

Madison foursquare

70

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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Lisa Freitag

[SC] I thought your essay on fan fiction and your attraction to A03 was excellent. As for WisCon, from what I heard, they got through it again this year but they are struggling.

Steve Swartz

[SC] I'm sorry to read about the stressful time you've been having. You may have missed a month in Turbo, but your lavish July contribution was well worth the wait.

I was envious at once of the route to Eugene from Seattle you described. It must have been a gorgeous drive on a clear day. I'm sure it would become onerous to do it many times, but just once I'd love to make the drive myself on too much caffeine and the music blasting.

Although *Dhalgren* is unlikely to end up on my to-read shelf, I enjoyed reading your thoughts about it.

Regarding your comments to me, I'm with you about weight-lifting. I was never out for athletics in school and never became a gym-rat, so lifting weights has never come naturally to me. I've always preferred cardio/aerobic activities like walking, running and biking. But at my age I know that weight-lifting would likely be very good for me going forward, so I think I will have to bite the bullet this fall (end of biking season) and return to the gym, COVID or not.

You will not hear a lot of complaining from me about the weather in Madison, at present. In the face of the heat wave, drought or flooding most of the rest of America is suffering through, we have had a rather mild and pleasant summer. We are quietly enjoying it.

My lawn is full of weeds and I'm going to seed (per you, I saw your lineout). Both the lawn and I can get quite shabby looking without the occasional haircut.

The short answer to your question about *The Thousand Crimes of Ming Tsu* is that I wanted to read it after seeing an interesting review in *The New York Times*. The slightly longer answer is that I have been a fan of Westerns in TV and movies since I was a kid and over the years have read some novels, mostly classics like *Lonesome Dove* and *True Grit*. I'm often attracted to Western stories told from unconventional viewpoints, like the fierce Chinese killer

It's long past the fourth of July, but this picture was taken on that weekend this year, from a boat on Lac La Belle. There is no theme for photos this month, other than "That's cool."

You might remember in December 2021, that we posted a photo of this skeleton person perched on top of a Willy St. building. The skeleton was all decked out in a Santa costume. Now, this summer, they are raising a rainbow flag to celebrate LGBTQ+ pride.



in *Ming Tsu*, the lost souls Lurie and Nora from Tea Obreht's *Inland* and the Native Americans battling a supernatural vengeance on the reservation in Stephen Graham Jones' *The Only Good Indians*.

Travel is a complicated issue for us these days with COVID and whatever. I can see something like a shared trip to a particular city coming together sometime but right now I'd be just as happy coming back out to the West coast to visit you and Allison and so many of our good friends there.

[JG] I've never found driving to be a relaxing activity, so I have often opted for mass transit when traveling alone. Whichever way you travel though, that route between Eugene and Seattle looks like the views must be gorgeous.

I think I missed taking advantage of my personally ideal time to read *Dhalgren*. As I mentioned in an earlier zine, I used to really like reading meta-fiction, especially during my college years, so it's odd to read your (excellent) ponderings on *Dhalgren* and know that the very things you mention would have captivated me then, but now seem only mildly interesting.

I'm sorry that your friend, Joan, decided not to join us. But I imagine that an apa might very well feel intimidating to someone who hasn't seen one before, especially in these days of mostly electronic communication. Reading, much less writing and crafting, monthly letters might feel as difficult as going back to the eighteenth century custom of writing many letters every week to keep in touch with family and friends.

Re your comment to **Greg** about how you find it unlikely that human beings will leave Earth – I think the most realistic (recent) portrayal of that possibility plays out in the Apple+ show, *For All Mankind*. The idea in this

alternate history drama is that the Russians beat the US to the moon. So, the US didn't win the race, but kept going. I love this series and recommend it highly.

My dad said our family's name had evolved from the Polish name, Gomolka, meaning a type of round cheese, ultimately from an old Polish word meaning "round," which I suppose might also be called "hornless."

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] Regarding Turbo's growth, I think the departure of Cathy Gilligan keeps us at about the size we have been. Joan Hart's (**Steve Swartz's** nominee) decision to back out was a disappointment. Personally, I think it was Swartz's fish/penis humor that scared her off, but what do I know? Still, we remain on alert for a few more members.

Pat Hario

[SC] I did not realize your office was in the CCB. I think the last time I met you near your office for lunch downtown, you were in the Municipal building so I always think of you being over there. Guess it's been too long since we did lunch.

I think any public employee is wise to be aware of the potential for violence in the workplace. The public's opinion of government institutions these days is poor. With the proliferation of firearms and the lack of meaningful restraint for carrying them around, I'd be inclined to assume anyone you meet might be armed. I suggest thinking about shelter and escape routes if something were to suddenly erupt near your office or in public areas of the building. Be prepared to move quickly without waiting for instructions.

In the shooting incident you described just outside your building, I was surprised the police did not make an announcement to close the entrance and alert everyone to take an alternate route out because it was a crime scene. I think it's "hail of bullets" rather than "hailstorm of bullets," but certainly a dozen shots would qualify if you're within earshot of them.

Regarding your comment to us about meal times when traveling, it has only taken us 30 years to figure out how to travel together. I'm a morning person, Jeanne is not. She can get up early if there is a damn good reason or we have an appointment, but in the usual course of things I'm often up an

hour or so before she is. When traveling, we usually work out a schedule the night before for the next day but it's common for me to get up and go for some exercise, seek out coffee (and snack if I'm hungry), check my email or read until she's up and around. Normal.

To the shock of both of our families, Jeanne and I have never seen either of the *Top Gun* movies. The U.S. military can be lavishly helpful to movie projects when they show the military in a favorable light. That is reason enough, in my view, to avoid such films unless there is some other really compelling reason to see them, and *Top Gun* looks to me like pure fluff.

[JG] As you know, I worked at the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for many years, 23 to be exact, and security was always an issue for us. One of the first things I learned when I started work there in 1979 was that many people Up North translated "DNR" as "Damn Near Russian." The DNR made lots of people very angry by making rules about waterways, air quality, and hunting. Death threats were common. So, many of the bureaus in the GEF-2 building acquired doorways through which people had to be buzzed in to enter. In the early 2000s, I think, anyone who entered the building had to register and wear a temporary visitor nametag. DNR has their own law enforcement division and those guys got involved in most of the "incidents" I heard about. But there were never any fatalities that I know of, and the threats were mostly kept quiet so as not to alarm anyone.

If you like fiction featuring "traveling shows," I think you might like both the miniseries and the novel, *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel. *Station Eleven* is an unusually hopeful post-apocalyptic story centered on a traveling troupe of actors and musicians that travels via horse-drawn caravan around Lake Michigan, making a circuit once a year, performing at settlements along the way. Their slogan is "survival is insufficient," meaning that art is what makes us human.

I think that we (meaning you, Scott and me) may be unusual in our habit of parking our cars in the garage every night. It seems that many, if not most people I know, seem to prefer to use their garages to store... other stuff. Despite frequently heard news about cars being broken into during the night in our neighborhood, we only lost a handful of change once when we forgot to park our car in the garage. We have a two-car garage, but mostly we use the second-car space to store a lawn mower and snowblower. A few years ago,

our neighbor across the street, Ron, was able to gaze through the open doors of our garage while Scott and I were doing some yard work. Ron was a hoarder and his house and garage were bulging with *stuff*. So, I suspect he was astonished to see so much unused *space* in our garage. Ron ambled across the street and asked us if we would mind storing his motorcycle while he made room in his garage for it. He expected that he'd have enough room for it again soon. And he did.

Walter Freitag

[SC] I liked your report "Part 1: Duck and Cover". In response I'd say that anyone attending the conference who was persuaded to take the proffered advice and make big changes in their lives would, eight years later, still be waiting for the collapse of industrial civilization. Perhaps they are starting to drum their fingers on the table by now. Of course the whole subject of the collapse of civilization by whatever means (war, plague, climate change, unavoidable natural collapse or zombie apocalypse) has inspired a lot of SF but it's a subject that naturally interests many of us. At my age, I think I'm pretty vested in the system not falling apart while I'm still around. I'm unlikely to sell everything out to buy a sustainable patch of ground, plant a garden and dig a bunker. But it's fun to talk about "what if" scenarios.

I thought your question for the group was terrific. If the underlying theme of the discussion is that large-scale, complex social and economic systems don't work, then what should the future look like? As humans, what ambitions should we have?

[JG] I really liked your essay, Walter. Lots to think about, especially the concept of variable efficacy of proposed solutions.

Kim & Kathi Nash

[SC] Your Sandy the Squirrel story was great. I liked that the Nextdoor commentary remained civilized. Nextdoor can be useful for things like connecting people to needed resources or answering practical questions, but it doesn't take much to rile up the fuck-wits and trolls, who end up taking over a lot of the conversations that I see.

[JG] I loved the Sandy the Squirrel story too. It reminded me of how so many adults like to participate in perpetuating the Santa Clause story for young kids—weather announcers who include Santa radar sightings

in their nightly forecasts, post office employees who reply to kids' letters to Santa, etc.

Jeannie Bergmann

[SC] Regarding the horses in *Wheel of Time*, we just saw the new Jordan Peele thriller *NOPE*, which we liked a lot. The main character is an animal wrangler for the movies and TV, and mainly supplies horses. Horses play a significant role in the story. All the horse business in the film seemed authentic to me, but I'd like to know what you thought if you end up seeing it sometime.

[JG] I am glad to hear that *Mobius* is printing some of Don Helley's photos. Don just gave us one of his pieces in exchange for his pick of some picture frames we had stacked in the basement (waiting for a garage sale). He's doing some really interesting work.

What does it mean when your lifeline forks? Isn't that when you walk through a stone and marry a Highlander?

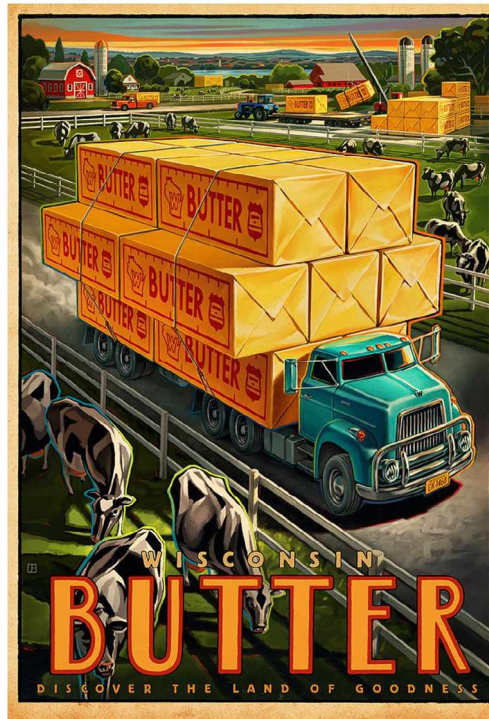
"Ol' Fuzzy" was hilarious. Thanks Jeannie.

Elizabeth Matson

[SC] I'm a little jealous that you've managed to make two rather extended road trips this summer and we have only gone as far as Door County and Eastern Iowa. We have been paying off remodeling expenses and ducking COVID, but still. I'm past ready to get out on the road to see some different landscape. I'm looking forward to reading about your latest trip.

I enjoyed reading your thoughtful book reviews. *When Women Were Dragons* sounds like a hoot. Jeanne and I are on deck to see APT's *Sense and Sensibility* this year, too, and your comments will definitely be on my mind. Though I have seen a couple screen versions, I have not actually read it yet. Maybe I still can work it in before our show on Oct. 9.

I'm sorry your job has become so stressful and I wish I had a constructive suggestion.



Regarding your comment to me, I thought it was very sweet that Gerald picked books for the book group partially to woo you.

It was good to finally see you and Nick, the wonder dog, and hang out for awhile. It's been too long.

[JG] I have a movie recommendation for you: *Operation Mincemeat*, a World War II movie based on a real, wildly successful British intelligence operation in 1943, whose goal was to convince the Germans that the Allies were going to land troops in Greece rather than Sicily. The story takes place in London focusing on several intelligence agents (played

by Colin Firth, Kelly Macdonald, Matthew Maffadyn, and Penelope Wilton, among a larger cast of British actors—most of whom would be familiar to fans of Masterpiece Theater productions). The reason I recommend *Operation Mincemeat* to you is that the film suggests that the reason the operation was so successful was that the agents immersed themselves in the creation of *stories* for a fictional agent (his family, his lover, his life), whose dead body was set adrift and washed ashore with fictional documents. The stories these agents created, gradually became more important, and possibly more real to them than their own lives. It's a fascinating movie about the power of story. So of course, I thought of you.

Now that we understand that Gerald was wooing you during the early years of our book club (I didn't know! I thought you two had been together for a while then.) I wonder if *The Innkeeper's Song*, by Peter Beagle, was one of those books chosen for wooability. I remember we all loved it and I remember that it was a wonderful love story, but the thing I remember most vividly was the sword fight between two women and the stories they told each other while they fought. The stories affected the outcome of the fight. I frequently skim fight scenes in novels, but I read every word in that one. It was mesmerizing Do you remember *The Innkeeper's Song*?

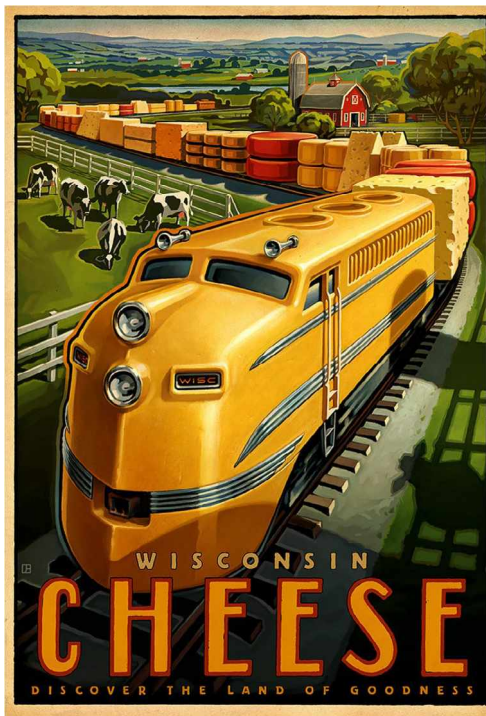
I'm looking forward to APT's *Sense and Sensibility*. My eagerness flows from APT's adaption, several years ago, of *Pride and Prejudice*, which was brilliantly choreographed as a play-length dance in which one

scene melted into the next, and the main characters skipped and slid around one another as if performing a narrative cotillion. I'm not surprised that APT played S&S as a romance; that was also the case in APT's production of *P&P*. Interpreting Austen's novels as romances is what has converted her stories, in many people's minds, to "women's fiction." I share your interest in the less romantic aspects of Austen's stories, and agree with you that economic issues were of topmost importance for the marriage choices made by her characters, which of course *should* be an important aspect of so-called "women's fiction." But of course, that's not what is usually meant by that categorization. I find it very interesting that readers during Austen's time didn't perceive her novels to be purely romantic, of interest only to ladies. The economic realities of the marriage market were obvious to most readers who *lived* within its strictures. A century later, Austen's work was still considered suitable for the general public. During World War I, her books were popular among British soldiers serving in the trenches. Soldiers read them aloud to one another because the stories reminded them of home. I've read that her books were sometimes categorized as war novels because they took place during Britain's war with France. It may be that we can now read Austen's novels as primarily romantic because of gains made in women's rights and the allusions to women's lack of options no longer seems as real or threatening to us.

I read a review of *When Women Were Dragons* earlier this year when we were tossing around ideas for titles for the book club. I might have suggested it, but the book wasn't out in paperback yet. Do you think it would make a good book discussion book?

Marilyn Holt & Clifford Wind

[SC] Congratulations on the plumbing work. That's a serious project. Did they have to tear into any walls in order to get at the pipes from the upstairs bathroom? Plumbing is expensive, but what a great relief to have new, properly functioning plumbing fixtures. I've always liked pocket doors. Pictures please!



Regarding the Secret Service, Washington Post reporter Carol Leoning has just come out with a very well-received new book on the Secret Service called *Zero Fail*. I am interested in reading it and I'm trying to decide if I want to wait for it to come out in paperback, or get in line for it at the library.

Great news about your progress with *Making Angels*.

[JG] I empathize with your frustrating experiences publishing *Making Angels*. I have self-published quite a few books, mostly for the benefit of the Tiptree/Otherwise Award, TAFF, the SF Poetry Award, and a couple

other not-for-profit groups, and if I end up having to self-publish my memoirs, I know how to do that. I still haven't heard back from Timmi at Aqueduct Press, though I have a couple other professional publishing options in mind, but I may very well be forced to self-publish. I think I'm reasonably skilled with the physical book publishing process and will have no trouble making some attractive books. But I will be at sea when it comes to making an eBook. I've never done that. I suspect that my project will pose a special level of difficulty because of all the illustrations. I'm not really looking forward to learning how to make an eBook and may need to pay someone with those skills. As for the marketing part of it...well, that's where I'm looking at your experience and business plan with greatest interest. A memoir of a not-very-well-known person isn't going to be an easy thing to sell. And I'm crossing my fingers that I don't encounter any computer disasters along the way. So sorry to hear about your experience with a dead hard drive! I hope your new computer behaves itself.

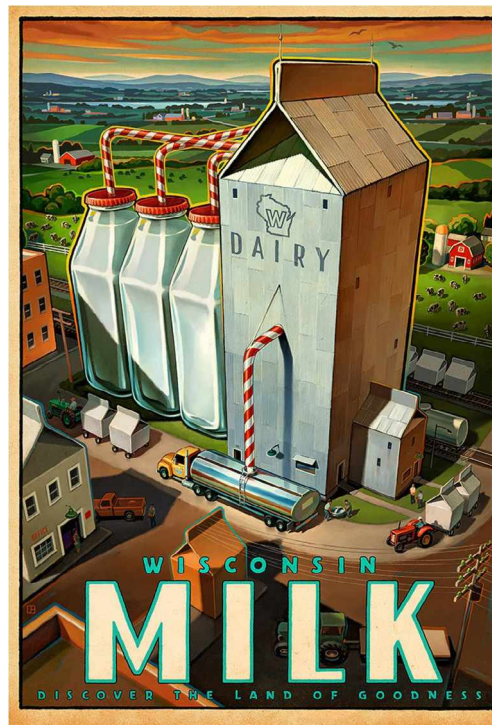
Catie Pfeifer

[SC] I liked your thoughtful and insightful reviews of *Arcane* and *WandaVision*. I have never heard of *Arcane*, but *WandaVision* got a lot of attention. I have not been very tempted by it because I've been avoiding the whole Marvel Multi-verse thing, but your comments certainly helped show me that I may have made the right decision.

[JG] (Comment also to **Andy**—) I often think about how much a reader's familiarity with a genre makes a story or a movie more or less accessible to them. I've been a science fiction reader for so long that it's difficult to tease out my assumptions and reading background when processing the ideas in a new book or movie. I frequently wonder if stories like *Everything Everywhere All at Once* makes sense to a movie-goer who hasn't encountered multiverse ideas anywhere else but Marvel movies. *Everything Everywhere All at Once* provided only the most minimal "explanations" for what was going on, and relied almost totally, it seemed, on viewers' acquaintance with its ideas from other science fiction stories. It used to seem to me that most people liked SF only if they began reading SF when they were kids. Adults who tried to read SF for the first time often seemed to find it difficult and intimidating, almost as if it were written in a foreign language that they had to translate word for word. Now that science fictional ideas have infiltrated all levels of art and culture, that may not be true anymore. More and more people are familiar with the cadences and tropes of the previously "foreign" SF language. So maybe things have changed considerably.

Carrie Root

[SC] Regarding your comment to **Jim and Ruth** on restaurants. I thought you might like to know that long-time Madison restaurant institution, Paisans (where we all went with you and **Andy** when you visited Madison last summer) has permanently closed. They were continuing to have problems with the building owner failing inspections on his underground parking garage. It was deteriorating and he was not fixing it, so the whole building was becoming unstable. Finally, the owner threw in the towel and the building will be torn down. Paisans, which existed for years on University Ave before moving to an extensively remodeled site on Wilson St. with its own outside terrace with a beautiful view of Lake Monona (back in the day that terrace with a much smaller bar was known as The Library and



we held some WisCon meetings there) is gone for good. Crap!

I finished *The Lord of the Rings*. I enjoyed re-reading it after all these years. A couple of the things I took away from it this time was how much more I sank into the Scouring of the Shire story near the end of *Return of the King*. I think on my first reading, it struck me as annoyingly anti-climatic and I must have raced through it to finish the trilogy. I completely forgot that here is where we find out the ultimate fate of Saruman and Wormtongue. I'd been thinking they just remained locked in Issengard in the custody of the Ents forever.

The other thing was how good a job the movies did of casting the characters. Many were excellent versions of how I'd imagined the characters and the others I had only a few quibbles. Maybe the Hobbits in the Fellowship were all a bit too young, or maybe Viggo Mortensen as Aragorn was just slightly too classic-Hollywood handsome and not quite rugged enough, but really just quibbles.

Jeanne and I have just finished reading aloud Neil Stephenson's new novel *Termination Shock*. We liked it a lot.

[JG] You asked how my brother managed to get an invite to throw out the first pitch at a Brewers' game. In his words: "Last year, for my 66th birthday present, Linda [Steve's wife] surprised me with a 'Milwaukee Brewer First Pitch' certificate that she had purchased at a Milwaukee Urban league charity ball and auction. I was shocked and speechless. What a great gift!" He's invited many friends and family to attend and it's likely that the tailgate party will be epic, given Steve's and Linda's legendary party-throwing expertise.

Thanks for your comment about the melancholic feeling of my Rock Island piece. I guess that's a pretty accurate reading. I felt a little sad during our Door County visit this year when we gazed at Rock Island from Schoolhouse Beach on Washington Island. We could see Thordarson's boathouse, but that's the closest we got during our visit. Nevertheless, my memories of the place still make me happy.

Scott and I gave **Jim** an emergency *Turbo* cover. So, if cats fail to be cute, and flowers fail to bloom, and all Jim's walks are shrouded in fog, Jim will still have cover options.

Andy Hooper

[SC] Your piece on Horror Host Svengoolie was entertaining as always. Your comments and the letter column were also delightful, but the star of Captain Flashback #44 for me was your wonderful review of *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once*, a movie Jeanne and I greatly enjoyed, but was almost too much of a good thing. It was a dizzying, exhausting, almost hallucinogenic, experience. There were times when I felt very much like one of the boulders with googly eyes sitting in the audience. There were other times when Jeanne and I were laughing hard at such sequences as a profane martial arts fight to top all martial arts battles. Thanks for the background information particularly for Ke Huy Quan, I look forward to seeing him again. Michelle Yeoh and Jamie Lee Curtis were divine.

Moving Backwards

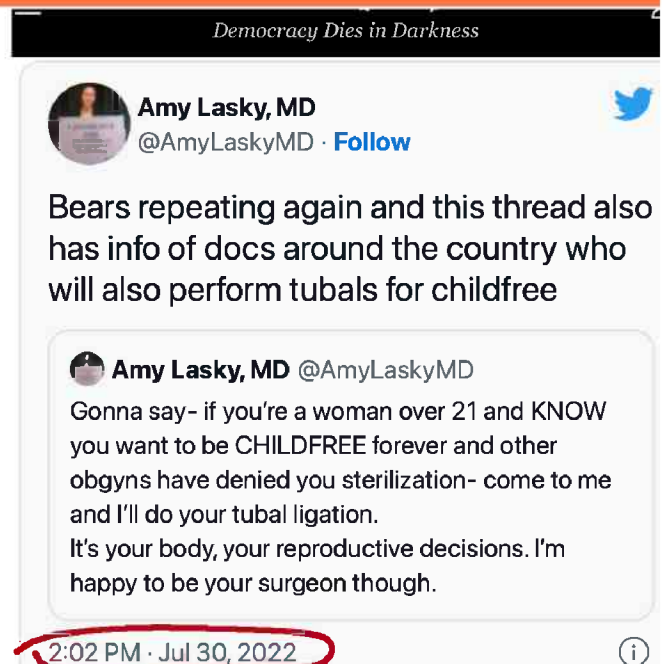
[JG] Among the horror stories we've all been reading and hearing about recently that stem from the Supreme Court's abortion ruling, I have been surprised to find out about another post-Roe problem—confronting women who want their tubes tied. This has gotten very difficult. The reason I say I was surprised is because the experiences reported by women in the recent months (several articles in *The Washington Post*) echo the social and medical landscape that existed when I chose to have my tubes tied...*forty-two years ago*. One woman in the *Post* article reported that she was refused a tubal ligation from several doctors in spite of the fact that those same doctors knew about her heart condition which would likely kill her if she gave birth. The article referred to the (current!) common reasons many doctors gave for refusing a tubal ligation to young, unmarried women: the doctors believed the women will change their mind or that she should wait to see if her husband wants children, and so denied her the operation.

I arranged for my tubal ligation immediately after my new job's health insurance covered the procedure in 1980. I could not have afforded it before I got health care insurance. (I don't know what it cost then, but

[JG] Re your comment to **Lisa** about diversity-enhanced speculative fiction, I have also occasionally had the feeling recently while reading a new author, that they didn't write it for me. Most recently, the idea occurred to me while reading Jemisin's *The City We Became*. I thought it was likely that in a general way, Jemisin might lump me in as a likely resident of Staten Island, as a white, privileged resident of the Midwest—America's Staten Island. The plot of *The City We Became* did not depend upon saving or even attempting to educate Staten Island's avatar, Island. If Island was unwilling to recognize the humanity of others who do not look like her, the heroes quite reasonably left her behind. Seems fair.

It was great to hear from Steve Bieler again. I would also like to see Jophan re-booted as a woman. What a great idea! It reminded me of Nicola Griffith's novella, *Spear*, which reboots Percival, of the round table and grail fame, as a woman—which has a similar myth-remaking feeling to Bieler's proposal, since both Jophan and Percival were archetypal questing heroes. I loved *Spear*, by the way.

Like Scott, I also enjoyed your take on *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. See my comments to **Catie**.



today, a tubal ligation costs between \$4,000 and \$5,000.)

So, here's the story from my memoir, part one, *Pretending*.

From the Book

Getting Fixed, by Jeanne Gomoll

When I was in college, one of my best friends—Viki Gaydosik—was told by her physician that she had a rare heart condition and that pregnancy would be lethal for her. Her doctor sent her to the UW hospital after she inquired about the tubal ligation procedure. This was in 1972 and very few doctors even in liberal Madison would even consider a sterilization procedure for a young, unmarried woman. Planned Parenthood published a list of doctors and their “requirements” for the procedure. Most of them demanded that the woman be over thirty years of age, married, and have the consent of their husband. Viki was twenty-one and did not intend to marry. In spite of the compelling medical reason she had (not wanting to die) to avoid pregnancy, the doctor felt that Viki was being far too impetuous about this decision and suggested that she come in to see him once a month for six months for a one-hour talk just to make sure she knew what she was giving up. She bluntly stated that she would certainly not marry any man who expected her to sacrifice her life for his offspring. I raged with Viki and celebrated victory after she had completed those six months of patronizing counseling and finally got her tubes tied.

But Viki’s situation also got me thinking: I was pretty sure that I did not want to have children. Would I be willing to run the same obstacle course that Viki ran? Over the next few years, I gradually became sure that I didn’t want to have children, ever, and that yes, I would do what was necessary. It seemed ridiculous to me, after all, to rely upon the pill, which is essentially a delaying tactic for those who want, eventually, to become pregnant.



When I was a kid in Milwaukee, we used to play a game of tag that centered on a big oak tree in a neighbor’s yard down the block. The person who was “it” hid their eyes against that tree and counted to 100 while all the rest of us ran away and hid. When the it-person had reached 100, they would try to find us and tag us before we could get back to the tree. If you could get back to the tree without being tagged out, you won.

In 1980, I felt very much like I’d gotten back to the tree without being tagged. On November 14, I went in for a tubal ligation. I stopped relying on birth control pills and was home free.

This is how it went.

One of the worst things about the day was having to get up at 5:00 in the morning. That says more about my disgust of early morning rising than it does about the comparative rigors of the operation and recovery. By 6:30am I was dressed in the weird open-ended hospital gown and robe reading Eleanor Dark’s *Stem of Time*. Intermittently a nurse or doctor would come in and take blood samples, measure blood pressure. (“It’s OK, I normally have really low blood pressure. I’m fine really.”) They lectured us about the effects of the anesthetic procedure and what we could expect during the rest of the day. There were three of us in the ward all scheduled for the same procedure. Madison General Hospital performed about ten sterilizations a week.

I was a little nervous, but more excited than worried.

And mostly I was anxious about a whole day lost to nothing but sleeping and lounging around in bed. So, I read quickly, hoping to finish the book while I was at the hospital. The other two women seemed far more nervous than I was. While I preferred to sit in one of the easy chairs and wait until the nurses wheeled me into an operating room, they laid their heads onto pillows within ten minutes of entering the ward. They complained jokingly about being starved and missing breakfast, since we were not allowed to eat or drink after midnight the previous night. Since I rarely eat breakfast anyway, I wasn’t hungry.

It was funny though, because later after we’d all been rolled back into the ward after the operations, I recovered without any nauseous feelings and ate some soup and jello. The other two women who had talked about being voraciously hungry couldn’t bear to look at my tray without becoming nauseated. Apparently, women have all sorts of different reactions to the operation, and about the worst one possible is several hours of nausea.

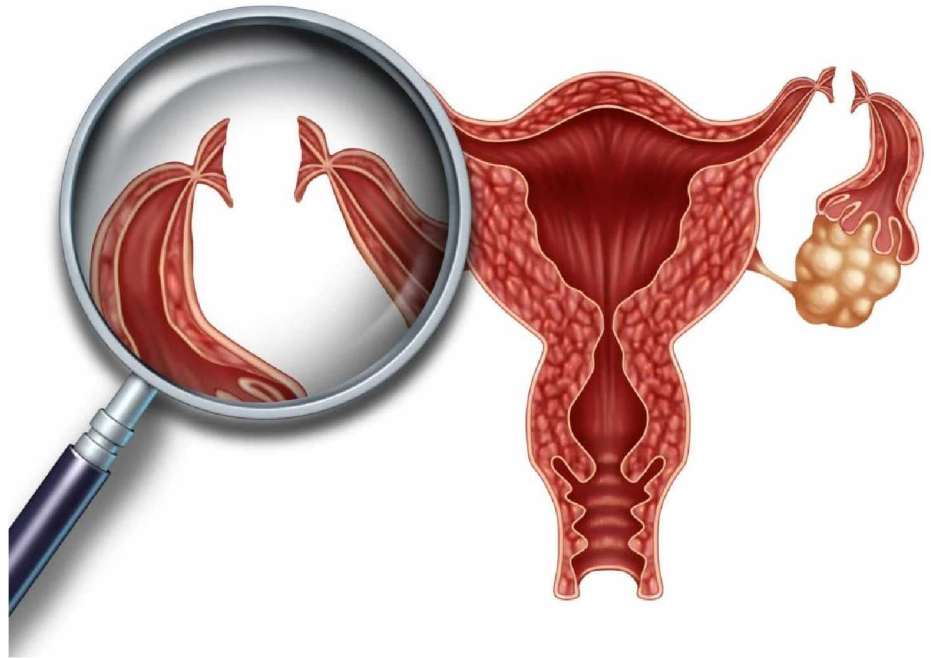
I theorized, based on my experiences and questions answered by the nurses, that the differences tracked with the women’s attitudes about sterilization. I laughed a great deal that morning, and when the doctors and nurses in OR were making humorous comments just before I went under with the anesthetic, explaining that they liked their patients to feel relaxed, I said that I thought it was more important that *they* were relaxed. So, Dr. Anderson suggested that I tell them a joke. And I did. With my feet up in stirrups I faked a Scottish brogue and told

them a joke about a woman giving birth. The midwife kept asking the father to hold the lantern closer because, "I think there's another one coming!" And indeed, a second child was born. But then the midwife asked the father to hold the lantern closer again, saying "I think there's another one!" And the father backed away in horror, saying "No, it's the light that's attracting them!" Considering my position on the operating table, that was quite a weird joke to tell.

Later when Dr. Anderson was making his rounds and came in to check on me, I recalled all the times he had warned me that I should consider the procedure to be irreversible, that once done, I would never be able to change my mind. So, when he came in to check on me and asked how I was, I said "fine...but I think I've changed my mind." He looked stunned for only the small amount of time it took me to lose control of my straight face and break out in giggles. That hurt the incisions in my abdomen and I held my stomach, and tried to stop laughing. He walked out shaking his head, muttering that I deserved it.

The other two women, on the other hand, really didn't want the operation. Mary simply couldn't afford any more than the two children she already had, and Edith probably couldn't survive any more deliveries. Only two of her six children had survived childbirth. Both said they loved babies and loved giving birth, and would have liked to have many more children if it were possible. Mary said that her sister in Dubuque had been sterilized the previous year and her relatives had found out about it because one of them worked at the local hospital. Mary's sister had been grilled about it and sternly "talked to" by nearly every member of the family. Mary decided that she didn't want that treatment, and so to preserve her privacy had come up to Madison secretly under cover of a visit with her sister-in-law. Only her husband knew what she was actually doing.

All Mary could talk about before going into OR was how she loved babies and how she wished she had been able to tell her mother about what she'd decided to do. She was a bundle of regrets. Mary came out of OR



sickest of the three of us, doubled over in cramps and throwing up every little while. She almost had to stay the night.

But even in the case of someone who reacted badly, the Band-Aid sterilization was almost always an outpatient procedure. The only discomfort I experienced, after I'd gotten through a post-anesthetic sore throat, was a two-hour feeling of being beat up all over from my upper legs to my shoulders, and two days of discomfort at the incision points. The beat-up feeling was an aftereffect that affects some patients and results from carbon dioxide injected into the abdomen to give surgeons a clear view of the fallopian tubes. This gas rose to my shoulders and until it dissipated, was slightly uncomfortable, though not bad enough for me to need aspirin. Slightly more uncomfortable, mostly because it lasted longer, was the pain at the incision points. I wish I'd worn something other than a pair of belted jeans to the hospital. The belt buckle pressed down on the uppermost incision in my abdomen. I should have worn a loose dress.

It's a very simple operation. For me, the feeling of relief I felt knowing that I would never get pregnant, never have to get an abortion, and most of all, would not have to worry about the possible side-effects of more years on the pill, was worth the discomfort a hundred times over.

I laid on the bed waiting for my friend, Nancy, to come to pick me up. We weren't supposed to spend the night alone, so Nancy had generously invited me to her

house where she could take care of me. While I waited for Nancy, I watched TV with a nurse who sat with me.

She was explaining something about the show we were watching and asked with an incredulous voice, “Don’t you have a TV set??”

“No, I haven’t had one in six or seven years,” I assured her. A long pause followed.

She was young—twenty-one or twenty-two—and had enormous green eyes. She said, “Well...wait till you have kids!”

“What have you done to me!!” I cried, then laughed uncontrollably (painfully) at her embarrassed apologies.

Probably another consideration that I really didn’t have to worry about was finding a doctor who was willing to sterilize an unmarried, single woman. My age, twenty-nine, probably caused the patriarchal medical institution less worry than Viki, at age twenty, had inspired. But I made sure that I didn’t encounter a doctor who would want to cross-examine me and possibly would not believe my motives “correct” enough. I called Planned Parenthood and obtained their list of doctors who do female sterilizations cross-indexed with their surveyed attitudes. Thus, I could avoid all those doctors who required a husband’s permission. When Dr. Anderson asked me if I was sure and I said yes, that I had been sure for eight years, that was all there was to it. I didn’t have to explain my personal and political reasons for wanting never to have children.

The only frightening thing about my experience happened during one of my meetings with Dr. Anderson. By state law, he was required to show me a film before we talked about the procedure. The film is awful. I really didn’t want to know what it looked like when they make the incision in a woman’s belly and inserted the tool that cuts and fuses the fallopian tubes, and I almost got sick watching it. I just kept telling myself “You’ll be asleep. You won’t know what’s happening. You won’t see any of this. You’ll be asleep.” And that was true. I was unconscious and it didn’t matter. But I’ve got this thing about blood. I’d have made a lousy medic.



Nancy arrived late in the afternoon to pick me up and wheeled me downstairs in the regulation wheelchair. As we drove home, I made my second mistake (the first was the jeans). Nancy had nothing prepared for dinner since she was at a social workers’ conference all day and so we decided to stop off at a fast-food place on the way home.

My advice to anyone in this situation is to skip Big Macs right after anesthesia. My stomach tolerated that for only a couple hours. But other than that embarrassing episode, the weekend was a wonderful vacation such as I had not allowed myself in years. I spent the whole weekend doing nothing at all. I watched TV and on Saturday, talked with Nancy and her daughter, who was very interested in my operation, but also typically polite about it: (“I hope I’m not embarrassing you by asking...”). Also, on Saturday I took Nancy out to a movie. *It’s My Turn*, which I thought was quite appropriate, and we went out to dinner. I still walked kind of funny (that was the jeans mostly), but I was completely recovered by Sunday morning.

I told this story to many of my friends who were considering their own sterilization. I tried to dispel some of their worries about the Band-Aid sterilization procedure. My advice to them was to get the procedure paid for by their insurance, to find a sympathetic doctor to do it through Planned Parenthood, not to wear jeans, not to eat at McDonald’s right afterwards, and to find a good friend to be with them that night and the next day. And to keep their sense of humor.

It was pretty easy for me, a single, young, white woman to get myself sterilized in 1980, but I worried that things could change back again in the future. In fact, I wondered if I hadn’t possibly had myself sterilized just in time. I hoped that was an unfounded fear, but it added to my feeling of relief and sense that I’d gotten home free without being tagged.