

Comments on #388

Covers

[SC] Thanks for the great covers, Carrie (front and back as well as inside and out, nice.) So many uses these glyphs can be put to.

Greg Rihn

[SC] As a fellow owner of an old house, I appreciated your tale of summertime home repairs. Sometimes it feels like it's just "one damned thing after another." As our contractors were finishing up in our kitchen, we took a long look at our basement windows, which are in the foundation just above ground level, and realized the glass was nearly falling out and they were held closed with only hooks. We have been hearing escalating reports of home break-ins via basement windows lately so we decided we needed to deal with them, too. Our guy just finished replacing the five windows last week. He not only replaced the windows he, of course, had to deal with the old, paint-peeling frames. The frames were still solid, if ugly, so he carefully covered and caulked all of those. Combined with the new windows the finished job was a much more dramatic improvement in the house's appearance than we expected. We are very happy, if a bit poorer. We decided to go with windows rather than glass block because I want to be able to open the windows if needed. They lock securely, at least.

I honestly don't know if Jeanne and I would ever choose to sit through another production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. I think the last version we saw at APT was a game attempt to blunt the offensiveness of the story, but in the end, it is what it is.



We got to see *Colette* while it was briefly in town, and also enjoyed it very much. A really rich and complex story, beautifully done.

[JG] Echoing Scott, I enjoyed *Colette*. I read a couple of her novels in college and recall that my image of her situation was so much simpler than it probably was, and as shown in this movie which portrayed the relationship between Colette and her husband as a complicated one. I was surprised by the affection when I'd previously imagined only abuse.

Another echo: I'm through with *The Taming of the Shrew*. In order to make this play (and a few others) palatable, modern directors have to insert a stage negation to the original substance of the text, reversing the message, camouflaging the actual content. It's no longer worth it to me.

Congratulations on your home repairs! The bricked chimney on our roof has been gone since 2005. There is just the pipe that vents the furnace, which was the last model of its type that required a chimney vent. Our newer model water heater vents out the side of the house. But we know that furnace replacement will have to

be done soon, and it would be better if we chose the time for the purchase rather than be forced by an emergency. So probably next year—at which point we will vent the new, more energy-efficient furnace out the side of the house. At that point, we can close the hole in the roof and remove the pipe that goes through the attic, which will make that space much more useable. I don't think one ever "finishes" work on a house. We have our eyes on a bathroom remodel, would love to replace the driveway and add siding to the garage.



Marilyn Holt

[SC] I loved your zine this month.

Despite the challenges, it sounds to me like you and Cliff are both enjoying what you are doing. Isn't that the most important thing? I spent so much of my life working at jobs I barely tolerated that I envy people who actually get to do what they like.

Best of luck with the dogs, hope they work out.

Jim Hudson and Diane Martin

[SC] We loved our night out to *In the Heights* in Milwaukee. The Milwaukee Rep is getting a pretty solid reputation with me for producing musicals. We were blown away a few years ago with their production of one of our all time favorites, *Ragtime*. We had dinner before the show with Jeanne's sister-in-law, Kelly and her daughter, Rachel. Rachel got to go when Jeanne's brother Dan ended up going to the last Brewers playoff game against the Dodgers that same night at Miller Park (I remember remarking at one point, rather cruelly in retrospect, that only one of us might end the evening in tears.) We ate dinner at the Rock Bottom Brewery which we expected to be a convenient place to walk to (after parking at the theater) except we did not know that the East Wells St. bridge was closed so we had to cross the river at Kilbourn Ave. which added a much longer and colder walk to our plan. Still, we made it. My only regret is that we forgot to bring our plastic Rep cups with us for hot beverages we could take into the show (which I could have used after that walk.) Maybe we will just have to go back to the Rep more often so it will be easier to remember to bring the cups. Oh dang.

[JG] *In the Heights* was a lot of fun. I was impressed by how much Ryan Alvarado (Usnavi)'s voice resembled Lin-Manuel Miranda's. It sort of reminded me of how often the male leads in Woody Allen movies sound very much like Woody Allen. As Scott says, we are now inclined to assume the best about Milwaukee Rep productions and so it was an easy decision in December to buy last-minute tickets to *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*. More about that later.

Kim and Kathi Nash

[SC] I made a similar decision about Social Security, Kim. In order to make retirement at 61 work for me, I elected to take an accelerated pension and claim Social Security at 62. Every advisory I read about Social Security and retirement argues to wait until 70 to claim it, which for many people means continuing to work past age 65. I'd rather enjoy a smaller amount, and more of the good life, now. Most of the males in my family were lucky to make it to their eighties, I expect I will be in line with that. Waiting is not worth it to me. Besides, we have been learning bitter lessons in recent years that government should not be counted on to be there when you need it, so maybe it makes sense to take what you can get as soon as you can get it.

Sorry about the sad news about the loss of your friends, but relieved to see you are holding your own against diabetes. And the house in Beloit is gone. Yay!

[JG] I've read some articles lately about typical spending patterns of retired folks. Financial planners tend to advise that you will need enough savings to provide a steady income after retirement, but it turns out that as people age, they tend to spend less, even taking into account

increasing medical expenses. There tends to be initial large expenditures early in retirement reflecting travel, home renovations, etc., but after a few years expenditures gradually decrease. So, waiting till age 70 to get the largest Social Security payment may not be the best idea. I'm glad Scott decided to retire when he did.

F.J. Bergmann

[SC] I was mildly disappointed to read that your Writers of the Future submission did not result in a trip for you to L.A. I was looking forward to reading about your experience locking horns with Scientologists in the City of Angels.

I hope you had a fine time in North Carolina, but I have to wonder if you actually found it less "floody" than here, after they were socked with two hurricanes this year.

[JG] Re your comment to **Jim** and **Diane**, and the weirdness of insurance plans that cover fire, but not floods. That is not true everywhere, for instance in California. I understand that the cost of fire insurance for folks who live in high-risk canyons is almost out-of-reach for most homeowners. Some companies have stopped writing new policies, or have stopped insuring homes in *certain* areas. And apparently, homes damaged by smoke from nearby fires are having problems getting reimbursed. In summary, it seems like insurance is the art of offering coverage for disasters that are least likely to happen and disguising the fact that homeowners will end up paying for calamities most likely to affect them.

Interesting art on Pinterest! (Though, typing the links made me sympathize with occasional clients of mine who don't seem to understand how links work and complain that they don't work on printed material.)

Andy Hooper

[JG] Your colophonic mention of your ancestor's multiple families got me thinking about a similar example in my own family tree. I am told that my dad's family bible clearly showed that two of my great grandmother's marriages overlapped. Maybe bigamy was much simpler without computerized record-keeping.

Thanks for the comment about my forest path cover art. Neither front nor back versions were "real." Both were artifacts created by multiple Photoshop filters.

Re your comments to **Greg** and **Steve**: Intriguing suggestion that Frenkel's victim might have been given the power to prevent or allow Frenkel to return to WisCon. But... It turns out that there were many other victims, not just Elise and not just at WisCon, and many of those cases were horrible. But even if several victims had been given the power to determine his punishment, there are big problems with this scheme. (I can just imagine the pressure and harassment the victims would feel while they considered and after they announced their decision. It might be enough to squelch

reporting in the first place.) We don't ask victims of any other crime to define punishment. That is what our system of justice is *for*. I hear echoes of the idea that #MeToo proponents have the power to pronounce sentence in media articles titled with variations of the question, "How long must he pay for his crime?" "When can he return to the stage again?": I think those questions are actually indirectly posed to the victims, demands that the victims define the sentence. And, in a way, I can sympathize: Since our justice system has for so long failed to address sexual harassment, the #MeToo movement was successful only because the people involved detoured around the formal institutions and took their complaints directly to the public via social media. I am very hopeful that this is a TEMPORARY solution: that our laws and courts will reclaim the responsibility that was theirs in the first place. The US Congress and Senate are changing their rules. Media corporations say they are reviewing their policies around harassment and gender. Workplace harassment policy is very much a hot topic right now. (I'll believe that when I see it in practice; I don't imagine that we will see a quick fix.) SF conventions are working on their rules and enforcement process. It's been a rocky start. I (partially) agree with you that accusers' names and accusation text should be shared with the person accused before any punishment as drastic as banning is imposed.

I eagerly look forward to the article about fanzine auctions! Oh and, by the way, **Diane**, I have the almost-complete collection of *Janus/Aurora* that Andy mentioned, waiting for you in my office. Whenever you have reclaimed enough space for it, the zines are yours to claim.

Thanks for the tip about Pete Young's *Big Sky* artwork. Wow!

Patrick Ijima-Washburn

[SC] Congratulations on the success of QUINTET and on getting to meet Leiji Matsumoto. Probably my favorite Hitchcock film next to *Psycho* is *Vertigo*, which deeply impressed me the last time I saw it, mostly due to the performances. I will have to see *Strangers on a Train*, because I don't think I ever have. It will go on my retirement viewing list of great old movies that I somehow never saw.

[JG] I mostly agree with you about Doris Day (not a huge fan), but I can't forget her movie, *Young at Heart*, with Frank Sinatra and Gig Young. Unexpected depths.

Julie Zachman

[SC] On the TV front, we have just finished season 3 of *Daredevil*, which was a fairly tedious exercise that strained my patience for self-absorbed superheros. We are now almost finished with season 6 of *House of Cards*. The 3-season original British *House of Cards* series was a tightly conceived and effectively delivered delight. The U.S. version seems to have a much more ambitious agenda but, in my opinion, was not improved by the additional length. I

hope this ends on something like a positive note because, if not, I won't quite understand what the point of it all was.

[JG] I have not upgraded to the new Mac OS yet. Frequent warnings from various applications that they will not be supported in the new OS, make me quite sure that the process will take a bit of time and expense. I expect that several programs I depend upon will fail to open in the new OS and I want to wait until I've closed my business down entirely before I deal with it. For instance, I think I will need to upgrade Quickbooks for the new OS: on the other hand, I may not need that program anymore after I file my taxes for 2018. I'm using Banktivity for Scott's and my joint and personal financial records. What has your experience with the new OS been like?

I understand that *The Walking Dead's* Anne and Rick Grimes are on their way to a new story, possibly to appear in a movie. It's hard to believe that if Rick survives that he would not find his way back to his family, but I think that's how it's going to be written: Anne and Rick are gone, gone, gone. Father Gabriel will have to find another soulmate.

Cathy Gilligan

[SC] I have been meaning to ask you what you think of the changes out your way at the Northside Town Center shopping center. It seems a lot livelier lately since Willie St. Coop North moved in along with a new Goodwill store, True Value and Bierock brewpub. True Value may become our go-to hardware store since they closed the Ace on Cottage Grove Road. We discovered that we rather like the Sunday farmers market out there. We stopped there several times this season.

[JG] The reason I used the phrase "pandering to outsiders," was because the original complaints were brewed within a Tweet-conversation that happened DURING the panel. Audience members were live-tweeting the panel and people outside the con were reacting and interacting with audience members. The audience members couldn't have been paying close attention to the speakers as they typed and the non-WisCon Tweeters had only the bare minimum of information provided by the opinions typed by the audience members. **Lisa** was entirely unaware that this was happening at the time. (By the way, **Andy**, if the Tweets from this panel are findable, this is where you might find the names of the accusers and the texts of their accusations.)

My opinion (and it is just that, an opinion. I have no evidence, just a memory of similar sequences of events in the WisCon conglom in the past) is that the conglom reacted to both in-person and on-line comments, but that the escalating social media reaction provided the most urgent motivation to act immediately. Had it not been for the exploding spotlight of on-line attention, I believe that the committee would have waited to talk with Lisa before acting.

Walter Freitag

[JG] To my embarrassment, I remember my reaction to a complaint in a letter of comment many, many years ago, that the type in my fanzine was too small to read easily. I thought to myself (but happily did not share my thought) that the person—an older, retired, well-known fannish gentleman named Harry Warner, Jr.—should just hold the fanzine closer to his eyes. Duh! Well, it's payback time for me: I really wish you would enlarge the size of your type.

Beautiful photos!

Comments on #389

Covers

[SC] Another stunning front cover, Steve. I was amazed at your revelation on the back cover, something I never knew about you. Those eye surgeries must have been scary for you at that age.

Lisa Freitag

[SC] It's not like I'm unsympathetic to the view you appear to have that all wars are bad. I get that. I mostly agree. WWII is problematic because the fascist forces we opposed really were bent on mass extermination and likely world domination. Setting that detail aside, the thing about your beautifully written essay "A Gravestone in Tuscola" that bothered me was that you neglected to mention that the U.S. was attacked by Japan in 1941. Prior to that action, the country was very deeply divided about getting involved in another European war in spite of the fascists and stories of atrocities. WWI was still fresh in many American's minds having ended only 23 years earlier, and even the perilous situation of our great friends the British was not enough to sway a clear majority of Americans to want to get involved in another foreign war. After Pearl Harbor public opinion changed to overwhelming support of war against Japan and its allies. Many young (and not-so-young) Americans joined up to fight because the nation had been attacked by a fierce foreign force. Galbreath's choice may have had little to do with the evils of Nazism, atrocities against Jews or threat to our allies. He was probably all about defending our country from further attack. You seemed to want to treat him as naïve about what he was getting himself into. I'm inclined to give him more credit. He was aligned with the mood of the country and he had plenty of support. He had no way to know that he would end up dying in a possibly unnecessary battle on some unheard of South Pacific island, but he may well have been ready to accept that so long as he was contributing to the war effort and fighting alongside his comrades. Peleliu may not have been his first battle either. He was a 1st Lt. not a 2nd Lt. He apparently had proven himself a leader and gotten that promotion somehow. Is he a hero or not? Your points are well made, but if we grant that

he was of adult intelligence and he chose to risk his life to defend his country, and then made the ultimate sacrifice in battle against our common enemy, then it's hard for me to see him as anything other than a hero.

Of course, I think all Lt. Galbreath's comrades who fought, were injured or died in the battle are heroes, too, and I have no problem with the Japanese regarding their soldiers the same way. Peleliu should still be regarded as a tragedy because people ended up making these sacrifices to decide a possibly pointless engagement. In the end you chose to place blame for these losses and waste on the people back at home. War is unpredictable, messy, wasteful and horrific but it's not clear to me what you expected people to do when they were attacked by a hostile foreign power. The folks at home made sacrifices, too.

I admired your Brave Spaces piece. I had not heard of Brave Spaces before. I agree that regarding WisCon as a Brave Space makes far more sense than trying to force it to be an actually Safe Space.

[JG] "Everything seems to be about WisCon for me these days." I think I felt the same way for two years after resigning from the SF³ board and the WisCon concom. News articles, stories, ideas ... everything related to, was reflected in, or provided examples of what I'd gone through. For good reason: both of us were involved in the turmoil surrounding an institution going through changes in its root structure, and those changes and that turmoil was and is mirrored by events going on in the larger world.

I like the idea of "Brave Space."

Jim Hudson and Diane Martin

[SC] Thanks as always for the update on Diane's continuing struggle. I can only guess at the frustration she is experiencing as she searches for just the right combination of medications.

We also enjoyed *Fun Home*. Since I hadn't read the graphic novel nor heard any of the music, I did not have any prior expectations. I liked how they structured the story with with three actors portraying Bechdel's character and how they worked in the music. Really good job all around.

[JG] I loved APT's *Engaging Shaw*, partly I think, because the conversational examination of marriage reminded me A LOT of conversations between Scott and I, early in our relationship. The acting was of course fabulous; I feel so very lucky to be able to see so many APT shows.

It's been many years since I read *Fun Home*, but both the book and the play gave me a similar understanding about Alison and her relationship to her father. I remember, after the book came out, hearing that Bechtal was planning a second book about her mother, but I don't think that happened. I did love the music, which was *not* something I would have expected in a stage production of the book!

Steven Johnson

[SC] Regarding the WisCon incident you described in your comment to Jeanne I can only say that, if accurate, it is very sad news. If the convention staff cannot manage a line of people for a food function, how can they expect to usefully help people who have complicated problems?

[JG] Very nice cover, Steve!

I'm sorry to hear about the person banned for life for rude behavior at WisCon. I wonder how long the list is of people banned from WisCon? *sigh*

Assisting the tangled tree branches and feeling/imagining a tree's stress and gratitude for unangling it, got me thinking about what sentient trees might have thought of the Native American practice of contorting tree branches into tortured, unnatural configurations in order to cause them to serve as signposts, helping to orient cross-country travelers.

Catie Pfeifer

[SC] Thank you for sharing Meera's story and I'm glad she recovered. If you want to have any hope of keeping up with the dog and cat owners in the apa, you're going to need to post some pictures of her.

Great wedding pictures in this issue! This is really helpful to me since I do not think we have met. Now I know who to look for at WisCon should you decide to go next year.

I was really blown away by *The Traitor Baru Cormorant* when we read it last spring, so the next book, *The Monster Baru Cormorant*, is silently mocking me from our to-read shelf. I think I want to review the first novel again before launching an attack on the new one.

You (and Jacob, of course) will be quite welcome to the book group. The November meeting had almost a record turnout to discuss the delightful *Murderbot Diaries* novella series.

[JG] I hope you are able to join us at the SFWithoutBorders Book Discussion Group. If you want to come to the discussion of Nick Harkaway's *Gnomes*, I suggest that you start reading it as soon as possible. It's big and very complicated.

I am also sort of interested in re-reading *The Traitor Baru Cormorant*, though I think it is unlikely due to ... other books. But I am tempted because I disliked the voice of Christine Marshall who read the audible version which we listened to during a cross-country trip. She had a perfectly nice voice ... and that was the problem for me. Her voice worked at the beginning of the novel when the protagonist was a young, naive, uncertain girl. But as Baru grew in strength and ruthlessness, the reader's voice did not change and thus was completely wrong. I know that I could correct for this if I were to re-read the book, rather than listen to it. But I suspect that I will simply dive into the second book.

Best wishes to you and Jacob.

Marilyn Holt and Clifford Wind

[SC] So the bulk of your business is chickens. Are the ducks and geese then mainly for eggs, or do you process some of them for meat, too? Congratulations on getting your story and poem published.

[JG] Send us a sample of your fiction, Marilyn!

Andy Hooper

[SC] Your zine on Jane Eyre was fabulous. I have never read the novel and I have never seen a movie version, but the story is so famous that I could hardly help over the years picking up a general idea of what happens. Still, your recap of the novel was very helpful. It was also helpful to have seen the Masterpiece Theater series on the Bronte sisters about a year ago. I was at least prepared for the tragedy of their brief lives and careers that you laid out. It's always fun to get the inside story on movie making when it involves such bigger-than-life characters as Wells and Fontaine.

[JG] What a great story you told—all the players, including author, screenwriters, directors, etc. bringing their own drama to it. Thank you. It's been a long time since I read *Jane Eyre*. I don't think I considered the idea, then, that Jane might have accepted Rochester *because* "he is essentially rendered helpless." Is that what you meant? I think my interpretation at the time was that Jane proved her love for Rochester because she chose to stand by him in spite of his blindness, and that Rochester proved that his love did not depend upon what she looked like to him.

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] As Halloween rolled around this year, Jeanne and I were wondering if the famous Milwaukee Trick or Treat event at Lee Schneider's was still going on. I had no idea your event drew so many kids. OMG! What fine news that y'all are still up to your old tricks. The photo was also excellent.

Every year Jeanne and I have to decide whether we are going to be home or away on Halloween. Sometimes we are looking forward to candy and trick-or-treaters and sometimes we aren't. This year we decided to be at home after Jeanne went to our neighbor's across the street to pick up our CSA box one night and was begged by the kids there to PLEASE be home for Halloween. We had no idea that anyone ever really noticed if we were home or not in the past, but apparently we were. As it turned out, the weather on Halloween was the best I have seen in years. And business for the night was good. We got about 75 kids, not counting parents even though many of them were dressed up, too. I managed to count the kids but not take pictures, which is a little sad because many of the costumes were very good.

[JG] Re the first line of your zine: Gradually, very gradually, I have decided to be encouraged by the November elections: I am reminded of a little kid rolling a bowling ball down the alley, very, very slowly. When the ball finally kisses the first pin, it seems to fall in slow motion, causing the pin next to it to go down as well. Minutes pass before one realizes that the kid has hit a strike. That's sort of been the story of the Democratic victories in the House.

One of the things I most missed from my absence in *Turbo* was hearing about your fabulous Halloween productions. What an amazing, annual project. Bravo! Does the local press cover your shows?

Thanks for telling me what Eric Larson said. I remember that conversation! It's sort of ironic, though, that I would have been the person to give him sound financial advice. It's not usually what I consider my forte.

Greg Rihn

[SC] You once again left me a little green with envy that you managed to see the National Theater productions of *King Lear* and *Frankenstein*, especially the later which I have heard good things about from several sources.

We had also planned to see *The Happy Prince*, but missed it when it showed up in Madison very, very briefly and, as I recall, only showed in one theater at one time of day (middle of the afternoon.) By the time we noticed it, we could not get there in time before it left town. So, it became another thing we will have to eventually see on TV. This happens to us a lot these days (warning: prepare for frequent rant), especially since giant AMC Theater chain took over the Sundance chain. We could once count on Sundance showing the best of the smaller films coming to town. For long stretches of time, Sundance was the only theater we'd end up going to because they showed most of the films, big and small, we wanted to see. AMC is more interested in providing very expensive food and concessions and mostly showing the same line of big budget blockbusters everyone else is running. These days we have to carefully comb through the movie listings on Fandango every week to find movies we want to see that could be showing anywhere at any cineplex, but often end up in very few theaters, at limited times for brief runs. This is how we also missed the celebrated western *The Sisters Brothers* that has shown up on several best movie-of-the-year lists. It happens even to movies that are promoted all over town as Coming Attractions but then never show up or show up very briefly. End of rant.

[JG] It seems every month our comments to you come down to "wish we'd seen that too!" So ditto what Scott said above about wishing we'd been able to see *The Happy Prince*. I expect we will eventually stream it. I also wish I'd seen the Met's version of *La Fanciulla del West*. I love Puccini, though I frequently find myself imagining different endings for his operas.

F.J. Bergmann

[SC] We also had plenty of turkey. We hosted Jeanne's family the Saturday before Thanksgiving because her brother, Steve, happened to be in town on business from Hong Kong and the family was able to come together to celebrate that day. Then, for the very first time, we drove down to Iowa on the actual holiday for dinner with my family. Always in the past we travelled to Iowa on the Saturday after Thanksgiving for a post-holiday meal. This time we were there for real deal. Since my brother's extended family and my sister's extended family got together separately at different times of the day, we were able to basically have dinner twice. Plus we had leftovers waiting for us back home. So it's fair to say we had plenty of turkey and fixings to last us a good long while. We are thinking lamb at Christmas time.

[JG] Congratulations on the Pushcart Prize nomination! And also for avoiding the scam author event at B&N. Damn. Bookstores used to be places that supported local authors!

Jae Leslie Adams

[SC] I was very amused at your bunny advice for Jeanne (plant more plants, the bunnies can't go to the store) vs. your willingness to help me plot a murderous solution by reaching out to the neighbors for potential assassin kitties. It's nice to have options.

I think your pact with Jon to save Vegas and all the Disneys until after you have seen everything else is completely sensible. But I have to sadly admit that, just as I had visited Vegas once as a child, it was on that very same trip that I made my first (and only) visit to a Disney property. Way back then it was Disneyland because that was all there was. I was the right age for it, at least. Today I can remember the day only as a wonderful, delirious blur. I came back home with a map of Disneyland almost as big as me and a few other souvenirs that I later used to give an all-time personal best show-and-tell in school. I have nothing but pleasant memories of Disneyland, and I'd prefer to leave it at that.

[JG] There is something lovely about the way you write your zines and make art, Jae. I imagine you walking through the arboretum along a creek, talking to us in stream-of-conscious observations. You pause to paint a single word on the pavement with brush strokes that take advantage of the crack that interrupt it, making the crack part of the art. The thing I have always admired about your art and your conversation is a thing that I have so much trouble doing myself: you are open to found art, found experience, found beauty. You let the path guide your eyes rather than what I tend to do: hold fast to the map I've prepared in advance...and then I miss seeing the unexpected.

What's New

Anamosa adventure

[SC] I was back in my hometown, Anamosa, Iowa, in October helping my brother and sister-in-law move from the house they have lived in for the last 40+ years to a newer house. Jeanne stayed in Madison during this trip. After a day of moving stuff, Jon, Donna, my sister Bonnie and I decided to head out to dinner. We jumped into Jon's van. As we rolled down the street toward town, Donna and I saw a dazed-looking young woman waving and shouting frantically at us from a front yard. I told Jon to stop and I rolled down the window. She said someone had just crashed their car through her basement wall. Donna and I were both confused because we looked at the houses to our left and right and could see no sign of trauma anywhere. Not only that, we both thought the only way a car could have run into anyone's basement wall would have required it to roar up out of the valley of trees and brush that ran behind all the houses on that side of the street. Jon and I got out of the van and started to walk along the front yards toward the first house on the street. As we got to the end of the house we looked around the corner and saw a car sticking out of the side of the house. And we heard a hissing sound. We instantly turned back and shouted "GAS!" just as a man carrying a large cage with two puppies came out of the damaged house.

It turned out the driver of the car had a seizure as he was coming up old North Williams Street before it does a little "S" curve into the newer development Jon now lives in. The car flew across the side yard of the first house, missing a tree and slammed into the basement wall exposed by the slope of the hill. He scored a direct hit on the gas meter. The mother and her son were in the basement at the time of the crash. No one was hurt. We found the driver staggering up

the street a few moments later guided by his wife, a nurse. They actually lived in the house right next door to the house he crashed into. The gas did not explode, the volunteer fire department showed up and shooed everyone back more than half a block. Repairs took awhile since neither the gas company office, nor their emergency response team, were local and the fix would involve finding and digging up the gas main.

Bad Times at the El Royale

[JG] The first time we saw the previews for this movie, I knew it was exactly Scott's favorite sort of movie. The previews made me think of Quentin Tarantino, and to be certain, *Bad Times at the El Royale* had a lot of violence. But as it turned out, it also had a complicated, gorgeous plot--the kind where every line of dialog, every scene, every plot turn, is important and fits together like a jigsaw puzzle to set up the final revelation. I never knew where the plot was going, but at the end, understood the inevitability of the finale. Which made it one of my favorite sort of movie--so both Scott and I were happy. Note: unlike a Tarantino movie, there were actually some good guys who were not murdered in a horrible manner. Basically, the plot told the story of five guests who are checked into the El Royale Hotel in 1973 by the sole, mysterious caretaker, plus a couple extra characters who show up later. We know there's a treasure hidden somewhere on the premises and suspect that more than one of the guests is searching for it. But we don't know, really, who these people are until late in the story. And, in fact, learning their stories provides an incredibly entertaining two hours.





1. Murder a fir tree.
2. Decorate its corpse.



Holiday card

[JG] Our holiday card this year drew its inspiration from the Pixar animated featurette, *Olaf's Frozen Adventure* which was followed by the main movie, *Coco*. You may not have seen it unless you went to see *Coco* early in its run; apparently lots of people didn't like the fact that the movie *Coco* was preceded by such a long "short" (21 minutes) featuring characters from *Frozen*. (Some folks apparently thought they'd walked into the wrong theater.) So Disney pulled it entirely a couple weeks later. Anyway, the plot of *Olaf's Frozen Adventure* involves Olaf, Anna and Elisa in search of a holiday tradition to make their own, and one of the houses they visit is lit up by a beautiful Spruce, about which the father of the house explains: "We murder a tree and then decorate its corpse." I went home that night with the idea for a holiday card.

Book Discussion

[JG] One of the reasons I really like participating in our book discussion group—Science Fiction without Borders—is that we read new fiction that, for the most part, I haven't read or even heard much about. For 30+ years, our book discussion group's leader (first Gerald Schoenherr and then Parrish Johnston) chose books, quite autocratically, but usually with excellent taste. Gerald now lives in Arizona and Parrish has retreated to Mineral Point where he manages the local opera house and lives with his wife and new baby. Trips to Madison are much more difficult for him these days. So now, Becky Johnson and I are choosing the books. We're trying to maintain the tradition of choosing books that

people have not read yet, even if that means we end up reading some clunkers. So we scour *Locus* and Award lists and recommendations on Goodreads for likely titles. I tend to suggest science fiction titles and Becky tends to suggest fantasy titles. In spite of that split, Becky was the one who nominated Martha Wells' *Murderbot* series of three novellas, which is certainly science fiction. Which brings me round again to the thing that I love about our book discussion group. I am so happy to have been introduced to the *Murderbot* series. There are quite a few books and authors that I may never have sampled if they had not been chosen for our monthly discussion, and I am so grateful to have been pointed at Wells' fiction. Murderbot--the main character of this series--is an amazing, sarcastic, smart character who grows in really interesting ways through the 3 stories, and soon apparently, will have their own full-length novel. Yes!

I have recently been thinking about the difference in reading a physical book vs. a book on a screen vs. an audio book. I am more and more favoring the latter two choices because my eyesight prefers larger type sizes, made possible with an iBook. And I've been enjoying audiobooks too for similar reasons, and this year bought an Audible subscription. The main upside is that I am reading more in spite of frequently tired eyes, and of course it's very easy these days to get almost any titles in electronic or audio formats. The downside is that neither electronic nor audio formats works very well with my visual memory. E.g., I can't find a line of text because I remember where on the page I saw it. However, the search functions in an iBook do largely compensate for that. I don't feel a loss, either, for not being able to shelve the physical book sitting on my bookshelf either. But I've been working on orienting myself to fewer books and fewer possessions for a while now, so perhaps this is just a sign that my campaign is working. One thing I was not expecting however, was the significant difference in reading (a physical book or an electronic book) compared to *hearing* a book.

When our group was talking about the *Murderbot* stories, several members had listened to the stories; the rest of us (including Scott and I) had read the novellas. The main character, Murderbot, has no gender and is referred to in the novellas as "they." But Scott and I had a hard time resisting the use of a female pronoun, possibly because the author, Martha Wells, was a woman. In addition, I have a theory that our assumptions were linked to the arc of Murderbot's story: Murderbot moves from slave to full agency, and that felt very much like an archetypal woman's journey. However, the two people who listened to the novellas, which was read by a man, had to fight the opposite inclination. They kept thinking of Murderbot as a man and referring to "he" and "him." I think that audiobooks may work in a similar ways to film versions of books: once the movie has been seen or heard, it's hard not to imagine that same actor's face (or gender).



Tree trimming adventure

[SC] It turns out that one of our neighbors, Matt, happens to be an arborist. So we asked him to come by and trim some trees in our backyard sometime. He got time to stop over in November and did a very nice job, including clean-up. As part of our compensation, Jeanne designed some business cards for him since he left his old tree trimming job in Edgerton to go out on his own here in Madison. The odd thing about the job is that we don't actually own any trees in our backyard. Our backyard neighbor let a bunch of junk trees grow up along the fence line. I tried to keep up with them from my side of the fence, but they got away from me and grew quite big and started to spread over into our yard and drop dead branches from time to time. Since our back neighbor does not communicate with us (and we think she rents out the house) we decided to just have our arborist neighbor, Matt, trim the growth on our side of the fence. Matt specializes in using ladders and ropes to climb and trim, which was very good since you can't bring a lift truck into our back yard. I could have spent all day watching him work. He was not only very clever in his climbing technique, he was very expert in cutting and dropping tree limbs precisely where he wanted them to go in the fairly tight space behind our house. I learned a lot just watching him.

Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley

[JG] We bought last-minute tickets for the Milwaukee Rep's *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*. Set two years after *Pride And Prejudice*, it is sort of an Austenean *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*: though the play subverts the Bennet family dynamics, not the novel's plot. *Miss Bennet* looks through the eyes of the geeky middle sister, Mary, whose strange bookish behavior continually embarrassed her family in *P&P*. But here, two years later at her sister Elizabeth's home in Pemberley, Mary's interests in books and ideas reveal her to be a smart and truly interesting woman. She's even improved her piano playing skills. The highlight of the show is when she dresses down a young man, a visitor to Pemberley, for believing that he has no choices in life, revealing that she is all too aware of how, in comparison, women's lives are severely circumscribed, much more so than men's in the early 19th century. Not to say that this is a serious, preachy play, not at all! It is witty and very funny, and it is feminist too. I am so glad to see a more nuanced and interesting version of Mary and I think her sisters in the play were also pleased to make acquaintance with this new Mary. Written by Lauren Gunderson (playwright of the excellent "Silent Sky"!) and Margot Melcon, it was directed by Kimberly Senior, and it was produced with all women stage managers. It was a real treat. Wonderful! We highly recommended it to you if, as we hope, the Milwaukee Rep stages it again next holiday season, or if it is performed by another acting troupe near you.



Arthur de Bourgh, Elizabeth Darcy, Fitzwilliam Darcy, Mary Bennet, Anne de Bourgh, Charles Bingley, Lydia Wickham, Jane Bingley



They Shall Not Grow Old



[SC] I was reading an article in *The New York Times* about a new movie from Peter Jackson (*The Lord of the Rings*) about WWI. Jackson is a bit of a WWI history buff and, this being 100 years since the end of The Great War, the British

Imperial War Museum asked Jackson to take 100 hours of war film footage and do something original with it. Ultimately Jackson decided to use modern technology to restore the film: he not only restored heavily damaged, grainy footage, he also darkened and lightened the images and changed the frame rates. (The cameras in use then were hand-cranked, meaning the picture frame rates were all different) The restored footage shows everyone moving much more naturally. Then Jackson transferred the film into 3-D and colorized it. The effect is absolutely amazing and hypnotizing. It looks as if they shot the footage yesterday. Then he went to work on the sound (what sound?) He filled in background sounds wherever appropriate and, wherever in the film you can see someone talking, Jackson brought in forensic lip readers to determine what they were saying. Then they found out who the person was, where they were from and brought in actors to say their “lines” in the appropriate, native British accent. Jackson also turned to the 600 hours of old interviews the BBC did with WWI veterans and basically used their stories as the narrative for the movie. The movie simply shows the war from the vets’ viewpoint via their stories of signing up at the beginning through boot camp and their experiences in the trenches. It was fantastic, I could have watched it all day long. The movie is called *They Shall Not Grow Old* and it was only screened on two dates, December 17 and 27. I saw this article on December 16 so we scrambled to find a local theater that was showing it and had available seats. We were lucky to make it. It was the most moving and impressive movie experience I had all year.



Travel plans, Hawaii & Hong Kong

[JG] In the first full year of Scott’s and my retirement, we plan to do some epic travel. We will be gone for most of the month of February. To begin with, we will visit Hawaii again with Kafryn Lieder and Craig Katz. We vacationed in Hawaii with them in 2014 and had such a wonderful time that we decided to do it again. Last time we visited Kauai, Oahu and the Big Island. This time we will visit Maui, Molokai and (again) the Big Island. We’re looking forward to a helicopter ride over the Kilauea volcano, a whale-watching tour, returning to the Inn at Kulaniapia Falls on the Big Island, climbing to the top of Mauna Kea and looking through a telescope from that peak, swimming in the ocean, and, well, a very long list of other delightful things to do. We’re really looking forward to it. Kafryn and Craig make wonderful traveling companions and Hawaii is simply...paradise.

After 3 weeks in Hawaii, Scott and I will continue west alone, leaving Kafryn and Craig in Hawaii. We’ll fly to Hong Kong, where my brother Steve has been living for the past four years with his wife, Linda. Steve works for Rockwell Automation and is in charge of that company’s distribution in Asia. His work travel schedule would drive me batty, but he loves it: He shuttles between South Korea, Japan, Beijing, Shanghai, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, New Zealand, Australia, and India. I may have missed a few countries, but you get the idea. He’s installed a line of hooks on his bedroom wall, one for each country he travels to, and on his way out he grabs the bag from the appropriate hook, containing money and ID for his destination. On top of that, Steve and Linda, take several exotic trips each year: most recently they visited Tibet. As I say, he loves traveling. He’s rarely at “home” in Hong Kong for more than a few days at a time, but he does have a home there, in fact, it is a very nice apartment at the Four Seasons Hotel, with a guest bedroom. Steve and Linda have been urging us to visit them for years, and now that we have the time to take a long vacation, we’re taking them up on the offer while Steve is still posted in Hong Kong. It’s likely that he will retire in a year or two. We’re looking forward to our big adventure!

Jeanne and Scott
December 2018