

Madison foursquare

63

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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This zine will have fewer and more sparse mailing comments than can be usually found in our zines. Scott is recovering well from his surgery, but isn't up to doing the normal amount of work on the apa. And Jeanne has been using most of her writing energy to work on her book. She's made enormous progress, but has also put off working on this zine.

Welcome back to the apa **Steve Swartz!**

What's New—Scott

[SC] The upshot is that my procedure is over and has been successful, so far as they can tell. They removed my prostate and they believe that got all the cancer. They will be monitoring my PSA levels closely going forward just to be sure. All that is a relief.

I will spare you most of the details of my experience other than to say that my surgeon, all the staff at UW Hospital and the UW Urology department were great and I think things went about as well for me as I could have hoped for.

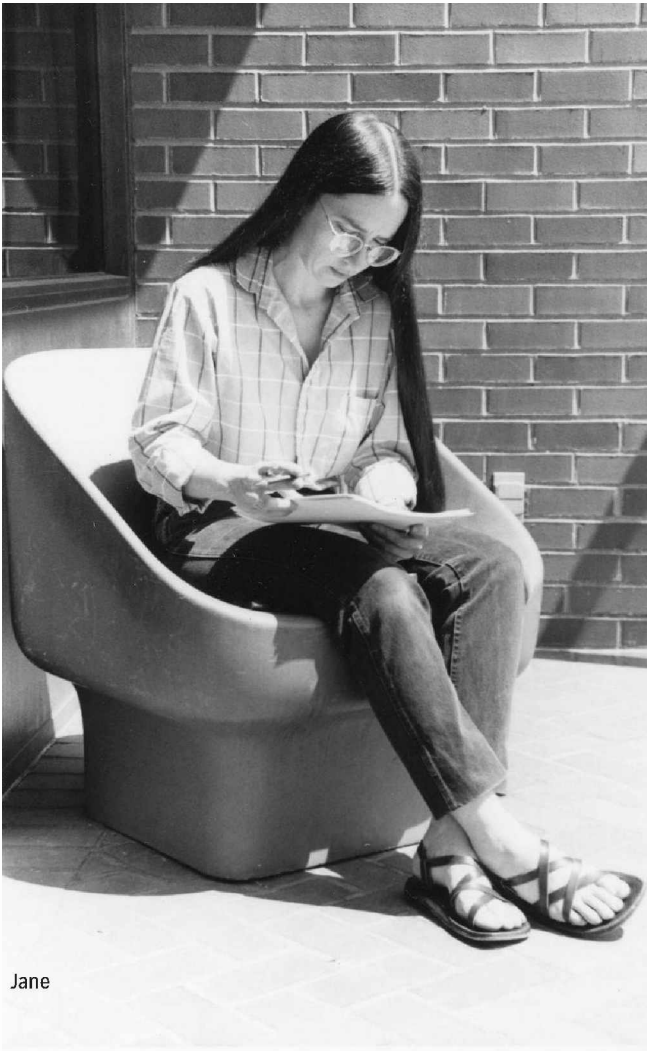
I'm now recovering which is expected to take four to six weeks, possibly longer. In a follow-up visit with a Urology Department Nurse Practitioner last week, she said walking was the best exercise for me at this point, so I have been trying to do about a mile a day around the neighborhood or up at the Capital Square while the weather has been reasonable. If the weather gets worse, I may do some walking at a mall. During the current Omnicron variant outbreak, I'd rather avoid exercising in the closer confines of the YMCA for the time being. I've also decided to do a dry January (at least) again this year. Jeanne has been a terrific nurse, coach and companion through all this. I think I'd have been very depressed if I had to cope with all this alone.

I expect to be writing to you all as usual next month.

What's New—Jeanne

Jane Hawkins, 1951--2022

[JG] Jane asked me whether I would be willing to be with her when she died and I said yes, of course I would be there. I talked with Jane once a week by phone, and after Christmas, it was clear that she had only weeks until she would choose death. Scott's surgery was scheduled for New Year's Eve day, and Jane knew that I would not leave him alone for that or for a while afterwards when he needed me with him. But Scott was doing well, and we could have asked local friends to spend time with him while I went



Jane

to Seattle ... if it were not for the Omicron Covid spike. None of us wanted...Jane didn't want her death to be a superspreader event. And so I wasn't there when she died. But several loving friends held her hand Friday evening, January 7, 2022, when Jane died. My friend, Ole Kvern sent me a note, describing what happened:

Jane was wearing the purple patchwork jacket that Kate made for her. Jane said, "I'm really scared, you guys," and I think we all hoped that she'd say, I think I'll put this off for a bit. We were all guilty of both selfishness and magical thinking. But she mixed up the powders and swallowed the liquid. "This stuff tastes terrible," she said, and had a spoonful of raspberry sorbet. Then she drank the rest. She looked at all of us. Within a couple of minutes, she was unconscious. It really looked as if she was sleeping peacefully. Over the next hour and a half, her breathing slowed, became irregular, and then stopped. I held Jane's hand as she died.

I hate knowing that our last conversation is in the past, that we will no longer talk.

My book: *That's Another Story*

[JG] I've just about finished the first rough draft of my book. As I write these apa comments, I have only to finish the last chapter, which I've got outlined. I plan to let it sit for a few weeks while I do some drawings for the book. Then I'll read through the manuscript, editing and maybe deleting a couple chapters. Debbie Notkin and Eileen Gunn have told me that they'd like to read it. They will get their wish. I'll probably send them pdfs in March sometime.

The End of *The Expanse*

[JG] We finished reading the final *Expanse* novel by James S. A. Corey. That's nine, rather thick novels, all read aloud. It was a fantastic experience. We were impressed by the ending which seemed very much as if it had been carefully planned from the very beginning of the series.

And of course, we finished watching the final episode of the *Expanse* series on Prime. Everything written about the TV series confirms that there will be no more episodes, that the TV show covered the first six (of nine) books of S.A. Corey's series. But then why were there several scenes foreshadowing events in the latter books? All of the scenes set on Laconia could have been left out of the TV series; they would only have been of use if the series continued, following the plot in the last three novels. I liked many of the changes made for the TV series, though, and am confident that the authors, Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck, made the final decisions for those changes.

Mailing Comments

Lisa Freitag

[JG] Scott and I just finished Fonda Lee's three-novel epic, *The Green Bone Saga*. I think you might like it. Your words describing the Chinese *Cultivation* series you liked so much are equally applicable to *Jade City*, *Jade War*, and *Jade Legacy*. Both have complex stories, and are (to use your words) "full of honor and loyalty, love and courage, and all the heroic deeds and epic battles you could ever want. Of course, there's also betrayal (So much betrayal!). And sorrow and death." In addition, there are several deeply moving, tear-provoking chapters. As Scott and I read aloud the final chapters of *Jade Legacy* our voices caught and we both teared up. Fonda Lee uses an interesting

science-fictional device to scientifically explain the Jade warriors' strength, mental abilities, and ability to take flying leaps, which I liked quite a bit, especially because only a few people in this world possess natural jade abilities. Lee creates a world in which complicated political and interpersonal relationships and confrontations stem from the unequal possession and use of "bioenergetic jade." Lee's novels blend martial arts and Mafia themes in its epic, multi-generation story. **Andy**, I should warn you that since you were "impressed" (is that the right word?) by the length of the first novel, *Jade City*, the two sequels are even longer. But oh my god, they are so good! Scott and I both recommend this series highly! If you do ever read *The Green Bone Saga*, Lisa, I would really love to hear from you how well it tracks or veers away from Japanese anime and kung fu-type storytelling.

Georgie Schnobrich

[JG] I am so happy to hear that you have vanquished the bladder cancer! But I am so sorry you had to go through hell in order to survive it. Knowing now a little of what you were going through these past months, I am even more impressed by the apazines, with their lovely writing, that you managed to publish. I hope that writing gave you a small part of the pleasure it gave us! I'm glad you survived the Cisplatin and hope that you never need to subject yourself to it again.

I loved your drawing of a turkey transformed into a fashionable Victorian lady. Perfect, from the woman's beaky nose and layered tunic, to her pointy shoes!

I was also scanned by the MRI machine at UW Hospital that played music for Scott. The technicians asked me what kind of music I liked and I said "Broadway or classical," which seemed to confuse them a bit. But one of the nurses said "I think that's one of the options," but then she couldn't get anything but heavy metal music, and I said, "no thanks. You can turn that off." It wasn't appreciably different than the MRI machine's normal sound effects, which would probably have made it difficult to hear the music I'd asked for in the first place.

Thanks so much for your comments about my story, "Music Challenge."

What a lovely story about how the Waukesha library staff helped survivors at the Christmas parade.

Greg Rihn

[JG] Lately, I also have been feeling so much less hopeful about the ability of human beings to save

ourselves from environmental catastrophe or rescue democracy. As you say, the sheer number of people who are making such incredibly stupid choices doesn't make it easy to feel optimistic about the future.

I'm so sorry for how hard this past year has been for you and **Georgie**. It's too bad that there is no rehab program for cancer patients recovering after chemo treatments. I would think that it would be useful to model a program on the physical rehab programs provided to joint-replacement patients. I found them incredibly helpful, not just for the physical exercises they taught us, but also for the conversations and comradery with other joint-replacement patients. Seeing people who were in different stages of recovery helped me avoid feeling that I would always feel a certain pain, and I appreciated knowing how long it would probably take me to improve.

Clifford Wind & Marilyn Holt

[JG] We totally understand what you mean when you talk about how many years of repairs and renovation on your home have dominated your lives. I don't want to even consider your suggestion that the total repair and renovation costs for our house might have been better spent in purchasing a new house that needed none of those changes. I will not do the arithmetic. Anyway, I love our house too much, mostly *because* we made the decisions ourselves on how to change it.

Thanks for the pictures of your animals. It's good to have images to attach to the names.

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[JG] As you say, Jim, evolution changes diseases. The most recent Covid variant, Omicron, reminds me of Michael Crichton's novel, *Andromeda Strain*, in which the deadly microorganism mutates with every growth cycle. When it escapes the secure facility, it mutates into a benign form. Wouldn't it be lovely if something like that has happened with Covid? I assume, though, that it's not done mutating.

I'm glad that you and Diane were able to travel and see friends over the holidays. It's too bad you weren't able to get to worldcon. The same fear-of-Covid kept me from flying to Seattle to be with Jane when she died.

Hope Kiefer & Karl Hailman

[JG] I enjoyed reading about your rollerblade adventures and State Trail tours! It's funny how Hope's Pokemon hunts work so well with your skating. Thank goodness she found you during your Whitewater exploit!

Happy Holidays!
Santa skeleton peering over roof on Willy Street



Jim & Ruth Nichols

[JG] Both a broken furnace and dishwasher, oh no! Both a new furnace and dishwasher, yay!

Scott and I watched *Schmigadoon!* It was a lot of fun. The more musicals you are familiar with, the more you will recognize in *Schmigadoon!*, but deep knowledge of musicals isn't at all necessary. Classic musicals are both celebrated and mocked. It jabs, for instance, at classic musicals' rigid sexism. My favorite song was the one that explained human reproduction in medical detail (to the tune of *The Sound of Music's* "Do-Re-Mi"). I loved the moment when a dream ballet sequence was about to unfold (you know, like the one in *Oklahoma!*) and one of the characters shuts it down. "Nobody likes a dream ballet," she says. If you are able to see it, it's definitely worth it.

Jae Adams

[JG] Oh dear, I just noticed that there are two copies of your zine in our copy of the apa. If anyone is missing Jae's zine, *Alphabet Obsession* #195, please let me know and I will send you the extra copy.

I hear that Amtrak is planning a high-speed rail line between Minneapolis and Duluth, to be called "The Northern Lights Express." Maybe if the Build Back Better bill ever gets passed this might happen sooner

rather than later. Taking the train to Minneapolis and then to Duluth might not involve an overnight stay!

Carrie Root

[JG] I'm glad that you and **Andy** had a chance to spend a little time with Jane before she died.

Kim & Kathi Nash

[JG] Why do you have so many power outages in your neighborhood? I don't understand.

We missed attending the annual holiday birthday party but completely understand your decision to cancel.

Andy Hooper

[JG] Re your comment to **Pat Hario** on the subject of email communications, I think the problem is much bigger than the different way people reply (or don't reply) to emails. I would really like a tool to be invented so that whenever I want to contact someone, I would automatically be notified as to the method of communication preferred by that person.

- ◆ Phone or text only. They will only look at emails once a month, if that. In fact they will become angry if you expect them to notice your email among the hundreds of spam emails that accumulate in their in-box.

- ◆ Phone is best. They're allergic to anything that seems too techie. They mostly forget their computer password, and although they have a Facebook account, they do not keep up with friends there.
- ◆ Phone during certain times. Not too early, not too late, and not during their favorite TV show.
- ◆ Email is best. However, be aware that they will respond to only one item in your email. If you ask several questions, they will answer only the first. Send a separate email for each topic.
- ◆ Specific email address for different purposes. Don't use their work email unless it is a dire emergency. You will get them in trouble with their employers. Use their google email address for concom business only. Use their other personal email address for personal notes. Ignore the third personal email address; it's an old one that they hardly ever look at anymore.
- ◆ Snail Mail. Your aunt believes, with Miss Manners, that you should send hand-written thank-you notes. If you have any hope of receiving an inheritance, make sure to write your note with a black or blue fountain pen.
- ◆ Text if you are traveling with this person and need to let them know you will be late or to set up a rendezvous. They will become irritated about wasted time if you attempt to call them.
- ◆ Fax your accountant and lawyer. Many years ago, they were taught that the only acceptable substitute for original, signed documents are faxes. Do not bother telling them that faxes use the same technology as pdfs. They will not accept pdf attachments. But feel free to use fax apps that convey your pdfs to their fax machines. The accountants and lawyers will be fine with that as long as their fax machine prints your document.

I did encourage Jane to reach out to a few folks and am glad to hear that you and Luke and others got to visit with Jane before she died.

I condensed my essays about art from C/Rapa into one small essay for my book. I'm much happier with it than I was by the sprawling, digressive writing I did for C/Rapa. You will find it posted to the end of this zine.

I've begun to think a little about what the hell I am going to do with this book after I finish. Jean Shepherd acquainted people with his writing during his career as a radio host, I think. Same for Garrison Keillor. I am not equating my work with theirs, but I think I'm

working in the same genre of slightly fictionalized, gently humorous memoir. I'm not a radio personality (or any other kind of publicly known person) and as you say, memoirs rarely succeed unless the author is well-known. But there will be drawings and artwork, for sure.

Perhaps I could try placing individual stories in publications, noting that they are excerpts from a larger work.... I don't know. My mind sheers away from considering a publication strategy. I am too focused on finishing the damn thing.

F. J. Bergmann

I liked "Horrible Things." I can sometimes look at ordinary things and by mentally squinting and looking at it from a different perspective, see something not-so-ordinary. Like a forest seen from orbit as a sort of mold covering the surface of a planet killed by oxygen.

And "Revenant" was wonderful too. Indeed any post-death survivor, a ghost or whatever, must regret the lack of thought that went into the choice of their final outfit.

And "Girls Rule." Yes! Thanks Jeannie.



This image feels like an F.J. Bergmann poem

From the Book

The Invisible Frame¹

Who is the artist?

Imagine that you are strolling through a museum. You stop to study an oil painting that you find particularly interesting. The subject of the painting is an artist standing by their easel, holding a brush loaded with pigment and poised above the canvas. The artist's subject is an enormous tree that shades a grassy knoll beside a sunlit river. The easel is angled so that you can clearly see the painting within the painting, as well as the tree that is being painted. You notice a contradiction: because of where the artist is standing, it should have been impossible for them to see the whole tree, but nevertheless, the painter has captured the entire tree on canvas. The visual paradox teases you with an idea that perhaps painters, like authors, create unreliable characters within their work. You speculate that the artist who created the larger painting that hangs in front of you on the museum wall may have misrepresented the entire scene, that perhaps the painting is a sort of visual joke. You look for clues for what may have been obscured or transformed, and you find one. Why would the painter have daubed red pigment onto their palette when there seems to be no red in the scene being painted? You smile, amused by the idea and keep looking. You admire how the tree's foliage is reflected in the river and imagine that you can see fallen leaves moving and light sparkling among the ripples. You find the diagonal arrangement of elements—the artist's arm pointing toward the tree, clouds, and reflection in the water—to be a pleasing, dynamic composition. You move closer to the painting and notice the rough, impressionistic brush strokes which imply form and detail when viewed from a distance, but feel abstract at close range. You stand back again, this time appreciating the colors, the green and blue pigments that cover the canvas extravagantly, and contrast with tiny flashes of yellow in the artist's neck scarf and palette. You think you'd like to walk into the painting and sit on a blanket beside the river for a while.

But then you move on down the corridor and happen to walk past a window with a view into a park outside the museum. The view arrests you and you gaze out into a night lit by a flickering bonfire, around which three women, dressed in white gowns, dance wildly around the blaze. The dancers disappear and appear again as they weave behind the bonfire and among the



C/Rapa cover art

trees. You pretend that you are looking through slow glass, into an ancient time, and that the young women are celebrating a Beltane ritual. You wonder if you are watching some sort of sanctioned performance, or if it is a spontaneous celebration to which police will soon respond. No matter, you think. You feel lucky to behold the magical moment. The window frames the bonfire and the dancing women perfectly. The women's white gowns echo the color of the marble balustrade reflecting light from your window. The blaze mesmerizes you with orange and yellow tongues of flame. In the background, pines so dark they only imply greenness, are dimly lit by a full moon. They sway in the wind. You imagine you can hear the boughs whispering, the fire crackling, and the women singing. You wonder if you might be able to slip outside and observe from a closer vantage point without anyone noticing you.

You walk across the corridor and peer closely at a small watercolor, a still life study of fruit in a bowl. Just then, a gallery attendant walks toward you, suspicious that you are standing too close to the watercolor and warns you not to touch it. She says "Ten minutes till the museum closes." The attendant doesn't look at the painting except to make sure your fingers do not

¹ This essay is based on some ideas published in my apazine *Shoreline* 2, 3, 4, and 5, for *Cascade Regional Apa (CRAFA)* 1978-1979.

endanger it. She walks by the window without noticing the activity outside, and also passes by the painting of the painter without a glance, stopping only to pick up a brochure that someone dropped on the floor. She is more concerned about the security of the building than contemplating the aesthetics of the museum's newest acquisitions.

Who is the artist?

You might point out that the museum's curator must have considered the creators of the watercolor and the oil painting to be artists. The paintings, after all, have been beautifully framed and hung on white walls with excellent lighting to illuminate them. Look! There are little cards with titles, names, and dates posted next to each of the paintings. Obviously, the persons who created the paintings are the artists. But, remember, the paintings do not exist in the real world; I made them up. Whether the paintings are "good" art and deserve to be displayed in a museum is entirely up to you and *your* imagination, because *you* created the images which you see in your mind, as guided by my descriptions. You are the artist.

There was very little difference between your thought process when you observed the paintings, compared to your thoughts when you looked at the scene framed by the window. You appreciated the composition—the diagonal arrangement of elements—of the painting and the way the bonfire scene was centered perfectly within the window frame. You observed the way the painter's brush in the painting hovered over the canvas, creating artistic tension, and the way the dancers silhouettes seemed to flicker behind the blaze and the trees. You enjoyed the colors in both. You appreciated the way light played on the water and how flames and moonlight illuminated the trees. You felt a sense of harmony in both painting and bonfire scene, and wished momentarily to become part of them. Your thoughts diverged from what the original painter might have intended when you chuckled over your idea that the piece might have been made by an unreliable painter, just as your thoughts embellished what was happening in the park when you imagined it to be a Beltane ritual, a commercial event, or an illegal happening. Notice how the art you created in your mind *diverged* from the actual work and scene. You mentally complicated both images—both framed art and window-framed view—in the same way that, in the first painting, the artist distorted the work of their imaginary painter.

I say that you are the artist, but of course, I also invented "you," and your reactions to the painting and the window-framed scene. I am the artist that conceived of both painting and scene, neither of which has more claims to reality than the other. It doesn't matter that I never made a physical representation of either. I described them to you in enough detail that we could have a conversation about them if you were sitting here with me. I created the images in my mind and you created an approximate version in your mind, but they will never be framed in gilt or hung on white walls with little placards posted alongside. And it doesn't matter. Art is the mental process of creation as much as it is the physical product of that process.

Almost everyone in this little story is an artist: the painter within the painting is an artist. The painters of both oil and watercolor pieces are artists. You are an artist when you create new versions of the framed paintings and the window-framed scenes in your mind. I am an artist, as the creator of the tableau, the museum attendant and you. We could easily make the case that the dancers in the park are making their own art. The only person not making art in this story is the gallery attendant. That person considers the paintings no differently than they think of the water fountain attached to the wall further down the corridor.

What I believe is that art is more than something framed and hung in an art museum. Art can be created without anyone other than the creator ever knowing about it; an audience is not essential. In fact I think that every time a person interacts with a piece of art and reacts to it, *new art* is created. A painting will mean different things for every person who comes upon it, and the art created every time someone makes connections in their own mind on seeing it will be different and unique. We build museums and hang art on their walls, we schedule symphony orchestra performances, we eat extravagantly produced gourmet dinners, we buy the recordings of inspired singers and musicians, etc., because we recognize certain artists as being able to most successfully catalyze our own creative processes of appreciation/criticism. The process of art creation is much more complex than the production of discrete works of art, things on walls, scores on paper, recipes. I think of Borges' story "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote." It is a humorous story of an artist who decides to re-write *Don Quixote*, word for word, and who then signs his name to the work because it's all *different* now! It means something entirely different today than Cervantes intended when he wrote it in the 17th Century. ☐