The Front

Beyond the Damage

I'm delighted to announce a new book—or, really, *two* new books, except that one's a periodical issue.

Big-Deal Serial Purchasing: Tracking the Damage

If your library subscribes to *Library Technology Reports*, it should soon receive an issue with that title. *Big-Deal Serial Purchasing: Tracking the Damage* improves on *The Big Deal and the Damage Done*, bringing it forward to 2012 and using a more refined model. Here's the abstract:

When serials publishers first offered Big Deals to academic libraries, they seemed to many to be win-win-win situations. But while Big Deals did appear to lower the rate of serials price inflation, they did not bring it down to manageable levels—and in the process, they limited academic library flexibility. This study looks at the apparent damage caused by Big Deals over the period from 2002 (when most had been introduced) to 2012, specifically looking at details of acquisitions money for books and other acquisitions by type and size of library. Some possible approaches to improving the situation appear in the final chapter.

If your library *doesn't* subscribe to *LTR*, you should look into purchasing this issue as a separate; I believe it's available (or will be available) as a complete document or in chapter-by-chapter pieces as an ebook.

Inside This Issue

This is an important study. It shows what serials pricing has done to the money available for not only other acquisitions—but also everything else academic libraries do. It's not a pretty picture, and it got uglier from 2010 to 2012.

The period chosen (generally 2002 to 2012, although the truly startling Figures 1.1 and 1.2 start in 1996, with all figures adjusted for inflation throughout the book) is one in which the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) used consistent definitions for all of the figures used in this analysis. (How startling are those initial figures? In 1996—following years of dramatic serials price increases—U.S. academic libraries as a whole spent roughly the same amount for current serials and for all other acquisitions. In 2012, academic libraries spent $2.75 on current serials for every $1 spent on all other acquisitions—and money available for all non-acquisitions purposes dropped sharply over that period.)

Big-Deal Serial Purchasing offers tables, graphs and discussions to flesh out the details of the damage across various types of academic libraries. It ends with a chapter suggesting some possible steps to improve the situation. The report is accompanied by a pointer to a PDF containing additional tables and graphs that didn't fit in the report itself.

Beyond the Damage: Circulation, Coverage and Staffing

This book complements the *Library Technology Report*, looking at changes in three other aspects of academic libraries from 2002 to 2012: circulation, coverage and staffing.

Here's most of Chapter 1, to give you more of a sense of what's in this book:

> *Big-Deal Serials Purchasing: Tracking the Damage* looks almost entirely at four aspects of library spending and changes in that spending: total spending, current serials, "books" (all other acquisitions) and the remainder—what's left over for staff, automation, preservation, etc.

> This book looks at some other aspects of academic libraries and how they have changed from 2002 through 2012: circulation, coverage and staffing. It's designed to complement the *LTR* report. Indeed, I assume that readers will have access to the report, as it includes details on which academic libraries are included and excluded. This book uses exactly the same universe of libraries (2,594 in all) as the report.

> I believe this book (and the supplementary PDF) will provide useful additional insights into what's happened in academic libraries over a decade in which Big Deals supposedly improved serials pricing problems—but still had serials spending taking more and more of a sometimes-shrinking overall pie…

> All data in this book is based on the ALS datafiles maintained by NCES—but all data that actually appears is derivative, based on

calculations from those datafiles. Any errors and inappropriate conclusions are, of course, my own.
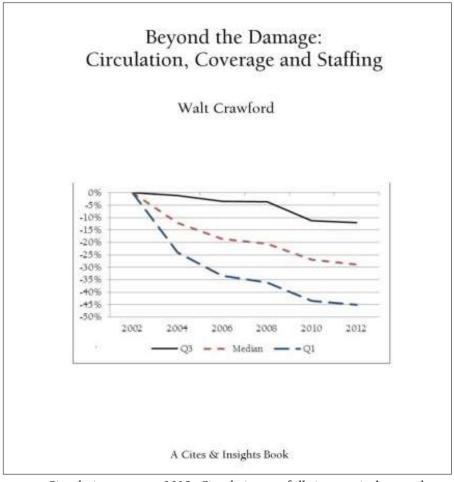
What's included

With one exception, this book looks at data on a per-capita basis, based on FTE student counts as reported to NCES. The exception is book coverage, where I relied on U.S. book title counts as maintained by Bowker.

2594	Q1	Median	Q3	Up
Circulation per cap, 2012	3.0	6.2	12.9	
Change from 2010 to 2012	-27%	-10%	14%	37%
Book coverage, 2012	0.40%	0.95%	2.3%	
Change from 2002 to 2012	-74%	-53%	-21%	18%
Book dollars per cap, 2012	$10.92	$23.08	$49.76	
Change from 2002 to 2012	-70%	-49%	-17%	18%
MLS per thousand, 2012	1.03	1.76	2.92	
Change from 2002 to 2012	-39%	-20%	0%	25%
Staff per thousand, 2012	3.04	5.18	8.64	
Change from 2002 to 2012	-45%	-29%	-12%	15%

Table 1.1 All academic libraries (type reduced for C&I)

Table 1.1 shows the items covered in this book along with the actual figures for the universe of included academic libraries (as explained in the *LTR* issue, some libraries were not included because they either haven't been in existence throughout the period or they failed to submit survey responses in 2002 or 2012). Let's look those elements in order:

- 2594: the number of libraries in this table.
- Q1: Quartile 1, the point at which one-quarter of libraries are lower than the figure and three-quarters are higher.
- Median: Median, the point at which half of libraries are lower, half higher.
- Q3: Quartile 3, the point at which three-quarters of libraries are lower and one-quarter higher. The range from Q1 to Q3 represents half of all libraries. If it's a small range, it could be considered the "normal range" for that particular figure (e.g., if MLS per thousand for a group of libraries is 1.25 for Q1, 1.5 for Median and 1.75 for Q3, that suggests that most libraries in that group have "around one professional librarian for every 600 students").
- Up: The percentage of libraries that have a positive change (or no change) for this element. So, for example, 37% of libraries circulated more items per capita in 2012 than in 2010. ("More" includes "at least as many," but there are rarely any libraries with no change whatsoever over the decade.)

Beyond the Damage:
Circulation, Coverage and Staffing

Walt Crawford

A Cites & Insights Book

- Circulation per cap, 2012: Circulation per full-time-equivalent student.
- Change from 2010 to 2012: This is the only two-year change figure. For some groups of libraries, a graph will show change patterns over the decade. This figure covers two years largely because of the common falsehood that all academic libraries continue to have falling circulation.
- Book coverage, 2012: Book volumes added in 2012 as a percentage of U.S. book titles published in 2012. It's a crude figure, but offers some indication of how book buying has changed over the years. The next line shows how that percentage has changed from 2002 to 2012. This is the *only* figure that's not per capita.
- Book dollars per capita, 2012: Technically, this figure includes other non-serials acquisition spending, but it's at least an approximation.
- MLS per thousand 2012: The number of professional staff (FTE) per thousand FTE students.

- Staff per thousand 2012: The total number (FTE) of staff, including professional librarians, per thousand FTE students.

This table will appear either here or in the supplemental PDF for every group of libraries discussed, along with brief discussion as appropriate.

Graphs

As many as four different graphs may appear for a given group of libraries, either here or in the supplemental PDF.
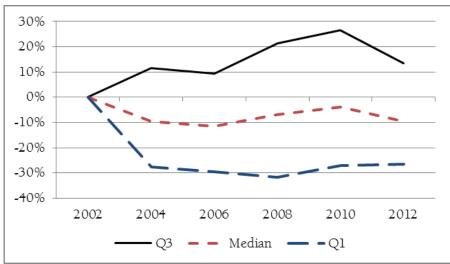

Figure 1.1 Changes in circulation per capita, all libraries

This graph shows changes from 2002 for each surveyed year at the Q3, Median and Q1 levels. Remember that the area from the bottom line to the top line represents half of all libraries in the group.
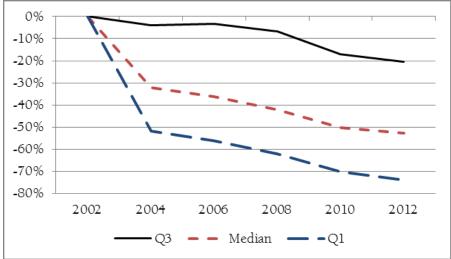
Figure 1.2 Changes in coverage, all libraries

This graph looks at book coverage—and, unlike circulation per capita, it's down for *more* than three-quarters of libraries, with the sharpest drop for half of them coming between 2002 and 2004.
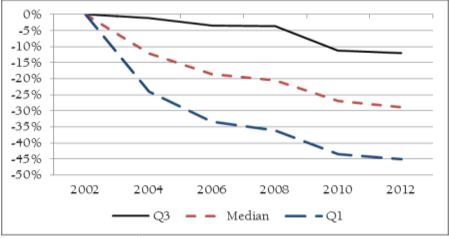

Figure 1.3 Changes in staffing per capita, all libraries

This graph shows changes in staff per capita (that is, staff per thousand students—but percentage changes are the same), also down for at least 75% of libraries, although not so much as coverage.
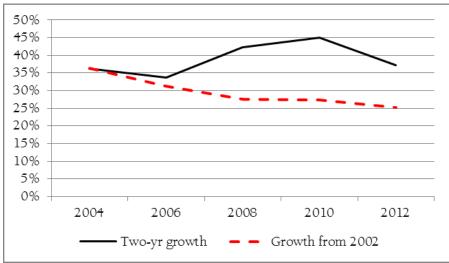
Figure 1.4 Growth in circulation per capita, all libraries

Figure 1.4 shows the percentage of libraries with higher circulation per capita in one report than in others. The solid line compares each biennium with the previous one (it begins in 2004 since the first figure shows change from 2002 to 2004); the dotted line compares each other year with 2002. Note that the solid line is never much lower than 35% and is as high as 45%. It has *never* (at least since 2002) been the case that more than two-thirds of academic libraries had lower circulation per capita than two years before.

Discussion

This book is mostly tables and graphs. I include commentary when I believe there's something especially interesting about a particular set of libraries.

As with acquisitions spending and the damage done by increasing serials prices, the details are probably more interesting than the overview. Remaining chapters show those details in three ways: libraries divided by total budget size, libraries by sector (and community colleges in general), and libraries by Carnegie classification.

The supplementary PDF primarily focuses on "circulation winners," the 25% of libraries with more circulation per capita in 2012 than in 2002, showing what else is different about those libraries. It will also include tables or graphs for some groups of libraries too small to include in this book. (I prepared an initial test run using the same

total-spending criterion as used to distinguish some subgroups of libraries in the *LTR* report. In practice, separating out the 45% of libraries where total spending, adjusted for inflation, has increased since 2002 either made essentially no difference for the metrics in this book or actually made them *worse*, possibly because libraries with increasing spending haven't had to face up to cutting some serials and have, apparently, in general devoted *more* than their increased resources to increased serials prices.)

Getting It

Beyond the Damage is available in two versions, both containing exactly the same text and graphs, both from Lulu at the Cites & Insights Bookstore. The easiest way to find both is probably to go to Lulu.com and search for "Crawford Beyond Damage," especially if you're reading the version of C&I in which hyperlinks don't work.

The [$45 paperback is 6" x 9"](#) and includes full-color graphs. It's 130 print pages (vi + 124).

The [PDF ebook version](#) is also $45, but that gets you explicit permission for multiple use and download from an institutional server: it's a site-license version. The PDF is *precisely* identical to the print version—only the covers are different.

I believe some academic librarians will find this book useful. I believe every library school should own a copy, but that's true for most of my books. In this case, the shrinking likelihood of future studies this broad and comparable makes the publication somewhat distinctive.

Media
Mystery Collection, Part 7

Discs 37-42 of this 60-disc, 250-movie megacollection. Including some movies in—gasp—color!

Disc 37

Cry of the Innocent, 1980, color (made for TV). Michael O'Herlihy (dir.), Rod Taylor, Joanna Pettet, Nigel Davenport, Cyril Cusack, Walter Gotell. 1:33.

> Based on a Frederick Forsyth story and with a first-rate cast, this movie is set in Ireland, where a former Green Beret (Taylor), now an insurance executive in Dublin, is on vacation with his wife and two kids in his second house in Kerry. He goes off with his son to fish—but sends his son back to get the carrier for the catch. At which point,

just as the son gets back to the house, an airplane falls out of the sky, crashes into the house and explodes.

As the movie progresses, he learns what we already knew—the crash was no accident, as there was a bomb in the plane (but hitting the house was bad timing: it was supposed to explode over water), and industrial espionage appears to be at play. He runs into a young woman, a journalist, who has an uncanny resemblance to his dead wife (and who he falls for in time)—Pettet, quite good in both roles. There's a lot more plot, including retired spies and agents in an old folks' home on Corsica and their connected friends, leading up to a fairly remarkable final ten minutes as he takes his revenge while keeping the constabulary happy. (Cyril Cusack as the Irish police inspector is particularly good throughout.)

But right about the middle of those last ten minutes, it began to seem a little familiar. There's a reason for that: I'd already seen the movie—*more than seven years ago*, in another megapack. Still, it was worth watching again. Not great, but quite good: I'll stick with $1.50.

Paper Man, 1971, color. Walter Grauman (dir.), Dean Stockwell, Stefanie Powers, James Stacy, Tina Chen, Elliott Street, James Olson. 1:29.

A college student picks up his mail and finds in it a credit card in someone else's name, sent by a local bank (this was before Visa and Mastercard, I think). His ethics are not wonderful, so next thing we know he's gathered three friends—two women, one man—all of whom have learned to fake the signature he adds to the card. Then they corral a shy computer nerd (Dean Stockwell with Big Hair) who always seems to wear a suit, to add records to "Big Ugly," the campus computer, that will give some credence to the existence of the "paper man." (For some reason, all four of these students also spend loads of time in this computer room—and in at least one case it's not at all clear why.) Then they each go out and charge things on the card (ah, the old imprinters in action!), figuring they'll eventually pay them back, and it's really OK because students can't get credit cards…

That's the setup. A "technician" who's actually in charge of this computer room (the old, huge, lots-of-blinking-lights computer naturally operates *everything* in the building including a pretty sophisticated dummy medical patient) learns about this and agrees to keep it secret. And then…people in the group start dying. In various odd ways. And when the computer nerd decides to remove the records from the computer, he finds that it doesn't work, and also that there's now *more* real-world paperwork for the "paper man," stuff he didn't add.

You can probably see what's coming: Identity theft added to identity creation in order to give a hunted man a new identity. And you can

probably guess who the hunted man is. Or, if you prefer, maybe the computer's the killer! (They sure try to make it look like that along the way…) If you guessed that the survivors are Stockwell and the ever-lovely (and talented) Stefanie Powers, that's not a stretch either.

Classic early-'70s computer: Loads of blinking lights with huge waves of light when it actually does anything, teletype for input, all caps output (DEATH DEATH DEATH…when one of the four is trying to teach it "Breath" in a speech recognition exercise), incredibly powerful and linked up to all the other computers in the world by telephone lines. (Note: IMDB says "made for TV" but in fact this was briefly released in theaters—and what's here is the 89-minute theatrical version, not the 75-minute TV version.)

Especially for its time, pretty good. On balance, I'll give it $1.50.

The Cold Room, 1984, color (TV). James Dearden (dir. & screenplay), George Segal, Amanda Pays, Renée Soutendijk, Warren Clarke, Elizabeth Spriggs. 1:35.

In the first half of this film, a young woman's leaving school to meet her father in Berlin; one of her teachers (a nun) hands her a Berlin guidebook from 1936, while a friend hands her a bag of weed. She meets her father; they drive to *East* Berlin (this was before The Wall fell); the relationship is clearly strained (the father has a girlfriend in East Berlin, the daughter worries about the border guards finding her pot). It doesn't help when they check into a hotel that's *not* one of the tourist hotels, instead being…I guess quaint is the best word.

She almost immediately starts having vivid dreams of Nazi Germany, seeing a butcher in the shop opposite the hotel…which has apparently been boarded up for some years, hearing things in the wall and eventually managing to tear down the wall behind the cupboard and find a man there. Who's a dissident and wants her to contact a person on a specific street. Except that the street was renamed after WWII and the person's long gone.

There's probably more, but I gave up after the first half. This seems to be more a psychological thriller than a mystery, and I just plain didn't like it well enough to keep going. George Segal as the father was OK; Amanda Pays (in her first role, the daughter—but also apparently somebody else, presumably in the second half of the movie) was mostly annoying; and I gave up. One IMDB review says "Incredibly bleak and almost unwatchable." Sounds about right. No rating.

Millions (orig. *Miliardi*), 1991, color. Carlo Vanzina (dir.), Billy Zane, Lauren Hutton, Carol Alt, Jean Sorel, Alexandra Paul, Roberto Bisacco, Catherine Hickland, John Stockwell. 1:50.

The bad news: This flick was filmed in Panavision but what you get here is pan&scan. Oh, and it's a little trashy. The good news: It's stylish EuroTrashy with good production values, loads of casual nudity, almost wholly amoral characters (except the two women, one of them Lauren Hutton, who *don't* get naked and have sex with whoever's handy), and a plot that—while sometimes a little over the top—is fun.

The opening sets the scene for the ethics at play. A drunk gets kicked out of an Italian tavern. As he's walking home, he sees a helicopter explode not too far away. He walks over to it…and removes the wallets and watches from the pilot and passenger, along with a briefcase in the passenger compartment. (As he later says: "Why call for help? They were dead anyway.") As it turns out, the passenger wasn't *quite* dead…

The passenger's an industrial magnate, who has secret plans (guess where they are!) to take his company public and make it one of the ten largest international conglomerates. Now he's in a coma, with his (ex?)wife (Hutton) by his side and his family gathering to look after the company. Or in the case of Maurizio (Billy Zane, who makes a great villain), a nephew, find some way to take over the company by hook or by crook. Preferably by crook.

Zane beds or attempts to bed his sister-in-law, his cousin, the second-in-command of the company's American operations (headed by his father, who she's also sleeping with), hookers sent his way by various people…I lost count. He's a good enough bluffer to be able to determine that his father's been cooking the books, which lets him blackmail his father into making him the acting president of the overall company and…well, it gets complicated.

As far as I could tell, the only two characters who had ethics worth a damn are Hutton's character (the reason she's separated from her husband is because she can't conceive and she thinks he should have an heir with somebody else) and her sister-in-law (I guess: it got a little fuzzy) who doesn't have much of a part. Otherwise—well, even after the more-or-less happy ending, there seem to be at least two more double-crosses waiting to happen.

And, although "millions" really should have been *billions* for one of the ten largest international companies, even in 1985 (really? you could take that large a company public and, when the stock crashes, buy it back for $200 million?), the print's good and the plot just keeps moving. Certainly not a classic, but not bad as an Italian sex-and-wealth-and-intrigue comedy with several American actors, and at 10 minutes shy of two hours it didn't *seem* long. (The sleeve says 1985 and 105 minutes; in fact, it's 1991 and 110 minutes.) I'll give it $1.50.

Disc 38

The Boxer (orig. *Un uomo dalla pelle dura* or "A man with a thick skin"), 1972, color. Franco Prosperi (dir.), Robert Blake, Catherine Spaak, Ernest Borgnine, Gabriele Ferzetti, Orazio Orlando. 1:13.

Let's see if I can get the plot straight. Teddy "Cherokee" Wilcox (Robert Blake), a boxer after a stint in prison and in Vietnam, decides his manager's holding out on him, takes the manager's entire wad ($800) and goes somewhere else—where, as he's being ignored by a diner waiter and making a scene, an old buddy runs into him, says he's in the money (he's an assistant newspaper editor/sportswriter) and takes him home.

After a while, Wilcox says he needs to make some money of his own, so the buddy introduces him to a manager/trainer who's *not* in it for the money, supposedly. We then get to The Fight, in which the manager's called with a threat that if he doesn't throw the fight, he'll be killed—and the manager *tries* to throw it by dosing Wilcox with something that partly blinds him. But he catches on, rinses out his eyes, and wins the fight, and of course says he's gonna kill that manager… Who then calls him, says he needs to talk, Wilcox goes over…and winds up on the floor next to the dead manager. Running out (as the cops arrive), he collides with the beautiful estranged daughter of the manager.

That's just the start. Police Captain Perkins (Ernest Borgnine) grows increasingly exasperated as the daughter perjures herself by identifying a cop in the lineup, the buddy perjures himself with a phony alibi for Wilcox, and the body count keeps growing—the ex-manager, two TV station (I guess) guys trying to work with the fight video and audio, maybe some others? Oh, and a little random footage of a pseudo-hippie at the fight can be lip-read by a deaf professor making the whole scene a little clearer: Big Money's involved and the hippie "balances the books." All of which is sort of resolved in the last few minutes with another two or three murders, the police miraculously saving the day and a fadeout with promise of romance between the daughter and Wilcox.

Lots of plot, but not much of a picture. It's just plain dull. Some of it almost seemed random; some seemed slow and pointless. I guess Borgnine would take any paying job, and the same must have been true for Blake at the time. (I just learned from IMDB that Blake started out in the Our Gang comedies. Now it all makes sense…) R-rated, I guess for all the killings (there's less than a minute missing so it can't be sex that was trimmed from the American release). The print's OK, and on that basis I can maybe come up with a generous $0.75.

Cat O' Nine Tails (orig. *Il gatto a nove code*), 1971, color. Dario Argento (dir. & story), James Franciscus, Karl Malden, Catherine Spaak. 1:55 (1:52).

> It's Italian—with two known Hollywood actors and one of Europe's best actresses for this sort of thing, Ms. Spaak. It has lots'o'plot mostly involving a genetics research company and some sort of idea that we could solve violence by testing all children for the "XYY" deviation that's linked to murderous rage and "separating them" (a euphemism for eugenics? separate them for life? to Italy's version of Australia?). The "cat o' nine tails" refers to nine threads in the mystery, I guess.

> And it's all a bit much. Karl Malden is one lead as a blind former journalist (the sleeve says police detective) living with his sub-teen niece; James Franciscus another, a journalist who gets involved in whatever this story really is. Spaak is the mysterious daughter (well, not really…) of the head of the research firm; she's always showing lots of leg and a fair amount of breast, pretty much demands sex of Franciscus (always happy to oblige) and continues to be mysterious to the end, even after Franciscus puts 2 and 2 together and gets 7. Four murders (two of them shown in loving detail as people are garroted slowly), child kidnapping, industrial espionage (maybe), gay bars…and lots more. Oh yes: also car racing and a humorously incompetent thief they call The Loser.

> I never did quite know what to make of this. Maybe it makes more sense in Italian. But it's stylish in its own way. I'll give it a slightly-better-than-mediocre $1.25.

The Woman Hunter, 1972, color (made for TV). Bernard L. Kowalski (dir.) Barbara Eden, Robert Vaughn, Stuart Whitman. 1:14 [1:10]

> Ah, there's nothing like a plot twist—unless it's one, three minutes before the end of a movie, that makes you go "Give me a break!" Which is the case with this movie. You have Barbara Eden as the wealthy woman who apparently accidentally killed someone with her runaway car, now recovered from the hospital and on her way to Acapulco (I guess) to relax. Robert Vaughn as her husband, a go-getting developer who wants to develop a resort—with her money, natch. And Stuart Whitman as an apparent stalker who, well, stalks her throughout and seems likely to be the jewel thief who murdered somebody else at a party (before the titles). (Larry Storch is in the movie for the first five minutes, telling *really awful jokes* at a party as a woman's being killed outside. The best I can say for Storch is that he was not in the rest of the movie.)

> And then there's the twist. And, you know, *it doesn't work*. Sorry. It left me with a bad taste in my mouth; it just undermined what was otherwise a mediocre little star vehicle, appropriate as a TV movie. (There's also a magic tape recorder—a pocket unit that, somehow,

when you push the Play button goes back to play from the start of the last recording session all by itself. Isn't that convenient?) At best, for a good cast and scenic filming—well, and for Barbara Eden really doing a pretty good job—I could maybe cough up $1.00.

Escape from Sobibor, 1987, color (made for TV). Jack Gold (dir.), Alan Arkin, Joanna Pacula, Rutger Hauwer, Hartmut Becker, Jack Shepherd. 2:23 [1:59]

> While I'm not quite sure this counts as a mystery, it's quite a movie—apparently based on the true story of the one and only time workers in a Nazi death camp managed a mass escape. Alan Arkin is the key man fomenting an escape for perhaps 10 or 20 people—and rethinking that after seeing two people escape, 13 others try and 26 in all shot because of the attempt. Rutger Hauer arrives halfway through the film as leader of a captured Russian outfit—and between the two of them, they conclude that the only way for anybody to escape is for *everybody* to escape.

> I'm not sure it's a great movie, but it's close. I'm also not sure what more to say about it. I'm a little surprised it's a TV movie; the production values seem movie-worthy, the acting's good, and it's just under two hours, long for a TV movie. (Apparently the original was even longer!) Good print, and I'm giving it a full $2.00

Disc 39

Paco, 1976, color. Robert Vincent O'Neill (dir.), Jose Ferrer, Allen Garfield, Pernell Roberts, Panchito Gomez. 1:37 [1:30]

> Paco's a kid living in the hills of Colombia with his ailing father, his mother and his younger siblings; his only real possessions are a donkey and cart. He makes his way down to the village where he tells the priest that his father is very, very sick—so sick that his uncle's on his way from Bogota. The priest performs Last Rites; the father dies; the uncle shows up; there's a funeral.

> Paco wants to go to Bogota with the uncle (Ferrer), who says no, stay here, I have a business there, go back and be the man of the house. But first, since the next bus isn't until the next day, the uncle's going to show Paco a good time: buys him new clothes, takes him to dinner at a "restaurant" (one table, a woman cooking on a home stove)—and would have taken him to the hotel, except that the uncle gambles away his money (with the priest looking on and drinking beer) and, eventually, the kid's donkey and cart; both wind up sleeping on the street.

> Next morning, the uncle says the donkey must have been stolen, says he'll send money to get a new donkey and cart as soon as he gets back to Bogota and leaves on the bus. So we already know the uncle is a liar;

soon enough, we learn that his business is being Fagin to a huge gang of gamines, street thieves for whom he acts as fence and occasional loan shark. (He begs as a presumed blind man when he's not dealing with the street thieves, and apparently has a cozy relationship with the police.)

Anyway…Paco eventually runs away and makes his way to Bogota, in the process having most of his possessions stolen and doing an odd job for which he doesn't get paid. He encounters one of the street kids and keeps looking for his uncle. Then a new plot enters: the uncle had claimed he was a good friend of a big-time movie star…and the kid manages to find the movie star and give him a crucifix necklace for good luck. While the movie star, a former street kid, is now informed by his Family that he must do something for them: steal a huge emerald that's to be shown in a museum. Let's just say the plots intersect thanks to the crucifix necklace and, in the end, the uncle continues to be what he is and Paco goes back home.

I guess the mystery is whether the incompetent jewel robbery (which becomes a smash-and-grab job, and come on, of a gang of four or five people only the actor has any disguise at all and there are a bunch of eyewitnesses…) will be solved and whether Paco will survive. I'm not sure what to make of the movie. The plot (badly mangled on the sleeve summary and equally mangled by IMDB: *Paco is not an orphan!*) seems to bear a fair amount of debt to Oliver Twist; the movie doesn't make as much of the Colombian scenery as it could. It's sort of a mess. But it's not terrible. Maybe $1.25.

The Lucifer Complex, 1978, color. Kenneth Hartford & David L. Hewitt (dirs..), Robert Vaughn, Merrie Lynn Ross, Keenan Wynn, Aldo Ray. 1:31.

Where to start? How about "how did Robert Vaughn and Keenan Wynn both wind up in this atrocity?" It seems to be a one-hour low-budget schlock paranoia movie stretched out to 90 minutes through, well, loads of padding—a guy on an island, with thought narration, who happens to have a cave equipped with a big lights-flashing computer that's apparently actually a laserdisc player with All of Man's Records, including footage that couldn't plausibly have been taken—oh, and although the huge console has a microphone, he doesn't control playback using a keyboard: he twiddles one of many knobs scattered across the console. He mostly sits there staring at the screen and twiddling knobs. He's apparently the Last Man on Earth, which does raise the question of who's filming him, but never mind. For the first half hour or so, he's showing various war clips from WWI and WWII. Then, he goes on to what I assume is Woodstock footage and Vietnam.

Then he gets to The Real War, in 1985, and that's the actual movie. Basically, the Fourth Reich is cloning world leaders and running an operation on an island. Robert Vaughn, an apparently not-very-competent special agent, winds up parachuting onto the island, being captured and uncovering the plot. Or, rather, being told the plot by his captors until he uses his Fancy Moves to get out. Oh, and all the women who've been kept in a barracks (for unclear reasons that have *something* to do with cloning) have apparently armed themselves with submachine guns (maybe they made them during craft period?), so when he gets away, they start shooting up the place. I think half an hour is devoted to this nonsensical mayhem. All of which ends with…it being too late, because by then all the world leaders had been replaced by clones anyway. Which is why the narrator is alone on this wholly self-sufficient, eternally-powered island.

The pacing is…zzz…sorry, nodded off there. The photography is worse than mediocre. The acting…what can I say? It's probably better than the direction. I would say the direction is better than the screenwriting, but you reach a certain level below which it's hard to make fine distinctions. There's no character development at all. The "small group of women who've been under constant watch suddenly become fully armed and wipe out an entire Nazi compound" plot makes no sense. Honestly, I only watched the whole thing because I was exhausted from a hike and kept hoping it would improve. I see from IMDB that the movie, filmed in 1976, was never released to theaters, going directly to TV in 1978. I imagine it was shown mostly after midnight.

This is dreck. It's not "So bad it's funny" or "Nice try by an incompetent team," like, say, *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (a masterpiece by comparison). This is more in the *Apache Blood* category: so bad it's really bad. But at least that horrendous film (which I think was even worse) had good photography; this doesn't. Not worth a cent. The big zero.

A Tattered Web, 1971, color (TV movie). Paul Wendkos (dir.), Lloyd Bridges, Frank Converse, Sallie Shockley, Broderick Crawford. 1:14.

Lloyd Bridges standing on a hill looking down at the young couple in swimsuits strolling far below. Lloyd Bridges in car as guy (from the couple) comes out of apartment building; calls girl, tells her to stay away from the guy. It doesn't take long to learn that Bridges is a veteran cop, that the guy is his cheating son-in-law, that his daughter and son-in-law are living with him (and she's a papa's girl)…and when Bridges confronts the girl again, he winds up accidentally killing her.

That's the setup. The rest of the story is how he tries to cover for it—and simultaneously keep his son-in-law from being blamed. It's not great drama, but it's reasonably well done, with a fairly predictable ending. Broderick Crawford has a remarkable turn as a befuddled old drunk who's killed his best friend and can be convinced that he killed the girl as well. It looked like a TV movie from the get-go; I'm not surprised that it was one. Good cast, TV-movie direction and music, not great but not terrible. $1.25.

Target of an Assassin, 1977, color. Peter Collinson (dir.), Anthony Quinn, John Phillip Law, Simon Sabela. 1:45 [1:42]

Anthony Quinn. John Phillip Law. Hey, how bad could it be?

I honestly can't tell you. First, I had external speakers on. Kept turning them up and up and still couldn't make out the dialog. So switched to headphones. Kept turning them up and up, to the point where any musical cues were way too loud…and *still* couldn't understand the dialog.

Based on IMDB reviews, it's not that I'm going deaf(er)—it's that either the original movie had incompetent sound recording or the transfer (which looks fine otherwise) was absurdly mishandled. After about 20 minutes, I gave up—at least up to that point, it was slow-moving and required the dialog to be worth watching at all. (Actually, based on other IMDB reviews, the flick sounds pretty marginal in any case.) South African; not sure if that's part of the problem. Couldn't watch; no rating.

Disc 40

Death Collector (aka *Family Enforcer*), 1976, color. Ralph De Vito (dir. & writer), Joe Cortese, Lou Criscuolo, Joe Pesci, Bobby Alto, Frank Vincent, Anne Johns. 1:25 [1:29]

What to say about this? I guess it's about a small-time Jersey (New, that is) crook involved with the local crime families, who tries to act as a collector but never actually recovers any money. Eventually, he gets killed.

There's lots'o'plot in between, but the movie failed a personal test: There was nobody—*nobody*—who I found worth caring about. At all. I'm not sure why I even watched the whole thing, except maybe that Joe Pesci (a costar who gets killed partway through) is at least interesting to watch.

The flick establishes its R rating in the first five minutes and seems to glory in showing as much blood as possible. (The picture on the IMDB page, with an alternate title, seems to suggest that Pesci was the primary star. He wasn't.) If you're a big fan of sleazy lowlife crime flicks, it might be worth $0.75. Personally, I wouldn't give it a dime.

The Master Touch (orig. *Un uomo da rispettare* or "A man to be respected"), 1972, color. Michele Lupo (dir.), Kirk Douglas, Giuliano Gemma, Florinda Bolkan, Wolfgang Preiss. 1:52 [1:32]

> Here's another widescreen movie—filmed *very* widescreen, panned & scanned to 16:9. It's not enhanced for DVD—zooming it out loses a little clarity—but it's a pretty good widescreen picture anyway. And, you know, Kirk Douglas, also a Morricone score. And one impressive and long car chase with loads of bumper-car action, with one car pretty much demolished at the end and the other only drivable thanks to suspension of disbelief. Also, apparently everybody in West Germany drives like a maniac with lead-footed starts and hasty stops, and police cars travel in huge flocks.

> The plot has to do with Kirk Douglas, safecracker who relies more on explosives than finesse, getting out of prison after a three-year term and the crime lord who'd gotten him into the failed job wanting him to rob a safe in an insurance company that's protected by incredibly high technology alarm systems. He rejects the idea—but only (apparently) because the only time he ever got caught was when he was working for somebody else. Instead, he recruits a circus trapeze artist who's made an enemy of the crime lord's henchman (there's a lot of fighting in this movie as well, but the henchman ultimately disappears for no good reason). He has this great notion of giving himself a perfect alibi for the 1.5 million-dollar high-tech safe robbery (hey, $1.5 million was a lot of money in 1972—equivalent to $8.4 million in 2013): he gets caught cracking a pawnshop's safe at the same time the other alarm goes off. Easy-peasey: Serve 18 months for *attempted* burglary, get out to retire with the money (after the trapeze artist who *actually* cracks the safe gets his cut). Except that the trapeze artist kills a guard—changing the 18 months to a life sentence. It seems as though the trapeze artist and Douglas' wife…oh, never mind.

> Sorry if these are spoilers, but the plot doesn't make a lot of sense anyway. Defeating the high-tech security system is *way* too easy; the henchman turns out to be a sideshow that takes up close to a third of the movie; and the situation with Douglas' wife suggests that Douglas has all the emotional sensitivity and listening capabilities of a fencepost. The missing 20 minutes might help. It's an Italian production set in Germany, and it's at least stylishly done at times. One IMDB review does point up one thing: None of the characters is really likable, although Douglas comes close enough that I watched the whole thing. All things considered, I'll give it $1.25.

Code Name: Zebra (aka *The Zebra Force*), 1976, color. Joe Tornatore (dir.), Mike Lane, Richard X. Slattery, Glenn R. Wilder, Anthony Caruso. 1:40 [1:20]

We start with seven black guys robbing a (presumably illegal?) casino (I guess in LA), shooting quite a few folks in the process—but it turns out they're not black guys, they're whites wearing uncannily good black masks. The honcho of the group is The Lieutenant, a one-armed Vietnam veteran with half his face badly disfigured: the rest of the group were his squad from Vietnam (where he got blown up by a land mine). He's worked out a plan to rob the Mob (it was a Mob casino) four different ways, then split the money among the eight so they'll be set for life. Hey, why not? They're taking from the crooks (the second heist involves a big load of heroin, which he insists they flush down the toilet: they only keep the money) and keeping for themselves—not *quite* Robin Hood, but close.

Meanwhile, the local mob's brought in a Detroit enforcer because the Detroit capo's son was one of those killed in the casino heist. Naturally, they assume that their black subordinate in East LA is either behind it or leaking info (the robbers always know just where the security is and how to deal with it). In one plot, they decide to set up the black subordinate using the crooked cop (in a tiny little police station that seems a bit odd for LA) and, in the process, take out the cop as well. That happens…but the Vietnam vets also make their fourth and final stop, robbing the local capo's house on delivery day. Unfortunately, one of the vets gets captured.

This all leads to a big gun battle involving the mob, the vets and the police. If I count right, either three or four of the eight (including the leader) survive and escape. There's one final plot twist, but I won't give that one away.

An interesting plot, albeit wildly implausible (there's no explanation for the amount of info the vets have, the mob seems underarmed and generally sloppy, etc., etc.). Unfortunately, once again, there's nobody that's worth cheering for—not even close. More unfortunately, the print's really bad in parts, with serious digitization artifacts. How bad? It's literally *impossible* to read the closing credits and about half of the opening ones. I relied on IMDB for credits—as, apparently, did the people doing the sleeve copy, as both their "star" and their plot are for *another* movie, eight years later, with the same director but an entirely different plot. It's also not, shall we say, a paragon of acting or screenwriting—but there's loads of action. Maybe the extra 20 minutes would help, but I'm guessing not. At best, I'd give it $0.75.

The Cape Town Affair, 1967, color. Robert D. Webb (dir.), James Brolin, Jacqueline Bisset, Claire Trevor, Bob Courtney, John Whiteley. 1:40.

This is more like it. James Brolin plays an expert pickpocket in Cape Town, who lifts a wallet from a young woman on a bus (Bisset, lovely as ever)—a wallet, as it turns out, that was carrying something she was

supposed to deliver to somebody. Who, although she didn't know it, is a Red or Commie (used more or less interchangeably in this of-its-time movie); the delivery is a strip of Highly Important Film (*not* microfilm). And although Brolin's an expert pickpocket, he's identified immediately—because two agents on the bus (trying to find who the wallet's intended for) were watching her, not him, and could figure out when the wallet disappeared. A tie-selling woman (Trevor), Sam, knows all the crooks and, when the cops provide a 50 Rand inducement, gives them four names (based on the guy's methodology), allowing the agents to select his photo.

Thus begins a reasonably fast-moving number with a modest number of complications. I won't even attempt to describe all the plot twists, although—with one huge exception—none of them seems especially outrageous. The huge exception: The villain (not Brolin) is at large, the cops have an all-out bulletin for him (with photos), they know Brolin's address and that the villain's likely to head his way…but when that happens, the cops are nowhere to be found, leaving Brolin to take care of the matter on his own.

That glaring improbability near the end weakens what's otherwise a pretty good flick. The print's good, the cast is good, the acting's good enough, the script is…well, you can't have everything. You get to see a lot of Cape Town at the peak of apartheid (the movie's a South African production) and even with the slightly-weakened ending, I'll give it $1.25.

Disc 41

A Dangerous Summer, 1982, color. Quentin Masters (dir.), Tom Skerritt, Ian Gilmour, Ray Barrett, James Mason, Wendy Hughes, Guy Doleman, Kim Deacon. 1:28 [1:29]

Set in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales, Australia, this fiery movie starts with fire, ends with fire and is about firebugs and insurance fraud. It's also deeply disappointing, in that it can't seem to decide whether it's a heavily plotted situation—or just an insane young man. Mostly it was a paid Australian vacation for James Mason and Tom Skerritt.

It's set in December (summer in Australia). We open with brush fires and school fires simultaneously, so that when Skerritt—the American co-developer for a supposed resort hotel that never seems to be much more than multistory wood framing—sees smoke from a (set) fire nearby and asks for firefighters, he's told they're all busy. We learn a bit later that the chief of the brush fire squad is absolutely convinced the resort will eventually burn down, and apparently not too unhappy about that. Meanwhile, a lawyer at a local insurance company is a bit concerned that the place is insured for $10 million—but only through the end of the year—even though it can't possibly be worth more than

a fraction of that. So is the co-developer, who is told by the person putting up the money that, well, a bit of the bank's money went to "other little projects" like the money guy's yacht. Oh, and the local insurance company, which has reinsured with Lloyds of London, either owns the company that owns most of the resort or vice-versa.

We wind up with a drowned insurance company lawyer who was an excellent swimmer (we see the drowning in some detail, and apparently the drowner felt the need to rip off the top half of the lawyer's swimsuit: she was an attractive young woman). We get various other stuff, including the train the co-developer is on running right into a fire zone and catching on fire. And eventually the partial wood framing that's supposed to be a big hotel burns down (this time through direct arson on Christmas day)—taking the firebug with it. (First, he sets the co-developer's house on fire, with his girlfriend— the co-developer's daughter—upstairs, naked and partly bound. Her father does save her.) And that's it: We get no resolution of any plot other than the firebug himself.

I found it disappointing and, frankly, not all that well done: poor photography, mediocre directing, poor sound, mediocre acting, incoherent editing. Really nothing special. I'm being generous (mostly for Mason and Wendy Hughes) by giving it $0.75.

Mitchell, 1975, color. Andrew V. McLaglen (dir.), Joe Don Baker, Martin Balsam, John Saxon, Linda Evans, Merlin Olsen. 1:37 [1:31]

This feels like the pilot for a TV series—but it also appears to be filmed wide-screen (but displayed pan & scan), so maybe not. Joe Don Baker is Mitchell, a slob of a plainclothes detective who doesn't get along with much of anybody, seems largely incompetent, drinks too much, lives in a studio apartment and seems to be sort of a wreck. He's warned off one case that's called justifiable homicide but that he thinks is murder (because the killer's subject of a big FBI investigation) and told to tail another crook; things start out from there. He's *very* obvious about tailing, winds up having drinks with the crook and saying what he's supposed to be looking for (the crook's been set up by an associate), and…well…lots'o'plot. None of which makes much sense, any more than Mitchell's ~~defective~~, er, detective work

We have Linda Evans as a $1,000/night hooker who shows up at Mitchell's door as a Christmas present (he chooses the wrong crook as the likely donor) and shows up again—the second time, he busts her for pot. But he asserts that he's clean, as in, he doesn't take *cash* bribes. Some interesting car chases; some interesting interactions; and in the end all of the *low-level* bad guys are dead, which doesn't help the FBI or anybody else get to the bigger crooks.

But never mind: it's mostly just a hoot. *Great* cast, and if you suspend disbelief a little it's fun in its own cornpone way. For that, I give it a credible $1.25.

Please Murder Me, 1956, b&w. Peter Godfrey (dir.), Angela Lansbury, Raymond Burr, Dick Foran, John Dehner, Lamont Johnson, Denver Pyle. 1:18 [1:15].

Raymond Burr and Angela Lansbury. In 1956. When Lansbury was a stunning young (31-year-old) femme fatale, and Raymond Burr was (39-year-old) Raymond Burr. It starts with him buying a handgun at a pawnshop, then going into a dark office, turning on a lamp, putting the gun and an portfolio into a desk drawer, then starting a tape recorder in the other desk drawer—and telling the story of how he's going to be murdered in 55 minutes.

It's quite a tale, involving best friends, apparent love, pure gold-digging, a dramatic murder trial and acquittal—and people with and without integrity. Talky, to be sure, but compelling enough. I downgrade it somewhat because the print's jumpy at times, with missing frames and words. Still, $1.25.

The Squeeze, 1978, color. Antonio Margheriti (dir.), Lee Van Cleef, Karen Black, Edward Albert, Lionel Stander, Robert Alda. 1:39.

Great cast (Lee Van Cleef, Edward Albert, Karen Black, Lionel Stander, Robert Alda and more). Interesting concept—retired safecracker (Van Cleef) lured into one more job to help an old friend's son, who soon finds out that the folks he's helping are Bad Crooks (that is, they'd rather shoot helpers than share the loot). Odd side-story that leads up to an interesting triple-cross finale. (There are a *lot* of movies entitled "The Squeeze"—this one's from 1978 and stars Lee Van Cleef.)

Also not anywhere near as good as it could be—but not bad. Unusual to see Van Cleef in something other than a Spaghetti Western, but his looks and personality work here as well. Not a great print, but not bad. On balance, $1.25.

Disc 42

Seducers (orig. *Death Game*), 1977, color. Peter Traynor (dir.), Sondra Locke, Colleen Camp, Seymour Cassel, Beth Brickell. 1:31 [1:26]

Blame it on a mild ongoing headache if you like.

Or blame it on sheer incompetence on the part of the moviemakers.

In either case, after several weeks without watching an oldie, I was looking forward to this. Until it started. I made it through the bizarre credits sequence. I made it through the opening sequence and to the Real Plot, where this apparently well-off middle-aged man is

temporarily deserted by his hot young wife on his 40th birthday (there are reasons), and two young women show up at his front door in a driving rainstorm asking directions to a neighbor's house he's never heard of.

And we're off. After another 10 minutes—his being a gentleman, his rebuffing combined advances from the two young women (both of whom have gotten naked in his palatial bathroom) for, oh, 30 seconds, partial nudity, suggested three-way action, and an odd breakfast the next morning—I couldn't. I just did not give a damn what happened to anybody in the movie, perhaps immediately following what seemed to be a lengthy still shot of spilled ketchup with multiple layers of music over it.

So this isn't a review. Maybe this is a minor masterpiece. Maybe it's noteworthy schlock. Maybe it was the highlight of Sondra Locke's film career (not sure whether she's the young woman with a look that suggests that she regularly lunches on crocodile heads). I'll never know.

After giving up and writing this non-review, I looked up the IMDB reviews. Now that I've read them, I'd guess the chances of my ever going back to see the rest of this movie are considerably worse than the chances of my winning Power Ball. (Which I don't play.) Especially if that damn song gets played again. Not rated.

Kill Cruise (orig. *Der Skipper*), 1990, color. Peter Keglevic (writer, dir.), Jürgen Prochnow, Patsy Kensit, Elizabeth Hurley, Franz Buchrieser. 1:38.

Maybe I'm getting less patient or maybe I just hit a bad run. This movie is considerably less awful than *Seducers*, but after getting halfway through (with difficulty) I found that I just didn't give a damn what happened in the rest of the movie.

It all begins with a storm at sea that kills or badly harms two people on a boat, with the survivor giving his tale to the Gibraltar portmaster the next day and saying he'll head back out soon, because what's the point otherwise? Six months later, he's become a barfly, every day saying he'll head back out soon… Meanwhile, two young British women (typically wearing relatively little clothing) are hanging out in a cheap hotel, singing and dancing (badly) in the California Club the guy hangs out at, and trying to go…somewhere. (One wants to go back to England; the other doesn't.) Somehow, they wind up convincing the guy to take them from Gibraltar to Barbados. His estimated time to get to Barbados in a motor-assisted sailboat is four weeks.

Beyond that, it's various tensions and paranoias, all with a soundtrack that's hard to hear and a style that's hard to care about. I gave up. Maybe you'd like it better. (Reading some of the IMDB reviews, I'm

not sure why Barbados—the destination mentioned at least a dozen times—gets turned into Bermuda.) Not rated.

The Sell Out, 1976, color. Peter Collinson (dir.), Oliver Reed, Richard Widmark, Gayle Hunnicutt, Sam Wanamaker, Vladek Sheybal, Ori Levy. 1:41 [1:26]

> By far the best movie on this disc so far—but that only means it was good enough so I watched the whole thing. It involves some solid actors (such as Richard Widmark and Oliver Reed) and a plot that, although it involves a few too many accidental deaths, at least makes a twisted sort of Spy vs. Spy vs. Spy sense.

> We open with the start of an auto race, at which one driver is shot at long range. Then a KGB higher-up drops by a CIA outpost-head's place, they share a drink, they open up this cabinet full of photos, many of them crossed out. Time to cross out another name (another former agent) on one side—and for the next on the other side to come up, since apparently that's the long game. The next one, in this case, is Gabriel Lee (Reed), a double agent who defected to the Communists—and the action begins, taking us to Israel, where the double agent has an old friend, Sam Lucas (Widmark), an American agent who has supposedly actually retired (which seems implausible) with his wife.

> Lots'o'plot after that, with repeated betrayals, until a somewhat flat ending. Near the ending, we get the final twist, such as it is. Along the way, car chases, shootings, explosions—hey, it's a spy picture. I'm guessing the missing 15 minutes wouldn't make much difference.

> Certainly not great drama, but at least watchable; I'll give it $1.00

Crime Boss (orig. *I familiari delle vittime non saranno avvertiti* or "The families of the victims will not be felt"), 1972, color. Alberto De Martino (dir.), Telly Savalas, Antonio Sabato, Paola Tedesco, Giuliano Persico, Guido Lollobrigida. 1:33.

> "Sociopath Makes Good"—a better title, and a reason why I don't feel particularly good about finishing this flick, even though I did so. There's not one character that I found worthwhile or cared about; Telly Savalas as an important aging Mafioso Don may come close, but not that close. The protagonist is a country boy who comes to the city (Milan, I guess) to make good in the crime scene and shows his cleverness and utter ruthlessness to good effect, eventually moving up to the big leagues, where, of course, he betrays his mentor.

> Good Italian and German scenery. Filmed very wide screen and not panned-and-scanned (but it's not an anamorphic disc: when you zoom, you're expanding not very much visual information, although it's watchable). A protagonist (Antonio Sabata) who always uses his

full name, Antonio Mancuso, and seems to expect others to do so as well. Overall, it's…meh. Charitably, $1.00.

Summing Up

That's the end of the seventh six-disc portion of this 60-disc collection: only three more to go! And it's clear that color with no royalties required certainly doesn't guarantee quality, which is no surprise.

I don't believe I've had another case where five movies out of 24 were so bad that I either gave up on them or refused to give them any dollar amount, but that's the case here. There are also four barely-tolerable $0.75 ratings, some of them charitable, and three wholly mediocre $1 points—and that's half the collection.

At the other end, *Escape from Sobibor* earned a full $2 and three movies were good enough for $1.50, with eight more in the "enjoyable fluff" category, $1.25. Adding in the true mediocrities, I can come up with $19.50 worth of movies.

The Back

You Call That a Subwoofer?

This is a subwoofer—the Magico QSub-18 Subwoofer, featured on the last page of the December 2013 *Sound & Vision* as a "premiere design."

What's so impressive? Well, the beast has two 18" drivers, fed by a 6,000-watt digital amplifier (which, I assume, you'd connect to a dedicated 60-amp circuit if you actually plan to use all that power). It weighs 570 pounds. The footprint is 25" by 37". It's anodized.

Oh, it's also $36,000. If you have to ask…

Of course, a *real* aficionado will buy at least two, since two-subwoofer setups usually offer better sound. (I hear tell…)

That subwoofer might make a good complement to *Sound & Vision*'s February 2014 "Perfect focus" feature non-review (these things are breathless descriptions, not actual reviews): Linn's Klimax Exakt 350 Speaker System. (Linn is from Scotland: the firm's love of "k" has nothing to do with sheets worn at midnight.) Naturally, since it's Linn, you should be playing LPs…ah, but the system actually includes a network music player that passes digital signals directly to each speaker's crossover.

The Klimax Exact speakers include two eight-inch woofers, so maybe they don't really *need* subwoofers, but we're in the right territory here: each system is built to order and the price includes setup and calibration. The price? $80,000.

Now that I think of it, the Magico full-page "it's not an ad, 'cuz Magico didn't pay for it" isn't a review, either—no test results, no rigor,

no nothing. It's another example of "gee, aren't these pricey things wonderful?" crowding out useful content.

Are You a Troll?

It's two years old, but "The Bloggess"'s June 27, 2012 post "How to tell if you're a troll" is still charming in its own way. The writer offers five scenarios, each with four possible answers A-D.

It's fair to say The Bloggess uses a strict definition for "troll," but that's part of the charm of the piece. Several hundred comments, including this wonderful one from Jessica (quoted in its entirety): "This may be the first time I've ever been described as 'a normal human being.'"

Also, The Bloggess has been out among the snarksters too long. She has this to say about people who mostly responded with the "A" choice (which for me is three of five, the other two being "B"):

> You're a compassionate human being or a compulsive liar. You may not actually exist. You are kind and considerate and if I was having a birthday party I would invite you to it. Most people enjoy your company unless they are assholes or trolls. Trolls just want to eat you.

We do exist. We're just less excitable. I'm not all that kind or considerate, but I don't go out of my way to be *un*kind or inconsiderate. Do you?

Prices of the Year

Stereophile's "Products of the Year" roundup is carefully done and offers an interesting look into the range of things these editors found especially worthwhile. What they also say, possibly even more so than the Recommended Components and in a lot less space, is that you can generally pay pretty much whatever you want for audiophile-quality sound.

Take, for example, the loudspeakers. Two units tied as winners, costing (respectively) $106,800 and $200,000 a pair. But runners-up include not only the KEF LS50 Anniversary Model ($1499.99 a pair), which emerges later as the best overall product of the year and as a budget winner—but also the Pioneer SP-BS22-LR, a striking $129.99/pair, which later emerges as one of two Editors' Choices. From $129.99 to $200,000.

No other component category has such wild and wooly price ranges. Amplification component winners (four of them) range from $9,000 to $55,000, with runners-up as low as $1,895; the winning digital component (a CD player!) runs $12,999, with runners up starting at $299; the winning accessory is a $199.99 pair of headphones (not Beats, I can assure you—they're B&W), with runners-up as low as a $29 cable.

Tech remorse: worst gadgets we ever bought

The staff of *ars technica* put this delightful little discussion together [on July 1, 2012](#). It's good for technophiles to bereminded now and then "that chip-based life forms are cold and indifferent," and they name a few of the ones that have given them grief over the years.

Remember the 3Com Ergo Audrey? It was an internet appliance (remember internet appliances?): an odd kitchen-friendly little terminal with an undersized keyboard and a translucent stylus. So if you were leading the connected life in your kitchen in 2001, this might have been *great*—except that it wasn't good for much of anything despite costing almost as much as a real PC. The product line lasted seven months. Or the predecessor to the Kinect—Broderbund's U-force NES controller, a $60 device that could control some games based on holding your hands out in front of it, moving them just the right way at just the right time and, well…read the story.

But those are cute little devices. How about the IBM Thinkpad, circa 1990s? Matthew Lasar bought one and calls it "just about the worst laptop computer that I have ever owned"—for a variety of reasons.

Or the Nextel i30sx, an ugly 2004-era cell phone that could *receive* text messages—but could not send them. Period. Even says so in the manual.

That's just the start. The silly ThunderScan, a "scanner" that worked by replacing an ImageWriter II's print head with a tiny scanner (and you essentially unprinted documents)—but it was only scanning one row of pixels at a time, making it phenomenally slow. The Apple PowerBook Duo and Duo Dock. HP's Mini-Note 2133 netbook. And others. Fun read (unless you owned or own some of these), with several hundred comments. Including, of course, some who argue with the choices made, as is only reasonable: One owner's Droid-the-dreadful is another user's brilliant success.

Austrian city builds public library with nothing but QR codes, NFC and stickers

That's a little too baroque for an *Onion* story—and it's apparently for real, as reported by Alexis Santos in *engadget* [on July 10, 2012](#). It represents one of the more extreme misuses of "public library" I've seen, but there's more.

Here's the story: Klagenfurt, a small Australian city and capital (90,000 people) apparently doesn't have a public library—but Project Ingeborg was sticking up 70 stickers around town with QR codes and NFC chips.

> Plastered throughout town, they direct users to web pages where they can download public domain works, largely from Project Gutenberg.

> Oftentimes, e-books will be located in relevant locations—so you'll be sure to find Arthur Schnitzler's The Killer near the police station, for example. Come August, the team behind the effort will partner with local talent to distribute books, music and other digital content too. In an effort to build a stronger bond to the location, the organizers have prevented search engines from indexing the links, so you'll have to visit Klagenfurt to access the curated goods. If you'd like to turn your city into a library, the group hopes to release instructions for replicating their system soon.

Scattering a few dozen ebooks around town: now *there's* a public library! I'm sure there must be thousands of other cities just anxious to do the same.

Interesting to see a confrontation within comments, with one person calling this a fine example of "how to harness technology to make everything less efficient" and another one saying it's about "placing literature in situationally relevant situations." A third comment in that stream says the project isn't meant to be a library (presumably that's *Engadget*'s term?) and it's more of an arts project and scavenger hunt.

I only saw this story because of Tasha Saecker, who discussed it in "That's Not a Library!" on July 10, 2012 at *Sites and Soundbytes*. The title may hint at Saecker's overall take…and if Project Ingeborg never used the term "library" then she's actually attacking *Engadget* rather than the project:

> Really, what are they thinking?! That is not a library. It's a great project, one that connects people to public domain books, but a library? I think not.

(I must note that *Slate's* somewhat more breathless article on the project—with exactly the same photo—also talks about turning the city into a library, as do other sources, so I'm *guessing* the Project isn't entirely innocent here.)

Saecker objects to calling any old collection (or in this case uncollection) of old books a library, noting among other things that public libraries are so much more than books. Hard to argue with that.

DARPA? Who Dat?

What a great lead for a humor piece: "It's an urban legend that the government launched the Internet."

OK, that's a little *too* broad for, say, the *Onion*: it requires far too much suspension of disbelief. Or, perhaps, it just requires the *Wall Street Journal*, where that was the start of the second paragraph of L. Gordon Crovitz' piece on July 22, 2012. Seems Crovitz was highly offended by Barack Obama's claim that most businesses wouldn't succeed without publicly-funded infrastructure, and his specific example: "The Internet

didn't get invented on its own. Government research created the Internet so that all companies could make money off the Internet."

I don't read *WSJ*; I picked this up from Timothy B. Lee's July 23, 2013 *ars technica* piece, "*WSJ* mangles history to argue government didn't launch the Internet." Lee isn't buying it. (After I read Crovitz' description of ARPAnet as a modest little effort that had nothing much to do with the internet, I gave up on the original article.) Oddly enough, Vinton Cerf never argued with DARPA getting credit for underwriting TCP/IP, and while Cerf is certainly no Jobs, he's also not a shrinking violet. (Cerf and Robert Kahn invented TCP/IP…while working on a government grant.)

Lee points out that giving Tim Berners-Lee credit for hyperlinks is both irrelevant to the internet (the web runs on the internet, but it is not the internet) and, well, wrong: Ted Nelson apparently coined the term and Berners-Lee created HTML, not hyperlinks as such. Oh, and for Crovitz' exaltation of private industry over government, Berners-Lee was working at the time for CERN, which is a government-funded operation.

Michael Moyer comments further on the *WSJ* piece in "Yes, Government Researchers Really Did Invent the Internet" on July 23, 2012 at *Observations*. He notes some of the author's confusions and his "profound misunderstanding of not only history, but technology." He also quotes the author of a book on Xerox PARC that was cited by Crovitz—and that author says "he's wrong. My book bolsters, not contradicts, the argument that the Internet had its roots in the ARPANet, a government project." And there's this sad close:

> In truth, no private company would have been capable of developing a project like the Internet, which required years of R&D efforts spread out over scores of far-flung agencies, and which began to take off only after decades of investment. Visionary infrastructure projects such as this are part of what has allowed our economy to grow so much in the past century. Today's op-ed is just one sad indicator of how we seem to be losing our appetite for this kind of ambition.

Snowball Fights in Hades

Gotta admit, this one surprised me: Ken Pohlmann's April 2014 *Sound & Vision* column. Readers may remember THE BACK in March 2014 and specifically "A Little Deathwatch," where I raked Pohlmann over the coals for pronouncing SACD and DVD-Audio "dead and gone" (and saying that *nobody* remembered SQ; I'm beginning to think that a lot of audio writers are much older and more forgetful than I am!).

Pohlmann now says "I was speaking of mass-market acceptance," which I didn't get from his column then and still don't—but he admits that he was wrong. He apologizes. Amazing.

Who Gets To Be a Geek?

John Scalzi answer that question in [this July 26, 2012](#) *Whatever* post with "Anyone Who Wants to Be." This particular Scalzi entry in the geek/gender/whatever wars was triggered by [a bizarre little item](#) on CNN.com's site by Joe Peacock, entitled "Booth babes need not apply" and starting out with these two sterling paragraphs:

> There is a growing chorus of frustration in the geek community with—and there's no other way to put this—pretty girls pretending to be geeks for attention.
>
> San Diego Comic-Con is the largest vehicle, but it's hardly the only convention populated with "hot chicks" wearing skimpy outfits simply to get a bunch of gawking geeks' heads to turn, just to satisfy their hollow egos.

Reading on, we *of course* learn that Some of Peacock's Best Friends are Beautiful Women who Cosplay. What would a piece like this be without a "Some of my best friends are…" disclaimer?

But Peacock's friends are *real* geeks, not "poachers," and Peacock knows enough to make those distinctions. I'm reminded of a Randy Newman song in which his mother is sitting with him in New Orleans calling out who's what, but let's not go there…

Scalzi's partial response is that he's definitely enough of a geek to disagree with Peacock's Judge of True Geekdom—and his judgment is this:

> Your entire piece is thrown out as condescending, entitled, oblivious, sexist and obnoxious.

Scalzi thinks anyone who wants to be a geek—even for just a day at a con—gets to be one. That simple. And nobody gets to decide who's a geek.

That's a short paraphrase of parts of a fairly long post—but not as long as the comment thread (736!). I did not, of course, read it all. (Scalzi's moderation assures that the long thread will be relatively free of asshattery.)

While it's not *directly* related (Peacock is apparently very strong against harassment), this might be a good place to note another Scalzi classic that appeared a couple of weeks later: "An Incomplete Guide to Not Creeping," [dated August 9, 2012](#). It's by way of responding to a con-goer who wanted "tips on how not to be a creeper" by somebody who tried not to be.

It's a good discussion; I'm only quoting the numbered topic sentences:

1.   Acknowledge that you are responsible for your own actions.

2. Acknowledge that you don't get to define other people's comfort level with you.
3. Acknowledge that no one's required to inform you that you're creeping (or help you to not be a creeper).
4. Acknowledge that other people do not exist just for your amusement / interest / desire / use.
5. Don't touch.
6. Give them space.
7. Don't box people in.
8. That amusing sexual innuendo? So *not* amusing.
9. Someone wants to leave? Don't go with them.
10. Someone doesn't want you around? Go away.

But do read the whole discussion. It may be incomplete, but it's still a pretty good starting point. *Of course* there are hundreds of (moderated) comments, 680 in this case.

This blogpost will cause lasting damage to children's brains

By Dean Burnett, on July 15, 2012, at *The Guardian*'s "Brainflapping" blog. And maybe that's all I should say: Given that title, how can you *not* go read the original?

It's impossible to summarize or paraphrase. Either you'll get what Burnett's saying, or you won't. So, well, go read it if you haven't already. It's still good.

The Future of Local Storage Is Practically None At All

I'm noting this September 19, 2012 item by Louis Gray on his eponymous blog mostly because it's a well-written example of "As I am, so should everyone be" thinking. Key sentence:

> It won't be too long until the concept of a hard drive, or any local storage, beyond that needed for temporary offline use, is itself antiquated.

Gray's an early adopter and admits it—he deliberately "planned to forego the purchase o9f physical media" in April 2011 and "I haven't looked back." So he's sworn off print books, magazines, etc., because, you know, *digital's better*. And the cloud is best. He pretty much doesn't use desktop applications either: he's a ChromeOS fan and "if it can't be reached via web browser, it's probably not worth having."

The key here, though, is that's right for Louis Gray is right for everybody else. Just ask him! Kids should "never need to use or know

about local storage." He says we've now seen how USB drives "now seem…almost completely useless," which comes as a surprise to me. He raises one reasonable objection—not everybody has pervasive truly high-speed broadband—and answers it by saying "but look over here," responding by looking at an entirely different topic.

Apparently Gray lives in that magical world where Netflix really *does* offer *everything* via streaming (and if it doesn't, iTunes must). That must be a nice place to live.

Gray works for Google. The comments are interesting—including one true believer whose response to crappy broadband speeds is "this article is about the future." Odd; it isn't written that way. And, frankly, I don't see that consolidation in the U.S. is likely to make truly high-speed broadband a whole lot cheaper or more competitive any time soon.

Less Good Reviews

You rarely see a *bad* review in any of the audio magazines (or car magazines, or…), and I've seen justifications for why that's so. Still, it is a little odd sometimes, especially when the writers feel the need to mention reality.

Take, for example, Brent Butterworth's review of the REL Acoustics Habitat1 subwoofer in the April 2014 *Sound & Vision*. It's a "terrific industrial design that may work where a traditional sub won't"; it's designed to sit on a wall or even be mounted in the wall, looking a little like a European air conditioner. It costs $1,699. It's easy to install.

But…it's a one-note wonder. The frequency response is narrow, just a few notes around 54Hz, and it won't handle much power. So, it turns out, for $2K you get a snazzy, easy-to-install subwoofer that just doesn't provide any deep bass or volume. I guess you can't have everything. The summary box gives it three of five stars for performance and two of five for value; I guess that's about as negative as you're likely to see.

Masthead

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ14i6on.pdf