

Madison foursquare

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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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December 2024 for *Turbo-Charged Party Animal #462*

Holiday Craziiness

[JG] Family stuff occupied a lot of my time this past month.

My brother Steve asked me to design a book celebrating the 70th birthday of his wife, Linda. He wrote emails to 100+ of Linda's friends, from childhood, college, career, and the many places she and Steve have lived during the past 21 years. He asked them to write a note or an anecdote, and most importantly, to send one or two photographs of Linda from the time they knew her. Emails and photos began to pour in, and I started working on the book's design. Steve had come up with the idea of a book for Linda less than a month before it would need to go to press in order to be published in time for her birthday. Which meant that I spent 20+ hours working on the book— but managed to send it off with a couple days to spare. It turned out pretty well, I think. The photos were all good, some even great. And the 8.5" x 8.5" format was perfect for the design, which clocked in just under 100 pages. I'm very proud of it. But I was a bit disheartened a few days after Steve presented the book to Linda. Embarrassed, he told me he'd missed a couple of emails from friends who had sent their material after the deadline and wondered if I could re-do the book including that material. Also, he confessed that he had failed to notice a couple mis-spelled names while proofreading. And, hey, could I have the book reprinted as a hardcover rather than a paperback? This would have involved another ten hours of work, at least, because the on-line print-on-demand process requires that I initiate a new job for edits. Steve and I had a talk. It turned out that he had no idea how much time I'd already spent on the book, and finally recognized that he couldn't ask me to spend most of my time, right before Christmas, re-doing the book. Here I thought that now that I was retired, I wouldn't have to deal with any more difficult clients....

The other family thing was Thanksgiving, which didn't turn out as well as Scott and I had hoped. Linda's book actually had a role

70 and Fabulous!



Detail from stained glass panel hanging over our dining room windows

in complicating the celebration, because her birthday occurred on the day before my family got together (which happened a week after the official date of Thanksgiving, delayed because Steve and Linda and their family were vacationing in the Bahamas over the holiday). Linda's sister and brother-in-law flew in from California for Linda's surprise birthday party, and at the last moment, Steve realized that he couldn't just leave his in-laws at his house the next day, when he and Linda drove out to Madison for the family get-together. So, he phoned and explained the situation.

"I invited Marie and Jim to join us. I hope you don't mind. I didn't know what else to do!"

That increased the guest list from 13 to 15, a number over the limit for seating at our dining room table. So, Scott and I worked on the logistics and decided to serve buffet-style and figured out a way to seat everyone. Seating turned out to be less of a problem when one of my nephews and his wife canceled at the last moment, which brought the guest list back down to a manageable 13. But Steve struck an ominous note when he arrived: "I'm coming down with a bad cold. It's not COVID; I tested. But you should probably not hug me."

The most disappointing thing for me was the dinner. I figured that most everyone had probably eaten a turkey dinner on Thanksgiving, so I decided to cook a different protein. I've perfected a really good pork loin. And I found a similar recipe with what looked like an amazing rub. I will try it again, because it really



does look luscious, but it was not very good that day. I'm actually unsure of what exactly went wrong, and sharing my theories here would just be tedious and bore you to death, but in the end, the roast came out of the oven very dry. Most of our guests were either oblivious or tactfully lied to me when they said everything was delicious. But I was frazzled. The menu I devised required some intense work in the kitchen during the hour and a half before we sat down to eat, so I didn't get much time to socialize with everyone before dinner. And after dessert (which turned out to be the highlight



of the meal – Maple Pecan Cheesecake), Steve announced that his cold had gotten worse and that he was really tired. Most of them had carpooled with one another, so after Steve's announcement they left, leaving Scott and me entertaining my niece Sara and her new husband, Casey. The visit with Sara and Casey was wonderful. The four of us have had a couple great visits in the last couple months; the conversations have been amazing. But I wish I'd been able to talk more with my brothers, Dan and Steve and their wives before they left.... Ah well, Scott and I plan on joining Dan and his wife Kelly for a movie (*Wicked*) and dinner out during the week between Christmas and New Years. I'm glad about that.

Business

[SC] We second **Pat's** nominee, Kim Owens, for membership if she still needs one. I don't know Kim, but Pat's judgment is good enough for us.

Comments

Cover

[SC] Classy covers, Pat. You made such good, productive use of your time making these covers in the Atrium space at Olbrich Gardens during TurboCon. What did I do there? Goof off, I think.

Kim & Kathi Nash

[SC] Kim, I have been fortunate to have never, so far, had a car breakdown on the interstate. A harrowing experience, I'm sure. I'm glad you got

it started again long enough to get to safer ground. I recently had an experience with a check engine light that would come on when we were far away from home, but nothing was actually wrong. The dealer discovered that a sensor needed to be replaced and I was lucky that I brought it in just days before my 5-year, 50,000-mile warranty ran out, so the sensor replacement was free. Good thing, too, as it took them a couple hours to replace it.

Interesting description of your sheephead group. A couple people have tried to describe the rules to me and they always seemed too complicated. Most of your old bar hangouts are gone now, except the Harmony and the Plaza. Did you guys decide to go to Sun Prairie to make it easier for people to drive and park there? Or was it for the food?

Kathi, it's been a long, pleasant fall for getting ready for winter. I've only cleared leaves from the sidewalks and driveway, whatever lands in the yard stays there until spring (for the bugs and wildlife to use.) Winter is a lot more pleasant for me now that I don't have to fight with it to get to work.

[JG] My parents and all my brothers were avid sheephead players. I never learned – not sheephead, cribbage, or any other card games that they liked to play. When I was young, I preferred to spend the time reading, I guess. But clearly, I failed to appreciate several iconic Wisconsin activities in addition to Sheephead – cribbage, beer, brandy, and the Packers.

Steven Vincent Johnson & Darlene P. Coltrain

[SC] I think all of us are dealing with some sort of anxiety looking ahead to four more years of Trump. One of the things in his first term I found exhausting was it seemed like he was in the news every single day. Something (usually stupid) he did or said, a moronic proposal, something he messed up, a new update on some familiar scandal or some altogether new outrage. Every. Fucking. Day. This time I will have to keep a firm grip on the news faucet just to make it through the term without losing it.

[JG] The first page of your zine convinces me that an illustrated version of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the*

Loose Parts by Dave Blazek



Galaxy for children would be a wonderful thing.

In addition to the obvious fears for Democracy and the government totally collapsing, the thing that has been generating nightmares for me is what the next unexpected crisis might be – a pandemic, a nuclear war, a major collapse of Greenland or Antarctic glaciers, an alien invasion – and how the next administration will be even less capable of dealing than the first Trump administration.

Elizabeth Matson

[SC] Thanks for another beautifully written zine. Great

photos (particularly of the children's library rooms tour) and book reviews once again. Thanks also for taking us along with you on your yarn shopping trip, I was particularly amused by your encounter with the llamas.

RYCT **Pat**, at the November apa collation, a couple folks were actually shopping through the finished apas to choose one based on what stickers were on them. I randomly ended up with a back cover featuring stickers of my favorite cat (tiger), favorite planet (Saturn) and a sloth bear that somehow struck me as appropriate. The letters and numbers on the front cover screamed "Rococo."

[JG] I have signed up for your adult story-telling workshop and hope that it will attract the requisite 6 participants!

Jeannie Bergmann

[SC] You've had a busy month. I hope Fred is okay after his fainting spell. Congratulations on the prize for "Grand Tour," which was a very fine poem.

[JG] I also liked *Ministry of Time*. I love time travel stories, but I think I liked this novel most for its remarkable love story. Recommended.

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] Good tip about checking passport expiration. I hadn't thought of that. Even the Social Security promises Trump made in the campaign could end up hurting more than helping and a long recession that depresses the stock market could have an effect

on our pension payouts and personal investments. Trump could hurt us in number of ways. I sometimes find myself thinking about what sort of job I would look for if it came to that.

Jeanne and I finally visited the new Whole Foods store very recently. Do you guys shop there often? It's much bigger than the old one and the parking seemed convenient. The shelves are very high, I even noticed little step ladders in many of the aisles (which seemed like a bad idea to me.) I was underwhelmed by the fish counter, the old store used to have a very attractive one. This store has a cold, techie feel to it in contrast to the old store's more hippy, health foody vibe. In the future I'll probably opt instead for Metcalf's down the hill when I want a more upscale food shopping experience.

[JG] I am also concerned that the WisCon website history may go away eventually. The updating process seems spotty, already. I frequently refer to the history page that shows dates, places, gohs, and chairs for each WisCon. Is there some way I could copy it (and the links), as is, for my own use, in case it goes away?

I agree with you that the recent movie version of *Uglies* didn't work as well as the YA novel did when it was first published. I don't know if the movie failed to translate the book well enough, or as you suggest, that its message just doesn't work as well in today's world. Maybe a combination, but I suspect that I'd find the novel just as irrelevant as the TV series if I re-read it today. Same with the *Hunger Games* novels and YA fiction like it. These worlds have a single bad guy or group of bad guys that can conceivably be defeated if the heroes act bravely enough and are willing to risk all. I was actually thinking about this in connection with the folk-hero status gained by Luigi Mangione for his assassination of the United Health Care CEO. The unfair, cruel circumstances are there in both the YA fantasies and our abominable health care system, along with the inarguable need to fight for a better world ... but the efficacy of killing an individual to

effect change doesn't work in the same way it seems to in the novels.

Walter Freitag

[SC] Your essay presents an argument that seems as sensible to me as any that I have read about the election outcome. The challenge of making it through the next four years more or less intact overwhelms much concern I have for the why of it all. I'm not running for office. I'm not managing anyone's campaign. I have little interest in changing anyone's mind. I don't feel any need to understand, or care, why anyone voted for Trump, or what becomes of them. I only have space in my world to survive and help the people I care about.

Lovely photos. Addie is a handsome pooch!

[JG] Thanks for the thoughtful essay. I am not ready to think about the HOWs and WHYs yet, either in the terms of your essay or in their metaphorical meanings. When I doodle (electronically), my artwork has turned decidedly apocalyptic. An example may show up in the February *Turbo* cover.

Greg Rihn

[SC] Great reviews once again, thanks particularly for your review of *The Wild Robot*, which I am interested in seeing. Whenever we see a trailer for it, it looks a lot to me like *The Iron Giant*, which I liked a lot. Your review has helped me to see that it's not just rerun of that plot. Yummy restaurant reviews, too.

RYCT us on TurboCon, we were trying to organize a "con" that was really more like a three-day party, so the answer to your question is "I don't know a better way to throw a party."

There were no concom meetings; we did not have any formal panels, and we did not produce a convention publication, but we did have a variety of "performative" elements, including a spelling competition, fanzine readings, storytelling, scientific video demonstration, fashion show, poetry reading, musical performance, guided tour, etc. Maybe performance is the direction the *Turbo* crowd wants to pursue.

[JG] I wonder if you and **Georgie** have heard (or heard about) Jon Batiste's new album, *Beethoven Blues*. Last

Speed Bump by Dave Coverly for December 02, 2024



year I heard Batiste perform “7th Symphony Elegy” on Colbert’s *The Late Show*, and immediately tried to find it on-line; it was so beautiful. But it didn’t become available till recently and I’ve been listening to all the tracks frequently ever since I downloaded it. All the pieces are jazzy versions of 11 Beethoven themes. Mmmm, lovely.

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] My dad used to pick up the black walnuts in his yard, remove the green covering (I think he had an antique machine for that part), bag up the nuts and hang them to dry, then crack them and use a slender pick to tease out the meat. He used to do it while watching TV. It seemed like a tedious job to me. Have you ever had black walnuts in a cookie, scone or ice cream? I like it. It has a very distinctive flavor.

I saw some photos from TeslaCon on FB. It always looks like people are having fun. I expect your presentations (particularly the one on pirates) would have been a highlight for me.

[JG] The current WisCon conglom can’t use the “restroom strategy” for appointing chairs because none of the conglom meetings are held in person. Since the current meetings are virtual, I imagine that they would need to devise some electronic diversion, perhaps by inserting a fake AI election into the meeting minutes?

Jim Brooks

[SC] Terrific zine, Jim. Your tribute to your mom was beautifully written. It should be assumed that such a loving article about a mother is bound to inspire the reader to think about their own. I sure did. My mom has been gone since 1983 and in over forty years I still miss her and think about her all the time. Shirley must have been a wonderful mom and friend with a great sense of humor. Thanks for

sharing that, it left me sitting at my desk, staring at my mom’s picture and woolgathering for a while.

The story of your long-running series of related pranks was hilarious. Thanks for that. I think Clarence’s expert delivery of the final reveal was brilliant. The lesson here is that, clearly, your family are not to be fucked with lightly.

Trump won Wisconsin and some House races did not go our way, but overall Wisconsin did make some progress in the election. Besides re-electing Tammy, we gained about 14 seats in the state Legislature. If we hold on to our majority in the state Supreme Court next spring, we may take back one or both state houses in the next election. The state MAGAs will have to learn a skill they have never needed before, negotiation.

[JG] I hope your mom knew that you saw her life accomplishments as a whole lot more impressive than her one-word characterization. I would like to think that she got to read your praise/obituary before he died.

Coincidentally, on the same day that I read your story about pranks (excellent fun!), I suggested a prank to Scott that we might play on **Pat Hario**. Pat and Barb Gilligan had just left for a holiday cruise in the Sea of Cortez. Before they left town, Pat asked Scott to keep an eye on her house, and this morning he announced that he planned to drive by Pat’s house to make sure everything was OK. Well. As all of you probably know, I know how to use Photoshop. So, I immediately suggested that Scott send her a text with a photo attachment of her house, to reassure her. Then – getting to the prank part – we could send her a new altered photo, one each day of her vacation. Scott vetoed a few of the versions I created as being unnecessarily alarming but he agreed to send some of them and we eagerly wait to find out how she reacted to the pictures.



Andy Hooper

[SC] What a pleasant read you gave us with Roberta Solomon's story of "her time in the coffin." Thank you.

RYCT **Jae** about development on East Washington Ave, the blossoming has been startling over the years even though we knew the city has long been pushing for improvement. And development continues, just a few days ago I was able to give Jeanne the happy news that the notorious "dirty book store" (Red Letter News) in our neighborhood on the corner of E. Washington and North St. is sporting a new For Sale sign, and I don't think they mean the business, I think they mean the building. The Greek Orthodox church next door owns the buildings along that stretch (which once included Rod's Bar and a Himalayan restaurant) and it looks like they have finally decided to redevelop it all. Yay, a win for the neighborhood!

[JG] Your comment to **Pat** about me, that you wondered how the nuns survived me, made me laugh. I was no favorite among the nuns at St. Luke's Grade School and I'm sure they were glad to see me leave. Once, I asked to be excused when a bunch of nuns from a large Wisconsin abbey visited and put on a recruitment program for eighth-grade girls, urging us to open ourselves to God's invitation and declare a vocation – i.e., a calling from God to serve as a nun in the Catholic Church. I told the principal, Sister Mary Rupert, that I was definitely not interested in this career and would rather spend time in the library than attend the presentation. That didn't go over well. Not long before I moved on to public high school, Sister Mary Rupert told me that she doubted that I would manage to complete high school, much less attend college. She made me so angry. Years later, I saw her at a gathering at my folks' house (she and Mom were friends), and I told her that I'd recently graduated from UW-Madison with honors. I told her what my grade point average was. Then I reminded her that when



Our Impatiens



Elm bookshelf

I was 13 years old, she had predicted I would drop out of high school. I was expecting her to apologize or at least say, "oops," but instead she just smiled a Mona Lisa smile and told me that she had known I'd do well all along, just to be contrary. I still don't know if she believed what she was saying.

I've got a recipe for "Chicken Diavolo," but I don't think it has anything in common with your Seafood version; there's no bacon in it, just jalapeño and Serrano peppers, and quite a bit of hot paprika. It's one of our favorite dinners.

Carrie Root

[SC] Thank you for the lovely review of *Women in Wonderland* ... We will have to look for something like this to read before or after our drive out west to WorldCon next summer. It will all depend on which routes out and back we choose to take.

[JG] A lovely photo of *Impatiens Omeiana*! I forget which variety of impatiens we planted in one of our big outdoor pots, but we were delighted by the beautiful flowers and how long it bloomed – continuously from June through early November. We hope to plant another one like it next summer.

Re your comment to **Jae** in which you specify which of your phone numbers receives text messages, you say that one of them is incapable of texts, and will "rebuff" them. In my experience, one can send texts to any phone number, landline or cell phones, and never know if the message has actually been received or was just shuttled off into the void. I really wish that text messages sent to non-text-receiving numbers actually *were* rebuffed and bounced back to the sender. I always feel a bit nervous about sending a text to someone for the first time, especially if they have multiple phone numbers; I am unsure of whether they will actually receive my text.

Your photo of the signed underside of your dad's hand-made stool got me thinking about several pieces of furniture that my brother Rick made for me. None of them are

signed and I really should figure out some way to mark their provenance. I am especially fond of an elegant bookshelf he made out of elm, which is a famously difficult kind of wood to work with because of its twisted grain. Rick was a very good cabinetmaker. One holiday, he carried the disassembled shelf with him as carry-on luggage. And then on Christmas morning, he sat cross-legged on the floor and put it together without any tools, just his hands. The dovetailed parts slid smoothly into one another without screws or nails.

Andrea Connell

[SC] When it comes to submitting humor to *Turbo*, you are setting a very high bar. Your zine was giddy fun (especially the *Ice Planet Barbarians* review). Makes my latest (“nice, normal”) reading choices sound rather stuffy in comparison (*Hopeland* by Ian McDonald, *Playground* by Richard Powers and *Little, Big*). You are probably a very bad influence. I love it. More please.

[JG] “...we are living in the first few pages of a dystopian novel...” Perfect and very depressing way to think about current events. Who will the heroes be?

Jeanne Bowman

[SC] Thanks for sharing your election polling place experiences. Excellent piece. Jeanne and I have not graced a polling place in years, we are dedicated absentee voters. No drama for us, baby. Your experiences were wonderful to read, but did not tempt me to go back to in-person voting. I think you are the ideal person for the job. We need smart, dedicated people with a sense of humor doing this crucial work.

The cartoon on the last page needs to go on a t-shirt.

[JG] What an amazing story. Thank you for the story and your fine work at the polls.

Steve Swartz

[SC] Great piece on *Little, Big*. I got a lot out of it. I’m looking forward to your commentary on the last chapters. I’m starting to think that maybe *you* should be the one writing a one-volume monograph on *Little, Big*. I’d buy it.

RYCT **Carrie** on your drive back from Wisconsin, you chose to drive up a snowy one-lane dirt road on the side of a mountain? How far “off-road” were you going? I can see leaving the interstate for some scenic two-lane state or county highways, but narrow dirt roads up mountainsides? No.

RYCT me, I liked your Bible verse translation. We are looking forward to a *Turbo* gathering in Seattle. My only concern is whether Trump will do something in the early months of his administration that will make it difficult for us to go. Your point about Trump needing a long tie in order to cover a mobile beltdine is well taken. That he feels the need to wear a tie at all during crotch-grabbing activity makes a peculiar statement about his privileged-class ideas of manners.

I liked your observation to **Jim Brooks** about how his writing is deepened by experience.

[JG] I empathize with Allison’s interpretation of the 1-10 pain chart. If “10” describes the worst pain I can imagine ... well I am always able to imagine pain worse than I currently feel, so I don’t think I’ve ever claimed to feel 10 on the pain chart. Nevertheless, your interpretation of that chart is probably a more effective way to communicate with doctors – as a lever to motivate them to provide the help you hope to get. I am skeptical, however, that it is that simple. In the late 1990s, I experienced two years of terrific pain in my left hip and reported that to my doctor as the worst pain I’d ever felt. She was convinced, however, that I was too young to be experiencing hip joint failure and prescribed physical therapy. When that didn’t help, she suggested (actually it felt like she was chastising me) that I really needed to get serious about exercising. I think she thought I was goofing off ... in spite of the fact that I commuted to work and everywhere else by bike, and swam laps three times a week. You are experiencing sciatica, she said, and the best way to feel better is to exercise. So, I did. Religiously. But then, one day during a physical, I accidentally said the magic words. (If only I had known the magic words earlier, like choosing the right number on the pain chart!). I told her, “I can’t sleep through the night. The pain wakes me up.” Suddenly I was whisked off to get an x-ray and when my doctor saw the negs, she said, “Oh my god, you’ve got no cartilage left! You must be in terrible pain!” Yeah, like I said. Later, she told me that she didn’t take me seriously because I had been able to calmly describe my complaints. She had been diagnosing me by my tone of voice. After that miscommunication was cleared up, my left hip was surgically replaced and my doctor promised to take me more seriously from then on.

Karl Hailman & Hope Kiefer

[SC] Karl, we missed you at the Halloween party, but your excuse was very good. I was feeling confident enough of a Kamala win that I was almost tempted to join y'all for the election party, but I have to say I'm glad now that I did not. Two such disappointing election outcomes in a lifetime is enough (Trump 1 and Trump 2), watching the carnage unfold on TV here at home was all I could take.

RYCT **Andy** about Madison restaurants in the 80's, Jeanne introduced me to Josie's Spaghetti House on the corner of Regent and Park after I moved to town in '87. I liked that place a lot. And Garibaldi sandwiches at Paisan's was a regular thing from our earliest days together.

Hope, so good to see you writing more for us! I liked the photos. We went through a big street reconstruction several years ago. Your experience has reminded me of the pain we went through at that time. I was working and commuting by bus which wasn't bad, but Jeanne was trying to run her business out of our house and that was a hassle. Just this year they finally worked on the 2900 block of Union Street and they are going to end up widening the terrace and limiting parking to one side, which I'm glad they did not do to us.

Sorry to read about your TurboCon-related injury. Thank you for taking one for the team because there won't be any other compensation beyond the satisfaction of hosting a much-appreciated event. Just so long as you are recovered in time for bowling, okay?

[JG] I regularly prepare for making whipped cream by sliding a metal bowl into the freezer. So far, I haven't frozen any digits, but figure it's only a matter of time, now that I know about the danger. I think I'll switch to using glass bowls for whipping cream.

Hope, I read an article a while ago about how various mapping companies tap into data collected from Pokemon players, especially in locations with little auto traffic. So, does that mean that the rarest Pokemon sightings can be found at remote locations?

Karl, the bootprints on Turbo cover #458 were meant to represent both yours and **Luke's**.

Thanks for the photos. As Scott said, they brought back memories. I was very impressed by the machines that poured and molded curbs. I had never thought about how curbs were made. I'm glad you've got your accessible street back!

Pat Hario

[SC] Nice job on the bookcase. You are much bolder about tackling strip and repaint projects than I am. I have a wooden chest from when I was a kid that I

need to redo someday, but I'm dragging my feet partly because I have never done that kind of project before and partly because I don't really have a place to put it when finished.

I also learn a lot from the apa, I'd never heard of The Bobs. I may need to learn more.

I had fun at bowling last Sunday (I'm writing this on 12/11). I have not been bowling since August and my scores showed it. I'm not too sad that you beat me both games, I may be a little irked that you came from behind the second game and beat me by four pins in the last two frames after I'd led our group the whole game up to then. Not a problem, of course.

Not until next time, anyway. I have since come to realize that I should bowl once a month whether I go with the group or not because on Monday I could feel muscles complaining that I don't use much except for bowling.

I hope you have a fantastic trip and we get to read all about it in a future *Turbo*.

[JG] Ah stripping stories; I have one too. I lived in an apartment in the late 70s and early 80s that was gorgeous ... except for the fact that the previous tenants had desecrated the walls and radiators. By "desecrate," I mean their paint job was both sloppy AND ugly. A free-handed, slapdash rainbow dominated the living room. My stomach felt queasy whenever I looked at one of the bedroom's walls, painted with wide, uneven, horizontal stripes in colors that never did and will never go well together. All the walls in the apartment were painted with bright, bold, and messy primary colors. And then there were the cast iron radiators – all embossed with lovely, detailed, ornate decoration. They were gorgeous! Except that one was painted fire-engine red and another was yellow. Blaze orange paint had obviously been poured thickly over two other radiators. So sad. The only



reason my roommate and I had agreed to move in was that the landlord had made us an offer we could not refuse – nearly free rent for the time it would take to repaint everything a nice, neutral eggshell color. Of course, he also bought all the paint (so much paint!) and equipment, including many containers of Strip-Ease. As it turned out my soon-to-be-ex-roommate skipped out on the renovation work, and it all fell to me, including the fume-producing radiator-stripping and scraping, which had to be done quickly before the heating season began and the windows and doors could no longer be kept open. I've mostly blocked out the memories of that work, though it could be that the fumes I inhaled damaged my memory. The next opportunity to use stripper came when Scott and I had the second floor of our house renovated. The painted wood doors were all weird with cracks and crazing. But this time we had a contractor and he took one look at the doors and said, we'll just "dip" them. Lovely. As is your new, blue bookshelf.

Yes, (re your question to **SteveSw**) we read *City on Mars* for our book club, SF Without Borders.

I hope that you and Barb had a great time on your cruise through the Sea of Cortez!



Luke McGuff

[SC] I'm glad to hear you're planning to continue doing Postcards to Voters. The Neneh Cherry book sounded interesting, but I always feel my musical tastes are far more mainstream than yours. I had fun at our last coffee/bakery outing too and I look forward to another one next month. I don't know how two hours went by so fast, but zooming on coffee probably helped.

RYCT **Elizabeth** on pie, Ogden's North Street Diner (across the street from the North Street place we used to meet before bike rides) used to sometimes offer little individual pies made in a coffee mug, which I thought were fun. I wonder if they still do that.



RYCT **Jae**, we had a Carnegie library in my hometown, too. It was a smallish stone building, solid and quiet. I liked that place. It's still there, the town built a new and much larger library some years ago and the Carnegie building became the town's police station for a while (the building was poorly suited for that job). Lately the police have moved out and now I don't know what's going to become of it.

Julie, I see you ego-scanning back there. Come on in and join us, the water's fine.

[JG] Thanks for your thoughts on the complicated issue of invasive species. It seems to me that as the world gets more interconnected and biomes continue to collapse and evolve, that the term becomes less useful. Did you read Kim Stanley Robinson's novel, *New York 2140*? One of the subplots involves moving polar bears from the Arctic to Antarctica. It doesn't turn out very well, but I imagine that we will see things like this being proposed as people try to find ways to preserve certain plants or animals.

Screens

[JG] **Black Doves** (Netflix) Helen (Kira Knightley) embarks on a passionate affair with a man who has no idea what her secret identity is; caught in the cross-hairs when her lover falls victim to the dangerous London underworld, Helen's employer' (Reed, played by the marvelous Sarah Lancashire) calls in Helen's friend (and an assassin) Sam (Ben Whishaw) to protect her. It's an exciting series with an updated view of espionage in the modern world in which information gets sold to the highest bidder.

Blitz (Apple) In World War II London, nine-year-old George (Elliott Heffernan) is evacuated to the countryside by his mother, Rita (Saoirse Ronan), to escape the bombings. Defiant and determined to return to his family, George embarks on a journey back home after he jumps out of the train and moves through London. What impressed us about this really well-done movie, was how it showed a much wider view of the London Blitz than we've seen in other movies which have tended to focus on a small group of people or just one person and usually, just one neighborhood. *Blitz* showed us what was happening in many parts of London, wealthy neighborhoods and poor, and the surprising controversy (to us) about whether the underground tunnels should be opened to people without access to shelters.

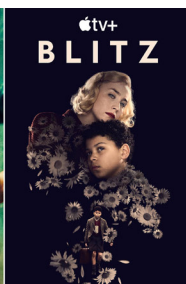
The City and the City (Prime) Scott and I watched this series because he'd read and enjoyed the China Mieville's novel it was based on. This four-part series follows the life of Extreme Crime Squad Inspector Tyador Borlú as he investigates the murder and mutilation of a foreign student. The story is very noirish. Inspector Borlú is thrown into a political battle when evidence reveals that the victim was involved in the political turmoil of his city, Beszel, and its twin city – in an adjacent, sometimes overlapping dimension – Ul Qoma. I bet that a lot of people would have rejected the idea of making a series about side-by-side, Venn diagram universes. It might plausibly be argued that this is an idea that only makes sense in a novel. But they would have been wrong. The film makers managed

to create images and a filmed story that made it feel real. Quite an achievement, and an engrossing story, too.

The End (Theater) This is probably the weirdest movie on my list, stranger even than *The City and the City*. *The End* is a post-apocalypse story, set in a salt mine, that a rich family has converted into a luxurious home and shelter. The scenes filmed in the gigantic, multi-chambered salt mine are gorgeous. "Mother" is played by Tilda Swinton and Michael Shannon plays the billionaire father who made his money selling oil and bears significant responsibility for the ecological disaster that destroyed the world above. Their son (George MacKay) was born in the salt mine and has never seen the outside world. The only other inhabitants of the shelter are a butler, a chef, and a doctor – all essential servants. Inexplicably, a young black woman finds her way into the salt mine, and disrupts the fiction that the family has woven about their prospects ("a bright future!"). The story is mostly about how out of touch people can get when the lies they tell about their lives are all that protect them from a devastating reality. It is a very weird movie, and not just because of the stuff I've told you so far. Here's the kicker: *The End* is a *musical*. You are warned. (Local theaters showed this movie for only four days. It didn't even survive the week.)

Freud's Last Session (Netflix) We really liked this one. The movie takes place in the home Sigmund Freud which he shared with his daughter in London, through the course of one day, September 3, 1939. The world is on the brink of war and C.S. Lewis (Mathew Goode) drops by for a conversation with Sigmund Freud (Anthony Hopkins). The two men discuss the future of mankind and the existence of God. Wow.

Gladiator II (Theater) I understand that Paul Mescal, who plays the gladiator Lucius, has become a heart-throb, big movie star, partially on the basis of his performance in this movie, but he didn't impress me much. But that's probably because I wasn't much impressed by the movie's plot. Almost every plot turn was predictable long before it was supposed to surprise us. For a story claiming to be based at least



a bit on history, the movie-makers didn't seem at all interested in telling us much about history. Denzel Washington as a thoroughly bad guy was occasionally fun, but the Coliseum fights were just boring. At least I thought so. Not recommended.

His Three Daughters (Netflix) This movie felt like a play to me since it confined itself to one apartment and a bench just outside the building. The story involves three sisters (played by Natasha Lyonne, Elizabeth Olsen and Carrie Coon) who have lots of unresolved issues, but who nevertheless reunite in NYC to care for their sick father. Tensions rise as they confront past issues and try to heal family bonds. Laughter and tears ensue. It's a beautiful and extremely well-written story.

Lee (Prime rental) I loved this movie. It's the story of photographer Elizabeth "Lee" Miller, a fashion model who became an acclaimed war correspondent for *Vogue* magazine during World War II. She photographed a concentration camp soon after it was abandoned by the Germans and had to fight to see her photos published. She was fearless and smashed as many gender expectations as she could, but the horrors of war changed her and made it difficult for her to live a "normal" life after she returned home. I was blown away by Kate Winslet's performance.

Olive Kitteridge (Max) Frances McDormand and Richard Jenkins star in this four-part drama adapted from Elizabeth Strout's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, which spans 25 years. Outspoken middle school teacher Olive has a complex relationship with husband Henry, a good-hearted, selfless pharmacist. It's hard to like Olive; she is very critical, often harsh and hurtful to her husband and son. But somehow the relationship works and more importantly McDormand's and Jenkins' stellar acting convinces us. The series depicts life in a coastal town and the effects of mental illness: lots of commentary on depression and suicide. Very weird thing: Somehow, somehow, Bill Murray's character enters Olive's life at the very end of the movie, and the movie manages to end on a positive note. I'm glad we saw this series, but unsure of whether I would actually recommend it to someone unless they are huge fans of McDormand.

The Order (Prime rental) Jude Law stars in this movie about a string of violent robberies in the Pacific Northwest that leads veteran FBI agent Terry Husk to a white supremacist group. The group plans to overthrow the federal government. Although it is set in the 1980s, this movie echoes fears about the upcoming couple years.

Somebody Somewhere (Max) THIS is the one I want to spend a little time talking about and urge you all to see when you can. It is such a wonderful series. The show was canceled after its third season, despite the fact that it won the Peabody award, among others. But don't worry, the last episode was lovely and satisfying; there's no cliffhanger. The story follows Sam, a true Kansan woman on the surface who, beneath it all, struggles to fit the hometown mold and its expectations. As she grapples with loss and acceptance, Sam finds a saving grace in singing. It leads her on a journey to discover herself and a community of outsiders who also don't fit comfortably in their small town, but who don't give up, proving that finding like-minded people and a voice is always possible. Jeff Hiller plays Sam's best friend, a gay man struggling with his relationship to religion. Murray Hill plays a trans soil scientist/professor who owns a purple party bus and DJ's an LGBTQ pop-up nightclub the group calls "choir practice." There are lots more great characters, and all of them feel very real. I miss them terrifically. See it.

Taboo (Peacock) This is another weird one, and a show that Scott and I have decided not to follow when it returns for a second season. Adventurer James Keziah Delaney, long believed to be dead, returns home to London from Africa in 1814 in order to inherit his late father's shipping empire. All is not what it seems, however, as Delaney encounters numerous enemies intent on making his life back in the United Kingdom very difficult. Focused on building a shipping empire to rival the imperious East India Company (the very bad guys of the story and the time). That plot description leaves out the fantasy element: Delaney is able to see and talk to people he has seen die, a power which was never explained and seemed to work only



intermittently. That's the main reason I grew tired of this show. But I also got uncomfortable with the sheer unhygienic aspect of Delaney's life. He was constantly covered in mud, never washed, never cleaned his many injuries and wounds. I couldn't take it anymore.

Little, Big

Book 6, Chapter 3

[SC] Sophie uses the cards to describe the way to the Fairie Parliament to the assembled Drinkwater/Barnable family and friends. As always, the directions are vague and Sophie struggles to answer specific questions. Ariel Hawksquill asks Sophie if there is a war, but Sophie does not know, all she knows is the family and friends must travel to the Parliament to "help them" or "they" will go away (the Fairies?) Sophie says they must go on Midsummer Day and to make ready in the meantime. Smoky finally asks Sophie how are they all to get back. Sophie does not answer, but leaves the answer implied that they won't be coming back.

The gathering breaks up for refreshments. Sophie offers Ariel a chance to look at the cards to see for herself, but Ariel refuses because they are not for her "to touch." In the ensuing socializing, Hawksquill gives Smoky a hint of how his orrery might be made to work. Then Hawksquill hears the house itself telling her she's been mistaken about what is going on, the Tale is not as simple as she thought it was. Shaken, Hawksquill refuses to stay the night and hurries to leave to catch President Eigenblick's train, on her way out she sweeps the abandoned cards into her bag.

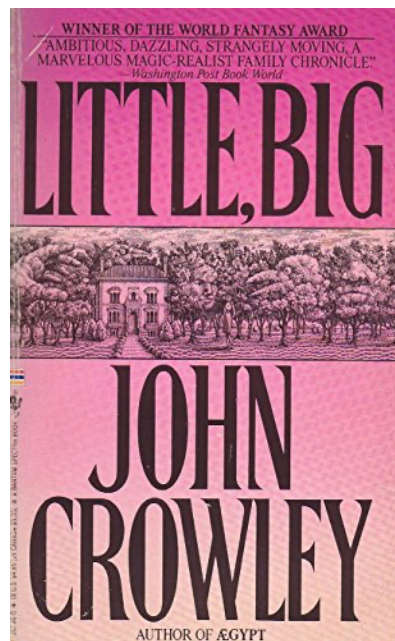
After the guests have gone, Daily Alice and Sophie sit together and Alice breaks the news that the trek to the Parliament happens at Midsummer, but that Alice must leave sooner, that very day in fact. Alice asks Sophie to look after Smoky. Smoky briefly interrupts them to fetch a book and explains that the orrery is a perpetual motion machine and that he needs to understand the positions of the planets to start it. He leaves. Sophie and Alice then fall into a discussion of whether the trip to Parliament is actually a trip to death. Sophie doesn't know, but

doesn't think so. Alice ponders her new role in the Tale once she leaves the house. It may not be death, but she understands she is leaving Smoky behind just the same. Smoky returns to announce that the orrery is running and wants Alice to come up to see. He runs upstairs ahead of her but she turns and leaves the house instead.

Book 6, Chapter 4

George Mouse, Fred Savage and Auberon begin the trek to Edgewood through the forest with Fred as guide. After a period of deciding on preparations for the journey, including Auberon writing the last episodes to "A World Elsewhere", they finally depart. They descend to the underground train levels to make their way out of the city and after taking a ferry across a river, they finally reach the forest. Along the way George speculates on how this mission was really a family thing. When Auberon expresses confusion, George explains how he once had sex with a Puerto Rican woman who looked a lot like Sylvie suggesting that Sylvie might actually be George's daughter. Auberon is shocked at this idea, but it would show how Sylvie could have been part of the family and therefore part of the Tale. Travelling together George gets separated from the others and ends up going through a period of remembering much of what he'd forgotten from long ago until he ends up at a little house in the Wild Wood (the Wood's house?) and settles in as if he's returned home.

Ariel Hawksquill is on Eigenblick's train pondering the Tale and what it all means when Eigenblick bursts into her cabin in search of the cards that Hawksquill brought with her. He can smell them. Before he can seize them, she stops him with a spell, grabs the bag with the cards and flees. She stops the train and gets off while being pursued by Eigenblick's men. She attempts the invisibility spell again, but drops the precious bone and tries to run. They shoot her. She said she cannot die, but she looks dead. They take the cards back to Eigenblick. The train resumes its journey but encounters a long, dark tunnel that should not be there, on the other side the train porter discovers the train is empty except for himself and the engineer. Eigenblick was not dead,



or gone, but back to sleep to awake again one day when his people needed him.

Book 6, Chapter 5

George Mouse shows up to guide Daily Alice on her journey through the woods. They talk of many things, Alice blesses George at the end of the woods and he promises to attend the banquet. Alice goes on alone. She eventually meets a confused stork who turns out to be the transformed Ariel Hawksquill who joins Alice on her journey. Ariel realizes she was always part of the Tale and apologizes for not being more helpful, but Alice says it doesn't matter and Ariel can help Alice in other ways.

Smoky Barnable sits in the library and contemplates his decision to stay with the house which he is quietly satisfied with.

Fred and Auberon reach the heart of the woods. Still no Sylvie, but Fred declares this is as far as he can go, as he transforms into a tree. He still guides Auberon by telling him that only the brave deserve the fair. Auberon does not know where to go but eventually recreates the little locked park from the city established by Mouse Drinkwater and Stone. He uses the power of his memory to resurrect this place and as he leaves the park he sees Sylvie, package under her arm, walking uptown. He follows knowing this is the way.

Sylvie, gift for Auberon under her arm, is on her way knowing she will see Auberon at the banquet. She leaves the city to the edge of the forest and travels near Edgewood on her way. Mrs. Underhill is almost finished, the banquet is ready and she is packed with only one last thing to do. She goes to Grandfather Trout to ask if he's ready to return to himself, but he would rather stay a fish. She doubts that is possible. She gives the command to begin her own journey with her children and the old Prince on his charger.

On Midsummer Day Sophie is about to lead the family out of Edgewood and she asks Smoky to join her. When Smoky tells her he's not going, she tries to convince him but it's not until Lilac appears to him that he changes his mind and decides to come. The procession begins, but Smoky is not part of the Tale and could not go out the charmed gate that he'd come into Edgewood through. He stays. He dies.

Sylvie arrives at the banquet (Parliament) under a flowering tree. Everyone is there but they are mourning the passing of Smoky. Sylvie and Auberon

are reunited as prince and princess. Daily Alice arrives from Smoky's private burial as the banquet winds down and dedicates this perfect summer day to his memory.

The last image is of the great house at Edgewood, empty but with the lights still on until they begin to burn out one by one, far into the future.

What can I say about the experience of reading *Little, Big*? I enjoyed it. I should say I enjoyed my second reading of it. My first reading was hampered by my tendency to focus on the plot, and the plot felt almost maddingly meandering the first time through. The second reading, along with commentary from **Steve** and others, prompted me to direct more attention to the characters' journeys, the settings, and other details that were so carefully conjured by the author. In my 2006 Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition, Roz Kaveney wrote an insightful afterword full of ideas like, "There is another great Matter for fantasy, one of more obvious resonance for the creative artist—the reconciliation of faerie and humanity; of the passion, power, and wit of a world of sensuality, magic, and danger with the requirements of kind and ordinary life." Which certainly describes this novel. She also pointed out "This tale is full of people, clearly visualized and likable; it is without villains, though those who like Hawksquill and August abuse power have to pay a price" and concludes "Crowley avoids easy answers by a preparedness to show the good faith of strenuous thought and effort, by hard sayings—he reconciles the fantastic and the mundane by ordering them in a vigorous, upsetting, and consoling fable." What she said.

