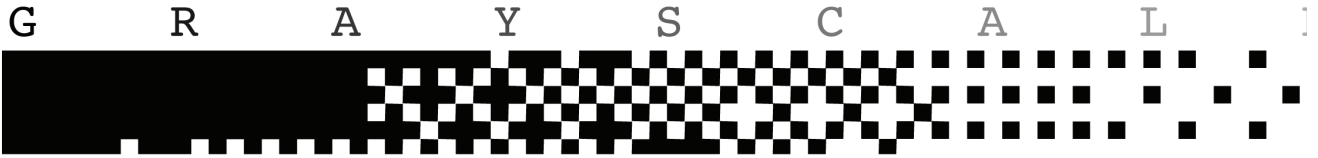


The illusion of gray created
by an arrangement of
alternating black and white dots



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WisCon happens at the end of May. The new WisCon event, the Gathering (the Friday afternoon fair) is taking up a lot of my time. Amy Hanson, who is in charge of this event, is an incredible whirlwind of activity and ideas, and I get several emails from her each day and I've got a very long to-do list made up of just Gathering-related jobs. It's all reminding me that I enjoy planning brand new, first-time projects quite a lot. I liked figuring out how we wanted to do the first WisCon, or the first really big WisCon (#20), or helping to make the Tiptree Award a reality, or starting new fanzines, or ... opening a sketchbook or a screen on the computer and confronting that big, white space. So I am liking this business of figuring out how to do this new event, the Gathering, too. In addition, since Scott is coordinator of WisCon this year, I'm also helping on a lot of other aspects of the con. And then there's the Tiptree ceremony coming up in just a couple weeks in England, and I've been helping our UK liaison, Maureen Kincaid Speller gather together Tiptree material for the program book and arranging other details, but I better start thinking about the trip soon too, for instance about what *else* we're going to do in England. And then I'm supposed to do something for Corflu, which happens in Madison several days after we return from England. And then...

My brother is getting married at the end of the summer. Would I please design his wedding invitation, he asks? Of course, I'd love to do that for you. There's plenty of time since they won't need to send out the cards till ... June 1. Aargh. But I think I've got the design work mostly done, assuming he likes the idea I sent to him.

At work, we're dealing with the annual oh-my-god-I-didn't-realize-the-fiscal-year-deadline-applies-to-ME blues and its attendant flood of work that just has to get done right now, and couldn't-I-reserve-a-place-in-line, what-do-you-mean-you-don't-take-reservations meltdowns. (Publications must be printed by mid-May in order to get paid for by the end of the fiscal year. Anything that misses that deadline has to wait till July 1 to get to press.) My fellow artists are a little worried about the fact that I will be gone to England in the midst of the annual, expected-but-always-a-complete-surprise deadline season.

Scott and I showed up at an anti-war candlelight vigil a few weeks ago which felt good, and we attended a mayoral debate for what has turned some very interesting local politics. (Or maybe it's just so interesting because the national and international politics is just so scary and disheartening.) We've attended several plays performed by the Madison Rep and seen lots of movies. And I finally got around to writing blurbs for the books I read in 2002! Turn the page and you'll find the start of the list. Now on to mailing comments.

Comments on *Intercourse* № 104

Doug Barbour

What an interesting proposal about "reading" whiteness in aboriginal responses to Christian schools. It sounds more sociological than literature-oriented for sure, but it would be really cool if the student was able to use literary tools to consider the data. Lit crit, I think, is often underestimated for its potential to examine verbal artifacts. Perhaps it would be a good thing to broaden literary criticism's

Books read in 2002

The Return of the King, J.R.R. Tolkien

I read the last of *The Lord of the Ring's* books in a hot fever. I was well and truly hooked by Tolkien's epic at that point. But I look forward to reading *LotR* again sometime soon, when I'm no longer so focused upon what *happens*. (I definitely want to reread it after the third movie comes out, to make sure that I fix in my mind the written rather than the movie version.) Even a year after I finished it, I continue to think about Tolkien's story and mull over how I imagined a whole secondary plot to explain what my subconscious simply couldn't believe, i.e., the near total absence of women. And of course the movies and the dvd release of *Fellowship* have kept the story fresh in my mind. My mother has begun reading *LotR* for the first time; when I talked to her on the phone last week she was still half-way through the first book. She exclaimed at how much she was enjoying it, but then hesitated and asked, "but aren't there any women characters?" I laughed and told her we'd have to talk about that later. I'm expecting some interesting insights from her, actually. She's reading it mainly because *LotR* was my late brother Rick's favorite novel. It's taken her almost 14 years since Rick's death to find the courage to read it; she expects a lot of painfully familiar moments when she reads passages that Rick talked about.

The Last Hot Time, John Ford

Well, I know a lot of you really liked this book. I only found out much later that it can be considered a fragment of the shared universe stories called "Borderlands." But reading it alone without understanding the shared world it was set within, and not having read any of the other stories set in this world, made it slow going for me. And I ended up not liking it very much because characters seemed to act without motivation and according to an unexplained set of rules.

The Shipping News, E. Annie Proulx

I loved the style with which this book was written. The sometimes incomplete, clipped sentences. The way the main character had of describing his life in darkly funny, small town newspaper headlines. The mixture of Newfoundland history and the main character's personal history, both of which sometimes seemed absurdly real in a taken-out-of-context way and sometimes simply magical. I loved the metaphor of sailors' knots. And it's a good story too, of a third-rate newspaper writer who survives his wife's abandonment and death, and joins forces with his two daughters and his aunt to find and

subject matter to lots of other written or spoken materials, and not just those specifically created as art.

Michael Sturza

I really enjoyed your Italian trip report. Thank you! Ever since my sister returned from her world trip listing Italy as the place she most wanted to return, I've been noticing a similarly wistful note in the voices of other friends who have traveled there. It must be a wonderful place to visit. On the other hand, driving the "boat" sounds like something to avoid, though it did make for an amusing motif in your report. Your mention of Trajan's column made me wonder if the name has any connection to the font....

Your comments to Janet on the subject of terrorism reminded me of a weird naming game that played out this week (3/24-3/28/2003) in the news reports from Iraq. General Franks referred to the Fedayeen fighters in his first press conference as "not really soldiers ... *terrorists*, actually." What? I thought. Not guerillas? Terrorists aren't what you call people fighting against invaders of their own country. The next day, CNN dropped the term "terrorists" and simply called the Fedayeen "thugs." On the third day the Fedayeen got a small measure of respect in the words used to describe them by CNN and newspaper articles: "paramilitary forces," or "irregulars." But it wasn't until the fourth day that I finally heard the word "guerillas" used to identify them on NPR. This might all have been an artifact of which news shows I happened to tune into and when; maybe there was no evolving attempt to shape American opinion with the specific words used to describe the forces that had effectively blocked the anticipated quick U.S. victory. Certainly I am not one of those people glued to the TV watching the invasion's progress. I read *The Nation* and a daily paper, listen to NPR, and catch 15 minutes or so of CNN in the morning. Nevertheless, it's fascinating, and creepy of course, how public opinion is being bulldozed by the repetitions of quite a lot of big lies. I think calling the whole thing a "war," is a sort of nasty semantic deception too for the fact that it evades the more appropriate word "invasion." And of course there's "coalition of the willing," "weapons of mass destruction," and "awe and terror." Scheech.

Your August Beethoven concert in Cleveland sounds like it was great fun. I really enjoy going to performances that involve teaching. A long time ago I remember watching a TV episode of "A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra" (at least I think that was the title of the show) in which the performance of Richard Straus' *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was the lesson. Now I think about the war between the strings and brass instruments (good *vs.* evil) whenever I hear that piece. Someday I'm going to have to sign up for some music appreciation courses.

I agree with you that the massive international anti-war demonstrations of the past months are potentially hopeful signs indicating change ahead, both for the (re)awakening political awareness of several generations, and for a power beyond any single nation's to control. I've just started a really interesting article in *The Nation* that calls this movement "The World's Other Superpower," that pulls together views of anti-war movement from 14 other countries. My partner, Scott thinks that the U.S. and other powerful countries will consider this international/Internet movement much too threatening (because it is way too effective), and that a way will be found

to clamp down on the Internet's role in the movement. I'm hoping that it's way too late for that, but the signs of a growing U.S. fascist government are indeed scary, and I wouldn't be surprised if the powers-that-be are trying to figure out a way to disable this new force.

I guess I'm not too surprised that the Catholic Church has chosen to blame gays for its sexual abuse scandals. If they don't find a fall-guy (or guys), they'll have to examine the very foundation of the Church's organization and I expect that they will avoid that at all costs. But they won't be able to maintain a purported causal link between homosexual priests and sexual abuse for long. I can't believe that removing gays (if that's even possible to do without destroying the Church) will improve the situation and think that it could actually warp the Church even more than it's already warped, and could increase the number of scandals. Before the Church hierarchy changes its mind about everything being the fault of gays, witch hunts against gays will create even worse scandals and melt the Church down further in public opinion, not to mention ruining the lives of thousands of gay priests. In my opinion, the U.S. branch of the Catholic Church may be doomed. Unfortunately, I expect that its role will be taken over by Fundamentalist Christian sects, which could be even worse.

For a long time, before he came out to friends and family, my brother considered becoming a priest, I think he viewed the priesthood as a place where he could avoid the pressure of constant assumptions about his sexuality. "When you date...", "When you marry...", "When you have children..." When he came out, he dropped the idea of the priesthood as a career choice.

Interesting comments about Octavia Butler's writing. My expectation of Butler's most recent *Parable* series, is that the religion being created by the main character will evolve into several interstellar off-shoots (as the religion is carried to the stars, which is crux of the founder's Plan). Butler says she plans an 8-book series. The off-shoot religions, I think, will turn out to be radically warped away from the original religion, although the imprint of the original will be clear. At least one, and maybe all of them will actually turn into incredibly evil interpretations of the original philosophy. I think a worrisome interpretation is already suggested in the first two books and that's why I bring this up in response to your comment. I think that Butler often presents us with incredibly uncomfortable ideas, not because she believes them, or considers them likely, but because doing so creates a paradoxically realistic situation for her characters. Butler often sets up a power, or a movement, or even a disease — just to show how, for an individual, its effect might be completely different than for her community as a whole. I've been fascinated by Butler's consideration of how the needs of communities differ from and in fact conflict with the needs of individuals.

Your analysis of *The Graduate* and *Igby Goes Down* was great. It's embarrassing to me now, however, to realize how differently I reacted to *Igby* as compared to my youthful reaction to *The Graduate*, and how those reactions were based on my generational point of view. I seem to have unconsciously traded positions on an Us-Them generational continuum. Sigh.

I loved *Frida*, especially for the way images of her art were intertwined with images of her life. The movie did a great job of portraying an artist and an artist's life, or actually two artists and two artists' lives, both interior and exterior.

make a place for himself in the world. The fact that the story takes place in Newfoundland adds to the black humor and magic. Climate and landscape are pivotal in this novel, almost becoming characters in their own rights. Highly recommended.

Adventures in Time and Space with Max Merriwell, **Pat Murphy**

It must be the year for finishing trilogies. Of course no one would ever ask where the women are in *this* trilogy. Pat Murphy's adventure novels, linked by the conceit that they are all supposedly written by a fictional author (Max Merriwell) and his pseudonyms, includes a Tolkien pastiche, (*There and Back Again*, by Max), a gold rush western adventure featuring a girl raised by wolves (*Wild Angel*, by Mary Maxwell), and a mystery set on a cruise ship in the Caribbean, in which all the authors, including Pat, and several characters mix it up with aliens and writing workshops (*Adventures in Time and Space with Max Merriwell*, by Pat). I remember when Pat talked about this trilogy in public for the first time, explaining how each book would be written by a different author or author's pseudonym. The prospectus itself was wildly entertaining. While we sat there laughing our heads off, we wondered how the hell she'd managed to convince her editor to go along with her idea. Well, I'm very glad she did. It was a really fun ride.

Angry Young Spaceman, **Jim Munroe**

My friend, Gerald Schoneherr picked this book for one of our book discussions, otherwise I'm sure I'd never have decided to read it. I sure wasn't expecting to find a really interesting political perspective in it. Have you ever had a discussion with people who steadfastly deny that the United States does absolutely nothing to coerce the rest of the world to adapt our culture? They say we don't force anyone at gunpoint to watch our movies, listen to our music, and abandon cultural mores, which of course misses the point that there are a lot better ways to do it than with bullets. There are all sorts of marketing techniques and some of them don't look authoritarian at all. I think the truth about the effects of American culture upon the world is both more complex and more horrible than is generally believed. Jim Munroe's novel, *Angry Young Spaceman*, considers this idea as part of a very funny story, where it eventually turns out that the only effective way to combat invasive alien marketing is with self-defense marketing.

Preternatural Too: Gyre, **Margaret Wander Bonanno**

This novel is the sequel to Bonanno's earlier novel, *Preternatural*, which I read and enjoyed several years ago, about a woman SF author who literally converses and has adventure with her alien muses (intergalactic jellyfish) ... Or is she the fictional creation of aliens with really good imaginations? The meta-novel adventure continues in *Preternatural Too*, as Karen Guerrieri is sent back in time by the alien jellyfish to fix a little glitch caused by the curious aliens. Her time travel excursions ends up having a profound effect upon Karen's understanding of herself as a writer and the power of fiction. I like these novels a lot. Bonanno's references to SF, fandom and writing make me think she would fit in really well at WisCon and I'd like to get her here someday.

The Silent Strength of Stones, **Nina Kiriki Hoffman**

Hoffman was a Guest of Honor at WisCon 26 and I picked up this novel so I'd have read at least one of her books before the convention. I liked Nina a lot when I met her at WisCon, which made me wish I'd enjoyed her novel more. Nevertheless, this novel, along with John Ford's *The Last Hot Time*, are examples of the kind of fantasy for which I've never developed a taste. Even though *Stones* is clearly the first book in a series, my reaction shares something with my reaction to Ford's novel, in that it is clearly part of a larger work, and many essential details about how its world works remain to be revealed. There is a family of werewolves. There is a young girl, the protagonist, who is just beginning to realize that she has a lot in common with them. There are ancient family secrets, none of which come very far into the light in this novel. It's well written, but I don't think I'll be looking for the sequels.

A Winter Haunting, **Dan Simmons**

You never know what genre Dan Simmons will choose to write in next—hard SF, horror, fantasy, novel noir mystery featuring Earnest Hemmingway as a main character, comedy, thrillers. I've read quite a few of his novels and have been impressed by his flexibility, his imagination and his command of different styles. I'm not a big fan of the horror genre, but I've read several of Simmons' horror novels, including *Summer of Night*, which is about a group of young boys in a small town and some strange things that happen to them one terrible summer. (Psychologically, Simmons' boys seem closely related to the three young buddies in Stephen King's novella *Stand By Me*.) I liked *Summer* quite a lot. But Simmons shocked me because he killed off the smartest, most likeable character

Christina Lake

You have my sympathies around your frustrations with Sophie. There are a very few people who I react to as if there's something basic about me and about the other person that clashes on a very deep level. (No doubt one of those personality quadrant theories would explain it all.) Thankfully, I think most of us encounter our "opposites" rarely, but when we do, it's hard to pinpoint exactly why this person is so irritating. They may be perfectly nice people. They may be intelligent and do good work. But when I'm around my opposite, I have to remind myself repeatedly to be calm and to react appropriately to what they say. One of my clients at work has been driving me crazy for quite a long time. I've been working on a mapping project with her for almost two years. In my opinion we should have finished it within a couple months, but Diane needs to work through each option and see it before she makes up her mind which one she likes, which means I have to redo the work each time so that she can see and choose. She is unable to visualize the result of any given change and unwilling to trust me when I predict how it will work, so I have to slog through the process and 99% of the time, she ends up choosing the option I suggested at the very beginning. I've put more hours into this one project than I have into any other job I have ever done for the DNR in my 24 years employed there. Nevertheless, she's a very up-beat person, fairly well organized and people mostly like her, I think. (Here's a sample conversation in which I am biting my lip, trying hard to remain civil. Diane: "I don't think we need to show the toilets on this map. The only reason people will be using this trail is to go to the campground." Jeanne: "You can't predict how people will be using a trail or a sign. They may rely upon the outhouses as a reference point or they might suddenly have to use the toilet while they're hiking. It happens." Diane: "Hmm. I don't know. Well, do the map without the toilet symbols and I'll check with the park manager." And of course you can guess what the park manager will say. The next visit, Diane will be back instructing me to put the toilet symbols back into the map. I'm amazed sometime that the Park Manager chose to work with Diane as a trail designer (or continues to do so). He knows how much my time is costing his program, but that seems to be OK with him. As I have this conversation with Diane, I'm trying very hard to maintain a calm tone to my voice, but apparently I don't succeed very well, because after she leaves, my co-workers, two other artists, burst into my office laughing at what they overheard through the partitions, and help me to calm down. I will be *sooo* glad when these Devil's Lake maps are finally done!

Elizabeth Fox

I was sorry to hear about Pat's dad's death but I admire how you worked hard to be there for Pat, and to make things as easy for him as you could by avoiding confrontations or complaints about dealing with his relatives, and by taking care of him. I can well imagine that the experience has brought you two closer together.

You're right that UGG boots aren't the most stylish looking footwear in the world, but in deep winter in Wisconsin which commonly (or used to)

includes temperatures well under -20°F, stylish attire is the *last* priority for most folks. Staying warm and avoiding falls rank much further up on the list. It's just a pleasant bonus that UGGs feel like slippers.

Thanks for going into detail about how you feel about your mother's hostility. I sympathize and I think I understand much of what you're going through with her.

Wisconsin is also dealing with the issue of Tribal gambling operations. I also dislike the idea of encouraging gambling, especially as a way to fund government programs. I don't have much of an opinion about casinos' contribution to urban sprawl since they're rare compared to the far more prevalent strip malls that our culture seems addicted to right now. But I don't like the fact that gambling hurts poor families of compulsive gamblers, I don't like the temptation it presents to organized crime, and I don't like that it is a regressive tax. In the long run it seems to me that society will lose more than it gains from publicly sanctioned gambling. On the other hand.... At least here in Wisconsin the issue gets complicated really quickly. Wisconsin Tribal Councils are using a lot of the profits from gambling wisely. Indian populations are rapidly escaping from the lowest income levels; it may be a regressive tax, but it also benefits some of the most poverty-stricken groups in the state. More Indians have good jobs today, and most of their kids are getting good educations. (In fact an amazing percentage of the money raised at casinos is being funneled into schools on reservations. Milwaukee area tribes are also forming partnerships with inner city schools which end up benefiting all poor kids, mostly children of color.) In addition, gambling funds have made it possible for Indians to continue their commendable stewardship of Menominee County forests. The Indians there employ forestry methods in which individual trees are harvested according to ecological priorities rather than financial efficiencies. Much to the chagrin and frustration of the big paper industry companies here, the Menominee Indian Tribe has been able to prevent clear-cutting the forests in their county/reservation which includes remnants of old growth forests. In fact, they're actually learning to make a profit from this kind of forestry. Now that the Tribe is no longer desperate for funds, it is likely that they will not feel forced to sell these precious forests. The political boundary of Menominee County is one of the very few in the world that can be perceived from outer space. (Another, of course, is the boundary between North and South Korea.) If you ever get a chance to look at a daylight satellite photo that includes Wisconsin, look for a nearly rectangular area in Northeastern Wisconsin that is much darker and densely covered with vegetation than any other part of the state. So I like Tribal priorities -- their children's education, the environment, and a living wage for their members. And I laugh sometimes at the irony when I think about how gambling seems to be a mostly "white man's" vice compared to the so-called Indian vice of terrible vulnerability to alcohol. This year, the incoming Democratic Governor of Wisconsin — Jim Doyle — signed new agreements with several of Wisconsin's Indian tribes that will allow them to make their investments in casinos much more secure (by removing the requirement to re-negotiate treaties every five years) in return for enormous payments to the state. Wisconsin, of course, is in the same red-ink hole that many other states find themselves today, and this cash influx is very attractive even to those who dislike the idea of making gambling a permanent Wisconsin fixture. The Republicans here are throwing a fit about the deals because they would prefer to lay off more

in the novel (Duane McBride), the character I thought was in fact the protagonist — about 1/3 into the novel. For a while I thought that surely we readers had been misled, that Duane would turn out not to have been killed after all, that he would return to save the day. But no, Duane stayed dead ... or mostly so until 2002, when Simmons resurrected his ghost in *A Winter Haunting*. Well, of course, I had to read this new novel. I wanted to hear Duane's voice again, even if it came from beyond the pale. But it didn't feel to me that Duane was really there. In fact, Simmons is fairly ambiguous about whether the adult Dale Stewart (Duane's best friend from *Summer*) was just imagining Duane or if Duane was really typing warning messages with Dale's typewriter. I ended up feeling rather dissatisfied with the story for lots of reasons, but mostly because I didn't like or care about the characters nearly as much as I did about them in *Summer*. This may have been Simmons' intention: to show that Dale and Duane had been more real, more complete human beings when they were young boys, and that the horror at the heart of both novels, whether metaphorical or not, destroyed the best part of both of them. Nevertheless I've been feeling like Simmons is writing more quickly these days, with less care, less depth. Certainly his novel last year (*Darwin's Blade*) felt as if it had been slapped together in the space of a few weeks.

Earth Logic (Elemental Logic, book 2), manuscript, Laurie Marks

Fire Logic (Elemental Logic, book 1), manuscript, Laurie Marks

No, I didn't accidentally type these two books in the wrong order; that's the way I read them. Last year, Laurie sent me an email and reminded me that way back when, I'd offered to read and give her feedback on any new manuscripts of hers. (I made that offer just after reading and loving her novel, *Dancing Jack*). Don't agree too quickly Laurie warned me; you may not actually want to read this book. She wanted me to read *Earth Logic*, which is the second book of her series, *Elemental Logic*. And she wanted me to read it *before* I read the first book of the series, *Fire Logic*, so I could tell her what things were unclear to me, and give her an unbiased report on anything she had failed to explain. She wanted to make sure that *Fire Logic* stood on its own, without irritating the reader with dangling, unexplained motivations or information about the world, and at the same time she wanted to avoid those horrid narrative recaps. Well, since *Earth Logic* hadn't been published yet (it came out just before WisCon 26, where Laurie and her partner Deb threw a lovely launch party for it), my reading was guaranteed to be uninfluenced by any knowledge or even rumors of the first

book's plot. I accepted the assignment with trepidation. As you might have concluded by my dissatisfaction with Ford's and Hoffman's books, I can get pretty unhappy when I get the feeling that there is a lot of missing information about how the fictional world works and the author is either assuming I know all that or is purposely concealing it. I sure wasn't looking forward to telling Laurie that I didn't like her new novel. But in fact, I found it amazingly good. As I told her right at the beginning of the very long letter I wrote her after reading *Earth Logic*, if I had a choice about whether to read the third book or the first book at the moment I finished *Earth Logic*, I would have chosen to go on to the third book. (This is not to say I did not want to read *Fire Logic* as soon as possible, but I had become so caught up with the story and the characters and the world, that if I had the chance I'd have kept going rather than catching up with the first novel.) That's what she wanted to hear, I think. And since she hadn't written the third book yet, she was gracious enough to immediately send me the manuscript of *Fire Logic* which I fell upon as if starved for reading material. It was an interesting exercise to read a book consciously looking for clues about what may or may not have happened in the earlier novels, piecing together that plot from clues in the second. Actually it was a lot of fun, made much more satisfying for the fact that I could actually figure out fairly easily what had happened (in general terms) and was nevertheless drawn to the complex and well-drawn characters as they were presented in the second. But all this doesn't tell you much about the story, does it? The *Logic* series (which will eventually include an *Air* as well as a *Water Logic*) is an epic story involving a large complex, nation with many cultures and class issues of its own that is subjugated by an occupying, foreign army. It is the story of how these peoples learn to live with themselves and with one another. Atrocities occurred during the occupation that have helped to generate a very unique kind of resistance among the natives. Despite what this simplified description might suggest, the *Logic* series is definitely not a story of "good guys" vs. "bad guys," or any kind of revolutionary war fairy tale. One of the most sympathetic and compelling characters in *Earth Logic* is an officer of the occupying army. Both *Fire* and *Earth Logic* are primarily about families and how relationships among individuals within those families forges new ways of defining community and eventually heal the larger family of this battered country. Definitely read these books. I believe they will become classics of feminist SF.

Northanger Abby, **Jane Austen**

The Madison Jane Austen group strikes again!

state workers and cut more benefits to the poor, and because some of their tavern-owning constituents are dead set against any gambling that isn't also allowed in bars, but the Republicans are going to lose this battle in spite of the fact that they have a majority in both state houses, mostly because of our fiscal predicament. So that pleases me.

The "public service" aspect of political life annoys me only to the extent that so few politicians take it seriously anymore.

I met Sally Gearhart for the first time at WisCon last year and I can see how she might intimidate a young person. She seems to me like a born-marketer; she loves the part of being an author that involves promotion and sales of her own work, which is certainly a rare thing. Last year she contacted A Room of One's Own book store and managed to get included as one of the readers at that store's annual reception of WisCon writers — at which we normally only schedule readings by the GoHs. I don't quite know how that happened but I suspect the owners of ROOO found it difficult to say no to Sally!

My sister Julie recommended Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* to me a couple months ago and I began reading it soon after. Julie had just begun it when she talked to me and she mentioned that it was written in the second person, with the narrator introducing us (you), the readers, to a character at the very lowest rungs of society, and suggesting that this character would then introduce us to another character, a bit higher up in the hierarchy, and so on, until finally, we were introduced to people at the very highest rungs of the upper class. It sounded like an fascinating device, but I discovered that the author used second person only sporadically throughout the novel after the initial chapter. And in fact the expected hand-off of the reader from character to character, like a water bucket brigade, didn't continue for very long. Once the low-class whore introduced us to the slightly higher class-whore (Sugar), who in turn made a connection with a man on his way to becoming a powerful member of the upper class (Rackham), the hand-off game was basically over. Oh, we met a variety of interesting characters among Rackham's circle of family and acquaintances in the same way we meet new characters in other novels, but the "introduction" device was discarded quickly. It felt to me like the use of second person and the "introduction" device were remnants of earlier drafts that Faber was unable to erase entirely. In fact this book has a single protagonist, Sugar, the woman who begins as the whore with ambition. Her ability to learn the styles and languages of successively higher levels of society, allows her to metamorphose into a succession of different people, so that by the end of the novel, friends from her past no longer recognize her. I thought the portrayal of isolation and self-doubt in a person moving through class barriers was a very interesting one. Sugar's opinions of prostitution, marriage and freedom evolve in some very interesting, feminist pathways. But it sure wasn't the book I was expecting when I started reading it.

▣ Karen Summerly

Congratulations for having done a good job and for having finished the work as executor of your uncle's estate! I hope you feel satisfied with a job well done (and over)! I'm familiar with two instances in which the home owners have used other criteria than the highest bid to decide whose offer they accepted. The first was when Steve Swartz and his wife Elk Krisor

bought their house here in Madison many years ago. The owners were in fact selling their house without a realtor. As it turned out, unbeknownst to one another, Steve and Elk looked at this same house on the same day as Jim Frenkel and Joan Vinge toured it. Jim and Joan were about to move to Madison and they were in town for only a couple weeks and were frantically house-hunting. As it further turned out, both couples — Steve and Elk, and Jim and Joan — made offers on the same house that same day. This was discovered when they all arrived at a backyard party with most of Madison fandom attending, exclaiming about the perfect house they'd just found. Things got *very* gloomy when they all realized that good news for one would inevitably turn into really bad news for the other couple. As it turned out, Steve and Elk had bonded with the sellers, had spent an hour or more discussing their collections of Grateful Dead tapes, and apparently this was the factor that decided the owners in favor of Steve and Elk's offer. In fact they left some Grateful Dead tapes in the house for them.

The other instance has to do with Scott's and my house. Our realtor had gotten an early line on the fact that a certain house on Union Street was going to go onto the market soon. Although she couldn't get us in to tour it immediately, she drove us over to see it. We walked around the outside of the house. I peered into the window of the front door. And we generally jumped up and down a lot, ooohing and ahing about how beautiful and *perfect* the house was. The next day we were able check out the inside of the house even though it hadn't officially been put onto the market (it wouldn't until the open house scheduled for the next weekend). The house was perfect. We wanted it. So we made an immediate offer—lower than the asking price, and the next day the owners sent us a counter offer—a compromise between the asking price and our offer. We accepted and signed on the dotted line before anyone else had even seen the house. At the closing, old Mr. Oliverson told us that he and his family had been inside the house cleaning when Scott and I had first visited and had watched us, and that they had decided then that they wanted to sell the house to us because we looked like we would love it as much as they did.

So anyway, when you pointed out that it's a rare thing for an owner to consider any factors other than the offered price, I realized how lucky we were that there are exceptions to that common practice. Nevertheless, I don't think you should feel badly about using price as the only criterion. You could hardly expect to be sure about how people you would be able to meet so briefly might eventually interact with your former next-door neighbors. I should think that when the stakes are as high as they always are when people are attempting to buy a house, they would tend to show only their best sides in an interview situation.

Your uncle's house looks lovely in the photos you included. You did a great job getting it ready for sale.

▣ Arthur Hlavaty

Congratulations on achieving Curmudgeonhood! I like the definition of Cintroverts/extroverts that you report from *The Introvert Advantage*. It fits very well with my own usual feelings of being “drained” by too many social activities, and refreshed by solitude.

Though published later in Austen's career, *Northanger Abby* was actually the first novel of hers that was accepted for publication. It does feel as if it was written by a younger person than *Pride and Prejudice* or *Emma* certainly, but once again I found re-reading an Austen novel rewarding for interpretations that suggest that Austen was criticizing the literary/political culture of her own time under cover of fiction. As she did more sharply and angrily in *Mansfield Park*, she uses archetypal characters from novels published during Austen's lifetime that represent family ideals: the wise, protective father. The foolish daughter in such need of parental guidance. The ideal mail suitor who takes on the role of guardian to his new wife. And then Austen blows apart the assumptions and expectations of her Edwardian audience. The wise protective father's motivations are shown to be anything but wise, and the foolish young girl must depend upon her own moral convictions and intelligence in order to avoid the abuse of such a disreputable guardian. The young male suitor must actually repudiate the actions of his own father and support the greater wisdom of the woman he loves in order to win her. It must have been shocking stuff in the early 1800s. Just to remind her readers where all those assumptions come from, much of *Northanger Abby* consists of the protagonist's commentary on popular novels of her day, and the plot plays with many of the tropes of the very popular gothic novels of her day.

Lamb: the Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal, **Christopher Moore**

What did Christ do for 17 years, from age 13 when he revealed his divinity and age 30 when he began preaching in public? Well in this wildly funny, but surprisingly respectful novel, Christopher Moore suggests that the young teenaged Christ may have been highly dubious about his heavenly origins and might have used this time to search for those mysterious three wise guys who left gifts at his birthday celebration and seemed to know much more than they told his mom. Joshua and his buddy Biff go on a quest to find out what the Savior is supposed to DO. They travel through the Mideast, cross the Himalayas, and visit India. Christ and Biff do time training as magicians, Buddhist monks and Hindu ascetics. Basically they learn (or trip over) most of the lessons that turn up within Christian doctrine. But *Lamb* is closer to a Hope and Crosby road movie than to a book of the bible and sometimes I had to stop reading because tears of laughter were blurring my view of the pages. I leave you with a few early drafts from the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the meek, for to them we shall say ‘atttaboy.’” and “Blessed are the dumbfucks for they ...

shall never be disappointed.” I like Christopher Moore’s writing a lot. He’s the funniest fantasy writer around.

9-11, Noam Chomsky

This tiny booklet contains a number of essays written by Chomsky about terrorism, U.S. policy, and especially about how media coverage shapes our understanding of events and policy. Most scary: the U.S. Congress has officially defined terrorism in such a way that it would include many American international actions, except for the fact that the State Department has helpfully refined that definition to explicitly state that all terrorism is foreign. Apparently it is impossible for Americans to practice terrorism no matter how indistinguishable from the “real” kind.

The Years of Rice and Salt, Kim Stanley Robinson

Activists of all stripe eventually ask themselves if their work has had any effect upon the world, if their passionate devotion to a cause actually accomplished anything. Kim Stanley Robinson confronts this issue quite elegantly and optimistically in *The Years of Rice and Salt*. Several characters reincarnate over and over again within the alternate world that Robinson proposes might have happened if the Black Plague had wiped out ALL of Europe’s population and left Moslem and Chinese cultures to dominate the world. The mission of the characters’ spiritual journey is to fight against societal oppression, cruelty, war, starvation, and against racial, sexual, and religious hatreds. Each time, in each life, one or more of the characters takes a stand, and fights for their bit of a time against those enemies. Each time they die, thinking that nothing changed, that things may have actually gotten worse.... But in fact, each battle is remembered in some way—in books, in mythology, in songs or stories. And the battles won DO eventually make a difference for larger and larger groups of people as time goes on. The changes are imperceptible from a single mortal’s viewpoint, but they add up. I think Robinson wanted to suggest in this novel that working toward an ideal good is never a waste of energy, that eventually those actions will add up and result in real changes for which no single person can claim responsibility. I hope to keep this vision in mind for my own life, even if I don’t believe in the possibility of reincarnation.

The Wooden Sea, Jonathan Carroll

I enjoyed this novel when I read it, but it’s become one of those books whose plot I have a hard time remembering. This isn’t because I didn’t like it (which is the usual reason I lose plots) but because the story has a dreamlike quality, with

□ Donya Hazard White

What a neat thing you and your friend Jennypaula do for one another — providing minac for one another in times of need. The leg therapy sounds like a good thing. I hope your knees felt better soon after you started! The mini-college reunion must have been fun. And the opera too! I’m so glad the performance of *Hansel and Gretel* turned you on to the possibility of enjoying more opera. It’s wonderful to hear all the good news about Amber. I laughed at how your fellow volunteers “protected” you from the chaotic shelves. I think I can relate to sometimes feeling more protective of organization than is appropriate in the circumstances. Congratulations on all the hard work you’re putting in to learn Japanese. I’m sure it’s going to be more than worth it for you when you return to Japan.

□ Kerry Ellis

It was fun reading the last two bits of your trip report in *I-zine* 104 and 105. Thanks a lot for sharing it with us.

I’ve had several friends who’ve worked at Borders and have heard the same thing from them about the flood of books that must be stocked for the holidays and how amazing it always is that so many of them seem to get sold. I hope you weren’t so completely exhausted around the holidays that you weren’t able to enjoy them yourself.

I hope your hands feel better these days. Is there any kind of physical therapy you can do?

I’m really sorry for mixing up names and places in your zine when I was responding to you last time. It’s no excuse, but I think what happened was that I wrote notes in the margins of your zine the first time I read it, and then much later wrote my comments based on my notes, and I should really have read your zine over again to clarify my understanding. I apologize.

I think we should probably give up on finding that t-shirt from last year. I hope you will accept a 2003 t-shirt instead. I will make sure that I reserve one for you from the shirts we get from Freddie Baer to sell at WisCon. Is there anyone close to you geographically that will be attending WisCon? It would be nice to bypass the post office altogether and avoid losing another shirt. Send me an email and let me know what size you’d like. (I forget.) I’ll use your email to remind myself to reserve a shirt for you.

□ Debbie Notkin

It was really interesting reading your trip report after reading Michael’s summary. I very much appreciated your focus upon interactions among the travelers. That’s one of the things I’m most curious about when groups of people I know go on trips together, because of the way travel exaggerates and focuses everyone’s personality traits. Normally people can retreat, cool off, or disengage much more easily than they can when they’re traveling together. Everyone is forced to deal much more publicly with each others’ idiosyncrasies. And of course, as you noted, there’s also a commensurate opportunity to learn things about oneself in travel situations. Were Ann and Matt aware that they were taking the mom-and-dad roles? Did you all talk about that at the time? If Matt and Ann acted like mom and dad, and if you and Alan acted the roles of rebellious teens (to different degrees),

which family member's role did Michael adopt?

I had to laugh at your insight into your own behavior—at how you so readily step into the peacemaker's role. I've certainly seen you do this several times. I can't think of a time I wasn't either grateful or at least willing to let you take that role when I was involved.

I loved the image you painted of the time in Venice when the opera singer performed beautiful arias from a gondola. And I liked your mention of how you and Alan fantasized about living in Venice. That's something that Scott and I nearly always do when we're traveling — we try to figure out what it would be like to live in that place and to do and see things that give us more information about what it would be like. And “vaporette”! — what a lovely word.

Congratulations on the publishing job. I hope you've been enjoying it and that it has led to some good contracts.

I'm sorry to hear about your mom's fall and hope you're feeling more confident that she's getting the kind of medical help she needs.

Akiva is really an impressive kid! Wow! How old is he? Do you think he's not yet reached the age when kids get obsessed with being like other kids? Or is he just an amazingly strong-minded person? I love his response, “if I minded [being mistaken for a girl], I'd cut my hair.”

Shock-corded poles are very strong but lightweight, hollow aluminum poles within which are stretched elastic cords. Each pole is made up of several sections (with one elastic cord connecting them all) that can be pulled apart and folded up for storage, or fitted to construct a tent's “ribs.” They replace much heavier, more cumbersome solid wood poles and guide ropes. A modern tent can be put together or disassembled in a matter of moments and is much stronger than the old canvas and rope type tents, not to mention far lighter, and waterproof. The shelters used by many dealers at arts and crafts shows use this technology. Next time you go to an outdoors art show or fair, take a look at the metal poles holding up the tent roofs. Those are shock-corded poles.

I'm still a little unsettled by how you and Jim reacted to the idea of WisCon's new event, the Gathering. By chance, (because Jim and Diane leave early on the last day of WisCon to take care of money), Jim missed the whole riotous dead dog discussion about the Gathering, and afterward I really felt like he was angry at all of us for having had the discussion without him. I didn't feel like he disapproved of the idea, but of how enthusiastic we'd grown without his involvement. I was equally surprised by your immediately negative reaction to the idea when I first brought it to you. And I still don't quite understand what happened in either of those interactions.

The phrase, your “nonprofit partner Laurie Edison,” made me laugh. I know exactly what you mean, but my mind immediately suggested the possibility of a *for profit partner*....

[WARNING: PLOT SPOILER!] I just read Lois McMaster Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion* too. Maybe because I haven't read any of her Vorkosigan books and haven't grown to love that famously damaged hero, I felt that *Chalion*'s main character, Cazaril, really should have died (for real). It felt too slick that he managed to survive it all and get the girl too. It felt like the author had fallen in love with her character and simply didn't want to let him go. I've got other criticisms too, although there's a lot I liked about the novel, especially the opening parts of the book in which Cazaril manages to crawl

events happening out of order chronologically, and people meeting themselves from alternate timelines mixing up with each others self-perceptions. It was well done. I recall images: the main character digging a grave and discovering that he has found his younger self, buried. A scene at a diner in which the time-traveling main character meets his dad at the counter and discovers that his father had been having an affair with his high school teacher. A relationship between the man and his own teenage self that grows into an affectionate though wary alliance, especially after the teenage self falls in love with the step daughter of the adult self. It's complicated, but good.

Emma, Jane Austen

This was the last Jane Austen novel available to our group and we were very sad to have reached the end of Austen's much too short bibliography. (We are now considering other 19th century classics to read next, although our schedule seems to have gotten a little off track recently and we haven't gotten together since reading *An Ideal Husband* by Oscar Wilde [See below].) In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's main character is entirely likable, though if a list of her characteristics were written down, they would describe qualities most Edwardians would claim to despise in women. On the other hand, the main character of *Mansfield Park* is a woman whose listed qualities would define the ideal woman to that Edwardian population; ironically she is the most disliked of all of Austen's characters, a sniveling, cowardly, not very intelligent dupe. Austen makes the point that the so-called womanly ideals aren't altogether good things to aim for. With *Emma*, Austen plays with those ideas again, confusing the issue by creating real people who defy the definitions. In this case she pokes holes in the assumptions of class superiority as well as gender.

The Kappa Child, Hiromi Goto

Have you had a chance to look at the cover of 2001's Tiptree-winning novel? Did you notice the alien on the cover, painted simply in gloss varnish on top of the lovely close-up photo of prairie grasses? I thought of Georgie Schnobrich when I bought the book and gazed at the cover. It would have been quite a project drawing from the cover because it would not be possible to trace the alien; it would have been necessary to keep turning it to catch the light in order to (briefly) see the image of the Kappa, a magical Japanese creature. As it turned out, the Tiptree ceremony took place in Boston in 2002, and we didn't ask Georgie to make a cake. Inside the cover is a delicate and delightful story of a young Japanese Canadian woman who lives in a prairie town where she attempts to re-cre-

ate herself as a strong person apart from her family. She has escaped from her autocratic, abusive father and from her injured mother and sisters to a Canadian Prairie city and she has a possibly magical, definitely life-changing and erotic interlude with an alien woman, or perhaps a kappa, that results in a peculiar sort of pregnancy. Delightful.

The Mount, **Carol Emshwiller**

Most people seem to like Emshwiller's earlier novel, *Carman Dog* the best, but *The Mount* is my favorite now. It's an allegorical science fiction story, actually closer to hard SF than Emshwiller has ever gotten, about a post-invasion earth in which surviving humans have become slaves to the ruling aliens. Humans are treated like animals and the aliens depend upon them completely. The main character is a young boy who is treated like a prize-winning racing stallion—a mount. There are rebel humans living in the mountains, and the main character's father is their leader. But the most interesting relationship is between the boy and his master, a young alien who rides upon his shoulder. Both are being trained for their future lives as master and slave/mount, but an uprising throws them into a rebel camp, and they must both come to terms with their mutual dependence as well as the evils of slavery. Like Marks' *Logic* series, this book does not use the stereotypical plot involving triumphant rebels who transparently represent "us." The romantic view of isolated rebels claiming freedom from evil overlords seems to be something that will be difficult if not impossible to carry off any more, since 9/11. *The Mount* reads like an allegorical YA book, but its many layers of complexity make it rewarding for anyone.

The Fresco, **Sherri Tepper**

Here's another allegory, quite a bit more heavy-handed than Emshwiller's *The Mount*, however. "Good" aliens land and begin testing humanity to see if human beings are worth protecting from evil aliens bent on rape and pillage of earth's resources. We know the good aliens are good because of the person they choose to be their representative—a smart, capable older woman who has left her abusive husband and who protects her daughter. The fresco in the title is a piece of alien art long hidden under layers of grime and dust that can no longer be viewed directly but can only be studied by reading accounts by people who talked to people who actually saw it a long time ago. (Rather like the Christian bible.) The fresco will reveal that the good aliens haven't always been good, but the question is, does that matter since the aliens have since re-painted their history and have lived up to ideals that pretend or not, have now become real. Human beings help the good aliens

back home after all his trials, looking only for a quiet job in the kitchen and ends up tutoring the princess. Was that a reference to *Canterbury Tales* at the end? Is *Chalion* supposed to exist in real Earth history? [END OF PLOT SPOILER WARNING]

Interesting comments about *Frida*. I confess I didn't much think about how Hayek portrayed a handicapped person when I saw the film. I wonder if she has spoken about this aspect in any interview?

▣ **lisa Hirsch**

Your flying trip to England was packed with some great activities. I've been so busy with WisCon and Tiptree stuff these last couple months that I haven't thought much yet about what I want to do in England other than go to Seacon for the Tiptree ceremony and visit with Maureen Kincaid Speller and Paul Kincaid (our hosts). Must start considering this. I am sorry that our trip to England made us miss Potlatch for the second year in a row. Damn, Potlatch is one of my favorite cons. Next year for sure!

I'm glad Molly has a new dog friend in Solomon. And congratulations on your refinance! We just refinanced our house too, for a rate about one percentile point lower than our old mortgage. It was only a few years ago that we refinanced last time but we couldn't pass the savings by and besides, we will need to buy a new (used) car this year, and so we borrowed enough over the mortgage to do that too. I suspect that unless a car drives up and honks its horn at us ("Buy me! Buy me!") we won't get around to actually shopping for one until June, after WisCon.

Congratulations too on winning the Product Operations Performer Award! That's one impressive list of accomplishments.

You agreed with me that the Elk/Deer conspiracy on the part of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is an unlikely one. The idea was dropped by DNR critics as soon as the first Elk was diagnosed with Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Actually, the news from the tests done during hunting seasons was somewhat positive. It appears that CWD is still restricted to the small area in southwest Wisconsin in which it was initially detected. Our fears that CWD was already widespread throughout Wisconsin happily turned out to be false. On the other hand, the numbers of deer killed in the "hot zone" during hunting season were far less than had been hoped, so the danger of disease spread is still very real. We have a new DNR Secretary now (Scott Hassert), appointed by the new Governor, and so it's unclear what direction the DNR will take to combat the disease this year.

Actually the thing I am most interested in, with regard to Secretary Hassert, is how he will choose to carry out the Governor's requirement that 190 positions be eliminated in the DNR. (Other state departments are being equally or more sharply affected by the state's dire fiscal situation. Scott works for the Department of Transportation, and their cut number is even larger than the DNR's, though we think Scott's position is fairly safe.) It's quite possible that the DNR will decide to privatize graphic artist positions, and that the other two artists and I will be laid off sometime this year. (Which ironically will actually increase the cost of publications for the DNR.) We're now waiting to see whose jobs appear on the list of endangered positions, but probably nothing will actually happen till late summer after the legislature has negotiated the state budget, the line-item veto process is completed and Governor Doyle signs the budget. As with

health issues, I seem to be able to maintain my calm pretty well by keeping myself distracted with other things. I have done a little thinking about what I would do if my position is eliminated. I'd immediately start doing DNR work on a freelance basis while I examined my options. The other artists and I've discussed this briefly, but right now I'm focusing on the usual annual fiscal year-end flood of work. (Unfortunately it always comes at the same time as WisCon deadlines take over our lives. At least there's no shortage of things with which to be distracted!)

Well it's nice to hear that Cuban Spanish is beautiful to your ear. I studied Spanish in High School under a Cuban immigrant professor's tutelage but didn't learn much Spanish *except* for the accent. (After two years he never got beyond present tense with us. *His* English, however, improved dramatically.) However my college French teacher commented several times that my French was tinged with way too much of a "Spanish American Tourist accent."

▣ Comments on Intercourse №. 105

Avedon Carol

You're on the wait list again! Damn! Well just in case you get to see this issue, I'm going to comment on your zine anyway.

Knee problems are a fairly frequent problem cited by people in this apa. I hate how stiff mine can get in the morning, though that's improved a lot since I started using a stationary bicycle every morning since late last Fall. We'll bring my outside bike up from the basement any day now, and returning to a daily pedal commute will help too. Hope your knees are feeling better also!

Surgery is a lot better than unfixable macular degeneration. I hope surgery went well for you; if possible I hope you got the drugs I got earlier this year when I had a breast biopsy done (all benign, just a cyst). Scott says I asked several times what kind of drugs they'd given me, all the time grinning like a loon, but I can't remember what they told me.

Even if your mom started using a walker almost immediately after her hospitalization, she may very well have gotten a hip replacement. They install different kinds of hips for very old folks as opposed to the ones they give to younger people. If a person's life expectancy is less than 20 years, it's quite common for them to have a hip glued into the socket, which means they can start walking as soon as the incision is healed. The other kind of hip replacements involve the installation of an appliance with zillions of tiny holes running through it. This is the kind I have. This artificial hip requires that the patient keep all weight off it for at least six weeks, during which time bone tissues actually grow through the honeycomb of holes in the appliance and create a strong organic bond. The reason there are two different kinds of artificial hips is that younger folks may need eventually to have a *second* hip replacement when the first one wears out. (I try not to think about this.) If your mom's hip actually broke, it's almost certain that she would have needed a replacement. The pain is way too excruciating and the cure is such a reliable cure of that pain, that it's almost universally performed in cases of broken hips.

I'm curious about the complicated reasons you know nothing about George R.R. Martin's health but I'll politely ignore that remark. The only reason I mentioned it was because I saw his photo in a worldcon photo

avoid shame and catastrophe by showing them how easy and possible it is to reinvent oneself (or ones culture) by portraying and then living up to a better philosophy. As always, Tepper comes up with really interesting ideas, but I want her to spend more time re-writing....

Stupid White Men, Michael Moore

This is a book of essays by political satirist, Michael Moore. Amazingly it was set to hit the bookstores on September 11, 2001, and was frantically pulled back by the publishers after the horrific events of the day. Moore's essay concern Bush's theft of the election, the growing gap between the extremely wealthy and the rest of us, racism, sexism, pollution, prisons, the lack of political choice in mainstream American politics, the religious right, etc. And there is a lot of criticism of George W. It's all good stuff, but more polemical than his earlier work. Moore is getting more angry and finding it harder to be funny perhaps. His publishers (HarperCollins) told Moore they wanted to scrap the whole print run. If he insisted on the book coming out, they wanted him to change the cover and tone down all the criticism of the president. Word got around. A librarian started a letter-writing campaign to the publisher who eventually caved and allowed the book to be distributed, though early on it was very difficult to find copies of it. Many bookstores were refusing to sell it. But then word-of-mouth gained momentum and in spite of the attempts by publishers and bookstores to suppress information about it, *Stupid White Men* climbed to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list and stayed there for months. I think it still may be on the *NYTimes* top-10 list.

The Battle of the Sexes in SF, Justine Larbalestier

I was really impressed by Justine Larbalestier's literary history, *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*. We've come a long way from the days when apparently the only reason most people could imagine for including a woman in an SF story was to provide a "love interest." I really liked how Justine followed the fiction that worked on the war-of-the-sexes theme, and linked correspondence, fiction, and criticism into her text to suggest that a long conversation has raged on this topic and continues up to this very day, and is firmly embedded in the process and products of the Tiptree Award. Also, it was kind of fun reading about the last decade or so of activity and recognizing so many of the names!

An Ideal Husband, Oscar Wilde

The movie is better. There are some great lines; Wilde is a witty writer, but I felt like throwing the little book at the walls several times for all

the stuff about the “nature” of women and the “nature” of men. *An Ideal Husband* would not win the Tiptree Award.

Making Book, Theresa Nielsen Hayden

A funny thing happened. I finally got around to reading Teresa Nielsen Hayden’s book *Making Book*, and it was fun partially because I knew almost every person she mentioned in her stories and essays. In some cases, I remembered reading the articles for the first time when they were originally published in Teresa’s and Patrick’s fanzines. I told Teresa at Readercon how much fun I had reading her book and she seemed pleased. We talked a while and it was like a little reunion. She pointedly mentioned that a lot of people whose names I had recognized were hanging out on some SF discussion list. Anyway. Then I read a Jae Adam’s lively, fascinating report of her experiences at Ploktacon and realized that I recognized hardly anyone mentioned it. A funny thing, time. If you haven’t read it I suggest you do so, if only for the classic story of how Theresa got herself excommunicated from the Mormon church, though I also really enjoyed the inside story on the art and craft of proofreading.

**Bold as Love, Gwyneth Jones
Castles Made of Sand, Gwyneth Jones**

I finished Gwyneth Jones’ Clarke Award winning book, *Bold as Love*, just a day before we arrived in Boston for Readercon, and was delighted to discover that she had brought some extra copies of the sequel with her. So I was able to begin *Castles Made of Sand* on the plane going home. I like these books a lot, though after that panel with Gwyneth in which she spoke disparagingly about “strong women characters,” I couldn’t help but think about one of the protagonists, a young Rock and Roll star/Revolutionary named Fiorinda. Despite the fact that other characters describe her as tough as nails, she is most certainly not a “strong woman character” according to the stereotypical definition (physically powerful, always dominating, always rescuing, etc.). Fiorinda, is however, a strong woman character in the sense that her character instigates action within the plot and is developed unsterotypically and imaginatively. But she is no feminist poster woman: at one point in *Bold as Love* Fiorinda compares her role in the Rock and Roll Reich (which basically dominates this fictional British society in a post-ecological-disaster Earth) to that of a concealed, protected, restrained woman in Moslem culture. She is also a warped, polyamorous version of Guinevere in this turbo-charged version of the King Arthur legend. But I’m crossing my fingers that Fiorinda will grow into a more powerful woman, or at least into someone who is comfortable with the

montage and he looked rather pale and thin, like he was recovering from something nasty. I have no facts.

□ Donya Hazard White

Your new larger font size is much easier to read. Thank you. Back when we were first publishing *Janus*, we got a letter of comment from Harry Warner, Jr. complaining about the tiny type we used for our letters of comment. Sadly, I didn’t have a clue then, and just remarked that Harry should just hold the zine closer to his eyes! That’s what I do! (Luckily I didn’t publish that reply.) Now I know better and appreciate the larger type.

Ironically, right after I wrote in *Grayscale* last fall about my history of needing iron supplements to combat joint pain, I started feeling the same old aches and pains in my joints. At first I didn’t make the connection; after all, I was still taking a daily vitamin pill with extra iron. But then one morning I noticed a dramatic reduction of the joint pain I’d been experiencing for several months and I remembered that the night before Scott and I had enjoyed an excellent steak dinner. Hmmm, I thought, and walked into the bathroom to do a little research. Only a couple months before that, I had purchased a new jumbo-sized bottle of my usual vitamin pills. One of these bottles usually lasts me for a whole year and I had thrown away the empty bottle. But I still had a smaller bottle in my travel toiletries bag that I refill from the larger bottle. The smaller bottle was originally purchased several years ago. I had noticed a slightly different label design on my new jumbo bottle of vitamins and I wanted to check to see if the amount of iron contained in each pill had remained the same over the years. Indeed it had NOT! Whereas there used to be 185% of the daily minimum requirement of iron contained in each pill according to my small older bottle, the amount listed on the new label was only 130%! That means that right around the time my joint pain returned, I had started taking a *less* iron each day. So that night I went out and bought a bottle of supplemental iron and added that to my daily regimen. A couple days later, I was feeling fine again. Weird huh? Next time I see my doctor I plan to report this episode and make sure I’m not overdoing the amount of iron I take.

I like your choice of traveling/change/growth songs. What a perfect choice *Into the Woods* is. When I was 11 or 12 I used to hum the music from the film *Exodus* when walking alone in scary situations. And I have several songs, among them a waltz from *Der Rozencavalier*, that humming even a bit from will cheer me up almost immediately. And then there are the songs that I hum or sing while biking to keep my legs moving with a good, fast beat....

Thanks for the explanation of “Our Own True...” I should have guessed!

I’m sorry for having frustrated you all with my obtuse refusal to acknowledge the meaning of “controllable.” I really do appreciate your calm and patient response to my questions (and Debbie’s response too). I do understand and indeed I think I have always understood the generally accepted meaning of the phrase, but even now, when I use those words in my own head, I find myself resisting them for the slant my own inner self puts on the words. Your suggestion to expand the meaning of the phrase to include the determination to try in spite of the likely outcome smothers whatever gremlins inside me argue with any attempt to define something as out of

my control. Thank you Donya.

▣ Doug Barbour

What a horribly prescient quotation from C. Vann Woodward in 1952! It sure sounds very much like what the United States is doing right now — trying to “compel history to conform to [our] own illusions” with this so-called “preventative war.”

Thanks for offering to help me find Hiromi Goto. Debbie was able to give me her email address and as it turns out, Hiromi will indeed attend WisCon.

Far From Heaven was a fascinating film. Scott thought it should have been filmed in black and white, though. I remember watching films on late-night TV, darkly romantic, mysterious films, in which characters' lives were ruined for shameful ambiguous reasons. I remember thinking that when I grew up and saw these movies again, I would understand what the hell made the characters feel so guilty. *Far From Heaven* revealed some of the answers with a marvelous style that mimicked the original films. By exposing the taboos of the 50s, rather than using coded allusions, all became clear. I think it's a great film. I wonder if Europeans are puzzled by it since so much of what was mysteriously shameful in the older films was never shameful or mysterious except in puritanical American society.

▣ Lynn Paleo

That's quite a dream. Did you identify with the hawk? If I had read the description of your dream without your commentary, I would have assumed that the wild animals were mirroring the human abuse, and that the meaning is that there are no magic, natural spirits who protect the young against abuse.

You are doing amazing work examining your own behavior when pain surfaces from past abuse, and when your behavior collides with others who are also reacting to issues born in past abuse. It all sounds incredibly hard, incredibly important ... and very hopeful. I admire your three-point strategy for ramping up to work on surfacing abuse issues. It sort of reminds me of union-sanctioned process for dealing with problem employees. First warning: The supervisor identifies the objectionable behavior and explains what is expected of the employee. Second warning: The supervisor identifies the objectionable behavior again, this time warning the employee that disciplinary actions will be taken if it happens again. Third warning: Disciplinary action is taken.

I wish *Hours* had won the Oscar for best movie. What a great film, what incredible performances and brilliant writing! I like to think about what Virginia Woolf would have thought about it.

I saw one of those anti-SUV TV spots with the look and feel of the anti-drug commercials and quite admire them. I happened to be watching the news the morning of the day they first aired the ads, and listened to an interview with the woman (sorry, I forget her name) in charge of the advertising campaign. I think it was the CBS morning show that interviewed her along with an automobile company spokesperson who was there, I presume, to defend SUVs and the American Way, and so the “interview” was really staged as a sort of debate. The funny thing about it was that the

power she does possess, as the story continues. Jones says that she plans three more novels in the series. Right now, it looks like the Rock & Roll revolution is moving toward a really interesting sort of artist-designed, ecologically sustaining utopia/Camelot. I'm sort of expecting that sexual politics in the next book in this series will experience a renaissance similar to that experienced by the women's movement in the U.S. after the anti-war demonstrations of the late 60s and early 70s. Or maybe not. Maybe Gwyneth means exactly what she means about being tired of strong women characters. We'll see.

Fast Food Nation, Eric Schlosser

This is a muck-raking book in the best tradition of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. *Fast Food Nation* has become identified as the book that attacks McDonalds, but really Schlosser's target is much wider and includes several industries that were born along with fast food technology. The potato, beef, and chicken industries have all recently become Big Business by perfecting methods of processing huge amounts of food in the cheapest way possible. The cost has been unsafe workplaces, impoverished workers, dangerously tainted food, and the collapse of many smaller businesses and the workforces and families that depended upon them. It's a horrifying picture of a network of industries that have had a profound affect upon US culture, and upon the whole world. The style is engaging and not at all academic.

Firestorm at Peshtigo, Denise Gess and William Lute

We here in Wisconsin are frequently reminded of the firestorm that burned the northeast part of the state on the same day as the infamous Chicago fire of 1871. Even though the number of fatalities and the acreage burned was far greater than Chicago's, the metropolitan tragedy overshadowed the event at Peshtigo, even to this very day. What's really fascinating about the two fires is that they are considered by some scientists to be two parts of the *same* fire that raged on both sides of Lake Michigan and were caused by an unfortunate coincidence of several months of drought, available tinder, and a monster high pressure system that brought record-breaking high winds at exactly the wrong time. The fire in Peshtigo, especially, were studied for the fearsome fire cyclones spawned by flames and winds; this is when the term “firestorm” was coined. I didn't realize that research begun at this time was relied upon in the plans to bomb Dresden and create a man-made firestorm in that German city during World War II. *Firestorm at Peshtigo* retells the individual stories of survivors and victims of that terrible event, and explains

how the practices of the lumber industry and homesteaders (both of which frequently used fire to clear land in all weather), and the super dry weather cell combined to make firestorms inevitable that day. I wish Gess and Lute were a bit more conversant with climatology; they are obviously able to only quote other scientists' hypotheses about what occurred. They also favor the 19th century scientists who first identified what the real cause of the conflagration had been. I would have liked to read some of the later refined theories, or at least some explanations of how science now understands firestorms. Nevertheless it was fascinating to read this historic account of an incredible disaster that is unknown to so many people.

Report to the Men's Club, **Carol Emshwiller**

This is a collection of short stories written from Emshwiller's typical absurdist, surrealistic point of view. What a fine short story writer Emshwiller is!

Stay, **Nicola Griffith**

I hardly ever read mystery fiction, but I did read Griffith's novels *The Blue Place* and its sequel, *Stay* because I like Griffith's other writing so much. (Ironically it seems that most lovers of mystery fiction do not like these books.) The main character of both books is a woman with nearly superhuman powers. She can fight using any weapon, she is preternaturally observant, she can build her own house from scratch and then make the tools needed on top of it. She is incredibly smart. And yet (in *The Blue Place*) she was unable to save the woman she loved, and so (in *Stay*) she must learn to deal with limitations and accept her own need for help from others. I think it's possible that Nicola is purposely dealing with the false value of purely physical strength in these novels, possibly because she is so focused on her own ebbing strength in real life.

A Game of Thrones, **Book 1 of A Song of Ice and Fire series**, **George R.R. Martin**

A Clash of Kings, **Book 2 of A Song of Ice and Fire series**, **George R.R. Martin**

A Storm of Swords, **Book 3 of A Song of Ice and Fire series**, **George R.R. Martin**

The Hedge Knight, **George R.R. Martin (a novella and prequel to A Song of Ice and Fire series)**, **George R.R. Martin**

I may not have begun this series if I had realized that it was going to go on for more than three books, but somewhere I got the impression that it was (just) a trilogy. At 800-1000 pages per book, it would be a pretty hefty trilogy. But as it turns out, it's likely to go on for 4 more books. Someone broke this news to me when I was partway through book two. *Aargh* But now I'm

CBS interviewer obviously expected this woman to be a complete kook. The questions they gave her were lame; they were obviously completely taken by surprise when she responded calmly and intelligently. In fact the SUV guy's behavior quickly devolved into nothing more than raving sputters of outrage. The interviewer stepped in to supply arguments on behalf of the automobile industry, which my heroine easily batted aside with some skillful, intelligent rebuttals. It was stunning, not something you see very often on network news shows. I really enjoyed watching!

You asked Donya if she thought your typeface was easy or difficult to read. Here's my opinion. Even though your type is probably about the same (small) size as Donya's used to be, I find the face you use easier to see. Part of the better legibility has to do with the fact that you use two columns, which is much easier on the eye than one page-wide column, and the fact that you use color and lots of white space to break up your paragraphs. It looks like a characteristically Lyn Paleo zine; I don't have to see your name at the top of the page to recognize your voice.

Excellent advice about using keyboard strokes whenever possible to save wear and tear. I know zillions of keyboard shortcuts... except when someone asks me to verbalize them. I seem to "know" most of them only kinesthetically. I also like using a keyboard that breaks apart into two sections set at an angle to one another.

Ann Patchett's novel, *Bel Canto* was chosen as the community book of the year here in Madison. Everyone was urged to read it, book discussions were scheduled through the year at libraries and bookstores, and Ann Patchett was invited to Madison in the spring (actually just last week, and I accidentally missed going to her appearance). I'm glad this book got all that attention, since I probably wouldn't have noticed it otherwise. I liked *Bel Canto* a lot. I liked the idea that music became the uniting aspect for an international group of people who spoke so many different languages, and that a translator would naturally become such a pivotal personality in that situation. And I admired how unexpectedly (for me anyway) the plot evolved from modern-day fearful expectations about terrorism to a very human situation. My favorite character was the Japanese businessman character, Katsumi Hosokawa. When it was first announced last year that *Bel Canto* had been chosen by Madison librarians, I assumed that there would be some topical aspect of the terrorist theme in this book and was actually glad that it didn't have as much of a political point of view as I expected. The scenes in which the opera singer, Roxanne Coss, performed for her fellow captors, converting all of them to a love of opera, kept reminding me of the opera singer in the movie, *Diva*, whose singing entranced everyone who listened in much the way I imagined the Japanese Businessman when he first heard Roxanne sing. In fact, I kept hearing the music from *Diva* as I read *Bel Canto*. And not to forget: *Bel Canto* is a really beautifully written book and deserves the several awards it has received.

Christina Lake

Your description of Jane's daughter Emma makes me wish you could get some help for her, though I can certainly sympathize with you not wanting to get involved with Jane.

Box Elders are such junky trees. They look great, sprawling in summer sunlight, so shady and tempting for an afternoon of reading and napping.

There used to be a half dozen Box Elders way in the back of our yard when I was young, and we used to climb them and play underneath them all the time. But they grow very quickly and so their wood is soft and they don't have big strong trunks, but thin, weak trunks that split low to the ground (thus that sprawling look), and so they are easy marks for high winds and lightning strikes. There's hardly anything left of the Box Elder stand in the back of my folks' yard; storms have gotten most of them. But at least there weren't any buildings nearby to be damaged when they went down.

Hey, see you at Eastercon! I'm glad you're planning to attend. We'll recruit you to sing with the Amazing Tips at the ceremony!

▣ Guy Thomas

Ah love and lust, what wonderful things. I'm very happy for you Guy, and glad that you and Sandra have found one another.

I'm sorry to hear about your dad's hospitalization. It must have been very rough on your family, but I can sympathize with you for feeling that Linda and Richard should have gotten more involved. It's too bad your mom is letting experiences with greedy members of her family interfere with accepting help from you.

Congratulations on becoming the new ... Tiptree procurer. Yes. Ahem. I'm imagining you out on the street waving down cars asking for books....

Yeah, I liked *Chicago* a lot too. My favorite song was the one sung by the female inmates, *He Deserved It*, though *Cellophane Man* comes in a close second.

I've used my mom's Zucchini Cake recipe several times, and the result is not what it sounds like you're imagining. It tastes pretty much like a normal chocolate cake, in fact.

▣ Jane Hawkins

There's *so much* to dislike about credit card companies — the outrageous interest rates, the way they prey on the young, the way they encourage debt, and the way they're lobbying to prevent everyday people (but not corporations) from escaping their debt through bankruptcy. But yeah it's infuriating that credit companies take so little responsibility for their business (everyone else should pay through the nose) that they expect customers to pay for mistakes made by the company, and don't even feel the need to fix the problems that cause the mistakes!

I'm glad to hear that Judy and you are able to talk now without Steve's demonizing propaganda poisoning your relationship. You are one of the few people I can even imagine to have the tenacity and patience to wait Judy (and Steve) out on this battle. Your patience must have frustrated the hell out of Steve and I hope you take some pleasure in imagining that. But I am mostly glad for you and Sam, that your determination kept your bond with him strong and wonderful.

Your description of how the guy at work threw you into the "briar patch" with a supposedly insolvable problem got me laughing. Good for you! And maybe at the end of it, if this guy is an adult, he will revise his opinion of you he based on your downtime last year, and learn to appreciate your

hooked. I finished the third book a few weeks after I started the series and am very eager to get the fourth book due out sometime later in 2003. Aside from each books' resemblance to a doorstep, I really enjoyed the complex story ("epic" is too puny a word for these books) and characters. There is no "good" family vs. "bad" family, though there is most certainly conflict between several dynastic families whose alliances and hatreds are based on perceived loyalties and insults incurred in previous generations, not to mention an extremely unreliable medieval communication system. Each of the many dynasties (and aspiring dynasties) is made up of admirable as well as despicable individuals. Sometimes the only thing that makes a particular family good or evil at any given point in time is the accident of birth order of its members. On top of that, there are no characters who could be considered totally admirable or despicable. I found myself gradually feeling respect for characters that, at first, I thought were pure scumbags. And visa versa, characters I thought at the beginning were saintly, were swayed by circumstance or simply bad assumptions to do awful, despicable things. The complexities Martin weaves into each of these characters makes them fuller and more interesting for their contradictions. Martin's characters include quite a few really remarkable women. In fact, that it's hard to believe that not one of these books ended up on a Tiptree shortlist. This is a world in which there are as many amazing and strong women as there are men, even though it could in no way be called an egalitarian society. I use the term "strong women" here in several senses—the individuals are both strong physically and/or mentally *and* they are strong as characters. I plan on suggesting that the Tiptree committee consider Martin's book next year.

Solitaire, Kelly Eskridge

Solitaire is a rousing hard-SF yarn about a rather naïve person (Ren "Jackal" Segura) who witnesses something she shouldn't have and ends up in prison because the world-running corporation doesn't want the truth to come out. "Prison" in Eskridge's world makes the most horrible of the modern super prisons look like pleasant places. Jackal's experience of lockdown is totally in her mind; she is drugged and sentenced to months of solitaire that literally feel like years. She develops a skill to cope with this experience however, and ends up running for her life again in an attempt to learn how to control that skill before the corporation kills her to get it. The most amusing thing about this novel is how the novel demonstrates the old maxim, "write what you know." Kelly Eskridge spent the last decade working for a giant corporation as an upper level executive. Jackel's career at the

beginning of the novel, and the skills she uses to cope with the stress of her imprisonment are obviously science fictional extrapolations of corporate skills Link gained in real life, and reminiscent of the training workshops attended by many of us who work for large agencies or corporations.

The Chamber of Secrets, J.K. Rowling

Well the movie was coming out and Scott and I took a long road trip. It seemed like a fun thing to read aloud Rowling's second Harry Potter novel to Scott as he drove. We were only a couple chapters from the end when we got back home and rather than unpack, we just sat down in the living room and finished the book. What fun!

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay, Michael Chabon

Scott and I camped along the sandy eastern lakeshore of Lake Michigan this summer. While we relaxed around the campfires I read the first book from George Martin *A Song of Ice and Fire* series and Scott read *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*. I'd be holding my head moaning, "you'll never believe how THIS guy dies, oh my god. One more chapter." And Scott would look up and snip at me, "Quiet. I'm reading a Pulitzer Prize-Winning Book." Well we had a lot of fun with the contrast of our reading materials, but I'm glad I finally got around to reading *K&C*. It's probably the best book I read all year. *K&C* is in the Great American Novel tradition because it comments about American culture even as it tells a much more intimate story of two young men and their dreams. The comic book industry of the 1930s provides the backdrop against which two friends, Kavalier (a Jew and a professional theatrical escapist who slipped out of Nazi Germany just in time) and Clay (an aspiring comic book artist, lame from childhood Polio, ambitious to make it big) form a partnership and create a Superman-like comicbook character named the Escapist. Kavalier turns out to have the greater drawing skill, while Clay finds he can write compelling stories. Their work draws from Houdini, from a real Golum with whom Kavalier escaped from Germany, and from Clay's dream of overcoming his handicaps. It's a brilliant novel.

Telling, Marion Winik

"Telling " is one of the funny, autobiographical short stories in this anthology. You may recognize Winik's name if you listen to NPR; she is a frequent contributor and she read many of the stories in this volume on "All Things Considered." "Telling" contemplates the benefits of confession, of "telling." It begins with the story of a little lie Winik felt ashamed of telling her best friend, and which she confessed. Winik's stream of conscious continues along that topic to her jealousy

brilliance based on your work now! That would be the safest thing for him to do in my opinion!

I have never felt as awful about our country, not even when we were fighting in Vietnam, as I have since Bush stole the presidency. We are illegally invading another nation, arrogantly disregarding the laws and opinions of the international community, threatening other more dangerous countries, and on a path to converting our own constitutional freedoms to the dictates of a fascist state. It's bad. I agree we're on the path for some really deep trouble.

See you in May.

▣ Elizabeth Fox

Boy can I empathize with you on the subject of family gift-giving! Year-end holidays are always packed with stress for me partially because of the heavy emphasis on gifts by my mom. (Ooops. I suddenly have this suspicion that I may have already written about this here in *Grayscale*. If so, I apologize for repeating a story.) My mom never learned the lesson about graciously expressing appreciation for the act of giving, and is quite capable of saying exactly what she thinks about a gift at the moment of unwrapping it, no matter how negative her opinion. And the rules keep changing. One year she refused to give anyone ideas about what she might like. "If you love me you should know what I want," she actually said. For several years she declared any kitchen tools or recipe books not appropriate gifts because we *all* benefit from those gifts, and a gift for her should be a gift for her *alone*. Sigh. Mom holds to a strict budget for each of us: she informs us each year that she will only spend up to an exact amount for each of us, and it's comical sometimes when some of us get a very inexpensive gift whose cost obviously fills the gap between the value of the main gift and her budget amount. It's the same amount every year and has been for as long as I can remember. But she puts no limits on our spending on her and doesn't seem to notice, really, what we spend on anyone else. So that's a blessing really. None of us get stressed out on gifts for anyone else at least and aren't worried that she's comparing our gifts to her with our gifts to other people as you do. Actually, I think she's comparing the gifts she receives with a gift she never received: a childhood dream of perfect delight created by the perfect gift.

But this is the best story my sister and brothers tell one another about mom and gifts: One year, my sister Julie decided to outdo herself for a really special gift and got a very expensive ring mounted with my mom's birthstone jewel. She wrapped the box from the jeweler and then put *that* box inside another one, an empty box she found around the house, and wrapped it in brown paper, addressed it and sent it to mom a couple weeks before Christmas. Knowing that Julie usually used two layers of wrapping paper (brown paper on the outside address, and decorative wrapping paper around the gift inside), mom unwrapped the package when it arrived. When she saw the unwrapped box, she assumed that Julie had forgotten to wrap it with holiday paper. She assumed that the box's label accurately described what was inside and that Julie had in fact sent her a laminating tool. Mom tossed it aside and grumbled for two weeks about what a thoughtless and silly gift Julie had sent her, but on Christmas discovered that the laminating box contained yet *another* box, the wrapped jewelry box with the ring inside. When she spoke to Julie on the phone later in

the day, her first question was, “Is it real?” “Yes,” Julie said, cautiously, not sure of what mom thought about the gift. Then mom told her the story of how she had opened the box two weeks ago and how angry she’d been that Julie had given her a laminator. “But after a while I thought about how I could use the laminator, about how neat it would be to have one, about all the cards in my wallet I could laminate, and now that I realize that there is no laminator, I’m a little disappointed...” Mom never did let Julie know whether she liked the ring or not.

My sister and brothers and I tell stories like this to each another and we laugh and feel better about it eventually, but we still get nervous as mom’s birthday or Christmas approaches. Telling the stories is a good way to let off steam and I think we’re all afraid we might find traces of this kind of behavior in ourselves, and so we tell the stories to ward off the possibility. Maybe that’s why I’ve been telling you all these mom stories here in this apa.

But anyway I do understand how the ceremonies of gift-giving have behavioral effects lasting long into later life, and I do sympathize with the version with which you are learning to cope.

Yes, a lot of women are iron-deficient throughout their menstruating years. And certainly that must have a lot to do with my own situation because my cycle is usually only about 23 days long and my period lasts a whole week. I do not want to work out how many days of my life that works out to! I expect a real improvement after menopause, for which I’ve had no symptoms so far.

What main plot points in *The Crimson Petal and the White* did you think were “simply idiotic”? I think I enjoyed reading this novel more than you did, although I agree the writing has some problems. I enjoyed most of the subplots, though, and really liked the way characters changed over time in what I thought was a fairly believable way.

▣ Kerry Ellis

I’m sorry to hear that Canth died but glad he did so without trauma and that he was home with you when it happened. I hope you’re on the road to recovery from the holiday retail season at Borders. Good luck on the new classes!

Thanks again for the trip report and the great photos.

▣ Arthur Hlavaty

Excellent defense of geekery, Arthur. Thanks. And thanks also for the informative and highly amusing list of 100 phrases describing you. I howled with laughter at number 99 (among others).

▣ Karen Summerly

Sounds like you had a good visit in Mesa. I liked your description of seeing the full sized Renoir at the Phoenix Art Museum. No matter how well prepared, I’m almost always surprised at how impressive the actual full-sized original painting is to me. What fun!

I hope you’re satisfied finally and that all the details are wrapped up on the sale of your uncle’s house. What did you finally decide to do with the proceeds with respect to your brother?

of the Catholic ritual of confession to her enjoyment of certain kinds of magazine articles that are in fact public confessions, which lead logically (or it seemed so at the time) to the presumption that revealing all would heal all. Her experience as a topless dancer didn’t seem to bear out that hypothesis. But that story leads into other kinds of confessions, of tellings.... That’s how Winik’s stories go. By the time I finished the book, I felt like I knew her pretty well.

The Minority Report, anthology, Philip K. Dick

This was another book chosen by our book discussion group and I had fun reading it, although I felt a bit of the same sense of disappointment I felt when I read a Theodore Sturgeon anthology a couple years ago. In re-reading some of the stories I remember loving so much in the 1960s I kept asking myself, did I really like stuff like this? Didn’t I get annoyed at ALL at how these authors talk about women? With Dick’s stories, I most frequently asked, isn’t this a really super simplistic view of the world? Didn’t he consider the affect on people of some of the technology he imagined? I always thought Dick was so paranoid. But suddenly I realized that I’ve become far more paranoid than Dick every showed himself to be in his fiction. News media machines with sensors everywhere, so the news is always complete and completely invasive of everyone’s privacy. Dick seemed to think that would actually be neat. Marketing technology develops such power that a whole planet’s population can be moved as one toward pre-scripted opinions about war. Sounds familiar, only in Dick’s world, the marketing technology is actually understood by only one person, who changes his mind about war partway through the story, and decides to reprogram everyone so that war can be avoided. See what I mean about simplistic? Still the sheer number of ideas he crammed into each story amazes me. I can also see why Dick’s stories have been such popular sources recently for movie plots. If you liked the movie, *The Minority Report*, you might enjoy reading the original story, which is much different than the filmed version. Again, Dick seems to like the central technological idea (prediction of crimes before they happen).

The Star Fraction, Ken McLeod

The Stone Canal, Ken McLeod

The Cassini Division, Ken McLeod

The Sky Road, Ken McLeod

If I can count all these books as one novel, then this would seriously compete with *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* for the title of best book read in 2002. And it’s hard to avoid thinking of these books as one work because events mentioned in *The Stone Canal* are viewed

from another perspective in *The Sky Road*, and some events in *The Stone Canal* precede events in *The Star Fraction*, some of which are themselves viewed as apocryphal legends in other books. It gets complicated, and I can see why there was some debate as to which order they should be read. I love how events seen from one point of view or in one era look completely different from a different character's point of view or from the perspective of a later age. In fact, the theme of unreliable perspectives offers a good tool with which to consider these novels about an evolving revolution from the current day through various permutations of anarchic democracy and anarchic communism. The difference between these two political systems is, of course, a matter of perspective. Human beings survive a near apocalyptic AI takeover of the planet and throughout the series we readers waver back and forth about whether the evolving AI intelligence is a hopeful evolution of human intelligence or a deadly alien threat to humans. In the course of these novels, humans begin settling the solar system, create a wormhole and create an anarchic capitalistic utopia on a planet in a distant star system, while the humans who stay behind build an anarchic communist utopia on earth. Technology and science is viewed as evil or liberator depending on where and when and who the point of view. Gradually details of events described in earlier novels are filled in by flashbacks from the point of view of various characters. Sometimes we know better *what* happened, but usually the question of *why* or whether it *should* have happened simply get more complex. A masterpiece.

□ Lisa Hirsch

You think you're lazy?! I bet nobody else does. You know I think it's fairly common that everyone thinks they could have and should have done more with respect to a specific job or just in general. My sister once told me that in the midst of a job on which she'd been regularly working 80-90 hours every week for more than a year, she found herself blaming herself for not working hard enough when something went wrong. She recalled this episode with more than a little bit of horror coloring her voice. What did she think she should have done, *killed herself* for the work?, she asked. Happily she's now aware of this tendency and has been making progress lightening up on herself. But I think many of us do this to some extent, and maybe sometimes the self-criticism is justified, especially if we ignore all the other priorities that need to be considered in our lives, including the need to relax and spend time with those we love.

What does laziness mean to me? It's something I look forward to enjoying in between busy times.