

Madison Foursquare

37

This issue of *Madison Foursquare* is brought to you by Scott Custis and Jeanne Gomoll, who live at 2825 Union Street, Madison, WI 53704.

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Scott Custis [SC] and Jeanne Gomoll [JG]

November 2019 for *Turbo-Charged Party Animal* #401

Fall Art Tour scenery



American musicals of the mid 20th century, this seems to be one of the few that does not have major problems as a revival. For instance, I love the music of *Carousel*, but am very uncomfortable with the main plot involving a woman who loves (and gloriously sings about) her husband despite his horrific abuse of her. I was astounded to find out that the revival did very well on Broadway. I assume that the director of the version of *Oklahoma!* you saw, focused on the parts of the play that are relevant today. I'm happy for the effort; it's too bad it fell flat for you. *The Book of Will* was actually my favorite APT play this season, so I am looking forward to seeing more plays written by Laura Guderson; I hope to see *The Revolutionists* eventually! Thanks for the notes.

Georgie Schnobrich

Covers

[SC] Absolutely gorgeous covers, Darlene. Certainly one of Turbo's very best covers in all of its 400 issues.

[JG] I agree. Your artwork is sublime.

Greg Rihn

[SC] We have seen excellent productions of *Ragtime* and *In The Heights* at the Milwaukee Rep, so I'm rather sad that we missed *West Side Story*. I'm glad that you liked it, which only encourages us to look forward to future Rep productions. I'm also encouraged by your comments on Laura Gunderson's *The Revolutionists*. We enjoyed her *The Book of Will* at APT and *Silent Sky* a few years ago at Madison's Forward Theater. She has a lot of plays, so there is a lot to look forward to.

Thanks for the wonderful travel report to Potsdam, Wittenberg and Dresden. I'm looking forward to the next installment in Prague.

[JG] When we got the postcard in the mail from the Milwaukee Rep advertising *West Side Story*, I said to myself, "I bet I'm going to regret not buying tickets for this show." I regret not buying tickets for this show. Sorry to hear that you were disappointed by *Oklahoma!* Among the many, great

[SC] I liked your comparison of the Greta Thunberg photo with the Mucha piece. Yes, very similar. Their eyes, mouths and hair all communicate a very personal anger. We took in a Mucha exhibit at the Czech Museum in Cedar Rapids a few years ago. It was an excellent show and we took our time going through it. Great stuff.

I also liked your poem. Falling leaves are a big part of the beauty and character of autumn. It had not occurred to me before just how much they vary in the way they make their descent to Earth.

[JG] I'm also a big fan of Mucha's work. Someday I want to make a Mucha-flavored image of Space Babe. And I agree with you about the benefits of extended time that comes with retirement. Starting with my *Space Babe Coloring Book*, and the several projects that followed, I've been able to work on big projects far more easily than I could have before retirement. When I talked about the unlikelihood of doing something in retirement that one did not do before, I was referring to folks I have known who, for instance, do almost no reading for pleasure, but who say they expect to read many novels after they retire. I think the most likely things one does after retirement are the things one has done a *little* before, and about which one feels constantly unhappy that there is not more time.

Steve Johnson

[SC] Bad news often comes in threes, or so I used to be told. Your triple hit of medical woes seems to fit that old saying. Fortunately two of the three have turned out okay, but the last one (PSA Woes) is worrisome. I have followed your hugely helpful updates on FB, thanks for those. The news is good, but surgery is never a picnic so we remain concerned. I know you will keep us posted. You will be in recovery more or less at the same time as Jeanne.

[JG] We are thinking of you and hope you recover well and cleanly from surgery, Steve.

I wish you had told me that you were not able to access the *New York Times* article by Douthat, "Jeffrey Epstein and When to Take Conspiracies Seriously." I would have gladly sent you the text. As it is, you have chosen a very different article to discuss with me—one that doesn't make any of the points made in the Douthat article. I think you jumped to the wrong conclusion about the article I'd recommended and what it was about. I will email the text of the *New York Times* article to you today. Douthat was not, and I certainly was NOT speculating that there might be a UFO conspiracy related to Epstein's death ... but it looks like that's the major part of your response to me. Douthat's article was a wide-ranging, philosophic consideration of the whole idea of conspiracy, including UFO conspiracies, but also touching on the many conspiracy theories supported by right-wing supporters of Donald Trump. Douthat makes it clear that real conspiracies absolutely exist, but surprisingly (for a very conservative political writer), urges us to resist the tendency toward unfounded speculation.

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] I appreciate the work you are doing as OE getting things back in shape, repairing the mailbox, getting the accounts in order, test driving (and sometimes fixing) big staplers, etc. The collation gatherings are fun, too. Jeanne and I will certainly miss the next one in November, and possibly a few more after that. We will keep you informed.

As I write this we still have one APT show left, so it's a little early to choose a favorite for the season, but for me right now it's a tough choice between Shaw's *The Man of Destiny* and this year's version of *Twelfth Night*. Both pulled me completely into the show and at the end left me wanting more. The way it looks now, we are in danger of choosing to go to all the shows next year for the first time.

[JG] I added the April 25 party date onto my calendar. Hmmm, will this also be a collation party?

Walter Freitag

[SC] It has also been a grey and rainy fall out here and Jeanne and I have had to make an effort to go out and embrace the beauty of autumn when the sky clears and



Fabricated tin witch art, purchased during Fall Art Tour and now decorating our front window. We figure that if THEY want to start the Christmas season at Halloween, WE can extend the Halloween season to Christmas.

the sun is out. We took one road trip last month during the weekend of the Fall Art Tour, which is an annual showcase for artists scattered around the Driftless area of Wisconsin from up around Baraboo in the north to Mineral Point in the south. There is a map and a list and you just drive around to open home studios and galleries of potters, painters, jewelry makers, woodworkers, glass and fabric artists, metal sculptors etc. while enjoying the trip driving over rolling Wisconsin back roads in the fall color. We picked a pretty nice day and made four stops and bought something at three of them, which was not part of the original plan but enjoyable all the same. Weather was a bit hazy early but the sun eventually came out and the fall color was nearly at peak. The artists we met were always very gracious. Being Wisconsin, we naturally had to stop for a beer and fried cheese curds at a little bar along the Wisconsin river. The bar featured its own ultra friendly door-greeter dog. Of course a few days later, the next storm system moved through.

[JG] I loved your essay on coughing as a flawed design feature.

Lisa Freitag

[SC] I'm not sure how to respond to your very sad and intensely frustrating ethics experience. You have been treated very shabbily by almost any measure and I can't blame you for wanting to throw in the towel on the whole business. I'm in no position to offer much beyond support, but I've known you for a while and I have always seen you as a nice person. I do not accept that it is somehow your

personality that is a problem. What do you plan to do next?
[JG] “Unreasonably Awful.” A good description of what you’ve endured. I’m so sorry.

Re art and audiences (in your comment about Tibetan sand mandalas), my opinion is that art can be both created AND appreciated by the same artist. The artist, in fact, is the first and possibly in some cases, the only audience. And if an audience seems required for some art forms, as you say about music and theater, then the musicians and the actors are also perceiving the work as they create, and thus provide (a particularly educated and biased) audience. I know that I’ve sometimes made art with myself as the primary target; working to provoke an “Oh, that’s cool!” response.

Good comments about women and power in comic books.
Yes.

Yeah, I can see how you might feel dismayed that so many of us attended WisCon. For my part, the many commitments I had to the Tiptree Award made it impossible to skip the con. However, I am gradually disentangling myself from those commitments and Scott and I expect to significantly reduce our attendance in the future.

Catie Pfeifer

[SC] Congratulations on the new additions to your home. Nice pictures. It must be nice that their coloration is so different for telling them apart. I hope the new job is still going well.

Andy Hooper

[SC] “Wait for the Bus” was terrific. So much great information gathered in one tightly written article is a gift. Why hasn’t *Rolling Stone* or someone ever done a piece like this? I’m sure everyone who has ever mourned the loss of a treasured musical talent in a small aircraft accident would be drawn to this. If it truly hasn’t been done before, Andy, you should pitch it to a magazine.

The Count Antoine de Saint-Exupery tale was quite interesting and odd. He seems like he was a poor fit for this assignment despite his determination to do it, and it turned out badly for him. My dad also crashed a P-38, at one point, and walked away from it. I think he had some knee pain from that crash, but never had the knee replaced.

A real mixed bag of material in the Entropy department this month. I liked Rostler’s waking up to an A-bomb experience which is something worth bragging about. I also liked Steve Bieler’s LOC a lot. As for Harlan Ellison and Ed Wood, I was alternately amused and offended at various points in their respective pieces. Maybe I should have expected that. I’d like to know more about this Indian Lake convention, like where it was and when it was and whether it was really the drunken blowout Harlan describes or if he is putting us on. The racism of the hotel can too easily be written off

as typical of its time. I don’t feel like giving the hotel the benefit of that doubt. As for Ed Wood, I think I’m missing a lot by not knowing much about him. Was he a professional crank?

[JG] I laughed at your idea that “some future graduate student” would be reading my apazine to glean insight into my work. I am determined to leave evidence of myself behind after I am gone, but find it unlikely that there will be people eager to closely examine my work. But for sure it is interesting to look back on (yours and) my output and try to discover themes and reasons that bind them together over our lifetimes. Fanac changes in interesting ways as we grow older. I have been reading (on CaringBridge.com) Denny Lien’s beautifully written, humorous and insightful updates on Terry Gary’s health. I wrote him a complimenting note saying that we will have to add “caretaker reports” to the fannish repertoire (of con reports, why this issue is late, etc.),

I thought Harlan’s screed on the Midwestcon Fiasco was amazing and weird. Boy, he sure didn’t have a good time at that con. Like you, I was a bit disconcerted that the target of his animus wasn’t the con’s racist policies.

Ed Wood’s piece was fascinating. The details are all mostly murky; the passion is familiar. Did people really regret that professional SF zines began publishing book reviews and fear that these would discourage fanzine-published book reviews? Did people really think that convention committees were scamming attendees by charging a \$1 membership fee? Wow. I bet you could use Wood’s text as a Mad Libs game: filling in terms from the most recent fannish arguments.

Andy, I have a question about your apazine’s format. Why do you use so many page jumps (continued on page...)?

Clifford Wind

[SC] So good to hear from you again, Cliff. Impressive dinner menu and wine list for your party. How many people did you guys end up serving? Must have been a crowd to go through all that wine. It all sounds delicious, were you or Bob Doyle professional cooks at some point?

I would also like to say that I’m getting less reading done in my new spare time (since retiring). One of my principal distractions are online subscriptions to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, which both update through the day and evening, with notifications of breaking news. It’s easy to check some late breaking story and find myself an hour later reading a long magazine piece on discovering lost WWII submarines. <Sigh>

[JG] I remember my mom saying (a few years before she died) that she was reading much less than she used to. I found that very scary; I couldn’t imagine, didn’t want to imagine, that I’d ever lose interest in reading. But I also read less these days, partially I think because the prism in my eyes makes it more difficult to read. When I get tired, my vision tends to split vertically and I have to concentrate to get my

eyes to stereoscopically cooperate with one another. If I don't concentrate, I unconsciously squint one eye in order to let the other one take over. Not good. Now I wonder if failing eyesight might not be what caused the decline in my mom's consumption of books. What has helped me a lot is to switch mainly to reading on an iPad, where I can enlarge the type size and prism doesn't seem so strong. Nevertheless, I no longer read in bed (I can't read lying on my side with trifocals). And as Scott mentioned, the time in between other tasks that I used to take advantage of to read short bits of whatever book I'm reading, is now taken up with keeping up with electronic articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Or Facebook. <Sigh>

Lovely menu. Lovely food. Lovely friends.

Marilyn Holt

[SC] Wow, sounds like that feral kitty took about a pound of flesh out of you. You should pack some leather gloves next time you decide to go a few rounds with wild cats.

Thanks for continuing to write about your writing process, a subject that has always interested me. I have to express my admiration for how you and **Jeannie Bergmann** refuse to let rejection stop you from submitting, and I like your strategy of "aiming high" for the best chance for making a connection. One question that I wanted to ask you was whether you ever do, or ever did, workshop your stuff with a writers' group? Why or why not?

Jae Leslie Adams

[SC] Delightful picture of Elle and description of her life as a devoted Osaur mom.

I think of a ride around Lake Monona as a nice "quick" ride on a day when I'm not up for a longer trek to the Arboretum, Mendota Mental Health neighborhood or out to some edge of the city. I always ride around Lake Monona in the same direction, from my house down the Capital City path and pick up the Lake Loop through the city of Monona, around the south side of the lake, pick up the Cap. City again around the west side of the lake and through Law Park to Willy St. I vary the route a lot depending on mood and time and how pooped out I am. Sometimes I ride the Cap. City path on the causeway next to John Nolan drive and sometimes I weave over to your neighborhood and around Monona Bay and through Brittingham Park. Sometimes I bullet for home down the Cap. City path parallel to Willy St. and Eastwood Dr. and sometimes I wind around the neighborhoods along the lake on the Lake Loop path as far as Olbrich Park and then saunter home. I usually find time for a stop at the Willie St. Coop for a refreshment on the leg home. Next year maybe I will change that up sometimes with a stop at the new Garver Feed Mill complex. On a nice day, it's a lovely ride.

[JG] Yay, Elowyn! I am imagining Jeff Goldblum in the next *Jurassic Park* movie saying, "Osaur hungry!"

Interesting (upside down) backsides to your zine's pages. Is the text from some play?

Kim and Kathi Nash

[SC] The SF Without Borders book club has resumed meeting at the new Frugal and we like it a lot. Nice cozy store. I have it on my list of winter things to do to stop in on a non-book group day to do some shopping.

The good news on your eye surgery is very welcome and I hope you are still happy with the results. I think I have told you before, however, that your stories of procedures on your eyes always give me the shakes in a way that stories of wounds, organ removals and joint replacements never do. The idea of someone cutting on my eyes just gives me the willies. Sorry.

[JG] Frugal seems to catch a lot of bad luck. I don't understand why they couldn't have kept their phone number, damn! And it's really too bad that someone stole valuable stock during the move. Double damn! But I do love their new store, much more in fact, than the old space.

Cathy Gilligan

[SC] So sorry to read about the loss of Mardi. What a good old friend she must have been to you.

Jeannie Bergmann

[SC] Not sure which of you I envy more this month. The thought of Fred getting to drive home from L.A. on his own is certainly appealing. Unless he is under the gun for time and money. If it's all 10-12 hour days interstate driving and sleeping in cheap motels and bad food, he can keep it. If there was time for some sightseeing, nice restaurants and comfy hotels then I'm all in. You, on the other hand, get to do your best to help your friends by consuming hot snacks and free drinks to use up the budget for WFOP. It's a tough assignment, especially when you might have to make up for some of the geriatrics in the group who can't pull their weight. Someone has to do it.

Your helmet advice is appreciated. My own helmet is rounded on all sides, now that I really examine it, but not very new, fancy or fashionable. I also don't wear bike shorts, bike jerseys or bike shoes (I use toe clips and tennis shoes). My single pannier is borrowed from Jeanne and strapped to the rack over my rear tire with bungee cords. Biking around Madison, I often feel these fashion failures on my part should bother me more than they do.

My favorites of the fine pieces you shared with us this time were "Scout," "The Death of Stars," and "A Simpler Time." Thanks.

What's New—Scott

[SC] We had about 40 kids show up at Halloween this year, down from nearly twice that number last year. It may have something to do with the nearly four inches of snow we got the night before, along with plunging temperatures as the sun went down on trick or treat evening. We may share a few pictures in the apa that we rushed to take on Jeanne's new iPhone, which is quite good at taking shots in various qualities of light. I think if we want better pictures, we have to refine our approach. Too often we started asking about taking a picture AFTER the kids got the candy. Once they get the prize, they turn right around and take off whether you are still talking to them or not. We should encourage them to let us get a shot first and THEN give them the goods.

Of course we had leftover candy. Since I'm retired and can no longer set it out for the ravening hoards at the office, we brilliantly decided to take it with us to ICON two days later and offer it to the Consuite. Cons can be so handy sometimes.

The Halloween snowfall was our second one in October, which is MUCH too early for significant snow/slush accumulations. In both cases I ended up manually shoveling because the snow was much too wet, heavy and slushy to use a snowblower on. I think Jeanne's brother Dan in Muskego captured my mood perfectly when he posted on FB that he had just come back in the house from "rage shoveling."

At WisCon last spring, Pat Murphy mentioned to us that she was going to be GoH at ICON 44 in Cedar Rapids in November and asked if we'd be going. We responded that we'd be going now that she was a guest. After doing a little arithmetic, we realized that this year was exactly 35 years since Jeanne and I met at an ICON, then held in Coralville,



Trick-or-Treater—tired, wet and cold

IA. We hadn't attended another one in all these years, so in addition to Pat's attendance, we decided it was high time we celebrated this anniversary by finally going back.

For awhile after Jeanne fell on her knee, we feared we might have to cancel our trip, but she improved enough to go, so off we went on the Friday after Halloween. The convention was in a nice Marriott on Collins Road, a more recently developed area away from downtown. The hotel was about seven stories with a big atrium area and plenty of program space. The registration desk estimated attendance would come to around 400–500 members. We called ahead and requested a room with a small refrigerator and ended up being assigned a suite, with a small sitting room and two TVs on the second floor. Although we were on the consuite/party floor, our room was at the end of a hallway, so there was no one on one side of us. The consuite and most of the parties

appeared to be on the other side of the atrium and, since most of the rooms faced the open atrium area, sound was greatly dispersed. It was quiet as a church in our room.

We got checked in in time to meet up with Pat Murphy, Diane Silver, **Jim Hudson** and **Diane Martin** for dinner before opening ceremonies. Since the hotel restaurant was closed, the hotel helpfully recommended a nearby place called 30hop. This turned out to be a beer place with high seating in the bar area and booths in a second dining room. We crowded into a booth and embarked on a lively conversation. The food turned out to be surprisingly good. Afterward we hustled back to the hotel in time for Pat and the other guests to be introduced at Opening Ceremonies, which featured a long, frequently indecipherable and in-joke-loaded play. Welcome to ICON.

Jeanne's only panel was at 9 am Saturday with Pat Murphy and moderated by author Lettie Prell on Feminism, Gender Identity and the Tiptree Award. For most of the time, Pat and Jeanne focused on the Tiptree Award and entertainingly covered familiar stories. Pat only brought up the subject of the award's name change in the last 15 minutes of the hour and prompted little controversy in the audience.



Tiptree panel at ICon

The title of the program book was ICON 44: Unpacking Non-Binary Reality, and this seemed to be the con's theme this year. Other panel titles included: What Does Non-Binary Mean, A Guide to Pronouns and Why They Matter, Transgender Rights and Storytelling, etc. These program items were alongside more traditional (and probably regular) panels like: Crochet Cthulu, the Value of Romance in Science Fiction and Fantasy and Dungeon Master Workshop. The



Rue the Day, by Jeff Lee Johnson

convention members were from all age groups including a rather lot of younger people which was good to see. ICON appears to be healthy and not in danger of aging out. There were a lot of program ideas that did not appeal to me and I stuck mostly to Pat or Diane Silver's panels and readings by authors I recognized. I don't think ICON would appeal to me as a regular event. The art show took up a large space on the floor of the atrium area. Jeanne and I walked through and even bought a piece ("Rue the Day" by Jeff Lee Johnson—Look carefully at the image above. There are some gruesome things going on.), but it was a pretty familiar SF con art show. The dealers' room was nearly full of vendors, but only a couple book dealers. Lots of clothing and jewelry, at least one weapons vendor and lots of sellers of SF/fantasy "stuff" of all kinds.

The hotel had a nice restaurant and bar on the atrium floor, but the restaurant was only open for a breakfast buffet in the morning. The rest of the day, they had prepared and packaged food for sale in the restaurant area. You could buy to-go burgers, hot dogs and pizza in boxes and chips and soda but the restaurant area was otherwise closed. The bar was open and gradually Jeanne and I figured out that if you asked the bar staff discretely, they would slip you a limited hot food menu that you could order from and eat at your table in the bar on plates with silverware and napkins. It was a little odd, but we finally figured out that the restaurant was only open all day on weekdays because they either couldn't get enough staff to run it on the weekends or the hotel did not normally have enough business to keep it open on the weekends after breakfast. Jeanne and I had a nice modest dinner in the bar on Saturday night and hung out with Jim and Diane in our "sitting room" for a while in the evening. Sunday we checked out and attended Pat's last panel on

How to Be Inclusive with a young woman who was very much in love with the sound of her own voice. We said goodbye to Pat, Diane S. and a few other folks we knew and headed to my hometown, Anamosa. We went out to dinner Sunday night with some of my family and returned to Madison Monday morning.

What's New—Jeanne

A new car! Scott will have much more to say about this in our next zine, but we bought it AFTER he wrote his comments for this issue. We've been thinking about replacing our 20-year-old Lincoln Continental for a while now, ever since it started needing more frequent big-ticket repairs. We've been most interested in hybrids and for a while were very serious about getting a Prius. But we test-drove a new 2019 Kia Niro the other day and Scott fell in love. I thought it was pretty nice too. And VERY uncharacteristically for Scott, he decided within one day that the Niro was the car for us. And for those of you who have followed my sad story of Too-Many-White-Cars-from-Dad, our new care is blue! Yay! And it has ApplePlay AND gets around 50 miles per gallon. Big yay!



1999 Lincoln Continental—Good-bye!



Behold our brand new 2019 Kia Niro Hybrid!

Láadan Dictionary update: Susanna Sturgis is still editing it, apparently in such great depth that she is actually learning the language as she goes. While the manuscript has been out to Susanna, a couple folks who are still working on the language contacted me. One of them is writing music using Láadan. So we plan on showing them the dictionary after Susanna is through working on it. That may end up adding some more vocabulary to the book. We will see. I am still hopeful about getting the dictionary published sometime in the spring of 2020.

Surgery. I go in for a full knee replacement the day before Thanksgiving, November 27. I finally managed to get to work on some of the prep details I needed to take care of before surgery, like renting a hospital bed, setting up PT appointments, physical check-up, etc. And now the date is barreling toward me way too fast. We will host my family for Thanksgiving the weekend before the official holiday. We've been doing that for the last few years because Steve is able to travel to the US (from Hong Kong) then. So with cooking prep and surgery prep, I am busy. WE are busy.

I continue to work on excavating my own work. There is way more stuff than I remember. I generally think I'm pretty productive NOW. Well, it seems like I used to be even more so. Right now I am working mostly on stuff related to my 1987 TAFF trip. It turns out that I left off work on that in 1988 with everything much more organized that I remember: photos are all labeled with names of people pictured. Audio tapes provide details for every day of our trip. It's been spooky hearing my voice whispering through earphones. But I'm very glad that I've got these tapes. There's no way I could ever have remembered the things we did or the people I talked with—much less the substance of some of those conversations—if I hadn't taken extensive notes. Not even if I had written the report immediately upon returning home from the trip. Knowing myself, I would have run out of energy for *writing* notes (as opposed to recording notes) early in the trip. When I take notes, I inevitably start writing extensively in essay form about my ideas and try to connect conversations, make conclusions, etc.... There just wouldn't have been time for that. If I'd tried to write (rather than record) a journal as we traveled around England, I would have gotten bogged down and then behind as I lost the thread of a continuing point of view. Anyway, now, listening, I am living partly in 1987. Eerie.

So, I've decided to offer you a story I actually wrote in 1987 about a typical Madstf meeting at Nick's....



Scott and Jeanne in York, 1987

One Night at Nick's

By Jeanne Gomoll, originally published in *Cube* #20, edited by Spike Parsons, 1987

A long time ago the Madison Science Fiction Group used to arrive at Nick's Restaurant. That Wednesday night I arrived at Nick's Restaurant just in time to hear Greg order a beer and the Hamburger Plate Special from the waitress. Since Molly is no novice at this job, she carefully scrutinizes Greg's face. Molly knows that delivering his order may not be an easy task. Dick stops her and requests his "usual" dinner, and I ask her for a Coke. Molly's eyes widen momentarily with the first hint of panic. As soon as she turns toward the bar, Greg sidles down the table to sit next to Pete and Mike, and asks them if they've found jobs yet. Pete and Mike glare at Greg. Dick moves to help shove an additional table over to the one at which Paul, Bill and Dennis are discussing computer software. I am now partially hidden in the corner hanging my bike panniers and helmet on a coat hook when I notice Molly pause. She seems to be puzzling over something written on her order pad and she turns and starts back toward our tables....and can see none of the three people from whom she just took orders. Her eyes widen in panic, an expression that holds on longer this time, but she shakes her head and returns to the bar with a determined stride.

A TV perched above rows of liquor bottles frame Ronnie Reagan's face. He smiles a merry smile like someone's jocular uncle. But the group's conversations and a rousing rendition of Mario Lanza's *Drink! Drink!* from the juke box, drown out Reagan's speech.

"What's going on?" I ask.

"He's either explaining how he would find emergency welfare assistance, or declaring war. I forget what speech is tonight," someone jokes.

"No, I think he's trying to explain how SALT can be dead in the water at the same time it's a viable treaty, if only the Russians would be reasonable," somebody else explains.

"No, no--he's explaining why the 5 to 4 Supreme Court, pro-choice decision is really a victory for the anti-abortion faction," says Pete. And indeed Reagan's face does look all scrunched up as if he is working up into some great mental effort. I turn to Pete and ask him if anyone's offered him an engineering job yet, and he abruptly gets up and leaves the table.

I turn back to the TV screen and try to block out the sounds of the SF group and Mario Lanza.. Reagan seems to be saying, "Well. Ah. Um. No. Yes."

Molly is standing to my left now, holding a beer in her hand. I am about to point Greg out to her—he's demonstrating unicorn calls from under one of the other tables. But Kim is smiling and reaches for the foamy brew.

"Ah, at last!" he grins and slurps a gulp thirstily.

Molly looks confused. "But I thought you'd left!"

"No, I'm just chaotic," says Kim, and hands her some money. Ardis, the restaurant manager walks over to our tables. "Is there a Spike here? There's a phone call for it." Spike vaults over the table and jogs to the phone behind the bar. Ardis critically surveys the usual Wednesday night crowd. We don't drink a lot of beer but many of us eat dinner there, and lots of soda is ordered by our group: so Ardis tries to be tolerant.

"Please stay at these tables," he pleads. We sometimes spill over to many other scattered tables in the restaurant, and scare away his other customers. He looks at the man under the table, shakes his head and mutters, "Sci-Fi..." under his breath as he walks back to the bar.

Jim strides through the restaurant with a crew videotaping his every move. "Taping this Saturday morning everybody! Anyone want my autograph?" Jim is the book and cable TV mogul of the group. He flashes his smile at a young fan (i.e., someone who isn't yet wary of Jim's schemes), and draws him aside. "Have I got a job for you!"

"Who was that bearded man?" asks the young fan after Jim and his retinue has left Nick's.

Spike returns from her phone conversation looking thoughtful.

*CLINK!*CLINK!* A knife taps a glass. Dick tries to attract our attention.

So far no one has noticed Dick standing there. Someone tells a bad joke. "What's worse than a truckload of dead babies...?"

"I HATE dead baby jokes!"

"No. It's—"

*CLINK!*CLINK!*CRASH!*tinkle!*

"Announcements! Announcement Time!" shouts Dick. He's finally gotten everyone's attention. Two strangers off in the corner who've been holding hands and looking deeply into one another's eyes—trying their best to ignore the SF club—look our way and stare at the tall, red-haired man who is holding a clipboard and picking a sliver of glass from his hand.

Diane sighs. "Rats." She likes to be on her way home before Dick starts the announcements.

"The SF convention FunCon will be held at the Oostberg Holiday Inn this weekend. Does anyone need a ride to FunCon?" Dick asks for a show of hands. "Does anyone need a rider to FunCon? Does anyone want to share a room at FunCon?"

No one raises their hand. Hope returns to whispered consultations with people she hopes will give her a ride to FunCon and maybe allow her to crash in their room. No sense in playing Russian Roulette for roommates. There's no telling who you might get stuck with.

Molly stands behind Dick with a Hamburger Plate Special and scans the crowd.

"...and there's going to be a party at my place next Saturday." Dick hands out maps to everyone, including his next-door neighbor.

"What time should we come over?" asks the young fan (i.e., someone who still listens to all of Dick's announcements).

"Oh, anytime after noon," says Dick.

Diane, one of Dick's housemates, rolls her eyes, and turns to a conversation with Spike. "Oh things are better at the office this month. I'm only working 100 hours a week and we're merely a year and a half behind."

Spike groans sympathetically with her and together they construct a theory that each of their respective assistants at work are alien saboteurs sent to drive them over the edge.

Steve looks up, confused. "Are you talking about the Space Shuttle program?" Spike and Diane gaze at him blankly.

"What?" they ask.

"I'm working at the Department of Revenue again. I couldn't stay with the shuttle program any longer. You know, after..." Steve explains helpfully. "But I've developed a new air brush technique now and I'm painting larger paintings."

Kim grins. "Earth to Steve! Earth to Steve!" Molly delivers Steve's chicken dinner and he guards it suspiciously from the rest of us.

Spike turns to Andy. "I just talked to Carrie on the phone. Remember, this year you're not the chairperson. Carrie is. And I'm helping. Marrying the chair doesn't count."

"Maybe if you'd married a TV set Instead, people would pay more attention to you, Andy!" someone laughed.

"Who got married?" someone else demanded, shock and moral outrage coloring their voice. We're a pretty open-minded, lefty sort of group. Bohemian and atheistic opinions are encouraged; even bad puns are tolerated. But you have to be pretty brave to do something mundane like get married.

Andy tries to explain. "It's OK. We're going to live in a slant shack, rife with complex sexual intrigue, and Carrie won't even have a bridal shower." The offended fan sits down again, still a little shaky. "...well...OK..." but she looks at Andy suspiciously for a while, especially when he affects an Irish brogue.

"No sense trying to change the subject," says Spike. "Just how many guests of honor do you think we can afford at next year's WisCon?"

At the mention of convention finances, Diane (the club treasurer) turns and snaps automatically, "We can't afford it." and then goes back to her conversation with me about the group's fanzine, *Aurora*. The 25th issue is due out soon.

"We've typed your article into memory already and Hank is editing the letter column. Can you draw me a cartoon for the back cover, please, Jeanne? ...And I don't know when I'm going to get the time to do the proofreading. Dick only proofreads *after Aurora* gets published."

"You've got to get some more people working on the zine, Diane!"

"Well, why don't you put that into the *Cube* article you're writing for Spike?"

OK...

COMMERCIAL INTERRUPTION!

We have this fanzine, you know? It's famous! *Aurora* is one of the only and easily the best feminist SF fanzine in the world. Don't you want to work on it? Write articles! Choose articles! Type! Collate! Get complimentary letters addressed to you! Call or write SF³ and we'll sign you up!

END OF COMMERCIAL INTERRUPTION

I hand Diane a stack of mail that's come into our post office box over the past week. There are six or seven fanzines published by fans in North America, Europe and Australia. There are checks and orders for the *Láadan Dictionary* by Suzette Haden Elgin that Diane published last year, and some for *Aurora* back issues. Bundles of poetry submissions to *Aurora* outweigh all the rest, but there are also small press advertisements and assorted weird mail that groups like ours attract.

From across the table, people are talking about movies.

Back to School gives me a whole new appreciation for Madison."

"Yeah. Beautiful fall colors and still warm enough to swim outside!"

"I think I must have been out of town that year."

Molly wanders past Diane with a Hamburger Plate Special. She looks lost and the barrette in her hair has loosened and is about to slide from her head.

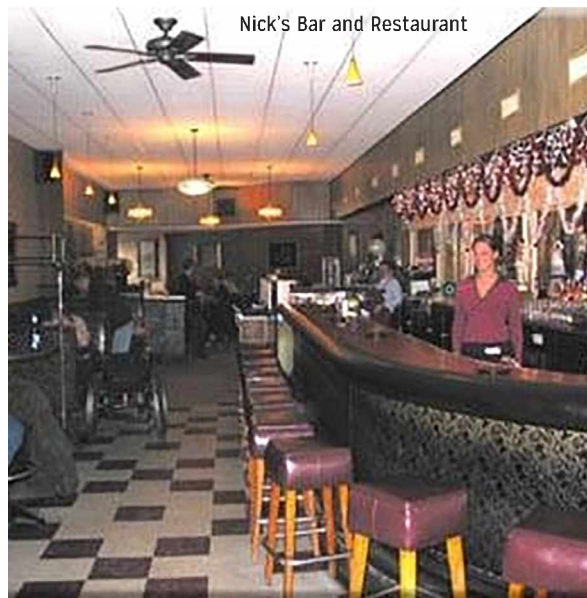
A burst of laughter erupts at the other end of the table. Dick is still standing and delivering announcements.

"...Kim's house, Saturday night for the poker game."

Phil is rubbing his hands together, grinning wickedly and encouraging Julie to play poker. "Bring all your money," he advises.

Julie agrees uncertainly and returns to a whispered conversation with Kim K. about liaisons with famous guests of honor. "Well if you don't let him buy you dinner, he can't assume anything, right?" And then the conversation dwindles into totally inaudible hand motions and facial contortions.

The movie conversation heats up and one voice can be heard above all the others. "Bottles of super-plutonium does not make *The Manhattan Project* a science fiction film!"



"Is somebody talking about science fiction?" asks Barb.

"Have you read the new novel by Ursula Le Guin?" I ask.

"It's not really a novel, you know. It's got a cassette tape recording after all," says Barb.

Who's got the Hamburger Plate Special?" yells Molly, her hair in disarray.

"Over here," says Greg. He is sitting at the other end of the room at the bar where he has been exiled for his vile smoking habits.

"But it's cold," he complains when she brings his food to him.

"You're lucky it's not petrified," she says.

Back at our tables, Dick is still announcing. "And there will be a WisCon planning meeting this Sunday at 1:30 in the afternoon. It says here that you're supposed to bring program ideas to the meeting."

"What's the room number?" asks the young fan. He is taking notes. Dick beams at him.

"Check 'Today at the Union' on the bulletin board. Times and places are listed there. Any more news?" Dick asks. "Have Pete or Mike found jobs yet?"

Pete grimaces. Mike meets Dick's eyes and asks if Dick has got the WisCon hotel contract drawn up yet. It's a stalemate.

"Anything else?" Dick asks, oblivious.

Phil announces a special sale on paperback SF at Hank's 20th Century Books the next day. "35¢ a book!" he says and the crowd moans in anticipation.

Spike stands up and asks for volunteers to publish the next issue of *Cube*, the group's newsletter. "I need people to help me gather and type the news. Then next week, we'll have to collate and mail them out." Hope and Pete volunteer. I quick write this article for *Cube*, and Spike sits down again.

"Anything else?" Dick asks.

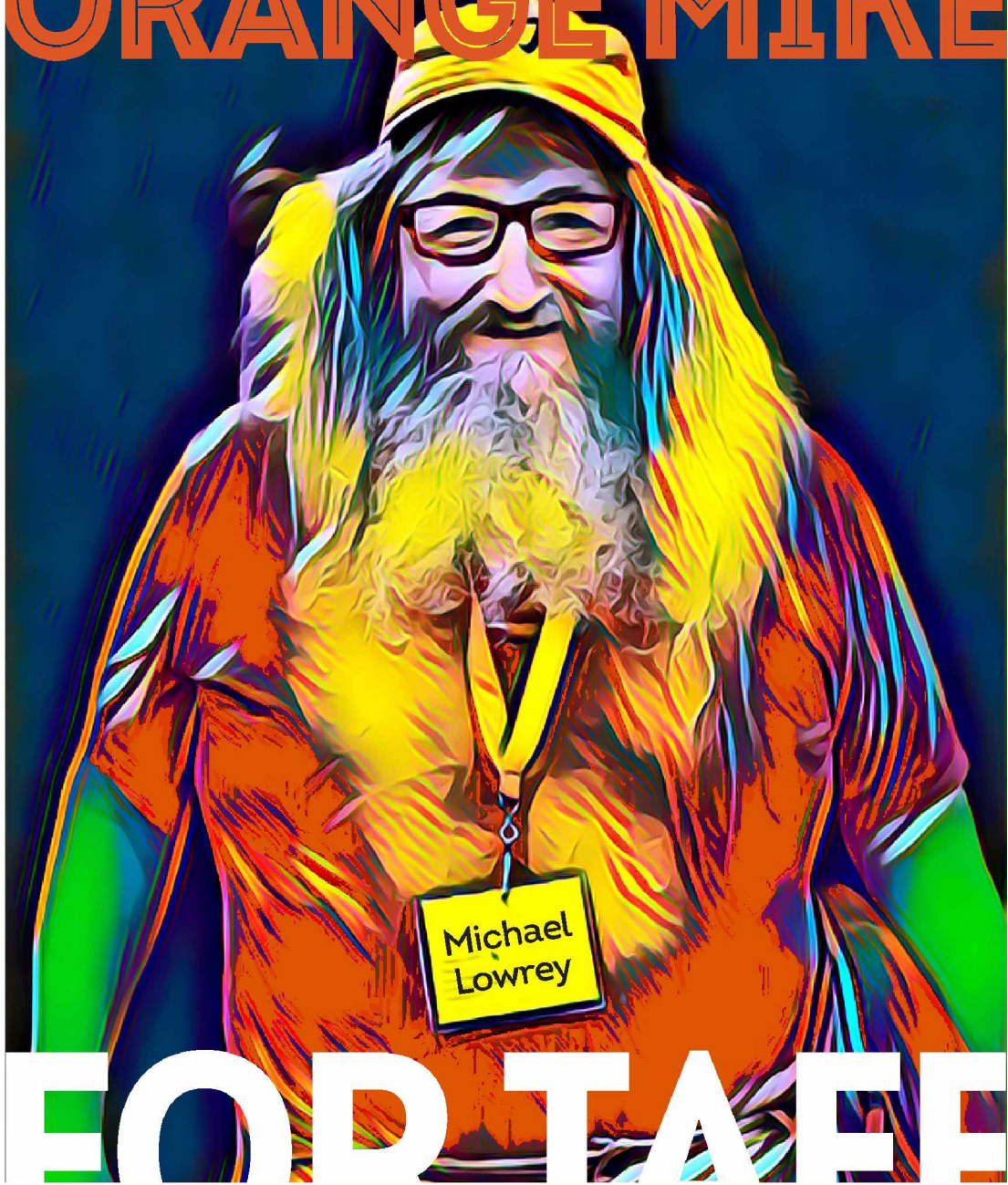
"Yes," says Phil. Next Wednesday is the last Wednesday of the month which means we meet at Union South instead of at Nick's."

"What's the program, Phil?"

"Science Fiction, of course!"

Scott and Jeanne
November 2019

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