

Madison foursquare



Cover

[SC] Nice turkey photos, **Jim**. Do you suppose they just wanted to come in, pull up a chair, have some tea and sit a spell?

[JG] We've seen so many large, plump turkeys around this year. It makes me wonder if people have found a way to hunt them in the middle of the city and are serving them for dinner.

Lisa Freitag

[SC] My reaction to your article on the robbery at the store is of a deep sadness. You are right, of course. How can we expect a satisfactory outcome from this sad and frightening incident? When we are in the moment when we are personally confronting threats of violence or death, the world shrinks very

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small and we're forced to focus on personal survival. We shouldn't have to be put in this position, but this is the America we live in. When we widen the view to encompass all that must have contributed to these kids acting out in this way, it's hard to see what action our community is likely to take, at this late date, that could lead to a positive outcome for them. We're left with a lot of questions. What could be the practical motive for a 17 year old to commit armed robbery of a bookstore for \$110? Even a successful spree of stick ups of small businesses is not likely to net enough to justify the risk of a prison stretch as an adult for armed robbery. Were they desperate for funds to feed a drug habit or is this a gang-related thing or is it something else?

[JG] Why didn't the police return the money that was stolen from Dreamhaven? Surely the thieves hadn't had a chance to spend it yet. Or is that something that happens much later after the court case is closed? I'm so sorry you and Greg and other Dreamhaven staff have had to deal with the robberies. It sounds like you feel that it is unsustainable to continue operating a store while being afraid that the next person who walks in might be another thief or someone violent. Do you?

My current solitaire title is "Tableau Titan II." I've been playing more multi-player games of Solitaire recently—all of which are winnable (and so rack up the points quickly), but only count as wins if you beat another person playing at the same time. I play solitaire only in the evening while I listen to news shows (Chris Hayes and Rachel Maddow), glancing up at the TV screen occasionally when I need to see a face or a thing. I don't quite understand how it works in my mind, but playing the game helps me to concentrate on the information, almost as if solitaire-playing keeps a part of my mind busy that would otherwise distract me from focusing on the news.

Damn! Your comment to **Elizabeth** about time-&-space-shifting squirrels was a wild idea! What if aliens, many aliens, are here already and they've disguised themselves as wildlife familiar to human beings? What

are those turkeys doing? The incursion of wild animals into urban areas takes on weird implications. Writing a novel about this idea would be quite a world-building exercise.

Jae Leslie Adams

[SC] Regarding your comment to **Kim** and **Kathi**, why are you not reading fiction anymore?

[JG] I am so sympathetic to you and Jon for what you went through with Al's death and cleaning up his house afterward. I've done something like that twice now, for my parents and my sister Julie. It was so sad because I knew I was making fast (hasty? pragmatic? cruel?) choices about objects that represented another person's lifetime. They would probably have made entirely different decisions than I made and no doubt could have told me things about those objects that might have caused me to decide differently. But I just kept plowing forward. Please give Jon my condolences. And yes, let's all take care of our livers.

I laughed that you were astonished to learn that I continue working on projects once started. Scott is not surprised. Fanatically finishing things has sometimes felt like a curse (but not enough of a curse to try to shed. I am aware of the benefits). Staying up late, losing sleep, because I want to finish. Avoiding friends and parties because I need to finish. Making Scott and I late because "I need a few more minutes. I'll just finish this part." Missing chunks of life because I am only vaguely aware of what's going on around me. Pushing Scott beyond his patience to finish some joint project, that he would have been quite willing to work on over a series of days or weeks.

I suggested that Scott write a little bit about what it's like to be around me when I'm in the downhill stages of an obsessive project like this book, when I'm grabbing every minute to work on the thing. I wake up and scribble notes on a pad of paper at my bedside, and then walk through the kitchen directly to my office (I'll eat breakfast later) to flesh out the idea that occurred to me during the night. I work on the book for three or four hours during the day. And then, after dinner when Scott goes to the kitchen to clean up, I zoom into my office for a little more time at my keyboard. I'm sort of afraid that I look even crazier than I think I do. Scott handed the apa over to me after he'd finished writing comments and I told him about something I'd been thinking of for the book. "I think I'll write about that in the apa." That might have been the only way to tear myself away from the book and shift over to work on this apa.

Please insert your time travel story here.

Elizabeth Matson

[SC] Before you visit Room of One's Own, check their hours. They have already cut back to noon to 6 pm. They open at 11 am only on weekends.

In your comment to **Lisa**, you wrote about the knotty issue surrounding authors (or artists in general) whose work you enjoyed only to find out they have done or said something abhorrent. I agree completely with your view of this issue, "too many shades of grey" is a good way of putting it. Over the years, I have encountered work I loved by artists I would never want to meet in person or have a beer with. That doesn't mean I stop loving the work.

[JG] I absolutely agree with you that a reader or viewer's interpretation, is valuable in itself, something made after the original author or artist finishes their work. I like to think of art as something that is constantly being created. Some art ends up framed on a wall or published in a book, but there is also art created by people who write *about* the painting or the books (the critics, reviewers, and literary scholars), and there is art created by the people who simply gaze or read and make connections to their aesthetics and personal stories. And there is art created by people who look up and contemplate an Aurora Borealis, even if they construct no artifacts based on the epiphany they experienced. I don't think it matters if the art is never shared; the artist and the appreciator can be one in the same person, in my opinion. I think that the making of patterns and connections, the way we make sense of the world, is just another way of making art, and that it happens all the time.

Thank you so much for what you wrote about stories and memory. I would like to quote part of that paragraph at the beginning of the introduction to my book. It fits perfectly with what I am writing there. Would that be OK with you?

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] I hope by now you are fully recovered and in the clear.

I had to laugh at your comment to me about Zeno's bathroom. I think it has more to do with fannishness than college major. In fact, it happened just that way. I (B.A. Business Administration, 1980) did not get Jeanne's Zeno joke, but it seemed all our friends did, that is, all our fannish friends, which is about all our friends these days. To date, I'm the only person so far Jeanne had to explain the joke to.



Union Street Thanksgiving with Gomoll family

I think your “fanciful” take on Thanksgiving in America today is right on the money. I have taken to regarding the holiday narrowly as the day every year we host Jeanne’s family for a big dinner. We mostly use the occasion to eat and drink, catch up, tell stories and play games. I doubt anyone in the family thinks of a wider national or cultural significance for the date. Trying to do that just gets so messy and uncomfortable as you pointed out. Not like Christmas, which is supposed to be about kindness and cheer but has become more about consumption and greed.

[JG] Excellent survey on the weird evolution of the meaning of Thanksgiving. Perhaps one day, when and if humanity manages to figure out how to avoid destroying the environment and/or democracies, we can celebrate a new kind of Thanksgiving. That seems like a long shot right now, but I would be in favor of changing the official focus of the day.

Your comments to **Lisa** about the WoW problems reminded me that I quit using an on-line game because of something the company did in 2014. It was called “Draw Something.” I loved playing it. I made some on-line friends with people who did quirky, interesting drawings and just missed meeting up with an English woman I particularly enjoyed playing with, when I went to WorldCon in London. The Zynga company had just bought it and everyone who had been playing had to accept the new agreement. I quit because I made the mistake of actually reading the agreement and found out that Zynga claimed ownership of all artwork created in their game and claimed the right to publish any and all of it using any existing publishing methods or any method invented in the future. It was a very long, detailed, chunk of legalese, and it disgusted me. Zynga’s demand was like a sketchbook manufacturer claiming ownership of any art drawn on their paper.

I stopped playing “Draw Something.” I also resolved never to read software agreements again.

I loved “Shopping by Woodman’s on an Autumn Evening.” Thank you!

Gregory Rihn

[SC] Thanks for your evocative review of the 1960 movie *Sparticus*, which I have not seen since I was a kid. Back then, of course, the famous Crassus/Antonius scene you described was edited out. I should see the movie again as I think that scene was only restored in recent years. It would also be interesting to experience Dalton Trumbo’s script again in light of what we know about the role it played in bringing him back from the Hollywood blacklist.

[JG] I’ve never seen the ballet version of *Sparticus*, but I have heard the music. In the early 80s, NPR did a pledge-drive special show, “The Most Beautiful Love Themes in Classical Music,” or something like that, and people called in to suggest their favorites. That’s where I first heard the love theme from Katchaturian’s *Sparticus*. I loved it and tried to find a cd containing the music, but I was handicapped by the fact that I’d misunderstood the NPR announcer. When he credited *Sparticus* with the music, I assumed he meant the Kirk Douglas movie. I had seen and enjoyed that movie several times and was surprised I hadn’t noticed the gorgeous music. I finally got that straightened out and bought a cd with Katchaturian’s music.

The leaf on the cover is from a Japanese Maple tree. The (front cover) color is real, not at all computer-enhanced.

Re your comment to **Marilyn** on the issue of royalties for resold books and artwork...I agree with you that it would seem impossible to figure out a way to share resale income with the authors and artists once the books and artwork have been sold. So, maybe what so-called content creators should do is mimic the methods of big corporations who prefer these days not to sell software, movies, music, or books to customers. They have shifted to a rental model to provide content to customers, thus ensuring that they own the artwork in perpetuity and can prevent secondary sales. I’d like to see the authors and artists benefit from a similar system. An author could lease a novel to a publisher for ~five years, at which point the lease agreement could be re-negotiated or ended which is how movie options currently work. Artwork could be leased to museums or corporate entity in the same manner, or a painting could be leased to individuals who understand that

their lease will run out upon their death; the artist or the artist's heirs would recover ownership at that point. Corporations would hate that.

How funny is it that you and I both copied the same cartoon strip for **Steve Johnson!** Great pumpkin! Pumpkins with weird growths like that one always gross me out. But you found the perfect way to make use of one.

So many people in the apa this issue noted that they might be interested in going to a Lost Art Festival in the future. Maybe we could organize an apa field trip to it someday.

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] Since I wrote last month, my surgery has been delayed until December 31 (Happy New Year?) I'm of two minds about this development. Getting it done sooner means starting recovery sooner and less time dreading what's coming. On the other hand, the delay will mean something like a more normal Christmas holiday for us after all, which is nice. Hopefully all will go well and successfully. I have never had major surgery before. Up until my bike accident three years ago, I'd never broken a bone before. I'm finding that old age brings with it lots of new experiences, so far, none of them pleasant. I remember my father warning me about that. Thanks for the well wishes. Knowing you have trod this same road recently and made it through to the other side okay is comforting.

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] Great stories about Brian Deese and Michelle Wu.

We saw *The Amateurs* live at Forward. My principal takeaway from it was that it was okay because it did not leave me angry or annoyed at the end. That's a win these days. I liked the first act, but the long interlude with the playwright lecturing the audience did not work particularly well for me.

Much better was *Fiddler on the Roof* the next night in the main theater at Overture. That was a terrific show. We also saw a local Four Seasons production of *All Is Calm* at the Overture playhouse theater and liked it a lot. It may become a regular Christmas show for a few years, I recommend it.

Our most recent television venture was a lawyer show called *Goliath* with Billy Bob Thornton. We finished the first season which was very implausible

and unsatisfying as a legal drama. Later seasons are supposed to be much better. We will try another season, if it also fails, we'll drop it and move on.

[JG] Since I am writing my comments almost a week after Scott wrote his, I can say that the second season of *Goliath* convinced us to stop watching it. The judge should have thrown lawyer Billy's case out of court in the first season, but unbelievably, Billy won his case, apparently just because juries love him. It was ridiculous. The second season was bad in other ways, but had equally unbelievable plot turns. I got really fed up with all the young, gorgeous, sexy women who kept throwing themselves at broken-down, drunken Billy. I'm pretty sure we won't go back for season three.

I thought *The Amateurs* was a so-so play. As Scott said, we didn't hate it as we did a couple of other Forward Theater's productions last year. But I walked out missing the feeling I often have after a great play in which I've lost myself in the story and characterizations. I want to feel that way again, not just, "well, that wasn't bad."

I do recommend *West Side Story*! Stephen Colbert interviewed Stephen Sondheim before he died and asked him about Spielberg's remake of *West Side Story*. Sondheim said he liked the changes that were made to "update" the story. I assumed from that comment that the 2021 *West Side Story* would be set in a later time period than the 1961 Jerome Robbins version. But no, it's set in the same era, but the setting is enlarged so that the screenwriter (Tony Kushner) could connect the story with what was actually going on at the time in New York, especially the urban renewal project that bulldozed tenements in the San Juan Hill community of Puerto Ricans, Caribbeans, and blacks, in order to make room for a very white Lincoln Square neighborhood.



The story widens to conflict between white Americans and newly-arrived immigrants who whites love to exploit and blame. The music and the voices were wonderful. The biggest change I noticed (and the one I appreciated most) was the stronger emphasis on story and

character development. (That wasn't at all surprising with Kushner writing the screenplay and Spielberg directing—they're both story guys.) There was much more action and conversation between songs than I remember in the 1961 film. And there were a couple interesting changes too—a trans character, for one (replacing a tom-boy from the 1961 movie), and some lyric changes. And Rita Moreno's character (Doc's widow) sings "Somewhere," instead of Maria, and gives it an entirely new meaning—questioning the possibility of change given the power of hate. This new movie also incorporates Spanish and Spanglish without subtitles.

I've heard many people making derisive comments about the unnecessary remake of *West Side Story*. On occasion, I've complained about great movies being remade too. As we walked out of the theater, though, it struck me as a bit strange that people who love live theater sometimes see favorite plays many times, each one a remake of an earlier version. But most people consider film and stage entirely different when it comes to remakes. Theater doesn't even use the word "remake." We might feel we've seen the definitive *Hamlet* with the best cast and best director, but most of us expect to see lots of versions of our favorite stage plays, and in fact it's always exciting to see favorite acting troupes attempt a play you know well. Scott pointed out that many more people see movies than plays, and great versions of movies never actually go away. We can see them anytime we want to. So maybe it's reasonable to want a great version of a movie to stand unchallenged. I totally agree with this sentiment when the remake is a typical Hollywood remake that retains a huge amount of the original movie, only substituting popular young actors and updated special effects for the new version. Bleah.

But, if the remake actually changes the perspective or says something new about the world, filtering the new ideas through a revision of a classic film, to show us something imaginative or experimental or just different, I'm all in for it. I love how the King Arthur story gets retold for each generation, saying something new every time. Scott asked me, what about a movie like *Casablanca*? No one wants to see that movie remade. I don't know, I said. Just as a thought experiment—imagine if part of our country fell to autocracy in the next decade (not a complete impossibility), might not a good director choose to remake a classic, memorable movie like *Casablanca*, to tell the story of rebellion against a new awful reality, piggybacking on back of the familiar, mythic elements of that very famous movie?

Anyway, as you might have picked up from my hints, I thought *West Side Story* was one of the good remakes, well worth your time. And I will be interested to see what other folks think about the questions I posed here.

There's an excellent review here:

http://www.reverseshot.org/reviews/entry/2880/west_side_story

I also recommend streaming (Netflix) the movie *The Power of the Dog*, directed by Jane Campion, with Benedict Cumberbatch, Kirsten Dunst, and Kodi Smit-McPhee. We loved it. It's a great slam at toxic macho nonsense woven through westerns' mythologies. Great acting, beautiful scenery. And it's a mystery too. (Pay attention to the gloves!) Recommended! One mystery I can help you with if you missed it—Where's the barking dog?



J.J. Brutsman & Tom Havighurst

[SC] I enjoyed reading about all your travels and adventures. I have been doing more walking around the neighborhood again since I hung up my bike for the season at the end of October. My knees have been doing better and I have starting using some knee support, too, which has really made a difference. These days I can go over four miles on a hike and feel fine. Gradually going farther, weather permitting. I hope your hip pain is extremely temporary.

Sorry to hear about the 7-hour train delay. Just the sort of nightmare train travel is sadly famous for. The last time we took the train from Milwaukee to downtown Chicago it was fast and pleasant as could be, and our train to Seattle and back was on time within minutes both ways.

[JG] I'm glad you've been able to get out and do things and see friends, go to conventions and take walks and play at the Safe House. I'm getting a bit nervous about things closing down again. I've noticed that very few people have been swimming laps at the YMCA these

last couple weeks. There are usually just a couple people swimming when I get there. My brother and sister-in-law went to New York City to see *Hamilton* and the show was cancelled hours before it was started. A couple of the actors tested positive. So, they bought tickets for *Moulin Rouge* and the same thing happened, this time, minutes before curtain time. Canceled. Cast members tested positive for Covid. They finally got to see a play—David Byrne's *American Utopia*, which Scott and I streamed and liked a lot. But hearing about the huge spike in the numbers of positive Covid tests in New York made me wish Steve and Linda hadn't gone there when they did. Now I am worrying about all of you at WorldCon and hoping you stay safe.

Thank you, so much, by the way for your holiday visit. It was delicious!

Jeannie Bergmann

[SC] Congratulations on winning the award from Writers of the Future. A 10 pound glass pyramid? Seriously? You were out there for more than a week. If you're going to fly somewhere these days, good to not do it just for a weekend. Sounds like a great workshop.

Sorry to read about Polly's injury, I hope she has recovered.

Regarding your comment to us for issue #422a, I'm also on high blood pressure meds and any excuse to eat pecans is welcome. Thanks.

I think you should go ahead with your essay. Kerfluffle or not it's good to point this disparity out. I think many awards are struggling with issues of fairness and parity. Sometimes it may be more about what's popular or fashionable rather than a conscious gender bias, but pointing it out can't hurt.

[JG] Congratulations on the award. And what a very generous award it was.

The one cookie I still make every holiday is my grandma's recipe for pecan fingers. I think **Ruth's** pecan cookie recipe is similar to mine. I am also going to use a recipe we tried last year and liked very much—walnut and five-spice thumbprint cookies. I'll make those right after I finish typing these comments.

When we got our Lincoln repainted many years ago, we ran up against the same problem you did—most auto-body places only do work for insurance claims. But we did find a guy way out of town who had a shop in a refurbished farm building on his property. His name is

Dan Klister in Reeseville. He did great work, but it was not cheap.

Cathy Gilligan

[SC] Regarding obsolescence, I often feel pushed into upgrading before I feel I should have to. Jeanne always has a newer model iPhone than I do. When she upgrades, I inherit her old phone. I'm not looking forward to the next upgrade because her iPhone no longer has a button on the front. Everything on her phone is done by swiping your finger on the screen. It also no longer has a plug for earphones (I will have to switch to wireless listening.) I find these changes annoying and unnecessary, but I know if I try to refuse to keep up, eventually my old phone will become less and less able to accept software upgrades. I feel pushed, in other words. The world we live in. Not ready to give up technology and move into a cave yet. But some days...

[JG] You've been making great comments in the last many months, more than you used to, and I just wanted to say that I've enjoyed reading them a lot!

I agree with you about the impracticality of people choosing to individually approve and patronize companies that are acceptable to them personally. The only way boycotts have any effect is if many people get outraged by behavior that significantly affects multitudes, when they act together to stop that behavior. If I am not making choices in order to transform or at least have a noticeable impact on those companies, then I have to ask myself if all the time spent on doing research and decision-making is worth it. My revulsion and rejection of Zynga's user agreement (I talked about that in my comment to **Georgie** and her comment to **Lisa**) was certainly not joined by hordes of other Zynga customers, and had zero effect on Zynga's bottom line. Its only effect was on me (I felt better not to be contributing to Zynga's income). Nevertheless, when a company's documented behavior is onerous, I am more than willing to add my voice in protest, even if it has only a small chance of altering the behavior of the offending company.

Carrie Root

[SC] Regarding your comment to me, I'm relieved the Amistad gym has survived. I will keep in mind your offer of a driving loop to the area in late spring. It would be a welcome change from the Midwest.

I have not been writing about my personal reading lately because I haven't done much beyond the books Jeanne and I read aloud (or listen to) together. I got stuck for a while and am only just getting unstuck. On our trip to Seattle I finished, and greatly enjoyed, John Le Carre's *Shadowland*. I brought a second book along that I selected from Jeanne's to-read shelf partly because it fit in my bag. In Seattle I started Andrew Fox's 2009 novel, *The Good Humor Man*. I got halfway through, set it down and never picked it up again. When we got home, I had a big pile of periodicals to go through and read through them all before even glancing at the book. I found the plot boring, the characters unengaging and the writing failed to pull me in. Jeanne said she would probably not bother with it, so it's headed for a little free library one of these days. Very recently I've begun a new edition of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, which I've never read, but I'm liking a lot.

[JG] I plucked that leaf from the tree in front of a friend's house a few years ago. Holly told me that the tree was a Japanese Maple and that it didn't always go red in the autumn. But it was blazing with color that year. I was stunned. Not only was the tree gorgeous, but each individual leaf contained so many colors! So, I plucked a leaf, brought it home and scanned it. Voilà. I probably captured more detail, resolution, and color variation using the scanner than I would have if I'd just snapped a photo. I don't think I changed the size of the leaf for the *Turbo* cover, but I can't find the original scan to tell you for sure.



Matt Powell

[SC] Welcome! Thank you for the compliment on our bathroom art. For all our complaining about delays, there were fun aspects to the project.

When I first returned to the apa after a 12-year absence, I briefly tried to write something to introduce myself to the members I didn't know. I gave that up. Too awkward. Since I write about myself so much in my comments to people, I no longer think a formal intro has really been necessary. I liked how you deftly skated around the issue, "what's yet unsaid will either be otherwise apparent or can be provided on request."

I also liked how you shared fiction with us. None of my responses should be taken as criticism. You

introduced a lot of intriguing ideas here including Monumentism, lapses and lapstable, craftlines, the Song of Thieves and Song of Stars and others which I would look forward to learning more about as the story progresses but there is so much that it's hard to hold on to the underlying thread of the conversation. I am not a fiction writer or editor, so I don't have technical suggestions, but I had to read through it twice to end up with a sense of where the conversation was going. On the other hand, there are a lot of cool ideas in an ambitious story set in an interesting world and I hope you keep working on it.

[JG] My brain spun off for a while considering a "malty collateral environment" as if it wasn't an auto-correct error. That was fun. And I loved the idea you spun off to **Carrie**, that geology is the language of time. There's a novel in that idea, or several as NK Jemisin knows.

It has been interesting learning to compensate for hidden mouths when talking with people while wearing masks. I think I'm going to come out of this much more aware of how sincere smiles show up around people's eyes.

OK, I'm intrigued by your story. I liked how you used dialog to establish the setting for the story. Nice. And I love the idea of lapses and lapstability.

Marilyn Holt

[SC] I find Zoom meetings exhausting. I suppose people who do it all day somehow get used to it, but I'm always worn out at the end. Going on Zoom purely to watch a performance of some sort is not so bad, but interacting with other people is tiring. You said that you thought you did not understand the body language of the other people online, I think that's understandable because people on camera tend not to behave naturally. I know I don't. Since I can see myself, I get distracted by whether my hair is combed, my clothes are straight, my posture is okay, my glasses are dirty or not straight and on and on. If you don't look into the camera, it looks like you are not listening. So I probably appear to everyone as stiff and artificial. Other people are sometimes in bad light or sitting at an unnatural angle or eating food or something that is off putting and distracting. In live meetings, I most often try to sit near the back, stare at my papers or doodle, ignore everyone else and focus on what is being said. Try that on Zoom and everyone will think you're rude for not paying attention.

[JG] Thanks for your comment on my *Turbo* covers.

I was struck by your comment to **Lisa** on “toxic male 20-something egotism” found in most computer shops. You wrote, “the founders never grew up when their companies became real operations, and in their ‘childish’ approach to managing a company, they thought that their employees should work just as they did when they were building the company—that is, a 24/7 commitment.” I had to wince there. As a twenty-something young fan who poured hundreds of hours and sleepless nights into work on the fanzines, *Janus* and *Aurora*, I remember feeling sort of irritated when **Diane Martin** and I began backing away from the zine, and other people didn’t realize that it would take all-out obsessive work on *someone’s* part in order for the group’s fanzines to continue. (Offering “to help,” wasn’t enough.) Well, I hope the word “toxic” wouldn’t have been used about my expectations at the time, but I think I understand the impulse that the founders of a new project feel when they assume that the strategy they used to create the project is a necessary component for its continuation.

I am finding it a bit weird how I keep wanting to join the conversation that **Lisa** started about WoW, even though I’ve never played that game or any massive multiplayer game, for that matter.

What a cool idea to make an on-line game focused on fighting climate change!

Andy Hooper

[SC] Eugene Weingand’s story was a novelty. The first one of your Horror Hosts to be more than a little sketchy and creepy in real life. Fascinating story in any case.

Regarding your comment to **Hope** and **Karl** about brick-and-mortar retail and getting a “side order of crazy”, I think about that a lot in the context of travel by car. Jeanne and I are used to being cocooned here in sensible, mask-mandated Madison/Dane County. When we traveled to Seattle it was on a sealed train with staff carefully enforcing Federal mask mandates. Our destination, Seattle, was a sane place where we first started to routinely encounter requirements to produce our vaccination cards (starting to get more common in Madison since we’ve returned.) The thought of taking off on a car trip across the country like Hope and Karl or **Pat** did, strikes me as blindly venturing out into crazy town in comparison. Not only will we likely witness lots of proud defiance of mask-wearing, we

should expect to be regaled at some point by people spouting stupid at us. Not something I’d like to have to deal with in the context of vacation. Our world may have to remain small and sealed off for a while.

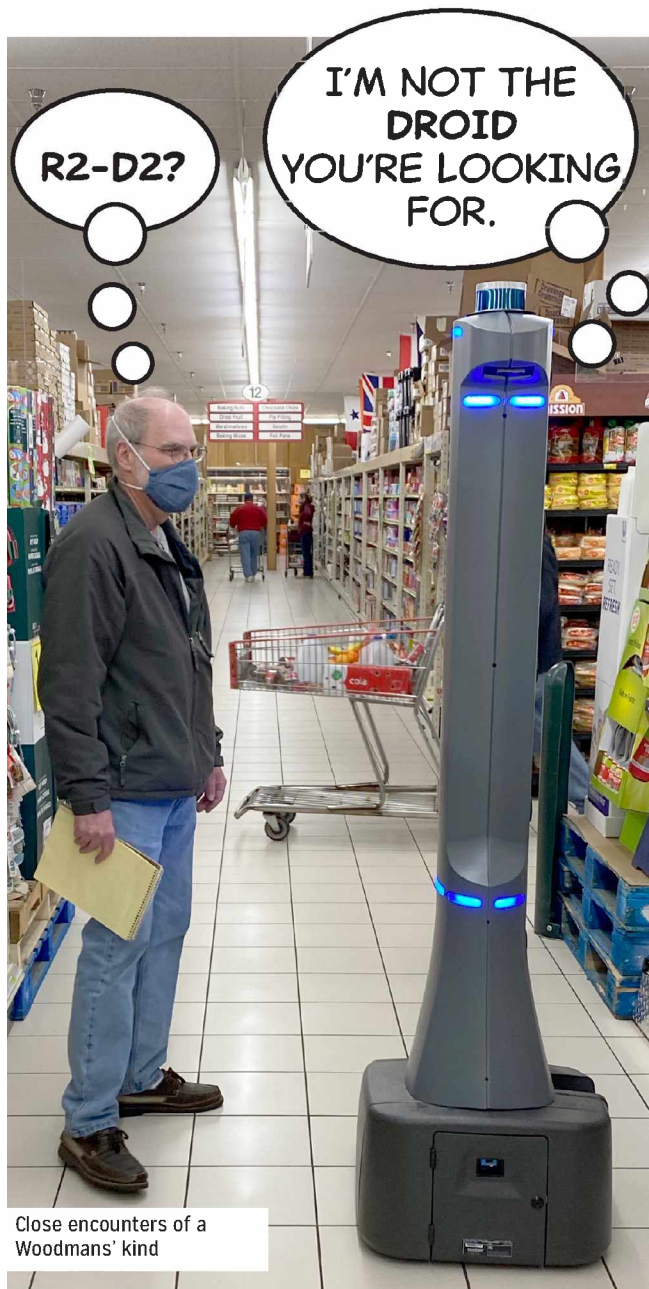
I enjoyed your letters department very much this month, too. I somehow did not realize that our overseas mail problems stemmed from another demented Trump administration decision to take the US out of the International Postal Union. I thought the Postal Service was halting service on a country-by-country basis. What fresh hell is this?

[JG] Thank you for the praise for my story, “Adventures with Shelley.” I don’t know if you would characterize the rest of my book as “breathless,” but while writing I often feel breathless. I’ve become obsessive about using every spare moment writing; it’s all just flowing and coming together as if I’d been unconsciously writing it for years and now it’s just a matter of transcribing the stories.

I’ve become more comfortable about sharing lap lanes with other swimmers. My main issue had been that after almost two years away from swimming (my knee injury preceded Covid isolation), I only gradually recovered my endurance and ability to do a front crawl for a half or whole mile without a rest. When I came back to the pool, I used a crawl stroke for three lengths and then a backstroke for one. Gradually, I reduced the resting backstroke to every six lengths, then 8 lengths, etc. And now I’m back. I’m swimming with a crawl stroke for the whole distance. But, before I regained my endurance, while I relied on back strokes in order to rest, I would have regularly crashed into anyone with whom I was sharing the lane. That’s no problem now. But ironically, there is no pressure anymore to share lanes; the number of people who swim laps at the YMCA has dramatically fallen in the last few weeks since the Omicron variation began scaring the shit out of people.

Oh, please don’t tell me that the foam-padded swim goggles aren’t being made anymore. I just bought a new pair from Speedo, but maybe I should go back and buy a couple back-up pairs, just in case they disappear. I have tried to use the all-plastic goggles but because of the shape of bones around my eyes, those never seal completely and I end up having to interrupt my laps frequently to empty the water that’s leaked into them and in vain attempts to adjust their fit.

Why is it I am learning from a letter-of-comment to an apazine that the U.S. pulled out of the International Postal Union, and that this action is what currently



makes it super expensive or impossible to send mail to other countries? Should this not be information that mainstream news covers? De Joy can't be fired fast enough. I hate the fact that he's still fucking up the USPS. Thanks for the info, Andy.

Catie Pfeifer

[SC] Your *Gideon the Ninth* costume was terrific. We were both fans of the book, but we have, so far, not continued following the series.

Your front apa cover shot reminded me of one of our favorite places in Door County, the view west on the lawn and beach at the Sunset Resort on Washington Island. Nothing like a warm, clear evening, Adirondack chairs, two gin and tonics and the

sunset view. From there, we can look out onto Green Bay, so we watch the sun sink below the water line horizon. We are often the only ones present for sunset. Very peaceful.

[JG] Loved your costume! Wow! And thank you for your kind words about my story.

Pat Hario

[SC] Email is a pain in the ass, I readily concede. The volume of crap email that I get every day is onerous to deal with, even with the help of a spam filter. I have to weed it out every day or so. It was a daily hassle at my old job, too. I get your reluctance to spend personal time on a computer dealing with email when you already spend all day working on one. When I was working, that was one of the reasons I did not think very seriously about returning to the apa. I had little enthusiasm for spending more time on a computer than I already was. Email has one feature that I greatly appreciate. I can send either a long or short email whenever I want. I have the option to take my time composing it so it reflects what I want to say. I can even ask Jeanne to read it over for a second opinion before sending. I can do all that and send it without worrying that I'm going to interrupt the recipient in the middle of something. You can read it and respond in your own good time. That feature appeals to me a lot more than telephone calls, text messages, FB messages, and snail mail. Unless the exchange is urgent, then email is not so attractive.

Your travel report was great fun to read. I love your enthusiasm when you're doing something that really engages you and you draw me into being interested, too. I also love it when you succinctly dismiss the junk, "New England Pirate Museum: crap. Witch History Museum: crap." I have never visited a major war battlefield and it's something I'd like to do, but I'd like the same good fortune arranging great weather, tours and guides that you had. The Flight 93 memorial sounds like a must-see, too. My sister stopped there on a bus tour to NYC some years ago and described her experience to me very movingly.

Naturally, I hope you recover swiftly from your broken wrist. Don't feel too embarrassed about the fall, I tripped over a raised sidewalk crack on my way over to the Hawthorne Branch Library a few weeks ago and fell all the way to the ground. Fortunately, I rolled enough to land on my shoulder

and back protecting my arms and head (my glasses got a little bent). No one saw me when I staggered a step or two trying to recover before going down heavily. I managed not to re-injure my broken clavicle from three years ago, but it shook me up a bit. Falls are not what they used to be.

[JG] How do you react to tomatoes? Mom used to complain about her mouth burning a little and feeling tiny bumps inside her mouth after eating a raw, fresh tomato. But she said that if she ignored the reaction and kept eating fresh tomatoes, the burning sensation and the bumps went away. The same thing started happening to me as an adult. Every year, at the beginning of the summer when I ate a tomato from the first farmers' market, I'd feel the burning sensation and tiny bumps in my mouth. And like Mom, I experienced the same diminution of the reaction; it occurred less harshly the next time, and not at all the third time I ate a fresh tomato. That certainly doesn't follow the pattern of an allergic reaction, and obviously both Mom and I liked tomatoes well enough that we were willing to keep eating tomatoes in spite of the unpleasant reactions. I'm not sure what was/is going on.

The Farnsworth House tour guide's rants about Covid and ghosts might have been amusing if you hadn't missed a much more interesting lecture from someone who was interested in history. Too bad you didn't have **Andy Hooper** to guide you. At least your guide at Gettysburg the next day was better!

Whew, that fall sounds like it must have hurt badly. I hope your wrist has mostly recovered by now!

WHAT'S NEW

My Mandelbrot Memory

[JG] In the course of writing my book, I have been re-experiencing my life, story by story. You could say that my life is passing before my eyes—very, very slowly. It's taking more than a year to watch the show! But something else happened and I find this much more interesting. Every time I read a full story or fragment, and consider whether it is worthwhile to keep it in the book or not, I embark on a sort of inner journey. Sometimes I discard the text because the thing is not a story; it is just a conversation fragment. But other times I think, "what is this really about?" Often, I realize that it is an idea that connects to a consequential part of my life, and more importantly, it is part of a larger story. So, I write that larger story. Then, later, when I am swimming laps in the pool, or in bed about to fall asleep, the story sometimes opens up further.

It's as if I had been exploring a bookshelf in a darkened room, when suddenly someone turns on the lights and illuminates the rest of the room, revealing boxes piled on top of one another. It's as if I'd boxed up memories and archived them, and then forgot them. But the boxes of memories are still all there! Once I start puttering around in the area they were stored, they became available to me. So, I start opening the boxes.

Occasionally, a story expands even further. It's as if I notice a stairway leading out of the room, up to a balcony that overlooks the room filled with archived memories. When I climb up and look down over the railing, my point of view changes from first-person to third-person. The experiences I recall no longer seem like they are completely mine. They happened to someone else—someone who is no longer me. The new perspective healed a few tender or angry memories and they no longer hurt me. In other cases, the perspective allowed me to better understand other people's motivations and feelings.

I've started thinking about it as my Mandelbrot memory, opening in successive layers and rooms and boxes.



Seeing America Through Bus Windows

Written in 2021 about an event in 1977

It had been a busy, emotionally draining couple weeks. I'd driven a drive-away car with friends to the Pacific Northwest, attended Westercon in Vancouver British Columbia, made a dozen life-long friendships, visited friends in Seattle, and then traveled by train down to San Francisco, where I visited with my brother Rick and his partner, Danny, as well as with a bunch of Bay Area friends. I was totally exhausted.

It's not unusual for me to need to isolate myself after a party or a weekend convention in order to recover from stressful social situations. I lean toward the introvert end of the spectrum. Given the choice, after all the non-stop socializing I'd done during this particular trip, I would have opted to travel within an isolation tank strapped onto the back of a flatbed truck all the way back to Madison. But that wasn't an option. In fact, I'd already purchased a Greyhound Bus ticket.

There were lots of empty seats available when I boarded the bus in San Francisco. I grabbed a window seat and threw my backpack onto the seat next to me, hoping to discourage anyone from sitting next to me. I curled into the cushions and shut my eyes and pretended I was floating in an isolation tank. I heard people boarding the bus and was conscious that they had either found seats in front of me or continued past me into the back into the bus, until the footsteps of one person stopped next to my seat. I opened my eyes a tiny bit and without moving my head, could make out a pair of feet standing in the aisle next to me. The feet were wearing peculiar shoes—slip-on, no-back athletic shoes (athletic clogs?). I'd never seen shoes like that before. Neither the shoes nor the feet moved and I realized that the person was waiting for me to let them sit down. I opened my eyes the rest of the way and looked up into the face of a friendly, young Asian man. He smiled and pointed to my backpack. I wearily smiled back and pushed my backpack beneath my seat.

It turned out that Makoto was Japanese and knew only a few words of English. He was touring the United States by bus with a 16-day pass that would take him from Los Angeles, to San Francisco (where

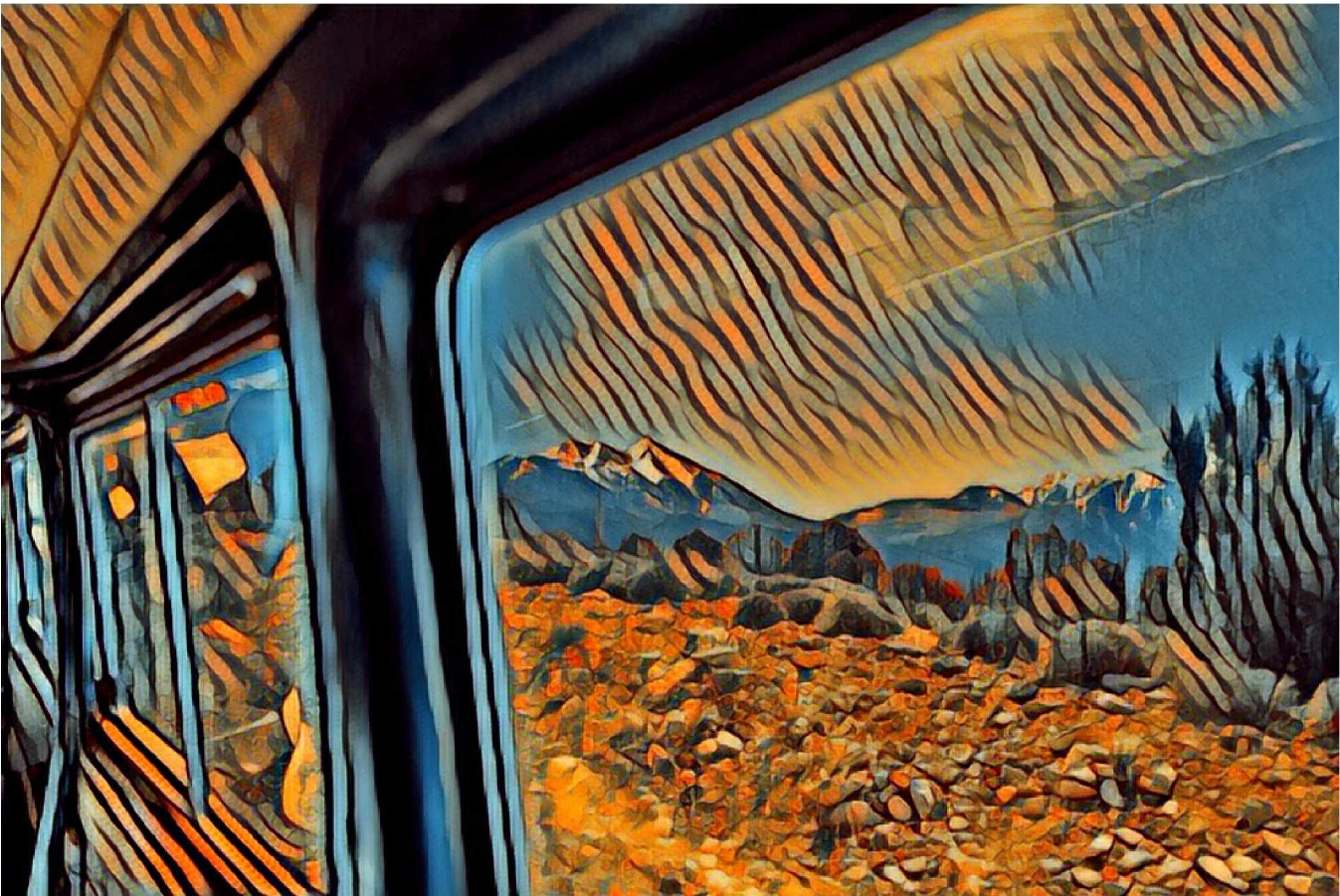


he boarded my bus), to Chicago, to New York, to Washington D.C., to Miami (where he planned to disembark for a one-day visit with his brother), to New Orleans, to Phoenix, and finally back to Los Angeles. Makoto couldn't actually tell me about his trip in words; he had to show me. When I realized that we had a language barrier, I pulled my sketchbook from my backpack, wrote my name in block letters, pointed to myself, and said "Jeanne." Then I

drew a rough map of the United States and sketched my route from Madison, to Seattle, to Vancouver, to San Francisco, and back to Madison. Makoto laughed, took the sketchbook from me and wrote his name in Japanese characters, pointed to himself and said "Makoto." Then he drew his own route onto the U.S. map beginning in Japan. Near the Miami stop he drew stick figures of a man and woman and two little boys. He circled one and pointed to himself, and identified the other as Naoki and drew an arrow from Naoki to Miami. He added a picture of a sun above them, which could have meant that he knew Florida was a sunny place, or as I chose to interpret it, that he would visit for Naoki for just one day. We bonded over our extensive travels, though I didn't complicate matters by identifying the other modes of transportation I'd used.

Makoto was touring the U.S. almost entirely through bus windows and seemed to be enjoying it immensely. I gave him the window seat so he could take photos as we traveled. He took pictures of gorges and snow-topped mountain peaks in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the Rockies, but he really went crazy, snapping dozens of pictures when we left the foothills of Colorado and spilled into the vast, empty, dull plains of eastern Colorado and Kansas. I laughed and shook my head and mimed falling asleep. He laughed too, but stretched out his arms and made use of one of his few English words, "big! BIG!!"

Via sketchbook we told each other who we were and what we did. Makoto sketched the inside of a theater with rows of audience seats and a stage. He paid particular attention to drawing spotlights directed at the stage and then pointed at himself, I assume,



a lighting technician. I chose not to portray myself as a typist, but instead drew a canvas on an artist's easel with me standing in front of it with a palette and paint brush. He nodded knowingly, as if he had already guessed my profession. Then I pulled a copy of the latest issue of *Janus* out of my backpack and showed him my name in the colophon. I don't think he understood what I was trying to tell him, (I didn't try to draw "editor"), but he paged through the zine and I nodded every time he pointed at one of my illustrations.

Makoto expanded on the family tree he'd begun on the map beside Miami and I sketched out my own family tree. We shared our hobbies. I drew myself reading, swimming in a pool, and watching a movie. Makoto drew himself mountain climbing (I think), playing baseball (hitting a ball with a bat), and playing pinball. We shared our favorite foods, though I doubt that either of us recognized all the foods the other drew. Noodles, I definitely recognized noodles. Or snakes. We laughed and filled up most of the pages of my sketchbook.

Then the bus stopped at a little town in Kansas. None of the town's buildings seemed to have been painted in the past decade and many of them looked ready to collapse. It felt like a gray ghost town. Bus stations

are often located in the more run-down areas of town, but as far as I could see, there didn't seem to be any nicer areas in sight. Makoto, along with a group of other Japanese travelers from the bus, all gathered in the middle of an intersection a block north of the bus station. They oooohed and ahhhed, pointed, and took photos. It seemed that they had discovered one of the great wonders the world. I couldn't resist; I had to check out what could possibly have impressed them so much. When I reached the corner, all I could see was an empty, dusty street, and a few teetery buildings that looked like they might be dangerous to enter. A tumbleweed blew down the street.

The Japanese tourists spoke to one another excitedly. "Ooooo," they said.

Then, a man wearing a cowboy hat pushed through the swinging doors of a tavern down the street. "Matt Dillon!" shouted two of the Japanese travelers.

"Ah," I said.

Makoto happily accepted my sketchbook as a gift when I switched buses from the transcontinental route to the stop-every-ten-minutes-or-every-town-whichever-comes-first route from Cedar Rapids, Iowa to Madison. I found a seat on the bus, settled back into my virtual isolation tank, and slept most of the way home. ☐