Bibs & Blather
The Librarian's Guide to Micropublishing
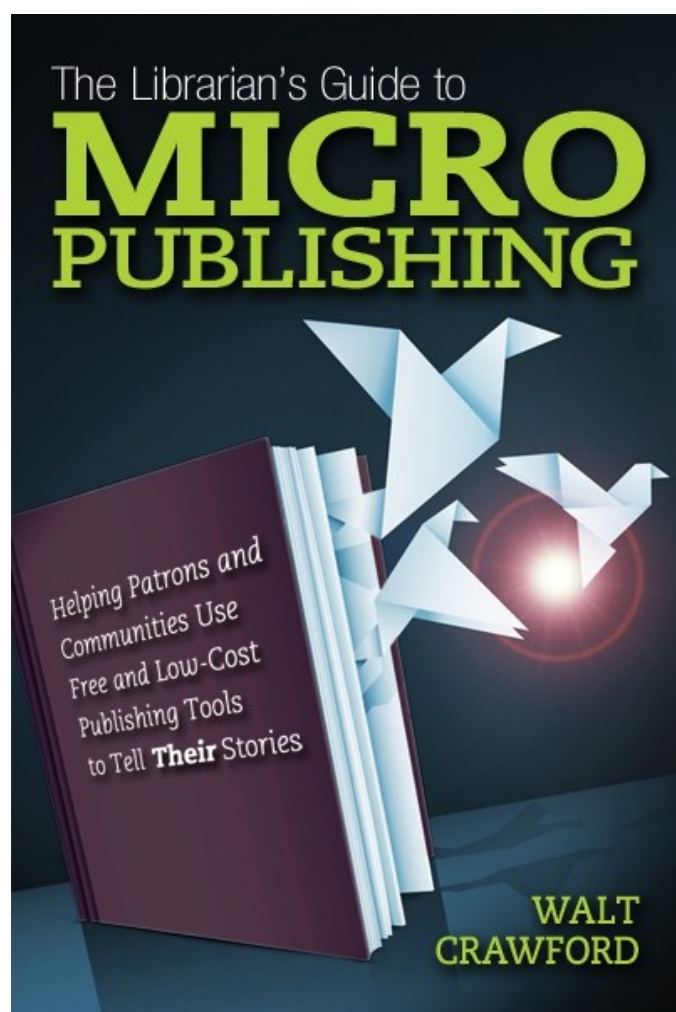
I'm delighted to note that *The Librarian's Guide to Micropublishing: Helping Patrons and Communities Use Free and Low-Cost Publishing Tools to Tell Their Stories* is now available, in paperback from the publisher, Information Today, Inc. and all the usual suspects (including Amazon—and it's also available in ebook form) and in casewrap hardcover from Lulu.

The paperback is $49.50 (usual disclaimer: I have absolutely nothing to do with setting prices). The hardcover is $59.95, although Lulu frequently has brief sales. I have both versions. They both look great and essentially identical. I've sent autographed hardcover copies to the three folks who read the unedited version and wrote blurbs (all on the back cover): Robin Hastings, James LaRue and Maurice "baldgeek" Coleman. My thanks to them!

Inside This Issue

About the Hardcover

The hardcover version does two things:

➢ It makes a prebound version available for libraries that want a hardcover copy for circulation. I believe this book is going to be used by tens of thousands of patrons at thousands of libraries. It's a casewrap hardcover—the cover design is part of the binding itself—so there's no need to laminate paper jackets.

➢ It's a proof of concept. This book is about producing attractive, high-quality books without spending any new money on software (assuming you have Word—or, although it's more difficult, OpenOffice or LibreOffice). Part of the process of preparing the book was polishing a good general-purpose 6 × 9" book template for Word, something that has no't been freely available. The book itself uses the template with no modifications. And, other than the title pages and the two ad pages at the back of the book, the body of the book is a PDF generated directly from Word2010, not using Adobe Acrobat. The same PDF is used for both paperback and hardcover—but the hardcover is itself a prime and pure example of what the book's talking about, producing books in very small numbers without compromising on appearance or quality. The book walks the talk; the hardcover version is proof of that.

Who Needs This Book?

I've been saying that every public library (in the U.S. and in other English-speaking countries where Lulu offers its services or CreateSpace is available) needs this book. That's probably a little grandiose, although the possibility of adding a new community/creative service for your patrons without any cost to the library (other than a copy of the book), especially a service that speaks to long-form text and local creativity, strikes me as worthwhile for even libraries serving fewer than 100 people. (As part of my next book project, I'm now even more acutely aware of the sheer heterogeneity of America's 9,000-odd public libraries: I've attempted to view the web pages of 5,958 of them.)

I'll offer some examples of libraries that should specifically find this book more than worth the price. It's potentially useful for a number of academic and special libraries as well: More on that shortly.

➢ Libraries serving genealogists and family historians: You say there's a link or tab on your homepage specifically dealing with genealogy? *You need this book.* Where there's an amateur genealogist or a family historian, there's a micropublished book waiting to appear: A book that will probably only be produced in a few or a few dozen copies but will be important to those families (and the local history group). Now that maybe half the libraries in the country are taken care of…

➢ Libraries with teen or adult writing classes or groups: You'd probably love to produce a collection at the end of a successful class or as part of a group's cycle. You can do so without requiring any capital at all and it can look great. This book shows you how. Quite a few of those writers probably want a durable example of what they've done, their own book (possibly 24 pages of poems, possibly a 700-page epic) as a showpiece that might or might not morph into a major publication. This book shows *them* how—and, by the way, we've provided a special copyright exception so that, within reason, you can legally copy the chapters of this book they'll need as they're preparing their own books, as long as your library's purchased one copy.

➢ Libraries serving local historians and historical societies: While family histories and personal histories (including the oral histories most people my age and older should be preparing) may be the most widespread examples of books that work best through micropublishing, there are also lots of local historians (and historical societies) out there who have manuscripts that deserve very short-run book publication and don't especially want to spend a few $thousand to make that possible. With this book, all they need is Word (and not necessarily even that). Your library can be the center of this creative community-building process.

➢ Libraries serving writers who aren't part of a writing group: One great thing about micropublishing is that neither Lulu nor CreateSpace claims intellectual property rights. They're not publishers, they're service agencies. (The exception: If you use their free ISBNs—and for Lulu, you don't need to—then they're the publisher of record for that edition. But the writer still owns the copyright and all rights in everything except those 13 digits.) With this book, those writers can get started with real books, handsome books, and if there's enough interest, there's nothing stopping them from taking the books to traditional publishers. (The library could create a great community service by finding ways for writers to swap editorial services, since the best editing and copyediting really do require eyes other than the writer's.)

I'm sure there are other cases I haven't thought of here, but the ones listed here cover nearly every community, I suspect, including most smallest communities. Is there somebody in Whale Pass, Alaska (not the smallest library population at 31, but the smallest library that I know of with a Facebook page) who could benefit from this book? I wouldn't be surprised…

Does your library have a special collection, materials of interest to some in the community and elsewhere that are too fragile for circulation? If you own the rights to them, you can prepare circulatable books with the content at very little cost. The techniques in this book will get you started.

Library Schools

If your library school offers a course on libraries and publishing, *you need this book*. (You also need *Open Access: What You Need to Know Now*, but presumably you already have that. In multiple copies.)

If your library school offers a course dealing with innovative public services, *you need this book*.

Academic and Special Libraries

This book is primarily written for public libraries, but one chapter focuses on academic libraries and

micropublishing, primarily discussing ejournals. If your academic library is getting into the open access ejournal business, aren't there a few authors and libraries who would happily pay to see their work in book form? You can add an annual print edition (assuming the journal publishes less than 750 pages per year) with zero financial outlay or risk, although in this case you do need a copy of Acrobat. The book shows you how. Oh, by the way, at least one academic library is already using Lulu to build a virtual university press…and there will be more.

I know, I know, the patrons of special libraries and the libraries themselves have unlimited funds, so this money-saving technique isn't relevant. (You can stop laughing; I hope you didn't choke in the process.) But maybe there are patrons of special libraries and even library projects where a book would be a great outcome, but you know there's only need for one, five, or fifty copies, and you're just about ready to go the ugly FedexKinko's route. This book can show you how to do it better and, quite probably, a little cheaper as well.

A Word or Two about Professional Editing

That's the story: The book's out. I believe it's the most universally applicable book I've ever written, detailings a new service almost every public library can usefully provide and the tools to make that service work. Without any cost to the library–other than the price of the book. Such a deal!

I think I'm a pretty good nonfiction writer: a hack in the best sense of the term. For that matter, I think I'm a better than average self-editor, although that may be delusional.

Cites & Insights is self-edited. My self-published books have been self-edited.

But I'll suggest that all of my editors–and over the past decades, I've dealt with quite a few–will tell you that I'm an easy writer to deal with because I know my writing can always stand improvement. (In practice, I don't go back to my original ms. when looking at a galley unless I spot a special problem: I read the galley on its own merits, assuming it represents an improvement over the original.)

This book was unusual because I was making all of the changes in the three full cycles and two or three minicycles of editing (line editing, copyediting, "proofreading"). I was sending ITI a PDF; they were returning the PDF with "stickies" (comments, which work a little like Post-Its®) for editorial and proofreading suggestions. There were hundreds of such proposed changes (many of them as small as correcting my bad habit of overusing em dashes, one of them proposing a complete rewrite of a chapter). I had to evaluate each change, since I was the only one who could make the changes.

I believe I made 99% of the proposed changes, maybe more. I *know* the book is the better for the cycles of professional editing it received from John B. Bryans, Amy Reeve and Brandi Scardilli (and possibly others whose names I've forgotten or didn't know). I *know* the book is better for M. Heide Dengler's advice and cooperation in refining the book template—professional advice that's reflected in the free .dotx, .dot and .odt templates available for book buyers to use and modify. And, to be sure, the book benefits from professional indexing; in that case, I'm not a hack so much as a *talentless* hack, so I really appreciate the quality of the index. (They sent the index to me as a Word document, so I just imported it into the manuscript before using the "Save and Send" button to prepare the final PDF.) And, of course, I anticipate considerable benefit from the professional marketing skills of Rob Colding.

There it is. It's a book I'm proud of, a book I believe thousands of libraries can benefit from, to the benefit of their patrons and communities. Go buy it. I'm available to talk about micropublishing or hold workshops…for a fee.

Cites & Insights 11 Out in Book Form
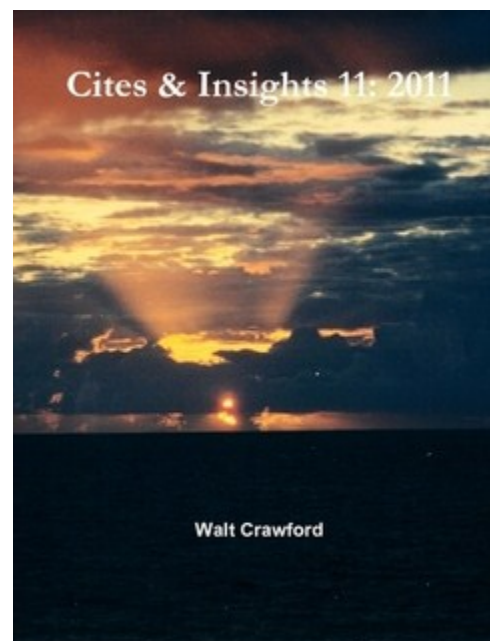
[Cites & Insights Volume 11](#), 2011, is now out in book form, available at Lulu for the usual $50. The

index is only available as part of the book. The address: http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/cites-insights-11-2011/18809137.

The Numbers for *Cites & Insights*

In 2011, there were 131,350 sessions at the *Cites & Insights* homepage and 329,322 pageviews on the site from 22,314 IP addresses. In all, there were some 77,000 PDF downloads and 225,000 HTML pageviews (but that includes site overhead).

Overall, there continue to be two *C&I* issues with more than 10,000 PDF downloads (one with more than 32,000). Three more are over 9,000 (all reaching that level last year), four more over 8,000 (one breaking that mark last year), ten over 7,000 (including seven that reached 7,000 during 2011), and so on… 62 issues have had at least 5,000 downloads and only ten fewer than 1,000—but that ten includes five of last year's nine issues. Looking only at 2011 downloads, it's curious that "Library 2.0 and 'Library 2.0'" still leads the pack, since for more than half the year the PDF has been a stub (and the substitute location has only been downloaded 22 times, while the book has sold seven copies to date). Next is 11:2, the followup on the topic—which has also been a stub for most of the year.

Looking at article readership, the top articles overall haven't changed much. Six articles appear to have been viewed (in PDF or HTML form) at least 15,000 times:

Library 2.0 and "Library 2.0"

Perspective: Investigating the Biblioblogosphere

Perspective: Looking at Liblogs: The Great Middle

Perspective: Conference Speaking: I Have a Little List

Perspective: Life Trumps Blogging

Perspective: Book Searching: OCA/GBS Update. Those are all from 2005-2007.

Looking only at HTML article pageviews during 2011, I find 10 articles viewed more than 1,000 times and another 10 viewed between 800 and 999 times—again, not including the full-issue downloads. With those included, these would range from 24,194 down to 1,578. Here are the articles, listed from most viewed during 2011 (2,458) to least within the top 20 (851):

Old Media/New Media Perspective: Thinking About Kindle and Ebooks

Perspective: Conference Speaking: I Have a Little List

Making it Work Perspective: Five Years Later: Library 2.0 and Balance

Perspective: Academic Library Blogging: A Limited Update

Perspective: Looking at Liblogs: The Great Middle

Perspective: Discovering Books: OCA & GBS Retrospective

Perspective: Book Searching: OCA/GBS Update

Offtopic Perspective: Mystery Collection, Part 1

Making it Work: Philosophy and Future

Open Access Perspective, Part II: Pioneer OA Journals: Preliminary Additions from DOAJ

Making it Work Perspective: Five Years Later: Library 2.0 and Balance (cont.)

Open Access Perspective Part I: Pioneer Journals: The Arc of Enthusiasm, Five Years Later

Perspective: Writing about Reading

The Zeitgeist: hypePad and buzzkill

Old Media/New Media

Ethical Perspectives: Republishing and Blogging

Copyright Comments: Public Domain

The Zeitgeist: Blogging Groups and Ethics

Perspective: The Google Books Search Settlement

Perspective: On the Literature.

The article that I had the most personal issues with during the year, given its apparent total lack of impact within the field? It missed the 800 mark by 18 pageviews.

What about the Blog?

I looked at 2011 statistics for *Walt at Random* as well, and while they're certainly impressive, I think they're mostly related to spiders and spammers.

The impressive part: 487,649 sessions and 2,251,367 pageviews—yes, that's two and a quarter *million* pageviews—from 49,655 IP addresses.

The less impressive part: When I look at most viewed pages, the first hundred are almost entirely month and category indexes, not actual posts. And the highest posts aren't ones that make a lot of sense. My conclusion is that most of the traffic isn't actually people reading what few posts I do.

For what it's worth, here are the ten actual posts with the most apparent pageviews, where they appear ordinally among the 6,044 pages and how often they were viewed (or "viewed") during 2011:

6. The Cover Story, Part 1 (11,164)

122. Public library blogs: Posting frequency (2,220)

124. Anniversary Post: Six Years! (2,111)

If you can come up with a common thread among those ten posts (other than "Walt Crawford wrote them all"), you're a better synthesis than I am.

Prospectus: An Ongoing Public Library Social Network Scan

I believe it would be worthwhile to do an annual nationwide survey of public library presence on social networks, looking at all U.S. public libraries–9,184 of them (based on IMLS figures as reported in Hennen's American Public Library Ratings (HAPLR)).

The Baseline

As background for my 2012 ALA Editions book *Successful Social Networking in Public Libraries*, I looked at all public libraries in 25 states (distributed by population) in late summer 2011—and later added the libraries in 13 more states, for a total of 5,958 libraries in 38 states. For the first 25 states (and 2,406 libraries), I revisited four months after the first visit to look at changes in social networking.

The result is two spreadsheets, one of which (LSNALL) would be the baseline for the new project. (The other, LSN25, looks at the four-month changes. It wouldn't be relevant for the new project.)

LSNALL includes, for each library, the following, based on my own searching and results:

➢ Library name and Legal Service Area population as provided by the state library in its spreadsheet, noting that "Library name" is frequently something other than the name the library actually uses. (Only libraries that have an LSA are included, leaving out 7,000-odd branches but also cooperative agencies that aren't double-counted.)

➢ State abbreviation

➢ Date on which I checked the library

➢ "FB?"–a code indicating whether I found a working Facebook link to a library Facebook page on the website (w), in the first 100 Google results (g), or by searching Facebook itself (f), in that order–or, if none was found, whether I found a community or information Facebook page instead (i) or nothing at all (n).

➢ If there is a Facebook page (or group, or non-page account), the number of Likes (or friends).

➢ For the most recent and fifth most recent Facebook post from the library itself, a code indicating its currency bucket: d (the day I checked), e (week–within the past seven days including today), f (fortnight), m (month), q (quarter), s (six months), y (year) or z (more than a year). ("e" was chosen to make the buckets directly sortable.)

➢ A one-letter code indicating whether I found some signs of interactivity within the "visible" posts (usually 20 to 30): "y" for a non-library comment or a non-spam post from someone other than the library; "l" if I found likes (by someone other than the library!) on posts but no comments; "s" if I found only spam comments (or only spam and likes); and blank if I found none of those.

➢ A Twitter code, similar to Facebook except that there are no "i" cases and I use "t" instead of "f" if the Twitter account could only be found within Twitter itself.

➢ Followers, following, and tweets.

➢ The same most recent and fifth most recent bucket codes for tweets

➢ An interactivity code, usually based on either non-library tweets, retweets, or tweets beginning "@"–I didn't look as far for these, and don't regard the results as very meaningful.

➢ Comments if needed—sparsely. (E.g., "FB0″ for a few cases where a library Facebook page is apparently the library's actual page but has no updates, up through FB4 if there aren't yet five updates, or "FB teen" or the like where there's no general-purpose FB page but appear to be specialized pages.)

➢ Added after the initial scan: "SN?"–a number from 0 to 2 indicating how many of the two possibilities the library had–and "H"–a number from 0 to 9 providing the HAPLR size category (0 being under 1,000, 9 being 500,000 and up), to ease sorting and, as it turns out, reporting.

A derivative spreadsheet, LSN38, leaves out rows with SN?=0 (libraries with no findable social network presence) and adds derivative columns for use in the book, such as "F%" (Likes divided by LSA), "T%" (same for Twitter followers), "T/F" (followers divided by likes), "Fr" (followings divided by followers) and "Fmx" and "Tmx"—two-character codes indicating frequency and reach buckets. There are also metrics spreadsheets and pages within these

spreadsheets, of course, but the primary LSNALL spreadsheet is the true baseline.

Proposed One-Year Revision

With proper funding in place and possibly better ways to distribute the results, I'd do this between June and November 2012:

➢ Start a new spreadsheet (linked to the old one for comparative metrics) to include the other 12 states and DC (which would require either acquiring Access or working with a partner, since the other 12 states don't seem to have downloadable spreadsheets) and update it for current LSA figures.

➢ Check each row in the spreadsheet to fill in columns as follows:

1. Actual library name—initially copied from names supplied by the state library, replaced if searching yields a different name or form of name. If so, that name would be used in a new Google search (Google unless Bing is modified to allow a 100-results-per-page setting, in which case I'd use Bing, since it seems to yield better results for public library websites).

2. Position of the library's official website (if one is found) in the result.

3. Facebook columns as at present, with these changes: a. The second "current post" bucket would be based on the 10th most recent post, but normalized to the same meanings (i.e., two days, two weeks, two fortnights, etc.) b. The interactivity column would be replaced with a number representing the number of non-library, non-spam comments and posts found within the first ten library posts, from 0 to whatever. Post-level likes would be ignored.

4. Twitter columns as at present, with the same "bucket" change as for Facebook and with the "Following" actual number replaced with a code indicating general approach of following (open to modification, but storing the actual number feels like overkill). Unsure whether to modify the interactivity column or simply drop it.

5. Google+ columns along the same lines as Facebook columns, but with the number for "Added to circles" replacing Likes. (Subject to change.)

6. Optional, if someone believes it's worth doing and would pay extra for it: Blogging column, with a number for the number of blogs identified on the library's homepage, and with a separate spreadsheet identifying those blogs. (This could lead to a five-year update of my *Public Library Blogs* study. It may be a lot more work than it's worth. The *Public Library Blogs* book sold 31 copies, but that was with only my own publicity.)

7. Optional, and I'm not sure any of these are worthwhile: Columns for MySpace presence, YouTube presence, Flickr presence indicated on homepage.

Later Years

Similar spreadsheet, linked to earlier sheets or pages for analysis, and adding significant new social networks that welcome institutional pages/accounts if such networks appear.

Deliverables

The deliverables would depend heavily on who's paying for this and what they want. Possibilities:

➢ Writeup of results including comparisons to 2011 and metrics similar to those planned for the forthcoming book, distributed as a free PDF. The writeup (and specific writeups) would include not only benchmarks by size of library and state, but also case studies and lists of libraries doing particularly well in various metrics relative to their size, to serve as examples for other libraries wanting to improve their social networking.

➢ More specific writeups for individual states or for specific library sizes.

➢ Possibly the spreadsheet itself for further analysis.

How to Pay

I believe the results would be valuable, since I believe most public libraries can benefit from a social networking presence and it's clear that most of them are not reaching as many people as they'd probably like to. A variety of benchmarks and examples should help. (My book should help too, combining benchmarks, examples, discussion, advice…)

But it's way too much work to do for free or on spec. My experiments in self-publishing have taught me that, and have taught me that I can't do it based on the hope of selling the results on my own, since I'm a good researcher but a terrible publicist.

I figure I could do this for $15,000 a year for the whole process, including deliverables (but not including #6 and #7 above). Adding #6 would push that to $20,000; adding #7 is unclear.

That is small potatoes for most funding agencies, but it would meet my needs.

Possible avenues:

➢ An agency could sponsor this—such as a foundation or an agency that already does library research, or, for that matter, an agency that finds it worthwhile. I'd be delighted to work with almost any such agency. The one real exception is one where I can't imagine they'd want to work with me. I'd be delighted

to work with OCLC or WebJunction on this, or the Gates Foundation, a library school, a vendor, almost any consortium, whoever. I suspect my lack of institutional affiliation is a problem for most funding sources, but I'd love to be proved wrong. Unfortunately, independent research is not highly regarded in this field, as with most other fields.

➤ A group of state libraries could sponsor it, in which case I'd narrow the research to cover only those states and charge a different fee, something along the lines of $500 + $n per state, where $n is the number of reporting libraries in the state times a constant, probably $1 to $2.

➤ I could find some way to be assured that sales of the report—which I'd prefer to be free—would come close to generating $15,000 in revenue. I don't see too many pigs flying overhead, so I don't regard that one as probable.

➤ I could prepare a Kickstarter project, video and all. Would it be accepted by the curators? No idea. Would it stand a chance? Stranger things have happened…

I need help on this. I'd need to have funding lined up by June in order to plot out the survey process, and by May if I was going to attend this year's ALA Annual Conference. If I can't work something out by June, I'll probably turn my attention to other book or writing possibilities and abandon this.

If you think you could help find a home for this, let me know: waltcrawford@gmail.com.

A library is…: A possible offshoot

Here's a possible offshoot of this project, at least for 2012. Lots of public libraries have mottoes or sayings on their websites (and probably elsewhere). Not all, by any means; I'd guesstimate 1/3, but that's a NSWAG (non-scientific wild-ass guess).

Those mottoes are frequently interesting as tiny indications of what libraries are, or regard themselves as.

It might be fun and, I don't know, uplifting to have a collection of these mottoes. I'm calling it "A library is…" for the moment, although I suspect only a minority of the sayings could be used to complete that statement.

If there's interest, and if I get funding, preparing that collection could be an offshoot. It certainly wouldn't be worth looking at all 9,000+ libraries (or the 8,000+, at a guess, that have websites) to find them, but if I was there anyway, capturing and organizing them would be a minor extra task.

Does this seem intriguing to anybody else? If I try the Kickstarter route, *A library is…* would al-

most certainly be one of the thank-you items, especially since it could be offered at four or five different levels (PDF or EPUB or HTML; softcover book; autographed softcover book; hardcover book; autographed hardcover book).

Making it Work
It's Academic (or Not)

Don't expect to see much about academic libraries in *Cites & Insights* in the future.

That's not to say that the comments of academic librarians and other academics won't feature into future essays (to the extent that there is a future for *C&I*), and it's not to say that I won't be writing about issues that concern academic libraries. Most library issues concern academic libraries to some extent.

But I've been thinking about what makes sense for *C&I*'s future. Given the lack of sponsorship, stuff only makes sense if it's clearly having an effect in the field, if it's at least getting mentioned elsewhere, if it's fun or interesting to write about or if it's an area where I really believe I add value and can hope for some of the other desirable outcomes.

Thinking about what makes sense could also be described as paring down, chipping away at the 1,730 items I currently have tagged in Diigo and those I'll tag in the future. I'm more likely to retain areas where somebody in the wavelet of email I received regretting the hiatus and possible shutdown of C&I indicated that they liked the areas. (So if you're hoping to have seen the last of OFFTOPIC PERSPECTIVES or MY BACK PAGES and my grumbling about stereo equipment prices—no such luck.)

Here's how I see the situation with academic libraries—or, rather, my unpaid efforts in writing about academic libraries:

➤ Having an effect: Not so much. I'm not convinced that I've swayed any academic librarian's opinion or even informed their opinion on any topic specific to academic libraries in some time.

➤ Getting mentioned elsewhere: That one's easy. As with other areas, *C&I* seems to have become largely irrelevant to the field—and in this case, I believe it's with some justification.

➤ Fun or interesting: In the past, I was vitally interested—but I had to be a little circumspect given my place of employment. (Was I going to call ARL members a bunch of cowardly idiots even if I believed that to be true [which I

don't], given who paid my salary?) Now, I have no real need to be circumspect, but I also have less personal interest. Whatever I may believe about the desirable role of larger academic libraries in preserving the records of humanity, for example, I'm not going back to college, I don't currently use any academic libraries (although I have secondary access to the collections of many of them through Link+), and I don't really feel as though I'm in touch with what's going on, beyond what I glean from the Library Society of the World and other folks on FriendFeed and occasionally Facebook, Twitter, blogs and Google+.

➢ Add value: This follows from the previous comment. I'm out of touch, and I'm convinced that it doesn't make sense for me to try to get back in touch. Here I'm talking specifically about topics related to academic libraries as such.

That all adds up to not adding up, at least for me to be a useful or effective commentator.

So the next time I sweep through Diigo—specifically through 28 tags beginning "miw-"—I'm probably going to delete items that appear to be primarily about academic libraries. I'll start by deleting the entire "miw-taiga" category (which only had one item; I'd pretty much given up on writing about Taiga already).

What I Believe

This is not to say that I don't have beliefs and opinions about academic libraries, just that I don't think I'm accomplishing much by writing about them here. Some of my beliefs:

➢ "The academic library" is as silly a general phrase as "the public library" or, worst of all, "the library." There are more than 3,000 academic libraries in the U.S. and a goodly number elsewhere, and they're almost as heterogeneous as public libraries are. (I was going to say "*at least* as heterogeneous" but I doubt that there are any academic libraries run entirely by volunteers, I'm pretty sure there are no academic institutions with libraries that have only 13 people in the entire academic community, and I doubt that there are any academic libraries that get by on $3 per member of the community. I could be wrong on all counts.) I suspect some community college libraries have more in common with

public libraries than they do with ARL libraries. I know the libraries in small liberal arts colleges are *very* different from the libraries and library systems in large universities. For that matter, I'm acutely aware that even "ARL libraries" groups together a bunch of wildly dissimilar entities. The "Big 25" are different from the not-quite-so-big 89 (or whatever), and so on. Even the UC Berkeley and UC San Diego libraries aren't really identical institutions, let alone Harvard and Guelph—or, for that matter, Harvard and UIUC, the #1 and #2 libraries by collection size from the latest ARL stats you can get without paying big bucks. (I won't offer my thoughts about ARL suddenly charging $750/year for outsiders like me to get access to the annual statistics or $170 for a print version; let's just say I'm impressed with ARL's new attitude toward openness and let it go at that.)

➢ Academic librarians should stop using "the library" or "libraries" when they really mean academic libraries—and, better yet, should stop overgeneralizing about academic libraries. When someone says, "Circulation is declining in libraries" I want to scream, starting with "THAT'S NOT SO for most public libraries, and it's not even true for all academic libraries." I'm guessing the chance of library school faculty and other academic library writers (who dominate the professional literature) stopping the habit of overgeneralizing is about as good as the chance of my winning a Macarthur Fellowship or the Nobel Prize for Economics.

➢ More to the point, academic librarians should stop thinking of public libraries as inferior cousins or assuming that what affects academic libraries now will affect public libraries in the same way later. It's not true, it's not useful, it doesn't even make sense.

➢ Academic librarians who don't use public libraries should not assume that they know how public libraries are used, either in general (which is nonsense anyway) or in particular. Which, turned around, is one reason I should probably stop writing about academic libraries: I don't have any first-hand experience. (Note that I've never written much about special libraries for much the same reason.)

➢ There are any number of first-rate thinkers and doers among academic librarians with

their feet on the ground and their heads clear. I believe there are enough of them (people like Jenica Rogers, just to name one) to have great expectations for the future of (most) academic libraries. It might or might not be a set of futures I'd find most desirable, but that's of no importance. And it is a *set* of futures, not one monolithic future. The future of the library at the Notre Dame de Namur University (where my wife was library director back when it was the College of Notre Dame) is *not* the future of the Columbia University Libraries. I suspect I'd find some of the futures appalling, others exciting and invigorating, still others simply puzzling.

➢ Unfortunately, there are also a fair number of speakers and writers who see monolithic futures, who argue for one set of solutions for all [academic] libraries (although they rarely use that limiter), who seem intent on getting rid of books, reference desks, professional librarians and, in some cases, much of anything that couldn't be done better and a lot cheaper by one licensing person in the bursar's office and a student employee group run by the student association. That's a caricature—but, well, you look at Taiga's output and some other things and wonder. I've given up trying to fight it: I lack the weapons and the audience, and *I don't know enough* to provide convincing counterarguments. Again, however, fortunately…see the previous bullet.

➢ It is no more likely that, in the foreseeable future, all or most of today's academic libraries will vanish or be converted into Commons than it is that all or most of today's public libraries will vanish or be turned into bookless makerspaces.

I could go on, but I just said I was going to stop writing about academic libraries, didn't I? If you're laughing at all the things I got wrong in that set of bullet points, you should be happy: I don't plan to make those points again. What's the, er, point?

Academic Libraries on Facebook

Michalis Gerolimos wrote "Academic Libraries on Facebook: An Analysis of Users' Comments" in the November/December 2011 *D-Lib Magazine*. Quoting the abstract:

This paper examines users' comments on the Facebook pages of 20 American academic libraries and subdivides them into 22 categories. A total of 3,513 posts were examined and analyzed in various ways, including how many of the posts included user comments and how many had none; how many comments were included in each post; and what the percentage of user participation was on the library walls, in terms of "likes" and comments. The most significant findings are that approximately 91% of the posts do not include any comments, over 82% of user participation is expressed via the "like" functionality and most comments on academic libraries' Facebook pages are not uploaded by prospective users (i.e., college and university faculty and students) but rather by library personnel, employees affiliated with the same institution as the library, and alumni.

Unlike Gerolimos (at the Alexander Technological Educational Institute of Thessaloniki, Greece), I don't have a PhD in Library and Information Science or, indeed, any higher degree—but I have been doing some research on library use of Facebook and Twitter, although I've been looking at public libraries, not academic libraries.

Up until that last sentence, the abstract seems to describe an interesting anecdotal research project, looking at less than 1% of American academic libraries. But the "significance" shadows the overall tone of the piece, as it's entirely composed of negative aspects: most posts don't yield comments, most user participation isn't comments, most comments aren't from "prospective users" as narrowly defined by Gerolimos.

The real problems arise when you get to the conclusions.

The study supports the conclusion that Facebook may never be a very effective marketing tool based on the fact that the 20 Facebook pages have, on average, a very small number of followers (mean number is less than 600 followers) and a librarian that quantifies the popularity of the medium (Facebook) to the number of followers for the library's pages presented in Fig. 1, he is certain to conclude that putting much effort into using Facebook as an outreach/marketing tool is probably not worthwhile.

Lest there be any question as to the mindset of the author, consider the final paragraphs of the discussion:

Developing a Facebook page as a new tool to reach out to a library's current or perspective users, but finding it is supported primarily by its own staff, cannot be considered a complete failure, but it would be no more effective than a library repeatedly circulating a collection of books that appeal more to library personnel than users. If becoming "friends"

with the library and user comments are two measurements of the success of the outreach and/or marketing efforts, then we can safely say that, based on this research, Facebook is thus far not an effective outreach/marketing tool for libraries.

Finally, this research clearly shows that although users are willing to share personal data on social networking sites, even when they know that there are important security issues to consider, regarding the possible exploitation of their personal data by the social networking for-profit companies, they do not, at this point in time, share information on library Facebook pages. Maybe they read the posts but have nothing to share, maybe they do not want to upload information about themselves inside a digital space that is directly related to their academic affairs, or maybe they simply find it an unattractive environment. If we consider how easily students "like" a page, add a group, post personal information, or simply interact with Facebook pages, then we must face the fact that library pages are amongst the least attractive to students. This does not come as a surprise to those who have not been taken in by the "social web" hype.

The most outrageous statement here is at the end of the first paragraph, where the author seems to generalize from 20 U.S. *academic* libraries to *all* libraries of all types: "we can safely say that, based on this research, Facebook is thus far not an effective outreach/marketing tool for libraries." Nonsense. I don't believe you can even safely say that it's not an effective tool for that tiny group, 20 out of more than 3,000 U.S. academic libraries. (That group is not only tiny, it is not in any way representative: It's composed entirely of libraries at major research universities.) But the last sentence is also telling: "those who have not been taken in by the 'social web' hype." I count myself among those—but I also count myself among those aware enough to see that social networks are and can be effective tools to reach some library users in some libraries.

If this study shows anything, other than the typical tendency of LIS faculty (which the author is) to substitute "libraries" for "academic libraries" and assume that a small study population can be extrapolated to the larger world, it shows that success or failure depend heavily on how you define your terms.

The Middle

There are two intertwined pieces to this article, in my opinion. There's what I'll call "The Middle," a qualitative/quantitative measurement of a relatively modest number of posts on a tiny number of academic library Facebook pages. Once you add those two caveats it's an interesting small study.

Given that, I won't comment on sections 4 (Research methodology), 5.1 (User's comments on the wall), any of the Tables in the Appendix or those portions of the discussion that deal strictly with the analysis of user comments. I'll summarize: Most posts on most Facebook walls don't get a lot of comments, and commenters tend to be a small portion of those actually liking/following a page. I suspect those statements are true for most public library Facebook pages as well—and, indeed, for most Facebook pages of any sort. To which the natural but unscholarly response is: *So what*?

Now, let's look at some of the things I do find odd, quite apart from the sheer nonsense of attempting to generalize from 20 randomly chosen "top academic institution" libraries to the universe of academic libraries or libraries as a whole. Frankly, if the article had concluded that *within this handful of libraries* X and Y was true, I wouldn't bother to comment.

Definitions and Language

I think there are two problems here: Definitions and language. That is:

➢ The conclusion that [20 academic] library Facebook pages aren't working is based on a narrow definition of "working." Among other things, the author determines that alumni and staff aren't really potential library users; this might surprise the libraries. He also seems to define working strictly in terms of the amount of conversation going on.

➢ At several points in the article, the author uses slanted language that makes clear his disdain for social networks. Since I do this sort of thing all the time, I can reasonably be accused of being hypocritical in calling it out here—except that this article is framed and published as a scholarly research article, not an opinion piece. I believe higher standards for neutrality of approach should apply.

Now let's look at specific items I have problems with. I'm going to ignore most of the hyperbole and nonsense in the interests of space—beginning with the very first sentence in the introduction: "Facebook has been a dominant presence in our lives in the past several years…" For anyone for whom that's literally true—that Facebook is the *most important* thing in their life—that's simply sad. It's certainly not true as a general statement. But if I fisk this article at that level of detail, my commentary

will be several times as long as the article itself. So let's hone in on the real problems.

Research findings (section 5)

Figure 1 in the article shows the number of Likes for each of 20 academic library Facebook pages—a number that ranges from low (under 200 for three libraries) through reasonable (anywhere from 260 to 901 for most libraries) to fairly high (between 1,700 and 2,200 for two libraries). But here's the commentary:

> Figure 1 also provides evidence that library pages on Facebook are not among the most popular or at least the most known pages on Facebook, especially when we consider that the libraries in the sample are among the most popular and well known academic libraries in the world; and a small number of followers/"likers" may impact the success of using Facebook as a marketing/promotional/outreach tool.

Library Facebook pages are not among the most popular pages on Facebook. That is absolutely, positive, 100% factual. It's also completely irrelevant. The UC Berkeley library is not Aston Kutcher; why on earth would anybody expect it to have even a tiny fraction of Kutcher's likes? (I wonder what "popular" even means when it comes to academic libraries; I wasn't aware that MIT's library system was in a popularity contest with UC Berkeley or Rice.)

A more relevant issue *might* be that the number of likes is a relatively small percentage of the campus student population. In fact, it's a surprisingly high 19% for Yale (well over 25% as of January 2012) and 11% for Princeton, and more than 7% for Rice and MIT. What I see from the chart is that hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of people—most, presumably, students—have explicitly said that they're interested in receiving messages from their campus library. That's success to me, especially if the numbers are growing rather than shrinking.

Looking at the chart emphasizes another issue with the study: The libraries are all at major research universities, a very small subset of America's institutions of higher education. That's not surprising: They were chosen from a *USNews* ranking. In practice, marketing and outreach will mean something very different for, say, UC Berkeley than it does for, say, a liberal arts college with a thousand students. (It's also likely to be very different for the Rice with 5,600 students than it is for Berkeley with more than 30,000.)

5.2 Facebook as an outreach and marketing tool

Outreach and marketing implies communication; it does not necessarily imply conversation. But this section is mostly about conversation, not marketing—and it's laden with questionable language. For example:

> Another aspect of Facebook use that needs to be mentioned is that in some cases librarians create posts that could be characterized as unnecessary, or even unprofessional.

Unnecessary? Unprofessional? To my mind, one benefit of a Facebook page for a major research university library is humanizing the library for some (relatively small) portion of the student body. The examples given are a question about books people loved as kids and a picture of a librarian walking to work. I fail to see what's wrong with either example.

There's a legitimate and perhaps important point to this section: Most explicit attempts to get feedback from students through Facebook don't work very well, *for these 20 libraries*.

6. Conclusions

"This study recorded the lack of a steady flow of feedback (especially comments) on any of the 20 academic library Facebook pages examined." Yes, it did. *So what*? Marketing and outreach don't require feedback; they require that people read the message.

> The study supports the conclusion that Facebook may never be a very effective marketing tool based on the fact that the 20 Facebook pages have, on average, a very small number of followers (mean number is less than 600 followers) and a librarian that quantifies the popularity of the medium (Facebook) to the number of followers for the library's pages presented in Fig. 1, he is certain to conclude that putting much effort into using Facebook as an outreach/marketing tool is probably not worthwhile.

The study does no such thing. It supports a conclusion that, for *some* of these 20 libraries, a relatively low percentage of students will follow (like) the library's Facebook page and very few will actively respond. Period. If reaching most students and getting them to respond is the reason for having a Facebook page, then major academic libraries shouldn't have Facebook pages; I find it hard to believe that any librarian within those 20 institutions was so naïve as to have that expectation. (In case it's not clear, I do not believe every academic library should have a Facebook page: I think that's just as silly as asserting that Facebook pages for academic libraries are always a waste of time.)

7. Discussion

There's a tiny admission here that this study can't be generalized:

We cannot assume that efforts to use Facebook as an effective tool to promote library services and "invite" more users into the library's digital (and physical) space have had the same outcome everywhere.

But that's not really what the author wants to say:

[W]e must also recognize that students everywhere have certain habits, activities, and social preferences in common when it comes to the tools they choose to benefit their academic work — and based on this this study, most appear to reject connecting with their libraries on Facebook.

So the author *is* asserting broader significance—and also seems to assert that success for an academic library (or any library?) Facebook page can only mean having a majority of patrons "connecting" with the library.

If you set the bar for success that high, most library Facebook pages (academic or otherwise) will fail—as will *every other* outreach or marketing effort taken by most libraries. As will, for that matter, pretty much any marketing done by any institution for any reason. Does McDonald's "connect" with a majority of its potential customers through Facebook? Not a chance. (The percentage of McDonald's customers who like its Facebook page is a whole lot lower than the percentage of Yale's community that like that university's library page.)

Since I've already discussed the final two paragraphs, I won't spend more time on them—except to wonder why it would even be *desirable* for students to "post personal information" on library Facebook pages. I will repeat one sentence: "Maybe they read the posts but have nothing to share, maybe they do not want to upload information about themselves inside a digital space that is directly related to their academic affairs, or maybe they simply find it an unattractive environment." Maybe—*probably*—neither the library nor the students regard a library Facebook page as intended for sharing personal information. Maybe they do read posts and have nothing to share: What exactly is wrong with that?

Looking at the Facebook pages

The appendix to this study includes links to the 20 Facebook pages, so I thought I'd take a quick personal look at each one in mid-January 2012. All of them are still up: Apparently nobody took this article to heart enough to turn off their Facebook page. All of them are adding new likes—in some cases, at a fairly rapid clip. A couple of them appear to be somewhat moribund.

I didn't see anything I'd consider inappropriate or unprofessional, but quite a few posts I'd consider humanizing—a good thing, in my opinion.

My snap judgment: eight of these pages are succeeding (in my estimation); four appear to be failing; and eight are somewhere in the middle. I find it impossible to draw the universally negative conclusions of the author.

Conclusion

I was heavily skeptical of the term Library 2.0 as being either meaningful or the basis for a movement. I feel the same way about Web 2.0 and, to be honest, about "social media," which I regard as a nonsense term. But in each case, to be skeptical of an overarching pseudoconcept is different than dismissing all the tools and examples: "Social media" may be an empty term, but social networks are and can be effective tools—not for everybody, but for some. And just because it's called a social network, success doesn't necessarily require conversation.

I was ready to believe that academic library Facebook pages were silly, at least for very large academic libraries. I think the connection between students and larger academic libraries is more tenuous than the connection between community members and good public libraries—although in both cases it's unreasonable to expect more than a fraction of the relevant community to be involved. There's a reason my book is about *public* library use of social networks.

This article simply doesn't make the case its author claims, at least in my opinion. The article demonstrates that most posts on a handful of Facebook walls don't get comments. That's not even very interesting, much less very meaningful.

And even if every single one of the 20 large research library Facebook pages could be demonstrated to be an utter failure (which the article doesn't do, and which I believe to be false for at least some of them), that would say nothing about the possible role of Facebook for the other 3,000+ academic libraries…and less about Facebook's usefulness for libraries in general.

After originally deciding not to bother with this detailed rant, then writing the first draft, I looked online to see who else had commented. About all I found was a laudatory discussion from a pseudonymous source I regard as primarily troublemaker. So I'm leaving this in. I do believe it's the last time I'll be commenting in detail on an article that only relates to academic libraries—at least in the near future.

50 Movie Box Office Gold, Part 1

Let's see. All color. Some dates in the 1970s and 1980s, some earlier. Mostly 84 to 94 minutes (some longer). Big stars in every movie. Thirteen discs to hold 50 movies, because there aren't six short subjects. This can only mean…*TV Movies*, at least most of them, or movies with no significant commercial presence in the U.S.

I reviewed another set of mostly TV movies in "50 Movie All-Stars Collection," and a generally good set it was, starting with the first-rate duo *Divorce Hers* and *Divorce His*. This set doesn't get off to quite such an auspicious start, but we shall see. Why am I interleaving a third megapack, along with "Comedy Kings" and the everlasting Mystery Collection? For the worst of all possible reasons: Sometimes I just want to watch a *color* old movie, and there are precious few of those in the other collections.

As usual, if the actual run time is more than a minute different from the run time as it appears on IMDB, I give the actual run time, as my player shows it (not as it's sometimes-inaccurately given on the sleeve) in [brackets]. And as usual, my ratings are given as the amount I think it would be plausible to pay for this movie, as offered here, as part of a single multi-flick disc, in a range of $0 to $2.50 (but almost never over $2).

Disc 1

Guns of the Revolution (aka *Rain for a Dusty Summer*), 1971, b&w. Arthur Lubin (dir.), Ernest Borgnine, Humberto Almazán, Sancho Gracia, Aldo Sambrell. 1:32.

> I'm not sure what to say about this one, with Ernest Borgnine as the general in charge of getting rid of all the priests in 1917-era Mexico—and one would-be priest, very much a jokester, who winds up defying the general and revealing the lasting Catholicism of the people. Supposedly based on a true story, this movie seems unclear as to its purpose and mood, although it's most assuredly pro-Catholic. Borgnine is, well, *peculiar* in the role of the dictatorial general insistent on freeing the people from the tyranny of religion. The rest of the cast is adequate, but I found the writing flat and the direction scattered. The picture's fine. This is supposedly a theatrical release, but has all the depth and attitude of a TV movie. I come up with $1.25.

High Risk, 1981, color. Stewart Raffill (dir.), James Brolin, Anthony Quinn, Lindsay Wagner, James Coburn, Arnest Borgnine, Bruce Davison, Cleavon Little, Chuck Vennera. 1:34 [1:32]

> A better title might be *Four Idiot Gringo Thieves*. I guess it's a caper movie of sorts, one in which we're apparently supposed to identify with four young men who decide to rip off a drug warlord in South America for a million or so. Hey: Four guys, most of whom have never handled a weapon, armed with various overpowered stuff from a friendly neighborhood armaments-out-of-a-truck dealer (Ernest Borgnine), flying on a chartered drug plane, parachuting in to open a safe (for which the leader *thinks* they have the combination) in a heavily-guarded estate, *expecting to just go in, do it, and leave*…oh, and they'll do it during siesta, because everybody will be asleep.
>
> What could possibly go wrong?
>
> Great cast, with James Coburn as the drug lord with $5 million (and a lot of drugs) in his safe, Anthony Quinn as the head of a scraggly bunch of former revolutionaries who are now just bandits, James Brolin as the head of the idiot gang who sold his house and belongings to pay for the weapons and arrangements, Lindsay Wagner as—it's hard to say …and more.
>
> Plausibility: Zero. Likability of the gang members: For me, not a lot more than zero. This was mostly people who felt justified in ripping off somebody else because, I dunno, they're underemployed, at war with a high-living suave drug lord and a bunch of aging revolutionaries. Decently filmed, good print, but…well, I just didn't get it. Apparently, this was also a real feature, not a TV movie, released in nine countries with as many titles. IMDB calls it a comedy as well as an action film; I *really* don't get that. Charitably, $1.00.

The Cop in Blue Jeans (orig. *Squadra antiscippo*), 1976, color. Bruno Corbucci (dir.), Tomas Milian, Jack Palance, Maria Rosaria Omaggio, Guido Mannari. 1:35 [1:32]

> There's this Italian cop (or "special agent") who dresses like a bum and rides a scooter that can keep up with any car and can be driven up several flights of stairs without difficulty. He's out to reduce the plague of purse-snatching and other crime—by going after the fences, which he does in an odd way. (And if you believe that, given a full busload of Japanese tourists, 100% of them would spend two minutes taking pictures of someone mooning them from across the street, with *nobody* paying attention to the guys putting all of their luggage in a van and

driving away…well, then you can believe everything else in this movie.)

Add to that a misstep by the king of the snatchers, the Baron, whose own scooter team manages to snatch a briefcase from an American coming out of a hotel—a briefcase holding $5 million in thousand dollar bills. Without giving away the plot climax, I'll mention the bizarro ending—in which the cop shows just what a good guy he is by, well, snatching somebody's briefcase while riding a scooter—while violating airport security in a fairly outrageous manner. Incidentally, the IMDB plot summary is as wrong as the sleeve summary.

It's all high-action nonsense, *really* badly dubbed (except for Jack Palance, the American) and with dialogue I'm pretty certain doesn't match the original—and badly out of focus to boot. Palance is there for maybe 15 minutes and pretty clearly in it for the bucks and the vacation. I'm being *very* charitable to give this Eurocrap $0.75.

Act of Love, 1980, color. Jud Taylor (dir.), Ron Howard, Robert Foxworth, Mickey Rourke, David Spielberg, Mary Kay Place. 1:44 [1:28]

Fratricide, euthanasia and Ron Howard (acting, not directing), with Robert Foxworth as a wealthy lawyer. How can you beat that? Well, a clear picture that wasn't red-shifted through much of it (Howard and others aren't so much rednecks, country accents aside, as red-faced) would help. This one *is* a TV movie.

The setup: Howard is the younger brother who loves his older (married) brother (Rourke), and both live with their mother—after their father died the previous winter. One day, Howard goes off to work while the older brother takes a brand-new motorcycle and starts driving it around the farm like a madman…including the uncleared five acres the two sons were planning to start clearing. Motorcycle. Uncleared acreage. Accident.

When the older brother realizes he's probably going to be paralyzed from the neck down, he asks his younger brother to swear to kill him. Which Howard does—by shooting him in the head with a half-loaded buckshot cartridge in a sawed-off shotgun. The rest of the movie is about the trial. I won't give away the ending.

Great cast, reasonably well acted. The poor quality of the print—soft and reddish—hurts quite a bit. I wind up with $1.00.

Disc 2

Shaker Run, 1986, color. Bruce Morrison (dir.), Cliff Robertson, Leif Garrett, Lisa Harrow, Shane Briant, Peter Rowell, Peter Hayden. 1:31 [1:29]

A research scientist whose project has accidentally developed a lethal bioweapon (it suppresses the immune system) finds that it's about to be turned over to the military—so to save mankind from that awful fate, she and her lover (also on the project) decide to steal the stuff and deliver it to…the CIA? *Really*? So that sterling institution, only interested in the good of humanity, can see to it that an antidote is developed. Oh, and the evil country whose military she's trying to avoid: New Zealand.

Yep. That's what we have: the New Zealand military vs. the CIA—except that it's mostly stunt car driving with Cliff Robertson as a former race car driver turned stunt-car driver, who takes on the delivery job without knowing what he's transporting (but he's *bad* broke and she's offering $3,000). Garrett plays Robertson's mechanic (and son of the crew chief Robertson's character accidentally killed at Daytona). The military presence includes a sinister head and an associate who's pure assassin. All filmed on location and with decent production values, on roads covering a good portion of New Zealand's South Island. Lots of scenery. Lots of shooting, explosions, cars going over cliffs and mostly lots of stunt car driving. The print's pretty decent for VHS quality, and the movie moves right along. Even if…the CIA? Really? (When Robertson, as an American stunt driver, hears what she's doing, he comments "Lady, you are *really* naïve." Ya' think?) I have no idea how Mill Creek Entertainment could get rights to a 1986 color movie cheap enough to include in a megapack, but there you go. All in all, a minor effort worth $1.25.

Against All Hope, 1982, color. Edward T. McDougal (dir.), Michael Madsen, Maureen McCarthy, Cecil Moe. 1:29.

Awful, awful, awful: A badly-done film that's nothing more than a 90-minute sermon for one narrow brand of Christianity as being the five-second cure (and the *only* cure) for whatever ails you.

It's all about a falling-down drunk and how he got that way, told in flashbacks as he's sitting in a 4a.m. chat with a minister he'd never met, trying to decide whether to kill himself. It's a mildly sad story, but mostly boils down to a man with no apparent self-esteem who lives for his drinks and has somehow stayed married. When he decides he's in trouble, we get a display of how every other helping profession is worthless. A doctor blows cigarette smoke in his face while telling him there are no medical problems. A neurologist dismisses his issues. A psychiatrist wants to know whether he hates his mother or his father and then refers him to a minister from the Church of Good Times (or something like that), whose only advice is that the

couple should come to Wednesday Night Bingo or Friday Night Dances at the church. And, of course, *not one* of these people asks anything about him being a drunk. No AA suggestions or anything that might actually help.

Add in a barroom scene in which *everybody in the bar* gathers around him to force him to take a drink after he's been on the wagon for a couple of months, a diner with a remarkably vicious waitress and even nastier other customer and the fact that *not one character in the whole film*, including the long-suffering wife and the protagonist, seems to be more than a convenient cliché. Even after the lead is miraculously saved (after a 30-second prayer, he walks out of the minister's house, says everything suddenly looks beautiful, and of course everything goes great after that), he's upset because his wife (who's always been religious, even taught Sunday School for 11 years, but doesn't much cotton to his particular fundamentalist group) "still isn't a Christian yet."

The lead character's name—Cecil Moe--is also the name of the cowriter and executive producer (who also plays a different role, the minister who saves Moe). It's really bad propaganda, of a sort that strikes me as wholly useless—I mean, would anyone outside the "you're all doomed, but if you just Say the Magic Phrase, you're instantly saved" camp be convinced by anything here? Madsen's first movie; based on his stellar performance, it's a miracle he was ever in a second one—but this one must have been seen by, what, 50 people including the cast? (If you read the IMDB reviews, note that the only semi-favorable ones are from those who think the "Christian" message overrides everything else.) I'd give it a flat $0, but as an example of really bad moviemaking that's also remarkably awful propaganda it's a weak $0.25.

Kangaroo, 1952, color. Lewis Milestone (dir.), Maureen O'Hara, Peter Lawford, Finlay Currie, Richard Boone, Chips Rafferty. 1:24.

An old guy, Michael McGuire, shows up at a cheap sailor's rest (six cents a night for bedding and a bunk) drunk and with booze to share—and, as he's singing and becoming maudlin, Richard Connor (a young Peter Lawford) asks about it and finds that he's mourning the long-lost son that he put in an orphanage as a child, from whence the son fled. Connor leaves the sailor's rest, tries to rob gambler John W. Gamble (Richard Boone), winds up robbing the proprietor of the gambling establishment along with Gamble (a robbery during which Gamble shoots the proprietor)…and that's just the start. (Interesting gambling hall: Most of the action's betting on whether a person tossing two coins in the air will have two heads or two tails land, with one of each being a non-result.)

The primary plot: McGuire's got a 10,000-square-mile cattle station in South Australia. The two, after taking him back to his ship (dead drunk), connive to go to the station…with the hope that they can convince him that Connor's his long-lost son. Turns out he also has a beautiful daughter (Maureen O'Hara), and they're just trying to hang on given a three-year drought that's nearly wiped out the nearby town and threatens to wipe out their herds.

Most of the movie's a combination of Australian scenery, driving cattle, aboriginal rites and a little action here and there. The ending's not terribly important (indeed, other than a break in the drought, the ending's not even very clear). It's fair to say that the long con doesn't work, partly because Lawford's conscience gets the better of him.

Fine cast, generally well played, maybe a little heavy on the Australian exotica (supposedly the first Hollywood flick and first Technicolor movie shot entirely in Australia). While the print's not terrible, it's not as good as you might want for a movie this heavy on scenery. All in all, though, it's entertaining enough. If the print was better, this might get more, but I'll give it $1.25.

A Hazard of Hearts, 1987, color (made for TV). John Hough (dir.), Diana Rigg, Edward Fox, Helena Bonham Carter, Fiona Fullerton, Christopher Plummer, Steward Granger, Neil Dickson, Anna Massey, Marcus Gilbert. 1:30.

Romance-novel fans may recognize that as a Barbara Cartland title, and snobs may say "Oh, please, it's a cheap romance novel." Maybe, but it's well done and a distinct pleasure, some highly implausible plot issues be damned.

The basic plot: A British nobleman (Christopher Plummer) is an inveterate gambler and loses not only his entire fortune but his estate and his daughter's promised hand in marriage (which brings with it an £80,000 inheritance) to a villainous lord who his daughter detests. Another lord takes on the villain, winning back the estate and daughter…while the nobleman shoots himself. Then, the other lord (an oddly distant sort, but handsome) discovers the youth of the daughter (Helena Bonham Carter, 21 at the time) and decides he can't possibly wed one so young—and decides to sell the estate and send her to live with his mother at *his* estate. His mother, played by Diana Rigg, is a proper scoundrel—another inveterate gambler who runs her own gambling operation and also a smuggling franchise, and who regards the girl as an annoyance to be dealt with.

That's just the start of a hearty plot involving hidden doors, staircases and even apparently dead fathers, subterfuge, betrayal, and eventually both a pistol duel and a swordfight. Virtue triumphs—how

could it not? And, frankly, *it all works*—because the actors are first-rate. Also, this is an unusually good print for a Mill Creek movie, nearly VHS quality: It was a pleasure to watch on the big screen. Yes, the plot's silly, but the staging and acting are both fine. I'll give it $1.75.

Disc 3

Catch Me a Spy (orig. *To Catch a Spy*), 1971, color. Dick Clement (dir.), Kirk Douglas, Marlène Jobert, Trevor Howard, Tom Courtenay, Patrick Mower. 1:34.

It's a spy movie—or, rather, a spy romantic comedy. Hot young teacher (and daughter of a British Minister who seems to spend most of his time playing with games) is courted by a handsome young import/export businessman and, after three months, marries him. They begin their honeymoon in Bucharest so he can take care of some business…at which point, he's arrested as a spy and taken to Moscow. Shortly before that, there's some business with a "waiter" (Kirk Douglas) who tapes something into the lining of one of their two suitcases.

Things progress at a dizzying pace, as the wife tries to fly to Moscow, is drugged by the waiter in the airport, winds up flying to London, and manages to convince the government to trade her husband for a Soviet spy—the only Soviet spy that British intelligence has ever captured, apparently. That goes badly, and we proceed from there. (By now, we know that the husband is actually a double agent—near the end of the film, his 'captor' notes that he's the only Soviet prisoner to gain weight.) There's lots of plot, a fair amount of silliness, and generally good fun.

Great cast, well played in the light manner that suits the plot, flawed mostly by the soft print and panned-and-scanned version. Not a movie for the ages, but it's fun and worth $1.50.

There Goes the Bride, 1980, color. Terry Marcel (dir.), Tom Smothers, Phil Silvers, Jim Backus, Broderick Crawford, Martin Balsam, Hermione Badderley, Twiggy. 1:30

Concussions sure are funny! Or at least that's one way to read this comedy, since the plot turns on four concussions, each of which involves an immediate recovery but a changed view of reality. Tommy Smothers is an ad man always on the verge of a breakdown, whose daughter is getting married the same day he's supposed to pitch for a new account. He also has some necessary errands to run—like, for example, picking up the groom's parents from the airport.

As played, the ad man is so incompetent with reality that things would have gone wrong anyway, so

bringing in an invisible flapper who's later his invisible flapper wife just adds to what I guess are supposed to be insanely funny mixups. Maybe you have to be in the right mood. One key plot point: Apparently, in this universe's version of the late 1970s or 1980, it was *shocking* for a young woman to have slept with her fiancée before the wedding—clearly, this wasn't the 1970s I grew up in.

Great cast. I think a better script, livelier acting and better direction might have made more of this—but what the hey, it *is* a TV movie. Oh, wait—apparently it isn't: It's a production that sure *feels* like a TV movie and was first shown in the UK. Soft picture—even more so during sequences when Twiggy, the invisible flapper, is visible, but there the softness is apparently intentional. Charitably, if you're *really* easily amused, $1.00.

Scandal Sheet, 1985 (TV), color. David Lowell Rich (dir.), Burt Lancaster, Lauren Hutton, Pamela Reed, Robert Urich. 1:41 [1:34]

What a cast! Burt Lancaster, Robert Urich, Lauren Hutton, Pamela Reed and others. What a…sad, trashy little movie. It's about tabloid journalism, big pay, friendship and betrayal—except that it's never quite clear who's betraying whom. I couldn't care about any of the characters. The script's mediocre, the better-known actors don't seem to much care, the picture's a little soft. Even by TV movie standards, this one's mostly a waste. If there's a moral, it's one most celebrities have learned: If you're going into rehab for alcoholism or drugs, your publicist should announce it openly. The best I can do is $0.75.

The Driver's Seat (orig. *Identikit*), 1974, col0r. Giuseppe Patroni Giffi (dir.), Elizabeth Taylor, Andy Warhol. 1:45 [1:41]

How you feel about this Elizabeth Taylor vehicle will depend a lot on how you feel about Elizabeth Taylor (and, I suppose, truly strange Italian filmmaking). If you believe she was a gloriously beautiful woman and great actress at all times, you'll thrill to this rarity, since she's front and center in all but maybe 10 minutes of the film. Even then, though, you may go "wha?" from time to time.

The plot: A woman wants to meet the perfect man…to kill her. Along the way, she encounters various people, including several men, virtually all of whom attempt to rape her. (At least one of them has a schtick: He's on a macrobiotic diet that requires him to have an orgasm a day.) That's about it. Andy Warhol plays two brief scenes as a wholly disinterested lord, with all the vibrant flair of most Andy Warhol appearances—that is, he kept his eyes open throughout his scenes.

The print in this case was really very good—I'd say better than VHS quality—but there was a tiny disc flaw rendering 90 seconds unwatchable. I'm convinced that I didn't miss anything that would have made this more than a very strange movie. I think the only people who would sit through this movie are Taylor completists and fans of vague Italian cinema. For them, it's probably worth at least $1.25.

Disc 4

The Missouri Traveler, 1958, color. Jerry Hopper (dir.), Brandon De Wilde, Lee Marvin, Gary Merrill, Paul Ford, Mary Hosford, Ken Curtis, Cal Tinney, Frank Cady, Will Wright. 1:43.

A charmer all the way through. A 15-year-old orphan (De Wilde) is running away from the orphanage and gets picked up by the biggest landholder in Delphi, Missouri—and, eventually, "adopted" by the whole small community. The landholder/farmer (Lee Marvin) is gruff and rough, and will only stand by agreements if they're in writing. The other protagonist, the local newspaper editor (Merrill), is much softer. Lots of other characters involved, and at one point I had to remind myself that the lead woman was *not* Marian Peroo. (The local restaurant owner, who was running a beer parlor until the temperance ladies made the town dry, is also essentially the mayor—and *is* the same actor [Ford] who was the mayor in *The Music Man*.)

Not a terribly deep picture, but a charming one. Good cast. Decent print. I'll give it $1.50.

Rogue Male, 1977, color (TV movie). Clive Donner (dir.), Peter O'Toole, John Standing, Alastair Sim, Harold Pinter. 1:43.

Peter O'Toole is a British aristocrat and author of books about hunting who attempts to assassinate Hitler in 1939—missing and being captured because of a stray quail. (Don't ask.) The interrogators torture him, including pulling out all his fingernails—then, finding out that he really is related to a high-up in British government, stage an accident to explain his death. An accident that doesn't actually kill him.

The rest of the movie concerns his flight back to England, his discovery that he's still being hunted by Gestapo agents and his attempts to survive. It's slow and gritty (much of it takes place in and about a small hand-dug cave) and with O'Toole, it's well worth watching. Not great, but worth $1.50.

Agency, 1980, color. George Kaczender (dir.), Robert Mitchum, Lee Majors, Valerie Perrine, Alexandra Stewart. Saul Rubinek, George Touliatos. 1:34.

Robert Mitchum is the new owner of an ad agency, a tad secretive and with little known background in the biz. Lee Majors is the creative head, prone to jogging, getting in late and being, well, Lee Majors. He's divorced and sometimes dating Valerie Perrine, a doctor. And his buddy Goldstein, a brilliant copywriter, thinks Mitchum's up to no good.

It's all about the sure-fire wonders of subliminal advertising and how they can enable any group to take over the world. I'm not sure how much more there is to say about it. It's lackluster but not terrible (although there are a few bizarre digitization errors and some really crude censorship, as certain words are obviously blanked out). The sleeve calls this "*The Agency*," but there's no pronoun in the flick's title. A paranoid trifle, worth maybe $1.25.

The Steagle, 1971, color. Paul Sylbert (dir.), Richard Benjamin, Chill Wills, Cloris Leachman, Jean Allison, Suzanne Charney, Ivor Francis. 1:27 [1:30]

Richard Benjamin is a professor in New York who hates to fly and has a typical suburban family: one wife (Cloris Leachman), two kids. Then comes the Cuban Missile Crisis and he goes—well, let's see, he gives a lecture of complete nonsense language, tells off his dean and starts hopping across the country on first-class airplane flights, making up a new identity each leg, screwing a married colleague at work, the daughter of a former wartime flame in Chicago and anybody who's convenient elsewhere. We also see a minister turn lecher in Vegas. Benjamin winds up in LA, getting drunk at the Stork Club and thrown out after a strange scene involving Chill Wills as an over-the-hill, drunk, befuddled old Western actor who supposedly thinks he's Humphrey Bogart—and the two of them wind up shooting live ammo and exploding live grenades at midnight on a studio set.

After which a cop wakes the two and doesn't run them in—because the Russian ships have just turned around and Kennedy's saved the day. Exit Benjamin, back across country, by train, across from a loudmouth Texan who thinks we shoulda' bombed Cuba flat.

I found it more annoying than anything else, and as a "comedy" it lacks humor. So the crisis was an excuse to abandon all morality, your family, everything? Really? That's not quite the way I remember it (I was at UC Berkeley at the time; to the best of my knowledge, we had no professors with Benjamin's approach to a world crisis.) Maybe if you find Benjamin charming enough you'd like it. For me, meh. But a good print and good cast; I'll charitably give it $1.

Disc 5

Christabel, 1988, color (TV). Adrian Shergold (dir.), Elizabeth Hurley, Stephen Dillane, Geoffrey Palmer, Ann Bell, Nigel Le Vaillant. 2:27.

When I look at the running time (nearly 2.5 hours), the date (1988) and the cast (Elizabeth Hurley), I immediately think, "Why is this on a Mill Creek Entertainment set?" The answer—or a possible answer—comes at the end of the movie.

Christabel is an upper-class British woman who marries a German lawyer she met a Cambridge, to the considerable dismay of her father. Did I mention that this starts in 1934? The two move to Germany, start a family, and by 1938—well, you probably know what was happening in the late 1930s in Germany. At her husband's request, she moves back to England for a while, but that doesn't stick. A fair amount of middling intrigue later, it's mid-1944—and he's been arrested after a plot to kill Hitler fails. She's off in the Black Forest (where he sent her after the bombing began, although she came back to Berlin at least once)—but she sets out to find him and see what she can do for him. It's gritty, includes some interesting (and, I suspect, plausible) details about ordinary people in Berlin coping with the situation (they learn to count to eight for the bombs in each U.S. heavy bomber during nighttime raids), and—well, I guess it ends happily.

It's a little slow, and maybe that's intentional. It's also quite good, with some remarkably good scenes and Hurley doing subtle, generally deglamorized work. If you don't mind a fundamentally serious movie, you'll probably like this. The print is *usually* better than usual: Somewhere between VHS and DVD quality—but about 10% of the time, something happens and it's got jaggies and vertical jitters. All in all, though, the problems don't distract from a very good picture.

The answer? It's a BBC television production, and since it's not a series, BBC probably didn't think they could ~~gouge~~ sell pricey DVDs successfully in the U.S. (Reading IMDB, I see that this is apparently based on a true story.) This one's worth $1.75.

Ginger in the Morning, 1974, color. Gordon Wiles (dir.), Monte Markham, Susan Oliver, Mark Miller, Sissy Spacek, Slim Pickens, David Doyle. 1:30 [1:33]

This begins with two entirely different scenes. In one, a young woman—OK, let's say it, a hippie chick (Sissy Spacek)—is getting out of a truck, thanking the driver, and starting to thumb her way along the highway again, suitcase and guitar case in hand. In the other, a vaguely worried man (Monte Markham) is deplaning and being pestered by someone he must have been seated next to on the plane, a middle-aged dirty old man (David Doyle) telling him he should go out and get laid a lot (he's been divorced for a couple of months), that he should say "motel" right away when picking up a

woman so he knows where he stands... And then they come together, as he (Markham, not Doyle—thankfully, we never see Doyle again) passes her on the highway, turns around, gets a flat tire in the process, and they wind up in the car together.

After this "meet cute," we have a three-day story (starting on December 30) that winds up with an odd sort of Happily Ever After ending and involves the worried man, the young woman, the man's rowdy friend who's in Mexico but flies back to see him, the rowdy friend's ex-wife who also happens to be in town...and, for good measure, Slim Pickens as the sheriff of Santa Fe (where this is all set).

I want to like this movie more than I do. Unfortunately, much of it is drunken carousing, and neither of the primary characters seem concerned that they're apparently both badly-functioning alcoholics. That, and the somewhat vapid characterization by Spacek, diminish an otherwise interesting little film. (OK, so Spacek was probably 22 at the time this was filmed, and had to work with a poor script. She apparently wrote her own songs; they're actually pretty good.) Good print. This has the feel of a TV movie, but apparently it wasn't. All told, I'll give it $1.25.

The River Niger, 1976, color. Krishna Shah (dir.), Cicely Tyson, James Earl Jones, Louis Gossett Jr., Glynn Turman, Jonelle Allen, Roger E. Mosely. 1:45.

A superb cast, a generally very good print (except that the music, written & performed by WAR, is sometimes wavering as though there were soundtrack problems), a Tony Award-winning play opened out into a movie.

I'm not sure how much more to say. I'm probably not the natural audience. The movie, set in an LA ghetto (presumably Watts), features James Earl Jones as an alcoholic house-painter/poet trying to keep his family together, Cicely Tyson as his wife, stricken with cancer, Louis Gossett Jr. as the best friend and local doctor—and a remarkable crowd of other actors. It's a movie of its time, and very well done. Summarizing the actual plot would be of no particular use.

I don't quite understand how this movie could be in this set, but that's a common theme here. I'll give it $2.

Disc 6

Callie & Son, 1981 (TV), color. Waris Hussein (dir.), Lindsay Wagner, Jameson Parker, Dabney Coleman, Joy Garrett, Michelle Pfeiffer, Andrew Prine, James Sloyan. 2:22.

The stirring tale of a mother who loved her son a little too much... Well, not incest, but that's the key to this tearjerker that feels like (and is) a TV movie,

but a *very* long one. Lindsay Wagner is Callie, who in the opening scenes is in a hospital bed after Being Wronged…and being pressured into giving up her baby for adoption without ever holding him (for $2,000 plus a couple hundred in prenatal expenses). She leaves Chillicothe and moves to Dallas, where she moves into an absurdly restrictive (and probably historically accurate for the 1950s) rooming house and takes a job as a waitress. Since she's gorgeous and pleasant, she does well…including good tips from the wealthy newspaper editor (Dabney Coleman, in a wholly positive role) who never says much and always just has coffee. In a little side plot, she hires a sleazy PI to find her son—and he winds up decamping entirely (leaving an empty office) after taking another $200 from her.

Moving forward a bit, she learns to be a court stenographer. We then see her doing the stenography for a deposition involving—guess who? He suggests coffee, they talk, he realizes she's the former waitress, and a little while later she's the Cinderella who's married the prince (and is received badly by the local elite). Further down the line, she becomes pregnant, then miscarries and can't bear children; eventually, she reveals the existence of her son. In the most implausible bit (in my opinion) of the flick, the editor manages not only to find the son but to have him returned to his mother, apparently without difficulty. (What? The adoptive parents didn't really want him?)

And she turns into SmotherMom. She wants her son to take over as editor. The editor had planned to sell the paper, move to his ranch and run a few head of cattle, but she talks him out of it—and when, shortly after the JFK assassination, he's shot dead in the newsroom along with two other newspaper staffers, she takes over as editor (after rejecting her husband's drawn-up but not yet signed plan to make the paper employee-owned). She tries to get her son, now a pot-smoking guitar-playing slacker (Jameson Parker), to get involved in the paper; it doesn't work.

Third section of the interminable plot: She gets her son involved in politics—but instead of marrying the Suitable Prospect, he elopes with a very young Michelle Pfeiffer (23 at the time, but she plays even younger). A few years later, as he's planning to move up a rung in office, there's a big party at the ranch with lots of dove hunting—and SmotherMom winds up shooting and killing Pfeiffer after a struggle (but just a little too late to believe it's an accident). And a determined local DA gets a grand jury to indict the son for first-degree murder (there was adultery and various other nonsense implied between the not-so-happy couple). The rest of the

picture is courtroom drama, remarkably unconvincing, especially when the rotten PI (who Smother-Mom had prevented from becoming a judge) lies through his teeth to convict the son and apparently faces neither effective cross-examination nor background checking. The movie almost ends with the son"s execution—but not quite: She goes back to Chillicothe, adopts a baby boy, and we start all over.

Long description because there's a lot of plot. It's not terrible, it's not great. Really good cast, pretty good print. All in all, I'll give it a middling $1.50.

Dear Mr. Wonderful, 1982, color. Peter Lilienthal (dir.), Joe Pesci, Karen Ludwig, Frank Vincent, Ed O'Ross, Ivy Ray Browning. 1:56 [1:52].

I'm all in favor of naturally paced movies, but this one is so naturally paced that it seems to fall apart repeatedly. I *think* the plot goes something like this:

Ruby Dennis (Pesci) owns a bowling alley in New Jersey, where he sings in the lounge and has apparent dreams of being a lounge singer in Chicago or Las Vegas. He also writes the occasional song. He lives with his divorced sister and her son. There's some stuff involving a frequent dinner guest (?), an older Jewish man who barely speaks but insists on full observance of rites; also some stuff involving the ex-husband, who's apparently a leech but trying to get back in touch: Dennis won't even let him in the door (to his sister's place).

The mob (I guess) wants to take over the bowling alley for a big new development and makes it clear that they're going to get it one way or another, one favored way being that it burns down overnight and he collects the insurance. Meanwhile, he's gotten interested in a daughter of someone who's involved with the mob (I think), seeing that she gets singing lessons and dating her in his own awkward way. There's a Tony Martin cameo, very much as himself. Oh, and along the line, his sister basically disappears, quitting her job in a garment factory to go work with—what? urban rehabilitators?—and, I guess, moving in with a family of them. The son is a cheap street criminal who presumably means well; he has a gang ripping chains off of people and sells them to another cheap criminal in a boxing gym, getting ripped off himself in the process.

There's probably more to it. Eventually, Dennis does sell the place, winds up with the girl (I think), the mom moves back in (I guess) and…well, the movie ends. Frankly, if I hadn't been down with a cold, I would have turned this off half an hour in and done something more exciting, like staring at the wall. But fans of Pesci might enjoy it. According to IMDB, the German version is 1:56 and the U.S. version is 1:40. This version was 1:52—and I'm sure cutting 12 minutes wouldn't hurt. It's a German

production, which may or may not explain anything. Charitably, $1.

Twisted Obsession (orig. *El sueño del mono loco*, also *The Mad Monkey*), 1989, color. Fernando Trueba (dir.), Jeff Goldblum, Miranda Richardson, Anemone, Daniel Ceccaldi, Dexter Fletcher, Liza Walker. 1:43.

> There are some oddities with this one. First, it's in stereo—unusual for movies in these collections. And I do mean stereo, not reprocessed mono: The orchestral score underlying most of it is well-recorded stereo. Second—well, it's in English, except for a few minutes of dialogue in French with no subtitles, and it was filmed in Spain (Madrid stands in for Paris).

> The plot? The very tall and very strange Jeff Goldblum (he always seems to do best with semi-deranged roles) narrates the movie as an entire flashback about a movie he won't see, that shouldn't have been made, that he shouldn't have written. That's right: He's a screenwriter, an American in Paris, whose wife leaves him early in the movie for no apparent reason, leaving behind a son whose apparent indifference masks his total need for his mother. None of which has much to do with the plot.

> A producer wants him to write a screenplay based on a "treatment" that's one line handwritten on a sheet of paper—a line, as it turns out, that's from *Peter Pan* and used in front matter to the screenwriter's failed novel. The very young director (whose previous experiences is music videos) who wants to make the movie points this out and hands him an annotated copy of the novel—annotated, we find out, by the very young director's *extremely* young sister (16 years old, but a very mature 16), who also seems to make any difficulties in the way of the film go away, apparently by various acts the screenwriter summarizes with the word "whoring."

> The plot? Oh, let's not forget the screenwriter's agent, a lovely wheelchair-bound 30-year-old who pretty obviously has a thing for the screenwriter. And who we later find also has some backstory with the director and sister. Nor should we forget the screenwriter's final development of exactly the screenplay the director wants, which the producer knows to be unbankable unless a major star is on board—and, oddly, the screenwriter knows such a major star.

> The plot? I give up. There's also drugs, death, various forms of love, the seeming absence of any deep human emotions on the part of most everybody involved—and, in the end, it felt like an art film, in the reading of "art film" that keeps them out of the commercial marketplace. To wit, after one hour and 45 minutes that *seemed* much longer, I had no idea

what the outcome was, I didn't know where things would lead, but…well, but I'd kept watching. For those who might enjoy this sort of thing, this is exactly the sort of thing they'd enjoy, and for them it's probably worth at least $1.25.

Summing Up

So here we are at the first half—or, really, not quite, since this 50-movie pack lacks very short films and so is spread over 13 discs. The first six discs include the first 22 movies; the "second half" includes 28 over seven discs.

It's a truly odd set, a combination of TV movies, foreign films that apparently weren't headed for stateside DVD release, and at least one movie that should never have been in this bargain set. Two attempts to assassinate Hitler along the way. There's one absolutely first-rate film, *The River Niger*, and two very strong contenders, *Christabel* and *A Hazard of Hearts*. I count four more good $1.50 flicks, seven at a reasonable $1.25 and five at a mediocre-but-passable $1, for a total of $25.25. Ah, but as I look now, the prices of Mill Creek Entertainment's 50-packs have firmed up a *lot*—I see $44.49 at Amazon, about three times what I would have expected. At that price, the first half is neither a bargain nor a cheat. (Of the three other films—two at a weak $0.75 and one at a miserable but charitable $0.25—the less said, the better.)

Masthead

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