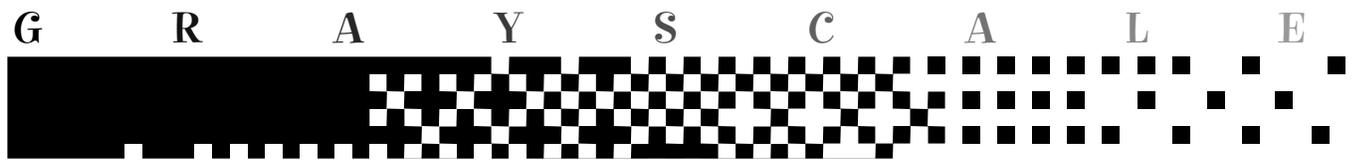


The illusion of gray created  
by an arrangement of  
alternating black and white dots



This is Grayscale #25, a zine for *Intercourse*, and an Obsessive Press Publication #258, from Jeanne Gomoll, 2825 Union Street, Madison Wisconsin 53704-5136. 608-246-8857. ArtBrau@globaldialog.com

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Catching up with my mailing comments was my main goal with this issue. But I didn't catch up completely and only got to the first few zines from *Intercourse* #99 before it was time to send this off. But I'm determined to finish the comments this weekend and have them ready to append to my next issue. Also, I want to remember to write up a great show-and-tell-story about how 9/11 affected a DNR publication's cover image. Next time...

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© **Intercourse 96**  
**Kerry Ellis**

I really enjoyed your travel bulletins, especially the brief (tantalizing) descriptions of people you met along the way. (I'm thinking here of the prevaricating John in Egypt.)

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© **Guy Thomas**

You mentioned that you were enjoying *Six Feet Under*. Scott and I have gotten hooked on this HBO series. I have read a couple articles about how the major networks are saying that shows like this (and *Sopranos* which we like too) "unfairly" compete, because they're not bound by censors. Scott and I think the networks are missing the point. *Six Feet Under* and *Sopranos* and other acclaimed HBO shows aren't popular because they show a bit more nudity or spout a few more expletives; they're popular because they're well written.

Your description of how polyandry "works" in the SIMS environment ("only if none of the members of triad see displays of affection with another member of the triad everything is cool.") It sounds like SIMS programming/relationship definition isn't "allowing" polyandry so much as it is allowing cheating.

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© **Michael Sturza**

I also loved *The Widow of Ste. Pierre*, but wasn't as sure as you were that the captain's wife (Madame La) was in love with the prisoner. I agree that many villagers assumed that there was something going on between the two, but only because they couldn't imagine a close relationship between a woman and a man that didn't involve sex. But probably the main source of the misunderstanding stemmed from their lack of appreciation for the amazingly egalitarian marriage of captain and Madame La. I was convinced all the way through the film that the incredibly passionate and complex relationship between the captain and Madame La was never threatened by her befriending of the convict. In fact, both captain and Madame La demonstrate several times their tendency to stand up for principals over happy endings. They understood one another so well in this that in spite of every unusual circumstance neither ever doubted one another.

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© **Lyn Paleo**

I enjoyed your trip report, thank you. It's interesting how the different attitudes toward smoking in Europe and the US persist and have even seemed to grow in the last decade. I am curious about why there doesn't seem to be a similar anti-smoking health movement in Europe comparable to the one here. People say it that this is just one more aspect of the "Puritan" American view and thus irrelevant. Is there a parallel between the European attitude toward cigarettes

## Books Read in 2001

**The Blind Assassin**, Margaret Atwood. Scott surprised me with this one as a Christmas gift and I read it almost immediately after the holidays ended. It reminded me of the kind of dream where you keep dreaming that you have woken up from a dream, but soon discover that it's just one more level of dreaming. The character you thought was narrating turns out not to be the point of view character. Nevertheless it all gets settled in the end of what turns out to be a complex examination of how the lives of two daughters of wealth have been warped and repressed by their class. And on top of that there is lots of typically Atwoodian humor. Isn't it about time for a new Atwood novel to come out?

**Pride and Prejudice**, Jane Austen. This is my third time reading this most famous Austen novel, and I had more fun reading it than either of the previous times. I can only hope that it will just keep getting better with every re-reading, since there are so few Austens to spread over a lifetime.

**What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: from fox-hunting to whist—the facts of daily life in 19th century England**, Daniel Pool. After having spent so much of my lifetime reading modern fiction, this recent interest of mine in 19th century fiction has made me curious about strange things.... I'm still not sure what pudding (not made by Jell-O) tastes like. But now I've got a better idea about what the Enclosure movement did, what it means to have 200 pounds a year, and understand a little more about how those wacky inheritance laws used to work.

**The Start of the End of it All**, Carol Emshwiller. I think I like Emshwiller's short fantasy stories better than her fantasy novels. (Although I like her western novels best of all.) These stories are great, surrealistic, sharp comedies, in which Emshwiller follows Ursula LeGuin's path to subject matter that hasn't traditionally been considered the proper subject of genre fiction. Solitary, elderly women considering their lives. Housewives cleaning up after alien invaders. Stuff like that.

**The Marriage of Sticks**, Jonathan Carroll. I like fantasy that doesn't go off the deep end into unbelievable land. This one stayed on the edge of the *Twilight Zone*, and I liked it for its very modern take on this story about emotional vampires. Interesting characters.

and AIDS? I saw a little article in the paper many months ago about the surprising cultural impact of Starbucks in Vienna Austria. Not the usual thing though. Apparently Starbucks' no-smoking rule is enforced in all its stores, and when Starbucks began opening stores in Vienna, it was generally agreed by locals that there wasn't a chance in hell that they would be successful, simply because NO ONE would go to a coffee house where smoking was prohibited. Nevertheless, Starbucks was wildly successful immediately because it attracted non-smokers who flocked there as the only public place they could go without cigarette smoke. The article writer wondered if non-smokers would soon be recognized as a new market. I'll be interested to hear some follow-up stories.

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### © Debbie Notkin

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Silences are a significant behavior for both Scott and I when we are upset with one another. I agree that silences are potentially very hurtful, especially if they don't end with an open discussion about the reasons for that silence. For me, being silent and obviously angry is a way to clamp down on my first impulse to say something hurtful, as a sort of revenge. In my head, I'm playing out the argument I imagine would occur if I were not silent. Most often, this exercise helps me quickly identify the real reason I am angry, or to realize that the end result of that argument, if vocalized, would not be worth the cathartic relief. It's then easier to trace back my anger to a bad day, a misunderstanding, or even a constructive insight about a process that's not working well. Nevertheless, silences certainly are useful at drawing attention: Something's wrong, I'm feeling very emotional about this, we're going to have to deal with it, get ready....

My pyrophobia seems limited to lighting matches. I think I just don't believe that it's possible to get your finger out of the way *fast enough* when I light a match the way I was taught, with the index finger pressing down on the red part while striking it. It's kind of like my driving-around-curves or over-bridges-phobia which slows me down sometimes. What I don't see gets filled subconsciously with all too believable dangers; I know logically that it's (most probably) safe but my subconscious insists on taking some portion of my motor control. So too with a match. I can't imagine moving my finger fast enough to evade the flare, so I can't easily force my finger to risk itself.

Thanks for the information that *The Last Hot Time* was originally written for Terri Windling's Borderlands series. That explained the sense that the author was making some assumptions about my understanding of the world.

I just finished reading *LotR* for the first time. I'd put it off when I was younger because I had such a hard time getting into *The Hobbit*. I'm not sure anymore what put me off on it except that I never did get caught up in the episodic plot of *The Hobbit* not even when I finally finished it in mid-December 2001. But I pushed my way through because I wanted to read *Fellowship of the Ring* before the movie came out. I managed that, finishing it only a few hours before we walked into the movie theater, by which time I'd also compulsively read the first couple chapters of *The Two Towers*, trying to find out if Gandalf was Really dead.

I've now finished the whole trilogy and enjoyed the whole experience immensely. But. I was constantly bothered by the lack of active women. It may be that I've lost my childhood ability to identify with male characters or

to identify with the “other.” I commented out loud several times to Scott as I read about the weird blindness of the author to a big missing chunk of his world. (Scott has read *LotR* already, so I would inform him what was happening at the moment. “At LAST! a woman who does something! .... Damn, she’s dead already! ... Oops, no she’s not!”) I thought Ursula LeGuin who apparently has read *LotR* aloud several times, once to each of her kids, and thought about how she has recently began re-visiting *Earthsea*, revisioning it through the eyes of the similarly missing eyes of women characters. And I wondered if her own revisioning process had a beginning in one of those re-readings of *LotR*.

But I didn’t realize how strongly my awareness of this “missing” piece was influencing my reading of the book, until I’d finished and it became clear that one of my assumptions about *LotR*’s plot was completely without foundation. I had thought Tolkien was building up a mystery about who the Hobbits were Really and where they came from. I thought he planted lots of obvious clues:

1. The Ent’s repeated question to Merry and Pippin about whether the Hobbits had seen any Entwives around in the Shire.
2. The characterization of the Entwives as gardeners, as beings who would have liked Shire life a lot.
3. The weird unfamiliarity of the Ents with the existence of the Hobbits. The Ents are supposed to be the oldest creatures in Middle Earth and they have long, detailed memories. But after meeting Merry and Pippin, they find it necessary to add a verse onto their list of Middle Earth creatures to include Hobbits.
4. Nearly EVERYONE seems unfamiliar with the Hobbits.
5. The longtime vigilant guarding of the Shire by the Rangers.
6. Gandalf says he’s the only wizard that is at all interested in the Hobbits.
7. Hobbits are experts in moving soundlessly and hiding well.
8. The super-elixir of water drawn from Ent streams starts Merry and Pippin growing. Even with only a few days-worth of water consumption, they grow several inches and are considered rather gigantic by Hobbit standards.
9. The fact that at least two Middle Earth races have been created by wizards, both sort of mutant variants of existing species — orcs (from elves) and trolls (from dwarfs). Why not one more?

Here is what I expected Tolkien to reveal: Once-upon-a-time when Sauron first rose and the darkness fell over the land, and the Entwives disappeared, Gandalf rescued them, probably because of a legend/prediction that if Entwives/Hobbits ever died out, Middle Earth would be doomed. Perhaps it was only the lack of Ent elixir-water, or maybe Gandalf actually put a spell on them and they shrunk. But in any case they became small enough to dig holes for their homes and effectively hide. Some of them were already pregnant and they survived over time, tiny entwives and ents. The giant Ents lost track of them. The new creatures forgot who they were, and their memories of traveling faded and they began calling themselves Hobbits. Others called them Halflings.

***The Grand Portage Story***, Carolyn Gilman. The year before last, Scott and I went to the North Shore in Minnesota and Canada and spent some time at the Grand Portage, where 18th and 19th century fur traders made the trek between Lake Superior and the connected network of rivers and lakes in Canada. I got really interested in the social and political aspects of the Voyageur’s culture. So it was an amazing coincidence that I happened to talk about our vacation to science fiction author and historian Carolyn Ives Gilman at Chicon. I had no idea that she had done research on the Voyageurs and was the author of a respected book on the subject. She sent me a copy of her very interesting book as a result of that conversation. Her science fiction background gives her useful tools to discuss the alien culture that existed in the Great Lakes wilderness of the time and I enjoyed the witty style of her commentary.

***Thunder and Roses***, Theodore Sturgeon. Short stories by Sturgeon used to rank among my favorite SF reading choices when I was a kid. I remember liking the fact that women were actually portrayed as capable, smart characters in his fiction. But sometimes it’s better not to go back to fiction you remember liking as a kid. On re-reading this book of short fiction as an adult I noticed a lot of sexism that I apparently missed completely when I was younger. I found it really hard to read these stories and only pushed my way through because it was the Book-of-Honor at Potlatch. At Potlatch I was reminded of the fact that Sturgeon was nevertheless a radical writer in his time, for his inclusion of women, gay, and non-white characters, and simply for his emphasis on characterization and good writing. I guess it shows how much we’ve changed. Nevertheless, the story of the gorgeous blond (a world-famous engineer) who gets help brushing up on her engineering skills from an alien-infested golden retriever and doesn’t actually DO anything other than channel the dog/alien’s wisdom while her handsome farmer boyfriend constructs the spaceship, has probably permanently spoiled my fond memories of Sturgeon.

***Carmen Dog***, Carol Emshwiller. I may believe that Emshwiller’s fantasy short fiction is better than her fantasies of novel-length, but this one is my favorite Emshwiller fantasy novel. It’s about a woman that is changing gradually into a dog who aspires to be an opera diva. Elsewhere in the world, there are women changing into other sorts of animals, and animals becoming women. The men seem to be capable of only helpless confu-

sion, but do not seem overly alarmed at the situation. It's as if this is simply an extension of their old nightmarish conviction that women are a whole other species and are totally incomprehensible to them. And indeed this novel says some surprisingly interesting things about women and men as it makes its always unexpected passage to the end of the story, and Carmen's ultimate freedom.

**The Telling**, Ursula K. LeGuin. I'm in awe of LeGuin's prodigious output in recent years and how she has been going back and re-seeing and re-telling her stories from new perspectives. *The Telling* is another Hainish novel, in which Suttu observes for the Ecuman on the planet Aka, which seems about to obliterate a whole class of people. Suttu's study of the people's language and storytelling enables her to help save the cultural roots of both cultures. I think the idea of storytelling shaping and preserving the roots of human culture is an compelling one for LeGuin. I recommend this book especially to anyone who has some background in Zen Buddhism. I felt my lack of education in this area.

**Hearts in Atlantis**, Stephen King. I like King's ability to connect childhood dreams with grown-up lives in an emotional and believable way. This is one of King's more interesting novels (or rather, one of his more interesting collection of linked novellas): in it he looks for a different perspective on the Vietnam generation's moral dilemmas by beginning with the 1950s culture which incubated us. And I really admire King's ability to create characters that I care about. But in this trilogy of loosely connected novellas, I was a little frustrated that it wasn't possible to follow up on the characters I'd grown attached to in the first novella, which was my favorite of the three.

**Probability Moon**, Nancy Kress. I just couldn't get into this novel. I read it in preparation for WisCon at which Kress was a Guest-of-Honor, but all I can remember is a feeling of frustration at its over-contrived alien culture. It seems like every year, there is one book on my list that I can't remember much about when I come to this task of briefly reviewing what I read during the previous year. I didn't pick up the next book in the series and was relieved never to find myself in a situation with Nancy Kress in which I'd have to avoid giving her my opinion of her novel.

**Pest Control**, Bill Fitzhugh. OK now I know that I really shouldn't trust Amazon.com when it tells me that if I like Christopher Moore's

But no, Tolkien didn't write that story. I think I must have been so convinced that there was a huge group of "missing" people in this world that I nurtured the idea in my mind and looked for a pattern that didn't really exist.

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© Elizabeth Fox

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Sorry to still be dwelling on this question, when it's been so long since you answered me the first time. But it seems important and I really don't understand. You wrote: *"I have always thrown my trust toward specific men in my life. I feel like women know me too well, which makes them dangerous, so I guess that translates into my not trusting them."* The only way I can twist my head around to understanding this is if there are hidden assumptions in what you say: (1) you assume that your hidden self, if really understood, is somehow *bad*, and so you must hide from those who are capable of seeing you. Why else would it be dangerous if someone really understood you? Well maybe (2) that everyone is consciously or unconsciously attempting to "get the goods" on everyone else so that they can use that information against them and hurt them.

It seems to me that women have sometimes been taught both lessons. That we as women are intrinsically evil, original sin and all that. And that other women are by definition our enemies and will take away our happiness if offered the least opportunity. In my opinion, the lessons and the assumptions they foster are the dangerous things.

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© Donya Hazard White

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Whew, that Jay must have to work overtime to make everything fit in his homosexual conspiracy view of the world. I sometimes wonder what the world must look like to someone who must ignore or re-package almost everything they see and hear every day to maintain such a bizarre sense of beliefs. I deeply sympathize with you that you feel you have to maintain a relationship with him for the sake of his daughter.

I hope you are doing well. Thank you much for the delightful holiday letter!

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© Karen Summerly

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Freya Stark's piece about the middle class representing the summit of civilization because (she says) they have more choices, doesn't ring at all true to me. (The fact that not all generalizations are dangerous doesn't mean this one is not.) We all have choices irrespective of our class, and those choices are meaningful in our own lives and the larger life of our community to an extent not limited by our class. Stark's essay seems mostly meaningful for its rationalization of the value of her own existence (in contrast to other wealthier or poorer individuals).

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© Ian Hagemann

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I'd like to hear more about your trip to Cuba, including a little more detail concerning the statement you left dangling in a comment to Arthur Hlavaty

about discovering that you are more of a materialist than you thought you were.

You asked about my comment about different learning styles among me and my co-workers. Well, I tend to be the one that gets interested in upgrades or new software or techniques first among the four of us who work as graphic artists for the Wisconsin DNR. For instance, in the early 90s we were using PageMaker and Illustrator mainly. I pushed to get Photoshop but none of the other artists wanted it; I went ahead and ordered it and used it alone for at least a year. Only after I'd demonstrated the things we could do with it did they request copies. Oh, and also, there were an increasing number of files I'd authored which included Photoshop work. In order to get access to my files, the other artists needed to have the program on their computer. This recently happened with InDesign too. I now it for all layout work; the other artists mostly use it mostly to open my files, but are gradually beginning to shift over to it.

I like to dive into new software and commit myself to doing a job with it that requires that I quickly learn most of its features as I go. I love this part: scoping out a new job and looking ahead and seeing which parts will be most efficiently done by which programs or which tools. It sort of reminds me of High School Geometry class when chalk lines seemed to glow on the blackboard as I mentally figured out a proof. This gets me in trouble sometime with my co-workers. I enter their cubical and see what they're working on (the glowing lines on the computer screen!) and blurt out that a different tool or technique might work for them. This is not always the tactful thing to do.

What does work well, is to be easily available when they encounter problems. Of course, it's easier to accept help when it is requested. And rather than pushing techniques that I know they could use, I am now more likely to explain which technique I used when they admire something in my work. They're more likely to try to incorporate the technique that way, or ask for help in learning it.

My teaching style is horrible I think. The more I try to communicate a technique, the less verbal I become. In order to show someone how to do something, I become less and less capable of expressing myself with words; I need to do it, to show it. And then, without knowing I'm doing it, I speed up, start going too fast to effectively show it. But if I slow down and try to verbalize, I lose track; it's almost as if I forget how to do it. \*sigh\* So I've learned that it's best if I act as a resource for teaching little bits of a process when needed. I can't imagine trying to teach someone from scratch, for instance, how to use Illustrator or Photoshop or a layout program.

One of my co-workers, Linda, is an excellent wildlife illustrator. She always draws with pen and ink and then (grumbling all the way) scans the artwork in and places it in electronic publications. It took her many years before she began doing at least part of her illustrations electronically. Not only did she not really want to do electronic art, but she also didn't even want to *begin* until she had read every word in the manuals and felt she understood completely how to use the programs. Then she would do all the tutorials. She'd ask me questions and my first impulse was, of course, to SHOW her, which would just irritate her. So now she asks me questions while sitting at her computer and refuses to give up her seat. She forces me to answer her with words, and I try very hard to do just that, all the while gripping my hands behind my back, resisting the urge to at least point to

fiction, then I'll love something else. *Pest Control* is a comedy about an insect exterminator whose new ad campaign gets him confused by government and other nefarious agencies with an assassin of human beings. Clever idea, but with Fitzhugh's not very imaginative execution, it would have made only a so-so sitcom pilot that would undoubtedly fail to survive.

***Perdido Street Station***, China Miéville. After the string of mediocre novels I read before this one, this one burst into my life like the grand finale of a super fireworks display, without any prelude. What an amazing, excellent, superb book! This is easily one of the best books I read all year. It starts out moving slowly. There's lots of description of an extremely alien world. The style sort of reminded me of Lovecraft (only good) because of all the word images of a scummy, greasy, dark, ominous world. It's gorgeously written, but it took me completely by surprise when suddenly, about a quarter of the way through the novel, it suddenly turns into a rip-roaring horror story. If they ever made this into a movie, something I doubt is possible for the sheer complexity of the novel, it would make *Alien* seem tame by comparison. Miéville's pointedly left-leaning politics make the descriptions of class and privilege in this alien society really intriguing. I also liked the fact that one of the first characters we meet is really and truly a Bug Eyed Monster, though I liked even better what we learn later on about her artwork. (I don't know if I remember ever reading SF that actually explores how aliens with non-human physical attributes might create artwork. The Borders book discussion group read Miéville's first novel, *King Rat*, last year and though we enjoyed it, we were all taken completely by surprise by the enormous improvement in his work in this second novel. Miéville says that his next book should be out in June this year and that it considers gender issues. I can hardly wait.

*Plumage*, Nancy Springer. This novel is about an unhappy woman whose marriage is breaking up and whose life is generally unsatisfactory — in other words, a woman about to make big changes — whose very readiness for change gives her a sensitivity to a parallel world of magic into which she escapes several times as a bird. She also begins seeing everyone around her as a kind of bird. It's slightly surrealistic, but mostly has the feeling of a fairy tale, with many of the same themes and similar characters of her previous two novels, *Larque on the Wing* and *Fair Peril*. It was fun reading, but felt too much like the other two. I wish she'd move on to different material.

**Prodigal Summer**, Barbara Kingsolver. Here's another one of my favorite books of the year. What a change it is from *The Poisonwood Bible*, though! Where *Poisonwood* sprawled across several lifetimes and two continents, *Prodigal Summer* takes place in one small valley in Virginia, nestled in the Appalachian Mountains, and the lives of some of the people who live there during a single summer. Nevertheless it sprawls by mirroring ecological theories in the lives of its characters. I love the way in which Kingsolver uses the passionate relationship between hunter and forester to illuminate the function of predators in the world. But I think I liked best the two old chestnut trees and their human analogues who finally find a way to come together and heal old wounds. Highly recommended.

**Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel**, Claudia L. Johnson. It's not a novel, and at times it's hard to get through some of its passages because it's so very academic, but this is another one of this year's favorites for me. Johnson's book may end up being influential in my life for years to come, because it made me re-examine everything I'd assumed about Jane Austen and her times, and the different ways it's possible to affect radical change in society. I am especially indebted to Johnson for giving me a new understanding of my own time and the power of conservative backlash against 1960s radicalism and feminism. Brilliant.

**In the Wake of the Plague: the Black Death and the World it Made**, Norman F. Cantor. I was in the mood for non-fiction, I guess, after that amazing book about Austen. But I picked this book off the new book table at Borders and found that I couldn't put it down again. Its style is at times humorous, scientific, curious, but always profoundly interesting. It's part history, part philosophy, part speculation, and part science, and yet it's just a little book. I like books that show me more about an idea or a time period than I suspected could exist and then show me how much my world has been influenced by it. This is one of those.

**Galveston**, Sean Stewart. Something has happened, the magic has broken through and the world has changed. We don't know what happened outside of Galveston, Texas, but everyone seems to know that the magic changed everything everywhere. Normally, this sort of thing would frustrate me because I would want to know more about what's going on in the outside world but Sean Stewart's characterization is so good that my attention was almost completely caught up

something on her monitor. I'm a huge admirer of Linda's drawings and if I remember to compliment her frequently on her work (which always deserves great praise), she doesn't jump to the conclusion that my suggestions are criticisms, and we maintain a good working relationship.

Georgine is less a technophobe than Linda. George and I help one another along with electronic graphic problems, at least with the software we've all used for a long time. The main difference between George and me is that she wants there to be just ONE correct way to solve a graphic problem. So if I suggest an alternate way to get the same effect, she will usually demand to know which way is the *right* way or focus on her irritation that what worked better last year is no longer the fastest or most powerful technique. Usually what happens is that we agree to disagree and then a few weeks later she will re-visit the conversation and will start using the technique as if the earlier conversation had never happened.

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### © Intercourse 97

#### Jane Hawkins

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It's been so many months since I've done mailing comments that you've been diagnosed and through several operations and now have a clean bill of health in the interim. You've been through a lot this year. I admire you so much and am so glad you're in my life (and that you're in yours)!

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### © Vicki Rosenzweig

I'm glad that you've been able to do some interesting traveling lately. Your description of Philcon sounds a bit like what I'm expecting next year at Corflu, which Tracy Benton, Bill Bodden and Jae Adams will be running here in Madison. I haven't been to a Corflu since it was in Nashville (many years), and while I expect to meet lots of friends and enjoy many happy reunions, I haven't actually stayed in touch with many of them except for the ones who go to WisCon or Potlatch or are in this apa. And I'm feeling a little odd about that. WisCon, the Tiptree Award, life-with Scott, and work seems to have conspired to push the fannish scene and fan publishing (other than the occasional apa) rather low on my list-of-things-I'd-like-to-be-doing, so that fannish activities rarely bob up to the level of things-I-actually-do. I've fallen off most fanzine trade lists and am amazed that I still remain on a few. Nevertheless, doing a zine, reconnecting with those who publish zines, stays on my list for when there's more time....

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### © Kimberly Appelcline

I have been admiring how you and James are working things out between one another and all of it being done in public. For me, the public part would put too much stress on the communication; it would provide too much temptation to say something or portray the circumstance with the benefit of hindsight. But I can see that it works for you to use the public forum of this apa to do the opposite, to stay more honest with what is really going on. What do you think? Do you think you and James could have found understanding if you had done this privately (with a little help from local friends)?

The Rules of Kimberly sound like a good set of goals, some things you could spend your whole lives working to approach.

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## © Christina Lake

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I don't remember if I mentioned here that the main events of the Jane Austen festival are available on the web in streaming audio at

<http://www.humanities.wisc.edu/archives/>

There, now you *can* hear Andrew Davies speak!

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## © Lyn Paleo

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Fascinating stuff about the how class affected height in Jane Austen's day. Indeed I remember part of the lecture at the Voyageur's encampment up by Lake Superior which stressed that goods were carried over the portages by stocky, very short men, who probably looked even shorter than they were after carrying 360 pounds on their backs (180- or 270-pounds at a time) across 30+ miles of wilderness.

You asked how long to keep fresh sweet corn in a vinegar and ice bath. I usually keep the corn in until most of the ice has melted.

Thanks for including the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It's an amazing document.

Speaking of amazing documents, I just finished a little pamphlet by Noam Chompsky, *9-11*, and one of the most surprising thing in it for me was the discovery that the U.S. Congress has officially defined terrorism:

"[An] act of terrorism, means any activity that [A] involves a violent act or an act dangerous to human life that is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or any State, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States or of any State, and [B] appears to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by assassination or kidnapping." (*United States Code Congressional and Administrative News, 98th Congress, Second Session, 1984, Oct. 19, volume 2, par. 3077, 98 STAT. 2707 [West Publishing Co., 1984]*)

By that definition, our own country is the biggest terrorist in the world. Of course we can't have that. The definition must be wrong.

Which may explain why the Department of State's legal criteria for designation of terrorism specifically requires that "The organization must be foreign." and that "The organization's activities must threaten the security of U.S. nationals or the national security (national defense, foreign relations, or the economic interests) of the United States." (from the Department of State's *Report on Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, released by the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, October 5, 2001)

By definition, they're terrorists and we aren't. This of course is more in line with the fact that in 1986 the U.S. (together with Israel) vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution calling on all states (meaning the U.S.) to adhere to international law (specifically in Nicaragua). This was after we were condemned by the World Court for "unlawful use of force" (i.e., international terrorism).

It seems to me that there is a built-in human resistance to the idea that terrorism is begotten by other terrorism. When something so horrible happens, the media and the powerful find it surprisingly easy to convince many of us that it all starts here. That this one inexplicable event justifies all actions that follow (which are by definition, *not* terrorism), but can be

with the story at hand. I especially liked how we gradually come to agree with other characters about the dislikable nature of the viewpoint character — and yet still remain interested in and hopeful about his fate. I also liked the notion that good luck isn't a necessarily wonderful thing to have. (Dad's good luck, for instance, may be responsible for his losing his house in a high-stakes poker game. The house burns down the next day killing the "winner" of the game and that man's family. Nevertheless the poker player and his family loose their position in society. Lucky? Highly recommended.

### *Tales from Earthsea, The Other Wind*, Ursula K. LeGuin

It was so wonderful to visit Earthsea again. Le Guin claims that she needed to do some "research into Earthsea's far past for *The Other Wind*, and she did that by discovering (i.e., what most people would call writing) the stories of what came before, in *Tales from Earthsea*. Together, the two books explain the absence of women among the ranks of wizards in the original trilogy and set us up for the quest to heal the wounds of that ancient tragedy. I loved these books. At OddCon last year, I found myself on a panel with Jack Chalker, and Jack maintained that as the author of his works, he was like god: he knew everything about his world and therefore, by definition, no reader or critic could uncover hidden meanings or suggest alternate explanations for any event or character in it. I asked him did he really mean that he knew everything there was to know about the fictional world he created, and Jack repeated, a bit irritated, that yes, that's exactly what he meant. I said that Ursula LeGuin keeps finding out things about her world that she hadn't known before, even some things that would seem to contradict some of the "facts" she had revealed in earlier novels. Jack didn't want to consider this and rather quickly changed the subject. But this is the thing I am in awe of in LeGuin's relationship with her work: she has continued to pay attention to and question the assumptions with which she wrote when she was younger and to reexamine her fictional worlds from different perspectives. Earthsea, as a result, just keeps getting to be a richer, more complex, and *real* place. I think Jane Austen had begun to question her younger assumptions in her last novel, *Persuasion*, which is one of the many reasons I wish Austen had lived longer. I think she would have written some amazing fiction. But I am very happy that LeGuin's health and finances have allowed her to write prolifically for so many years.

**Sister Noon**, Karen Joy Fowler. Karen says that the most fantastical parts of this novel of turn-of-the-(20th) century San Francisco are the true bits. And indeed it's sometimes hard to tell the fictional bits from the complex, contradictory bits of historical details. The more the author and the characters within the novel delve into the records and attempt to ascertain just who the mysterious Mary Ellen Pleasant, the less we seem to know for sure. Reality is always stranger than it looks at first glance in Fowler's fiction. In *Sarah Canary*, characters seemed to change identity depending upon whose eyes we were looking through; here, in *Sister Moon*, people and events change from every vantagepoint. Only from a distance and with considerable glossing of detail does San Francisco look familiar. By the end of the novel, we know that any person or place, focused on with the same intensity, would also yield up contradictions and unanswerable questions. Why? Not because life is inherently unknowable for mysterious, supernatural reasons, but simply because people are people who guard their secrets, lie frequently, and are simply a lot more complicated than most people (with their own complicated lives to live) want to believe. Amid this ambiguity, Karen Joy Fowler weaves a delightful, funny and subversive story. I'll read anything Fowler writes, especially now that I can hear her voice as I read.

**Passage**, Connie Willis. Willis is an author I keep wanting to like more than I do. One of the things I do not like about her writing, but seems to be inextricably part of her style, is her use of confusing, stupid characters who constantly interrupt and trip up the main characters in their attempt to figure out the main plot problem. It's meant to be a humorous element, I think, and sometimes it is a bit funny, but when 1/3 or more of the plot gets wound up with these intricate, frustrating interruptions and characters attempts to avoid the stupid frustrating interruptions, I start wanting to skip whole paragraphs. But of course I know I can't skip too much because somewhere in one of those inane conversations with a stupid person who interrupts the hero with an idiotic question or demand, Willis will have hidden the solution to the problem of the novel. The hero will eventually figure it out and the novel will end triumphantly. So you can't just skip those parts. This technique actually works well with Willis central metaphor in this novel. *Passage* is set in a vast hospital with complicated, difficult to navigate hallways, through which the main characters are always running around

justified by nothing that came before. The current horror being played out in Israel and Palestine may finally be hammering home to Americans that it doesn't *ever* stop unless one side or the other acknowledges that it will all just get worse unless someone starts working toward forgiveness and healing rather than revenge.... I am hopeful that at least one good thing may come out of it, that the U.S. war on terrorism will fizzle out as people are forced to look ahead and see what the endgame might look like for the whole world.

And then maybe we can seriously start trying out the idealistic goals in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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© **Debbie Notkin**

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I like the little mountains or waves you used beneath your colophon. How did you make them?

I think you are probably right in pointing out that the idea of any book (not just Austen) being gendered is a fairly recent one. I suppose you're right that most women in the 19th century mostly read books owned or approved by their fathers. But it's a pretty weird idea to contemplate that once women did start making choices for themselves, that the notion of gendering books happened so quickly! (It sort of reminds me of the way professions that make room for women have away of losing some of their prestige and pay scales.) I mean, one day dad and big brother are reading Jane Austen, no doubt praising her for her family values, etc., and the next year mom and sister are reading and loving Austen, and suddenly all that becomes chick reading, not important enough for guys. Whew. If you can't beat 'em, insult 'em. It would be interesting to find evidence of the historical moment of change, when the numbers of women increased to whatever the threshold number was, or when the number of books bought by women reached the magic number, and masculine perceptions shifted as to the value of that fiction. I actually thought that started happening around Austen's day, when gothic novels became so popular among women (as portrayed in Austen's own *Northanger Abby*) That's why I was so surprised to learn that Austen herself wasn't considered a writer of women's fiction. (Claudia Johnson says that she was the most popular author among British soldiers in the trenches during World War I. Soldiers formed reading groups and read Austen aloud to one another. Johnson points out that Austen was, in fact, a wartime writer herself, and that her attitude toward the war — focusing on the things that matter while the effects of war changes everything around you — was a very British kind of wartime behavior.)

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© **Intercourse 98**

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I think I got an extra copy of the business pages in place of D's zine, *Basic Kata*.

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© **Doug Barbor**

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Thanks for explaining how letters of recommendation work. It's been a long time since I was part of an academic community. I may have known about this, but I've long forgotten. It sounds like a fair, though potentially painful process

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## © Janet Lafler

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Good luck with the pregnancy. I've known several people who have had great difficulty getting pregnant and it's obvious that it's a hard thing to do. My friend Kafryn here in Madison, recently told me that years ago she had been pregnant four times and lost the baby early each time. I was stunned that she'd gone through such a painful thing with only one person to share her feelings with. I send you my best wishes.

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## © Ian Hagemann

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I didn't realize that your bike accident was a hit-and-run when you told me about it at Cronecon. How awful. Did the cops not show up? You should have been able to "let someone else deal with it." I'm glad you recovered quickly and are biking again, but I wish that driver had been held accountable (and had paid your bills!). Winter's over here, and I'm biking too.

What do I think of you? Views from outside oneself are always useful. It seems to me that you have two personalities, an in-person face and an in-print face. Well, probably we all have this split to some degree, but it is more obvious or critical when I think of you, Ian. Once I got acquainted with both of you, the two Ians fit together quite nicely, but neither can be predicted from the other. If that makes any sense. You and I had a great conversation a couple years ago at WisCon, in the back of a program room I think, after a panel, and the good feeling I got about you then is the one that dominates my thinking as I try to answer your question here. I felt you were open and working to listen intently at the same time, which is a nice combination. I feel very comfortable with your politics and admire the intensity with which you attempt to examine your life and this culture. I admire your intensity, though I sometimes cringe when your intensity about one issue blinds you to others' feelings or other issues. The fact that you're willing to revisit an interaction when it is perceived differently by others is a wonderful thing. You express your intensity about political issues differently in print and in person. This is what I meant by your two personalities. Your in-print personality doesn't feel as if it is interested in or gauging the reaction of your readers; whereas the your in-person personality is much more aware of the person you are interacting with.

Another thing I think about you coalesced when I read your wedding vows many issues ago. I think of you as someone sometimes lets a theoretical understanding of self and relationships outstrip too far their actual behavior. About some things — bicycling or personal risks during political demonstrations — you have a physically grounded, empirical understanding of what you are capable of, limitations, best practices, and goals. But in other areas you tend to make guidelines and rules for yourself a long way out from where the familiar ground of your actual behavior. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, I don't think, but it is a sort of defining image for me when I think about you.

It's hard to tell you what I think of you without actually talking about myself, and that last paragraph probably says a whole lot more about me than it does about you. There is an image for me that I acquired while I was in college, one that I didn't realize at the time would become so important to me. But I keep going back to it and it floats up to the top of my mind so often that I think it must match some really central thing about my own personality. In fact I may have already written about it here. If so, I apologize if I am

in, as if through a maze. Hidden, surprise hazards fall into their way and delay them. This physical setting mirrors the way the hero doctor's theory of how the brain works in its final moments alive as it tries to find a way to keep itself from dying. But I didn't enjoy most of it, in spite of the fact that Willis's central idea, her speculation as to what might actually be happening in the brain during a near death experience, was fascinating and intriguing.

**Replay**, Ken Grimwood. Appropriately enough, this is the second time I read *Replay*. I read it when it first came out in the mid-80s and was surprised when it was republished this year. The author Grimwood, never wrote anything as powerful (or successful) as this novel, he has nothing new coming out, and so I wonder why the publishers reprinted it. Maybe they just thought it was a damn good story, and it is. On the other hand I've seen rumors reported on the web that there may be a movie being made based on *Replay*. Maybe. It could be a good one. It's certainly one of my favorite, and one of the most unique time travel stories I've ever read. Also, its premise gets one thinking about one's own life in interesting ways. The main character dies of a heart attack at about age 52 and wakes up in his college dorm at age 19. He remembers everything that happened in the intervening years and gets the chance to do it over again ... differently. Grimwood takes this idea and shows us every possibility and opportunity in the situation, investigates many possible explanations as to why it is happening, and tells a great story along the way. I don't want to say anything more about the plot because I'd hate to spoil it for anyone who hasn't read it. (Special Note: If I lent my copy of this book to you, please let me know. We can't find it and suspect we may have lent it to someone. Thanks.)

**Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone**, J.K. Rowling. I read this a couple years ago but read it again this year, at first as read-aloud entertainment for Scott who drove us to Iowa just before the movie came out. As I did the first time, I had fun.

**Mendoza in Hollywood**  
**The Graveyard Game**, Kage Baker.

As I've said before, I like time travel stories, and I do like the central conceit of Kage Baker's series time travel stories: that people in the future use time travel to rescue plants, works of art, and information, that has been "lost" in the past. Essentially immortal people/cyborgs are sent into the past, where they

stash some of those lost items into buried warehouses, so they can be “found” again in the future. These workers’ lives last as long as human history and they should be full of incredible knowledge about what they have seen. Their knowledge should be at least as detailed as someone like Karen Joy Fowler, for instance, who researched in depth a decade of San Francisco history. Only they should have this sort of complex information about the whole of human history. This is where my dissatisfaction in Kage Baker’s fiction arrives: Her history is as superficial and clichéd as a high school history text. The only thing that keeps me even slightly interested in continuing to read this series is that I really want to know if my suspicions are correct about who REALLY is controlling everything. I’ve got my paradox theory and am hoping that we get to the end of this in the next book. I don’t think I can keep reading any more of this series.

**The Fourth Hand**, John Irving. This is one of Irving’s more superficial novels, but even at his most superficial, he’s a delight to read and I’m glad I did. The main character lost his hand while doing a news report from India during which he got a little too close to the tiger cage. The whole world has seen the tiger eat his hand ... over and over again. There is an anorexic hand doctor, a Green Bay Packer fan who donates her dead husband’s hand as a transplant, and who asks for “visitation rights” in return. There are many funny and odd characters, but that’s about all this book has going for it.

**Cold Mountain**, Charles Frazier. What a beautifully written novel! I loved how the two characters — a civil war soldier and a young woman waiting for him on a farm in the Cold Mountains — gradually move toward one another, physically and spiritually as the soldier journeys home.

**American Gods**, Neil Gaiman. This is actually the first Neil Gaiman novel I’ve ever read and it makes me want to read more. I didn’t understand why no Christian gods were included in the pantheon of gods powerful in the American imagination, but I liked the idea of the old gods fighting the new gods of the computer and malls. It was great fun to see Wisconsin’s House on the Rock featured as one of America’s mystically powerful places.

**Not of Woman Born**, ed., Constance Ash. Some good stories. Mostly mediocre.

**Starlight 3**, ed, Patrick Nielsen Hayden. Lots of good stories, though not as many as *Starlight 2*, which I still remember fondly for several specific stories.

subjecting you to a re-run. Carroll College in Waukesha, near my folks’ home, was built when I was in high school. But the sidewalks weren’t poured until several years after the college had opened for business. The builders decided to wait to see where the students walked from one building to the next before they decided where to lay out the sidewalks. The result are lawns that seldom get trampled on by students seeking a shortcut, sidewalks of different widths to accommodate different use patterns, and a traffic pattern that flows naturally. It’s also a rather strange-looking campus, for all those snaking, weirdly non-geometric patterns of paths. I love this image as a metaphor for life-planning. I always feel more comfortable with starting from information about a behavior or interaction that works rather than trying to fit new behavior into a theoretical framework of what *should* work. So I take notice when someone seems to prefer the opposite approach....

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© Shannon Appelcline

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Your comment about the vulnerability of web relationships to breaks between its members made me curious about how a star relationship is vulnerable. It seems to me that a star relationship’s stability is vulnerable to dishonesty of the core person because the more lies that central person tells, the more they will strive to make sure that none of his/her relationships gets to know another person in his/her star and thus discover discrepancies.

One of the interesting things about King’s novel, *Hearts in Atlantis*, were the references in it to his unfinished *Dark Tower* series. In fact, King seems to be doing more and more cross-referencing between his novels lately.

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© Karen Summerly

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Sorry to hear about your uncle Roy’s death and the stress of dealing with his estate. I’ll be very interested to hear how you deal with the accidentally unequal treatment of yourself and your brother. Has he been pressuring you to “fix” the division of assets?

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© Michael Sturza

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I have no objections to Diane joining the apa.

I loved the story about Karl’s Hagen-Daz s-stoked rant turning into laughter and black humor.

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© Jane Hawkins

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What a lovely, strengthening image — dragon wings growing inside you, about to unfurl and make you stronger and capable of flying! I especially like this dream’s counterpoint to your previous dream of wings torn off, and expression of a psychic wound. Now, after a literal body-wound, you’re instead dreaming about a much stronger, useful set of wings! \*applause\*

What would change if suddenly no one could maintain privacy? Everything, I think. We would become a horribly suppressed society. My first image is of old Soviet Russia, in which everyone suspected their friends and even family members of spying upon them. All criticisms of government and the establishment could potentially land one in trouble or be used as

blackmail against you. And this is the situation for average, conforming folks not involved in anything technically illegal or immoral by local standards. Every conversation would be as fraught with risk as would be a decision by one of us, today, to get involved in a public demonstration, to take the role of a whistleblower, or to publicly take an unpopular position. You'd have to think twice before blowing off steam about a powerful person, law, or bureaucratic snaffu. And for those whose lives do not conform with whatever is considered the status quo, the pressure to conform and hide would be even more acute. I can't think of one thing in my life that would not be affected by a loss of privacy. I can't imagine any price — even the deluded perception that I was safe from violence, theft or deception — that would be worth its loss.

The horrible thing is that our privacy is being nibbled away, crumb by crumb, even as we talk about this.

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## © Debbie Notkin

I'm glad to hear you're feeling better about the looking-for-work process. I like the idea of treating long-term commitments as short-term ones. When I get long-term things done, that's actually been the mechanism for me too, though I don't think I would have described it like that. Setting an artificial deadline is something that works for me if I can convince myself there's a really good reason for that deadline. I'm sorry to hear that Alan is still stuck. I can imagine how that would put stress on a relationship.

I meant to write you a canned bio for me, but I didn't get to this apa as soon as I wanted to. By the time I send this to you, I'll still be most of an issue behind and I didn't do as many comments as I wanted in general. So this will have to wait till next time. Aargh.

My reaction to Russell's *Wasp* was quite different than yours. I'm really glad I read it, but I thought the assumptions with which it was written, especially around the assumption that the Sirians deserved to be terrorized, and that basically any kind of warfare is justified from "our" side, kept me from reading it in the way I think it was intended.

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## © Intercourse 99

### Kerry Ellis

New Zealand and Italy must be great travel destinations. After her round-the-world trip, my sister Julie *also* pointed at those two countries as being her favorite parts of her trip. High risk sports were among her reasons for liking New Zealand, but other than that it sounds like you two would have agreed completely.

Using the word, "violent" to describe any protests is a bad idea, I think. Philosophically I understand what you mean, but in actual practice, this word has a very specific meaning that is translated into very physical reactions on the part of government and public opinion. If the public is convinced that any kind of violence — against people or against property — is being employed in a protest, authorities acquire the power to react with literal, non-metaphorical violence against those protesters. Recently we have seen several examples of governments attempting to convince communities that protesters are engaging in literal violence, in order to justify their

*Lake Wobegon Summer 1956*, Garrison Keillor. A lovely story. I keep thinking that Keillor's work is similar to Mark Twain's for the fact that both of them did so many performances and plumbed the geography and emotions of their childhood memories for the substance of their fiction. And they both have some sharply critical things to say about politics, society and people. And they're both amazingly funny. In this book, Keillor remembers the moment he decided to write and understood how writing gave him a tool for understanding the world around him. It's also about an adolescent boy's fascination with sex. It makes good reading-aloud material as Scott and I found out on a trip to Iowa this fall.

*Wasp*, Eric Frank Russell. This is an old novel (1940s) about a war between Earth and the Sirian empire (which has the advantage in personnel and equipment). Earth sends a physically camouflaged James Mowry to the enemy planet to act as an irritant. The idea is that one man can disrupt an entire world. Reviewers called this an inspiring novel, but of course this novel takes the point of view that the terrorist is one of the "good guys" (us, of course) fighting against the "bad guys." I read this as part of a literature search in October when I was asked by someone at WORT to talk about what SF has to say about terrorism, plague, and 9/11-relevant topics. It was a really interesting experience altogether because I wasn't expecting to find all the stories in which heroic behavior could be seen from a different point of view as terrorist-like. From Heinlein's *Puppet Masters* to *Wasp* to *Star Trek* Borg-fighters to *Independence Day*, to *Star Wars* — science fiction has frequently told the story of the lone, brave individual vs. the monolithic, menacing culture. James Mowry harries the Sirians like a wasp; Captain Picard finds the switch that puts all the Borg to sleep; Luke places the bomb in Darth Vader's Deathstar in exactly its most vulnerable node; and the computer geek in *Independence Day* slips a virus into the evil alien's computer system. The individuals in these stories win, partly because the evil empire is so huge and dependant upon its totally subservient drones or simply because it is one organism, so completely networked that damage done to any part affects the whole cataclysmally.

- Desolation Island*
- The Fortune of War*
- The Surgeon's Mate*
- The Iowian Mission*
- Treason's Harbor*
- The Far Side of the World*
- The Reverse of the Medal*
- The Letter of Marque*
- The Thirteen-Gun Salute*
- The Nutmeg of Consolation*
- The Truelove*
- The Wine-Dark Sea*
- The Commodore*
- The Yellow Admiral*
- The Hundred Days*
- Blue at the Mizzen*, Patrick O'Brian.

I started O'Brian's series of Aubrey-Maturin novels last year, just after O'Brian died actually, because I'd heard so many people at WisCon describe his books as some of their favorite reading. (And because they were written about Jane Austen's time and I wanted to see what was going on outside the drawing room). O'Brian's fans described the series as funny, enlightening, and addictive. And they were. After reading the first five books every so often, in between other books during the year 2000, I picked up the 6th book sometime in mid-2001 and began gobbling them up, 2, 3 or 4 at a time. The plots of the earlier books in this series about a British Navy Captain tended to wrap up after one or two books, and one could wait a while before one picked up the next one in the series. But as the series progressed (and probably as the series' popularity increased), O'Brian was guaranteed of his audience and (I suspect) he was therefore able to stretch out his stories to cover the several years necessary for a long voyage and divide it into three, four or six novels. What this meant for me, the reader, was that I was increasingly unable to finish one book in the series and wait a few months till I picked up the next one. The last 10 or so books in the series I read in two big swallows. Scott didn't even realize that I had finished one and was already on the next one. I glazed over at times confused at finding myself in the year 2001 and not on the deck of a sailing boat. I agree with those folks who claim that the series can be considered one long, extended novel. It was a fun ride, though unfortunately, O'Brian obviously expected to live long enough to write a few more books, because the series ended with some loose ends: will Maturin at last marry compatibly with the woman scientist? What will come of Aubrey's bratty kids? I expect that eventually, other writers will attempt to provide additional books in the series, but I

own violence, in Seattle, in Italy, in Montreal.... These words have powerful meanings and ought not to be blurred together.

Also, the phrase "non-violent protest" has a very specific meaning and an important part in the toolkit of civil disobedience. Ghandi's and Martin Luther King's philosophy of non-violence were not theoretical mind tricks. When Rosa Parks sat down in the front of the bus she was most certainly acting as a revolutionary, but she was also most certainly acting in a non-violent manner. If she had instead entered the bus with dynamite strapped under her dress, we would remember her actions in a completely different way. The difference is important.

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### © Guy Thomas

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I'm glad your painful stomach turned out to be caused merely by gas and that despite the uncomfortable procedure, that you actually had a positive experience at the hospital.

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### © Elizabeth Fox

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Your response to my account of Madison's school board brouhaha around the required pledge of allegiance reminds me that I should tell you all the ending to the story. Not very long after all the screaming and ranting at the school board meeting, the right-wingers retreated on their plan to organize the recall of all school board members. Instead, they focused on getting two of their guys nominated as candidates in the February primary, and on beating Carol Carstarson who would be up for re-election in April (this month). Turnout was typically low at the primaries and only one of their guys was nominated. The more rabid of the failed candidates complained bitterly about the lack of support he received on the pledge issue during his campaign. Just this week, the one protest candidate who was nominated, was beat by Carstarson (Yeah!), and the local media reported that the pledge issue completely lost steam as a significant element in the race. So, a fairly up-beat ending.

We're also in need of a bathroom re-furbishing. We're taking bids now on re-fitting our upstairs bathroom with a bath-shower (in place of the very old, not-to-code bathtub that exists there now), new fixtures, new linoleum, and filling the window that overlooks the tub with glass block. It will be interesting to see what it will cost us. We're not sure yet whether we will be able to afford it, since we just had our house re-roofed last week. That involved stripping 3 layers of shingles and a layer of shakes, applying a plywood surface to the stripped roof, installing new ventilation, and new shingles. It looks great now. We hadn't had any leaks yet, but it was a very old roof and we feel we've been living on borrowed time with it, so we're really glad to have finally gotten the work done. We won't ever have to do it again, that's for sure: our new roof is guaranteed for 50 years! Anyway, we'd like to get the bathroom done too, but that will only happen if it comes pretty close to what we've budgeted to pay for it. It's our year for house renovation. The roof was painless. Our guys cleaned up amazingly well after themselves. I swear our yard is cleaner than before they arrived. And it only took 3 days during which no precipitation fell. We're hoping for an equally good experience with the bathroom. Since we've got another fine bathroom

with shower on the first floor, and the bathroom that needs work is at the far end of our upstairs hallway and the work won't inconvenience us as it proceeds, we're optimistic. I'm looking forward to picking out fixtures and colors. I don't know exactly what I'm looking for, but I expect I'll know when I see it!

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© Kimberly Appelcline

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Sorry to hear how conflicted you're feeling about taking drugs. I can sympathize, not because I've got the images you have in your head about addiction, but because I have other images in my own head about loss of control connected to drugs. I've had a hard time dealing with fears or real changes that involved the phrase "...for the rest of my life." I strongly resist the idea of needing a drug or a crutch that I will always need. That aspect of going to an artificial hip was ameliorated only by the knowledge that I was getting rid of pain that would have lasted for the rest of my life. Having to wear a wig, or take a certain pill, makes me feel too dependant on a certain lifestyle or the availability of a support system, or technology, and that makes me very nervous. Yet that's the route we all move along as we get older. Anyway, I'm glad it's looking like you will eventually find a drug that works for you and helps you deal with life in the way you want and I hope you manage to counteract the mental images you've got to confront in your own head.

It sounds like you've come to a good understanding of your mom and a way to help you stop trying to make your relationship with her turn into something it cannot. That seems to be one of the central lessons we all end up having to learn about family members. Sometimes it's hard, sometimes easy, but at some point we have to grapple with the fact that they are who they are and not who we think they *should* be. I'm still working on this lesson with my folks, though I've made a lot of progress over the years. My conversations with my mom are mostly like that deviled eggs conversation you described, not about very important issues, but still it's nice to find a way to maintain contact with her without all the angst and pain. I suspect one never completely gives up on the ideal in any relationship one depends upon. Congratulations on the good work you've been doing.

We went to see the movie, *The Majestic*, with more expectations than you did; perhaps that explains my different reaction. I thought the plot of this movie was way to easy a depiction of the 50s blacklisting. It was nice that Jim Carey's character got to make such a soul-stirring speech to the committee, but the film made it look like others would have been given the opportunity to make an effective and well-publicized speech. In reality, such outbursts were simply not allowed and a lot more much braver, smarter, committed lives than Carey's character were ruined in spite of their clear understanding of the issues and what was being done. I thought the film was rather an insult to those who actually accepted the ruin of their lives rather than submit to the committee's demand.

...Comments to be continued next time

don't expect any of them to adequately portray the characters of Aubrey and Maturin to O'Brian's fans' satisfaction.

***Harbors and High Seas: An atlas and geographical guide to the complete Aubrey-Maturin novels of Patrick O'Brian***, Dean King and John B. Hattendorf. I highly recommend this atlas to anyone reading O'Brian's series. Maps are essential!

***Mansfield Park***, Jane Austen. This was my least favorite Austen novel the first time I read it, but after considering some of the points raised by Claudia Johnson in her book, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, this has changed in my mind into the most radical, most interesting of her novels.

***The Hobbit***, J.R.R. Tolkien. As with *Mansfield Park*, this was never one of my favorite books. In fact, I never actually was able to finish it until I finally forced myself through it in 2001. Now I like it only insofar as what it reveals about Middle Earth and the great story that begins in *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

***The Fellowship of the Ring***  
***The Two Towers***, J.R.R. Tolkien.

I finished *The Fellowship of the Ring* mere hours before we walked into the theaters to see the movie. I'm very glad I read it first. Mere hours after walking out of the theater, I started *The Two Towers*. I finished *The Return of the King* within the same week (but in the year 2002). It's hard to believe I missed the experience of reading all this when I was younger; still it was wonderful to have saved such a treat for this time. I just hope there are many more treats awaiting me in the future. The hope that the next book will be as fun and wonderful as this one is what keeps me reading. Definitely one of the best books I read all year. Lovely.