Libraries

It's been 2.5 years since the last roundup on library issues—and by then I already realized that I was sufficiently out of touch, and there were so many smarter and younger observers who would do a better job, that the gap made sense. Still, in the spirit of clearing out the remaining tagged items, here's a roundup—mostly on service issues with a few other items. Note that these service-related items start in 2010, the year I stopped doing the Library Leadership Network. (OK, so the first item goes back to 2009—for some reason, these aren't in chronological order.)

Inside This Issue

Library Services

It's not me, it's the user
We begin with an item by Jenica Rogers on September 20, 2010 at *Attempting Elegance*—an item that is especially relevant in 2019, albeit this time around mostly for public libraries and with a very different twist. The general issue is that, when it comes to ebooks and other e-resources, publishers and libraries tend to have somewhat different ideas as to what's right and reasonable.

Here's a key portion of the 2010 situation:

> The problem is that ebooks are, as far as the publishing industry is concerned, a "new" medium. The old rules don't apply. But they want them to! And so do we! *We* want to order the stuff, own it, and use it the way we want to, just like we always have. *They* want to sell it to us at the highest possible profit while protecting their investment in the content, just like they always have.

The problem is in figuring out what those things mean to each of us. And from where I stand, figuring out what's best for the user.

Right now, I'm arguing with a salesman about ebooks that we want to buy. He made promises about "no copying or printing restrictions" for the books. We, thinking like librarians who try to look out for the user, expected that to mean "no copying or printing restrictions" for the books. What it really means, to Legal at the vendor whose job is to look out for the corporate bottom line, is "you can print 30 pages at a time per session, but to print more you must log out and log back in." To us, this means that users will hit a 30 page print limit on a 45 page chapter and, in most cases, believe that they cannot print more. To us, this does not, therefore, mean "no copying or printing restrictions". The vendor disagrees. And so we are at an impasse. They won't change their license. We won't accept less than we were promised when it means the user is done a disservice. They do not license their content outside of their platform. We don't agree with the terms of use on their platform. It's not their primary job to care about our user. It's not our primary job to care about their bottom line. We're both right, and we're both wrong.

Rogers flatly states that she doesn't have the answer—and I suspect we're still in the state of flux she mentions.

You can't please everyone. Don't try.
Jenica Rogers posted this on [December 15, 2010](#) at *Attempting Elegance*, and it's as relevant now as it was then.

Seth Godin writes that [2% of people will complain](#) when they're unhappy with an institution/company/thing, saying, "If you have fans or followers or customers, no matter what you do, you'll annoy or disappoint two percent of them. And you'll probably hear a lot more from the unhappy 2% than from the delighted 98. It seems as though there are only two ways to deal with this: Stop innovating, just stagnate. Or go ahead and delight the vast majority."

I may not be a big Godin fan, but it's hard to argue with that. Rogers points out a suggestion in her library's suggestion box whining about people getting kicked out of the library's individual study areas for (presumably not silent) group study, with the comment "It is our school. We should be able to make the rules." After a graphic comment (which no longer loads), Rogers says:

Nancy Alzo, our head of reference, posted a very evenhanded response which included "It is your school and we work hard to accommodate what all of our patrons ask for within the limits of our facilities and our budget. We offer both group space and individual space because we have requests for both kinds of study areas. You want a rule that suits your particular preference, but take a look at the other comments we

have received recently. Our most frequent "what's wrong" issue has been posed by those who want quiet study. They want a rule that is the opposite of the one you are requesting."

And thus we draw a line in the sand. We will strive to do good work, to provide flexible and useful spaces for our population. But we will not let the 2% who want what they want, and want it now, deter us from trusting our experience, our professionalism, and our goals as we deliver good service to the quiet and, we hope, delighted, 98%.

No additional comment required.

Numbers vs. meaning

This post, by Meredith Farkas on July 21, 2010 at *Information Wants to be Free,* is another one that's still relevant (from a librarian who continues to contribute first-rate commentaries).

I've been thinking a lot about assessment lately and the librarianly love of numbers in assessment, and I'm a troubled by the way that some academic libraries tend to measure how well they are supporting the academic mission of the institution.

Librarians keep a lot of statistics and measure a lot of things. Gate count, reference transactions, instruction sessions, website hits, visits to a specific tutorial or research guide, e-resource usage, etc. We are *big* on numbers. I have no problem whatsoever with measuring things like this and in many cases I think it's essential. The thing I do have a problem with are the unsupported interpretations we often make based on these numbers and the direction they're going in.

That's followed by three excellent examples, such as this:

Reference desk transactions went down. This is a bad thing! We need to try and get them back up! Really? Why? Do you know why they went down? You probably have some theories, but do you know for sure? Is it because you're less approachable or is it because there has been an increase in instruction sessions which helped students become more independent researchers? You need to look at the larger ecosystem beyond the reference desk to figure out why this happened and whether it's a good or bad thing.

And several worthwhile paragraphs of commentary on the issue. I'll quote this brief paragraph that's so true it hurts:

Statistics can tell us a lot of things, but they can also be manipulated to support just about any position. Without actually knowing why something increased or decreased, we should be hesitant about making any judgments.

Ya' think?

Comments also worth reading.

Almost half of poor Americans go to the library for Internet
The story itself, by Matthew Lazar on [March 25, 2010](#) at *ars technica*, is fairly straightforward—key findings from a Gates Foundation survey and report. (The intro also notes that roughly a third of Americans over 14 used library internet services in 2009.) For example:

> • Forty percent of those 2009 users accessed library Internet resources to find employment. Seventy-five percent of these looked for a job online. Half posted their resume or filled out an online job application.

> • Another 37 percent researched some illness or medical problem, or searched for or made an appointment with a doctor.

Then there are the comments—85 in all. *ars technica* comments tend to be more useful than some, but there's always a mix. Consider the first two:

> A while back, libraries were terrified that they'd have no place in the Internet world. It looks like they've found their niche... as Internet Cafes. Give 'em funding.

Yeah, because *nobody* goes to libraries for books or story hours or anything else in this Internet world! And…

> We just need to pass a national computer and internet bill that provides this basic human right.

> Seriously tired of working to give it all away. When I volunteer to work on habit for humanity homes the new home owners 4 out of 5 times have newer/nicer cars than me and my wife. I'd like to have a car newer than 15 years but didn't qualify for cash for clunkers, nor would have participated if I had. Don't have cable or satellite...blah blah blah.

> Cry me a river.

> Maybe my family should just 'loose' our jobs and participate in all those government programs like welfare. After all, as we get taxed more and more, we can come out about the same if we choose to make less money.

Number of times the story mentioned a need for more funding or tax increases: zero. Pretty sure we have a proud non-library-user here, and I'd venture a guess as to their presidential vote six years later…

I was a bit surprised to see how many variations on that second theme there were, some of them much more extreme. (There are also responses, including "Who let all the Randroids in here?")

Then there are strange ones, like this:

> Can someone more mathematically inclined than I tell me if it's actually realistic that 77,000,000 people could utilize the 16,604 public libraries in the U.S. for a reasonable amount of time in a year? How many people a day is that, spending how much time on the internet? It could be completely realistic, it just seems a bit high to me on the face of it.

They did look up the number of library branches and provide a link—but apparently somehow are techie enough to read *ars technica* and either (a) don't own a calculator *or* realize that Google and Bing work just fine as calculators or (b) believe that you need to be a mathematician to come up with 4,639 people per library branch—and that for a library open, say, 75 hours a week (I'm using my own public library as an example), that's an average of 1.2 users per hour over the year. More realistically, if there are an average of 50 users in the library (that would be low for my own library), that means the average user could be making 41 on-hour visits to the library per year. So, no, the 77,000,000 figure doesn't seem high at all.

There were, later in the comments, some responses to that one—including one from a mathematics viewpoint and another from a public librarian.

putting on my positive face

Another one from Jenica Rogers, this time on [December 1, 2009](#) at *Attempting Elegance*. Short and to the point. The first half:

> I have, so far in this reference shift, refilled the stapler, directed two students over to the computer lab to find an available computer, helped one student find her professor's website and then helped her open a .pdf file, told a student to turn down the volume on his iPod, and explained to two students how to print to the color printer. And also helped one student to find sources for her paper on the transition of the Jeep from military to civilian vehicle.

> It would be very easy to get grumpy about all of that. I'm the Director of Libraries, for heaven's sake. What am I doing refilling staplers and troubleshooting the printer?

> I'm helping our students, that's what.

> I'm also watching how our library is used, and by whom, for what tasks, in what way, all of which is information I need in order to make informed decisions about how to lead and direct this library on this campus for these students.

> And… I'm helping our students.

The rest is equally good.

I should apologize for so much of this section being from Jenica Rogers. What can I say? She has thought and written well and clearly for a long time.

Our next reference desk should be a dark room with a closed door

This last piece (for this portion) comes from another of my library heroes, Iris Jastram, posted on [January 26, 2011](#) at *Pegasus Librarian*—and in this case the comments definitely are recommended.

The post begins with a big illustration that doesn't show up at this late date, and continues:

We often joke at my library about how my co-worker and I are always on reference duty even when we're not at the desk because our offices are the first two in the row of offices along the reference room wall. I had been thinking of it as just one of those things… kind of annoying sometimes but not a huge deal. Now I'm wondering if I can learn from it.

I'm sure his experience is similar to mine, but here's mine. Students pop in to ask me where a call number is even when someone's at the desk not 25 feet from me (and far closer to the entrance to the reference room). During the summer when we have "on call" reference, I'm basically always on call, even when I close my door. Today a student worker from the post office asked if she could leave a package with me since the Archives door was closed. (The archives are three floors downstairs.) Last week I was out in the reference area and a student hovered around my closed, dark office door. When asked if he needed to talk to me, he said he just needed help finding if we had the full text of an article. He'd walked right past the staffed desk to find an office, any office, even if it was clearly uninhabited at the time.

This has made me wonder about several things, but two in particular.

1. Are college students that much more comfortable looking for an office than looking for a desk? Office hours are a fundamental part of a college student's experience, and maybe there's something either more legitimate or simply more private about an office.

2. We designed our desk to be unimposing. It's not a fortress; it's a desk much like the other computer tables in the room, except that it's got a sign hanging over it that says "Research/IT" and it's positioned so that you walk directly at it as you enter the room. Maybe unintimidating a red herring. Maybe they're looking for more of a Structure. More of an office… After all, closing my door (and sometimes even turning out my light) should be a bit intimidating, but it clearly doesn't get in their way. They're looking for an academic authority figure, and apparently that comes with trappings that don't include "unintimidating."

That's the whole post, followed by six comments. All worth reading, but especially the last two, one of which raises a third possibility (the second basically agrees):

I think part of the problem is your sign. Think about what it says "Research/IT." It does not say "Help available here" or "Got a question." **Research** is big, imposing, important. Finding a book on the shelf is not research. So, some of our colleagues talk about thinking about the "User Experience." I think that your sign is **one** part of your problem. [Of course, I am writing this sitting at a desk with a big, old fashioned sign which says "Reference Desk."]

Miscellany

I had three items tagged "lib-humor" and one tagged "lib-issues." One of the four disappeared, and the other three just didn't stand up at this late date. So here's what's left—and it certainly (to me, at least) verifies that I made the right decision in abandoning the "libraries" section.

Cheapskates love libraries (it's mutual)

Cory Doctorow wrote this on April 10, 2012 at *boingboing*, and it's aged pretty well.

> Libraries aren't just the mark of a civilized society -- assembling, curating and disseminating knowledge to all comers! -- they're also a cheapskate's best friend. Anyone who's interested in saving money probably already knows about the free Internet access, daily newspapers, DVD and audiobook borrowing, and book lending (duh). But local libraries go beyond that -- many host community meetings, book readings for kids, author signings, and workshops, as well as providing free or low-cost meeting spaces.
>
> My favorite cheapskate pro-tip for libraries is asking reference librarians really hard, chewy questions. For example, any time I have a question about science fiction literature ("When did William Gibson first utter 'The future is here, it's just not evenly distributed'?" or "What was the time atomic weapons appeared in science fiction?") I ask the librarians at the Merril Collection, Toronto's incredible science fiction reference library, whose librarians are ninjas in such matters. But it's not just esoterica: many's the time I've walked into a good library and asked the reference librarians for help with something really chewy -- the sort of thing I might otherwise pay a researcher to find. Unlike a paid researcher, reference librarians usually don't just give you the answer, but rather take you by the hand and guide you through the use of library resources (including proprietary databases that aren't accessible over your home Internet connection), giving you an education in problem-solving as well as the solution to your problem.

There's a bit more, and it also exudes the sense of somebody who not only *likes* libraries but *uses* them. Either there were no comments or they've disappeared, as digital content is wont to do.

But Is It a Library? – Reflections on 'Little Free Libraries'

This piece, by Peter E. Murray on April 14, 2012 at *Disruptive Library Technology Jester,* is an interesting take on Little Free Libraries (and their unlicensed cousins). You know what they are:

> There are these places popping up around the country where people are putting out books in containers ranging from little huts to hutches to converted fire extinguisher cases for others to take, share, and return

or substitute with a book of their own. In some cases, they are even replacing closed library branches.

What I find especially interesting is that Murray comes to a different conclusion as to his title question than he originally expected. The start:

> As librarians would tell you, a 'library' is so much more than that. Libraries are less about the physical artifacts and more about the connections made with people and between people and ideas. It is just that libraries have been focused on the lending of physical artifacts for so long that they have become synonymous. Particularly as we now start the era of ideas encoded in digital form and many begin to wonder what will become of that place called the 'library' as the predominance of the physical form declines.

OK, in 2012 it was reasonable to suggest that physical books in public libraries might dwindle away—at the time, the Digital Juggernaut was seen by many to be unstoppable. But that's not the point:

> I changed my mind as I read one story with the title Using books to build community. Part of a supplement to an NBC Nightly News story, the article says:
>
> > And each one has become more than just a place for getting books and leaving books. [Todd] Bol said the little libraries have fostered a greater sense of community.
> >
> > "There's a primal need," he said, "for people to be a part of their community. We have people tell us all the time in seven days of having a Little Free Library I've met more people than I have met in 20 years in my neighborhood."
> >
> > In Madison, Wisc., Meghan Blake-Horst put a little library in her front yard. "It's a continual conversation piece," she said.
> >
> > Terri Connolly Cronk, who also lives in Madison, said people in the neighborhood who never stopped and talked before are stopping now because of the library that rests on the corner of her property. The library is not just encouraging readers, it's giving neighbors opportunities to get to know each other.

Not sure whether I entirely agree, but Murray makes an interesting case here. At least for some LFLs.

50 Years of ITAL/JLA: A Bibliometric Study of Its Major Influences, Themes, and Interdisciplinarity

This fairly long article by Brady Lund appears in the June 2019 *ITAL*—albeit with a typo in the title (the last word appears as "Interdisplinarity"). It seems like a plausible way to end my discussions of libraries, since to the extent that I had peer-reviewed articles, they appeared here.

Over five decades, [Information Technology and Libraries](#) (and its predecessor, the Journal of Library Automation) has influenced research and practice in the library and information science technology. From its inception on, the journal has been consistently ranked as one of the superior publications in the profession and a trendsetter for all types of librarians and researchers. This research examines ITAL using a citation analysis of all 878 peer-reviewed feature articles published over the journal's 51 volumes. Impactful authors, articles, publications, and themes from the journal's history are identified. The findings of this study provide insight into the history of ITAL and potential topics of interest to ITAL authors and readership.

That's the abstract. The article appears (PDF) as [a separate link](#).

I won't attempt to summarize the wealth of stuff here. Apparently, I'm the tenth most cited author (but four of the top nine are institutions or corporations)—but seventh in *ITAL*. But that's just a little egoboo: it's an interesting article.

Conclusion

Started with 22 items; wound up with nine. And that's it for libraries in *Cites & Insights*—but, of course, I expect to keep using public libraries as long as I'm able. And maybe a little beyond that.

Media

One last roundup, this one including a few more recent items. Early in the days of *Cites & Insights* (and its predecessors, "Crawford's Corner" and "Trailing Edge Notes" in *Library Hi Tech News*), I frequently took issue with Digital Absolutists and their cry that print books were Inevitably Doomed and that this was A Good Thing. I wasn't ready to go out on a limb and say print books would necessarily be a big part of reading forever—but I felt that public libraries should respond to public demand and usage, not reallocate substantial portions of the book budget Because Digital.

That said, the first part of this is about text, books and reading.

Books and Reading

Is this the end for books?
Sam Leith wrote this on [August 14, 2011](#) at *The Guardian*, and it's a charmer—but also a bit hard to summarize. So I won't. Fundamentally, Leith believes long continuous narrative texts—call them "books"—are here to stay, whether in digital or print form (he owns a Kindle and finds it entirely adequate—but prefers paperbacks). He also thinks *how* we read

long-form text is less interesting that we continue to do so—and at this point, I'll just point you to the essay itself.

Debating Literacy

This post, by Mike Ridley on [January 10, 2012](#) at *Exploring the Information Ecology*, is a response of sorts to John Miedema's post prior to a debate the two (ahem) white men were to have at the OLA SuperConference with the topic: "Beyond Literacy: Reading and Writing are Doomed."

I find his argument somewhere between mystifying and preposterous, with "extended joke" as an alternative. Key portions (I'd quote the whole thing, but the Creative Commons license is BY-NC-SA, a maddening version that appears to preclude use in a CC BY publication):

> No, the real issue (dare I say problem) is not about books (paper, digital, whatever), or the Internet (it really isn't making us stupid), or any of the new media. The real issue it is that the tool we use as a fundamental building block for all this is showing its age: the alphabet.

> The alphabet is the essence of literacy. Reading and writing are doomed because the alphabet is toast; it needs an upgrade; we need Alphabet 2.0.

> …Literacy is a tool, it is also a prison.

> Being "anti-literacy" is not a very popular position but nor is it what I intend. For me post literacy is not some new Dark Age. It is the broadening of human potential; it is the opportunity to breakdown barriers among people; it is a very exciting future state.

> Transitioning to post literacy will not be easy; transitioning to literacy wasn't either (Plato was deeply suspicious of the alphabet; see Phaedrus; and he was right to be concerned, writing destroyed memory, the essence of his world of ideas).
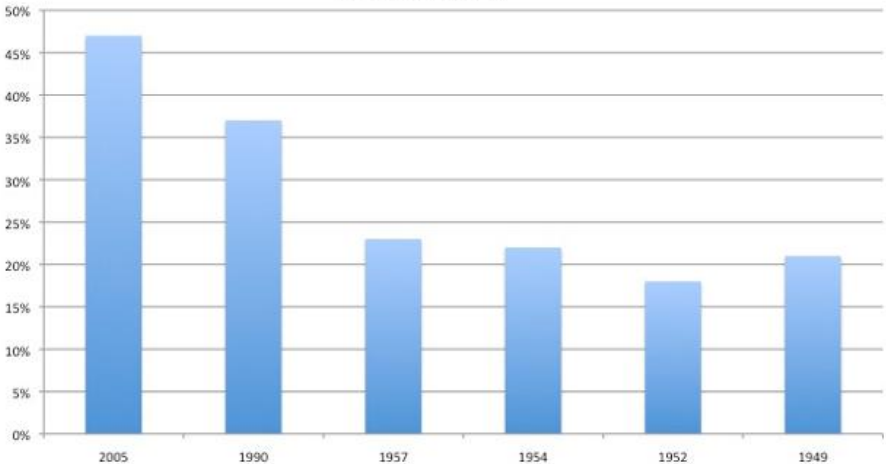
> So I will leave you with this thought: the future is not digital, it is biochemical.

To which I can only say: *Wha?*

The Next Time Someone Says the Internet Killed Reading Books, Show Them This Chart

This piece is by Alexis Madrigal on [April 6, 2012](#) at *The Atlantic,* and it leads off with this:

Do you happen to be reading any books or novels at present?
(% answering yes)

Maybe that's all that needs to be said (and I'm guessing more recent surveys aren't drastically lower). As Madrigal says:

> Remember the good old days when everyone read really good books, like, maybe in the post-war years when everyone appreciated a good use of the semi-colon? Everyone's favorite book was by Faulkner or Woolf or Roth. We were a civilized civilization. This was before the Internet and cable television, and so people had these, like, wholly different desires and attention spans. They just craved, craved, craved the erudition and cultivation of our literary kings and queens.

> Well, that time never existed. Check out these stats from Gallup surveys. In 1957, not even a quarter of Americans were reading a book or novel. By 2005, that number had shot up to 47 percent. I couldn't find a more recent number, but I think it's fair to say that reading probably hasn't declined to the horrific levels of the 1950s.

> All this to say: our collective memory of past is astoundingly inaccurate. Not only has the number of people reading not declined precipitously, it's actually gone up since the perceived golden age of American letters.

There's more discussion here, but I'm just going to quote *and take issue with* one section:

> After I posted this chart, Twitter friends made some good points: 1) This chart does not establish that high-quality literature readers have increased. That is true. 2) There are a lot of factors that go into these numbers and variables that are unaccounted for. 3) The big spike is partially driven by higher levels of higher education attainment. 4) Perhaps the quality of books has fallen, even as the number of readers has grown.

Points 1 and 4 are, essentially, the similar snobbish replies: they're not reading Quality Fiction (as defined by my in crowd). It's fair to say, regarding the rest of the post, that Madrigal isn't buying the Death of Longterm Literacy. Neither am I.

As Independent Bookstores Make A Comeback, E-Book Sales Take A Dive

This one's fairly recent, by Chloe Anagnos on December 22, 2018 at the Foundation for Economic Education…and as far as I know the trends continue. I do question the tease:

> With everything in our lives going digital, the simple joy of reading a physical book has become a novelty once again.

How about: Real people never entirely bought into "everything in our lives going digital"—and a growing number of them patronize real bookstores (with real print books).

> Some key figures:

> With bookstores in more than 2,400 locations across the country, hardback and paperback book sales have grown 6.2 and 2.2 percent, respectively. That, along with the fact ABA's membership is growing, shows us there's a real demand for physical books over their digital version. That's particularly true if you observe that e-book sales fell by 3.9 percent this year alone.

> Overall, the sales of both paperback and hardback books generated nearly $4 billion to the publishing and independent bookstore industry during the first nine months of 2018, while e-book sales brought in only $770.9 million.

I believe that 2,400 refers to independent bookstores. The close:

> While it's difficult to argue against the convenience of e-books, it's also easy to see why shopping for physical books makes so many of us happy. Perhaps that is the lesson behind the triumphant comeback of independent bookstores: economics is all about human action, and trying to pin it down or dictate it by law will always backfire.

A Cohen Trilogy on Print Books in Academic Libraries

Three recent pieces that explicitly deal with book circulation in *academic* libraries—starting with Dan Cohen's *The Atlantic* article.

The Books of College Libraries Are Turning Into Wallpaper

Dan Cohen published this article on May 26, 2019 in *The Atlantic*. The tease and lede:

> University libraries around the world are seeing precipitous declines in the use of the books on their shelves.

When Yale recently decided to relocate three-quarters of the books in its undergraduate library to create more study space, the students loudly protested. In a passionate op-ed in the *Yale Daily News,* one student [accused](#) the university librarian—who oversees 15 million books in Yale's extensive library system—of failing to "understand the crucial relationship of books to education." A sit-in, or rather a "browse-in," was held in Bass Library to show the administration how college students still value the presence of books. Eventually the number of volumes that would remain was expanded, at the cost of reducing the number of proposed additional seats in a busy central location.

Cohen cites other instances to show that Yale's not an outlier in this regard. To summarize:

The Association of Research Libraries' [aggregated statistics](#) show a steady decrease of the same proportion across its membership, even as student enrollment at these universities has grown substantially.

It's not that university libraries aren't being used: they are, but not so much for print books. Then Cohen grounds the discussion nicely:

What's happening here is much more complicated than an imagined zero-sum game between the defenders of books and library futurists. The decline in the use of print books at universities relates to the kinds of books we read for scholarly pursuits rather than pure pleasure, the rise of ebooks and digital articles, and the changing environment of research. And it runs contrary to the experience of public libraries and bookstores, where print continues to thrive.

Unlike most public libraries, the libraries of colleges and universities have always been filled with an incredibly wide variety of books, including works of literature and nonfiction, but also bound scientific journals and other highly specialized periodicals, detailed reference works, and government documents—different books for different purposes. Although many of these volumes stand ready for immersive, cover-to-cover reading, others await rarer and often brief consultations, as part of a larger network of knowledge. Even many monographs, carefully and slowly written by scholars, see only very sporadic consultation, and it is not uncommon for the majority of college collections to be unused for a decade or more. This is as it should be: Research libraries exist to collect and preserve knowledge for the future as well as for the present, not to house just the latest and most popular works.

There's quite a bit more, and it's well-argued. (Cohen is Dean of the Library at Northeastern University.)

Print book reading is surging, just not in research libraries
Cory Doctorow flipped this discussion in a [May 28, 2019](#) piece at *boingboing*. He's commenting on Cohen's article (which he calls "excellent," and I'd agree).

> US booksellers and public libraries are reporting strong growth in demand for print books, but research libraries are increasingly serving as archives, rather than references.

> Despite this, there is little political will to reorient academic research libraries around electronic materials; attempts to reduce print collections or move them to long-term storage are staunchly opposed by students and faculty who often win their battles…but then fail to patronize the libraries they've saved, a phenomenon documented in an excellent *Atlantic* article by Dan Cohen, Vice Provost for Information Collaboration at Northeastern University.

> …

> I'm torn here. I love the idea of long-term preservation of books (the Internet Archive is trying to amass every book ever published, scanning them and then preserving them in giant, climate controlled warehouses), it's also clear that the use-case for research is very different from other forms of reading, and libraries have finite resources that should be oriented around serving their patrons needs -- and what the patrons demonstrate a need for is very different from what they demand.

An interesting range of comments, some helpful, some less so.

On the Response to My Atlantic Essay on the Decline in the Use of Print Books in Universities
Dan Cohen posted this on [June 6, 2019](#) at his blog.

> I was not expecting—but was gratified to see—an enormous response to my latest piece in *The Atlantic*, "[The Books of College Libraries Are Turning Into Wallpaper](#)," on the seemingly inexorable decline in the circulation of print books on campus. I'm not sure that I've ever written anything that has generated as much feedback, commentary, and hand-wringing. I've gotten dozens of emails and hundreds of social media messages, and *The Atlantic* posted (and I responded in turn to) [some passionate letters](#) to the editor. Going viral was certainly not my intent: I simply wanted to lay out an important and under-discussed trend in the use of print books in the libraries of colleges and universities, and to outline why I thought it was happening. I also wanted to approach the issue both as the dean of a library and as a historian whose own research practices have changed over time.

> I think the piece generated such a large response because it exposed a significant transition in the way that research, learning, and scholarship

happens, and what that might imply for the status of books and the nature of libraries—topics that often touch a raw nerve, especially at a time when popular works extol libraries—I believe correctly—as essential civic infrastructure.

But those works focus mostly on *public* libraries, and this essay focused entirely on *research* libraries. People are thankfully still going to and extensively *using* libraries, both research and public (there were over a billion visits to public libraries in the U.S. last year), but they are doing so in increasingly diversified ways.

There's more to this post, and it all adds usefully to the discussion.

Music and Audio Media

What Is Going on with the Record Industry?
I suppose this fairly long piece by Andy Doe, posted November 7, 2012 at *NewMusic USA*, is a listicle, as most of it consists of ten things about the music industry, from the perspective of a fairly successful person involved with what he calls "art music": classical music, new music and jazz.

There's no good way to summarize this or comment on it. I found it refreshing and useful, especially as Doe pushes against The Industry and focuses on The Record.

Same Old Song? Not Exactly.
This article by Dave Mandl appeared May 10, 2013 at *Slate*. The tease:

Many classic hits are secretly re-recorded. Can this be stopped?

Can re-recording be stopped No—and it shouldn't be. Can *secret* re-recoding be stopped? Probably not…

Re-recording? That's when an artist goes back and creates a new version of a song they previously recorded. It happens a lot, and it's not new: as the article notes, when Frank Sinatra started his own record label (Reprise), he made a series of albums re-recording his Capital hits.

It turns out that many oldies hits have been re-recorded by the original artists in recent years, and in most cases for a simple reason: royalties. As Irwin Chusid, a music historian and producer (who's also a colleague of mine at WFMU) explained to me, most of these artists were still bound by ancient contracts that they signed when musicians routinely got the short end of the stick—and also, to be fair, when few people imagined the fortunes that would one day be reaped from licensing songs to filmmakers, TV producers, and advertisers. The result was that these contracts provided the artists with "a pittance, if anything," according to Chusid, for "sync licensing," the fee paid to a recording's owner for the use of that recording. (This fee is not to be confused with the songwriting royalties paid to the song's composer.)

Today, film licenses for popular songs are frequently in the five figures, and the licenses for commercials and movie trailers can go even higher. Short of renegotiating an expiring contract, which is rarely an option, Chusid says, "those artists have every incentive to re-record and try to license" the new recording with a fairer royalty arrangement.

…

Today, film and TV licensing are often more lucrative than record sales—especially for oldies groups who haven't been in the charts for decades but whose recordings are frequently used on soundtracks. Often, independent films can't afford to license original recordings of hit songs, because record companies ask for prices that could blow their budgets 10 times over. The labels have no particular incentive to slash those prices: Given their size and overhead, it's not worth their time to license a record for $5,000. But to an artist, $5,000 is real money. So when an artist re-records a hit and keeps the sync licensing fee for himself, it's a win-win for recording artist and filmmaker. As the musician and producer Dave Amels told me, "This whole sector of the business is ignored by major labels because there's not enough money out there. An artist can license the [re-recorded] master for less money to the film producer, but get more."

There's more to the discussion. As a Gordon Lightfoot fan, I was aware that "Gord's Gold" was a re-recording on Reprise/Warner Brothers of songs originally released on United Artists (which then released a "United Artists Collection") I own both; in almost every case, the recordings are *distinctly* different—and in most but not all cases, I like both but prefer the original. It would be nice to have transparency, to be sure.

Summing Up: The Limits of Nostalgia

Of 14 items on books and reading, eight made the grade.

Of seven items on music, two made the grade.

Everything else either disappeared, hadn't aged well, or was from a writer I could no longer deal with.

Intersections
Open Access Issues

I've written a lot lately about the economics of access and the ethics of access, along with various pieces related to my research on what's actually out there. Indeed, I had a cluster of articles all set up to do another economics roundup before various events sidelined it.

This one's not primarily about ethics or economics. It's about some other aspects of OA discussions and controversy. The seven sections here

overlap, to be sure, and I see another 50+ articles that *might* belong in one of these seven sections. This roundup began with more than 100 tagged items, reduced to 87 while subtagging them (404s, duplicates, articles behind partial paywalls, etc.). We'll see where it winds up. As usual, order is more-or-less chronological (oldest first) within a section. But first…

Well, no, there's something else. Partway through this essay, I was sidelined in a hospital for 11 nights—and I won't be back to 100% for a while yet. Returning to this essay, I encountered a blank essay. Going to the trashbin didn't help. I track changed files on a flash drive, and that did yield this (through the end of "Access"). It appears that two sections with about nine items are simply gone, and I won't try to retrieve them. It's also *possible* that from "Where I Stand" through "Access" is a repeat—but I can't find any evidence of that. In any case, I'll add the remaining two sections and call it a day for Intersections essays in *Cites & Insights*. [After writing this, I wound up in the hospital *again*—but for only four nights. Sigh.]

Where I Stand: Additional Notes

I tried to summarize some of what I *personally* feel about OA in the [September 2017 issue](#) (pages 4-12). If you haven't read that essay, I recommend that you do so, and I won't be repeating the points here. There are a couple of additional comments possibly worth making, though:

➢ **Single solutions almost never work**. I believe that's true for universal mandated green OA (even if that was possible), academic librarians throwing themselves under the bus by unilaterally dropping all subscriptions, the "big flip" or any other single solution—probably including 100% OA as a solution.

➢ **"Universal access" that's both parasitical and illegal is not a solution**. I've stayed away from Sci-Hub in general, but *give me a break*.

➢ **"Eventually readable" is not open access**. I'm unimpressed by studies that half of some set of articles are openly readable after some period of time, presumably after most of their value in continuing research efforts has already lapsed.

➢ **Getting to 21%-33%% true OA is *not* failure: it's slow success**. (That 21% figure assumes 2.5 million articles and pure-gold 2016 article counts, *DOAJ* journals only; the 33% count adds gray OA but also uses 2.9 million articles, assuming that the 400,000 additional OA articles aren't in the traditional indexes.)

➢ **There is no monolithic Open Access Movement**. That should be obvious to anybody who's paid attention.

➢ **100% OA would solve one problem but not others.** OA won't bring us to the Promised Land (nor will open data). It will make more scholarly articles available to more people. It won't inherently make them more readable or valid, and it won't do much for people without access to the internet.

➢ **"Inevitable" applies to death—**and that's about it. OA is no more inevitable than the death of print or the long-term survival of the U.S. as a functioning democracy.

➢ **100% OA is improbable.** I'd say nearly impossible in my lifetime, but that's probably no more than a quarter century.

I could go on (and on and on…), but let's get on with the citations.

Myths

Some items focusing on some of the persistent myths surrounding OA, mostly setting aside economics and ethics.

Keeping an Open Mind about Open-Access Science
This commentary by Dorothea Salo appeared October 23, 2013 on the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery website.

> No one likes "pay $40 to read this article" come-ons. No one likes getting no response from principal investigators after asking for the data they promised to share in their latest article. Researchers are busy people; nobody wants to run headlong into a brick wall when all they're trying to do is look at something useful.

Salo notes the "fundamentally fatal brokenness of current scholarly publishing and focuses on what researchers themselves can change. After a bit more background she comments on half a dozen common OA myths:

1. "The only way to provide open access to peer-reviewed journal articles is to publish in open-access journals." (No! You can also use repositories like PubMedCentral, arXiv, SSRN and Wisconsin's own MINDS@UW.)

2. "All or most open-access journals charge publication fees." (Exactly backwards! As a percentage of total available journals, more paywalled journals than open-access journals charge author-side fees.)

3. "Most author-side fees are paid by the authors themselves." (No. Grants often pay, and the University Libraries offer a fund to help out as well.)

4. "Publishing in a conventional journal closes the door on making the same work open access." (No. Most of the time you can still put your work in a repository!)

5. "Open-access journals are intrinsically low in quality." (No. There are high-ranking open-access journals in many, many fields now.)

6. "Open-access mandates infringe academic freedom." (No. How does this make sense? Forbidding sharing is what infringes academic freedom!)

There's more:

> The most common reason researchers I talk to turn away from open access, both for themselves and those they mentor, is that they fear open access will endanger hiring, tenure or promotion chances. Often they are victims of Myth 1. Uninterested in open-access journals, these researchers just plain haven't considered open-access repositories.

> It makes intuitive sense that open access would help careers, not hurt them. The easier it is to find a researcher's work, and the fewer paywalls and other barriers between that work and its readers, the more readers the work gets, and the more careers benefit. We don't know exactly why yet, but repeated studies have demonstrated increased citations for open-access articles, and we are starting to see studies demonstrating an allied citation benefit for articles whose underlying data is openly available.

No additional comment required.

The 3 dangers of publishing in "megajournals"–and how you can avoid them

This piece, appearing April 3, 2014 on the *Impactstory blog*, focuses on one specific area, megajournals. (They define megajournals as "online-only, open access journals that cover many subjects and publish content based only on whether it is scientifically sound." My studies tend to avoid the term; when I do use it, it's for OA journals publishing at least 1,000 articles in the most recent year studied.)

> You get that *PLOS ONE, PeerJ* and others offer a path to a more efficient, faster, more open scholarly publishing world.

> But you're not publishing there.

> Because you've heard rumors that they're not peer reviewed, or that they're "peer-review lite" journals. You're concerned they're journals of last resort, article dumping grounds. You're worried your co-authors will balk, that your work won't be read, or that your CV will look bad.

They then define three myths and how to deal with them. Briefly:

➢ **My co-authors won't want to publish in megajournals**. They suggest showing coauthors "the data" demonstrating that megajournals publish "prestigious science"; that such journals "boost citation and readership impact"; that they "promote real-world use"; that they "publish fast"; and that they "save money" because

of economies of scale. Unfortunately, most of the argumentation has *nothing* to do with megajournals (except possibly the first and last) and everything to do with OA journals.

➢ **No one in my field will find out about it**. The argumentation basically says "you can promote your article via social media." Once again, nothing to do with megajournals as such.

➢ **My CV will look like I couldn't publish in a good journal**. "So, it's your job to demonstrate the impact of your article. Luckily, that's easier than you might think." Via article-level metrics and social media, apparently. Oh, and using Impactstory profiles.

It's not a bad article, but I believe it's misnamed, given that most of the touted advantages of megajournals are true of all OA journals—and there are certainly some newer "megajournals" that hardly qualify as cheap, given that one megajournal charges a low, low $5,200 per article.

Common myths about open access...busted!

From the BioMedCentral blog, and there's no date on the item but I tagged it on <u>October 22, 2015</u>.

With open access publishing making up an increasingly growing element of the scientific literature, attitudes are certainly changing. However, many authors still have preconceptions about open access, which we aim to expose as myths, and then bust them with real–life data and examples.

The myths:

MYTH "Publishing my work open access is a nice thing to do, but there is nothing in it for me."

MYTH "I can't publish open access because I don't have the funds to pay an Article Processing-Charge (APC)."

MYTH "I've checked and I really don't have access to any funds to publish open access."

MYTH "Open access articles are not peer-reviewed."

MYTH "Open access articles are not copyrighted."

MYTH "Publishing my article open access in a journal means I will comply with my funder's OA policy."

Expansions for every myth—but the last one's generally *not* a myth and the second and third have one problem in common: they rely on a fundamental myth that BMC seems to regard as a truth: that all gold OA involves article processing charges. Thus, the expansion on the third "myth" offers as responses that you can ask for a waiver, that maybe your *institution*

could prepay APCs—or that as a last resort you could go green OA. That there are thousands of gold OA journals that don't charge APCs? Not a word. Consider the source, I guess—BMC, now part of SpringerNature.

Misleading open access myths
Also from BMC, but indirectly—copied-and-pasted from the Wayback Machine to Graham Steel's *McBlawg* on February 21, 2016, it deals with "the most common myths highlighted in the UK's Select Committee on Science & Technology 2003-2004 inquiry into scientific publishing and open access." Unfortunately, the cut-and-paste fails at times, with the same text appearing multiple times.

Yes, this is now old stuff—but some of the quotes from written or spoken testimony to the committee, supporting one or more of the myths, are fairly astonishing. For example, Elsevier's Crispin Davis:

> All of us are committed to increasing accessibility of scientific content. I would argue that in the last ten years we have made a huge contribution to that, and I think 90 per cent worldwide of scientists and 97 per cent in the UK are exceptionally good numbers.

As the piece points out, that 97% is for scientists in UK higher education institutions (many of them shelling out for Big Deals) and involves some funny numbers. Then there are these comments, which are technically true (or were at the time):

> I think the mechanisms are in place for anybody in this room to go into their public library, and for nothing, through inter-library loan, get access to any article they want. (John Jarvis, Wiley)

> Incidentally, any member of the public can access any of our content by going into a public library and asking for it. There will be a time gap but they can do that. (Crispin Davis, Elsevier)

From the article's response (and setting aside the fact that there are restrictions on how many articles from a journal a library can lend):

> To say that being able to go to the library and request an interlibrary loan is a substitute for having open access to research articles online is rather like saying that carrier pigeon is a substitute for the Internet. Yes – both can convey information, but attempting to watch a live video stream with data delivered by carrier pigeon would be a frustrating business.

Then there's the "they wouldn't understand the articles and reading them might be dangerous" tack—this time from Jarvis:

> Without being pejorative or elitist, I think that is an issue that we should think about very, very carefully, because there are very few members of the public, and very few people in this room, who would want to read some of this scientific information, and in fact draw wrong conclusions from it […] Speak to people in the medical profession, and

they will say the last thing they want are people who may have illnesses reading this information, marching into surgeries and asking things. We need to be careful with this very, very high-level information.

Part of the response:

This position is extremely elitist. It also defies logic. There is already a vast amount of material on medical topics available on the Internet, much of which is junk. Can it really be beneficial for society as a whole that patients should have access to all the dubious medical information on the web, but should be denied access to the scientifically sound, peer-reviewed research articles?

On the other hand, I have no doubt that, for some doctors, "the last thing they want is people,..asking things," especially if they've read current *good* articles that the doctors haven't gotten around to.

Regarding the long-standing myth—that OA with APCs involves a conflict of interest because it encourages publishers to publish more articles—I'll just quote *two* Davis statements, effectively asked-and-answered:

The second question that increasingly is being asked is the inherent or potential conflict of interest if a publisher is receiving money from the author to publish that article. There is an inherent conflict there in terms of quality, objectivity, refereeing and so on. One of the real strengths of today's model is that there is no conflict there. We reject well over 50 per cent of all articles submitted. Other journals do that or even higher. If you are receiving potential payment for every article submitted there is an inherent conflict of interest that could threaten the quality of the peer review system and so on.

On pricing, we have put our prices up over the last five years by between 6.2 per cent and 7.5 per cent a year, so between six and seven and a half per cent has been the average price increase. During that period the number of new research articles we have published each year has increased by an average of three to five per cent a year. […] Against those kinds of increases we think that the price rises of six to seven and a half per cent are justified."

So it's perfectly fine for Elsevier to demand more money because they keep publishing more articles—but it's *bad* if OA publishers stand to gain for publishing articles. (The response also notes why there's really no conflict in either case: crappy journals shouldn't get submissions. Also, subscription journals *frequently* have author-side charges.)

Is the quality of open access and non-open access reporting comparable?

A short, focused piece by Jo Chapman posted May 25, 2016 at *The Publication Plan*, dealing only with the strong "OA is crap" myth.

In a recent [study](), Pastorino et al, compared the quality of primary epidemiological studies and systematic reviews and meta-analyses in subscription-based journals to those published with open access. The authors selected the first case-control or cohort studies and first systematic reviews and meta-analyses published in 2013 in open access and non-open access journals from the oncology field. They assessed the quality of the reports by evaluating compliance to methodological quality scales (Newcastle and Ottawa Scale [NOS] and Assessment of Multiple Systematic Reviews [AMSTAR] scale) and reporting guidelines (STrengthening the Reporting of OBservational studies in Epidemiology [STROBE] and Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analysis [PRISMA] checklists).

No significant differences were observed with regards to methodological quality or quality of reporting between open access and non-open access journals. Although these results are encouraging, further studies involving a larger set of papers and additional fields of research are needed to provide reassurance that the quality of open access and non-open access publishing is comparable.

I leave the study itself (in *PLoS One*) for your own analysis.

Impact

Both Impact Factor and actual impact.

Are elite journals declining?

That's the question discussed in this paper by Vincent Lariviere, George A. Lozano and Yves Gingras, submitted to arXiv [on April 24, 2013](). The abstract:

Previous work indicates that over the past 20 years, the highest quality work have been published in an increasingly diverse and larger group of journals. In this paper we examine whether this diversification has also affected the handful of elite journals that are traditionally considered to be the best. We examine citation patterns over the past 40 years of 7 long-standing traditionally elite journals and 6 journals that have been increasing in importance over the past 20 years. To be among the top 5% or 1% cited papers, papers now need about twice as many citations as they did 40 years ago. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s elite journals have been publishing a decreasing proportion of these top cited papers. This also applies to the two journals that are typically considered as the top venues and often used as bibliometric indicators of "excellence", Science and Nature. On the other hand, several new and established journals are publishing an increasing proportion of most cited papers. These changes bring new challenges and opportunities for

all parties. Journals can enact policies to increase or maintain their relative position in the journal hierarchy. Researchers now have the option to publish in more diverse venues knowing that their work can still reach the same audiences. Finally, evaluators and administrators need to know that although there will always be a certain prestige associated with publishing in "elite" journals, journal hierarchies are in constant flux so inclusion of journals into this group is not permanent.

Nothing *directly* to do with OA, but relevant nonetheless.

Science publishing: The golden club

It's a *little* tricky when the publisher of *Nature* features an article (by Eugenie Samuel Reich, appearing as an October 16, 2013 news feature) that touts the advantages of appearing in, well, *Nature* or *Science*—but this seems to be a well-done piece of journalism. Two key paragraphs:

> Researchers often say that publishing in prestigious journals can make a career. And for decades, the most sought after of the bunch have been *Nature* and *Science* — broadly read journals that reject more than 90% of the manuscripts they receive. A paper in one of these journals, it is said, can bring job opportunities, invitations to speak, grants, promotions and even cash bonuses and prizes. [Jeffrey] Rimer believes that his *Science* paper contributed to his winning a grant from the Welch Foundation, a chemical-research funding organization based in Houston, in 2012, and he expects that it may help when he seeks tenure at his university.

> His impressions echo what many other scientists say — often with gritted teeth — about premier journals. But the publishing world is rapidly changing, and the leading titles are facing increasing competition. The push for open-access publishing has gathered steady steam; more than 5,000 open-access journals have been launched since Rimer's paper was published in October 2010. These journals, along with the more established open-access publications, are attracting a growing share of submissions, threatening the hold of the leading journals.

A good read, including comments that publishing in glamour journals may be less important in the US and UK—and certainly less so in some fields.

Open Access, Tenure, and the Common Good

Barbara Fister's October 22, 2013 "Library Babel Fish" column in *Inside Higher Ed* is about impact in general—or, more specifically, the impact of published articles (including *where* they're published) on tenure. The tease is critical here:

> Examining the "but I can't make my work open access because of tenure requirements" excuse.

Key paragraphs (and, as always, the whole column's worth reading):

Too often, tenure hasn't been handled responsibly. Even in institutions where teaching matters tremendously, publications often carry more weight because it's more easily measured by outsiders, and that's so much more pleasant than having to make hard decisions amongst ourselves. The methods commonly used to decide which publications provide evidence of scholarly promise are about as valid as reading goat entrails when predicting whether a scholar will continue to support the mission of an institution for the rest of his or her career. Oh, we assign numbers as we read the entrails: must have a book from a university press, or hey, let's make it two to show how rigorous we are; must have a certain number of articles in journal with an impact factor of X or higher.

We do this because we're not confident that we can actually assess a scholar's worth, or we don't trust each other to make a fair assessment, that by somehow attaching mumbo-jumbo to the process we're being even-handed even though we know perfectly well that impact factors are bogus, that university presses can't and shouldn't be asked to determine tenure decisions, that we're responding to an exploitive overuse of dreadfully-paid contingent scholars by raising the stakes for the few remaining positions.

How journals like Nature, Cell and Science are damaging science

That's Randy Schekman on [December 9, 2013](#) in *The Guardian*, and you could say it's about the *negative* impact of high impact factors:

The prevailing structures of personal reputation and career advancement mean the biggest rewards often follow the flashiest work, not the best. Those of us who follow these incentives are being entirely rational – I have followed them myself – but we do not always best serve our profession's interests, let alone those of humanity and society.

He points out that the luxury journals (same as glamour journals) may have reputations that are only partly warranted:

While they publish many outstanding papers, they do not publish *only* outstanding papers. Neither are they the only publishers of outstanding research.

Schekman specifically takes on impact factor, which he calls a "marketing gimmick" and a "deeply flawed measure" that he regards as damaging to science:

It is common, and encouraged by many journals, for research to be judged by the impact factor of the journal that publishes it. But as a journal's score is an average, it says little about the quality of any individual piece of research. What is more, citation is sometimes, but not always, linked to quality. A paper can become highly cited because it is good science – or because it is eye-catching, provocative or wrong. Luxury-journal editors know this, so they accept papers that will make waves because

they explore sexy subjects or make challenging claims. This influences the science that scientists do. It builds bubbles in fashionable fields where researchers can make the bold claims these journals want, while discouraging other important work, such as replication studies.

In extreme cases, the lure of the luxury journal can encourage the cutting of corners, and contribute to the escalating number of papers that are retracted as flawed or fraudulent. Science alone has recently retracted high-profile papers reporting cloned human embryos, links between littering and violence, and the genetic profiles of centenarians. Perhaps worse, it has not retracted claims that a microbe is able to use arsenic in its DNA instead of phosphorus, despite overwhelming scientific criticism.

Note that this appeared in 2013—but the message hasn't changed. He notes OA as a better way.

Schekman, a Nobel laureate as of 2013, discusses this further in a December 23, 2013 interview in *Library Journal* and in a December 20, 2013 piece at *The Conversation*, the latter linking to and discussing some criticisms emanating from *The Guardian* piece.

Open Access Journals and Forensic Publishing

This article by James L. Knoll appeared in the September 2014 *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*. It relates to a fairly specific field, forensic psychiatry, one where the top-ranked journal has a relatively low impact factor.

While it's an interesting article, it fails on several counts, e.g.:

In contrast, the golden road "involves a shift from the current subscription-based approach to one in which authors (which in practice means their institutions) pay to cover the costs of (open access) publishing."

You know the refrain: most gold OA journals don't charge fees.

In particular, there is concern about the potential lack of a traditional, rigorous peer review process. OA proponents counter this criticism, believing that the process "allows interactive discussions and reviews by being open to all interested members of the scientific community and the public."…

In case the implication that OA *generally* doesn't mean proper peer review, consider this later comment:

The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law has a somewhat unique publication format, in that it is an OA journal that has maintained the traditional peer review process. Author fees have never been charged by *The Journal*; its publishing enterprise is supported by AAPL membership dues.

That "somewhat unique format"—OA, peer review, no APC—is shared by *thousands* of other gold OA journals; calling it "somewhat unique" is a backhanded slap at most OA. And the author doubles down in the very next paragraph:

> At the present time, the pros and cons of OA publishing are subjects of contentious debate. A prominent past concern has been that the quality of scientific publishing will be degraded by the lack of a traditional peer review process. However, the past several years have seen OA journals use traditional peer review, as well as innovative and interactive models that connect scholars in a transparent process of addressing critiques. In addition to reliability concerns, there are concerns about the potential for "predatory" OA journals (described below) and the possibility that author submission fees may lead to a biased output from authors of greater financial means.

Sigh. It has *never* been the case that most OA journals did not use traditional peer review, and you won't be surprised that a form of the usual "predatory" nonsense follows.

There's some interesting discussion of impact here, but there's enough wrong that I can't recommend the piece. Too bad.

The public impact of open access research: A survey of SciELO users
This is actually a poster by Juan Pablo Alperin, added to figshare on April 24, 2015. It summarizes a study done March-July 2014 with a series of one-question pop-up surveys on SciELO's portals in Brazil, Chile and Mexico, yielding 17,575 responses.

No special comments: it's brief and to the point.

Access

A handful of items specifically addressing the "access" side of OA.

Information Triage
Sure, this January 15, 2013 piece by Susannah Fox and Maeve Duggan at the Pew Research Center is a bit dated—but I'm pretty sure the problem hasn't gotten that much smaller.

> As of September 2012, 81% of U.S. adults use the internet and, of those, 72% say they have looked online for health information in the past year.

I'd guess both numbers are higher now. There are a lot more numbers and tables, but what's worth noting here is near the end of the article:

> **One in four people seeking health information online have hit a pay wall**
>
> Twenty-six percent of internet users who look online for health information say they have been asked to pay for access to something they

wanted to see online. Seventy-three percent say they have not faced this choice while seeking health or medical information online.

Of those who have been asked to pay, just 2% say they did so. Fully 83% of those who hit a pay wall say they tried to find the same information somewhere else. Thirteen percent of those who hit a pay wall say they just gave up.

A Case Study in Closed Access

More anecdotal than the above, but in much greater detail, this [October 25, 2013 story](#) by Adi Kamdar on the EFF website is mostly an interview with Cortney Grove, a speech-language pathologist. Some portions:

> In my field we are charged with using scientific evidence to make clinical decisions. Unfortunately, the most pertinent evidence is locked up in the world of academic publishing and I cannot access it without paying upwards of $40 an article. My current research project is not centered around one article, but rather a body of work on a given topic. Accessing all the articles I would like to read will cost me nearly a thousand dollars. So, the sad state of affairs is that I may have to wait 7-10 years for someone to read the information, integrate it with their clinical opinions (biases, agendas, and financial motivations) and publish it in a format I can buy on Amazon. By then, how will my clinical knowledge and skills have changed? How will my clients be served in the meantime? What would I do with the first-hand information that I will not be able to do with the processed, commercialized product that emerges from it in a decade?

> …

> We do continuing education in order to keep our licensure, so I recently attended an online conference. Frequently what happens is that I'll hear about a bit of research in a lecture that I'll find interesting from another perspective, so I'll write it down to look for it later.

> I went online to find the referenced articles when I started to realize I couldn't access any of the articles on my list for free. All of them are behind a gate and cost somewhere between $40 and $100 an article.

> I got frustrated. I spent maybe three-and-a-half hours looking at subscriptions to these companies to see if that was a viable option, but they were too expensive. I then started going to the websites of individual researchers. Unfortunately, only one of the 17 or 18 papers I was looking for was available.

> This is when I started to get really frustrated. It became clear to me that what was going to happen was what I heard during a number of lectures: "Don't worry, I'm publishing a book about all of this if you want to know more."

…

I think that ideally, if you're going to be in a healthcare profession—or really any profession—that research should be easily available. Even if I had to pay an acceptable yearly fee—if for $300 a year I could access *everything*—that would be better than how it is today.

I'm a speech-language pathologist in private practice. I know that if I was affiliated with a university, then through that I could have access to the information I need. And that highlights a bigger issue: there's always a gap between the research world and the clinical world. There's a gate that holds the normal profession out of the research process—or even from simply being able to consume the information. By the time it comes to most of us, it's prepackaged and late.

No additional comment required.

Two short observations on AAAS and open access
A brief [May 18, 2015 post](#) by Mike Taylor at *Sauropod Vertebra Picture of the Week* (SVPoW)—and I'll quote the two observations in full, since they're both cogent for OA in general:

First, here's Matt's observation: even making users register betrays a way of thinking wrongly about the material. It says, "This is *ours* but you can see it if you'll jump through our hoops. Because it is *ours*." Whereas real OA outlets say, "Hey, this is yours now, do what you want."

And here's mine: I sometimes wonder whether we're headed for a world where the meaningful scientific literature is going to be from 1660-1923 and from 2010 onwards, with a big gap from 1924 to 2009 that just gets ignored. Because it's the literature not old enough to be out of copyright but not new enough to be OA.

I omitted some introductory material in which Matt notes that even to read a *110-year-old* paper required registration.
    More than a dozen comments, most of them useful and worth reading.

DOAJ

A handful of items related to the [*Directory of Open Access Journals*](#), which I regard as the most important single resource in OA, a "whitelist" of (now) over 14,000 serious gold OA journals, and the basis for my *GOA* series.

Regarding a Delta Think blog post analysing the DOAJ
This discussion was posted [June 14, 2019](#) at the *DOAJ News Service*. It's excellent, and I'm quoting most of it:

The main problem, when you compare ROAD, Web of Science (WoS), Scopus and DOAJ, is that all of these services have different definitions and criteria as to what constitutes a valid journal entry in their databases.

In general, one can say that DOAJ's criteria are the strictest and therefore DOAJ is not an index of all open access (OA) journals but an index of *gold standard, quality, peer-reviewed OA journals*. So therefore not all OA journals meet our criteria.

Being indexed in DOAJ acts like a badge of quality. A quality stamp based on the business operations of a journal and its reliability, how closely that journal adheres to best practices and which standards it uses. Scopus and WoS are not in the business of measuring any of those. (We would take this opportunity to point out that DOAJ holds many more journals which aren't in Scopus.)

…

ROAD criteria are perhaps the most relaxed: open access to all content; no moving wall or embargo; no hybrid journals; mainly research papers; the audience is mainly researchers and scholars.

…

Another point worth highlighting is that, to date, DOAJ has relied on publishers applying to be assessed and indexed and we have done very little soliciting of journals. However throughout 2019/2020 we will start approaching relevant OA journals not currently indexed and working with them to help them submit a quality application. This initiative is part of a funding drive for this year.

This all bodes well for the future of *DOAJ*.

Myth busting: DOAJ is not inclusive

Same news service, this time posted July 31, 2019. Excerpts:

One of the most common criticisms levelled at DOAJ, particularly over the last 5 years, is that the index is not inclusive enough; that its coverage is poor; and that it lists only a fraction of the open access journals that exist. Our research shows that many journals reported as "missing" from DOAJ have a failed application or have been removed for not meeting DOAJ standards.

…

We are often labelled as unreliable because we don't index all open access journals. We would remind the community that we are not an index of open access journals but an index of *quality, peer-reviewed open access journals* – journals which meet our basic criteria, and sometimes more….

Here is just a selection of the many reasons why DOAJ does not index the sometimes thousands of open access journals that can be found in other databases. DOAJ does not index journals that:

- have ceased publication
- haven't published anything for up to two years

- are hybrid
- use a definition of open access that is not the BOAI definition
- require people to register to access content
- apply embargoes on full-text content
- do not perform effective peer review (we allow editorial review only for some arts and humanities journals)
- do not have a confirmed ISSN
- do not have an up-to-date, transparent editorial board

There's more.

Miscellany

Yeah, I know…

[The Public-Access Computer Systems Review](#), *an Open Access Journal, Was Launched 30 Years Ago This August*

Charles W. Bailey, Jr. posted this at *DigitalKoans* on August 20, 2019; it's a very good brief history of *PACS Review*, an early—although not quite the earliest—gold OA journal.

> What were some of the distinguishing characteristics of this early digital journal?
>
> - It was a born-digital journal. Major journal publishers, such as Elsevier, would [experiment with providing access to born-print journals in university settings starting in the mid-1990's.](#)
> - It was peer reviewed by a distinguished international editorial board with members from Canada, the USA and the UK.
> - It was officially published by a research library.
> - It was a library and information science journal with librarians primarily acting as editors and editorial board members.
> - It allowed authors to retain copyright.
> - It had special copyright provisions for noncommercial use.
> - It was freely available.
> - It adopted an accelerated publication schedule to publish articles as quickly as possible.
> - It published articles by influential authors, such as Stevan Harnad, John Kunze, John Price Wilkin, Ann Okerson, Vicky Reich, and John Unsworth.
> - It allowed authors to publish updated versions of their articles.

- It was issued an ISSN number in 1990.
- It was indexed by three major index and abstracting services.

I was not present at the founding, but I did write several (non-refereed) pieces for the journal and prepared the paperback print versions of the first five volumes through LITA. I was also on the editorial board, along with a distinguished group of library folk.

The journal lasted nine years. It published 42 issues with 112 articles, columns, reviews and editorials. No fees were ever charged; it was supported by the University of Houston Libraries. I was honored to be associated with it.

Alternative Publishing Models to Support Open Access
This brief piece is on the SPARC site I encountered it on [August 29, 2019](#). It offers four models for no-fee gold OA journals. It's CC-BY, and worth quoting in full:

> There are currently many types of alternative economic models that are capable of supporting open access to research content. SPARC actively supports investigating and experimenting with all of these methods, and to that end, provides planning resources, best practice guides, white papers, and financial and strategic planning consulting support for open-access initiatives.
>
> These alternate models include:
>
> - **Collective funding model:** Widely regarded as a logical and compelling approach to developing and sustaining open-access research venues and open-access infrastructure services. However, the design and implementation of such models pose practical challenges that require careful planning and coordination.
>
> - **Campus-based publishing:** Provide open-access publishing channels to scholar-led, society, and student research publishing initiatives. Providing publishing services for journals, monographs, and new-form digital research publications, these programs contribute to an expanding network of alternative publishing outlets. They support both new and existing publications. [View our resources on campus-based publishing](#)
>
> - **Publishing cooperatives & collaborations:** Multiple-stakeholder publishing cooperatives can bring societies, libraries, researchers, and funders together to provide scalable and cost-effective open-access publishing services. [View our discussion paper on publishing cooperatives for society publishers.](#)

- **Innovation incubation**: New open-access models evolve from both small- and large-scale publishing initiatives, ranging from individual journal and monograph start-ups to coordinated multiple-organization initiatives.

Additional SPARC Resources on Publishing Models:

Read SPARC's white paper, "Income Models for Open Access: An Overview of Current Practice."

No additional comment required.

The Library Solution: How Academic Libraries Could End the APC Scourge

This article by Jeff Pooley appeared September 3, 2019 at *items: insights from the social sciences*—and I'm not quite sure how to feel about it.

What Pooley's suggesting as The Solution for OA isn't new, and it's the radical version: take *all* of library subscription fees and turn them over to support OA. But that doesn't address the ever-increasing prices of the big publishers or the fact that academic libraries have already been drained of most non-serials resources to attempt to keep up.

There's also a matter of tone. For example, here's what he has to say about no-fee gold OA journals (which he insists on calling "platinum"):

> If close to three-quarters of the world's OA journals are already APC-free, why fret over a small band of holdouts?

> One reason is that most of the platinum journals are more like cubic zirconia. They run on creaky open journal systems and editorial pluck. Many publish irregularly, and with uneven quality. The journals limp along, with estimable doggedness, but are often one devoted editor away from the digital graveyard. Vital publication functions, like copyediting, preservation, DOI minting, and indexing, may get sacrificed on the altar of resource-constrained expediency. These underfunded titles—which tend to cluster in the social sciences and the humanities—are already up against a punishing prestige economy.

If I was a no-fee gold OA publisher or editor, I'd be inclined to give the author a one-fingered salute and ignore the rest. And there's this:

> This is the *library solution*: a collectively funded publishing ecosystem, APC-free, and centered on the academic library. Its core principle is that budgets used to acquire or subscribe to tolled materials be repurposed to underwrite an OA alternative. The money is in the system, the APC model is morally bankrupt and unworkable, and OA itself is inevitable. If pay-to-read is off the table, and pay-to-publish too, then it's left to the university system to pick up the bill. And our institutions are already paying, through libraries, for the closed system that OA is poised to displace.

I'm at the point where "inevitable" triggers an intense reaction unless death is being discussed. And remember that his "solution" does not have libraries *publishing* the journals and, with any luck, driving the big publishers out of the field—no, it's *underwriting,* and, well…

Maybe I'm unfair. But I find this solution wanting.

Learned Societies, Open Access and Budgetary Cross-Subsidy
Martin Paul Eve posted this on September 17, 2019 on his blog, and while it's a point I've raised over the past few years, it's good to see someone write more eloquently about it and possibly convince some people.

> There's an article out in ~~The Times Higher Education~~ Science Magazine (edit 11:38am) about Learned Societies and open access. As usual, it points out the thorny problem that Learned Societies derive revenue from subscriptions that they fear will be lost under an OA model. A few points spring to mind on this. 1. There is no guarantee that moving to an OA model will cause a loss of revenue; 2. zero-embargo green OA would be compliant with Plan S and does not seem to lead to loss of revenue; 3. I have written previously on how Learned Societies could manage this transition.

> What I really wanted to write on here, though, briefly, was how this is really a problem of value, transparency, and distributed financing of disciplinary activities. When people say 'Learned Societies fund their activities through subscription revenues' what I hear is 'academic library budgets are used to fund disciplinary activities' (yes, I know that there are private subscriptions, membership fees, and other revenue streams etc., but the majority of the money is, nonetheless, coming from library budgets). These are also the budgets that have lagged by several hundred percent behind the total cost of ownership of all subscription journals worldwide. The subscription model does, at least, distribute this cost among many libraries (as opposed to APC-based models, which concentrate the costs at fewer points). But the truth of the matter is that Learned Societies are funded by academic library budgets. If they rely on a subscription model, they are also reliant on excluding people who cannot pay, for the claimed good of the Society.

> I happen to think that a mission of a Learned Society should include getting its research as far under the nose of any interested constituent as possible, regardless of whether that person can pay. At the end of the day, what's the point of funding a Ph.D. studentship if, when that student graduates and likely does not get an academic job, she/he/they is/are unable to continue to read research in the field? Regardless of this, though, I think that what sits at the heart of this dilemma for Learned Societies is a crisis and anxiety of value.

There's more here (not a lot: it's a concise post). I believe that only library associations have any reasonable expectation that libraries should fund

their activities (noting here that most ALA scholarly journals are no-fee gold). I also believe that, for any learned society where half or more of the proceeds come from publishing, it's appropriate to call the society a publisher that happens to carry out society-like activities.

But that's my irrelevant opinion. Eve's is well-stated and perhaps more relevant.

New deals could help scientific societies survive open access
And here's the article by Jeffrey Brainard, on September 16, 2019 at *Science*, that Eve's commenting on.

> In the push to make the scientific literature open access, small scientific societies have feared they could be collateral damage. Many rely on subscription revenue from their journals—often among the most highly cited in their disciplines—to fund other activities, such as scholarships. And whereas big commercial publishers have the scale to absorb financial losses in some of their journals, many scientific societies operate at most a handful of journals.

In my more cynical moments, I wonder how it is that a worthwhile scientific/learned society is of so little value to its members that it can't survive without forced library funding? And, for that matter, how a society gets credit for scholarships that are actually being paid for by libraries?

That PlanS may offer a "reprieve" is…well, no, I'm trying to stay away from PlanS in the declining days of my OA commentary.

The Writing on the Unpaywall
This "Library Babel Fish" column by Barbara Fister on October 22, 2019 at *Inside Higher Ed* is nominally about a study I chose not to discuss, but it's also an excellent column on its own—and Fister offers this mini-list of myths:

- *It's not true* that open access means you have to pay. It all depends on the discipline and the publication. Yes, in disciplines where researchers get grants, it's not unusual to use available research dollars to fund publishing. If your discipline isn't awash in grant money, it's likely open access journals won't charge you a dime. (If they do, you're probably looking at a profitable mega-publisher that handles lots of STEM journals. Look for alternatives.)

- *It's not true* that if the author pays, it's vanity publishing. Open access journals apply the same peer review criteria and processes as toll-access journals.

- *It's not true* that open access publishing is lower quality than subscription-funded publishing. You're confusing open access journals with scams that pretend to be open access journals but aren't. Don't worry; you can tell the difference. And it's not as if every journal that charges subscriptions is high quality.

- *It's not true* that you can't get tenure with open access publications. Yes, some departments and some T&P committees are ill-informed and think Journal Impact Factors mean something they don't, but <ins>times are changing</ins>, and younger faculty are increasingly impatient to have their work shared.

Good stuff.

How journals are using overlay publishing models to facilitate equitable OA

I'll close with this <ins>October 25, 2019</ins> piece at the Scholastica blog. This isn't an endorsement of Scholastica, but the piece itself is interesting (even if it does refer to no-fee gold OA as "diamond" OA).

One of the more interesting radical futures for scholarly articles is that journals *as such* disappear, with repositories becoming the places where articles appear. Processes for peer review/validation could then follow—and, I suspect, it would make sense for a lot of specialized groups to have overlay journals that, in effect, are saying "we think these articles in your area are worth reading."

The Last Roundup

That's it: 23 out or 67—and that should have been 30, but a few on the colors of OA and CC licenses got swallowed up in the process of disappearing for 11 days.

I'm not disappearing from OA. I believe there will be a *GOA5*—which I think of as "14 and 8," because it will definitely begin with more than 14,000 journals and, I suspect, will show around 800,000 (or more?) gold OA articles in 2019. Look to Twitter, Facebook, and whatever blog I might have in mid-2020 for more information. (I suspect I'll have to close down *Walt at Random* and start a new blog Because Reasons.)

There are so many good writers on OA issues, along with a few horrendous ones. I wish that certain researchers were willing to admit that sampling can yield wildly bad numbers. I wish that certain bombthrowers weren't bombthrowers. And I hope OA will continue to progress, preferably in ways that serve the public more than big publishers.

Media
Warriors Classic 50 Movies, 1

Fifty movies about an Oakland basketball team: who woulda thunk it? OK, so they're really "sword and sandals" movies—all those Hercules, Son of Hercules, Colossus, Ursus and similar pictures, strong on Legendary Heroes, usually strong on magic and gods/goddesses, with lots of wholly innocent beefcake and (sometimes) cheesecake, usually some humor along

with lots of fighting, loads of scenery, surprisingly good production values and plots that don't always make much sense. Oh, and really bad dubbing, except sometimes for the one or two American actors. These are fun movies, mostly Italian, and I grade them within their own realm: a really great sword-and-sandals flick might not be a classic in traditional Hollywood terms. It's a thirteen-disc set (there aren't many hour-long sword-and-sandals flicks); Part 1 covers discs 1-6.

I believe quite a few of these are on Amazon Prime. The prints might be better there; they might not. I'm only commenting on the disc version.

Disc 1

Hercules and the Masked Rider (orig. *Golia e il cavaliere mascherato*), 1963, color. Piero Pierotti (dir.), Alan Steel (that is, Sergio Ciani), Mimmo Palmara, José Greci, Pilar Cansino, Arturo Dominici. 1:26 [1:23]

Who knew that Hercules ("Alan Steel") was not only a demigod but a time traveler? In this flick (clearly shot in widescreen and panned-and-scanned, more's the pity), he's jumped from the second century BC to the 16th century CE, since there are at least two handguns along with the many swords—and he's somehow riding with a band of gypsies in Spain. (According to the source of all knowledge, this character was Goliath in the Italian original, but that still involves time travel, albeit only 16 rather than 18+ centuries—and Goliath wasn't an immortal demigod. Hey, it's swords-and-sandal magic!)

This means that—other than Hercules, who seems allergic to shirts, and a few of the evil Don's soldiers who wind up naked after being humiliated by the gypsies and Hercules—everybody's fully clothed, from head to toe. (Even Hercules has a shirt on for maybe three minutes total.) It also means that there are no gods & goddesses, no magic (although the Evil Don would happily burn the head gypsy as a witch), just lots of plot.

Plot. Hard to say whether it's ever worth describing the plot in these spectaculars, but here it's two Dons with their lands on either side of a river—and the Don on one side is pure evil, just loving to hunt down innocent peasants trying to escape from forced labor and *really* loving the occasional torture opportunity. The other Don is aging, has a beautiful daughter, and is unwilling to risk war with the evil Don—to the extent that he's willing to marry his daughter off to the evil Don in the thought that this might prevent war. Foolish (and soon dead) man! Meanwhile, the aged Don's nephew, the actual love of the daughter (well, why not? they're first cousins, but it's 16h century Spain), has returned from battle (after meeting up with the gypsies, fighting Hercules to a draw in a one-hour contest that earns him not only his life but the welcome of the gypsies), and thinks this is all a terrible idea. He becomes the Masked Rider and…

Lots'o'plot ensues, and of course things all work out in the end. (Hercules isn't really the primary character, but here's there now and then. Some reviewers compared the real protagonist, the cousin, to Zorro: that's not too far off.) And, you know, even though the premise is even more bizarre than usual, it's fun. Good score, pretty good print. I'll give it $1.50.

Spartacus and the Ten Gladiators (orig. *Gli invincibili dieci gladiatori*), 1964, color. Nick Nostro (dir.), Dan Vadis, Helga Line, Ivano Staccioli/John Heston, Alfredo Varelli/John Warrell Ursula Davis, Giuliano Dell'Ovo/Julian Dower. 1:39

What this movie has in common with the previous one: in both cases, the titular character is not the major protagonist—Spartacus is there for maybe a third of the picture, and the biggest of the ten gladiators (who in this case aren't slaves but entertainer/warriors) is the protagonist (and, in the end, rides away with The Girl).

Otherwise: set in Roman times, with the Ten Gladiators blackballed by the primary entrepreneur (because the big one almost spears a Roman senator instead of killing the winner of a 12-person to-the-death battle who refused to kill his father, one of the others) saving a senator's daughter from Bad Thieves and being recruited by the senator to find and kill (they prefer capture) Spartacus, who is supposedly thieving. They find and meet Spartacus (involving an apparently hours-long battle between the big guy and Spartacus, ending with both of them collapsed and laughing) and join to his cause—which is, mostly, to take his group back to Thrace and freedom.

The gladiators say they'll go back and try to sell that to the senator (with the promise that he'll be sent ransom money for the group later)…who says "sure, why not?" and drugs them over dinner, putting them in the dungeon.

There's more plot—and, other than the sheer stupidity of the gladiators and the apparent deal that knocking an enemy out means he's out of the action forever, it's not as implausible as you might expect—ending with a reasonably satisfactory conclusion. The overall lesson: if the venal, vicious Senator Varro had let a hundred or so slaves escape, he would have avoided destroying a major part of the Roman army—and dying in the process. But, you know, power demands respect, especially wholly corrupt power.

Lots of fights, of course, with swords but the good guys prefer punching the other guys out; very little blood shown; some humor; the gladiators almost never wear anything above the waist or more than a foot or so below, if that matters; and the kind of production values (*thousands* of extras, huge battle scenes) you expect from these movies. I was particularly taken with one plot point: the gladiators, trying to figure out how

to free the slaves held in a compound that combines mining with aque-duct-building, capture a blacksmith and convert him to the cause by noting that, if they free the slaves, there will be thousands of chains and handcuffs that he can melt down and make into shields and the like. He winds up being one of the foremost warriors in the grand battle.

Excellent print, great production values, but a narrow view of a wide-screen movie. Still, another $1.50.

The Conqueror of the Orient (orig. *Il conquistatore dell'Oriente*), 1960, color. Tanio Boccia (dir.), Rik Battaglia, Irene Tunc, Paul Muller. 1:26 [1:14]

The story of Dakar, an Evil Usurper who's murdered the king (or sultan) and seized the throne, with an army that seems to go around burning villages for fun (which makes it difficult to provide the required tributes), and along the way found a beautiful young woman, Fatima, who Dakar would make the first of his many wives. We're also introduced to a young fisherman, Nadir, (trawling in the river) and his elder. A bit later, Fatima escapes and is next found floating in a little boat about to hit rapids—and, of course, Nadir rescues her. (Perhaps the name "Nadir" is a clue as to the quality of this flick.)

One thing leads to another, Fatima is recaptured, the fisherman vows vengeance, and of course we learn that he's the legitimate heir to the throne—and after lots of talk, more talk, some really bad scimitar-fights, and the like, he slays the usurper and brings eternal peace to his kingdom.

Pretty bad. The English-language scriptwriter appears to have had English as a third language (at one point, having been captured, our hero is left behind bars "until thirst and famine shall end his life." Famine? Really? The production values are at best OK, the plot makes little sense. Maybe the missing 12 minutes would help; probably not. Charitably, $0.75.

The Last of the Vikings, 1961, color. Giacomo Gentilomo (dir.), Cameron Mitchell, Edmond Purdom, Isabelle Corey. 1:43.

"Prince Harald needs more wood!" That cry as hundreds of trees are being felled by wholly inept axe-wielders is probably the best dialogue in this mess. We also learn that Vikings fight by waving axes around a lot, that axes defeat bows and arrows even at long range, that some kings are hand-rubbing gibbering incarnations while princes just laugh a lot…and that perfidy runs deep in Norway.

As to the plot and acting and scenery…well, this was the first old flick I'd watched in almost three months (the DOAJ project was more fun); I was watching it the day after surgery; I was on low-dose opi-oids,,,without all of which I might not have made it all the way through. Maybe, charitably, $0.75.

Disc 2

Two Gladiators (orig *I due gladiatori*), 1964, color. Mario Caiano (dir.), Richard Harrison, Moira Orfei, Alberto Farnese, Mimmo Palmara. 1:40 (1:33)

A mix of good and bad. Good: It's widescreen (but not Enhanced for DVD, so your player has to do the zooming). Bad: It's sort-of color: reds, blacks, occasionally a bit of blue-green, but rarely a full spectrum. Good: lots of mass swordfights. Bad: Really badly done swordfights with three heroes overcoming ridiculous odds on a regular basis.

It's about the twin sons of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, one supposedly dead at birth but actually, well, supposed to have been killed but we all know how that goes. The supposed only son, Commodus, engages in gladiatorial matches (really?) until he learns of his father's death, at which point he becomes emperor and looks to rival Caligula for evil. As you might expect, the other son (Lucius) wins out in the end (in the arena, with the two sons both dressed alike and wearing identical helmets, making it effectively impossible to tell them apart). Who knew that a hundred peasants armed mostly with torches could defeat whole hordes of Roman centurions?

Not terrible. $1.

Ursus in the Land of Fire (orig. *Ursus nella terra di fuoco*), color, 1963. Giorgio Simonelli (dir.), Ed Fury, Luciana Gilli, Adriano Micantoni, Claudia Mori. 1:27.

This flick falls into that special category of Paper Bag Flicks—one where it's fortunate that man-size paper bags didn't exist in the times being portrayed, since Ed Fury certainly could not have acted his way out of one. He can, however, defeat (and usually kill) any number of enemies at once, except when it suits the "plot" for him to be captured. (Apparently reviewers like the fact that he smiles more than most Hercules-style heroes, but to me he comes off as insipid. Diana is pretty good.)Another problem: this was a wide-screen picture (*very* wide screen, 2.35:1) converted to TV size by, apparently, just taking the center of the print: the credits are unreadable and during certain conversations you can only see part of the heroine's face.

The plot? The sleeve has it wrong, at least in part: Ursus, leader of a village of peaceful shepherds on one side of a lake, doesn't battle monsters except for the human kind. The setup is that a more military tribe lives on the other side of the lake and its evil general claims that for any shepherd to cross the lake is punishable by death. The beautiful Princess Diana, out riding near the lake, has her horse spooked by a rattlesnake; the horse throws her into the lake—and she seems unable to swim but can call for help. (Noteworthy because in two later scenes she's a champion swimmer in the same lake.) Ursus, wandering nearby (half-naked as usual), saves her…and is, of course, then arrested and

accused of trying to seize power (Diana was unconscious at the time, apparently fainting as soon as he's saved her). Anyway…he escapes, but the not-so-bad king is convinced by the evil general (aided by Diana's evil female cousin, who vouches for the general's story) to let him go after Ursus and, what the heck, set the village to flames, kill all the women and children and take the men as slaves.

Beyond that, the general kills the king and seizes the throne, with Diana somehow fleeing (and meeting up with Ursus, the two of course instantly falling in love) and the cousin marrying the general. But the people hate him, so he arranges a tournament to win their love. It's an interesting tournament: any challenger in danger of beating the general/king's champion gets an arrow in the back from the sidelines. Ursus shows up disguised, wins the competition against absurd odds and is immediately enslaved to help turn one honking big gristmill.

More stuff and nonsense having to do with the Land of Fire, a volcanic region with its own priesthood that the general defiled. The climax involves, in addition to more feats of strength and One Good Man Against Any Number of Bad Ones fights, the mountain's revenge for that defilement and the people finally rising up against their evil ruler. I've skipped lots of plot, but all ends happily. Lots of action, zero plausibility, volcano erupting, a painfully bad actor as hero and, well, I'll give it $1.

Cleopatra's Daughter (orig. *Il sepolcro dei re*), 1960, color. Fernando Cerchio (dir.), Debra Paget, Ettore Manni, Erno Crisa. 1:49 (1:29).

The perils of Shila, daughter of Cleopatra, captured and forced into a dynastic marriage with Pharaoh Nemarat—under the vengeful eye of his mother and with the court physician desirous of Shila. That's about as coherent as the "plot" gets, and the Big Dramatic Action seems mostly limited to a grave robbery and peculiar partial revolt. Let's see: there's also a poisoning, induced deathlike coma, several stabbings (rarely quite sure who's stabbed or doing the stabbing)…and mostly lots of moping around.

The good? Halfway-decent print, although you're getting just the center of a very widescreen "Ultrascope" movie. (That is: 1.33:1 of a 2.35:1 flick.) The bad? Pretty much everything else. Maybe the missing 20 minutes would help. This came off as a mediocre soap opera, but more confused, and with a few minutes of dramatic special effects. $0.50.

David and Goliath (orig. *David e Golia*), 1960, color. Ferdinando Baldi and Richard Pottier (dirs.), Orson Welles, Ivica Pajer, Eleojora Rossi Drago, Massimo Serato. 1:53 [1:32]

Orson Welles? Really? Yes, albeit an old, overly-large, shambling version of Welles as King Saul, the voice is intact. (Welles directed his own scenes—and he's in quite a few.) Otherwise, this story, "freely adapted

from the Bible" (as the credits say) is to some extent a typical tale of betrayal (Abner wants King Saul's throne and is scheming with one of Saul's daughters to get it), heroism (David, because David) and lots of action—except that in this case nearly all the action is in the last 15 minutes.

Slow and talky, but great scenery and a pretty decent print. If you can buy the premise that the Philistine army, ten times the size of the Isrealite guards, would actually give up (after its king breaks his promise to fall back if David slays Goliath, because what good Evil King wouldn't immediately renege on a promise?) just because the king is slain…well, never mind. The extra 21 minutes would probably help. As pans & scans of very widescreen flicks go, this one isn't terrible. All things considered, $1.25.

Disc 3

Hercules Against the Moon Men (orig. *Maciste e la regina di Samar* or *Maciste and Queen Samar*), 1964, color. Giacomo Gentilomo (dir.), Sergio Ciani ("Alan Steel"), Jany Clair, Anna Maria Polani, Nando Tamberlani. 1:30 [1:27].

The city-kingdom of Samar is ruled by an evil (if beautiful) queen and under the domination of creatures in the Mountain of Death, who require a sacrifice of many of Samar's young men and women on each full moon—a process that requires a remarkably large army and would seem to undermine the survival of Samar. (Most of the creatures are slow-moving stiff giants made of stonelike slabs, but there's a top man who's clearly a human with a funny mask and Princess Selene, a beautiful woman who must be brought back to life and power by the blood of the queen's sister so that Jupiter can align with Mars and…well, never mind, it's even more confusing than the Age of Aquarius.)

A senior adviser says enough is enough and asks for Hercules' help (against the wishes of the queen, who attempts to kill him on the way into town). Lots of stuff happens from then on, culminating in a pointless and lengthy sandstorm, Hercules once again winning through unlimited strength, and a happy ending of sorts.

The so-called plot is incoherent, and the revolt never seems to take any shape. What this is, is mostly HercPorn: lots of closeups of well-oiled arms, legs and chest of this person who can lift and move anything. A mediocre print, crudely panned-and-scanned from what must be a widescreen original. I double-speeded through some of it, which helped (true double-speed, with all the dialog and the really poor music.) Mostly for fans of Alan Steel's ~~acting ability~~ muscles. Maybe the dialogue made more sense in Italian (or Greek?). Notably, this is really a Maciste movie, not a Hercules flick. (The French title, *Maciste Against the Men of* Stone, makes considerably more sense—although the plot's still, well…) Generously, $0.75.

The Giants of Thessaly (I giganti della Tessaglia), color, 1960. Riccardo Freda (dir.), Roland Carey, Ziva Rodann, Alberto Farnese. 1:38 (1:28)

> Title or no title, this is Jason and the Argonauts and the search for the Golden Fleece. As such, it involves gods, an island full of beautiful witches and talking sheep and stones, despair at sea, treachery at home, lots of beef-cake (and beautiful women modestly dressed), and a lot of plot—and yet I found myself double-timing through a lengthy dance number and Jason's seemingly interminable climb to retrieve the fleece. There's only one giant (Cyclops) and he's one-eyed and nowhere near Thessaly. It's *amazing* how, after wandering aimlessly and seemingly lost for months, the *Argo* manages to return to Thessaly so rapidly and directly once the Golden Fleece is in hand, but… This was filmed three years before Ray Harryhausen's *Jason and the Argonauts*, for what that's worth.

> It's wide-screen (16x9), but you'll have to zoom to get that and the resolution isn't all that great. Still, good color, and it's all reasonably well done. Not a classic, but worth $1.25.

Ali Baba and the Seven Saracens (orig. *Simbad contro i sette saraceni*, color, 1964. Emimmo Salvi (dir. & story), Gordon Mitchell, Bruno Piergentili, Bella Cortez, Carla Calo, Franco Doria. 1:34 [1:20].

> I would say this flick has continuity problems, but that assumes continuity. Some scenes seem out of order; others just betray really cheap production—e.g., "midnight" scenes that are in broad daylight and a solar eclipse that only occurs over the palace grounds, not a few hundred feet away. When Simbad or Ali Baba or whoever is rescued (momentarily) by princess/harem member Fatima, he pushes her away and, about 30 seconds later, they proclaim their eternal love for one another. The best acting may be from the little person (Doria) who scurries around in secret passages—and the worst may be the deranged harem guard.

> The plot has to do with Omar, a brutal lord who wants control of eight territories and to sit on the Golden Throne, but to do that requires winning a death match with one representative from each of the other seven tribes—the Seven Saracens, I guess. Ali Baba has a knack for being captured, and much of the plot doesn't really work. No relationship to either the Sinbad or the Ali Baba of literature, of course. But never mind…

> A reasonably decent eight-way battle (accepting that these people only use swords to hack at each other: although some of them wear what seem to be modern pants, shirts and boots or shoes, nobody's ever heard of swordsmanship). A little unusual in that the American actor is the *villain* (although several actors used Americanized names for the film). Apparently only released in the U.S. as an 80-minute movie for TV, and not really even up to American-International's standards. *Very* generously, $0.75.

The Giant of Marathon (orig. *La battaglia di Maratona*), color, 1959. Jacques Tourneur (dir.), Steve Reeves, Mylène Demongeot, Sergio Fantoni, Daniele Vargas, Gianni Loti. 1:30 [1:24]

> Phillipides, medalist at the Olympics, new commander of the Sacred Guard and farmer at heart, saves the day for Athens against Persia, thanks to a sudden pact with Sparta and despite the treasonous acts of Athenian aristocrat Teocrito. Steve Reeves! Lots of action and scenery! Wide-screen (you'll have to zoom), and a good enough print that it's quite watchable. Good continuity, very good photography, excellent battle scenes, decent acting.

> The sleeve description makes it seem as though it's all about the battles, but about half the movie is about instant love lost, regained, lost again and…well, of course there's a happy ending. By the standards of these flicks, $1.50.

Disc 4

Colossus and the Amazon Queen (orig. *La regina delle Amazzoni*), color, 1960. Vittorio Sala (dir.), Dorian Gray, Rod Taylor, Gianni Maria Canale, Ed Fury. 1:30 [1:24]

> There's no Colossus, but there is Glauco (Ed Fury), strongest man in Greece as judged by an all-out battle royale that begins this mostly-humorous outing. Rod Taylor plays Pirro, conniving friend of Glauco who helps get them into and back out of trouble through a series of…well, escapades…involving the Queendom of the Amazons, where some men who arrive are married for one night then enslaved in bear-guarded mines while others seem to carry on as marketeers. Dorian Gray as Antiope is a continuing "Egyptian" inventor. There are holes in the plot, and some sequences seem to be missing endings, but this is mostly just peculiar good fun.

> I guess the plot doesn't much matter. A lot of sight gags, good scenery, slapstick, and mostly just fun. Music distinctly unlike a typical movie of this genre. If you treat this as a Serious Sword & Sorcery film it's atrocious—but it's really hard to do that. Not great, but $1.25.

Duel of Champions (orig. *Orazi e Curiazi*), 1961, color. Ferdinando Baldi & Terence Young (dirs.), Alan Ladd, Franca Bettoia, Franco Fabrizi, Robert Keith. 1:45 [1:29].

> Maybe I'm getting soft in my old age, but I found this one richer and more subtle than I expected—specifically, more of a family-conflict plot and less pure action. It's not a gladiatorial epic; it's something quite different.

> The setting: Rome and Alba have been fighting an exhausting war, as shown in the clumsy battle royale at the start and the successful am-

bushing of the 4th Legion, on its way to beef up the Romans. "Exhausting" in this case means that the resources of both city-states are pretty much exhausted—and, after some significant plot (the would-be future king has supposedly fled during the ambush; his wife, daughter of the king, is then immediately wed to the *next* future king—but the original future king was captured, escaped, and has been recuperating), both kings agree to see what their joint gods would have them do.

The sibyl proclaims that the war should be decided by three brothers from each city fighting a duel in one month's time: to the winner goes the war. But the only plausible set of Roman brothers includes the recuperated one, who's been denounced by his father for (supposedly) fleeing the battle and decides to go live peaceably outside the war zone. Lots of discussion ensues; at the last minute, he shows up to the fight. (The original title refers to the families: the Roman Orazis and the Alban Curiazis.) Without giving away plot turns, it's fair to say that Our Hero not only triumphs (by himself) but takes steps to see that the two cities live in peace.

To my taste, this was a good family-conflict drama with some action thrown in. The sound track's poor at times, but the print's pretty decent. You're only seeing part of the widescreen picture, but the pan-and-scan was competently done. [I see why many IMDB reviews are negative: as a traditional sword-and-sandals movie, it's not great.] I could see watching it again (unlikely though that is), so by the relaxed standards of these flicks, I'll give it $1.75.

Hero of Rome (orig. *Il colosso di Roma),* 1964, color. Giorgio Ferroni (dir.), Gordon Scott, Gabriella Pallotta, Massimo Serato. 1:30 [1:27]

The Romans have ousted and exiled evil king Tarquin, becoming a republic—and, of course, the king wants Rome back, allying with Etruscans to do battle. Enter a strongman hero (Mucius), following which all sorts of betrayal and battles ensue. There's a happy ending.

I don't think the plot deserves more. There are elements that aren't followed up, but mostly there are strong men, treacherous men, beautiful women, lots of scenery, and battles galore. I should note one thing about Mucius' typical one-huge-man-defeats-ten-warriors bouts: he does a lot of tossing people over his shoulder, and sometimes it's just a *leetle* too obvious that the other person has set up the stunt, unless appropriate fighting style was to place your foot on top of your opponent's outstretched hand. Decent pan & scan. Not great, not terrible: $1.00.

Thor and the Amazon Women, (orig. *Le gladiatrici*), 1963, color. Antonio Leonviola (dir. & screenplay), Susy Andersen, Joe Robinson, Harry Baird, Janine Hendy. 1:35 [1:26]

On one hand, there's some interesting scenery. On the other…

Really vicious misogyny, not just saying that a violent female dictatorship is bad but—explicitly, several times—that women should never lead a government. Of the two blacks in the movie, one is the vicious Amazon queen; the other, who seems to be more muscular than Thor, is mostly a comic figure. All men are slaves…except for the men who are guards. The gladiatrices (that's how they say it) don't so much engage in battles as in bloodbaths, and despite the fact that they are also essentially slaves, they're loyal to the queen (until they aren't).

Oh, and it's a *terrible* pan&scan: at times, both actors in a scene are off to the sides and either invisible or barely visible. For that matter, the big "fight" between 100 trained gladiatrices and Thor turns out to be a tug-of-war, "settled" because the flames between the two sides burn through the rope.

If I didn't look at what's being said in the flick, it might be worth $0.75; as it is, at best $0.25.

Disc 5

Damon and Pythias (orig. *Il tiranno di Siracusa*), 1961, color. Curtis Bernhardt (dir.), Guy Williams, Don Burnett, Ilaria Occhini. 1:39.

The plot summary on the sleeve and the one on IMDB cover roughly the last third of the film, and maybe that's OK. For the first part: the head of the Pythagorean group in Athens has died, and his logical successor is trying to teach the Pythagorean philosophy in Syracuse—and in hiding since the dictator Dionysus regards Pythagoreanism as dangerous, with its friendship and nonviolent ideals. So Pythias goes off to find him and bring him back, and in doing so is first robbed and then aided by Damon, a rogue. Meanwhile, Pythias' pregnant wife has gone into terminal decline since he's gone. After lots of adventures, the successor manages to make it to freedom—but Pythias is captured.

From there, the plot actually mostly follows the [legend of Damon and Pythias](). It's about friendship, philosophy, and lots of other stuff. It's reasonably well-done, remarkably free of gratuitous killings, and relatively low on the sort of spectacle that dominates most of these movies. (If you're a costume enthusiast: almost all the men wear very short tunics, while all the women wear floor-length clothes.) I'd give it $1.00.

Fury of Hercules (orig. *La furia di Ercole*), 1961, color. Gianfranco Parolini (dir.), Brad Harris, Luisella Boni, Mara Berni, Serge Gainsbourg. 1:37.

A bit more typical. This time, Hercules visits Arpad, one of his old haunts while on an extended journey and finds that his friend the king has died. His daughter, now queen, is trying to build impenetrable walls around Arpad using slave labor—and things are mostly run by the evil Menistus who hopes to kill her and take over as dictators.

Lots of action, all fairly coherent, culminating in a huge revolt combining slaves and rebels. Brad Harris is impressive, and as Hercules he's even more so. Another one with no cheesecake and even more beefcake, as Hercules' oversize chest is mostly exposed. Serge Gainsbourg is appropriately sneering and evil as Menistus.

I was somewhat thrown out of the action during the big extravaganza the queen throws in Hercules' honor. For background music, authenticity doesn't matter—but when entertainers are dancing to music, it seems a bit odd for the primary instrument to be a piano. The print's decent, except that the first five or ten minutes suffer from red shift (that is, most colors are shades of red). All things considered, a pretty decent flick; by the relaxed standards used for this set, I'll say $1.50.

Caesar the Conqueror (orig. *Giulio Cesare, il conquistatore delle Gallie*), 1962, color. Tanio Boccia (dor.), Cameron Mitchell, Rik Battaglia, Dominique Wilms, Ivica Pajer, Raffaella Carra. 1:44 [1:38]

Instead of mythology, we get history (or at least one portrayal of it), with Julius Caesar (Mitchell) in 54 BC wanting to invade Britain but beset by a rebellious Gaul, led by Vercingetorix (Battaglia). There are also scenes in the Senate (mostly wanting Caesar to show up in person to justify his expenditures), and a fair amount of stuff on Caesar as a person—including an odd extended scene where he's dictating to *three* young scribes, apparently dictating two different letters and his treatise on Gaul being divided into three parts, and doing so simultaneously.

And, of course, there are *lots* of battle scenes with enormous casts of extras, horses, and arrows. Lots of bloodshed, much of it right there on the screen—and, by the way, a double-betrayal, as the third of Gaul's tribes that Caesar believed he had bribed to support him choose to attack him instead. There's also a somewhat complicated love story, involving Caesar's ward Publia (Carra), who's pledged to one soldier, then used by Caesar to marry a commander to assure his support, then captured by Vercingetorix…and eventually reunited with the soldier.

The bad: lots of red-shift problems, with much of the movie being in various shades of white and red; extreme pan-and-scan, with speaking characters sometimes invisible on one side or the other; occasionally choppy print. The good: a bit more vividly realistic view of battle, with hundreds of people dying badly; pretty good acting on Mitchell's part and elsewhere; a bit more nuance than one might expect. (If you read the IMDB reviews, be aware that one negative review says this was a French production. As the original title and most of the cast names may indicate, it was typical of these movies in being an Italian production, this time with most outdoor scenes filmed in Serbia.) Overall, given the print problems, it comes down to $1.25.

Son of Samson (orig. *Maciste nella valle dei Re*, that is, *Maciste in the Valley of the Kings*). 1960, color. Carlo Campogalliani (dir.), Mark Forest, Chelo Alonse, Vira Silenti. 1:29.

> The basic plot line: In the fifth century BC, the Persians are marauding and essentially controlling Egypt, with Pharaoh Armiteo I a weak ruler essentially in the thralls of his young, beautiful, wicked wife Queen Smedes. His son, Kenamun, goes out wandering and encounters Maciste (who says that means "Son of the Rock" although some call him Son of Samson), a phenomenally strong and always shirtless man. Kenamun sees a lion about to attack Maciste and shoots the lion with an arrow—and then Maciste wrestles a second lion into submission or death (unclear). So they've saved each others' lives. Previously, Kenamun had met and fallen for a young woman in a village and vowed to return to her one day.

> That's the start. Lots of marauding Persians, killing the men of a village and enslaving the women; oodles of "blood." Maciste frees the enslaved women of one village (yes, the same one). Smedes has Armiteo assassinated. Kenamun returns to Memphis…and the evil grand visir has a forgetfulness necklace that causes Kenamun to forget everything and marry Smedes.

> Lots more plot. Much Egyptian scenery, including the pyramids. Decent production values. Some humor. A dance/seduction that's a cross between a Dance of the Single Veil and a vigorous belly dance. All ends well, albeit only after a bunch more deaths. Apparently Mark Forest was actually bodybuilder Lou Degni.

> Widescreen (*very* widescreen, 2.35:1), and if your TV can do the expansion, the print's good enough that it didn't look bad expanded to fill the width (not the height) of a widescreen TV. Generally good print. Fairly satisfying, almost worth $1.75, but I'll say—by the relaxed standards for this set--$1.50.

Disc 6

Son of Hercules in the Land of Darkness (orig. *Ercole l'invincible* or *Hercules the Invincible*), 1964, color. Al World (Alvaro Mancori) (dir.), Dan Vadis, Spela Rozin. 1:20.

> As offered here, this is one in a series of Sons of Hercules films, with a lively and very silly theme song at beginning and end—and apparently offered as a two-parter, since roughly an hour in we're given a fast preview of the final 20-28 minutes as "in the next part."

> Never mind. At times fast-moving, at times just lots of scenery with son Argolese and his cowardly sidekick wandering around either looking for a city surrounded by lava or *within* the city. The first 20 minutes have the daughter of a rustic village king stripping down to take a swim

(although she winds up holding her short tunic in front of her) and about to be attacked by a lion, which Argolese naturally defeats. He's told that would be enough to win the hand of *anybody but* the daughter of the king—but for her hand he has to slay a non-fiery dragon that's threatening the village and bring back a tooth. Which, with the aid of a witch, he does—all in the first 20 minutes,

Meanwhile, the soldiers of an evil queen—frim the lava-surrounded city—destroy the village and take all but the coward prisoner. That sets up the rest of the movie. We see that Argolese has *almost* unlimited strength (he can easily defeat hundreds of armed soldiers, partly because the only use they make of their spears is to let him grab them and throw them, once impaling three soldiers on a single spear), but he's not *quite* strong enough to keep two circus elephants from tearing him apart—until his quick prayer to his gods results in one of the chains breaking.

Lots more plot in one final busy day, and all ends well—if we're to believe that the beautiful daughter, who's been strapped to a St. Andrew's Cross and bleeding nearly to the point of death is *wholly recovered* six minutes after being rescued. I guess love is strong.

Silliness aside, this is well-mounted, a generally very good color print, panned-and-scanned well enough that it wasn't bothersome, and fun. I'll give it $1.50.

Gladiators of Rome (orig. *Il gladiatore di Roma,* and IMDB has the singular "Gladiator"), 1962, "color." Mario Costa (dir.), Gordon Scott, Wandisa Guida, Roberto Risso. 1:40.

Sometimes life really is too short. The title credits were in yellow text on a shades-of-yellow background; after that, at least for the first 15-20 minutes, it was black, red and white, with various reds the only colors to be seen. Add to that the pace: several minutes of people talking so quickly that I could never follow the plot, followed by action sequences basically showing that the current emperor was a bloodthirsty villain determined to drive out Christianity at all costs. Oh, there's a superhumanly strong slave—and a beautiful slave girl who is, according to the IMDB summary, really a princess.

What the hell. It's on Amazon Prime and might even have real color there. I gave up. According to IMDB reviews, I was probably right to do so. $0.

Goliath and the Dragon, aka *Vengeance of Hercules* (orig, *La vendetta di Ercole*), 1960, color. Vittorio Cottafavi (dir.), Mark Forest, Broderick Crawford, Gaby André. 1:27.

Now *this* is more like it! Very widescreen (if your TV can zoom the small 3x4 picture), fairly good print (a bit red-shifted at times, but fine overall), and…did you notice the second named actor? That's right,

Broderick Crawford is King Eurystheus, the sadistic ruler of Italia, a kingdom nearby Thebes, which is protected by Goliath.

Goliath has been sent on a mission to restore the Blood Diamond from a god's statue that Crawford hid—in a cave protected by three-headed/flaming dogs and, I guess, a not very impressive dragon. Crawford's convinced that Goliath is dead, making Thebes ripe for the plucking. Things don't quite work out that way…

The oddity here: we're told early on that Goliath has been granted not only enormous strength but *immortality*—yet one of the subplots involves Goliath's brother poisoning him (don't ask). Maybe immortality has a different meaning than I thought?

Anyway: bare-chested specimens of brute strength. Women in peril. Men in peril. Telepathy. Visits from an ethereal representative of the gods—in the final one of which the representative apparently cares more for Goliath than for the gods. A reasonably happy ending. (Well, not for Crawford…)

There's also a little peasant who *could* be a sidekick, but he's only in the movie for maybe two minutes total. Oh, and Goliath is also apparently Emelius the Mighty. Oh, and Mark Forest is apparently our old friend Lou Degni.

Apparently the American version, which I saw, is significantly different than the original, including the pretty much unconvincing stop-motion animation of the non-flaming dragon. It also changed hero names because American International released it—and Universal owned the rights to Hercules. Gods are easy; studio licensing departments are tough.

Oh, the US version has all new music, by Les Baxter no less.

All in all, I found this one satisfying: by the low standards of Warrior flicks, a full $2.

Maciste in King Solomon's Mines (orig. *Maciste nelle miniere del re Salomone*). 1964, color. Piero Regnoli (dir.), Reg Park, Wandisa Guida, Bruno Piergentili. 1:32.

Good things: the version I have doesn't rename Maciste as Samson (although others apparently do, including the IMDB page, which *clearly* shows the Maciste title). Equal opportunity villains: the king who's usurped the throne and his partner in crime, a woman who wants half the profits from the mines (which the old king had kept closed to avoid problems) are both sadists—which I guess explains why they take forever to carry out their Fiendish Tortures, thus allowing Maciste to save the day. Oh, and if you relish extended closeups of a grotesque hero's muscles, well, you get lots of that.

Otherwise…it's a panned-and-scanned segment of a widescreen movie. Another case where blues and yellows rarely appear. Reg Park comes

off as an absolute doofus even when he's not captive to a magic ankle bracelet (and yes, first overcome by a special garland—don't these folks *ever* learn?). Indeed, his "acting" seems about as lively when he has no will as it does the rest of the time. It's slow. And slower. Then, sometimes, it's slow. Generously, $0.50.

The First 24

Not really the first half: there are 26 more movies on seven more discs. I may finish the lot within the next decade. Or not.

The dollar scores for these are all on the generous side—I'd say most would be at least $0.50 lower if they weren't this special kind of movie. Given that, I gave one full $2, one $1.75, six $1.50, four $1.25 and another four $1. I guess I thought eight of the flicks were pretty decent and another eight were watchable.

Then there are the four $0.75, two $0.50, one $0.25 and one zero: eight pretty bad flicks.

It seems to add up to $26, which surprises me a little.

If future reviews appear anywhere, it will be in a blog, which may or may not be *Walt at Random*. Otherwise, well, it's been weird.

Masthead

NOTE: This is *not* the final issue: that will appear in very late December.

I have made a consistent effort to make sure each edition of *C&I* is reasonably full to an even number of pages. This time, not so much. Sorry.