



Madison foursquare

92

This issue of *Madison Foursquare* is brought to you by Scott Custis and Jeanne Gomoll, who live at 2825 Union Street, Madison, WI 53704.

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Covers

[SC] All I can say is, wow! I can't decide which is more impressive, the TIME magazine reproduction on the cover, or the colorful sunset scene on the back.

[JG] Wow wow.

Jeanne Bowman

[SC] When you decide to do comments, you don't mess around. Great stuff. Re your comment to me on *Little, Big*, I think this book can inspire a multitude of viewpoints and interpretations. It's probably the most academically challenging book I have tackled in a long time, and I think I'm doing a pretty good job of expressing how much I'm struggling with it. I like the year-long apa conversation about it, which I think is a first for *Turbo*. I think it may inspire more extended exchanges on books or movies in the future. Meanwhile, there is plenty of time to jump in or catch up. We will be talking about it through December. Come on in, the water's fine.

[JG] Re your comment to **Greg**, I think I remember seeing the painting of *The Money Lenders* in the Grohmann museum. I have no doubt that you are right that the artist was expressing antisemitic prejudice, and I'm feeling a little embarrassed now that I apparently didn't notice the caricatures at the time. But that painting and another one like it (*The Tax Collectors*) caught my attention for another reason. The walls of the room shown in *The Tax Collectors* were crammed with little hanging fabric bags, which I assume represented some sort of filing or money-tracking system, and that sent my mind puzzling over what kind of system they might have set up to track finances. I think that mindset is what made me appreciate so many of those old paintings; I like pondering the hints of a world in which things were made and lives were lived so differently than they are now. You are right that the vast majority of the images at the Grohmann feature male protagonists, and I am certainly not surprised about that, but the fact that there were also some stunning paintings showing women demonstrating impressive skills was enlightening, if only for the sad fact that their examples have been mostly erased by history. I definitely enjoy old paintings that show people actually doing and making things, as opposed to families sitting around dressed in gorgeous silks, surrounded by symbols of wealth, or reenacting bible stories.

Re your comment to **Luke** and speaking of pondering different ways of living, your description of “fire hardening” jolted me a bit. It’s a startling idea that one would need to consider plants and trees surrounding one’s home as potentially lethal dangers. I am reminded of other mind-sets, tuned to the characteristic hazards of certain regions: tornado shelters, go-bags, a hatchet kept in the attic, earthquake-resistant home designs, etc.

“Starter husband”! I think I’ve heard you use that phrase before, but again, I laughed, and then thought of other Realty-based phrases that might be applied to a partner – like “fixer-upper,” “hidden gem with untapped potential,” “dream home,” “handyman special,” “hurry, this one won’t last,” “great investment potential,” and “cozy.”

Re your comment to **Andy** ... Oh-oh. I wonder if our neighborhood polling site will get into trouble for putting out bowls of candy for folks who’ve just voted? I never thought that a miniature tootsie roll might count as a bribe.

Elizabeth Matson

[SC] Thank you for the update on your new director. Sounds like you have done well. I think it’s a very encouraging sign that he actually shows up at the library and does not seem afraid to make decisions. The next question is how well he backs up his staff.

Thanks also for the Nick the Greyhound update. Does starting at 4AM mean you’re walking him when it’s still dark out? That’s a crazy time to start your day. I hope your trip to celebrate your mom’s birthday went smoothly.

Writing the day after your *Coat and Boots* storytelling show, I really enjoyed it. I love how you manage to pace your performance so as to not rush

through it, as well as the expressiveness of your delivery.

[JG] I am so glad we were able to attend your *Coat and Boots* performance! I hope you’ll decide to share a story or two with us at TurboCon in October! As Scott mentioned, I was also impressed by your expressive and professional performance style. The fact that you actually compose your stories out loud (rather than writing them and subsequently learning to perform them) translates into lots of practice time, I’m sure. I am still pondering the differences between your process and my own story-telling technique, which begins and, so far, mostly ends with the written word.

Steven Vincent Johnson

[SC] I enjoyed the interview with Johannes Kepler. I learned quite a few things I did not know. I thought Kepler was more loquacious than his stern image on page one would suggest.

I’m sad to see you are headed back for surgery in July, though you clearly need it. Hopefully it will not require a long recovery.

Andy Hooper

[SC] I enjoyed your Corflu report. I did not realize how involved the Brits were in the planning committee for a Las Vegas convention. They seem to be really enthusiastic about Corflu, attending, hosting and even planning them from overseas. I was appalled to read that smoking is still allowed in casinos. They must be almost the only public indoor spaces that still permit it. Gross.

I never met Joyce Worley Katz, but your piece on her was sublime.

[JG] What a find! I suppose *Odd #21* will end up on the short list of rare and sought-after fanzines. Thank you

Pickles by Brian Crane



so much for your portrait of Joyce and the story of how she and Arnie birthed the Vegrants. I knew bits of those stories, but did not know the whole. It was a pleasure to read.

William Breiding's comments about the idea that apa writing might be a detriment to genzines is a personally interesting one for me. It's been more than three decades since I published my last issue of *Whimsey* (1992). But I've managed to put out at least one monthly apazine for most of the years since then, sometimes several, and I have no doubt that the number of words in my not-so-generally-available apazines dwarfs the piddly word count in my more generally-available perzines. Should I have made an effort and spent the money to trade zines with fandom at large? Shoulda, woulda, coulda, aside, I seem to have made a commitment to putting most of my writing in apazines, and now all I can do is try to understand why I've made that choice.

I like the monthly rhythm of writing for *Turbo*. It's not like my work is lost in the void after the OE staples it with the other zines. I've re-shaped and refined quite a few of the stories I told on the pages of *Madison Foursquare*, and put them in my books. And soon fandom.org will have pdfs of every one of my zines, published over the last fifty years or so –both perzines and apazines. They will be available to anyone who goes looking for them. But of course, I've lost one really important thing, and it was my favorite thing about publishing a regular fanzine.

The best things (for me) about doing *Whimsey* were the conversations begun in an article, continued in letters of comment, and then embroidered with comments within the next issue. Orchestrating a conversation with several dozen friends; that was the best part. But writing, illustrating, laying out, printing, and mailing *Whimsey* consumed a huge amount of time and was rather expensive too. And then life got in the way. It had been easier to do fanzines before I got a job that I loved. When I was working as a temp typist, I could pour all my obsessive energy into the fanzine (and other hobbies like WisCon), but when I finally got a job as a graphic artist, it turned out that there were lots more creative outlets available to me, not to mention a paycheck. Gaps between issues of my fanzine grew longer and longer. But I still wanted to write about my life and the books I was reading and ideas I wrestled with but could no longer find enough time to do a fanzine... so ... apazines.

I've lost track of many of the people who joined me in conversation in *Whimsey*, and found other friends and

different conversations in *Turbo*. I can't say I will never publish another generally available fanzine, but right now, I like doing *Madison Foursquare* with Scott.

Carrie Root

[SC] Oooh, decking repair. Cool. Good job. Don't forget to pub pictures of the finished job.

Re comment to me, thanks for the trip report to see Sam's play in California. It sounded delightful.

Re your comment to **SteveSw** regarding *Little, Big*, I had to read the whole book, too. I would never have made it through my first reading of the book by doing two chapters a month. It's too dense and complex. I also know I would get a lot more out of it on my second reading after I'm no longer distracted wondering where the plot was going.

Re your comment to **Pat**, Jeanne and I have also been gravitating toward key advisors younger than us. My primary physician is significantly younger than me, also our tax preparer and our financial advisor. If we get a lawyer again, it will have to be someone young and hungry. We'd rather avoid having key people retire on us anymore.

Your photos are gorgeous!

[JG] I've visited the northwest a few times in late spring and early summer and I remember the incredible profusion of flowering bushes. At times, walking the sidewalks, I felt enveloped in explosions of color and fragrances. Enjoy!

Congratulations on the new deck! Composite decks may not be immortal. I remember a conversation we had with our contractor about the railings for our front porch which we finally decided to have made of treated wood; he said composite wood lasts about 30-50 years. But for your purposes I would guess that's enough!

Jim Hudson & Diane Martin

[SC] The thing at Nick's was great, but I mostly remember it as kind of a crowded blur. Richard's BD party was more fun (see elsewhere for more details.) Richard and Abigail always make me laugh these days and I was sitting next to an old curmudgeon I didn't know; he was a hoot.

Re your comment to us, the *Spy vs. Spy* mural was a painted on the side of Megan's Custom Framing on the corner of East Washington and N. 6th St. I don't know what artery of creativity Megan has tapped into, but that mural space has been painted over twice since I took that picture in late April.

A Gentleman of Moscow, which sounds interesting to me.

[JG] Congratulations on the new job, Greg. I know what you mean about getting used to retirement. When I sold my design business, I expected that I would continue working with at least one client whose jobs tended to be very profitable for me. I figured I would use the income to pay for the monthly subscription cost of my Adobe software (InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, Acrobat, etc.). But within just a couple months I discovered the joys of spending all my time on my own projects and doing stuff with Scott and I decided that to use retirement income to cover Adobe's Creative Cloud subscription cost. I hope your new job proves interesting and unstressful, and that the income makes it easy for you and Georgie to enjoy as many cultural events as tempt you.

I'm glad you had a few kind words to say about the movie version of *Moulin Rouge*. I remember liking it quite a lot and would ordinarily be interested in seeing a staged version. But after reading your review, I may hope and wait for a different production. I really dislike it when I find myself needing ear plugs in theaters.

We here in the apa are gradually accumulating a short list of Trek crew member hobbies, momentarily glimpsed between universe-saving scenes. I thought of another one: *Star Trek: Discovery's* Saru obviously spends a lot of time caring for his plants. Nevertheless, I think the *Discovery's* room décor ranks among the most boring in the *Star Trek* universe. All through this final season (which Scott and I are frankly glad to see end), I thought frequently that the rooms resembled cold and anonymous corporate headquarters or hotel lobbies, with a painful dearth of any individuality.

I loved the photos showing paintings and flower arrangements mimicking one another. Lovely!

Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] We also saw *Alan Bates vs. the Post Office*. Your description is excellent. By the end however, I was distracted by how our own vital Post Office is being corrupted in a completely different way (via the administration of Louis De Joy) and we seem unable to fix it.

Re your comment to me. You are a good example of someone who I always thought enjoyed your work and derived great satisfaction from it. I think that's great and very enviable. The best I can say about my own work experience is that I sometimes enjoyed parts of my jobs. I usually liked being

assigned teaching or training responsibilities, both one-on-one and classroom style (teaching was my occupation of choice way back in high school). At my last job at DOT, I also got to do some "outreach" which involved traveling to conventions of client groups and giving presentations and/or answering questions about the work our section did. That was always fun. But the best I can ever say about any job was that it was tolerable. I was also in a hurry to leave my last job because of how it was changing for the worse outside my control.

[JG] I also noticed that early spring seemed to hang on a little longer than usual. The bright chartreuse of new leaves, that normally deepens to a darker green within a day or two, maintained its glow for a week or more. That was OK with me.

Like you, I was also impressed by the PBS show, *Alan Bates vs. the Post Office*. But I didn't interpret the story as one that happens when people assume that everyone is cheating, though that may be the painful reality and perhaps provides a better explanation for the saga than my own notion. What I thought about while watching it was that most people avoid taking the blame for their mistakes if there's a simple way to pass on the blame to a less powerful (poorer, younger, lower class) person who can be easily shut out of the investigative process. And then, if and when the consequences of the mistake balloons, the people actually at fault will tend to double down, because the potential consequences to their own careers and lives overpower their impulses to apologize and accept the responsibility. As long as the little people, the less powerful people, don't band together and demand justice, this strategy will work more often than not. I guess you and I may be equally cynical about people, though in a slightly different way...

I think I will look for the mystery you mentioned, *Mastering the Art of French Murder*. I don't usually read mysteries, but I do love Julia Child and cooking mysteries. So maybe...!

Marilyn Holt & Cliff Wind

[SC] I enjoyed your goose story. Are you expecting to end up with some baby geese (goslings?) Or is this just to keep Greyling settled? Thanks for the tip on *Bodkin*, which looks interesting to me.

[JG] What a lot of work to convince Jem/Greyling to stay home! As I read the saga, I thought about how Greyling might have told the story from her point of view – being kidnapped, and carried far away from friends and a familiar home, several attempts to escape

and return home, and then finding herself trapped by her ingenious captors in a prison. But finally, she meets another inmate, falls in love, and decides to accept her fate.

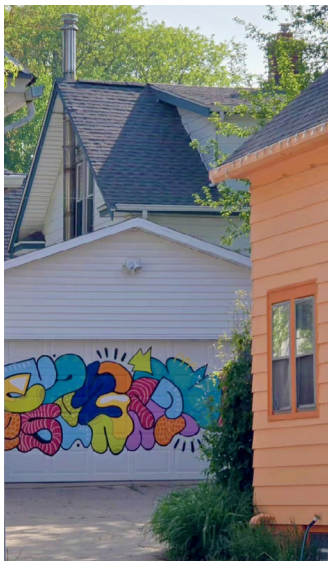
Jae Leslie Adams

[SC] Re your comment to me on “turbo-charged mojo,” **Andrea** started it by calling us “cozy.”

With regard to “animal collisions,” I think you should give us the full blow-by-blow of the moose catastrophe from the passenger’s perspective.

SteveSw can take it. “Well, that changes everything,” is a perfect Steveish understatement, and I laughed out loud.

[JG] Re the Triangulador, I follow his work as much as I can and watch with admiration as his style evolves (See the artwork on page one – so much detail!). But he is so prolific; it’s hard to keep up. He finishes a new mural every week. He’s done several commissions recently in indoor spaces that are truly magnificent, and at least one new garage piece like ours, and he continues to do roadside mattress canvases too. However, he’s getting a bit grumpy about people picking up his mattress masterpieces immediately after he finishes them, before the trash collectors show up. The price of fame, I guess.



Kim & Kathi Nash

[SC] Re the storm you wrote about, we had a branch break off one of the locust trees in front of our house (on the terrace, they’re our trees or the city’s trees, depending on the situation). I heard something drop as we were sheltering in the basement during a tornado alert, but did not actually see what happened until the next morning. When the branch dropped it took out the last overhead line to our house (our old phone line is long gone and the power line is underground), which was the cable that provides our internet. The branch landed in our driveway and I was able to cut it up with a hand saw. Since our internet is provided by Spectrum Cable Business, they came out the next day and fixed it. A few days later, while Jeanne and I were having breakfast on our front porch, Jeanne gasped as she looked out the window to our neighbor’s house. A large branch was hanging down from the locust tree in front of his house, with the jagged, broken end pointing toward the ground of his front yard like the Sword of Damocles. That looked dangerous, so Jeanne shot a picture and sent it to the city. Two days later, workers showed up to remove it.



[JG] My mom contracted scarlet fever and had most of one lung surgically removed when she was very young. Throughout her life, she tended to blame every cold, flu, cough, and out-of-breath moment on that missing section of lung, though her doctor disagreed with her diagnosis. So just keep in mind that you didn’t just lose a chunk of lung, you gained an excellent excuse to avoid doing anything you don’t want to do.

Pat Hario

[SC] Jeanne and I had dinner the other night with **Jamie** and **Diane** at Fabiola’s Spaghetti House, which I liked a lot (I’m not sure everyone was as happy with the experience as I was. It was kind of busy and very noisy). It shares the building with Leopold’s Books Bar Cafe on Regent Street. Have you ever been there? While we waited for our table, we hung out in the bookstore. It was my first visit to either place. Leopold’s organizes their books by geographical location. If the book is set in South

Africa (or is a non-fiction book about South Africa) it can be found in the South Africa section. Fiction and non-fiction are together. I have never seen a business organize books this way. It was perpetually surprising wandering around the store checking out what was shelved where. They also had bottles of wine displayed with the books, the same way. Bottles of reds and whites mixed together and displayed by where they were from. The cafe bar was bigger than I expected too. Nice place to hang out. FYI.

[JG] Your hiding Lindor balls reminds me of the Easter morning when Mom asked Dad how many decorated eggs we kids had found. "Twenty-two," he said. "Oh dear," said Mom. There are two more around here someplace."

Yeah, I read about comments made by Eric Hovde (the Republican running against Tammy Baldwin for US Senator) about how old people living in retirement homes have only six months to live (so why bother?). I figured that he must have heard that someone who enters hospice does so because their doctors certify they have six months or less to live. Hovde must have conflated that nugget of information with all seniors living in assisted living. I hope he's embarrassed to have repeated such obviously mistaken "facts." Well, maybe not for Republicans these days.

Here's a picture of our backyard neighbor's black monolith house with the flat roof. I agree that historically, flat roofs are uncommon in places where snow accumulation can damage rooftops, but after watching the construction, it's clear that they're using some pretty high-tech materials and design. The homeowner owns a construction company and I imagine that he's drawing on skills and experiences he's picked up on while working on other people's homes for his own dreamhouse. As I said, Scott and I are curious and will have questions to ask when we're given a tour of the place.

Re your comment to **Kathi**, what is "flower day"?



Luke McGuff

[SC] Thanks for showing me the Purple Martin condo you manage on our bike ride back from MMHI. Busy place. Good thing they can't call you out in the middle of the night to fix the plumbing or replace a light bulb. Did I hear you right when (I think) you told me Purple Martins no longer have any natural habitat, that these human built houses are their only housing options these days? Jeanne wanted to know more about that and I realized that I should have asked you more questions.

I hope you had a lovely time in Detroit. Trip report?

[JG] Apazine as diary. I like it!

Karl Hailman & Hope Kiefer

[SC] Karl, thanks for the Eclipse trip report. I would trade you some of the time you spent driving around the Missouri Ozarks for time we spent on dull freeways in central Illinois and Indiana. The park we ended up in for the eclipse was lovely, but much of the highway driving was utterly forgettable. Also, the cavernous, empty Wyndham hotel where we stayed in Springfield was depressing, along with Springfield itself, a fairly bombed-out state capital town. Madison locals who spend all their time complaining about Madison should travel to see more state capital cities, they might start to appreciate how beautiful our city is.

Hope, what a poignant memorial you wrote for John Peacock. I am again, so sorry for your loss.

[JG] I've enjoyed reading eclipse-trip reports here in the apa and on Facebook. All of them have basically the same structure and same climax scene, but differ in fascinating details. It almost feels as if all of us travelers were on the same trip together but were separated by thin screens. I'm glad you got your family together to see the eclipse together.

My condolences for your loss. I didn't know John Peacock well and appreciate reading about your relationship with him, Hope. I knew bits and pieces of that story, but am glad to have more context now. It seems to me that too many fans have been felled by glioblastoma.

[JG] Note: Those of you who watched Hulu's *Shogun*, and would have liked to compare it to the 1980 version with Richard Chamberlain, probably had trouble finding that earlier version on line. I heard that a couple episodes, but not the entire miniseries was available on YouTube, but that's all. But now, suddenly, the whole 1980 miniseries has been made available on Apple TV. We're watching it now.

Bridgerton, season 3 (Netflix) I'd read posts from a few people saying that they'd finished binging the most recent season of this romantic roulette soap (a different Bridgerton family member gets elevated to the top of the narrative hierarchy each season). So, we thought it was safe to start watching it. Usually, we try to wait till all the episodes of a show (at least for a single season) are available before we start streaming it. But we were deceived. Netflix split this show's third season into two parts—the first four episodes came out on May 16, and the last four episodes were released on June 13. I am confused. I thought Netflix dropped whole seasons at once. So, we were surprised at the end of the fourth, cliffhanger episode to find out that we'd have to wait a few weeks to watch the end of the season. Damn. But a few weeks is not too long. We will no doubt have seen it by the time *Turbo #456* is distributed. Maybe I will say more about the actual show next month. Spoiler: I like it.

Criminal Record (Apple TV) This British police procedural is excellent. Remember the actress, Cush Jumbo, from *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight*? She stars as DS June Lenker, with Peter Capaldi who plays her superior officer, DCI Daniel Hegarty. Capaldi is probably a name recognizable to you *Dr. Who* fans, but I am not one of those, so this actor's work came as a wonderful surprise to me. Besides being a great story, with excellent acting, *Criminal Record* did an amazing job weaving very complicated issues of race and class in England into the interactions between

the characters and within the story in general. Also fascinating: we were kept uncertain as to whether Hegarty would turn out to be a good or bad man. I was reminded a bit of Severus Snape....

The Dead Don't Hurt (Theater) Until I met Scott, I wasn't really a fan of westerns. But early in our relationship, he convinced me to see Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* with him. I was so impressed and so loved the idea that a western could critique the myth of westerns, that I've willingly joined Scott to see more westerns, even the non-meta sort, whenever they come out. *The Dead Don't Hurt* actually shares some similarities with *Unforgiven* in that much of the plot is propelled by a sexual assault and demolishes the macho mythology of classic westerns. Viggo Mortensen, who works as a carpenter and lives in a small homestead on the western frontier is the ostensible star of this movie, but I consider his lover/partner/eventual wife, played by Vicky Krieps, to be the real protagonist. Krieps plays a tough, independent, and smart woman, which of course I liked a lot, and her relationship to Mortensen's character is luminescent.

Discovery (Paramount) Thank heavens that's over. The *Star Trek* series I have most liked are ones that tackle ideas in a science fictional format. Of course, it's delightful to see glimpses of beloved *Trek* characters interact in personal situations, but *Discovery*, I think, took that aspect way over the shark. Meaningful-relationship conversations were the main substance of *Discovery*, rather than grace notes, often taking place during the suspenseful seconds before some part of the galaxy or the Federation was about to be destroyed. Second in importance in this show were the special effects, most of them created with AI. Interesting ideas were all but crowded out. I'm glad this series is over. I'm still following *Strange New Worlds*, but as with the Marvel universe, I feel like I'm



losing interest in many of the invented worlds offered by movies and TV.

Fallout (Netflix) I think someone in this apa recommended this show to us; I can't remember who told us that *Fallout* was a post-apocalyptic series based on a video game. That didn't discourage me since Scott and I recently were really impressed by another show based on a video game (*The Last of Us*). I will eagerly watch the second season of that one. But I'm not interested in continuing with *Fallout* if it comes back for a second season. I thought that the game aspect of *Fallout* overtook believable world-building. I assume that players of the game get to play characters who emerge into the nuclear wasteland from several dozen different bunkers across the US, with each bunker organized with a different philosophy. Given a certain philosophy and set of skills, which players will survive? There are so many unanswered questions about the organization and survival of people in these bunkers, and what exactly caused some rather amazing developments in the wasteland (zombies and technological advances like the "Rad-be-Gone" pill, which cures radiation sickness) that I was constantly saying, "What the fuck?" There was some good acting and a few intriguing characters, but that wasn't enough to keep my interest.

Nolly (PBS) The great Helena Bonham Carter portrays the actress Noele Gordon who starred in the British public broadcasting network (ITV)'s flagship soap opera, *Crossroads*, 1964-1968, followed by a short revival from 2001-2003. Nolly got fired in 1968. We are treated to many flashbacks to earlier times, but Nolly's firing happens during the first episode of the PBS three-part series. Nolly's adoring fans kick up a calamitous protest and Nolly herself is forced to assess her limited future career possibilities. The rickety sets, early TV production values, and behind-the-scenes relationships among the cast, make this a delightful and historical look at early television.

Terms of Endearment (Prime) Somehow it came up in conversation with Scott that I had never seen this

movie. Now I have. And I'm sure most of you have too. It was fun to watch.

Top Chef Wisconsin (Bravo, though we watch it on Sling) Last week we watched the last episode of this season that took place in Wisconsin. During the next two weeks, the remaining four chefs will battle it out in the kitchen of a giant cruise ship in the Caribbean. But while they still cooked in Wisconsin, it was fun watching chefs chase around the farmers market, shop at the University Avenue Whole Foods, eat at and consult with the chefs at some familiar Milwaukee and Madison restaurants (including some native American chefs), do a fish boil, cook with cranberries, beer and, of course, cheese. We used to be regular watchers of this show, but haven't seen it for many years. Tom Collicchio seems to still be having fun and the new host Kristen Kish is doing OK. But I suspect this season won't tempt us to watch the show regularly again.

Young Woman and the Sea (Theater) If you like *Nyad*, you may very well also like this movie. It's another biographical sports drama about an American competitive swimmer, Trudy Ederle, who was known briefly as the "fastest woman swimmer in the world." She won a gold medal at the 1924 Olympic Games, and then became the first woman to swim 21 miles across the English Channel. Her dramatic conflicts with people (including male coaches) who did not believe that women could or should swim at all, or at least should restrict themselves to the breast stroke (I'm still trying to understand that prescription), are probably historically inaccurate in their details, but probably essentially correct in general. For instance, I liked the notion, fictional or not, that Trudy began thinking about swimming when she was a little girl and found out that many women had drowned in a ferry accident because they didn't know how to swim (and, I suspect, would have been weighed down by their heavy skirts). I also laughed at the scene in which the male coach who actively sabotaged her as she prepared for the Olympics and during her first attempt to cross the channel, erupted in anger when he heard that she'd



succeeded in crossing the channel. I'm sure that scene was invented, but it felt good to see Trudy beat a fictional representative of the many people who wished and expected her to fail. But mostly I enjoyed seeing Trudy swim.

Books this month:

Homer & Langley by E.L. Doctorow

[SC] A short novel, shortlisted for the 2009 Man/Booker prize, that I found in a Little Free Library.

I have long been a fan of Doctorow's work. Homer and Langley Collyer are brothers. Homer is blind, musical and sensitive. Langley struggles with paranoia and madness following his exposure to mustard gas while serving in WW I. They live as recluses in their once-grand Fifth Ave. mansion scavenging and hoarding to get by, while watching the great events of the 20th century pass by their door. Beautifully written, insightful and sad, it's a small masterpiece.

The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements by Eric Hoffer

[SC] Another quick read. This is Richard S. Russell's favorite book, which I know because he awarded me a copy as part of a prize. Jeanne and I went to Richard's 80th birthday party on May 7 along with 40 or so of his and Abigail's closest friends. The event was hosted at the west side World Buffet restaurant in a private event space. This was a clever choice because the only menu option was to order the buffet, so all the wait staff had to do was find seating for the guests, keep track of who was ordering dinner and provide beverages.

The food was fine. After dinner, Richard and Abigail announced a game (this would not have come as a surprise to anyone who knows Richard and/or has ever attended one of his past birthday parties.) The game was not charades this time, however. Abigail came up with a creepily appropriate game idea. They passed out pencils and worksheets to all the guests, with space to record answers to 50 questions. Here's the creepy part: answers were not True or False, they were A or

D (Alive or Dead). The 50 questions turned out to be a list of 50 famous people. As Abigail read them off one by one, each player had a few seconds to choose A or D on their worksheet. Naturally, being Richard, the game was not won by who correctly guessed the most out of 50. The first pass was just to select a group of five to compete in a run-off of 10 more famous names (presumably tougher ones) to decide a winner. Long story short, I won.

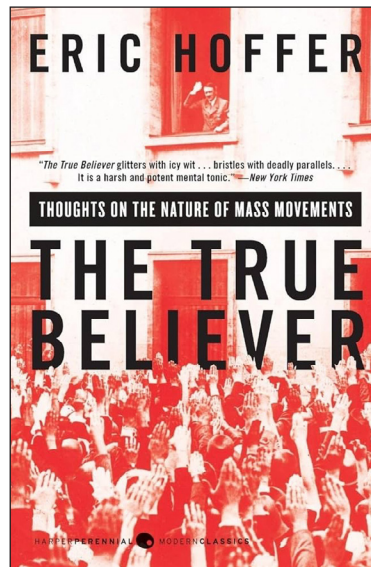
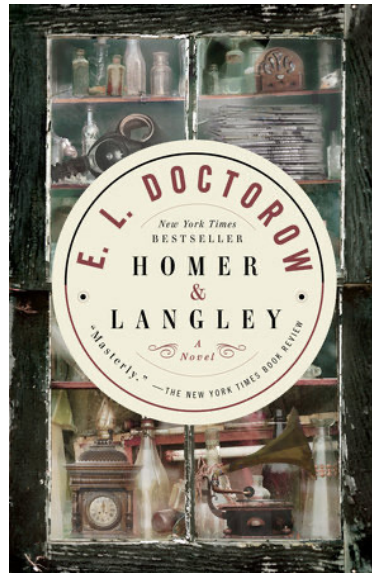
This came as a shock to me because I never win shit.

At one point early in the game the old guy next to me grumbled that the person who will win *this* game is someone who reads obituaries all the time. I chuckled at that, but later I realized he was right. I *do* read obituaries all the time, in my hometown newspaper, the NYT, the Washington Post and elsewhere. Afterward I told this story to **Pat**, who loaned me her book, *The Dead Beat* by Marilyn Johnson, about interesting obituaries (which I will be starting next.)

There was a prize, of course. A brown paper bag of stuff, including a copy of Richard's favorite book, a Barnes and Noble gift card (since used), an Apple gift card (also used), a small U.S. flag on a stick, a pickleball, a 1st Place ribbon, a box of green and gold game dies, a cheesehead key ring, Richard's old Green Bay Packers "TANGO!" license plate, a cat toy, and other junk drawer collectibles. I was delighted.

Anyway, about the book. It's a recognized classic about fanaticism and the dynamics of mass movements by a self-educated former drifter and longshoreman.

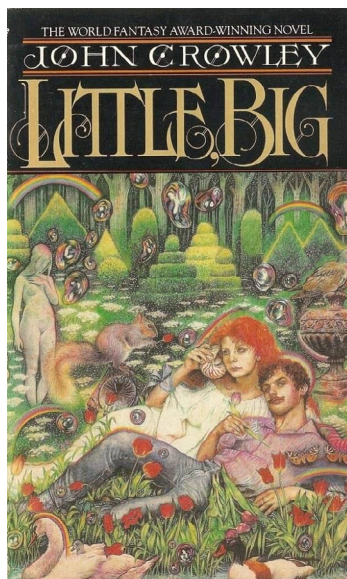
It was originally published in 1951, when Hoffer was mainly addressing the world's, then recent, experiences of Nazism and Communism. His terminology is a bit dated, but reading it now in the age of the MAGA movement and Trump fanatics, it's bracing how insightful it still is.



[SC] At the end of chapter 2, Auberon (son of Smoky and Daily Alice) drifts off to dream about his childhood back at Edgewood and chapter 3 takes us back to that time and place. The scene is set as the older generation (Doc and “Mom” Drinkwater and Aunt Cloud) are getting old and gradually giving way to Smoky and Daily Alice and Sophie. The great house is aging and filling up with pets. Auberon’s invisible friend is Lilac, the missing child of Sophie. No one else seems to see her except Auberon as she appears and frolics around always barefoot in a blue dress. When Lilac performs magic by making the fireflies dance, Auberon reports it to his parents only for them to ignore his statement and redirect him to a bath. When he tries to talk to Sophie, she also mostly fails to respond other than to agree that her Lilac is actually gone and Auberon’s invisible friend is the replacement Lilac. I think.

Auberon loved books even before he could read. In the next scene he and Smoky are relaxing in the library with books, Lilac (invisible to everyone except Auberon) circling the room and playing. When Auberon asks Smoky a question about the book he is reading, we realize he’s found John Drinkwater’s *Architecture of Country Houses* which may be about the magical doings at Edgewood, he also finds the onion skin map at the back of the book that once entranced Smoky. Auberon thinks it depicts a battle, but Smoky, as always, is impossible to pin down as to what it is or means since he never figured it out himself. Instead, Smoky tries to distract Auberon again by reminding him they are all going on a picnic that day.

The whole household heads out of the house into the old car for a picnic. They travel along the long-overgrown path that Smoky and Daily Alice walked on their honeymoon. The afternoon is glorious with much food and wine and as they all unwind under a tree “Mom” Drinkwater begins a long rambling story about her family, the Hills, of the city. Everyone else drifts off or falls asleep as she’s talking, but Auberon notices that Lilac appears to be running away. He chases her into the deep forest but loses her in the end, after she gives him a look that



clearly communicates that she is leaving him. It’s the day he “finally grows up.”

In the final scene, we are back in the city at George Mouse’s compound in Auberon’s Folding Bedroom. While Auberon is attempting to write a letter home, George Mouse shows up and drops off a load of Sylvie’s belongings, since she has appeared to have left him for Auberon. There is an awkward exchange as Auberon comforts George by telling him how Sylvie thinks of him as a father, but George believes he’s lost his lover not a daughter figure, and gives Auberon some tips about what she likes.

Chapter 4

We begin with Ariel Hawksquill, “the greatest mage of this age of the world.” She does not use crystal balls or astrology (a “fraud”). She disdains spells or “geomancies” of all kinds, and leaves the dead alone. Her great “Art” (author carefully does not use the word “magic”) is a sort of super memory palace technique which is explained in detail. In the course of her rummaging around in her childhood memories, she mentions her dog named Spark (Auberon had a dog at Edgewood also named Spark, coincidence?) and also her grandfather telling her about once having a deck of tarot cards that belonged to Violet Drinkwater. What follows is a lot of philosophizing about how the universe worked and how Hawksquill might be able to use these cards, if she could find them, to figure out what Russell Eigenblick’s role is (in the Tale?) She gets a visit from the mysterious Fred Savage with a message from the Noisy Bridge Rod and Gun Club (Hawksquill’s employer) which was a payment and request for a progress report on Eigenblick.

Hawksquill must track down the cards.

The next scene has Aunt Nora Cloud training Sophie to use the cards. They dealt a Rose pattern that Cloud suggests is showing them a Geography rather than an interior or a story. Sophie then reflects on her Life and how she had been a dreamer but now she was fully awake. In the cards, Cloud and Sophie still had to work out the meaning of the Geography, but Sophie also picked up the news of Cloud’s imminent death, which Cloud already knew. Later as Cloud climbs the last stairs back to her room, she reflects on the Geography of the Tale

as she had worked it out from the cards. Knowing she will never again descend the stairs, the family gathers around her.

The last scene has us back at Old Law Farm as Sylvie gives Auberon the gift of doing the chores for him on a cold morning. We follow her as she leaves Auberon and her warm bed to do the chores. She returns to sex with Auberon, then as he builds the fire in their room. He tells her the story, as he understands it, of the disappearance of the real Lilac at Edgewood and the appearance of his invisible friend, the substitute Lilac. Sylvie wants to know what happened to the real Lilac and offers to go back to Edgewood with Auberon if he wants to, but he does not.

I feel I'm being swept along by the Tale every bit as much as the characters are. Auberon appears to be on a quest as part of the Tale. Though he knows Cloud predicted he would "meet a dark girl who would love him for no virtue he had, and leave him through no fault of his own" he's rejected that prophecy even as he starts to see that he's trapped in it. The sinister Russell Eigenblick sub-plot seems to be in regard to the struggle between the "real"

and the world of fairey, but it's not clear who's side we should be on. Is Hawksquill an agent of evil and chaos, or someone dedicated to the successful outcome of the Tale? And why steal Lilac and replace her with a substitute only Auberon can see? Wheels are turning and the Tale is playing out. Any insights are appreciated.

Little, Big reading schedule

Book One: <i>Edgewood</i>	Book Three: <i>Old Law Firm</i>	September: Chaps 1, 2
January: Chaps 1, 2, 3	May: Chaps 1, 2	October: Chaps 3, 4
February: Chaps 4, 5	June: Chaps 3, 4	Book Six: <i>The Fairies' Parliament</i>
Book Two: <i>Brother North: Wind's Secret</i>	July: Chaps 1, 2	November: Chaps 1, 2, 3
March: Chaps 1, 2	August: Chaps 3, 4	December: Chaps 4, 5
April: Chaps 3, 4	Book Five: <i>The Art of Memory</i>	

What's New in pictures



[JG] We had new drapes made for our bedroom. This is an improvement that has been needed for a long time. These curtains replace the dark, somewhat bent blinds that we installed more than 30 years ago when Scott was still working the night shift and needed total darkness while sleeping during the day. Tracy Benton pointed me at an on-line fabric store, FabricGuru, where I browsed through thousands of images, sent for a dozen fabric swatches, made my selection, and then hired an in-town company to construct and hang our new drapes. Well it was a little more complicated than that. We like our new curtains!



[JG] And this is the drawing I did for our friend, Bill Hoffman's new hot sauce. Bill grows a bewildering number and variety of pepper plants, brews delicious sauces, and bottles them, In return for a few sample bottles of recent vintage, Bill asked me to do an illustration for the label for a new sauce he is planning to make using Serrano peppers.