



RUNE 91

Summer
2019

MINNESOTA SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY

Welcome to the first issue of Rune done (partially) in hectography! Well, as far as we know, anyway, since we're missing 10 of the last 90 issues, but it seems very likely, since hecto was obsolete long before Rune started.

So, about hectography. It is a super low-tech duplicating process. You make a paper master with a heavy load of ink, press it onto a sheet of gelatin, which absorbs some of the ink and becomes your gel master, then press blank sheets onto the gelatine to make copies. The "hecto" comes from someone's attempt to advertise that you could make 100 copies in this manner. Twenty is more realistic assuming you want the copies to be somewhat comfortably legible. You can read more about the history on Wikipedia, of course.

I'm going to refer to the gelatinous substance used for hecto as "gelatin", and I think that just gelatin probably works, but a mixture of gelatine ~~and~~ and glycerin is what everybody recommends and so probably works better. The standard recipe is 1oz powdered gelatin, reconstituted, plus 6oz glycerin. This seems right on the edge of what ~~it~~ stays solidish at room temperature, as I mixed up a few batches that resolutely remained liquid. A 1:2 ratio -- much less glycerine -- also works, and stays firm up to the mid 70s, at least.

I want to give some practical information about doing hecto with tattoo stencils, as suggested by some sources. This seems (is) easier than mixing your own ink (as suggested by some other sources) and means you can use your typewriter to make the paper master (no ribbon required - but if you don't have one, you'll be working blind. Ribbons are very easy to buy online.) I got the tattoo stencils from Amazon. The structure of the sheets is shown in Fig. 1.

Writing on the yellow sheet results in a positive copy on the white sheet below, where you have pressed down on the ink sheet, all the ink is transferred, leaving none ~~if~~ if you want to reuse ~~that~~ that part of the ink sheet. It's not just being smudged off! You can make a negative by ~~turning~~ turning the whole stack over and writing on the back of the white sheet instead. That's a bit surprising: the ink goes the same way regardless of whether the pressure is from the front or the back. This means the tattoo stencil is suitable for use either as a hecto master (which needs a positive) or a ditto master (which needs a negative). We tried both at

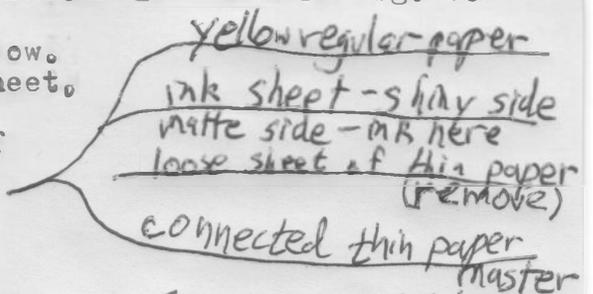


Figure 1. Structure of a tattoo stencil

Decongestant 3 and it really works.

The ink sheet has a very surprising property, which is that it can itself be used to make a gel master. If you write on the white sheet, so as to produce a negative paper master on the white sheet, you can press the ink sheet onto your gel and get a (correctly oriented) gel master that's just about as good as the one you get from the paper. Against all expectations, it is not a photographic negative. The undisturbed parts of the ink sheet will not transfer any of their ink, and I guess the parts that look free of ink actually have some ink left and give it up efficiently to the gel. I wondered if it were really the edges of the letters that allowed this to work, i.e. where the ink sheet was disturbed only marginally. It doesn't seem to be. The lettering you get is solid, not hollow. For artwork that looks good mirror-reversed or not, this means you get two chances to copy it, one from the paper and one from the ink sheet. I discovered this technique at Decongestant 3 when I inadvertently destroyed both the paper and gel masters by getting them stuck to each other.

Let's have some statistic on the tattoo stencils. The useful area is $8\frac{1}{4}$ by $10\frac{9}{16}$ ", including a dubious $\frac{1}{4}$ " at the top which does work, but is also glued together. Beware: the bottom $\frac{3}{8}$ " of the ink sheet has no ink on it, and you can't see this through the yellow sheet. (I didn't count that as part of the useful area.)

~~Another~~ Another aside: do you have to use the paper master right away? No, I tried letting it sit for a week before making a gel master from it, and it worked just as well.

Could hectography possibly be cheaper than modern duplicating technology, by which I mean laser printers? That's a high bar. Using off-brand toner, my laser printer costs about 0.7¢ per printed side, taking into account drum replacements, the ameliorated cost of the printer, electricity, everything. To give hecto a fighting chance let us take it as a given that your time is worth nothing, and that any marginally readable copy counts. I can easily find ~~the~~ the tattoo stencil sheets for 18¢ each in a 100-pack. Let's assume you can get 50 copies out of each master. That's 0.36¢ for the paper master for each copy. Given experience, I won't be so generous as to assume 100 copies.

Powdered gelatin ~~can~~ can be had for 45¢ per ounce without looking too hard (that's in large, but not industrial quantities). Glycerine isn't expensive either and can easily be had for 16¢/oz. So each gel sheet can reasonably cost as little as 61¢ to make. They can be melted and reused, so if we assume this can be done at least 5 times before it is too saturated with ink (remember we're not looking for high quality here), the total cost per copy can be held down to 0.6¢, which edges out laser printing. As a bonus, you can do it when the power is out.

DECONGESTANT

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It's a party!



Taiwan ten years apart

Rachel Kronick, January 2016

In the summer of 1995, I studied in Taiwan at the (then) Stanford Center. It helped my Mandarin a lot; I gave my first major talk in Mandarin that summer, to a pretty packed little café. When I got back to the US, it was with plans to return to Taiwan. In 1996, I went to Taiwan. I lived there for just slightly short of eight years.

In 2004, I came back to Minnesota. Pretty much the whole time since leaving Taiwan, I missed it. A lot of it was just nostalgia: remembrances of good times I had there, places I explored, food I loved, frequent chances to use my Mandarin.

When I was living in Taiwan, there were negative experiences, too, of course; a period of time that long isn't simply good or bad. When people ask me "What was it like living in Taiwan?", I have a hard time answering. It was just *life*, you know? It had its ups and downs. There were little victories and discoveries, like finding a little shrine down some alley I'd never seen, or discovering a new snack food in a convenience store; and there were little defeats, like finding sweat-salt patches on a newly-purchased shirt or nearly getting killed by a motorscooter driver who was going the wrong way on a one-way street. And there were a lot of days where life was just life, where things just went pretty much as they always do. It's hard to sum it up in just a few words.

But it made an indelible mark on me, that's for sure. Do you find that being in a new environment, sense impressions are crisper, deeper, and more intense? That's certainly true for me. That's one reason it made a deep impression on my memory.

Another reason is that it was where, in a lot of ways, I became an adult. I didn't grow up there, but I definitely matured there.

And yet another reason is that there are a lot of things I loved about Taiwan that are difficult or impossible to find in the Twin Cities; it's easy to find myself missing this food or that convenience of Taiwan. And I'm sure there are other reasons.

Since coming back in 2004, people – especially Taiwanese people – have asked me fairly often if I've been back to the island since then. The answer, for most of the past decade, was a desultory "no". No money, no time, no opportunity.

This past year, though, while I was teaching Mandarin in a high school, another teacher in the district and I organized a student trip to Taiwan. Ms. K and I designed the itinerary, and decided early on to make it purely a tourist trip; we knew it could only be a couple weeks at most, and attempting any kind of deep study in that amount of time seemed unrealistic. We tried, instead, to create some good opportunities for the students to use their Mandarin in real-world situations. I knew, for

example, that finding a meal on their own in a night market would be a superb experience for my students.

As Ms. K and I planned out all the places we wanted to go, our eyes may have been bigger than our schedule would allow. I, especially, wanted to cram in everything I'd been missing about Taiwan, and more. "We can't not go to the National Palace Museum!" "We have to go to Jiufen, even if it's crowded on a Saturday!" "Going to Taiwan without going to the Kending peninsula would just be silly!"

I'd tried to arrange student trips before, but not had success. This time, the combination of factors was right: Ms. K had led groups before; we were both highly experienced with Taiwan, especially since she is from Taiwan; the price was pretty good, considering the total package; and we were going to a bunch of places both of us were really excited to see. Our excitement for the trip must've been contagious, because in the end we had a dozen students and three parents join us. That was enough to allow two chaperons – Ms. K and me – to go along for free.

The trip was the last part of June, 2015. Both Ms. K and I wanted to spend some time on the island apart from the students and parents, so as it worked out, I went there five days early, and she stayed a couple weeks after the rest of the group returned.

Along the way to Taiwan, I had a chance to visit Ctein in the Bay Area. I'm still not entirely convinced that he actually lives there.

As soon as I got off the plane in Taiwan, June 16, the wall of humidity hit. I knew it was coming, but that still didn't prepare my sweat glands. Being even more out of shape than I was when I left in 2004 didn't help, either. And it was quickly coming to the height of summer. Taiwan is sub-tropical -- in fact, the southern third or so of Taiwan dips south of the Tropic of Cancer and is therefore fully tropical. And the capital, Taipei (also spelled Taipei) is in a big basin and is a former swamp, so humidity there is also potent. All this meant I pretty much never stopped sweating through the entire trip. I eventually ended up hand-washing my clothes every night and hanging them up to (partially) dry overnight. Better to have slightly damp clothing in my luggage than to have huge salt-patches on every single piece during the day.

After the wall of humidity hit me, the next was a wall of nostalgia. It was amazing to be back. On the bus from the main international airport to Taipei city, I tried hard (between clicks of the shutter) to soak in things I'd missed. There was the little Buddhist monastery in the mountains between Taoyuan and Taipei; there was the elaborate seafood restaurant with its many floors of neon-bedecked elegance; there were the myriad neon-clad street signs, the shiny steel water vessels on top of most buildings, the frequent pigeon coops atop many apartments, and the throngs of motor scooters and yellow taxis in every street.

CAFF-EIN-ATE!
CAFF-EIN-ATE!



19.2.2015

It was that feeling – one you may have had – of being back in a place you'd left long ago and wondering, for a few moments, if you'd ever actually left.

The many new buildings reassured me that I had, in fact, been gone for a while. I was staying with a friend, P, in Tucheng where she and a friend have had an apartment for many years. P is a retired professor of economics, and just a generally nifty person with lots of cool interests. When I was living in Taiwan and had visited her in Tucheng, in the early 2000s, Tucheng felt like a distant suburb. I remember it seeming isolated and decidedly down-key compared to the constant hustle-bustle of Taipei. As I took a cab to her apartment in 2015, I was cruising past busy shopping districts, night markets I didn't remember existing, and more general population than I'd experienced before in Tucheng. Buildings were taller, denser, and more brightly lit. The confusion of the new mixed with nostalgic familiarity.

When I got to P's place, it was nighttime and I'd been trying and failing to sleep for most of the past 24 hours. But I was so excited to be back in Taipei that I had to go out and see some of the area.

P very kindly accompanied me. We walked in a big loop around her neighborhood. We went down a busy shopping street or two, well lit by store signs and traffic headlights.

When we happened to walk past a small, average, neighborhood stationery store, I had to poke around a bit. I get the impression that P thought this was weird, like a traveler in Minneapolis wanting to inspect individual trees or fire hydrants. And if you're from the US, you may not understand the magnificence of a Taiwanese stationery store.

But: Are you a pen nut? Do you lose yourself wandering in Office Max or Staples? Do you have Jetpens.com bookmarked? Then you simply must see a Taiwanese stationery store at some point in your life. Even the smallest is crammed with calligraphy brushes, magic water paper (for calligraphy – it turns black with water, then dries back to its usual blue color), a vast array of mechanical pencils, every hardness of lead, cute notebooks with every cartoon character you can imagine, gorgeous pens of every sort, cute stickers, glue, general craft

supplies, notebooks, binders, maps, textbooks, exercise equipment, toys, even usually a pretty good selection of current manga and CDs. Every one is a marvel of stationery variety and density.

When I'd lived in Taiwan before, it felt weird to take photos of daily life. Street photography can be an exercise in embarrassment, or just plain invasive. I didn't want to take photos of a lot of the people and places I spent a lot of time, because it felt somehow wrong to do so when I was there. But this trip, I decided to indulge a bit more of my tourist instinct. It's a tricky balancing act, but I think I kept it respectful.

In this stationery store, as P and I poked our noses around a bit, I asked the proprietor if he'd mind me taking a few photos. I think he felt the same way that P did – you want to take photos of my utterly unexceptional store? – but he was quite happy to let me do so anyway. I told him, and P, a little of how amazing Taiwanese stationery stores are to someone from a place where Staples is about as good as it gets. He took this very humbly; I bought some pencils and leads as well.

Later, as P and I kept walking around her neighborhood, we passed through a school's running track. Dozens of people were out walking in the moist evening air. As we reached the middle of the track, I realized there was a very unusual sight in the sky: stars.

Taiwan, and especially the area around Taipei, is pretty heavily light polluted. With a dense population, flourishing night life and lots of clouds, it's rare to see even one star. But that night in Tucheng, I could clearly see all of Scorpius and a few other stars. And of course they were much further above the horizon than I was used to. I asked P if she minded stopping for a bit – my feet were killing me, too – so I got out my portable tripod and took a few shots of the stars. They didn't turn out well enough for publication, but it was still fairly amazing to get anything at all.

Once I got back to P's apartment, I pretty much collapsed. P had very kindly let me use the air conditioning in the room she let me use. It was well-appreciated relief from the mugginess just outside the window.

Wednesday morning, traffic sounds six or seven stories below woke me up, rather earlier than I'd hoped. I tried to go back to sleep, but the humidity and noise kept me up. Well, getting an early start to the day couldn't hurt.

I didn't want to disturb P, who was either busy or asleep (I forget now), so I headed out and down to the already bustling street. First stop was getting some cold, delicious soy milk at a breakfast stand. I then tried to walk to a bus stop. I have never been especially familiar with Tucheng, though, and even though I went in the direction that seemed logical to get into Taipei, I was actually walking away from the main business district, and thus away from most of the bus stops. I finally found a stop for a bus that purported to have stops near where I wanted to

go – the MRT, or Guanhua market if I was especially lucky – and waited.

Buses around Taipei don't come at particularly regular intervals; you might wait a half hour and then see three of them – all the same route – all hurtling toward you at the same time. There are schedules, but not all the drivers stick to them. Miss one cohort of buses and you're out of luck for who knows how long. So when the bus didn't come for a while, I started to contemplate getting a "little yellow bus" (that is, a cab). This thought, of course, served to summon a bus, and I was soon on my way.

The bus route happened to pass through some of my old haunts, and things started to feel more familiar. We passed the street where every store sells kitchen supplies; then the street with nothing but photography supplies; then we went past Taipei Train Station and the Xinguang Mitsukoshi building. It had been the tallest building in Taipei for a long time. Far away, peeking up over the buildings in the east, was the current record holder: Taipei 101. It rose like a glass palm tree, and was visible from almost anywhere in Taipei City proper.

Riding on the bus, I saw another bus cruise past with a big ad for *Terminator: Genisys* on it. I wanted a photo of this – for no particular reason – and got my camera ready. A woman on that other bus, seated beyond the window just above Arnold's head, held her purse up to block her face; apparently it looked like I was taking a picture of her. But she could see me well enough that I mimed "Down there", pointing to the ad. She lowered her purse and gave me a smile.

Finally, I arrived at my first destination for the day: Guanhua Market. The stores were just beginning to open. Like those other specialty zones I'd passed along the way, Guanhua pretty much just does one thing, and does it *very* well. That one thing is computers.

The amazingness of Guanhua is kind of hard to put into words. There's a street, Bade Road, where almost every single store sells computers, peripherals, cellphones or some related technology. Frequently there are three different stores selling different kinds of technology on different floors of the same building. Just off of Bade Road is a six-story mall full of more of the same, with tiny stalls jostling next to bigger stores. Upper floors of the mall contain repair shops; there are a few manga and DVD stores scattered around; and a few places sell sporting goods, food or other things. Even at this early hour, the place was pretty packed with people checking out the latest cool gadgets that you didn't even know you wanted, or haggling over hard drives, or chatting with each other about the best deals on cellphones. I used to spend many a Saturday just bopping around Guanhua, seeing what cool new things had come out. When I bought a computer in 2002, I did the comparison shopping by wandering around Guanhua for a few days. William Gibson is right: the future is already here, and it's distributed through the various levels of Guanhua Market.

drag•on•fly \drag-ən-flī/ (1989): a presumed, mythical winged creature, who, incapable of natural flight, adapts found apparatus for transportation. ■



On the airplane to Taiwan this June, my cell phone and tablet had both been giving me trouble. Neither was charging properly, and that was a big problem – my only method of contact with Ms. K was email. I needed at least one of my devices to work. I was getting desperate. But Guanhua had a cure for what was ailing me.

Arriving on the sixth floor of the Guanhua mall, I went to the first store I saw and asked about my cellphone. The rather gruff guy working there told me that my phone was pretty outdated, and he could find me new batteries, but it'd take at least a business week. So I did what you usually do in Guanhua: I walked all of 10 meters to the next store, and asked the same question. The much nicer guy working there said sure, he could get me new batteries; it might take as much as ten minutes, depending on how fast the delivery person could run from the warehouse. Sold! While I paid, I asked if he could check out my tablet and figure out why it wasn't charging. He prodded it a bit, finding nothing particularly wrong with it except age. He finally asked me to show him my USB adapter; seeing it, he quickly ascertained what the problem was. He kindly pointed out that I was using a 1-amp adapter, not the 2.1-amp variety that tablets require. D'oh! I didn't have a 2.1 in Taiwan, so I asked if he sold such things. Not only did he, but he gave me a good price for it, and he offered to let me charge my tablet for a while in his store to make sure it really wasn't the battery. I went and did some more shopping. What a nice guy!

I wandered a bit, seeing if it was possible to buy a used phone or otherwise get something I could use temporarily in Taiwan. (My main phone is CDMA, and doesn't work in Taiwan.) No luck, so I went back to the kind repair guy. My tablet had indeed charged, so I thanked him again, bought something else (I forget what now), and headed out.

Two items on the to-do list done, many more to go! Next up was getting a replacement for my amethyst pendant. Seen those cute phone charms that are popular in East Asia? I have one in the shape of a bottle gourd, called a *hulu*. (The streaming service is named after the bottle gourd, apparently.) The pendant itself is made of amethyst, and it took a long time to find, so I want to preserve it if possible. Over ten years of living in the US, the pendant itself has stayed in fine shape, but the cords holding it had become frayed.

Literally across the street from Guanghai is a bustling jade and precious stone market: stall after stall of vendors selling really gorgeous jade, amber and other pieces. I looked to and fro for a replacement, but while there were tons of jade gourd ornaments, and lots of amethyst pieces in various designs, no amethyst bottle gourds.

Finally, I hit on the idea of getting my piece remounted. Could you do that, I asked one of the vendors? Sure, no problem. She named a very reasonable price and said she could finish within a few minutes. She gave me a choice of beads to complement the pendant, and let me go wander some more through the jade market while she went to work. Within a few minutes and the expense of a few dollars, I had my amethyst *hulu* remounted!

I still needed to get a phone, and it was time to head towards lunch, so I took a cab to Yongkang Street. The street is a general shopping district, with lots of food and clothes for sale. I first found a phone store, where I bought the cheapest phone and the cheapest plan that Taiwanmobile had. It was surprisingly easy; I was half-expecting them to reject me out of hand, as a foreigner who was only in the country for a couple weeks, with a foreign credit card to boot. But it was easy as pie.

I worked at a school on the corner of Yongkang Street and Xinyi Road for a year, so I was still pretty familiar with the area. The thing I missed most about it was Chengji, the Vietnamese curry place just down a side alley. They were still there, so that was lunch. Beef curry over rice, with fresh lime slices and sliced cucumbers... Mmm. It was just as delicious as I remembered. I ate slowly and tried to savor it, while my tablet and phone sat charging.

The next stop was another stationery store – yes, I admit it, I have an addiction – and then to a gaming store on Xinyi Road.

Taipei doesn't have nearly as flourishing a gaming scene as the Twin Cities do. In the Twin Cities, there are at least a couple dedicated gaming cons; easily two dozen gaming stores; and so many RPG gaming groups that it's hard to know where to start. Taipei has only one, very small-scale, gaming con that I know of. RPG gaming groups are rare; there seem to be a few groups playing D&D, and nearly no one playing anything else. And there is only a scattered handful of dedicated gaming stores.

The biggest is a chain called Alchemy. It's owned by a guy I used to game with, when I was living in Taiwan; he

ran the store that is effectively grandparent to Alchemy, too. The Xinyi branch of Alchemy deals mostly in Magic: the Gathering, which continues to be huge. It has very much the standard FLGS vibe: a bunch of tables, a single worker hanging out behind the counter, posters for the latest set, a few dice and a bunch of rare cards under a glass counter, a cooler full of drinks, a few D&D books on a shelf... if you're a gamer in the Twin Cities, you'd recognize the place instantly. I asked how the gaming scene is, and asked if the boss was around; he told me a bit about games they have going on there, including a weekly D&D group, and he said that the boss wasn't there, but maybe I could try the Zhongxiao branch. I resolved to do so later on.

From there, I took a bus to Gongguan. Gongguan is to National Taiwan University as Dinkytown is to the U of M. Gongguan is also where I taught English for about six years. I know the area *very* well. Even with ten years of changed businesses and new construction – the once-streetful of Sichuan restaurants now only has one lonely Sichuan place surrounded by a dozen other cuisines – Gongguan still felt comfortable and familiar. (And humid – I hadn't stopped sweating since I got off the airplane. But that's not Gongguan's fault.) I knew most of the little alleys, and most of the stores. It felt like, well, not *home*, but certainly my old haunts.

I was kind of searching for an internet cafe, or at least someplace to charge my various devices (two cellphones and one tablet, at this point). In Taiwan, when I was living there, there were places where you can rent a cubicle or even a private room, then play MMOs, read from an extensive library (manga, light novels, etc. etc.) and watch DVDs, and order delicious noodles or french fries or other snacks when you're hungry. Did the US ever have internet cafes like that? I think Taiwan still has them; I passed one later on, but didn't have time to go in and verify their services. And as it happened, that Wednesday, I didn't find one, either.

But I did eventually find a coffee shop with lots of lovely charging stations at the long middle table. I sat and drank some fruit juice and tried to soak in the air conditioning. Eventually, I felt like things had charged about as much as I was willing to wait for – people often hang out in Taiwanese coffee shops for what seems like hours, but I somehow always feel like I'm imposing if I do that – and like it was time to head back to Tucheng for the night. Being in Gongguan, it made sense to take the MRT instead of a bus.

Taipei's Mass Rapid Transit had only just barely gotten started when I left Taiwan. When the system first opened, a few years before that, lots of people were scared to even ride it, fearing that inferior construction would bring a pylon or tunnel down on their heads. When more people started using the MRT, the concept of "queueing up" was difficult. But everyone quickly realized how convenient and efficient it was – trains come at extremely

regular, speedy intervals, with signs stating clearly when the next one will arrive – and the MRT became more popular. They added more lines and stops; there was eventually a stop about a three-minute walk from my house. The lines kept extending out into the suburbs, too. Now, there are so many lines and stops that it's almost confusingly convenient; and people wait in superbly ordered queues, and getting on and off is easy.

After a change of lines and about an hour of travel, I was back in Tucheng. I ended up taking a cab to go the final leg to P's place – probably unnecessary, really, but I wanted to make sure I got exactly there at exactly the right time. And indeed I was. (Taiwanese cabs are everywhere, and quite cheap. The drivers aren't always very careful, but they're usually fast, at least.) I took a second shower for the day – showering morning and night is one way of coping with the humidity – and then more or less collapsed into bed. A full day of sweating and walking had certainly exhausted me.

The following day, Thursday June 18, I got up relatively late. Still, I was up before my hosts, so I again headed out and got an early start on the day. This time, I was better oriented, so I took a bus to the closest MRT station. The MRT was full of people, no doubt mostly commuting into the city for work. There were lots of interesting ads; there was a cute anime-style ad for the dragon boat races that were soon to happen, and another featuring Fan Bingbing, advertising a new MMO.

Eventually, I emerged from the Guting MRT station. It felt like home; Guting is the stop located a couple minutes' walk from the apartment I lived in for about six years. Some of the businesses had changed, but much was just as I remembered it. The Wellcome grocery store in the basement below the McDonalds on the northeast corner; the electronics store on the northwest corner; the 100-meter skyscraper on the southwest corner; the calligraphy stores, beef noodle restaurants, tea stores, hair salons, appliance stores, law firms and numerous other businesses that filled in the rest of the buildings. The number of buildings that *hadn't* changed was actually a little surprising, but at the same time comforting.

Going a little way east, I poked my head into one of the calligraphy stores. I've never really known why my old neighborhood had so many of these establishments; perhaps it's due to the proximity of National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU). Regardless, there are easily a dozen stores nearby selling brushes, paper, ink, inkstones, examples of classic calligraphy to copy from, and gorgeous framed pieces that are way too expensive for my budget. I ended up buying a nice big brush at one store. Calligraphy brushes are sold with a kind of glue on them, to keep the bristles formed; I've never been very clear on how to get the glue off, so I asked the lady working there. She kindly and patiently explained the process for me.

Then I headed into the alleys behind the old Electric Company. (Not the Public TV show for kids; and neither is

it the huge skyscraper further south, nearer to National Taiwan University. I had to explain this latter difference many times to cab drivers.) Alleys I'd walked down hundreds of times. Alleys I could almost navigate blindfolded.

Shortly, I was standing before the building I'd lived in for so many years. That feeling that I'd never left was especially strong, and strange. I expected to reach into my pocket and discover the massive, round-barreled key I used to get in my front door, or look up and see kindly old Mr. Wang, my landlord, returning from replacing some household appliance. There was a piece of calligraphy from the Mayor of Taipei, Ke Wenzhe, on the main door. But no keys in my pocket, and I didn't want to bother the current residents.

The first floor is still the same little shrine I'd lived above for years. Not a prosperous or especially powerful deity, the God of the Earthly Palace (i.e., hell) enshrined there has nonetheless stalwart supporters. When I'd lived there, the worshippers burned a lot of spirit money for their ancestors. Good for their ancestors, but bad for me, as the chimney of the shrine's furnace ended right in front of my air conditioner. Sooty air was almost constant when I lived in that apartment. Now, I discovered, the chimney had been bent out, so that it was separated from the building by a couple meters; and not only that, but the whole spirit money furnace had been declared a fire hazard, and the mouth of the furnace had been wired shut. I hope the ancestors are getting their money other ways; and it's nice that the burnt paper is no longer fouling the environment. Mostly, I'm just happy for the residents of the building, who hopefully no longer have to sweep their floors or cough so often.

I took a bunch of photos, and then tore myself away to walk through the nearby alleys. The storefront where I used to get my laundry done was now some kind of delivery business; the Tai'angong temple further away was still a flourishing community center.

Then I turned south and walked back towards Heping East Road. I found a bookstore that was packed full of academic texts of all sorts; the Chinese philosophy section, for example, was huge. The store purported to be the Student Bookstore. Was it related to the old Student Bookstore that had been located on the campus of NTNU, I asked the person working there? He explained that it was the selfsame store, which had moved to its current (less crowded, but still book-packed) location a few years ago. Good for them.

I wandered through the NTNU running track. Like the one P. and I had walked through in Tucheng, the running track here is open to the public as an exercise area. Someone was carefully repacking their giant yellow parachute. Others were walking around the track. A few were in newly-graduated students in gowns, taking photos, both serious and silly.



As I meandered through the main buildings of the campus, a student came up and asked me, in very polite Chinese, if I speak Chinese, and if I'd mind taking a photo with him. A teacher had assigned him to take a photo with a foreigner, holding a card with a "no drugs" slogan on it. Sure, why not? He had asked so sweetly, I couldn't refuse.

Photos done, I kept walking east. Before long, I was in the Shida Night Market area. As Gongguan is to NTU, Shida (Mandarin for "NTNU") and the surrounding neighborhood are to NTNU. I've spent hundreds of hours in this area – exploring the cute little clothing stores, chatting with friends at quirky tea houses, buying *The Economist* at the strange old store that seems to specialize in umbrellas and statuary... but mostly, eating at the vast array of restaurants and food stalls in the area.

Before I left Taiwan in 2004, a friend of mine, C, had just opened a little tea house/restaurant in the area. Her business, Red House, is in a nifty little wooden building on a tiny footprint; the first floor is mostly just her (incredibly efficient, densely packed) kitchen, while the second floor is a romantic little place for sitting, drinking and viewing the crowds below.

The vagaries of communicating halfway across the world meant I'd lost contact with C. I wasn't even sure she was still running Red House. So when I came up to it, I was happily surprised to see her busily assembling someone's order for spaghetti. I was kind of hoping to surprise her by walking up and ordering something to drink without announcing who I am, but she spotted me first. "Are you Rachel?!" she asked. And soon we were chatting about old times, like the intervening ten years had just been a month or two without contact.

She was *supremely* busy; it was lunch rush, and her usual worker had called in sick. In fact, she wouldn't have been there at all if her worker hadn't been out that day. So while I wished the worker a speedy recovery, I was also glad it had worked out that C was there that day.

C was so busy that carrying on a conversation was actually kind of difficult. I'd ask a question, she'd take an order or two, she'd pop this pan into the oven and crack that egg into the pan, she'd start to say a response, and then another customer would come up to pay. Eventually, I realized the conversation was distracting her from work, so I said I was going to go get some lunch myself and then come back. She was fine with this idea.

I went literally just across the alley to a teppanyaki place. If you have the same associations I do, teppanyaki may remind you of the (rather immensely expensive) Ichiban restaurant in downtown Minneapolis. But only after I got to Taiwan did I realize how good, and how *cheap*, teppanyaki could be. At this restaurant across the alley, I got an overabundant meal of black pepper beef teppanyaki, fried sprouts, friend cabbage, rice, a glass bottle Coke and fried eggs with Chinese basil, all for about US\$5. It was actually more than I could eat – I probably shouldn't have ordered the eggs, but I am a sucker for Chinese basil and any delivery vehicle for it is welcome. The meal was *amazingly* good, and cheap, and filling.

After that, I went back to Red House. C was a little less busy, so we were able to catch up. I told her how life had been for me, and she told me how life had been for her. She'd gotten married, had a couple kids and continued to steadfastly run her (amazing) little restaurant. "Steadfastly", because Shida has been a spotlight example of the troubles Taipei has had with crowding.

Shida once held a true night market, full of fun bustling activity until at least midnight even on weeknights. When I lived in Taiwan, the Shida Night Market always went later than I could stay up. When I wanted Indian food, or Thai food, or office supplies, or toothpaste, or fresh squeezed kiwi juice, or whatever else, the Shida Night Market was probably my first stop. Both of my favorite alternative music stores were nearby. Everyone will say that the best Shanghai little soup buns are at Dingtaifeng; don't believe them. The best xiaolongbao were at the "Cafeteria" restaurant in the Shida Night Market.

But the Night Market became a victim of its own success. Businesses spilled over into more and more alleys nearby, meaning that residents got annoyed at boisterous college students thronging outside their living room windows at all hours. Voters put pressure on officials to restrict the night market. Merchants and residents got into well-publicized arguments.

C told me about the trouble she'd had. Unfair regulations increased; unfair enforcement increased. Police came by to check on (often false) noise complaints more often. Red House once had a beautiful second-floor balcony, expanding the seating and enhancing the romance. Inspectors forced her to remove the balcony wholesale. (Few buildings in Taipei, I will note, are anywhere close to meeting code; shutting down every building that has blocked staircases, poor-quality cement or overloaded

wiring would, I estimate, easily result in half the population becoming homeless. Yes, Red House has some quirky construction; but it is in no way exceptional in this.) She considered long and hard whether to sell the business entirely.

In the end, though, she's kept at it. I'm glad, of course, because otherwise I wouldn't have been able to find her. And I'm glad because it means she's got a – stressful, but at least consistent – source of employment. That is a rather precious thing in this economy. Many of the stores near the Night Market have had to go out of business; it is no longer the bustling place it once was.

C still hadn't had lunch, so I offered to go get her something. My tales of delicious teppanyaki enticed her, so she had her usual order sent over. (She knew the teppanyaki owners well.) We chatted a bit more. She told me about her kids, and showed me incredibly cute photos. We exchanged contact information and I invited her to stay with me if she ever comes to visit the US again. The whole time, she kept filling orders, accepting payments, receiving shipments... The restaurateur's life is certainly a busy one. I took my leave, resolving to keep in better touch this time. I still had a lot of sightseeing to do before Ms. K and the students arrived.

I took a cab to my next destination: the Alchemy branch at the corner of Fuxing and Zhongxiao. The cab driver had my favorite style: polite, kind, chatty but not blabbery, a careful driver... Hearing me speak Mandarin, he asked me if I'd been to Taiwan before, and I of course said I used to live there. He asked how I thought Taiwan now compared to Taiwan back then.

Comparisons? The buildings are bigger and more densely packed, of course. The traffic is just as bad. The food is just as good. The MRT is even more convenient and orderly and easy to use. People seem less insistent to use their English with me – less of a daily annoyance, but also symptomatic of the US's falling stature in the world. That student at NTNU, for example – if it had been 2004, he would certainly have approached me using English. Now, he assumed I could speak Mandarin, or was at least very ready and willing to use it with me.

Mostly, somehow, my overall impression was that the people had somehow become nicer. Taiwanese people have a well-deserved reputation for niceness to begin with; having a stranger on another bus give you a kind smile, or a store vendor offer to watch your tablet while you charge it in his store and shop elsewhere, is quite normal.

But on this trip, I had somehow experienced even more of that kindness. After this cab ride, I encountered even more. Maybe I was just lucky to encounter a bunch of kind people. Maybe I was experiencing the 'honeymoon' phase of culture shock. (I certainly had some experience with rudeness, too, during this trip to Taiwan. But mostly, people were very kind.)

Maybe it's that Taiwanese people have had more exposure to foreigners, leading to more comfort and less

distance. Maybe it's a compassionate response to the awfulness of the economic downturn. Maybe it's looking across the Taiwan Strait at the increasing economic might of China and feeling humble. Whatever the cause, it really does feel like, somehow, Taiwanese people have become even nicer.

I had a hard time formulating this clearly for the cab driver. Later on, talking with the tour guide for the school trip, I had the same thoughts, and the same difficulty clarifying what I meant. I met other kind people on this trip to Taiwan: a young woman who calmly folded paper stars while standing on the MRT, and who gave me a packet of tissues to wipe sweat from my eyes; a kind MRT worker who let me back into the station to use the restroom; not least, my friend P and her willingness to let me stay with her.

Since that trip, I've been missing Taiwan even more. The food, the amazing variety of shopping, the convenience of getting around, the kindness of the people... There were annoyances, to be sure. But the wonder and delight and compassion outweigh them. I definitely don't want to wait another ten years before I go back.

Con of the North 2019 Con Report

Emily Stewart, February 2019

Overall, this was an enjoyable convention, and worth attending, held at the Crowne Plaza Minneapolis West in Plymouth. CotN has no Opening Ceremony, no Closing Ceremony, and no Consuite. Just table top gaming, and video gaming, and RPG gaming, and Play Test gaming, and open gaming, and displays of member-built minifigures, game buildings, and terrain, and other game related stuff... and I dunno, maybe some LARPing.

As several local conrunners know, the Crowne Plaza Minneapolis West is very interested in courting small to medium sized volunteer run conventions. It's got lots of versatile space, and it's easy for a group to take over just a section of the hotel without disrupting or being disrupted by any other events. The downside of that is that the space that's there is very spread out across several sections.

CotN was the best convention for the space. It was easy to have four rooms that were together for just D&D games, a ballroom for a Dealer's Room, several areas for devoted playtesting, space devoted to specific tournaments, and space for open gaming.

My spouse signed up for several scheduled events that he liked, though he says he might leave more time open for open gaming in the future. I only did open gaming, I learned a few new games and played some that I haven't played in a while. The gaming was as gamey as gaming at a gaming convention should be.

And finally, something should be said about the food options. The Crowne Plaza has two onsite food options. There's a decent bar/restaurant, and a concession stand area of pizza, hot dogs, chicken nuggets, fries and similar.

The bar/restaurant is entirely acceptable.

The concession stand food is bland. On a scale of one to five, it's fucking awful. The closest other restaurants are about a mile away, which can cut into gaming time. Next time, we will pack sandwiches.

Upcoming Minn-stf Events

Hopefully most of these are still in the future when you read this, although it would be highly traditional for them to be in the past!

Minn-stf meeting (party) Sept 21, 6pm-2am in the RadishTree (Bloomington DoubleTree, 7800 Normandale Blvd) presidential suite. An extra-big party hosted by DD-B in honor of his 65th birthday and 50th year in the computer industry.

Decongestant 4 with Arcana 2019 is Sept 27-29, 2019. See ad earlier in this issue.

Minnstf meeting Oct 5, 4pm at Scott and Irene Raun's, 3928 11th Ave S, Mpls.

Mnstf Halloween party Oct 26, 4pm at Dreampark, 4002 Pillsbury Ave S, Mpls. It's the house with 100 huge plastic pumpkins.



Minnstif meeting Nov 9, 4pm at Emily Stewart and Aaron Vander Giessen's, 2829 Alabama Ave S, Saint Louis Park.

Minneapolis in 2073 party at Windycon 46 (Nov 15-17, 2019) on either Friday or Saturday night, TBA.

Minicon 55 is April 10-12, 2020. See mnstf.org/minicon55 for details.

Official Business

The board has amended the bylaws to make it easier to become a voting member. Since we first had bylaws as a Minnesota corporation in 1972, the rule has been that one needs to have attended seven meetings in a year to vote, and for many years, up to four of these can have been concom meetings. We have changed seven to five and four to three. In other words:

Bylaw I.2.b now reads "Voting member shall mean any person who attended five (5) or more meetings during the previous membership period and who has accepted voting

membership. Each membership period begins at the beginning of the calendar day seven days before the regular annual meeting. The membership secretary shall make a good faith effort each year to inform each eligible person of their eligibility."

And bylaw II.6.a.iv now reads "Up to three (3) general convention committee meetings."

This change will be in effect for our spring 2020 board election, so you only need five meetings between the 2019 voting meeting and the 2020 voting meeting to qualify.

Ye Olde Colophon

RUNE 91 is (c) 2019 by the Minnesota Science Fiction Society, except for credited contributions (Laramie Sasseville for the Magic Helix art, and the article and Dalek art by Rachel Kronick) and the Dragonfly art, which we found in DavE Romm's old Rune files, artist unknown. This issue was produced by editors Matt and Kelly Strait partially by hecto and partially by LibreOffice. It's a semi-cruzine! Because of the hecto part, it's an especially short print run, although perhaps we'll make inauthentic photocopied-hecto copies later if there's demand.

Thanks to Joe Pregracke, Lisa Cohen, Cally Soukup and Thomas Montgomery for collating Rune 90, and to Stacey Lam for folding page 1 of this issue!

Rune 92

Anticipated for our next issue: a history of Minicon t-shirts and fannish t-shirts in general (a write-up of the Minicon 54 t-shirt panel), a review of MNstf presidential assassinations over the decades, more hecto nonsense(!?), and maybe something you send in! (If you sent something in the five years since the last issue and I haven't published it here, do send it again and accept my apologies.)

You should get it if you (1) are a Minn-stf voting member or (2) if you send us The Usual: a letter of comment, fanzine in trade, or any amount of money. Write to rune92@mnstf.org or RUNE, PO Box 8297, Lake Street Station, Minneapolis MN 55408.