

Madison foursquare



Another Photoshop doodle. Original photo by Dan Gomoll

Comments

Covers

[SC] Thank you, **J.J.** and **Tom**, for the lovely, seasonal covers. A nice cheery change of mood from the brutally cold weather last month. Good of you to mention the dyslexia angle as I, one of the world's worst proof-readers, failed to initially notice. Jeanne and I had a low-key Valentine's Day. We did not even go out to get cards for each other in this plague year, but we did splurge on some premium chocolate from CocoVaa.

Greg Rihn

[SC] Thanks for the medical news updates. Very exciting developments indeed!

We have also been watching *Miss Scarlet and the Duke*. I'm a bit underwhelmed by it, but I actually like the fact that the two main characters are rather unlikeable. It gives the series a bit of an edge. For me the whole enterprise would be too saccharine without it. We finished the ten episode mini-series *Your Honor*

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

Scott@unionstreetdesign.com

Jeanne@unionstreetdesign.com

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with Bryan Cranston which was certainly watchable, but stretched credibility to nearly the breaking point. Cranston plays an honest, progressive, New Orleans judge, a good man, who takes a turn to the dark side in order to protect his son. Things go downhill quickly. The story ended as well as it could have, I think, but I'm distressed that there is fan demand for another season. If it happens, I doubt I will want to see it. As I write this in early March, Jeanne and I have stumbled into watching *Broadchurch*, which has us both mesmerized.

I agree with you that the animal in your picture is probably not a coyote. I vote for lost or feral husky dog or a cross.

[JG] I've also seen articles about medical breakthroughs catalyzed by mRNA research. It's really very exciting. It reminds me of how other scientific advances followed other seemingly unconnected work. The space program and AIDS research both led to so many advances.

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] So sorry to read about your back problems and I'm hopeful for a swift and complete recovery. I often find myself finishing the apa these days and feeling very fortunate that I only suffer the ordinary aches and pains common among my fellow citizens of LeGuin's Geriatria. That is unless I behave like a reckless child on my bike and break my collar bone again. I will miss your presence in these pages for even a short while, so I hope it doesn't come to that.

Wonderful poem. It makes me shiver, and not from cold.

[JG] Damn, I'm so sorry that you are dealing with so much pain! Take care, take it easy. We will welcome you back when you can return to the typewriter and sketchbook!

Marilyn Holt

[SC] Doesn't Jill Biden rock? I was reading in the Washington Post about her new habit of going to a meeting somewhere in town and making a special effort on the way to drop in to small businesses (particularly ones run by people of color) to make an appearance, buy stuff and generally make a scene. The business owners end up gushing their appreciation for the publicity and attention. She is classy, thoughtful and strategic.

Thanks for your response about the duck eggs. This year, I will keep an eye out for sign of them at Farmers Market.

Regarding your comment to **Greg**, I have plenty of bile for Lindsey Graham and Mitch McConnell, but here in Wisconsin we are all pretty obsessed with our own Sen. Ron Johnson who is fast becoming one of the most hated members of the Senate (next to Ted Cruz) and arguably the stupidest. The movement to find his replacement for 2022 is already underway.

Carrie Root

[SC] Coincidentally with the arrival of the apa and your zine, I was just reading about Recompose and the successful effort to get composting human bodies legalized in Washington State. I think it's absolutely the best idea for the disposal of bodies I have ever heard of and I think I'm ready to sign up, too. I never could imagine being laid out in a coffin and then sealed into a vault in the ground. It gets my claustrophobia worked up. Yes, I know I won't care because I'll be dead, but what good is it if it bothers me while I'm still walking around? I have never been too keen on cremation, either, but it's better than being sealed in a box in the earth. There is natural burial without a coffin. That puts me uncomfortably in mind of being buried alive, but probably better than the other two. Being transformed into compost and distributed like manure from a spreader sounds like the ticket. There is virtually no chance the hidebound Republican dinosaurs in our state legislature will ever approve something as radical and sensible as composting people, so I'd have to look into getting myself shipped out to your state. As for a memorial, I don't care. I'm not famous and I'm not leaving behind kids or grandkids, so who's going to look for me? My passing will be in the public record somewhere should anyone ever care to know what became of me.

Regarding your comment to Jeanne about missing the accessibility of a small city, I hear you. I have always lived in small towns and small cities (the largest by far being the Madison Metro area) and it always impresses me when we travel how different it must be to live a truly large city. I love visiting cities like New York, London and Chicago, but I have long lost any desire to live there, unless I became very rich. A while ago a local magazine columnist was writing about his friends who came to visit Madison from larger cities. He wrote that they would ask him questions like, how long does it take to get from the airport to downtown Madison? He'd respond, oh about 20 minutes. How about from downtown to the Middleton on the far west side? Reply, about 20 minutes. UW Campus to East Town Mall (far east side)? 20 minutes. Etc. It's easy to get spoiled. Back before the plague when Jeanne and I used to do an almost weekly movie night out on Tuesdays, I could expect to drive from our house on the east side of town to our preferred movie theater on the far west side in 40 minutes and have plenty of time to park, walk into the theater, print out our pre-purchased tickets, use the restroom, get popcorn and a drink, find our seats and be in time for the Chevy pickup truck commercial (Jeanne's favorite) that heralded the start of the movie trailers we hated to miss.

[JG] OMG, the Chevy pickup truck commercial. I'd almost forgotten it! I used to resist taking our seats in the theater till the last minute; I tried to hang out in the lobby for as long as possible (after all, we had reserved seats), but Scott would get nervous if it got too close to the official start time of the movie. So, inevitably, just as we sat down, that damn commercial (with actors claiming to be plain old real people spouting inane praise for the truck) would begin. I am hoping that a new PR team will have come up with something less irritating when we finally return to movie theaters.

Hmm, I like the Recompose option too. Maybe Scott and I should do a little investigating to see if there is anyplace nearby that offers something similar. I'd been assuming I would leave instructions for my body to be cremated, but I like the Recompose idea.

My sister Julie's body was cremated. We scattered most of her cremains in an Austin dog park (which was legal according to an Austin website devoted to what was apparently a frequently asked question), near a statue of Stevie Ray Vaughn. My brothers and I took small bottles of Julie home with us. I sent a couple teaspoons of her cremains to an artist who



Kilauea (left) and Julie (right)

incorporates ashes into glass-blown art. My brother Dan and I each had one of these made. Mine sits on a cabinet next to another glass blown piece that incorporates material from the Hawaiian volcano, Kilauea.

Of course Andy wants a fire-belching pyramid. Why am I not surprised?

On days that my knee is problematic (when it gives way unexpectedly), I've been wearing a knee brace, and that's helped quite a lot. Scott's found them useful too.

I believe that Shelly and I were both 9 years old when I typed that letter to her. My family had just moved to the suburbs outside of Milwaukee where my dad built a ranch house for us. I tried for a while to stay in touch with Shelly, who had lived directly across the alley from our old house, in which my family rented the first-floor flat. She and I had many adventures together, a couple of which I may have written up. Their titles might be:

"Kidnapped by Outer-Space Pirates and Forced to Eat Nails!"

"On a Dare, Shelly Eats a Whole Stick of Butter!"

"The Day We Bought Everything in the World That We Wanted!!"

Sadly, Shelly and I have long since lost touch with one another.

Re Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*: maybe not so fantastic. One of the proposals being made by Biden's environmental team is an international banking program (creating currency based on environmentally healthy actions) that closely resembles the one in *Ministry*.

Scott and I tend to favor binge-like behavior. We may not watch a huge number of episodes in one sitting, but we have gotten to like watching the whole season of a show on successive days, rather than waiting from week-to-week for the next episode. So, even when a show premieres in the traditional plodding, weekly

manner, we sometimes just let episodes accumulate until we are ready to watch them over the course of a shorter period of time.

Andy Hooper

[SC] Your lavish biography of Justus Erich Bollman and his adventures was a pleasure to read. Please continue with the stories of more of these interesting characters.

Dr. Sarcofiguay may be my favorite Horror Host so far. What a cool cat, and a professional comedian to boot.

This was the first time I have read an article by the great Jon Singer, who I have met several times but mostly know by reputation. I can easily visualize him sitting at the bar bantering with, and quizzing, the chefs into recognizing his sincere interest and depth of understanding and then being charmed by him. The sidebar glossary was helpful, thank you.

[JG] I loved the story of Justus Erich Bollman, especially the chapter involving his role around the Louisiana Purchase. As often happens when I read some of your detailed accounts of historical characters, I am struck at how naively I've accepted as complete, what were really very cursory summaries taught in high school history classes. I knew, of course, that Jefferson accepted France's offer to sell that immense tract of land. I don't think I thought much more about it except for how the states carved out of that expanse became important players in the US conflict over slavery and civil war. But it makes perfect sense that the almost inconceivable value of the newly acquired land would attract all sorts of mad financial and political maneuvering. I recall reading that Aaron Burr was accused of treason, but never pursued the story behind it. Fascinating. Thank you Andy.

Compared to the four other apazines to which I've contributed (*A Women's Apa*, *Cascade Regional Apa*, *Intercourse*, and *Anzapa*)—not a large number at all, and certainly not typical—*Turbo* actually contains the smallest percentage of mailing comments of all of them. I imprinted on those mc-heavy apazines, I suppose, and tend to favor writing mailing comments over essay-writing. In my perzine, *Whimsey*, I strived to weave letters-of-comment among my essays to approximate a printed conversation between me and my readers. I'm still in it for the conversation.

Actually, none of our renovations were done, and are not being done now, because they were necessities-at-the-moment. We re-roofed the house and we



Bacon-and-Egg Fried Rice



Slowcooker Chicken Picata



Lemon Tart with Raspberry Sauce

replaced our furnace and water heater because we knew that we'd need those jobs done soon, but preferred to get them done when it was most convenient and affordable. Same for re-wiring the house to bring the electrical service up to code, or window replacements, or insulation of the walls and attic to lower our heating and cooling bills. We were under the gun to get *none* of this work done because of leaks or breakdowns. They were simply on the list (begun in 1989) and we got to them when we could afford them. Certainly, neither of the most recent projects—the kitchen and bathroom—absolutely needed to be done. I would have hated it, though, if we'd completed some of those renovations just before moving out of the house, before we'd gotten the chance to enjoy the improvements ourselves. And I do enjoy the kitchen tremendously.

You mentioned fond memories of Plazaburgers in your comment to **JJ** and **Tom**. The Plaza almost went out of business, another victim to the pandemic. But so far they've been holding on with the help of a Go-Fund-Me campaign.

Thanks for sharing Jon Singer's wonderful piece on sushi. I actually received my introduction to sushi from Jon himself, during a WorldCon—either Noreascon Two in Boston, 1980, or Chicon IV in Chicago, 1982. Can't remember which. Jon led a group of us, that grew in number as we made our way through the hotel lobby, to a restaurant where they shoved 6 tables together to accommodate all of us. I had already learned to follow Jon anywhere when he was recommending a restaurant, so I hadn't bothered to ask what kind of food we would be eating. But I'd never tried sushi, so I was a little nervous to find out that the menu choices were sushi...or sushi (and nigiri and sashimi and miso soup, etc.) Oh well, I thought: time to try the raw fish thing. Jon conducted a very entertaining and informative seminar on sushi during the meal. I'm sure

he would have preferred to sit at the bar, but the rest of us were in dire need of direction. I surprised myself in discovering that I liked all the choices that made their way around the table to my plate, and was even more surprised to find out that I was actually one of the more adventurous diners. Jon took special care to send the weirdest items down to me and watched to see my reaction. Thanks Andy. I wonder how many other fans have enjoyed food adventures over the years with Jon?

J.J. Brutsman & Tom Havighurst

[SC] I enjoyed your description of the virtual conventions you attended, J.J. It sounded more fun than I had envisioned an online con would be. When you tuned in to a panel, did you only see the panelists on your screen, or did everyone attending the panel also appear (which is how I'd assume Zoom would work)?

Congratulations on the gin discoveries. January was the first time I had ever heard of taking a "dry January." Apparently, it's common for some folks to party over the Holidays, but stop drinking for the month of January to re-set their alcohol consumption habits for the new year. I decided that was a good idea, but I didn't know about it until after the new year, so I chose to do a "dry February." I felt that over our Covid year, I was starting to get into a rut. Maybe I was too much into the habit of having 2–3 beers five nights a week. Time to re-set (which I have never done before). It's been helpful. After a month off and starting into March as I write this, I haven't missed the booze at all. I have been spending a little time thinking about what alcohol consumption will be for me going forward. I don't feel in a rush to work things out in detail, but I already know it will mean significantly less quantity



Pizza Bianco



Chicken Pot Pie



Slowcooker Spinach-Artichoke
Chicken Stew

and a lot better quality.

The photo theme of this issue of *Madison Foursquare* is Cooking Adventures, Jeanne made a divine (VERY lemony) lemon tart with raspberry sauce. We usually try to have fresh fish once a week. We tried monkfish a couple weeks ago. The fish guy called it, “The tastiest monster in the sea.” He was right about that. Consulting Google for a picture of a monkfish reveals one butt-ugly monstrosity, but the meat is firm and mild. Jeanne found a recipe (Sautéed Monkfish with Leeks and Shitakes) that turned into one of the best fish meals I have ever had. The next week we tried another different seafood recipe—Caribbean-Inspired Seafood Stew, with cod and shrimp and hot peppers. Yum! Other menu items are pictured above. [Jeanne says: Recipes available on request.]

Here’s something weird. I have been slowly replacing my ceramic coffee mugs with pottery ones from a variety of local potters. The other day I poured coffee into one of the new pottery mugs (which I’d used a few times before) only to notice it was leaking slowly out the bottom. There did not seem to be an obvious hole, it must have been a hairline crack. Jeanne pointed out that we liked the mugs because they were so light, but that also meant the bottoms were not very thick. Online she found a description of a “fix” for this problem. We were advised to put the mug into a sauce pan, cover it with milk and bring gently to a boil. Once boiling, turn down to simmer for an hour. Let cool before extracting the mug. Clean up the mug but leave it sit for a day or two to “cure.” It worked. The crack sealed perfectly with milk. Ever hear of this? Apparently, it will work on pretty substantial cracks in ceramics.

[JG] I’m so glad the milk repair method worked! For a moment I envisioned a jokester posting a ridiculous repair instruction on-line, and laughing to their friends “I wonder if there is anyone out there gullible enough

to try this?!” But now I am expecting several of you to give us a geeky scientific explanation for why the method does in fact work.

Thanks for the report of Zoomed conventions. I haven’t tried one of those yet. The few times I “attended” a big party, I felt pretty overwhelmed by the number of people on one screen waiting to talk, even with breakout rooms. I find that the more people I know, the more I enjoy Zoomed parties, but I definitely have a low tolerance for too much time on a Zoom. I meet once a month with three women artists who used to work at the DNR with me. We used to meet for tea and pastries once a month at a local restaurant, but now we Zoom. (Ladies who brunch has turned into Ladies who Zoom.) I enjoy that quite a bit; 4 is a workable number for me.

I misunderstood your first mention of Wim Hof in a comment to **Walter**. I thought at first that it was your affectionate nickname for Bill Hoffman.

I remember “Russian Tea”!...with instant tea, tang, lemonade powder mix, sugar, cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg! I think a friend made it for me in college, and I made it for myself a few times after that. I’m unlikely to make it again; it was really too sweet even for me, a person with a known sweet tooth. Scott, you would not like it. Do they even sell Tang anymore?

We will have left-over chicken after tonight so I’m going to try your chicken and ham pot pie recipe next week. Thanks again for that recipe, JJ.

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] Good news for you on the vaccine and urology fronts. These pandemic days are a difficult time for recovering patients who need treatment or follow up appointments. We are closing in on better days at least.

[JG] You and Darlene got your GHC Moderna vaccine the day after I did. I was very impressed by the process



Sautéed Monkfish with Leeks and Shiitakes



Caribbean-Inspired Seafood Stew. Not my photo, which I forgot to take. But a good likeness.

and on-line support. No side-effects for me with this first jab. The second jab was different: I received my second vaccine injection Tuesday March 16 and felt no side-effects that day, not even soreness around the injection site. The next day was different. I woke up Wednesday a couple hours later than I usually get up, did some exercises and showered and then felt totally exhausted. Exhausted like it was 3 am and there were only a couple people talking incoherently in a room party, and it was time to retire to my hotel room before I forgot where it was. So I slept on and off all day Wednesday, and slept well Wednesday night. All better now and much less worried. Now, Scott and I are sending "hurry up" vibes to GHC and hoping Scott gets scheduled very soon.

I am so glad to hear that your PSA counts are so low!

Kim & Kathi Nash

[SC] I sympathize with you, Kathi, about exercise. I was going to the YMCA 5 days a week but since the plague, that ended. I biked and walked a lot last summer and worked on my elliptical machine 3 days a week after it got cold and snowy, but recently the machine showed signs of needing repair so I'm walking again until I can resume biking, hopefully this month. My plan is to possibly not return to the Y. It's far enough away that I need to drive there most days. I'm going to check out the gym at the Goodman Center which is just a couple blocks away from our house, close enough to walk to in any weather. But we have to get back to something more like normal first.

[JG] We are also watching *For All Mankind* (Apple+) and like it a lot. I was surprised at how much time had passed between seasons one and two. I predict that there will be a settlement on Mars established in Season three. Good characters and what appears to me to be good science too.

I am soooo looking forward to returning to the YMCA pool. I expect that I will be able to start swimming laps again in early April and am hopeful that it won't take too long to be able to swim a mile again.

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] Staying politically active is great advice. We plan to vote in the spring election as always not only for Jill Udderly for State Superintendent of Public Instruction, but we are losing our beloved alderman, Marsha Rummel. We will be voting for her replacement. Marsha has been the best alderman we've ever had, so it's a sad time.

We have streamed a couple of movies lately, the one I'd recommend is *One Night in Miami* about a fictional meeting with Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Sam Cooke and Jim Brown on the night Ali (then Cassius Clay) defeated Sonny Liston for the heavyweight title. It was a fascinating discussion of their roles in the Civil Rights Movement and the cultural upheaval of the 1960s. It was adapted from a play and since it's mostly set in one hotel room and involves a long conversation, it feels a little stagy, but absorbing. I thought the performances were strong, especially Leslie Odom Jr. because he got a chance to sing as Sam Cooke.

[JG] After watching the three seasons of the excellent Netflix production, *Broadchurch* (with David Tennant and Olivia Colman who play detectives working a murder case whose repercussions continue through all three seasons of the show), we started watching another murder-mystery type series streaming on Amazon Prime: *How to Get Away with Murder* (with Viola Davis). The two shows couldn't be more unlike one another. The murder in *Broadchurch* is solved in season one and adjudicated in season two; but family,

friends, and townspeople continue to deal with trauma in season three. A single tragic event is not easily disposed of with an investigation and court case and those processes take many, many months. But there is a murder every week, plus a bonus ark-murder, in *How to Get Away with Murder*. Ludicrously, the defense lawyer, her two employees and a group of student interns complete both investigation and criminal court phases for each of these once-a-week murders in unbelievably short order, cleaning up loose ends so they are ready for a new case the next week. We are supposed to believe that these cases are able to proceed through the juried courtroom stage in a matter of days. The student interns have been chosen from a class taught by the main character, a criminal defense lawyer, and that class is a ONE-SEMESTER class. It's been entertaining, nonetheless, but I think it's unlikely that we will watch past the first season. In fact we are talking about reading the Wikipedia plot summary to find out what happens so we can move on sooner. We recommend *Broadchurch*.

Joe Leslie Adams

[SC] You mentioned already making plans to go to Duluth post-vaccination. Joe Biden's recent announcement that he expects to have enough vaccine available by the end of May to vaccinate all the eligible adults in the U.S. has prompted me, for the first time, to really start thinking about what we might do in a significantly Covid-reduced summer after both of us have gotten the shot. We expect to have the bathroom project done by then and, of course, we will both be anxious to visit family face-to-face as soon as possible. A season at APT looks really probable, too. Travel? I'm thinking a Door County trip is becoming likely this year, but we should take the time to plan a bigger trip for 2022. The possibilities seem almost endless compared to what has been possible for the last year.

[JG] The on-line painting course sounds fun. I was remembering some in-person courses I took while I was working at the DNR. The courses all focused on software-specific computer graphic skills and were held in Peoria IL, by DGEF—Dynamic Graphic Educational Foundation. They were great classes, very intensive/immersive 4-5 days in length, hands-on training by professional working artists (not professional teachers), and all us students worked professionally as graphic designers. It was exhilarating and expensive, but DNR paid the tuition. I was very disappointed when

DGEF folded, but now I wonder if there might not be some similar courses offered on-line. The classes would translate well to an on-line format. I really enjoyed those classes. I think they fell into my "sweet spot" in terms of my learning preferences. Hmmm...

Jim and Ruth Nichols

[SC] Regarding "pods", Jeanne and I basically constitute a pod. We live together without masks. I suppose if we had a kid living at home, or a friend who lived with us, we would include them into our pod. It seems to me, the crucial thing for a pod to work is to have the trust in the other people that they will take necessary precautions (mask up, social distance, avoid people especially in buildings, etc.) when, inevitably, someone in the pod has to venture out to the grocery store, the post office, the hardware store, to walk the dog or wherever. That's where the vulnerability exists. Everyone has to be taking serious precautions all the time and everyone in the pod has to trust each other for it to be safe.

Congratulations on the new Honda. I expect you will not have to suffer the technology adjustment we had to go through when we had to shift from 1999 car tech to 2019 car tech right away. I'm still getting used to it.

Jim, retirement is nice, yes? I suppose if I had loved my work, I'd have had a more difficult time retiring from it. As it was, I was ready to leave since I did not feel very well treated by the State of Wisconsin, and not as highly valued by D.O.T. as I thought I should have been. I sometimes find myself musing about "roads not taken" but usually not for long as I feel I did okay overall.

It seems perverse that you are not considered "high-risk" for the Covid vaccine. Fortunately the wait for the rest of us should not be too much longer. Quite a story about your Dad and his wife down in Texas with the cold-weather crisis. These sorts of incidents will become more common across the country with climate change. I often wonder what disasters we might be in line for here in Wisconsin.

[JG] Keep laughing, Ruth. I loved your account of how you broke out of depression.

Jim, I STILL have dreams of going in to work downtown at the DNR building (GEF-2) and it's been 18 years since I left. The dreams are very similar to the college nightmares in which I've forgotten where my class meets or I haven't done any of the reading for a

class and there's a test scheduled. The work dreams involve some scrambling to figure out what work I am supposed to be doing, or where my desk has been moved to. I do not feel guilty when I wake up though. May you soon get over the guilt stage!

It seems absolutely bonkers that you were not included in the first tier of folks eligible to get the vaccine. Bizarre.

Hope Kiefer & Karl Hailman

[SC] Thanks for the tour of Madison (mostly west-side) parks for ice skating, a sport I wish I had gotten into twenty years ago. I think I'm a little past learning to skate at my age, but you make it sound like a truly fun winter exercise. Jeanne and I often drive by Tenney Park to see large numbers people out on the lovely lagoon, especially after the February cold snap really froze things. If you don't look too close at their

clothes, you can almost imagine a scene from the 1890's. You did not mention skating on Lake Monona at all. I've seen areas on Monona cleared of snow for ice skating, is it too windy or is the ice too rough? Also, why figure skates and not hockey skates?

I think one of those NiceRinks you mentioned might be over at Olbrich Park, but it's hidden in a corner such that you would never see it from Fair Oaks or Atwood Aves. You could only see it from the bike path, the northwest edge of the botanical garden parking lot or from little Garrison St that borders it. It's almost like it's a little hidden gem just for the neighborhood people.

[JG] Excellent skating rink tour!



And here's the article that Richard West asked me to write for the last issue of *Orcrist*.

From the Vault

I Know What Happened to the Entwives

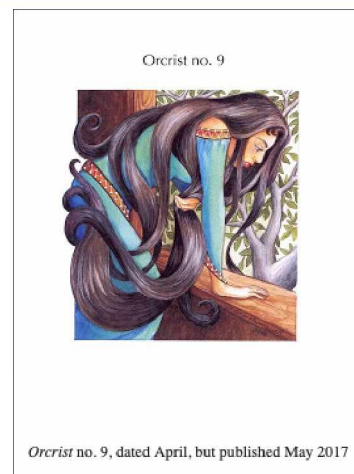
By Jeanne Gomoll, early draft published in *Grayscale 25*, and *Intercourse apa*, April 2002; and *Orcrist #9*, edited by Richard West, 2017.

I know what happened to the Entwives.

Didn't you ever wonder why Tolkien left this rather big mystery hanging and why none of the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy made any attempt to solve it?

I read *The Lord of the Rings* much later than most of my friends did (I was 50 years old); I was determined to read *The Hobbit* first, but had found it so boring that for years I kept putting it aside. My friends assured me that *LotR* was much better; my brother's favorite book was *LotR*; but it wasn't until Peter Jackson's movie came out and I swore I would not see it until I'd read *The Fellowship of the Rings*, that I finally forced my way through *The Hobbit*. And then, of course, I loved *LotR*: I finished the last sentence of the final chapter of the first book of the trilogy just moments before we drove off to the theater to see the movie. "Gandalf isn't really dead is he?" Scott just chuckled wickedly.

So when we got back home, I dove immediately into the second book of the trilogy, *The Two Towers*, in which Merry and Pippen meet the ancient, tree-like Ents who tragically had long ago "lost" their wives. It seemed like a big deal to me, a huge mystery that



Orcrist #9, front cover: "Luthien Tinuviel" -- illustration by Sylvia Hunnewell

would certainly be solved in the course of the story. In a narrative with so few women, it seemed to me to be an even bigger deal than Tolkien no doubt intended: I had been feeling uncomfortable all along, sensing that a great many women were hiding just beyond the spotlight of plot. So I started looking for clues to the location of these famously missing women.

Ents and the Entwives were put upon the earth to protect trees. But long ago, the Entwives abandoned the Ents in order to start a garden east of Fangorn in what became the Brown Lands which Sauron destroyed. No one knows what became of them. When Treebeard went searching for them, he could not find them. The Entwives are described by Treebeard as having "hair parched by the sun to the hue of ripe corn and their cheeks like red apples. Yet their eyes were still the eyes of our own people," yet little else

is known of their appearance. Like the males they looked after the growing things of earth, but Entwives preferred smaller plant life such as: small trees, grasses, fruit trees, flowers, and vegetables, while males tended the larger trees.

Tolkien may have meant the Entwives' fate to remain a mystery, but I didn't know that when I began reading *The Two Towers*. And by the time Treebeard and the other Ents had helped Merry and Pippin destroy Isengard, I was convinced I'd figured it out. At the end of *The Return of the King*, I fully expected that Gandalf would pause in Fangorn and would make the big reveal. When that didn't happen, I was absolutely stunned. Somehow, I thought I'd been reading a story that included a central mystery, but in fact I had stitched this imaginary subplot together in my imagination.

Nevertheless, I've come to treasure my solution and believe it even if Tolkien did not endorse it. Tolkien said: "I think that in fact the Entwives had disappeared for good, being destroyed with their gardens in the War of the Last Alliance (Second Age 3429–3441) when Sauron pursued a scorched earth policy and burned their land against the advance of the Allies down the Anduin...."

But this was MY reasoning as I tried to work out a solution to the mystery of the Entwives.

- 1) When the Entwives left Fangorn, they stopped drinking the miraculous water that made giants of the Ents and in the small amount of time they spent in the forest, even spurred Merry and Pippin to grow taller. So we can assume that the Entwives gradually grew shorter and shorter the more time they spent away from Fangorn.
- 2) Entwives preferred small plant life such as small trees, grasses, fruit trees, flowers, and vegetables, while males tended the larger trees. When Merry and Pippin told Treebeard about the Shire's gardens and gentle society, Treebeard recognized that the Shire would have felt very congenial to the Entwives and even asks whether there were any Ents living in the Shire, but when asked, could not recall what the Entwives looked like. Hobbits are experts in moving soundlessly and hiding well.
- 3) Ents are weirdly unfamiliar with the existence of the Hobbits. The Ents are the oldest creatures in Middle Earth and they have long, detailed memories. But after meeting Merry and Pippin, they find it necessary to add a verse onto their list of Middle Earth creatures to include Hobbits. In fact nearly *everyone* in Middle Earth seems unfamiliar with the Hobbits, although the Rangers have maintained a vigilant guard over the Shire.

- 4) Wizards have been known to create and/or protect races of people in Middle Earth. At least two Middle Earth races have been created by wizards, both sort of mutant variants of existing species—Orcs (from elves) and trolls (from dwarfs). Why not one more?

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

As the trilogy drew to a close, I anticipated a happy reunion in which Gandalf would magnanimously reveal the good news to the Ents and the Hobbits, and the long-separated relatives could embrace one another and....

Oh well. It's a story that existed only in my imagination, but it hangs in my memory of the story right alongside Tolkien's.

