

# Madison Foursquare

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## *Jeanne and Scott go to MidAmericon II*

Jeanne had gone to MidAmericon I (Big Mac) in Kansas City back in 1976 where she attempted to see the famous Susan Wood panel, "Women in SF," that inspired a lot of feminist activism in the years that followed. Jeanne finally got to see a video of that panel at MidAmericon II, made by Jeff Schalles. The panel was in a small, hard to find room that was too full by the time Jeanne found it for her to be able to actually see the panel, but the hours-long discussion afterward turned into a great source of networking energy and ideas that had significant influence on the first WisCon. Big Mac was Jeanne's first WorldCon, and maybe her first SF con, so it seemed like a natural idea to head back down to K.C. for MidAmericon II, 40 years later.

We decided to drive. Although we like long car trips, we have not done many in recent years partly due to the need to take a fairly big chunk of time off (at least if you plan to see anything during the drive other than monotonous Interstate highway the whole time). In addition, our car, at 17, is getting a bit old to rely on for really long trips. But Kansas City seemed doable from Madison, even for our elderly car, so off we went. We left town Tuesday night (16th) around 8:00PM following our monthly book discussion group meeting at Frugal Muse bookstore. We did not want to miss the discussion, the book was Neil Stephenson's Hugo nominated *Seveneves* and, at 860 pages or so, it was not a book you wanted to read and then miss the discussion. It turned out to be one of the best discussions we have had in a long while as people disagreed on the book for interesting reasons. Afterward we drove down Hwy 151 to my hometown, Anamosa, IA, where we spent the night. We had breakfast the next morning with my sister, and then took off to make the rest of the drive to K.C.

It was a beautiful day for a drive and we headed south across Iowa, but when Siri, on Jeanne's iPhone, warned us of travel delays in Missouri, we turned west and drove across southern Iowa on Hwy 2. We saw very little Interstate until we got to I-35 to take us the rest of the way into K.C. We had some time to kill on this drive so we started listening to an NPR Podcast series called *Serial* that Jeanne had heard good things about. It was a series examining a 16-year-old murder case of a high school girl by her Muslim ex-boyfriend.



SERIAL

The case against the ex-boyfriend seemed weak, but still possible, and the series examined every aspect of the case from a reporter's perspective. It kept us hooked for most of our roughly 7-hour drive.

I have never been to Kansas City. Jeanne recalls the downtown area being a bit dicey back in '76, particularly after dark. She recalls being advised not to go out on the city streets alone after dark. We drove into a promising looking downtown area, unusual only in that it did not seem to have any type of connection to a lake or river. The Missouri river ran north of downtown, but seemed almost out of sight and uninvolved with the downtown.



We were fortunate to be booked into the downtown Marriot hotel, but we were told our room was in the older "East Tower." Driving up to the Marriot, it appeared to only have one tower, but it turns out that via a skywalk, the main tower is connected to an older, recently remodeled building kiddy-corner from the Marriot that they call the East Tower. That building turns out to be the old Muehlebach Hotel, originally opened in



1915, and expanded in the 1950's. Marriot tore down the expansion part and built a much newer annex in the late 1990s, which is where we stayed. The original hotel lobby and ballrooms have been restored and are used by the Marriot for conventions, but the old original hotel rooms above have been gutted and are not in use. It turns

out that the Muehlebach was the actual site of Big Mac in 1976. At one point during the weekend we took a stroll through the old part of the hotel to see if Jeanne could recognize anything from her first trip. Naturally we tried to figure out which room might have held the Susan Wood panel, but without an old convention map to guide us, we could not figure it out. It may well have been in the, now long gone, original hotel annex.



MidAmericon II was held in the Kansas City Convention Center which was just across the open Barney Allis plaza from our hotel. The Center (called Bartle Hall, named after an important mayor) opened, oddly, in the summer of 1976. It's a massive facility of some 800,000 square feet of total space. It's long enough that it spans two city streets that run under it plus a section of Interstate 670. The 5000 or so attendees of WorldCon did not remotely challenge its capacity. The practical result of this was that the convention never felt full to me, or even very large. The only times I ever got much of a sense of how many people were really there was during the panels I attended, which seemed pretty well attended, or large events like the Hugo Ceremony. Otherwise, it felt to me like a fairly small WorldCon, but I don't think it really was.

These days, I often don't go to a lot of programming at conventions. In Kansas City I was curious about the city and downtown, the weather was mostly excellent, and I wanted to be outside exploring as much as I could. That said, I did catch a number of good panels such as "SF as Protest Literature" with Ann Leckie and Jo Walton, Jeanne's "Feminism in Science Fiction: When it Changed" panel with Eileen Gunn and Patrick Nielsen Hayden and "Hamilton as Alternative History" also with Patrick Nielsen Hayden. Patrick and Teresa gave a very good interview with Tom Whitmore also. Patrick and Teresa seemed to be everywhere and were excellent guests of honor.

By far the strangest panel experience I had over the weekend came on the last day. Jeanne and I had different priorities for panels at 1:00 on Sunday and I decided to go to "Austen and Shelley" which was trying to draw some connections between these two authors who were writing very different things at about the same time. The panel was made up of writers, moderated by Mary Robinette Kowal, none of whom I knew or had read. I'm not quite sure what drew me to this event, but I'm glad I went. Mary frankly admitted to the room that she had not prepared for the panel. She had no idea where to go with the discussion, but she had a plan. She brought with her a bottle of Scotch and a bottle of dark rum and some small cups. She had a simple proposition for the audience. Anyone who had a good question on topic that the panel could use, she would give them a drink. She then pulled out paper and pen and people started raising their hands. If she liked the question, she wrote it down and called them up to collect their choice of reward. She knew she was a little out of bounds with this tactic

because she asked the audience not to tweet what she was doing, but she had used this "solution" at other conventions. She took down a generous list of questions, then the panel worked through them. Late in the panel she calmly announced that someone had turned her in and that convention staff would be speaking to her at the end of the panel. She did not seem upset or angry at anyone for squealing on her. I was sitting near the door and as some people were starting to leave I recognized a concom member and a member of convention security sitting calmly right outside waiting for the panel to end. The convention had a strict alcohol policy agreement with the Convention Center and Kowal seriously violated that agreement, so they ended up kicking her out of the convention for the rest of the day.

I have to give her some credit for taking it well. We saw her later in the hotel bar as she was explaining that she felt the convention acted reasonably under the circumstances and that she had no issues with their decision at all.

A much more impressive program event I attended was the Tiptree Auction at noon on Friday, not an ideal time for this event in my opinion. We came prepared. Jeanne and I brought pre-selected items with us to auction and sell. Sumana Harihareswara was set to be our auctioneer, Pat Murphy would be there to help and Jim Hudson would be acting as Treasurer for the event. Sounds easy, yes? Imagine walking into an open program space in the enormous Exhibit Area, with just chairs and tables, a little stage area and some microphones and speakers available. No concom staff for help. We just walked into the space an hour before showtime, and in that time Jeanne and Pat and Sumana transformed it into a workable Tiptree Auction space, with items spread out to see for auction and t-shirts and cookbooks to sell, an auction plan made, mics checked ready to go and Jim got his laptop and money ready to do business. People then started showing up and Sumana started working her magic. The show lasted for one hour. At the end, we said thanks to everyone, closed it all down and transformed it back to bland open space,





ready for the next event as if we had never been there. Tiptree made about \$1500. It was amazing.

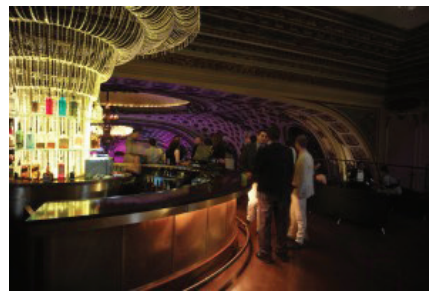
As Jeanne and I were strolling around the Exhibit area on Sunday checking out the Dealers area (but not the Art Show, which was closed down Saturday afternoon for judging and did not really re-open again. We never got to see it.) We ran into Neal Rest who showed us his invitation to George R.R. Martin's Hugo Losers party. We suspected there would be one, but we had no idea where it would be or if we would go. Now we knew. In the past, as a legitimate Hugo loser, Jeanne had attended George's parties when he held them in crowded hotel rooms. Following his success with *Game of Thrones*, the parties were reportedly more lavish these days. We decided to check it out.



We attended the Hugo's Sunday night. They were held in a vast hall they renamed the Pat Cadigan Hall for the weekend, and even though we ended up with seats far from the stage, we could see on monitors and hear quite well. Pat Cadigan hosted the event. It seemed to me to be a pretty well run program, and it was fun to be in the audience. Afterward we headed over to George's party, which was just a few blocks from the Convention Center. Jeanne identified herself at the door as a Hugo loser and we were admitted



through the metal detectors. George had rented the old, ornate Midland theater that had been reworked into a party space for hire. We walked into the former "lobby" area with a grand staircase leading to upper levels. A photo booth was set up for guest pictures by a photographer. We noticed a tray loaded with funny hats that any Hugo winners who showed up would be required to wear. In the main theater, the seats had been



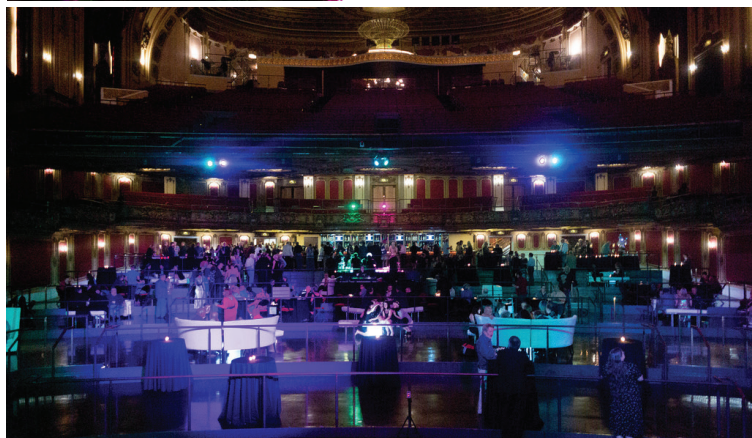
removed. On either side of the aisles leading down to the stage area, were open tiers where little comfy conversation groups were set up, with coffee tables, plush



chairs and couches with foot stools. Along the back wall of the theater, there was a long bar. Drinks were compliments of Random House. Scattered around the theater were food stations serving non-alcohol drinks, sweets, BBQ in cups, little ice cream drinks, and a truly amazing cake (see photo to left). The stage had a band and there was plenty of space for dancing in front of the stage. The mezzanine area was open above for additional plush seating and George announced there was another bar way up on top of the building for quieter conversations. It was one of the most lavish parties I think I have attended.



The downside was that we actually knew very few people. We spotted Neil Stephenson lounging about and talking to friends and we recognized a number of writers, editors and others, but in a party like this people in the industry are invariably networking. We sat down and talked with Moshe Feder for awhile. George recognized Jeanne and gave her a hug early on. Otherwise we mostly hung out on our own. We stayed to see George give out his Afie awards to people who would have been on the Hugo ballot had the Sad and Rabid Puppies not interfered. It was an unexpectedly moving presentation. He also gave an Alfie to the folks at *Locus* who had removed themselves from Hugo award eligibility for the past many years. We ran into a few people we knew as we moved around the theater afterwards and said hello, but we did not engage in many longer conversations. It just wasn't our crowd. We were back in our hotel by midnight.





Food in K.C. was pretty good. One simple lesson for me had to be learned the hard way. In our first group dinner out, we had about 8 people in our group and we wanted to find a place very close to the Center, so we settled on the restaurant in the Crowne Plaza hotel. Having had a large lunch, I took the prudent route in a hotel restaurant and decided to order scallops. Jeanne surprised me by ordering the steak fillet. When the food arrived, my scallops were just okay. Meanwhile Jeanne not only got a good steak, she said it was one of the best steaks she has ever had. Our dinner companion Diane Silver, a long time resident of Lawrence, KS leaned over to me and gave me the best food advice of the weekend. "When in Kansas City, order the beef."

We finally made it out to K.C. BBQ on Sunday night with a group that included Spike and Tom and Pat Virzi. We chose Fiorella's Jack Stack in the Crossroads Arts



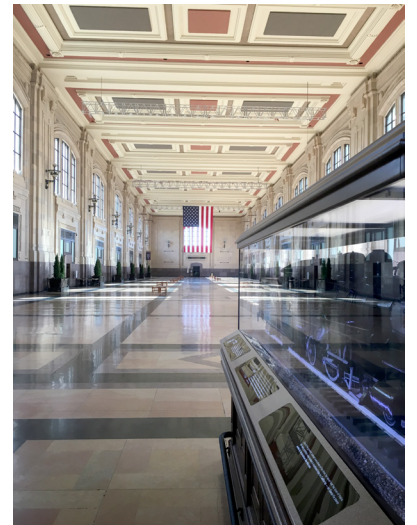
District, just a short streetcar ride from the Con. It was not far from the Union Station complex. Jack Stack was a newer restaurant, busy but quite comfortable. Jeanne and I chose to split a 2-rib "Crown prime beef short rib" dinner with sides. That might not sound like much beef, but when we asked our server if she thought it was enough food for two of us, she smiled and nodded. She was right. The two ribs were enormous beef ribs and each rib must have had about 12 ounces of very moist and tender beef on it. The sweetish K.C. style sauce was applied with admirable restraint. Neither of us thought it needed more of anything. Combined with nicely spicy baked beans, coleslaw and fine local beer, it was all good. The food highlight of the trip for me.

We planned to spend an extra day in the city to do some sightseeing, so Monday was our day. It was easy to do this in downtown K.C. without taking the car out of the garage thanks to the brand new downtown streetcar. It was a single line running North/South from River Market/ Columbus Park District (along the Missouri river) to the Union Station District. The streetcar was free and came by along Main Street about every 15 minutes. Since it was Monday, some museums were closed, but we left the hotel after breakfast with a general list of possibilities for the day. It helped that it was a beautiful day. We headed south to Union Station at the end of the streetcar line.

Last Fall we were in Denver briefly for a wedding and we ended up surprised and bowled over by their beautifully restored Union Station complex downtown. If you are ever in Denver, check it out. Kansas City's Union Station is much bigger and is also in beautiful shape. The complex includes the AmTrack Station, of course, but the vast building has restaurants and shops as well as a science museum and



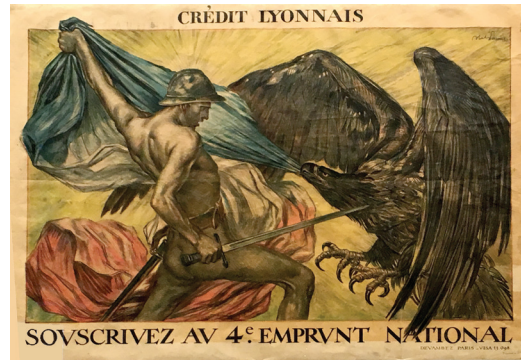
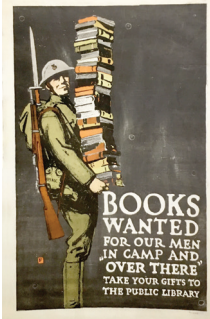
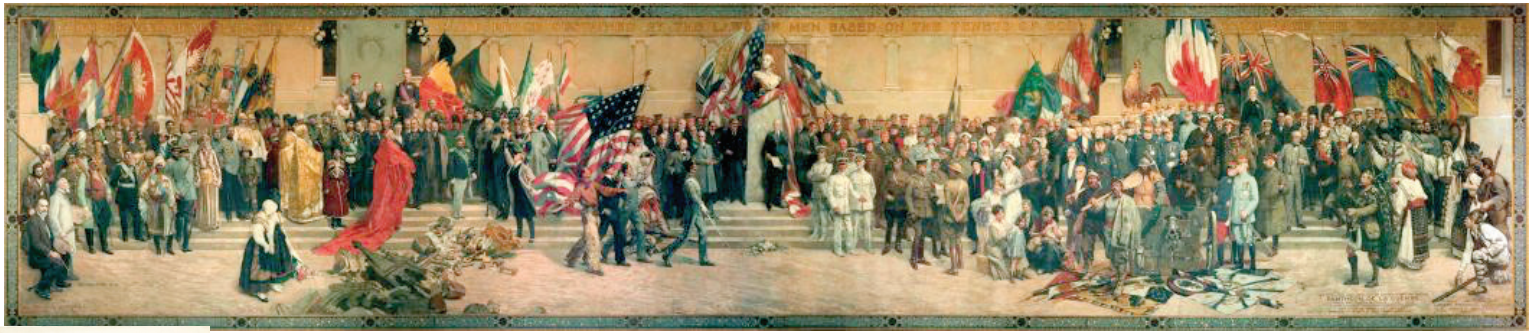
planetarium, something called the model rail experience plus vast halls and exhibit areas. K.C.'s station was one of the last really big stations built by the railroads (completed in 1914) reaching peak annual passenger traffic of 670,000 by 1945. Declining traffic eventually led to the closing of the station in 1985, but a \$250 million restoration brought the station back to life in 1999.



After walking around the station and through the excellent station history display, we initially decided to take a trolley tour of the city. With a couple hours to kill before the next trolley, we decided to check out the WWI memorial across the street. Although it seemed fairly close, the actual memorial was at the top of a hill that required a fairly long walk. Once we got to the top, we realized that it was not a local memorial, it was the National WWI museum and memorial. It was fascinating. The grounds included the giant 488 ft. x 48 ft. Great Frieze sculpture, walk of honor and reflecting pool, a 217 foot tall tower (with tiny elevator inside) offering a spectacular 360 degree view of the city at the top, a permanent indoor poppy field and remnants of the Pantheon de la







Guerre, formerly the largest painting in the world. The main galleries were divided into the East Gallery (1914-1917) and West Gallery (1917-1919) plus a theater, gift shop, café and more. Admission was good for two days because there

was plenty to see in two days. Jeanne was particularly interested in the posters. We ended up spending the rest of the afternoon there and barely scratched the surface. We skipped the trolley tour of the city.



At the end of that, we were pooped. So we boarded the streetcar for a ride to the north end of town. We stepped off the streetcar to immediately find a nice pizza place next door to a very friendly feeling coffee house. We relaxed with coffee for me, of course and tea for Jeanne, before dining on pizza and calling it a day. We drove back to Madison on Tuesday, pulling in to our driveway as the last four minutes of the *Serial* podcast concluded.



### A few comments on Turbo #360

Belated congratulations to everyone for 30 years of *Turbo*. Big thanks to Andy Hooper for starting it all off, and to current OE Hope Kiefer for keeping it alive for a very long run.

**Patrick Ijima-Washburn**

Beautiful front and back cover art once again, Patrick. Congratulations on your plan to return to Graduate school. It must be underway by now, I hope it is going well for you.

**Greg Rihn**

I appreciated your excellent, detailed WisCon 40 report. As evidenced by my own attempt above, writing something like that is not as easy as you make it look. I wanted to just say here that I'm glad that the issues WisCon has been going through the last couple years have not prompted you and Georgie to back off your participation in the program. I have no desire to be on panels myself, but I think it would be very sad if other longtime attendees chose to stop participating.

**Georgie Schnobrich**

Welcome back! Congratulations on your retirement. Your story is more than a little bit familiar to me. "She was pleasant to me, but it was clear that her vision was not mine and my time was past." Exactly.

**Andy Hooper**

Wonderful piece, "Masons, Moose and Oddfellows"! So many questions answered about organizations that I have known directly (my Dad was a Mason, I have known several Rotary members) or heard about or, in many cases, barely heard of but occasionally see evidence of (like the Elks building) around town. There was also a surprising list of groups I have never heard of. The thing that comes back to me is how little interest I would have in spending so much of my free time attending meetings and functions of several such groups. I think it's more than just TV and the Internet filling up my time. I really am not that social and not that much in love with meetings.





