



Welcome to *Union Street* #69 (Obsessive Press [JG] #171 and Peerless Press [SC] #71), the zine with the transmogrifying seasonal masthead. It comes to you from Jeanne Gomoll and Scott Custis, whose address is coincidentally 2825 Union Street, Madison, WI 53704-5136. Phone 608-246-8857. *Union Street* was created on a Macintosh Quadra 840AV, and hardcopy was printed on a Laserwriter HINTX printer. Text was created with Microsoft Word 5.1 and laid out with Aldus PageMaker 5.0. The *Union Street* Logo was designed with Adobe Illustrator 5.0 and Adobe Photoshop 2.5. All contents are copyrighted © by Scott Custis and Jeanne Gomoll, October 1995, for Turbo-Charged Party Animal APA #112.

### Official Business

[JG] I nominate Dr. Bill for re-entry into *Turbo-apa*. May he not burn up with all the re-entry friction. I hear you need good ceramics for that.

### Other

[JG] This may be a sparse year for mailing comments, folks, at least from me. Once again, I've been using most of my free time working on WisCon 20 stuff, and now it's only a couple days before deadline.

Here's the up-to-date list of authors, artists, editors, and academics attending WisCon 20: Eleanor Arnason, Catherine Asaro, Brian Attebery, Freddie Baer, Marleen Barr, Martha Bartter, Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff, Lois McMaster Bujold, Suzy McKee Charnas, Flynn Connolly, Beverly DeWeese,

Suzette Haden Elgin, M. J. Engh, Kelley Eskridge, Karen Joy Fowler, Jim Frenkel, Greer Ilene Gilman, Joan Gordon, Colin Greenland, Nicola Griffith, David Hartwell, Veronica Hollinger, Steven Vincent Johnson, Gwyneth Jones, Helene Klodowsky (who is working on a video about feminist SF and will be filming at WisCon), Ellen Kushner, Kelly Link, Rosaleen Love, Katherine MacLean, Laurie Marks, R. A. McAvoy, Margaret McBride, Helen Merrick, Judith Moffett, Elizabeth Moon, Pat Murphy, Debbie Notkin, Alice Nunn, Susan Palwick, Faye Ringel, Trina Robbins, eluki bes shahar, Pamela Sargent, Delia Sherman, Stu Shiffman, Nancy Springer, Susanna Sturgis, Barbara Summerhawk, Sue Thomas, Joan D. Vinge, Elisabeth Vonarburg, Tess Williams, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro.

### Steve Swartz

[SC] Very classy Jerry Garcia tribute cover.

[JG] I liked how it suggested the antithesis of "giving someone the finger." Very nice, but not in a sugary way.

### Michael Shannon

[SC] Congratulations on the anniversary celebration. Sounds like you had a fine time.

It was good to see you at ReinConation. Austin obviously agrees with you.

### Sandy Taylor

[JG] I was trying to be ironic in my comment ("oppressed superior people") to **Lisa Freitag**, I think. She cited several SF stories as examples of the SF field's sensitivity to racial discrimination issues. I thought those stories had more to do with the sensitive fannish experience of being rebuffed for being a brainy nerd, than anything connected to racial discrimination. Certainly, it's possible to learn something by comparing the feeling of being ostracized because of one's intelligence to the experience of other discriminated-against folks, but I hardly think a black person living on the drug wars front lines would consider me to have grasped the essence of his/her problems as a result of my experience as an unsocialized nerd.

[SC] I was very interested in your comments on the Underground Press Conference-Zine Scene '95. I would love to go. I don't know much about the zine scene outside of SF fandom, and I think it would be fascinating. Maybe you could remember to mention it to me next year before you go?

Re: the Judy Heim book, is this going to be a regular feature of your zine, recommending books to borrow from the library? A public service spot, sort of.



Iain Banks is one of my favorite writers, but he is rather an acquired taste. His work is often brutal and depressing, but funny at the same time. Does that make sense? He has a fabulous imagination, but his view of the world is often bleak. Not for everyone. I wish I could have made it to the discussion.

### Jae Adams

[SC] Wonderful zine, Jae.

I've seen your photo album and I recommend anyone else who gets the chance should see it. Great photos and nicely done captions.

You mentioned how nice it was in Skye to find yourself without much to do. I agree. It is easy, when traveling, to get into a situation where there is so much to do and see that you wind up working rather hard to get it all done. When I'm traveling on vacation, I like to avoid that. I like to plan to do a little bit, savor it thoroughly, and leave plenty of time for relaxation (in a good pub if possible.) If that means leaving some things out, well, I can always plan to come back someday.

Judging from your rant on Windows, I imagine you are no fan of Macs. Just the same, I enjoyed your piece. I am basically becoming less and less interested in computers, the internet and the whole Information Superhighway silliness. Macs still make computing relatively easy and painless for me. A very few other new things, like e-mail, are useful out of this shower of techno innovation, but for the most part, I think I'm becoming a bit of a high-tech Luddite.

[JG] Excellent travelogue, Jae. I look forward to years of anecdotes and insights. I like your technique of referring to photos, and making us see them with the paintbrush of your words.

You mentioned Suzette Haden Elgin's Laádan grammar in the first of your journal excerpts. Are you subscribing to her newsletter these days? If not, you may not have heard that Suzette has officially stopped working on the language. She has decided that it is a failure and is not catching on. One really interesting speculation offered to her by several women who responded to her question about why it wasn't catching on: that women don't want to be understood any more clearly than we already are understood. That such clarity is personally dangerous because it exposes self.

Also speaking of Suzette, we have some sad news about her family. Suzette's youngest son, Benjamin, was killed in an automobile accident on Tuesday, October 17. He was driving home at the time, on his way to his daughter's birthday party.

### Clay Colwell

[SC] Congratulations on finishing the show and the good reviews. It sounds like you had a good time. Do you foresee another five years before your next show, or do you intend to get back to it more often?

I have always been interested in the paintball thing, but I have never been involved with a group that wanted to do it. Sounds like fun to me.

On movies, have you seen *Jeffrey*? We thought it was wonderful.

On *Trouble and Her Friends*, see the reprint of Jeanne's review for *SF Eye*.

[JG] Rather than respond to your comments, point by point, on *Trouble and Her Friends*, I thought it might be easier to simply reprint a review I wrote last year for *SF Eye*. It hasn't been published yet; Steve Brown has a very laid back publishing schedule. But I hear that the next issue will soon hit the stands. So consider this a sneak preview....

### Review of Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (Tor, 1994)

#### by Jeanne Gomoll

The nineteenth century drew to a close and barbed wire fences criss-crossed the prairies. Frontier justice, once meted out by the strongest and fastest guns, was replaced by a system of sheriffs and courtrooms. Eventually, civilization overtook the West; the open range was open no more. Hotshot, hero-gunslingers and cattle rustlers were given an ultimatum: join the community or be branded criminals by it. Outlaws like Wyatt Earp, pondered their future and loyalties...

No, scratch that. In Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends*, it is the *twenty-first century* that draws to a close as new laws restrict access to the worldwide electronic network. The virtual frontier is about to close, ending forever the brief ascendancy of outlaw netwalkers and the romance of electronic anarchy. Hotshot/hero/cracker, India Careless—alias, Trouble—and her partner, Cerise, ponder their future and their loyalties....

*TahF* is the story of a legendary group of crackers, and of the most famous cracker of them all, Trouble, during the closing years of the electronic frontier. As happened in the last decade of nineteenth-century America, law and order is imposed upon the electronic frontier by some of the same people once attracted to its potential freedom, who recognize a stronger need: protection from other netwalkers. The United States Congress



passes the Evans-Tindale Bill at the beginning of *TahF* and that's when Trouble retires from cracking to a sleepy little backwater town as sheriff—oops, I mean syscop—until an unreformed outlaw forces her to return, literally to defend her own name.

*TahF* is the high tech, fast-moving, suspenseful story of a famous cracker defending her reputation against a young challenger. It is about growing up, and about the painful, necessary compromises that stem from the need to balance personal liberty with community security. Melissa Scott's novel is a dazzling science fiction tale set in the (legal) bright lights and (illegal) shadows of virtual reality where fantastic icons both distort and reveal reality. But *TahF* is more than that.

Scott explores the virtual shadowland of *TahF* and finds in it a metaphor for the gay community. The phrase, "the Family" refers to the discreet and supportive network of the gay community which, in Scott's world, overlaps significantly (and sometimes interchangeably) with the equally discreet and supportive network of illegal "brainworm" users. Everyone who regularly uses the electronic network in this future world plugs into the system somehow—

"...either via the implanted dollie-box and dollie-slot, the direct-on-line-image processor system, which [gives] a text-speech-and-symbol interface, or through the full-sense brainworm, with its molecular wires running directly into the brain that [lets] you experience virtuality as though it were real..." (page 14)

Traditional netwalkers tend to fear and distrust those "on the wire." Installation of the brainworm entails physical risk to the brain, and so it hasn't been universally accepted as the on-line vehicle of choice. In fact, "it [is] almost always the underclasses, the women, the people of color, the gay people, the ones who [are] already stigmatized as being vulnerable, available, trapped by the body, who [take] the risk of the wire." (page 129) Many traditional netwalkers—restricted to visual and audio on-line interaction—fear the total, sensual immersion of virtual reality. Netwalkers hold "back from physical display off the nets, fastidious to the point of prudishness." (page 123)

Trouble and her friends frequently confront prejudiced assumptions: If they are skillful—they must be male; or, if they are female—they can't be good crackers or syscops. Androgynous personal icons make it just as easy to misidentify gender in virtual reality as it is to jump to wrong conclusions about a person's sexual orientation in our world. And of course, virtual sexual identification gets even

more complex, all of which only increases the paranoia of non-wired, straight, male netwalkers who assure each other that they deserve exclusive on-line rights. As always happens in professions defined by gender—take the contemporary United States armed forces, for an example—the incursion of gays and women threatens those whose gender identities are bound up in their membership. (How can the Army Make You a Man, if homosexuals are allowed to join?)

There are several ways that science fiction writers have chosen to integrate attitudes about gender and sex into their fiction. Some writers create dystopias by extending and exaggerating contemporary prejudices. Others design utopias by simply eliminating prejudices from their future worlds. In *TahF*, Melissa Scott chooses a more subtle approach. She considers the idea that the very forms of prejudice might evolve and mutate as the institutions which maintain them are transformed. Scott describes a world in *TahF* in which the process of gender distortion has evolved into the future: A new institution created by the on-line community has adopted the prejudices of society in general and encourages distrust of those who are different.

"Too many men [assume] that the nets [are] exclusively their province, and [are] startled and angry to find out that it [isn't]. They [are] the same people who [fear] the brain-worm, [fear] the intensity of its sensations, data translated not as image and words alone, but as the full range of feeling, the entire response of the body...." (page 120)

Just as virtual reality metaphorically mirrors the real world, the virtual subcommunities of the wired and often gay members metaphorically mirror their doppelgangers in the real world. The possibility exists, for instance, that full, all-senses, virtual interfacing is actually physically addictive to those on the wire, which feeds the debate as to whether this activity stems from biological imperative or choice. Are you born gay or do you choose the lifestyle?

Virtual reality provides nuances of extra meaning to the idea of closeted identities, and once "outed" gays or brainworm users can expect to be ostracized and persecuted by straight netwalkers, who refer to them as "political."

"*Political* was a familiar euphemism, one that had never failed to draw at least a sour smile. Translated, Cerise thought, Sasquatch is saying she's a dyke and on the wire, and we don't have to take care of her." (page 239)



Once identified, gays sometimes simply disappear from the nets or die under mysterious circumstances. Melissa Scott shows us how the potential for tolerance in virtuality—which theoretically recognizes no permanent, immutable reality—might be perverted into an oppressive institution that enforces conformity. Just as the pioneers of the old west hauled their problems with them in covered wagons, even as they escaped to the frontier and fresh starts, we will carry our own fears and prejudices with us into the future and onto the electronic frontier, unless we first deal with them in the present.

That's where the two themes of Scott's novel come together: it turns out that the position of persecuted minorities within the ranks of former electronic outlaws can only improve to the degree that reformed outlaws influence or even take over the job of writing the laws that civilize the electronic frontier. You can't stay in the closet; you've got to change the laws. The outlaw, Wyatt Earp, reluctantly accepts a sheriff's badge. The outlaw, Trouble, reluctantly joins forces with her former partner, Cerise (now head of on-line security for a huge corporation, Multiplane), and Vesselin Maybry of Interpol. At the novel's conclusion, Scott stages both a literal and virtual dramatic shoot-out between Trouble, Cerise and the bad guys on Main Street.

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If you are a Macintosh user like me, you might wonder if Melissa Scott's portrayal of the conflict between wired operators and netwalkers intentionally satirizes DOS-users' prejudice against graphic interfaces. Colorful, full-featured personal icons differentiate those on the wire from flat, black-and-white icons belonging to netwalkers (who complain that full sensory interface makes hacking too easy). I was reminded of the sneering criticism we used to hear about the Mac being just a toy. I may just be projecting my own biases here, but I'd like to ask Melissa Scott about it someday. In any case, it's fun to read *TahF* with this DOS-dissing possibility in mind.

*TahF* is a wonderful, thought-provoking, and entertaining novel. My only complaint about it is that Scott only vaguely explains the details of the new laws which change the world. I want to understand the difference between the U.S. Evans-Tinsdale Bill and the Amsterdam Accord, which supposedly allow more freedom on the networks than U.S. law. The characters in this novel all gradually change with respect to their opinions about these laws; their self-images and relationships with others metamor-

phose with respect to these laws. So, it's frustrating that the actual legislation is never explicitly clarified.

On the other hand, you have only to read a copy of your favorite computer magazine to learn about on-line controls and regulations for which big business is lobbying these days. It may very well turn out that the history of the freewheeling, unregulated electronic frontier will be as short-lived as the old west was in American history—even as the romanticized fiction set in the brief period of electronic anarchy continues to be churned out by cyberpunk wannabes.

### **Bill Dyer**

[SC] You have our sympathy on the death of your father. It can be really tough to lose a parent.

### **Lisa Freitag**

[JG] This unibomber mystery seems to be causing lots of groups to look into their own ranks and consider the possibility that he is "one of us." There have been several articles published locally about the possibility of the guy being one of the still at-large Sterling Hall bombers, Leo Burt.

See my comments to **Sandy** about SF stories that feature discrimination against superior people.

[SC] I enjoyed your slide presentation at ReinConation. I hope your Scotland pictures turn out well. I'd love to see them.

Great comment to **Georgie** about the Unabomber being an old boyfriend. I also thought your rant to **Bill Boddin** about life being a fatal condition was interesting.

### **Hope Kiefer, Pat Hario, Tracy Shannon, Andy Hooper**

[JG] Thanks for some excellent and entertaining writing about your trip to Britain. It's the next best thing to being there.

### **Karl Hailman**

[SC] Good job on the trip report. The day to day rundown really communicates a sense of being there with you. Almost as good as the pictures you brought back. One impression I was left with was how busy you were on this trip. As I wrote above to **Jae**, I think I would have preferred to see less and relax more. I'm glad you did it all though, so we can see the pictures and read about your adventures.

### **Pat Hario**

[SC] Thanks also for your fine trip zine. It is interesting comparing **Karl's** detailed, but occasionally



downbeat piece with your very enthusiastic comments ("Wales was wonderful." "Edinburgh was super...") It's nice to see that you had such a good time that you didn't seem to notice any problems. I am looking forward to reading about the convention. I have been rather grumpy about the lack of pictures from the con, so a written recap of it would be very welcome.

### Andy Hooper

[SC] I had great fun reading your trip piece. Your style was as entertaining as always and it was interesting to read the adventures of someone who was not on **Hope's** tour. I am completely in sympathy with Carrie's driving anxiety. I drove from Stranraer to Carlisle during our trip in '87 after returning from Belfast. That was mostly rural. I would have been terrified to try it in London (narrow streets, heavy traffic, busses, roundabouts, etc. no way.) "The Magic Round-About" sounds to me like one huge nightmare. Roundabouts seem to make a lot of sense in theory, but they are very hard to get used to, I thought.

We relied a great deal on the information offices in many of the places we visited to help us find accommodations. It seemed so civilized to just go to one place in any town to make a hotel or B and B reservation rather than looking through the phone book or driving around.

### Bill Humphries

[SC] Good luck with the job hunt and congratulations on giving up the cancer sticks. Quitting smoking is not only a healthy thing to do, it's a good political act (a little shot at those despicable cigarette companies.)

I like this trend towards intro. pieces. The family histories are always interesting to me. Judging by your mother's family background, what could your father's family not approve of? I have always assumed that you are the most politically left-leaning member of your family. I was also the youngest kid in my family and the most politically aware and leftist. I wonder if this is common?

Good picture of you, your computer and a Tiptree t-shirt. You look a little tense, Bill. Who took this shot?

[JG] Pleased to meet you Mr. Humphries. Great bio material. Thanks.

### Peter Larsen

[JG] We're pretty much in substantial agreement about the dangerousness of censorship, and wishing it hadn't become such an important part of feminism for so many people.

[SC] Re: *Crumb*, you said, "3. Crumb is the best adjusted member of his family." He is the best adjusted member of his family *that we saw*. I think a significant gap in the picture is the complete lack of any information about his sisters. As screwed up as these guys were, surely the sisters must have had some interesting points of view growing up with these losers. I respect Crumb's talent and contribution to comic art, but he's also a massive asshole.

### Diane Martin

[SC] Your zine was fascinating Diane. I think you are making a very good decision, but I can understand the difficulty of choosing to leave an employer you were so loyal to for so long. I have spent most of my career working for the government which rewards seniority. Walking away from 20 years of time in would be very hard for me. In your case, however, you have a great deal to gain by stepping out and marketing your considerable skills and experience. Good luck. Thanks for being so open with us about this important change in your life.

[JG] You have my sympathies for the situation you are going through at work. I'm so sorry you're going to have to pull up stakes there, eventually. I know how deeply satisfying your job has been for you. If there is anything I can do to help you network, let me know. I'll keep my eyes open for possibilities.

By the way, this was also one fine piece of writing. I think that shows you are thinking very clearly about it. Which is a good thing.

### Kim & Kathi Nash

[JG] Very funny. Very funny.

### Jim Nichols

[JG] You would have had my support to ditch the name *Mad Moose Gazette* any time you wanted to do so. You may have noticed the absence of the name on the WisCon 20 brochure. I'm certainly going to suggest to the newsletter editor at WisCon that they are free to think about alternatives.

You don't want to know about Canada jokes.

[SC] Thanks for a completely different trip report. I have no pictures of the riding crop. You should ask Nevenah. After all, it is *her* riding crop. But I would be leery of asking for pictures of the riding crop from her. They are likely to show what she *does* with it, you know?

Jeanne & Scott  
19 October 1995