The audience skews heavily toward the mature demographic. I see several oxygen canisters and lots of walkers, and I’m sure there are many pacemakers in attendance.

We’ve come to relive memories.

On stage, two 45-year-old men stand at microphones, bearing guitars, below a screen displaying a huge picture of their famous father, dead these 26 years now. Matthew Nelson, the self professed “good twin,” is the front man and plays base. Gunnar, the slightly chunkier “evil twin,” plays lead guitar and adds harmonies.

Their voices are reminiscent of their father’s, but whereas Ricky Nelson never strained for or fudged a note, they use their rock star tricks to try to pump emotion into the words of their father’s songs.

They achieved rock and roll stardom in their own right as Nelson when their song “(I Can’t Live Without Your) Love and Affection” hit #1 in the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 chart in September, 1990.

Along with their grandparents, Ozzie Nelson and Harriet Hilliard Nelson, they form the only three generation family in music history to each have had a #1 hit record. Ricky had many, of course.

Matthew comments that his brother looks like Ellen DeGeneres, the comedian and talk show host, and there is a resemblance. The twins long ago abandoned their “hot Swedish chicks” phase, when their long, electric blonde hair had a life of its own.

They are just about the same age their father was when he died in that New Year’s morning plane crash flying out of Guntersville, Alabama, where he and his Stone Canyon Band had appeared at a friend’s nightclub.

They were only 18 when they lost their dad, and their life up until then could hardly have been anything approaching normal.

At one point, Mama Cass Elliot of Mamas and Papas fame was their babysitter, and they started playing guitars before they were out of pampers.
Even so, they call their father their best friend and sing a mournful ballad at the end of the show (just after their father’s iconic hit, “Garden Party”), wishing that “just one more time” he could “walk through the door” and be with them.

I’d been wishing the same thing, thinking how fine it would be if by some strange rock and roll miracle, he could walk out on that stage again.

They show clips of “the irrepressible Ricky” growing up before our eyes on The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, singing “I’m Walkin’” for the first time on the show, and later performing in concert, a shockingly handsome rock star.

Their covers of their father’s songs enable me to understand what was unique and uniquely good about Ricky Nelson’s music; he sang the words and the notes in that clear, sweet voice without adornment. He was the instrument, smooth and pure and without pretension.

They say he was a shy man, and I have always thought so, despite all the fame and carousing. Understand: when I was a little boy, I didn’t just like Ricky Nelson. I was Ricky Nelson. I’ll keep singing “Mary Lou” and “It’s Late” and “Traveling Man” until I lay these old bones down, and I’ll remember the wisdom Rick Nelson gained when he realized that people wanted him to keep singing those old songs—only those old songs—for the rest of his life.

Well, it’s all right now.
I learned my lesson well.
You see you can’t please everyone,
so you got to please yourself.

Rick Nelson, 1972

His sons say their dad never wanted to get old. Perhaps it’s best that he never had to.

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Extra Innings

#31

In which we celebrate writers, their enablers, and Emily the epidoula supreme

Madison, Wisconsin May, 2012

The All-Stars: Madonna Dries Christensen, Rex Owens, Den Adler, Ron Hevey

Doggerellogist: Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks

Poets: Norma Sundberg, Craig W. Steele, John Manesis

PUNisher: Ed Pahnke

Film critic: Nathanial Cook

Theater critic: Jennifer Bell

With Limericks by: Bonny Conway, Pat Goetz, Craig W. Steele, Sandra Rafter, and N. Sippola

Short-storyist: Vic Johnson

Head of office security: Pat Downes

Web Weavers: Celeste Anton and Emily Baker

Fisher of the Internet: Steve Born

The Writers Institute
The School of the Arts at Rhinelander
Weekend with your Novel and the Odyssey Project

No added sugar, carbs, trans-fats, or taste. Contains your recommended daily dose of nouns, verbs (transigent and intransigent), gourds, adjectives, adverbs and other artificial sweeteners, pronouns, antinouns, prepositions, propositions, conjunctions, contradictions, contractions, eruditions, bloviation, chiasmus, charisma, metanoia, paranoia, trace metaphors and the occasional halfwitticism.

Back issues available at: www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing/extrainnings
**GROWING UP IN MADISON**

**RON HEVEY**

What more could be better’n than reading about Roundy?

If you said the word “Roundy” in 1950’s Madison or in sports circles around the country, people knew you meant Joseph “Roundy” Coughlin, the *Wisconsin State Journal*’s sports wag from 1924 to 1970.

What Roundy said about this and that was daily fodder for those of us growing up in Madison. His writing style – I would struggle to fully describe it - was uniquely primitive. Might have had to do with his career path mowing grass in the Madison Parks and running a pool hall on State Street.

I claim two close encounters, one where Dad introduced us at Rotary - he looked like the Irishman who’d tipped a few - and the other where I almost fell over when my cousin’s new wife told me she was Roundy’s niece and that he was just as much fun in person as they all said.

I was amazed when a Roundy column came up in my Google search about another Madison old-timer, Monsignor Eggers, who built my childhood parish, St. Bernard’s.

His small town storytelling might bring back memories, even for those of you who never read Roundy.

In a column trying to explain his quirky style, Roundy wrote: "I don't know how I write it nor does a lot of other people. I don't know a word I'll put in one column until I sit down to that typewriter and then it all comes to me I never took a note on a thing in my life -- I suppose some will say because he can't write is the reason. . . . To write this column you got to be a little cuckoo and dizzy. The main thing about it is that I am writing it and the *State Journal* is printing it. And the crazier I get the more money I get. What more could be fairer."

We can thank Doug Moe of the *State Journal* for much of the limited Roundy material that is available. Roundy did write one book, as confirmed by Amazon: *The hand-painted chop suey: Translated from the king's English to the queen's taste* [Unknown Binding] *Roundy Coughlin* (Author) Out of Print

Roundy first used “What more could be fairer” in 1925 when the UW upset Iowa in a blizzard. Some other Roundy pearls include:

* “I can’t get it thru my head how them big cows stand on the side of them hills without falling off.”
* “I am going thru Oscar Mayer plant…they are keeping me from the jubilee ham room as when I went thru six years ago two of them hams were missing.”

* When friends bought him a hearing aid, he said, “Now I can hear you when you say you are going to buy.”

* "I suppose some won't like this I don't care if they do or not this is my opinion . . . that 45 cents for some of them drinks is terrible. . . . Some of this stuff they serve now has drove more guys to the water wagon than any Lent in history."

About that hearing aid-- Roundy had fallen off a telephone pole onto his head a while before he took up writing a column. He had also mowed lawns in the Madison Parks, worked on the railroad, and run a pool hall (where a sign said “Man killed here every Saturday nite”).

These and other activities led to his first column for the *Capital Times*. After three years, Roundy was wooed away with a red roadster by the *Wisconsin State Journal* in 1924, where he remained until retiring in 1970.

He left a rich legacy as a leader in raising money for needy children and handicapped people when he passed on in 1971.
So if dogs have nothing to do with poetry, what about dogged attempts at verse written by those who don’t know what makes good *versus* (I pun advisedly) bad? We call the results “dodgerel,” verse with inept language, wrenched rhythm, or faulty rhyme. It is clumsy, yet awfully sincere.

For instance, in a tract mailed to me, Christ declares:

_I am your GROOM,_
_So allow me to expand your room._
_Let me clean you with MY spiritual broom_
_So on MY EAGLE WINGS you will zoom._

Those capital letters are distracting. The reader who pays attention will know what to emphasize. Somewhat later comes the line:

_SHE_ drinks MY water _like a deer._

The phrasing is adequate; but text is set in a fancy script so distorted that ‘deer’ is extremely easy to mistake for ‘beer’! Soon after, this is how Jesus announces the Second Coming:

_I will sneak in under the shadow of the moon,_
_For I am truly nocturnal like a raccoon._

--Our Lord a clandestine beast?

Another flaw shows up when a poem sinks to gibberish. The last line from this anonymous contest entry really loses focus:

_The mind gets trapped as in a weighted state_  
_Cognizant but blocked from true believing_  
_That there’s balance other than the hot fate_  
_Faring the air fantasy werewolfing._

Even famous Wordsworth penned a ludicrous tear-jerker titled “The Idiot Boy.” Consider the first stanza of a lengthy 453-line tale which, despite melodrama, burbles to a happy ending.

_Why bustle so about your door;_  
_What means this bustle, Betty Foy?_  
_Why are you in this mighty fret?_  
_And why on horseback do you set_  
_Him whom you love, your idiot Boy?_

On the Internet I found one serious analysis of the poem (yet Freudian and pretentious) plus, to my amazement, related term papers for sale.

Though Coleridge, Wordsworth’s contemporary, snickered over “Idiot Boy,” it remained Wordsworth’s favorite, written, so he boasted, at one sitting. After cutting one stanza, he found it wordperfect.

---

_DOG EAT DOGGEREL_

**ESTHER M. LEIPER-ESTABROOKS**

_The lord is my raccoon; he leadeth me by burbling waters_
Your limericks came bubbling, smirking, and leering in from all over the world--- just about everywhere except Limerick, in fact.

“Greetings from sunny Surrey in England,” began an email from Diane Morrison. “I've been longing to contribute ever since I signed up for E.I. but have never come up with anything intelligent or off-the-wall enough to fit in. I think I might have just about found my level with the limerick.

“Keep up the good work - I'll be overjoyed if the limerick makes it into next month's Innings but, like all writers, I'm well accustomed to disappointment!

A writer from England, aglow
(like Tennyson, Swinburne and co)
With syntax and flair,
Breathes Shakespearian air
And has come up with one word: “Hello!”

Diane Morrison

Here are a few of the other great smirkies that came to E.I. World Headquarters.

There once was a man named John Schmitz
Who gave his invited guests fits.
You had to be arty
To go to his party
Or else just stay home and get blitzed.

Mary Ramey

“I also have a favorite from a long-ago Mad Magazine that's clean enough that I could share it with my grandkids,” Mary adds:

There once was a man from Nantucket
Who kept all his cash in a bucket.
His daughter named Nan
Ran away with a man,
And as for the bucket, Nantucket.

The usual gang of idiots at Mad

Poet Jane had a calico cat
who rhymed at the drop of a rat
He sharpened his clause
With Pedigreed Pause
On the fence he scratched his format

Bonny Conway

My wife, a new gardener, hates bugs;
considers them six-legged thugs.
So focused on spraying,
intent on bug slaying,
she failed to defend against slugs.

Craig W. Steele

A monster named Frank took a drive
He decided to phone his friend Clive
With cell in his hand
The car hit woodland
And no one could shout, "It's alive!"

Sandra Rafter

There once was a Finn from Marquette
who sat in his sauna to sweat;
with a nude rosy glow
he then rolled in the snow;
amusing his neighbors? You bet!

N. Sippola
I’ve just been handed this bulletin...

(Sur)Real headlines

*Sent along by sharp-eyed reader Karen Stelzel*

Man Accused of Killing
Lawyer Receives a New Attorney

Meeting
on open
meetings
is closed

Bridges help people cross rivers

City unsure why
the sewer smells

Study Shows Frequent Sex
Enhances Pregnancy Chances

County to pay $250,000
to advertise lack of funds

Statistics show that
teen pregnancy
drops off significantly
after age 25.

Hospitals resort
to hiring doctors

Homicide victims rarely talk to police

Meat head resigns

Parents keep kids home
to protest school closure

Starvation can lead
to health hazards

Rally against apathy draws small crowd

Total lunar eclipse will be broadcast
live on Northwoods Public Radio

Miracle cure kills fifth patient
December 1980. Columbus, Wisconsin. I had stupidly driven through the fog from my home in Janesville to attend a board meeting of the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers. At train time, we walked the block or two to the station, where I crossed the tracks and waited to photograph Amtrak’s Empire Builder arriving out of the fog.

This year, when I signed up to attend the April conference of the Center for Railroad Photography and Art, I sent this 31-year-old image for the attendees’ slide show. It got some nice comments from photographers who said I couldn’t have placed the people on the platform in any better positions. Of course, I hadn’t placed them there; it was a matter of luck.

I spent some time with a man, quite a bit younger than I, who showed me beautiful photography on his iPad, images of trains, many in Asia where he travels for work. I counted at least a dozen images with perfect compositions of trains, buildings, landscapes, and people that I wish I had in my collection, but I also realized that I wouldn’t risk going into the places he did, rundown industrial areas and crowded slums. Then he told me that he had been photographing trains only for the past year. Humbling.

One speaker told of his research on, and photography of, the original route of the transcontinental railroad. He presented some then-and-now photos, and it gave me ideas for doing the same thing. I’ll try one at Cross Plains, Wisconsin, where a 1913 real-photo postcard shows a Milwaukee Road train arriving at the depot where a man is walking down the wooden platform toward the photographer. The man is local harness maker John Virnig, my great-grandfather. One of the lumber sheds in the background is still standing, and a train platform of crumbling concrete lies between the tracks and the depot site. Perhaps I can time my “now” photo so a Wisconsin & Southern Railroad train is coming down the tracks while my son, Eric, walks in the steps of his great-great grandfather 99 years ago.

I’m hoping I get good light, a clean red engine, a decent day, perfect timing, and a great image. And please may I not kick the tripod at the moment of exposure. Something not too humbling.
But wait, there’s more...

(Sur)Real headlines
These passed along by Ann Meyer

Man Kills Self Before Shooting Wife and Daughter
Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says
War Dims Hope for Peace
If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile
Cold Wave Linked to Temperatures
Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges
New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group
Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft
Kids Make Nutritious Snacks
Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half
Hospitals are Sued by 7 Foot Doctors
And the winner is....

Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead

'OLD' IS WHEN...
Your sweetie says, 'Let's go upstairs and make love,' and you answer, 'Pick one; I can't do both!'
'OLD' IS WHEN...
Your friends compliment you on your new alligator shoes and you're barefoot.
'OLD' IS WHEN...
Going bra-less pulls all the wrinkles out of your face.
'OLD' IS WHEN....
You don't care where your spouse goes, just as long as you don't have to go along.
'OLD' IS WHEN...
You are cautioned to slow down by the doctor instead of by the police.

'OLD' IS WHEN..
'Getting a little action' means you don't need to take any fiber today.
'OLD' IS WHEN...
'Getting lucky' means you find your car in the parking lot.
'OLD' IS WHEN...
An 'all-nighter' means not getting up to use the bathroom.
'OLD' IS WHEN...
You're not sure if these are facts or jokes.

‘OLD’ IS WHEN
I set this in large type so we both could read it.

With thanks to Larry Tobin
I have two grandchildren with special needs, so this story is close to my heart.

It began in Northern Virginia, where high school student Samantha Hall worked at a soccer camp for youth with disabilities. There she met a girl who didn’t enjoy playing sports. She loved the arts, but this camp did not offer classes.

Samantha recognized that others with disabilities probably shared this child’s need for expression. She returned to Arlington and developed a program she called Doing Art Together (DARTT). After obtaining funding through a grant from the Arlington Youth Philanthropy Initiative of the Arlington Community Foundation, Hall saw the project through to the finish. She requested little more than a safe place to hold the program, art materials, and volunteers. She got all three.

The free creative art program, held at HB Woodlawn school in eight week sessions, was initially for children but now includes adults from group homes. Teenaged volunteers help. Parents must stay on the premises but are asked not to help their child unless assistance is needed.

On closing day of the latest session, on St. Patrick’s Day, the room burst with energy as the excited participants showed off their leprechauns. On display all over the cafeteria were previous projects: colorful masks, T-shirts, birdhouses, picture frames, drawings, and paintings.

Creative art is important for all children and especially for those with autism who cannot speak. Art allows them to communicate through their art.

On the Internet you can find the work of Stephen Wiltshire, a young man with autism, who can study a scene for 15 or 20 minutes and then, from memory, recreate the panoramic view in pen and ink on mural size paper. His renditions are beyond belief, and his work is shown and sold around the world, along with small gift items on which the scenes are duplicated. See his site at http://www.stephenwiltshire.co.uk

My eight-year-old granddaughter Sarah, who has Down Syndrome, loves participating in DARTT. It helps that Connor, her best friend since pre-school, attends, too. For this portrait Sarah did of Connor, he insisted on green eyes (and it wasn’t St. Patrick’s Day). Or are they tinted glasses? With art, it’s open to interpretation.

Amanda LaMunyon is also a presence on the Internet and around the world. She began painting at age seven, shortly before being diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. Her childhood paintings were impressions of the songs she loved. Now 16, she expresses herself and her faith through singing, painting, and public speaking. She encourages those with challenges not to give up on big or small dreams. She shares her talents with organizations that raise money for children’s health.

Amanda writes on her Website: “It is important that we as Americans must take the lead to find the cause, cure and prevention of autism. We have the privilege and freedom in our great country to raise money and speak about our concerns. It has been my privilege to work with Children’s Miracle Network, Autism Speaks, The Lili Claire Foundation, Dr. Rosa Martinez with Strokes of Genius, and other organizations. I hope to continue to share my art and my story of overcoming challenges.”

Her work has been included in several books and she has received many awards, including The President’s Daily Points of Light and The President’s Volunteer Service Award. She felt honored to present her painting of Our Flag Was Still There to President George W. Bush and her portrait of President Ronald Reagan to former First Lady Nancy Reagan. See Amanda at http://amandalamunyon.com.
Aisha Mitchell, Alvin Ailey Dance Company stun Madison audience

“Enjoy all of it” was the simple all-encompassing statement from Aisha Mitchell about the performances by the Alvin Ailey Dancers at the Overture Center of the Arts in Madison, the final stop of their tour. The excitement in her voice conveys the passion one must possess to leap into the air again and again with the vigor that amazes audiences around the globe.

Mitchell keeps this passion. “Dance is always on my mind,” she says. Dancers “work through our bodies, so we have to be conscious of this 24/7. Every performance resonates with so many people, in so many different ways. I still find enjoyment in each piece I perform, even though we do it so often.

“My favorite performance was in Istanbul in 2008,” she continues. It was my very first international tour and the first time I had been out of the country ever in my life. Turkey was welcoming, beautiful; I would love to go back.”

The program included works from Alvin Ailey including the 1960 choreography of Mr. Ailey’s Revelations. “Every piece is a feeling,” she says. And her limbs translate expertly to the audience with each perfectly executed extension, twist, turn, and leap.

“It is amazing to launch yourself into the air, to actually be ‘in flight,’ she says. “And I love it all. When I am dancing alone the challenge is to keep the performance alive and create a world all on your own.”

She picks no favorites relishing each stage moment whether it is individual, with a partner, or with the entire Alvin Ailey Company.

And what company of performers it was. As the performers stepped forward to take a final bow, the audience rose to its feet and roared its approval.

One Day in Spring

It’s kite-flying weather--
Square of ice lies in goo by the front porch, the pan from which it was dumped sits with making of pies in it—
complete with stirring stick--

Beginnings of a swing hang from the Maple tree; grassless spot beneath, is almost dry again—

One child sits surveying scenes below from vantage point in the tree’s great boughs—
One small pair of ‘Mary Janes’ basks in the sun, waiting for the mud to dry….

-Norma J. Sundberg-
I have no idea whether the film "John Carter" will still be playing at movie theaters by the time you read this, but if it is, I heartily recommend going to see it. The film brought back for me some of the youthful joy and excitement I remember feeling back when I saw the first few Star Wars and Indiana Jones movies, and that sort of heart- and spirit-lifting jolt doesn't come along all that often at the cinema these days.

I certainly wasn't sold on seeing it when I saw the first previews. For starters, it's a Disney film. To me, that often means it is "for kids," "conservative," "safe," or "rote."

It's yet another 3D picture, and the process they're using to create 3D movies nowadays has mostly left me cold. The images are usually too dark; the one exception so far I've seen was Hugo.

Also, as with most sci-fi or action films these days, "John Carter" looked to be full of CGI creatures and settings. While you probably need CGI to make a film like this work (really, how else to depict 15-foot-tall creatures with four arms at all believably?), so many sci-fi and fantasy film creators seem to let special effects take over their works. Additionally, CGI-created beings often come across as fake and soulless, which isn't at all good if your film relies on them to play major roles.

Finally, I wasn't convinced the lead actor was right for the part. I never watched Friday Night Lights (the actor who plays John Carter - Taylor Kitsch - played Tim Riggins on that show), but in the previews he came across as a bit too boyish, soft, and, dare I say it, "girly," to be able to pull off the title role of the Civil War veteran and epic hero. I had the same problem with the recent remake of "Conan the Barbarian," which I never ended up seeing. (Say what you will about Arnold Schwarzenegger - at least he looked tough and "manly" enough to play Conan convincingly!)

So why did I go see "John Carter?"

Well, I heard it was expected to become a major flop - all the critics and media outlets said so - and, well, I like an underdog. Even a $200-million one.

The film was a hard sell for much of the public. Unlike The Hunger Games, it's not based on a recent popular book or TV show: the first John Carter book - A Princess of Mars - was written 100 years ago by Edgar Rice Burroughs of "Tarzan" fame. It's based on "science" we know to be untrue (no life on Mars, remember?).

Then there's the movie's title: John Carter. It's just a name. It says nothing of what it's about. The scuttlebutt is that Disney balked on using A Princess of Mars, because they felt boys wouldn't go see a movie with "princess" in the title, and they left out "of Mars" (the main character is most often referred to in literature and fan circles as "John Carter of Mars") because they had a movie called Mars Needs Moms that did poorly last year.

Finally, most of the previews I saw did little to clarify what the story was about. If I hadn't known the little bit I knew going in, I'd have had no idea what to expect (other than the aforementioned "girly" lead actor, CGI creatures, etc.).

I knew it was about a Civil War vet who goes into a cave, succumbs to a mysterious gas, is transported to Mars, and becomes a hero with powers. (He can leap really high and far, due to Mars's weaker gravity.) I knew he interacted with six-limbed green tall guys with bug eyes and that he met/saved/paired off with a scantily clad princess of Mars named Dejah Thoris. And that was about it.

Honestly, you don't need to know much more than that going in to enjoy the movie, because its plot really isn't the important thing.

So, after all that, what made it work for me? Why have I seen it twice so far in theaters, and why am I planning to go again later this week?
First, the film takes its time getting Carter to Mars, and it establishes a nice frame story that pays off at the end of the flick. We see who Carter is - what kind of person he is - before he became the proverbial "fish out of water" - and that's very important, as it sets up his later transformation. Carter is burnt out from war, has lost everything (home, family), and pretty much wants to remain separated from all human beings. That sets up the real meat of the film, the conflict, whether Carter will continue sleepwalking through his life, or if he'll find hope, love, and a cause worth energetically pursuing.

A big reason for his eventual turnaround is that Martian princess, Dejah Thoris. No shrinking violet she, this princess is somewhat in the mold of Princess Leia from *Star Wars*, only she's a scientist too, and she wears the metal bikini-type outfits more often than not, reportedly at the request of the actress, who felt the clothes suited the character.

Lynn Collins, as Dejah Thoris, practically steals the movie, and I would have been happy to watch several hours of just her. But she also is a nuanced character, and she and Kitsch have a great, smiling chemistry with each other. I fell for her, and I fell for them.

The fact he was not as macho/strong/forceful as the lead role might have been worked well in this case: it allowed Dejah Thoris to take control at times ... after all, this is her world, not Carter's, so why shouldn't she be more comfortable, more sure of herself, than he is?

Watching Kitsch's Carter become more than he was - a greater-than-the-sum-of-his-parts melding of Earth man and Martian, able to navigate and succeed in both worlds, is the real heart of the film. Sure, there are villains - another Martian warlord who wants to marry Princess Dejah and rule the planet, and some otherworldly beings who seem to want to engineer as much chaos as possible - but they really don't stand out. The central conflict is within John Carter, not outside of him.

And yes, some of the CGI creatures (mainly Willem Dafoe and Samantha Morton as the voices of two Tharks, the four-armed, 15-foot-tall creatures mentioned earlier) play central roles, and some of the effects are fun (the open air warships were great ... more like pirate ships that flew and fought than enclosed star ships).

But they're less memorable than the characters and their interactions. What's fun is following Carter on his journey from being John Carter to becoming John Carter of Mars (and Disney even adds the "of Mars" at the end in a better-late-than-never move).

Sure, it's not a perfect film. There's no Darth Vader-like memorable villain here. And it is hard not to wonder if a different actor in the lead role might have made a stronger impression. But seeing this movie was the most fun I've had watching a sci-fi action flick in ages. It brought back some of the feelings I had in my youth ... it compares fairly well with the early *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* films.

If that sort of thing is at all interesting to you, I'd say give this movie a chance. It's more than Disney and many critics did.
WRITERSHIP

As a writer,
I never own
a moment, never
trust reality until
I pen it down.
Only then do mind
and soul converge in
liquid energy
that pulses through my fingers
and batters my poor paper
into shades of black or blue.

MUSE-IC LESSON

When you’re writing with the muse-ic,
there’s a thousand ways to use it.

Take a chance and choose to frolic:
dance your fingers ‘cross the keys,
causing conflict as you please
with a tale where heroes rollick,
whether urban or bucolic,

either soft or cacophonic,
storybook or verse laconic.
Play this neurologic game,
scoring bylines with your name,
and enjoy your daily tonic.

Just be quick before you lose it
when you’re lettering to muse-ic.

Craig W. Steele is a writer and university
biologist whose creative musings occur in
the urban countryside of northwestern
Pennsylvania. Besides Extra Innings, his
poetry has appeared recently or is
forthcoming in the Aurorean, Astropoetica,
Stone Path Review, Popular Astronomy, The
Lyric, West Ward Quarterly, and elsewhere.
The Writer magazine has a regular feature called BREAKTHROUGH, which each month features a one-page autobiographical story of a writer’s journey to publication. Each story demonstrates that debut writers can be successful and that there are many doors into the publishing world. I was undaunted by the infinitesimally small chance that I could be published in a national publication and submitted my story—only I submitted it to the wrong editor. That editor was impressed enough with the story to e-mail me and give me the name and e-mail address of the correct editor and said I could use her name as a reference when I re-submitted.

I had made a major blunder and survived, it was a miracle.

I submitted my story to the right editor and several months later received an e-mail that he was interested in the story but that it needed to be approved by his editorial committee. Hope springs eternal.

Several months later I received an e-mail that the editorial committee was also interested in my story, but the editor wasn’t sure when he could assign it. I think purgatory must be a place where you get messages like this—hopeful but not a solid offer.

I was cast into writer’s limbo.

This year The Writer celebrates 125 years of publication. In honor of the celebration the magazine asked readers to submit stories of how The Writer had changed their lives. In my case, I can say that without The Writer my debut novel, MURPHY’S TROUBLES, would not be scheduled for release later this year by Mischievous Muse Press.

I dashed off a 450-word piece and submitted it. The editor remembered me and offered to publish my submission but was vague on the details. I received an e-mail saying they wanted to shorten the piece and needed a 300 bpi headshot to run with the article. I sent the photo and asked what month my piece would be published. They didn’t ask me to shorten my original submission, and I didn’t offer. Without a publication date it was a “pinch yourself to see if it’s true” situation.

In late February I received my answer—publication in the May edition. I was elated; a complete novice was getting the chance to be published in the premier writer’s magazine in the country.

The May edition of The Writer arrived in the mail, and there I was, on page 10. It was shorter than my original submission—by about half. It didn’t matter to me. Being published in The Writer is a writer’s version of 15 minutes of fame, so I’ve had mine, and it feels great.

About a week after receiving my copy of the May edition of The Writer, I received an e-mail from the editor of the Breakthrough column, wanting to assign me the column for the September issue. Lightening does strike twice!

Hidden Talent

Percy Oliver, the orchestra conductor, looked up at the stage.

Three men’s Glee clubs stood in front of his orchestra completely screening the harp player from view. His face, red with anger, Percy scrambled up the steps onto the stage.

He thumped Cyril, the leader of the Glee Clubs, on his shoulder, getting his attention. Percy said, “It’s your Glee Clubs. They’re hiding my friend the florist and his harp from view.”

Cyril just shook his head. “All this fuss because you can’t see the florist for the glee clubs,” he said.

Ed Pahnke
Her Moment of Bliss

On June 14, 1949, while the Phillies were playing the Cubs at Wrigley Field on Ladies Day, Ruth Steinhagen, nineteen, sat spellbound in the stands, rekindling the blaze that she possessed, fixing Eddie Waitkus in her gaze. the handsome first baseman Chicago had traded to Philadelphia before the season had begun. She’d pored over sports pages, sliced his pictures out of magazines, a man she’d never met, a World War II combat vet, recipient of four Bronze Stars.

That night she reserved a room at the Edgewater Beach Hotel, knowing he’d be there, and sent a note to Waitkus, imploring him to meet with her—she had a message, she said, one that couldn’t wait.

Shortly before midnight, she heard a knocking at her door. After ushering Waitkus into the room, the tall brunette excused herself and fetched a rifle from the closet. “Is this some kind of joke?” he asked. She pulled the trigger—

a bullet ripped into his chest and as he slumped to the floor had strength enough to ask, “Baby, what’d you do that for?” She notified the operator who summoned the hotel doctor and in her moment of bliss, the one she’d craved so long, Steinhagen held her idol’s hand.

At the Cook County jail, she relished the barrage of questions reporters fired at her, their pens and pencils poised. Informed Waitkus had survived, she said, “I dream of him every night” and, pointing to his pictures in the cell, asked, “Why’s he always smiling?”

Note:
Waitkus needed months to recuperate, rejoining the Phillies in 1950 when they won the pennant, the beginning of the decline in both his baseball career and personal life. He retired from the game in 1955. A heavy drinker and smoker, he died of cancer at 53 in 1972. Steinhagen, diagnosed as schizophrenic, was committed to the Kankakee State Hospital and discharged three years later.

John Manesis

Recently baseballbard.com, published a group of John’s baseball poems. This poem is included in John’s fourth poetry book, In the Third Season, published this month by Createspace and available at amazon.com “I believe the only other baseball player shot while he was still an active player was Billy Jurges of the Cubs in 1932,” John reports. “Fortunately, he also survived”
Two-column format wins in a landslide

The two column format works for me, but if the vote goes the other way I can handle it. Old age has made me flexible.

Madonna Dries Christensen

I like E.I. the way it is. But I print it out to read at my leisure.

Norma J. Sundberg

[How many print it out to read, I wonder.]

As for two columns being difficult to read... what you do, the way you do it, is great the way it is. And I'm not saying that just because I have never figured out how to write the paper in columns (that would never compute, pun intended).

Perry Stone

As for cryptograms, “I have trouble breaking my own cryptic writing after it’s written.”

On the subject of layout I'd rather put up with the minor inconvenience of scrolling back to the top of the page for column two, than lose the silly pictures etc. They're an integral part of the Extra Innings experience.

Diane Morrison, Surrey, England

I DEMAND a two column Extra Innings.

Rex Owens

Coach's confession: I put Rex up to that.

"[I]f it ain't broke don't fix it" is a favorite saying of mine. I don't think it is a problem. I like it. You have to decide what is best, I am just thinking you will never please everybody, so just please yourself in a matter such as this. You are a very smart man. That is my answer. But who am I? !!! Very Sincerely, Bonny Conway

Coach's note: You are obviously a VERY smart woman, Bonny!

I think the format is fine the way it is. So I have to scroll up to continue reading an article. I don't think that is difficult to do. I think it is quite clear that the article continues in the second column. Not confusing.

Andrea Schoenthal

While the world sleeps, deranged man is on the loose

What thoughts run through your mind when the phone rings at 4:50 a.m.?

Yeah, me, too.

Fortunately, I had been awake and at the computer for about an hour already (Please don’t hate me. It’s the way I’m wired, biology, not virtue.) and snatched up the phone on the first ring, but it still woke and worried Mrs. Coach.

The caller was a robot.

“You have activated a reverse 9-1-1 call,” the robot informed me in its metallic tones. “A deranged man named Larry has escaped...” My pre 5:00 a.m. mind slipped a cog at “deranged man” (ESCAPED FROM WHERE?), and I may have missed the neighborhood he was reportedly roaming in, but the street names didn’t sound like anyplace I’d ever been.

Robo than described poor wandering Larry:\ six feet tall, thin, about 165 pounds, gray hair, balding, wearing a dark hooded sweatshirt and gray pajama pants.

Except for my grays being sweatpants rather than pajama bottoms, robo had just described me perfectly from head to ankles.

Somehow, I had become a deranged man named Larry, on the loose and dangerous, and didn’t even know it! Thank God they called me!

I quickly deduced that I wasn’t really Larry, but that left me wondering just what exactly I was supposed to do about him. They must have had a reason for calling me. Was I expected to grab my trusty rifle (everyone keeps one by the bed now, right?) and go out Larry-hunting?

I had been about to log off and take my attack miniature Schnauzer, Pixie, for a walk through the neighborhood, as is our morning wont. Would one of my neighbors, similarly alerted and better armed than I, mistake me for Larry and do his patriotic duty by picking me off?

I took Pixie for her walk. Nobody shot me. I never did hear what happened to poor Larry.

I’m left to ponder just why we need “reverse 9-1-1” calls like this. Isn’t the news scary enough already?
AN E.I. SPECIAL FEATURE

The Short Story of Thomas T. Writesman
By Vic Johnson

“Brilliant” was the word the review used, “brilliant . . . the stuff the Pulitzer prize was made for.”

Maybe he said half-aloud, after a moment of reflection, “It should read ‘for which the Pulitzer prize was made.’”

Well, why quibble. It was a great, great review. After 10 novels, countless pulp magazine stories, newspaper articles and a ton of rejection slips — national recognition by the New York Times! Not bad. Not bad, Tommy. It only took 22 years.

The electric fan on top of the filing cabinet oscillated slowly. It’s exhalation of stale, cigarette-smoke-tainted air was his only defense against the stifling heat. Ten o’clock, and the radio newswoman had said, 105 by afternoon.

Tommy glanced at the calendar. There was an X on July 10, a deadline to meet, and only two days from now.

This year, 1936, is going to be my big year, Tommy told himself. He opened the desk drawer, took out a sheet of white typing paper, and inserted it into the typewriter. Once he bought paper in 50 sheet packets, but now he bought it by the ream, 500 sheets.

An extravagance, said his wife. “Times are hard. We have barely enough money to keep body and soul together without investing in so much blank paper.”

But he needed paper. The waste basket would fill with discarded drafts, sheets cut apart and parts rearranged and pasted back together. A writer’s detritus, Tommy told his wife. The waste product of an active, imaginative mind. The results of insight gained incrementally, ever changing but narrowing in on the final objective. He reasoned she was too practical to understand.

Tommy began to type. He loved the sound. The rhythmic clack, clack, clack of the keystrokes slapping against the paper, the bell at the end of a line, and the ratcheting sound of the returning platen carriage. He imagined himself playing a piano as his fingers flew skillfully over the keys.

After 10 minutes, Tommy began to perspire. Who said writing wasn’t work? It got his heart pumping. There was a feeling of growing anticipation as word after word followed line after line.

Time for his fourth cigarette of the morning. He would have had coffee, too, except for the weather, the heat. He looked down at the open drawer-- the white paper gleaming in the darkness of its oak incased nest. How many sheets were waiting for their gift of carbon black? How many were coyly savoring the anticipation of an intimate brief kiss of vowel and consonant, consummating a word?

Tommy took a deep drag on his cigarette and let smoke curl lazily from his pursed lips. The sweep of the oscillating fan caught a gossamer eddy and whirled it away into the room’s thickening gray haze.

‘Brilliant!’ It was hard to get the word out of his mind.

He noticed he had stopped typing in mid-sentence. What would the next word be? Would it have been a brilliant word in a brilliant sentence?

All those sheets there in the drawer anticipating his brilliant words . . . his brilliant sentences . . . his brilliant stories!

The damn heat was turning his brain to Jell-O. The next word in the story is . . . ? The goddamn next brilliant word is . . . ?

Except for the electric fan busily humming away on top of the filing cabinet the room was silent. The half-finished sentence remained unfinished. Unable to conjure up that next brilliant word, Tommy walked from the room out into the July morning. It would be a very hot day.

Vic was an only child, and his father passed when Vic was seven. Since his mom worked, he had a lot of time on his hands. He went to the movies a lot and read. He’s always liked sci-fi, robots, twilight zone stuff. He had a story published in the Twilight Zone magazine many years ago, “Of Sleds and Forty Winters.” He’s also an artist and, at age 83, was recently commissioned to draw scenes for a documentary on the Kankakee River.
Liliana Lenore Cook
b 12:37 a.m. April 25, 2012
Daughter of proud parents
Kimberly and Jeremiah Cook
She is being expertly cuddled
by her Gramellen.