



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]

February 2020 for *Turbo-Charged Party Animal* #404.

Comments on #403

Greg Rihn

[SC] For me, the outlook for the survival of civilization looks as grim today as it ever has in my lifetime. Worse even than the dark Cold War years. As things stand, I don't really see that our future will work out well. Hobbes was right.

Jeanne and I have never seen *Cats* on stage either. The reviews of the movie version were so bad, so toxic, so almost personally offended by *Cats* that we were never tempted to check it out. I was amused that a couple of determined contrarians like you and **Georgie** went anyway and liked it in spite of everything. Good for you. Probably a bigger problem for us than the negative reviews was just the fact that neither of us are particularly crazy about cats.

I have to confess that I have never read the book *Little Women*, but I have seen several screen versions of the story, so I am familiar with the characters and plot elements that usually turn up in film and television versions. I liked this one because director Greta Gerwig jazzed up the story through the aggressive use of flashbacks in, what I felt was, a very modern way. I also liked how she felt free to improve Louisa May Alcott's story. After all, Alcott and her publisher initially thought her book was dull until younger women who read it started raving about it (this I learned from a NYT article about Alcott and her career that I read prior to going to the movie). The casting was also inspired, especially for Timothee Chalamet as Laurie instead of some tall, broodingly handsome guy like Christian Bale from the 1994 version. I also liked how Gerwig incorporated some of Alcott's own experiences as a woman writer of her time into Jo's experiences in the film. What I most liked was Amy's development and story arch in the movie. I agree that her wedding to Laurie felt a little bittersweet at the end, but since she already decided to give up her artistic ambitions before Laurie's proposal and needed a new direction perhaps managing a big estate with her best friend as husband wasn't such a bad thing. This movie and *JoJo Rabbit* were my favorite movies from last year.

[JG] As you may have concluded from my artwork in this month's Turbo cover, I also feel despair at times. At other times, when I try to focus on my life and the things I can do to make things better for those close to me, I feel less so. I

think despair for me is about a feeling of helplessness. When I can do something, whether or not my efforts will have a significant effect, I feel better. When I focus on all the stuff beyond my control, I am tempted to give up.

The non-stop action of the first part of *Star Wars: the Rise of Skywalker*—or the “hectic” pace, as you put it—was so intense the I actually stopped caring about any of the characters' survival or even of the plot. We went mainly, I think, because of the multi-year investment we put into the series. But I was not impressed.

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] Every now and then I will overhear someone from my generation say something like “Kids these days are so lazy” or “Kids these days are spoiled and don't have any respect” etc. I'm always surprised by this because I clearly remember the very same being said about us 40–50 years ago. I cannot believe people who grew up hearing such nonsense said about them would repeat the same bullshit about another generation of young people. So the “OK, Boomer” dismissal you wrote about initially struck me as an understandable response to some of my boorish peers. I'm sure my opinion will change the first time someone uses the expression on me. That said, I really liked your essay. We are indeed used to stronger stuff being (sometimes literally) thrown at us in anger and we should not be easily wounded by a mildly humorous dismissal. We may well deserve it sometimes, but we are also unlikely to fade away quietly, so the younger generation may as well take their best shot. It's only what we're used to.

[JG] Yes, I recognize myself in your chronological tracing of the evolving Boomer image. What makes me real uncomfortable is the Boomer image of today shared by so many among the generations that follow us. They see us as self-satisfied, complacent, beneficiaries of greedy economics and environmental rampage that votes Republican in large numbers. No generational group can be defined with one set of characteristics, but I can sympathize with those who see too many people in my generation as having willfully ignored environmental and political threats as we made ourselves comfortable. Nevertheless, I wish we focus on the fact that a significant portion of the whole population, not just certain generations, will need to show up, stand up and take action

if our country and the world manages to survive this century. We have to work together.

The other night I had a hilarious dream. I woke up laughing. Two teams of 60+-year-olds played basketball, rather badly, together. The cheerleaders belonged to the same age group and their acrobatics were not pretty. Anyway one of the teams' names was the "Boomers," and the cheerleaders led the audience: "OK Boomers ... **OK!**" I think that if anyone ever directs that phrase at me, I might just say "OK!"

Steve Johnson

[SC] I think it's healthy and positive that you are being frank here about the issues you are wrestling with in your recovery. Fear of incontinence is a big challenge and a threat to anyone's sense of dignity, but the truth is that it's something that is not uncommon for people recovering from some surgeries. I think it's a great idea to seek out the cancer survivor's support group. It's a great way to battle the sense of isolation and claustrophobia you are naturally feeling. Nothing like hanging out with people who know just what you are going through. Thank you as always for keeping us informed and I hope you know we all support you.

[JG] I have also felt down about how long recovery seems to take and hope that when you are able to join a support group, that you will like it. I found the group total knee replacement class very useful and remarkably good for my mood.

Marilyn Holt

[SC] I liked your little piece on Kabu and the tragedy of mornings. I have never heard of a dog who so clearly hated mornings. Does she stay up late at night? It's very troubling if you were lied to about one or both of the Great Pyrenees, especially considering how much time and money you have invested in them.

Thanks for writing about your last visits with Andi Shechter and her memorial service. The Seattle community has been going through a lot of losses lately.

[JG] Yes, "the tragedy of mornings." I am there.

I had a knee replacement, not hip. (Both my hips were replaced quite a few years ago.)

Clifford Wind

[SC] I hope you will find more satisfying and less onerous activities now that you are backing away from farming. Good luck at evading meetings, however, they are hard to avoid. Being from Iowa, I have long known that the Farm Bureau is a very rightwing organization. I did not know that membership in the group can be made a requirement of certain kinds of farm insurance. The NFU is a far better outfit to be associated with.

[JG] I think it's shocking that there is an insurance requirement that mandates membership in a group with such awful politics. Good for you for paying attention and thinking about alternatives.

Carrie Root

[SC] Welcome! Congratulations on your retirement! I like it so much I have to wonder why I spent all that time working instead of retiring right out of college.

When we first started looking at cars, I was determined to get a plug-in hybrid because of how perfectly suited it would be for the way we drive 90% of the time. With a plug-in, the first 20-30 miles you drive is all on electric power, then the hybrid system kicks in and it continues to operate like any other hybrid. There is no hard limit to how far you can travel before you're forced to do a lengthy re-charge (like you have with a fully electric car). As long as you keep putting in gas, you can keep going. We do take some long trips to Milwaukee, Iowa and Door County but most of the time we drive around Madison. With the plug-in, we could start out every day with a fresh battery and the first 20-30 miles is on electric battery power. Every night we re-charge. There are a lot of days we only drive 20 miles in a day, sometimes less, sometimes not much more. We could end up using a tiny amount of gas around town because every day we start over with a fresh battery. Madison Gas and Electric has a program for installing re-charging stations in peoples' garages. It doesn't cost that much. The reason we did not go with a plug-in is because our standalone garage currently has no electric power running to it. In order to install the charging station, we would also have to run electric power to our garage. If I'm going to do that, then I also want some lights and maybe an electric garage door, too. Suddenly a new car purchase was adding an expensive garage upgrade and we just didn't want to tackle that. So, we have a standard hybrid. We are still pretty happy with it, but the real test will come next month when we take our first long drive across the country in it.

I laughed at your comment to **Catie** that **Andy** "reacts to dogs and bears." Well, yes. I think I react to bears, too. If anyone in the apa gets a pet bear, please let the rest of us know.

[JG] Congratulations on your retirement Carrie. I am enjoying mine. I thought at first that I would continue to pick up a few design jobs here and there, but my time has been entirely consumed by several publishing projects of my own, and I find I am just not interested anymore in working with clients. The other day someone left a text message for me and asked me if I would take on a book design job. I declined, and then after scrutinizing her request further, realized that I had dodged a bullet. After describing the job she used that fatal phrase, "It should only take you an hour." Ha. Clients often over- or under-estimated the amount of time they assume jobs will take, almost always by enormous amounts of time. I felt relieved not to have had to explain the process to this

prospective client. Instead, I referred her to the company that bought my business.

Andy Hooper

[SC] I love it when you write about the movies. If I ever saw Bogart's *The Big Sleep*, it was so long ago that I don't remember it. I'm thinking I never did, an oversight just as stunning as the fact that I've never seen *The Maltese Falcon* either. These oversights are so great that they need to be rectified in my retirement. I not only need to see these and other old movies you mentioned in your piece, I'm more interested in reading Chandler. I have been trying to incorporate some classic novels that I've never read into my reading list (last week I finished my second Jane Austen novel, *Sense and Sensibility*) and adding some Chandler suddenly seems necessary. Thanks.

It was a little sad, but also funny reading the Andi Shechter pieces you ran. I'd never read her fan writing before, so I was quite delighted by these. I thought her piece on working on Star Trek conventions was a shrewd and insightful tour of a world much different from the conventions I'm used to. My favorite article was her piece on her music preferences.

[JG] Scott's comment, above, about reading Austen and Chandler sequentially inspired a brief surrealistic scenario in my mind: *Pride and Prejudice* narrated in Chandler's voice. Or a film noir storyline told from the point of view of an Austen character constrained by Austen rules that she only talk about people and events that (as an 18th century woman) she would naturally have been able to witness.

But yes, thank you for the fascinating history of book and film background of these classic American stories. I really like your style of discussing both versions seriously.

Thanks for your encouragement for my anthology/memoir. The work on *TAFForensic Report* is done. I just sent the files off and am waiting to look at a proof copy before sending for a stack of copies to bring with me to Corflu. I'll post the pdf on Langford's TAFF pubs page right after Corflu. And both book and pdf will be available on Lulu.com. More info later. I'm reprinting a chapter from the report at the end of this zine.

I think these are the first Andi Schechter pieces I've read too. Not sure how I missed reading her, but I'm sorry we've lost her voice in fandom. I really liked her piece on working on Trek cons, especially thinking about how much has changed both in typically fannish conventions AND for-profit media cons. Thanks, Andy.

Jim Hudson and Diane Martin

[SC] We saw *Mystery Road*. I liked it a lot, but an Australian outback Western Noir starring Judy Davis is pretty much the best of everything for me. We have been hopping around from thing to thing on TV lately. We watched the series *The Morning Show* about a male morning TV show host

(Steve Carell) who gets fired for sexually harassing women in the work place and leaves behind his female co-host (Jennifer Aniston) who is getting older and desperately wants to maintain control of the show. She attempts to do this by rashly hiring a tough but unknown reporter (Reese Witherspoon) to co-host with her. The infighting gets intense. We also watched *See* starring Jason Momoa and Alfre Woodard in a post-apocalypse world where the surviving humans have lost their sense of sight. Humans were starting to relearn how to survive in the world when everything is thrown into chaos after a set of twins is born with sight. The blind characters stretch credibility from time to time regarding what they can actually do while blind, but the production values are very high, the plot is engaging and Momoa and Woodard are both very good.

Great pictures with your holiday letter.

[JG] I loved loved loved the first season of *See*. It's part of Apple TV's new line-up. We wouldn't have known about it except that it was time to replace our AppleTV unit (the OS was no longer supported), and the new unit came with a year's subscription to Apple TV's offering. I loved not only *See*, but *The Morning Show*, and I was intrigued by M. Night shyamalan's *Servant*. Another paid subscription show (CBS Access), *Picard*, has caught us. In non-subscription TV, we have been enjoying Jane Austen's *Sanditon*.



Jae Leslie Adams

[SC] Sorry to read about your long struggle with sciatica. It sounds just awful. Fortunately you wove in enough touches of humor to keep the story from been too depressing. I hope you are on a long upswing now.

Your mention of Cargo Coffee as a motivator to get out of the house also works for me. I have all the neighborhood coffee places mapped out and no hike in the fresh air ever starts before I have planned my route with a coffee shop stop worked in.

[JG] It's sad how often I recognize something in my walking style as a remembered view of my grandparents' or parents' movements. I realize that, when I was young, I never really tried to imagine the underlying pain that required those short steps or wobbly movements. Now I sometimes grumble under my breath at how lucky other people are because

they clearly do not have to concentrate on each individual movement when they are simply walking. Sympathies.

Jim and Ruth Nichols

[SC] Jim, congratulations on moving forward with a retirement plan. You will like retirement. Don't worry about being bored or running out of things to do, the time will fill itself up. Some days I do little more than sit around and read all day. Other days I'm out and about all over the place. I always have a list of things I want to do. You get to decide what you're up for doing every day.

What's New

[JG] *TAFForensic Report* is done and gone to press and will be available in mid-March. Diane and I are in the final stages of working on the *Lāadan Dictionary*. Copies will be sold at WisCon at least, maybe earlier. I'm in the midst of designing a logo for Susanna Sturgis and the Martha's Vineyard Democrats (in trade for her copy-editing work on the dictionary). And a new project looms: My brother Steve will soon retire and return to the US from his home of almost a decade in Hong Kong. He wants to self-publish photo books on each of the countries he's traveled to, starting with his month long hike up and back from Mt Everest Basecamp. There will be books on Hong Kong, China (maybe several books), Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Bali, India, Tibet, France, and Kenya. One of Steve's post-retirement plans is to travel to Antarctica, so maybe there will be a book for that trip too eventually. Should be fun.

My knee continues to improve; last week I started walking down stairs with both legs. Yay! And I felt good enough to make a long road trip with Scott to visit his family in Iowa. He hadn't seen them since before my operation and we wanted to do a road trip with our *new* car, so it was time. That went well, so now we're planning a much longer road trip to New Orleans and Corflu (in College Station, TX) in March. Trip report in April probably.

And here's another offering from my archives. This one is actually Chapter 3 from my *TAFForensic Report*. It was originally presented in 2000, as my Guest-of-Honor speech at ReinConation II.

TAFForensic Report, Chapter 3 *From the Vault*

Last weekend at MagiCon, I met DUFF winner Roger Weddall, who suggested that I run for DUFF next year. If you have not yet met Roger, let me tell you that he is perhaps the most able and personable fan fund winner this continent has ever seen. He is not shy. He thinks fundraising is easy. And let me

tell you that I have known fan fundraising and it is *not* easy. Publishing *J.G. TAFF* and administering the auction and the elections after my TAFF trip in 1987 gobbled up a huge amount of time. They give you the trip first for a good reason. You've already enjoyed the reward; they count on a guilt-ridden sense of responsibility to get the work done. I blinked and gasped when Roger said that raising money was easy. And I believed him. How did you get so much time off for this trip. I asked him. "Oh, I didn't," he smiled. "I quit. I'll get another job when I get back. I've only done one interview in my life, but people just sort of give me jobs," he said, and flashed that smile again. I believed him. So, when he suggested I run for DUFF, I figured that I'd better bring out the big guns right away. Distract this guy, I thought.

"I think people would prefer that I finish my TAFF trip report first," I said.

"Right," Roger agreed. And then I steered him toward another subject before he asked me how my trip report was going. After five years, a TAFF winner develops a preternatural skill of predicting the onset of such questions and learns many distracting techniques to redirect conversation. Had Roger persisted, however, I might have offered him my newest excuse.

But let me digress a bit before I share this tale of woe with you...

Without Goldfinger or some other suitably menacing character, James Bond would be deadly dull. One can only imagine the diary of such a handicapped 007...

"Monday. World is still peaceful. Miss Money Penny asked me whether there wasn't someplace else I could hang out, other than her office. Played with my new combination fountain pen/laser stick in the pub and nicked my big toe. Maybe a lunatic will threaten world peace tomorrow. I hope so."

...Not the stuff of movies....

...Or of TAFF reports, I worry. One of the tragic things about writing a TAFF report is that there are seldom any bad guys involved. The fan fund writer needs to grab the reader's attention, all the while being handicapped by the fact that most of the characters in their story are really quite wonderful, generous, and delightful people. Seldom do one's hosts possess the sensitivity to realize that in order to gather material for a well-plotted, interesting trip report, the fan fund winner might well appreciate a minor, near fatal attempt upon their life. The sense of impending doom triggered by the growing awareness of a fandom-wide conspiracy aimed at the fan fund winner's betrayal would provide a wonderful framework for a gripping tale of intrigue and suspense. What a TAFF report we might have if the winner just managed to narrowly escape from the home of their so-called "host," by tying together the dozens of T-shirts meant for sale at the TAFF auction and climbing down the rough-hewn stone walls of their terrible prison, fleeing through the night disguised as an Anne McCaffrey fan—a

stuffed dragon on her shoulder—and mailed herself back home in a crate marked as “unsold L. Ron Hubbard books.”

No, generally the fan fund winner is greeted with hugs and—in the case of Brit hosts—many cups of tea and plates of cookies. One is continually offered free glasses of beer, and though the facade of genial pleasure occasionally cracked when I said, “No thanks. Could I have a Diet Coke?” the general impression is that the fan fund winner can do no wrong during their trip. All requests are met with sincere attempts to accommodate. Complaints never materialize on one’s lips: the merest wisp of nascent discomfort is instantly detected and remedies are offered.

Bored? David Langford was rushed to my side to tell a witty story. Nervous? Past TAFF winners Greg Pickersgill, the Nielsen Haydens, and even Walt Willis assured me that they too suffered anxiety attacks during their trips, and that I should just relax and be myself, and everything would be just fine. Hungry? Suddenly a gang of fans materialized and carried me off to their favorite restaurant. Beneath the magical view of a castle that seemed to float in the night air, Edinburgh fans I had never met offered us a choice of Italian or Tex Mex. Restless? Parties were thrown. Barge tours arranged. Chuck Harris drove us through the countryside at breakneck speed—which didn’t seem all that fast to him, of course, since he can’t hear the tires shriek or the wind whistle through the vents. He showed off his country’s beautiful castles with their delightful little torture chambers. He packed us back into his car and zoomed off to the canal museum where we learned about an early 19th century fandom that flourished on barges. Tired? Everywhere we traveled, fans opened their homes and spare rooms to us. The Pickersgills gave their only spare bedroom to Scott and me, allowing fannish luminaries like Mike Glicksohn and the Nielsen Haydens to sleep on sofas and floors. At Walt and Madeleine’s house, we were given the grandest room of the house, a third floor bedroom with a giant feather bed. Comfy chairs sat in front of a window which looked out over the wild and beautiful North Channel; a heater faced the bed in a little fireplace nook, and a bound copy of *Warhoon* 28, the Willis issue, sat on the bedside table.

During the whole of my trip to Britain in 1987, I was not shot at even once, not in Brighton, not in London, in York, in Edinburgh, in Reading ... not even in Belfast! There were no kidnapping attempts. No mysterious contacts in dark alleyways. Nothing like that. Not only were there no bad guys offering themselves as useful plot devices, there weren’t even any extraordinary natural disasters. Signs in London constantly me with hints that the city might someday be drowned by a terrible flood, but no such luck. We saw a part of a BBC documentary about the special precautionary floodgates being installed on the Thames which the announcer pointed out with a properly foreshadowing tone of voice might not be completed on time. But nothing ever came of that. It never even rained hard during our time in London.

So you can see what a hard time I’ve been having trying to complete my TAFF report. My kind of fannish writing, after all, falls most usually into the category of “Exaggerated Debacle.” I write most comfortably about Barbie Dolls melting inside flaming Lincoln Log buildings, hit-and-run quiche accidents, nude graduations. A wonderful trip in which everyone is extremely nice to me and I have a great time does not provide the sort of grist I look for in a good story. You know? In a fit of ambition, I actually wrote the first chapter before Scott and I left the US and published it in *Whimsey* #6. The portents for a disaster-plagued plotline were too ominous to ignore. Naively, I trusted that real life would respect the law of literary foreshadowing, and that the conflagration that consumed our travel agent’s office and was featured in that first chapter would be echoed by similar catastrophes.

You can understand why I had such high hopes for this TAFF trip after that. Things continued to look good ... or bad ... or whatever. The week before our plane was scheduled to take us to Heathrow Airport in London, England, there was a terrible storm in the Midwest, with tornadoes and enormous water damage. The airport from which we would leave—O’Hare, in Chicago—closed down for two days. A harrowing possibility occurred to us: we might have to hitchhike to New York City, possibly throwing ourselves up into the open train cars like common hobos, sharing grub out of cans, disguising our middle-class attire with smears of mud, and singing radical labor songs with the railroad proletariat. No doubt some other incredible disaster would have closed down both New York airports and we would have to catch a steamer bound for Liverpool. Boy, what a great “How-We-Got-There” story I’d have to tell for the first part of my trip report!

But then, the next week, the skies cleared up. Our plane took off without incident, and for the next three weeks, everything went quite smoothly. Minor disasters befell those around us and I occasionally envied them for the material they were no doubt accumulating for hilariously funny trip reports, filled with suspenseful missing-the-plane anecdotes, lost passport and luggage stories, etc. I briefly considered outright lying and began to consider which of our overly-wonderful hosts I might convert into a demonic character for my TAFF report, but I had to give up that idea because Scott and I would very much like to return to Britain for another visit. Ah well.

Nevertheless, I’ve been listening to and transcribing the tapes I made while I traveled through England, Scotland, and Ireland back in 1987. Chapter two was just published in the latest *Whimsey* #7, out in time for MagiCon and ReinConation, after a five-year hiatus. I would like to think of the preceding as a sort of prologue, an unnumbered chapter of my TAFF trip report, so to speak. Certainly, I am hoping that having read this newest TAFF chapter to you, that you will resist the temptation to harangue me in traditional fannish style about the progress of my TAFF trip report.

—Jeanne & Scott
February 2020