer!!" One of the women took my bag and smiled at me cheerfully. "Oh?"

"Yes!"

I waited.

"And how long have you been a ShopCo customer?" he boomed.

"This is the first time I've ever been here," I answered in a normal tone of voice, hoping to stop him from yelling at me. But he didn't follow my lead, and in fact he wasn't really talking to me, but to the cameras.

"And what do you think of Shopko now that you've tried us?" he said with large gestures, that insane smile, and much drama.

I was beginning to feel rather stunned at the whole situation, and could only look at the bag that one of the ballerinas held and say, "Well you've got some nice, cheap frames."

This momentarily seemed to take him aback, but he recovered in no time, and seemed to decide that he was going to have to carry the ball in this commercial. They'd picked the wrong millionth customer, I think. He went on and on about how wonderful Shopko was, and at the end of the monologue, announced that Shopko was pleased to award me with a gift in honor of my being the millionth customer to buy something at their store. It turned out that I had a choice between a water softener, a clothes dryer, \$300 worth of clothing, and a color TV set.

I momentarily considered the \$300 worth of clothes. Because of the exercising I've been doing, I had lost a lot of weight during the past year, and was having to discard wardrobes and buy new ones at an alarming rate. But having seen the inside of Shopko, I knew that I didn't want to come back much less wear Shopko clothing.

A few minutes later, my co-worker Dave who had been waiting out in his car, squinted through the car door window at the spectacle of me and the tuxedoed clown, followed by a bunch of ballerinas and a man with a loading cart and a color TV.

Later, when we finally got back to the office, Dave explained to Jim, who had been worried about why we'd taken so long, that I had stopped to get a TV. Jim looked confused. And eventually, I explained.

Sometimes there are things that even some Americans think are pretty strange and foreign about America. I only wish I could have tried spraying some UBIK at the guy in the tuxedo.

Yossarian found out in CATCH-22 that the only way to survive absurdities was to play along and contribute your own absurdities. I think that only makes things deteriorate more rapidly, PKDickian.

Take the recent paranoia caused by the publication of evacuation information by the USGovernment of late. In an effort to maintain a balance of power in the nuclear-holocaust-evacuation department with the Soviets, the Post Office has issued instructions on how to find and mail special change-of-address cards in the case of nuclear holocaust, so that we can find out who survived and what their current address becomes. The spectacle of the bureaucracy making plans for its own continued existence, totally ignoring the fact that there probably won't even be any people left seems to be an ultimate absurdity, but it spins off other absurdities anyway. Like...

The other day I received a POSSE COMITATUS fanzine in the mail. The POSSE COMITATUS is a far, far right, reactionary-in-the-extreme, fascist white/christian group that has been growing in support in some of Wisconsin's northern rural areas. Their fanzine's headlines shout: "ARM EVERY AMERICAN: THERE ARE CRIMINALS ON THE LOOSE IN WASHINGTON" The subject of this particular fanzine was that there is a conspiracy between the US,

the international banking community, internal Jewish Communists, etc., to create chaos either through a monetary crisis, communist revolution or "limited Soviet nuclear attack on major military installations and industrial cities." The POSSE COMITATUS goes on to explain that this crisis will be used to evacuate the population into rural areas (according to Civil Defense Preparedness manuals). Being very concerned about the rights of citizens to arm themselves and create "posses", they are critical of the parts of those manuals which stress that no firearms are permitted by evacuees. From this fact, and some other evidence, they envision a vast genocidal plot to do away with "Christian Patriots", as they call themselves. The other evidence is that "all shelters have been emptied of food medicines and other survival equipment," and the only provisions being made in the rural evacuation areas are "mass burial sites" and "massive amounts of disposable body bags." Weird, weird.

Things really do seem crazy sometime.

Two ladies in the bus on winter day had a conversation in the seat in front of me and I overheard it. They were both looking at the daily newspaper showing the radius of destruction that would be caused by a nuclear bomb dropping on the Capitol building in downtown Madison. Both seem alarmed by the diagram, and they talked for a while about whether either would try to escape if they knew that war was imminent. (A popular subject for a lot of conversations I've noticed.) One lady looked out the window, and then looked at her friend, and quite seriously asked, "How far do you think we could get if we caught the G-Line bus right after the alarms went off?"

Come to think of it, I sometimes wonder if most people aren't assuming we're in a science fiction novel, and that after we finish reading this particular story, we can close the book and pick up the next one, as easy as that.

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Before I finish, I do want to mention one of the things that originally prompted me to join ANZAPA in the first place. For the last couple of years, I've been fascinated by Australian films, and have supplemented that movie-going with some reading. I've seen all the US-released Australian films that have come to Madison, plus the BBC-made film AGAINST THE WIND. (I missed A TOWN NAMED ALICE, though.) For a while I was checking out stacks of books from the library, and especially enjoyed Eleanor Dark's historical novels THE TIMELESS LAND and STORM OF TIME. As is my habit, I started storing notes and quotations on 3x5 cards and building an edifice of a THEORY in my head about Australian literature and film. The theory was mostly based on the impression that the general attitude toward the land is different for people in Australia than it is for people in the US. It seemed to me that there was a continuing attitude of fear mixed with guilt, perhaps partially borrowed from the aboriginal mythologies, about the land. At times, in some of the books and films I'd seen, the land seemed to be portrayed as a conscious entity, one that would eventually brush off the human invaders and return to the peace of its previous existence. Well that was an interesting idea, but I eventually stopped collecting 3x5 cards and building the theory, because to support the thing I'd have had to do some totally absurd theorizing about there being a national neurosis, or else have suggested some fairly off-the-wall sciffy explanation about the nature of the Australian continent. Still, even though I'm over that particular obsession now, I'd be curious about your impressions of Australian literature, film or your own feelings toward the land, those of you from that part of the world, I mean.

Now that I've introduced myself and said hello and all, I'll be looking forward to reading your zines and getting a chance to join your conversations. I'll talk to you soon.

Best,

Jeanne

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