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The Front

Fourteen?

This issue begins the fourteenth year of *Cites & Insights*. Or, if you prefer, the 20th year of “this thing” under different names (the first six as part of *Library Hi Tech News*).

This issue is also the 169th issue—or, if you keep all the issues (or buy the annuals), the 171st issue, since two issues (one 38 pages long, the other two pages) did not receive issue numbers and are not part of the canon. Although they’ll continue to be part of those two annual paperback editions.

The question mark above reflects my mild astonishment that this thing is still happening—and that I have no current plans to stop it at a specific point. It *almost* disappeared in late 2011, but it came back strong (in my opinion) in 2012, and 2013 was another good year, especially strong on original library research, open access, ebooks and books.

How about readership numbers? I couldn’t do real numbers until the next issue anyway, since this issue actually appears in early December 2013—and, thanks to a change in LISHost servers, I can’t *really* do readership numbers at all: I’m basically starting over from October 2013 (partly my fault). I know the December 2013 issue had more than 600 downloads in the first three weeks of November 2013; beyond that, there’s probably not much to say.

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About that “early December” date: At some point (as soon as NCES posts the 2012 academic library statistics), I’ll set *C&I* aside and devote nearly all my attention to preparing a newer and more carefully-done extension of *The Big Deal and the Damage Done*, which will appear through a traditional library publisher. It’s possible that the next issue won’t appear until sometime in February. (Or not: I don’t know when NCES will release the statistics.)

Plans for 2014? To keep doing this if it continues to be interesting, at least sometimes fun, and reasonably well-read. (Getting more contributions wouldn't hurt.) I plan to complete the ebook sweep with a piece on ebooks and libraries. I plan to do some writing on library-related topics. I plan to write about magazines (not journals). I'll almost certainly write about OA (there's a little manufactured scandal that may deserve some attention, for example). And I'll write about a lot of other stuff, including miscellaneous snark in *THE BACK*, old movies and...whatever.

Meanwhile, here's the first issue of Volume 14. If you like it, kick in a few bucks...or at least tell other people about it.

By the way: I started the single-column 6" x 9" version a couple of years ago to suit those who read this online or on tablets. It appears that one-sixth to one-fourth of downloads are the single-column version. That's enough to keep the .on version going.

Words

Books, E and P

You *might* think of this discussion as Part 3 of WORDS: THE EBOOK MARKETPLACE. It is another set of notes and comments on material ranging back as far as May 2010 and related to ebooks, but it's really about books and the media in which they appear.

Note another key distinction from previous discussions in this area: *E and P*, not *E versus P*. Sure, some of these items make the digital-triumphalist assumption that print books will die out within the next generation (or next five years!) or become irrelevant collectibles, and there may be a few suggesting that ebooks will disappear or become a niche segment (although that seems unlikely). But my sense—not yet tested, since I'm writing this preface before beginning the essay—is that much of the discussion is now more nuanced and plausible, starting with the real-world fact that old media rarely die and the *likelihood* that there's room in this world for both print books and ebooks, in very large quantities in both cases, for the foreseeable future.

I've offered my own thoughts and a plausible scenario in previous essays. I am less and less convinced that “content matters, medium doesn't” is an adequate assertion, but I also believe many book-length texts can be served equally well by e- or p- form and some book-length items work better in ebook form. I believe it's beneficial to society to have lots of people reading lots of things and that the persistence of books is more important than the carrier. If almost all readers decide they really want entirely ebooks (and it's *their* decision, not a forced decision), I'm good with that. I think it's unlikely—and increasingly I

believe the facts and trends back me up—but my own opinion does not matter at all.

2009

Screen Reading and Print Reading

This piece, by Mark Bauerlein [on October 21, 2009](#) at *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, considers an article from *The Journal of Research in Reading* by Anne Mangen, “Hypertext fiction reading: haptics and immersion.” Mangen says the “intangibility and volatility of the digital text” is under-examined and “materiality matters.” Quoting Bauerlein interpreting Mangen:

The reading experience includes manual activities and haptic perceptions (what the skin and muscles and joints register), and so as activities and perceptions of that kind are changed from one kind of reading experience to another because of the object, the reading experience, too, will change.

The differences between screen and paper go deeper than the physics of each. They also involve the relationship the reader has to them.

There’s more, adding up to a claim that digital text makes people read “in a shallower, less focused way.” Which would imply that it’s unsuitable for reading complex texts—if true. (There’s a link to an interview, but it’s defunct.)

At least at the moment, Mangen’s paper [is available online](#). It’s 16 pages and I admit to only skimming it. It would appear to be primarily theoretical, with few actual studies backing up the assertions.

2010

the loneliness of the unshared e-book

Here’s one from Barbara Fister [on May 30, 2010](#) at *Barbara Fister’s Place*. While it’s technically not the lede, I really must quote this paragraph, if only because Fister shows a willingness to parenthesize (is that a word?) that I envy:

New York Times contributor Verlyn Klinkenborg (who [visited my place of work once](#) and was overwhelmed by the “deep-keeled Minnesotan politeness that states, as a life proposition, that you should not put yourself forward, not even to the raising of a hand in class”—and used it to write an interesting piece on young women’s hesitance to claim authority as writers) reflects on reading on an iPad. And he has exactly the same reservations about the experience as I do.

Those reservations? Primarily that nearly all ebooks are “ugly”—in the sense that they’re identical.

There is no design of the words on the page, no distinction among books. They all look alike, and at every page you feel as if you’re in the same place in the text, somewhere in the middle. It’s impossible to get a sense of how old the book is, what makes the book visually distinctive, or where you are in the text. There’s a profusion of editions of classics and translations, but because they’re all dressed in the same burlap duds, it’s hard to tell which is newer, which is more authoritative, which is more accurate. This seeming democracy of words has made every book wear the same drab, ill-fitting uniform.

That section isn’t quoted, so I’ll assume it’s Fister’s own take—and to a great extent it is inherent in non-PDF ebooks.

Klinkenborg notes that most of the books he’s read come from libraries (also true for me)—and that the assumption behind most ebook systems that you must *own* a book to read it, and that only *you* can read it, “goes against the social value of reading, the collective knowledge and collaborative discourse that comes from access to shared libraries.”

Why does this commentary wind up in “Books, E and P”? Because Klinkenborg is making two kinds of distinctions between ebooks and print books: Print books typically offer a much broader range of layout and typography (and inherently show you how far along you are) and print books lend themselves to lending.

The comments—11 of them, expressing an interesting range of opinions. One strikes me as particularly interesting: Celita DeArmond, who says that the qualities of print books are important for fiction but *not* for nonfiction—which, as a response seems to say, ignores the range of books called “nonfiction.” Some of us would reverse that: Layout, typography and the like may be more important for (some) nonfiction than for (most) fiction.

2011

Deciding on a Book, and How to Read It

Jump ahead more than a year—to August 10, 2011, when Nick Bilton wrote this in the *New York Times* “Personal Tech” section. The lede:

I just read a book!

This might not sound so extraordinary, but I didn’t just read a book in print, on an e-reader or even on a mobile phone. Instead, I read a book on dozens of devices.

Dozens? Yep, or at least almost—he wanted to find (his own) answer to “which e-reader or tablet is the best for reading books?” So he set out to try them all, reading one chapter of Caleb Carr’s *The Alienist* on each of

nine devices and a “crumply old print paperback.” Remember, this was 2011, when there was still “the Amazon Kindle” and only two generations of iPad, none having near-print-resolution screens. The book is a crime novel set in the late 19th century, but Bilton is one of those readers who *doesn't* want to get fully lost in a narrative: One of his complaints about the Kindle is that its web browser was limited, “which does not make for the smoothest experience when you are trying to hop off to the Web to look up facts; something I often wanted to do when reading a historical novel.”

Otherwise? He liked the Kindle as a reading device but didn't care for the keyboard (which has disappeared in many recent Kindles) and loved the fact that Kindle apps let him synchronize reading across various devices. He was happy enough reading the novel on various mobile phones. He thought the original iPad was a bit too heavy for an e-reader—and here's a curiously self-contradictory paragraph:

Both iPads offer an immersive reading experience. I found myself jumping back and forth between my book and the Web, looking up old facts and pictures of New York City. I also found myself being sucked into the wormhole of the Internet and a few games of Angry Birds rather than reading my book.

Dear Nick: My definition of “immersive” is that you find yourself immersed in it, *not* skipping off to web searches and Angry Birds instead. He notes that *some* people think distractions are distracting, and for those he suggests the Color Nook.

He finally tried a paper book—and it becomes clear why Bilton has an odd definition of “immersive”:

For the last chapters of the book, I read the paperback. It took barely a paragraph for me to feel frustrated. I kept looking up things on my iPhone, and forgetting to earmark my page.

He comes down to choosing between the (original) Kindle and the iPad 2, but he adds one note:

But if money is tight, go for print. My used paperback cost only \$4.

It would be even cheaper—with better-quality paper to boot—as a hardcover at his local library. I see there's a copy at my library and it appears to be available. Of course, I'm of the old guard: if I'm reading a novel I tend to *read the novel*, not use it as a springboard for web searches and wholly unrelated games.

print is dead, long live print

Jenica Rogers posted this [on September 22, 2011](#) at *Attempting Elegance*. She'd been thinking about ebooks. She loves ebooks:

I love ebooks. I love them on my iPad more than I love anything else on the iPad. Always having a book in my pocket? Brilliant. Best thing ever. Having a hundred books in my pocket? EVEN BETTER. I'm an avid re-reader of genre fiction, so having my library on my device is spectacular.

Great. What makes Rogers different is that, instead of declaring *therefore the print book is dead for everybody*, she notes some of the ways in which she is *not* Everywoman. She quotes a [September 16, 2011 LiveJournal](#) post "Across the Digital Divide" by author Seanan McQuire. I'll quote the same passages Rogers quoted:

It is sometimes difficult for me to truly articulate my reaction to people saying that print is dead. I don't want to be labeled a luddite, or anti-ebook; I love my computer, I love my smartphone, and I love the fact that I have the internet in my pocket. The existence of ebooks means that people who can't store physical books can have more to read. It means that hard-to-find and out of print material is becoming accessible again. It means that people who have arthritis, or weak wrists, or other physical disabilities that make reading physical books difficult, can read again, without worrying about physical pain. I love that ebooks exist.

This doesn't change the part where, every time a discussion of ebooks turns, seemingly inevitably, to "Print is dead, traditional publishing is dead, all smart authors should be bailing to the brave new electronic frontier," what I hear, however unintentionally, is "Poor people don't deserve to read."

I don't think this is malicious, and I don't think it's something we're doing on purpose. I just think it's difficult for us, on this side of the digital divide, to remember that there are people standing on the other side of what can seem like an impassable gorge, wondering if they're going to be left behind. Right now, more than 20% of Americans do not have access to the internet. In case that seems like a low number, consider this: That's one person in five. One person in five doesn't have access to the internet. Of those who do have access, many have it via shared computers, or via public places like libraries, which allow public use of their machines. Not all of these people are living below the poverty line; some have voluntarily simplified their lives, and don't see the need to add internet into the mix. But those people are not likely to be the majority.

Now. How many of these people do you think have access to an ebook reader?

It gets even *more* interesting. Rogers raised these questions to two classes of first-year (college) honors students:

[T]hey were baffled and annoyed by the idea that print books might someday go away—"I can't afford to buy the big paperbacks" and "the library's the only place you can get enough books to really read" both came out of their mouths—and horrified by the idea that people might someday have to overcome the technology entry barrier of buying an ereader in order to read a book.

College frosh in 2011, who despite being The Digital Generation not only don't want print books to go away, they don't want libraries full of print books to go away.

I'm not *quite* sure what to make of this sentence, but it contains one of those words that tends to tick me off: "Libraries all over are struggling to provide the richness of reading experience in ebook form that we can and do provide with print, while the BookSmellers are alive and well, shouting from the rooftops that a Kindle will never smell the same as a real book."

I wonder about her close, which seems to imply that ebooks *are* "the future" and somehow "enabling literacy and a love of words" in ways that print books aren't. Overall, however, it's an interesting discussion.

Coming to blows over books

Continuing with more from librarian colleagues whom I greatly respect (even as I frequently disagree with them), this one does appear to be "vs." rather than "and"—by Iris Jastram [on October 7, 2011](#) at *Pegasus Librarian*. Keeping the continuity, it's another anecdote that begins "a librarian walks into a classroom..."

This time, when Jastram walked in, students were "already there exploring the second edition of *Jane Eyre* that our special collections librarian had brought up for them." She found students engaged in "a spontaneous but very heated debate over the importance of the book as a physical thing vs an intangible narrative. Does it actually matter if you hold a book in your hands? Is there something about that experience that matters? Or is it simply a waste of resources and space to go about printing mass quantities of things that could exist as bytes instead?"

The most vehement ebook advocate raged against "self-righteous book smellers" while the greatest advocate for printed books talked about how it was important to be able to capture pieces of history not just in the text of the novel itself but in construction and display as well. At one point I threw a wrench into the "it's economically unconscionable to ship printed material around" argument by telling them the 2 second version of ebook lending woes in libraries and the digital divide (I couldn't resist). At another point the professor and I had to step in when things got heated to the point of ad hominem attacks. It's pretty safe to say that I haven't been involved in another class where the students were passionate almost to the point of blows.

There's "booksmellers" again. Just paste a scratch-and-sniff square on their Kindle and they'll be happy with ebooks, right? And the "print books *must* die because ecology/economy" argument (students, not Jastram), which invites a close investigation into the students' other consumption patterns. But mostly this is an incident.

What was the resolution? We decided that it's complicated, that neither side is categorically right, but that self-righteousness doesn't get anyone very far.

The first (and only) comment says, I believe correctly, "the ecological soundness of one format over the other is pretty much a wash" and explains why.

The Codex is Dead; Long Live the Codex

Similar title, also by an academic librarian—and *maybe* also with an underlying assumption that print books are Doomed in any case. This time it's Wayne Bivens-Tatum [on November 15, 2011](#) at *Academic Librarian*—but also (another twofer!) Laura Braunstein's "We Don't Read That Way" (the original title is in quotes) [on November 9, 2011](#) at *ACRL*og. B-T quotes a key passage from Braunstein's post:

Ebooks seem like sweet low-hanging fruit—they have enhanced searchability, accessibility at any time or place, and reduced storage and preservation costs. What's not to love? Ebooks seem to make our students very happy. Often they don't want to read a book cover to cover (although their professors might wish they would), and searching for relevant passages seems to satisfy their needs for many assignments. And journal literature seems exempt from the preference for print—I haven't heard many complaints about deaccessioning back runs of print journals represented in JSTOR's collections, for instance.

I'm not certain of all those statements (are students *really* entirely happy with ebooks? does the "enhanced searchability" of ebooks come at the expense of usable indexes, and does that matter? is it true that faculty are entirely happy with print journals being discarded, or have they just stopped complaining?) but I'm not in academia, so I'll have to assume Braunstein's right.

Let's spend a bit more time with Braunstein, because that key passage isn't all she's saying. Here's her lede (noting that she's English Language and Literature Librarian at Dartmouth):

I was chatting recently with a professor in my liaison department who was beginning research for a new book. Did she have everything she needed? Was there anything I should look into ordering? Yes, she said, the library was pretty well stocked with books and journals for the topic. However, many of the books she needed we only had as

ebooks—for those, she would order print copies through interlibrary loan.

Braunstein says another colleague had a similar experience: humanities faculty thought a new ebook collection was great for quick lookup—“But they would still want print books for serious study—ebooks weren’t the same, they told him, ‘we just don’t read that way.’”

It isn’t that the faculty members don’t do tech: many of them own Kindles or other ereaders and *love* them...for pleasure reading, but not for understanding and scholarship. Braunstein also notes that this is *not* generational: “some of the faculty I know who seem most committed to print are younger than forty.”

The last portion of Braunstein’s post is interesting and suggests that some academic librarians are far from neutral on medium issues and on meeting faculty needs:

Is a user who routinely requests a print copy when the ebook is in the library’s holdings just multiplying the costs we thought we were saving? Should we deny these requests? Should we tell our Humanities faculty that even if they “just don’t read that way,” they should, because that’s the way the world of scholarly communication is moving in most other fields? Do we need to change their habits of reading, and habits of mind? Do we lead them to new formats or follow their preferences?

Two dozen comments. Barbara Fister wonders just why academic libraries *are* buying ebooks in preference to print. Steven Bell goes generational (and should know better): “Wait for the next generation of scholars.” I’d quote more, but I found it depressing: in summary, *there’s only one future* but those old faculty members just aren’t on board. I wasn’t the only one who found Bell’s response dismissive—Rudy loves ereading but wants print books for scholarship and suspects that treating the preference as generational is doing a disservice.

Wayne B-T pops up in those comments with a great line (suggesting that librarians may be privileging students and themselves over the *legitimate* needs of humanities scholars), but we’ll get back to his own essay shortly. Barbara Fister’s also not thrilled with the “wait a generation” remark; as she notes, there’s no research suggesting that’s true.

Bell says he’s really talking about “the 3-year olds who are learning to read on ipads” and admits he has no evidence for that either. Are three-year-olds really learning to read on iPads? I thought kiddie lit and board books were still going great guns...

As to student preferences: Lisa Horowitz reports on a library survey about preferences—which found that most segments very strongly preferred print for fiction, *especially* undergrads.

Let's get back to B-T's thoughts. First, he takes on the "don't want to read books all the way through" point—students who want to treat *all* books as "collections of information tidbits to pick and choose among."

The scholarly monograph in the humanities isn't designed to be read that way. It's not a report of research results, but the result of research, and the analyses and arguments develop throughout the book or at least throughout the chapters. And what's more, scholars don't just dip into one book at a time to get some useful fact; they immerse themselves in books and frequently move among many different books while working.

B-T's surprised that Braunstein was surprised by the humanities faculty preference for print when doing scholarship, even when they love ebooks for pleasure.

It's easy to forget amidst the technological splendor that the codex is an extremely useful tool. Humanists often work on research projects that involve examining multiple texts and comparing them, sometimes moving from book to book and sometimes from passage to passage within those books. Spreading several books on a desk and flipping back and forth between passages is relatively easy, and much easier than trying to do the same thing on any current ebook reader. Annotating a book with pencil in hand is also faster and easier than doing it on any ebook readers I've yet seen.

When B-T's library did a campus survey, 92% of humanists viewed print books as "essential."

There's considerably more to B-T's essay (it may be a blog post but it's also an essay). He believes that "when the tools improve, no one will be protesting the demise of the codex." I wonder whether that's true, but never mind. Here's what he does anticipate, apparently accepting the probability that print books will up and die (which, given publishing issues, might be true for scholarly monographs—except that PoD makes it so easy to create short print runs):

The immediate future will be considerably more banal, but I can see the trend with both the new Ebrary ebook downloads and the new ebook platform on the new [Project Muse beta site](#). Both allow quick and easy downloading of portions of books into PDF format, and the entire book if you don't mind it being broken up into sections or chapters. This mimics the availability of scholarly articles through many databases, and everyone admits that even humanist scholars have no problem with electronic articles, just electronic books. That's because most of them print the articles out and read them on paper, which they will now be able to do with lots of future ebooks. I'd rather have the virtual reality library, but until that happens PDF printouts might be as close to an ebook-only future as most humanists are likely to get. Libraries might

stop buying printed books some day. The codex is dead. Scholars will then print out their PDF ebooks to make reading and research easier. Love live the codex.

A couple of comments, one of which highlights one great sentence I didn't quote earlier: "it's not reactionary to resist technology that makes one's life more difficult." Indeed not.

Books Vs. E-Books

In this case—a [December 30, 2011 article](#) by Ryan Matthew Pierson at *LockerGnome*—the "vs." is right there in the title. After an opening paragraph that strikes me as muddled, Pierson attempts to judge winners on each of several categories. You run into oddities right away when Pierson gives as one of the advantages of ebooks that they can "be read in the dark thanks to backlit screens," which owners of most eInk readers must find bemusing. Turns out Pierson is not only an early ebook reader (mostly pirated editions on a Palm Handspring), he's one of those who wants autoscrolling ebooks. How many people really want to read *anything* in autoscrolling mode? Personally, I'd find it maddening (yes, I've tried it).

The comparisons and winners-and-losers are interesting, if sometimes curious. For example, in declaring ebooks the winner on portability, I find this paragraph puzzling:

If you've ever changed addresses with even a moderate book collection, you're probably acutely aware of just how impossible it can be to move boxes of books in and out of your home. One or two is fine, but a dozen books can be a backbreaker.

I'm sure there *are* books for which a dozen in a box would be a heavy load, but that's not true for most of them unless you have a remarkably weak back. Still, there's no question: 1,000 books on a Kindle weigh a whole lot less than 1,000 print books.

He says cost is a tie—but the discussion makes print books look pretty good. As for battery life, infinity beats even the longest-lasting ereader.

He also declares "experience" a tie, with the proviso that "Experience is one area that is different for each individual" and this as a close: "E-books may be here to stay, but there will be a place in this world for physical printed media for generations to come." I'd go further: Experience is an area that may be different *for each book*, which is why "vs." may be the wrong word these days. Finally, he says books win for navigation.

The closing paragraphs make it clearer that he used the wrong connecting word in the title—and that using "books" to mean *print* books is probably a mistake:

Books and e-books are strikingly similar. Both of them have a fair share of pros and cons. What works great for you might not do so for the next person. Ultimately, the choice comes down to personal preference and needs. Many still prefer mixing the two in their own personal libraries depending on what each book is intended for.

Bottom line: There can be no clear winner in this battle of the literary mediums. Depending on the reader, the book, or the device, either side is equally capable of winning preference. What do you think? Are you more inclined to purchase an e-book or something more physical?

(The plural of medium is media, but never mind.) Seventeen comments offer a mix of opinions.

2012

Sorry iBooks, paper books still win on specs

This moderately long discussion is by Dieter Bohn [on January 20, 2012](#) at *The Verge*. It's an interesting and literate discussion, one that posits paper books as a technology and looks at the relative advantages of that technology. Bohn says at the start and finish that ebooks are inevitable—and it's hard to determine whether he also means that print books are doomed. The former (widespread use of ebooks is going to happen, and indeed is already happening) is true enough and a very good thing. The latter (ebooks displacing print books until the latter disappear or become museum pieces) is not implied by the former, and so far that's not the way it's working out.

That's not the heart of his discussion. Shortly after the announcements of iBooks 2 and iBooks Author, Bohn thinks specifically about ways that paper still works better. He has a long bullet list of “specs” for a standard paper book and it's a pretty good list. Bohn goes into more detail for passive reading (including areas in which ebooks may be better—e.g., embedded video and audio, although that's not true for eInk readers) and “active reading,” by which Bohn means marking up books or otherwise taking notes. He finds the ebook alternatives and experience inferior to active reading with print books. I *never* mark up books (a good thing since 95+% of them are library books!) and rarely do his kind of active reading, so I'll just point to his thoughtful discussion.

Unlike Pierson, Bohn thinks ebooks do better on navigation than paper books—and it's interesting that he calls indexes “a primitive system,” whereas direct text searching is more advanced. (Does Bohn know that good indexing is more than just word-tagging?) On the other hand, he finds “referencing” slightly better on print books—and, of course, ebooks win on storage and transport.

Then there are DRM, formats and resale—and you can probably guess the gist of a long, detailed discussion. One paragraph regarding the situation with ebook formats and DRM:

I find the situation nearly intolerable. It's not just that I want to be able to choose my e-reader device and then have free and easy access to any book, it's that what we're discussing here are *books*, the very things that have created and sustained our culture over generations. To allow them to be encrypted and inaccessible without specific software is to limit the dissemination of human knowledge. Imagine if you couldn't read Aristotle or Confucius because the DRM format their publishers chose wasn't compatible with your iPad. It's insanity.

Which brings him to the thousand-year view, and you can guess how that one goes. One paragraph:

If you're not convinced yet, I can make this point very quickly. I'd like you to read an ebook stored on a 5.25-inch floppy disk. Go ahead, I'll wait.

This section is more significant:

Before I am willing to say that ebook technology can measure up to paper book technology, I need to see the companies developing ebooks lay out a clear plan to ensure that their books and any notes we take on them have a legitimate shot of still being around and readable in a thousand years.

The thousand year view is simple: if you're going to commit knowledge to writing in some form, you need to ensure that it will exist and be readable in a thousand years. I can tell you that I've personally gained insight and understanding about our world by reading a lightly-distributed instruction manual for rural, parish priests in England — written in the fourteenth century. Will an independently-created iBook 2 textbook be around in the thirty first century?

And yet, Bohn says that in the short view “e-readers are clearly better” than print books. I'm not sure why that is true *on a general or universal basis*. It's certainly not based on anything in the essay other than portability and ease of word searching (but not concept searching).

There are 400 comments. After plowing through what seemed to be dozens arguing about whether “need for light” is a serious disadvantage for print books, I gave up. Probably worth noting: Bohn is another one who's been reading ebooks for a long time and likes them.

A Franzen Quintet

Novelist Jonathan Franzen made an apparently somewhat incendiary speech at the Hay Festival in Cartagena, excerpted in *The Telegraph* [on](#)

[January 29, 2012](#) with the *decidedly* incendiary title “Jonathan Franzen: e-books are damaging society.” Excerpts:

“I think, for serious readers, a sense of permanence has always been part of the experience. Everything else in your life is fluid, but here is this text that doesn’t change.

“Will there still be readers 50 years from now who feel that way? Who have that hunger for something permanent and unalterable? I don’t have a crystal ball...

“Maybe nobody will care about printed books 50 years from now, but I do. When I read a book, I’m handling a specific object in a specific time and place. The fact that when I take the book off the shelf it still says the same thing - that’s reassuring.

“Someone worked really hard to make the language just right, just the way they wanted it. They were so sure of it that they printed it in ink, on paper. A screen always feels like we could delete that, change that, move it around. So for a literature-crazed person like me, it’s just not permanent enough.”

An odd set of comments. (*Not* excerpted in the article: Anything that would justify that alarming headline.) And the crowd went wild...

Jonathan Franzen Thinks Ebooks Are Not for “Serious Readers”

That’s Torie Bosch’s take in [a January 30, 2012 piece](#) at *Slate*. She finds Franzen’s argument that real book lovers will favor a hard copy “a bit insulting.” She quotes another writer who wonders what Franzen’s getting at about permanence, which might be a good question, then makes her own prejudice clear:

What would be best is if people who don’t like a new technology—OK, let’s be honest and call them Luddites—could admit that they simply are happy with the existing strategies. It’s not necessary to disparage the technology and everyone who enjoys it as somehow less serious or missing a grand philosophical point.

I might be more willing to take her second sentence seriously if she hadn’t used the label “Luddite” so broadly. That’s about all there is to the story: If you dislike ebooks (or, apparently, *any* new technology) *you’re a Luddite*. Bang. End of any reasonable discussion. No visible comments.

Jonathan Franzen Shakes His Fist at the Clouds, Especially the Virtual Ones

John Scalzi commented in [this January 30, 2012 post](#) at *Whatever*, responding to a question on whether he had any thoughts on Franzen’s opinions.

Scalzi understands the physicality of a book and thinks the love of books as tactile objects will be around for a while.

On the other hand I suspect Franzen overprivileges the permanence of the book as a physical object to a considerable degree, and if you want to know why I think that, try reading an original science fiction pulp paperback from the 70s or earlier. They were printed on crappy acidic paper that started turning yellow nearly the moment they got off the printing press, the glue on the spine crumbles, and the thing starts falling apart the second you look at it too hard. You can *hold* one of these books, but if you try to *read* it, you run a really good chance of destroying it in the process. Bibliophiles—the ones who love physical books at least—are aware that physical books are anything but permanent. There are lots of ways for them to go away.

The cheapest possible mass-market paperbacks may not be the ideal counterargument, but Scalzi's point is well taken. Then he considers the permanence (or lack thereof) of an ebook on his Nook...a consideration that gets strange because, as he notes, for DRM-laden ebooks, if the company goes away, *your books disappear*. There's more to that discussion—and Scalzi also notes that printed books can be *and have been* altered in different editions.

Here's the author at work:

Franzen's dislike of eBooks appears essentially to be an appeal to the romanticism of physical books, which is nice and about which I can sympathize with him, although only up to a point. Ultimately, however, my more pragmatic side comes through, and it says "You want this book in [x] format? You'll pay me money for it? Here you go." Which is why my books are variously in hardcover, trade paperback, mass market paperback, eBook (in various formats) and audio (also in various formats), depending on their place in the production cycle and the agreements I have in place with publishers.

In other words—as he explicitly says—Scalzi is format-agnostic. He notes that Franzen's books are available as ebooks, which makes the discussion even odder.

Lots of comments—118 in all, and at the end of a medium-length post and start of the comments, I see that the vertical bar is less than one-tenth of the way down the screen. So, tempting as it might be, I can't say I've read *all* the comments, but I'm sure they're interesting. Early ones seem mostly to be in the "print *and* e" range, which makes sense.

Jonathan Franzen Is Wrong: Ebooks Are Good for Everyone

If Franzen may have gone to one extreme, you can count on *Mashable* to go to the other, as in [this January 30, 2012 essay](#) by Lance Ulanoff. Who tells us that some of his best friends are books, in much the same way

people used to say some of their best friends were [insert your choice of words here]. He starts out “I love books, especially old ones.” But he *knows the truth*: ebooks are “a better long-term solution for the reading public”—not for some of them, not for some uses, but as *the future*.

Here’s a fine example of how much Ulanoff loves books:

If Franzen is interested in permanence, shouldn’t he cheer the fact that people are now reading books, but not hacking down the world’s trees to make them or sending carbon-monoxide-producing global warming-promoting 18-wheelers around the county to deliver thousands and thousands of physical books (though, to be fair, this is still happening, too)?

He loves print books as a “romantic” idea—and his 13-year-old prefers print books. “She says she simply loves books too much and cannot imagine a time when they’re gone.”

Now, usually, if someone in *the youngest generation* says they prefer print books and don’t want them to go away, you might say “oh, maybe it’s going to be ebooks *and* print books.” But you wouldn’t be a *Mashable* author or possessed of total knowledge. Here are the next two sentences:

I hate to tell her this, but ebooks are the future. They’re cheaper to produce, easier to distribute and, dare I say it, probably promote reading better than your local library.

Oh good, a gratuitous slap at libraries as well! Ulanoff’s real and apparently total argument in favor of ebooks wholly replacing print books?

What Franzen fails to realize is that while books are beautiful, permanent things they’re also inconvenient. Years ago you traveled with, maybe, one book and some magazines. You wouldn’t consider taking two big books (maybe two thinner paperbacks). But even if you weren’t traveling, when you finished one book, you needed to head to the library or bookstore to buy another. When I finish an ebook, I simply connect to Kindle’s Whispernet and buy and download a new one. Like most people I know, I read more now with my Kindle than I ever did before.

And, of course, we all have unlimited resources to buy whatever new ebooks we want, so never mind that the library has them for free... He doesn’t discuss aspects of books other than convenience and price—apparently nothing else matters.

Ulanoff says firmly that print “will be a memory in 50 years.” And, at the end, tosses in the *inevitable* fall of print. If I were a gambling man (and thought I’d live to 117 or *wanted* to live that long), I would bet money Ulanoff’s wrong. Remember: Print being a memory means that *100% of print books, print magazines and print newspapers* will disappear. By 2062.

No More E-Books Vs. Print Books Arguments, OK?

Let's close this subsection with Jonathan Segura's plea [on January 31, 2012](#) at NPR's *monkey see*, making this discussion a three-day wonder. After sniping at Franzen and making fairly snarky remarks in "favor" of print books (e.g., "E-books do not allow you to advertise your literary affectedness on the subway"), Segura closes with a reasonably sensible paragraph:

Here's the thing: you don't have to be a print book person or an e-book person. It's not an either/or proposition. You can choose to have your text delivered on paper with a pretty cover, or you can choose to have it delivered over the air to your sleek little device. You can even play it way loose and read *in both formats!* Crazy, right? To have choice. Neither is better or worse—for you, for the economy, for the sake of "responsible self-government." We should worry less about how people get their books and—say it with me now!—just be glad that people are reading.

The short piece drew 168 comments. Some are with Franzen. Some aren't. Some understand that we can (and probably will) have both. Some buy into the Singular Ebook-Only Future. One vigorous pro-ebook comment ends with that magic sentence "Get used to it." I didn't read all of the comments, of course, but many of them are thoughtful and literate—on all sides of the issue.

So much for Franzen.

Back to the Rest of 2012

A meaningless heading to mark the end of the Franzen discussion.

Why Some Book Buyers Are Increasingly Resistant to E-Readers

That odd title heads [a February 1, 2012 piece](#) by Laura Hazard Owen at *paidContent*. The lede:

Book marketing firm Verso Advertising recently found that over half of book buyers say they are "not at all likely" to purchase an e-reader in the next 12 months—up from 40 percent in 2009. Why?

First guess: Because a bunch of those who were *likely* to buy e-readers did exactly that?

Turns out Verso is talking about *avid* book buyers: those who buy at least ten books a year. That's a subset of readers; I certainly don't fall into the category (I read around 50 books a year, but buy fewer than five). The reasons offered by the authors of the study? E-readers don't offer enough "relative advantage" to switch; screen fatigue (book readers like *not* looking at another screen); avid buyers enjoy discovering new books in a bookstore. All of which are plausible, but seem to ignore the elephant in the room: a *lot* of e-readers and tablets and smartphones were sold from 2009 through 2011.

You could equally well tag this story with a remarkably upbeat “Nearly half of avid book buyers who don’t yet own e-readers say they are likely to purchase one in the next year.” What a positive story!

Guess what group is most “resistant” to ebook adoption? Teens. You know: the ones who’ve always read everything on the screen and don’t know what physical books are? (The reasons offered: ebooks are not social enough and 14% of teens recognize the problem of DRM.)

Comments offer other reasons why some avid book buyers aren’t on the ebook bandwagon. Of course, there’s an “inevitable blah blah blah death of print” comment from someone who claims—unconvincingly—that they love real books, but You Must Face The Facts. “Mark” offered the same reason I thought of originally: Lots of people already bought e-readers.

The Way We Read Now

Here’s a good example of an “and article” by Dwight Garner [on March 17, 2012](#) at *The New York Times Sunday Review*. He notes arguments against ebooks and one truly odd argument in favor of them, says he’s been trying to migrate to ebooks, but...

It’s a battle I may lose. I still prefer to consume sentences the old-fashioned and nongreen way, on the pulped carcasses of trees that have had their throats slit. I can imagine my tweener kids, in a few years, beginning to picket me for my murderous habits: “No (tree) blood for (narrative) oil.”

Then he gets to the real discussion:

It’s time to start thinking, however, about the best literary uses for these devices. Are some reading materials better suited to one platform than another?

My first guess is that, apart from enhanced ebooks on one side and color/photo-heavy books (on eInk devices) on the other, the general answer is *No*: It depends more on the reader than on the material. But that’s an uninformed guess. Garner offers an interesting thought piece suggesting otherwise.

He calls smartphones “clearly...recent technology’s greatest gift to literacy.” Maybe so. He finds that he reads mostly journalism on his smartphone and offers other candidates, including audiobooks.

When it comes to ereaders, he thinks Kindles are “the most intimate, and thus sexiest” devices, and after a discussion I find slightly incoherent suggests that ereaders are ideal for “singles”—that is, novellas and novelettes. He distinguishes between ereaders and iPads; he thinks iPads are ideal for “big nonfiction books” he’s likely to skim rather than read. (He’s not wild about multimedia add-ons.)

On the other hand, he doesn't care for poetry on any digital device. That seems to be about it.

An odd discussion, but an interesting one.

Do E-Books Make It Harder to Remember What You Just Read?

That's the question discussed in Maia Szilavitz' [March 14, 2012 item](#) at *Time Health & Family*.

She begins with her own experience reading mysteries on her new (gift) Kindle:

But I soon found that I had difficulty recalling the names of characters from chapter to chapter. At first, I attributed the lapses to a scary reality of getting older—but then I discovered that I didn't have this problem when I read paperbacks.

Gathering anecdotal data was fruitful: she wasn't the only one suffering from "e-book moments" (her phrase, not mine).

She notes the advantages of ebooks *especially* as textbooks (I'll focus on that in another roundup) but says there are studies suggesting that print books may be better for long-term memory. She cites Kate Garland at the University of Leicester:

She found that when the exact same material is presented in both media, there is no measurable difference in student performance.

However, there are some subtle distinctions that favor print, which may matter in the long run. In one study involving psychology students, the medium did seem to matter. "We bombarded poor psychology students with economics that they didn't know," she says. Two differences emerged. First, more repetition was required with computer reading to impart the same information.

Second, the book readers seemed to digest the material more fully. Garland explains that when you recall something, you either "know" it and it just "comes to you"—without necessarily consciously recalling the context in which you learned it—or you "remember" it by cuing yourself about that context and then arriving at the answer. "Knowing" is better because you can recall the important facts faster and seemingly effortlessly.

It's not that students reading the digital versions *never* remembered the material, but they were less likely to know it immediately. The article offers some perspectives and discussion on why this might be true. (Jakob Nielsen thinks it is true—and also that larger screens work better than smaller screens.) The concluding paragraphs:

This doesn't mean that there isn't a place for e-text books or computerized courseware, however. Neither Nielsen nor Garland is opposed to using new media for teaching. In fact, both believe that

there are many situations in which they can offer real advantages. However, different media have different strengths—and it may be that physical books are best when you want to study complex ideas and concepts that you wish to integrate deeply into your memory. More studies will likely show what material is best suited for learning in a digital format, and what type of lessons best remain in traditional textbooks.

But someone—perhaps the publishing industry?—is going to have to take the initiative and fund them.

Read a Physical Book When You Really Need to Remember Something
This brief piece by Thorin Klosowski [on April 3, 2012](#) at *lifehacker* mostly excerpts the *Time* article and invites feedback.

The feedback is interesting if sometimes a little wacko (i.e., suggesting that you'd get booklike performance by putting the ereader inside a hollowed-out book), and some comments suffer from annoying universalisms (“We no longer retain specific facts or information, but rather where we would go in order to look up that information”). Most interesting: several people come to the comments planning to disagree—then find that they don't. (One person essentially says that since *there is no difference* between the media *there can be no difference* in performance, studies be damned.) And, of course, there's the “this is generational, and since kids have grown up reading everything from the screen...” argument, which uses a verifiably false premise to lead to a logically consistent conclusion.

Books: Bits vs. Atoms

There it is again in the title of this discussion by Jeff Atwood [on April 10, 2012](#) at *Coding Horror*: “vs.” as in “or rather than and.” It's a truly odd discussion, starting with this lede (all emphasis in the original: Atwood loves boldface even more than I do):

I adore words, but let's face it: books suck.

More specifically, so many beautiful ideas have been helplessly trapped in physical made-of-atoms books for the last few centuries.

How do books suck? Let me count the ways:

Followed by a bullet list that combines the plausible with the peculiar (“They are often copyrighted”). He follows this with:

What's the point of a bookshelf full of books other than as an antiquated trophy case of written ideas trapped in awkward, temporary physical relics?

Books should not be celebrated. Words, ideas, and concepts should be celebrated. Books were necessary to store these things, simply because we didn't have any other viable form to contain them. But now we do.

The next heading is “Words Belong on the Internet,” and he says that rather than writing a book you should be “editing a wiki, writing a blog, or creating a website.” Based on that, it’s not “ebooks vs. print books,” it’s *books* vs. the web. Atwood is absolutely convinced: “In the never-ending human quest for communication, bits have won decisively over atoms.” Although he admits that 100% replacement may take a few more decades. A bit later, he turns present-day triumphalist once more:

No, the Internet will not kill the book. But it will change their form permanently; books are no longer pages printed with atoms, they’re files printed with bits: eBooks.

Note the “are,” rather than “will be.” The party’s over: print books are dead.

He does offer a list of bullets as to what’s wrong with ebooks—but “we’re only at the beginning of this journey,” even though ebooks are already “vastly more flexible than printed books.” If you’re so inclined you can read the list there, along with an extended discussion of one example. (For a tech writer, Atwood should know better than to say this: “I attempted to take a photograph of the book, then realized it’s incredibly difficult to take a decent picture of two pages of a book for a photography noob like myself, so I manually scanned the pages in instead.” Scanning in pages is taking a digital photograph of them, just in a slightly different way.)

While Atwood admits that for some layout-intensive books (such as the example he chose), most ebook versions (specifically, anything other than PDF) are *not* suitable replacements for print, his solution is *not* to retain print where it makes more sense, because he’s already shut that door. Instead, he offers two things publishers need to do: make ebooks cheap and make them near-perfect replicas of print books. Bye-bye reflowing for various reader sizes; bye-bye flexible type sizes; if you want near-perfect replicas of print, *PDF is your answer*.

Some 95 comments, all over the place as you might expect—some hungry for the all-multimedia-ebook future, some noting that print replication doesn’t work on a phone, some disagreeing that all print books are doomed. Complementarity is mentioned (if misspelled). One person noted “dynamism” as an *advantage* of ebooks—the same advantage (they can change! without you asking them to!) that others note as a serious disadvantage. One reader’s flaw is another’s virtue.

Paper books vs. e-books: I still can’t decide

Ten points for honesty in this title, on [an April 6, 2012 post](#) by “Stephen” at *zeigen*. Stephen’s been reading more ebooks lately, but isn’t ready to give up on paper books. He notes that “we’re still far from the tipping point” and thinks that “in 20 years, I suspect paper books will no longer hold the majority of the market.” He quotes an absurd growth rate for ebooks

(“over 1,000% a year,” which was wholly unsustainable and not true even in 2011), then offers a table of advantages and disadvantages of each medium.

It’s not a bad list—incomplete, but not bad. Maybe worth taking a look at yet another anecdotal set of decision points. His conclusion is interesting, as the decision boils down to one factor:

For now, I’ll continue to experiment with both, and usually pick whatever format is cheapest for the titles I want to read.

Somebody needs to tell him about public libraries.

The Ebook of My Dreams

Laura Braunstein [on April 18, 2012](#) at ACRLog.

We all have our frustrations with ebooks. The problem isn’t just one of print vs electronic or Luddite vs early adopter. Even as I happily consume Kindle books on my iPad and the new Project Muse collection for work, I find that ebooks simply don’t do [the things I want them to do](#)—the things the electronic format seems to promise. In an ideal world, what would ebooks do that would make them not a substitute for print books, but better than print books? What features would make ebooks represent a true new step in the evolution of information delivery systems?

That link is to a Barbara Fister post, and it’s a good one, but I’ll (probably) discuss it in an essay on ebooks and libraries. Eventually. Meanwhile, here are Braunstein’s desiderata, with my brief versions of her discussion:

- Interoperability: She wants internal hyperlinks and popup footnotes.
- Intertextuality: When a book cites another book or article or whatever, she wants a link—and the option of turning off all the links.
- Sharing: The text and the notes.
- Device neutrality: Does not require expansion.
- Curating: She wants to collect ebooks for her library the same way she’d buy print books.

One I particularly like: “Can we also decide: eBook? e-book? ebook?” What about e-Book and E-Book?

She asked for comments. She got five. One wants books to be like websites. One wants “full integration with POD” and other things. You can read the others directly.

The innovation we need to see before eBooks can completely replace pBooks

With a title like that, on this April 22, 2012 piece by Boris at *TheNextWeb*, the conclusion seems predestined: Obviously—as you’d expect at this site—*digital will completely replace print*, but it needs a little help.

Boris is a True Believer. Take the lede:

I haven’t bought a paper book since I bought my first iPad in 2010. Before that I bought between 20 and 40 books a year. I also own every *Wired* magazine, including issue 1.1, but I switched to the digital version as soon as it became available. You could argue that I prefer digital over analog most of the time. But I would like to refine that a bit. I like substance over form and content over carrier.

He’s also an early adopter and holds “unconditional love for all things Apple.” Then he starts getting mean-spirited. He asks one writer “when his books would go all digital” and is surprised when the writer says he didn’t believe that would ever happen. Boris says lots of people feel that way, and of course offers the only plausible reasons: “They’ll argue they like the smell of paper and the fact that books are tangible, real, and even, romantic.”

All those qualities also apply to the horse and carriage, doing the dishes, washing your clothes by hand, and a fireplace. And of course, you can still go on a horse ride, do the dishes without a machine, wash your clothes manually and get a fireplace. But even though all of these things still exist, it would be safe to say they also have been replaced by their modern equivalents.

He then says that people who prefer paper over digital are almost insulting writers and “content producers.” He says he understands there are a few advantages to paper—but you’ll forgive me if I don’t believe him.

Anyway, here are the technical challenges *he* sees to let him “forget about paper altogether” (and, since Boris knows best, *everybody* will forget about paper): Make it easier to show off his library; make it easier to share books; make it possible for authors to “digitally sign books.”

That’s it. His conclusion is in keeping with the rest of this single-minded piece:

Digital books are here to stay and there is no doubt that within a few years we will look at paper books as relics from the past. They will still exist but will be expensive and only available for a small group of collectors. We will still see a lot of innovation in digital books. They will become more useful, personal, shareable and awesome. And I will keep buying and reading them.

I have a *lot* of doubt that “within a few years” print books will be regarded as relics—except by people like Boris. There were only three comments, maybe because there’s no point in arguing with people like Boris. One of them is a reply (to a *very* odd comment); the other two are both in agreement. (The really odd comment: don’t read from a tablet because LED backlit screens “produce a lot of radiation, just like a computer.” Which, unless you mean the same kind of “radiation” that a lightbulb produces, is pure nonsense.)

Roy Tennant commented on Boris’ essay in a “Digital Shift” post [on April 23, 2012](#), and since his title is “What’s Required for eBooks to Carry the Day,” one could assume that Tennant’s another all-digital-future believer (come to think of it, “Digital Shift” carries some of that implication). But I don’t think that’s the case, given this sentence: “Personally, I’m not sure print books will ever be that marginalized, but everyone knows I’ve been wrong before.”

Tennant was looking for comments. He got three. The first notes a case of an author “signing” a digital copy; the second doesn’t see print books being marginalized but thinks ebooks may come to dominate some categories (no argument here); the third offers an interesting solution for digitally “signing” an ebook—and ends with this:

Meanwhile, I would have said that the thing ebooks still lack is the many *centuries* of usability engineering that has gone into pbooks. And it shows.

But Is It a Book?

This one’s from Jennifer Howard [on July 25, 2012](#) at *The Chronicle of Higher Education’s* Wired Campus blog, after she spent a week at the University of Virginia’s Rare Book School taking a course on “Born-Digital Materials: Theory & Practice.”

What makes a book a book? For Michael F. Suarez, director of the Rare Book School at the University of Virginia, a collection of texts on an e-reader doesn’t qualify in the fullest sense.

Howard quotes Suarez on the “bibliographic codes” and “social codes” embedded in a book. Bibliographic codes include paper stock, bindings, typeface and illustrations; social codes are the cues that tell you what *kind* of a book you’re dealing with—why it would be unlikely to confuse a Harlequin romance with a scholarly monograph.

Suarez calls the text itself “the linguistic codes,” and admits that this may be enough for casual readers—and blames English departments for conflating the linguistic code with the book.

To a book historian, though, “every book is an interpretation or theory about the embodiment of some ideas about who that author is,

an embodiment of ideas about how the story should make its meaning,” he says. Try conveying that on a Kindle.

Suarez loves Kindles if they encourage reading, but does want to ask questions about the nature of the book. That makes sense for a rare book scholar (who’s also a Jesuit priest). He’s clearly not anti-digital, but he does see distinctions. It’s an interesting story, well reported.

Varied comments, one swiping at the “pointless glorification of the 19th-20th century codex” as giving aid & comfort to “faculty who cling to paper books out of nostalgia and other irrelevant emotions” and “pressure their library to collect in print when it is not the best option for the library’s mission or budget.” (There’s a thoughtful response to that later on, one that says it’s not necessary to choose sides and it’s unfortunate to “paint everyone with an appreciation for the printed word as simply nostalgic.”) One excellent comment (which I’m sure Suarez wouldn’t disagree with), in its entirety, from “061150”:

The answer is fairly simple—digital books are a different medium than print books. Every medium has strengths and weaknesses. I appreciate the qualities of each, and I think there’s a place and a preference for each.

Amazon’s Renaissance of Reading

This one’s by Richard MacManus, on September 6, 2012 at *ReadWriteWeb*, and it’s mostly a love song to Amazon. MacManus notes that—at least at Amazon—rapidly increasing *ebook* sales are accompanied by significant increases in *print book* sales, and there seems to be little question that ereader owners buy more books—frequently including print books—than others. According to MacManus, Amazon claims credit for a “renaissance of reading.”

The puff piece describes some of Amazon’s other innovations in publishing (Kindle Direct, Kindle Singles, Kindle Serials) and has “All Hail King Jeff” as its final heading. The close:

Amazon reigns in the book kingdom, which seems to be a good thing for readers and authors. For readers: books are cheaper than ever before, the eReader hardware is getting better (as evidenced by the Paperwhite Kindle launched today), Web services are becoming more flexible (serials, singles) and social (Lending Library, Highlights). For authors: there is an easy and attractive self-publishing option (KDP) and more flexibility in format.

Of course some of King Jeff’s subjects aren’t as happy: book publishing houses and competing book retailers probably see it more like The Spanish Inquisition, than a renaissance. But such is the price of progress. For now King Jeff reigns.

Consider that penultimate sentence. *Monopoly is the price of progress and is to be applauded.* Doesn't that make you all warm and fuzzy? And, of course, since—like Google—Amazon is an entirely good and benevolent corporation, gaining and maintaining an effective monopoly can only be for the betterment of all. Right?

Put Down Your E-Reader: This Book Is Better In Print

This one, by Lynn Neary on September 28, 2012 at NPR Books, is particularly amusing given the earlier “No More E-books Vs. Print Books Arguments, OK?” story...also at NPR. But, of course, the two stories aren't in opposition at all. This one's related to a 7:20 segment of *Morning Edition*, and it deals with cases in which print books simply make more sense.

The case in point: Gillian Cross' new retelling of *The Odyssey* for kids 8 and up—brightly colored and beautifully illustrated (the story includes examples, but I'd guess they look even better on high-quality paper).

“We feel that the book is a nearly perfect technology as it is, and that is why it's been around for so long,” says Karen Lotz, president and publisher of Candlewick Press—the publishing house that released *The Odyssey* in the U.S. Candlewick specializes in children's books, and like all publishing companies, it now releases books in both electronic and traditional book form. But Lotz says some books—*The Odyssey* among them—seem destined for print. That decision, she says, is made at the beginning of the publication process.

“If you're thinking about a book in its early stages, you're almost always imagining what it's going to be like and what it's going to feel like,” Lotz explains. “And I think we're coming into a time where we as publishers do that digitally as well. We think about something in a digital form. But if it's going to insist on being physical, it means it's going to be lavish, beautiful, tactile, something to linger over.”

The artist involved, Neil Packer, says he'd be interested in exploring what he could do with digital technology, “but he believes if a book is going to be viewed on screen, the artwork needs to be conceived that way. He says transferring artwork from the pages of a book like *The Odyssey* to an electronic device doesn't really work.”

For well-designed books, it's not just pretty pictures:

“With anything digital, even upon your e-reader, there will be another book, or on the Internet there will be another link you can click on,” Cross says. “The fact that a printed book invites you to close it, and that it has been specially designed so that the shape of it might be unique—the shape of *The Odyssey* is quite interesting, isn't it? And the weight of it in

your hands—all these things I think have value in that they invite you to reflect on what’s inside the book.”

While Candlewick already produces ebooks and Karen Lotz believes it may eventually be possible to “reproduce visually rich, highly designed books onto a screen in a way that is as satisfying as a physical book,” Lotz also believes “there will always be a place for both—and perhaps there will always be books that just don’t need to go digital.” Just as there are ebooks that really don’t make sense as print books.

Why is an ebook ever riddled with typos?

Laura June [on October 26, 2012](#) at *The Verge*. The theme of this story is in the title; the book in question is a 2007 edition of *Foucault’s Pendulum*. As June points out, print books from major publishers rarely have more than one or two typos (they *frequently* have issues that suggest lack of careful attention, but usually not many typos). So why do the ebooks? She also notes the major problems with typos: They pull you out of the story and suggest that the publisher didn’t care about the book.

To be clear, this isn’t exactly an Amazon problem: I bought the same book from iBooks and it reproduces most of the same errors (though not quite all of them, someone appears to have caught some). But, as the biggest player in the ebook game, it would be great to see Amazon be a leader here, and give publishers and readers alike better options for reporting and fixing issues with ebooks. Because I’ll be honest: this could be a dealbreaker for me. Oh, I know that *Foucault’s Pendulum* seems to be a worse case than most ebooks, but it is completely intolerable.

June discusses the “push updates” possibility for correcting errors as they’re reported (which Apple allows but Amazon doesn’t)—but apparently doesn’t see the issue with pushing updates: It means *the text is not fixed*, and the same method used to correct a spelling error can be used to disappear a person who’s no longer in favor.

The close:

The reality is, however, that publishing is changing very fast, and to keep up with that pace, publishers are moving quickly to get their books into stores like Amazon and iBooks. That’s great, I want as much content available as possible. But I also demand, and believe that all readers should demand, the high quality that book publishers have always offered to their customers. We can assume that this won’t be a problem with most new books, because printed and digital versions will be created simultaneously from the same master text... unless publishers actually get lazy. But most books aren’t brand new, and if the convenience of an e-reader must bring with it an acceptance of shoddily produced and edited versions of books, then count me out.

I'm guessing the major reason for typos in ebooks that aren't in the print versions of the same books is that the publishers are converting via OCR rather than by converting a digital file used to create the print book (I'm assuming a 2007 edition came from a digital file, which might be wrong). That's fast and easy; it's also a great way to add typos, especially the kind she cites (where the typo is itself a correct word, so spellcheck won't help). It's inexcusable for a \$15.98 ebook from a major publisher.

More than two hundred comments; didn't read them all. I was amused by one that claims the typos are *deliberate* and added as a way to catch pirates. I suppose almost anything's possible, but that one seems a tad unlikely.

Have We Already Reached "Peak E-book?"

[In both American and British English, that question mark should follow the close quotes, since the quoted phrase 'Peak E-book' is not itself a question. Since this is from *Publishing Perspectives*, presumably a professional site, I think it's worth noting.] By Andy Richardson [on October 31, 2012](#) at *Publishing Perspectives*, this piece combines three issues:

- The *likelihood* (let's call it *certainty*) that the rate of increase in ebook sales having fallen drastically was not a short-term event. This really is certain: ebook sales *could not* keep rising at the same percentage rate as when there were only a few ebooks and ereaders. Growing by 200% from a base of \$1 million in one year is one thing; doing so from a base of \$1 billion in one year is much, much harder.
- The *possibility* that publishers were cutting their own throats by offering ebooks at very, very low prices in order to capture a piece of a growing market—because those prices (he quotes prices under one pound; let's say less than \$1.50) would become established as the *appropriate* price point for ebooks.
- The reality that books are not a commodity: They are not interchangeable entities.

The lede:

Recently we've been exploring how the war for readers currently raging between e-reading platforms such as Kindle, Sony, Nook & Kobo might have unintended and damaging consequences for the publishing industry. By slashing e-book prices by as much as 97%, launching their own self-publishing imprints or launching often half thought-out e-lending schemes, e-reading platforms are at risk of killing the book business in the process of chasing ever larger markets.

The discussion is worth reading, noting that it really is from a publishing perspective. The comments are few but wide-ranging and raise some interesting questions as well.

2013

Will Gutenberg laugh last?

I've avoided Nicholas Carr for a while but [this January 1, 2013 post](#) at *Rough Type* strikes me as sensible (maybe because Carr's saying some things I've been saying for years?).

It has been taken on faith by many, including your benighted scribe, that the future of book publishing is digital, that the e-book will displace the printed codex as the dominant form of the dominant artifact of modern culture. There have been differing views about how fast the shift will happen (quite a few people believe, mistakenly, that it has already happened), and thoughts have varied as well on the ultimate fate of printed books—whether they'll disappear entirely or eke out a meager living in a mildewed market niche. But the consensus has been that digitization, having had its way with music and newspapers and magazines and photographs and etc., would in due course have its way with books as well.

“Consensus” is a tricky word, one I'd argue with. I think there's been a consensus among those with the loudest voices, the gurus and digiphiles, especially thanks to the ease with which they've dismissed other perspectives as Luddite or ignorant.

But Carr sees what I also saw in [one recent Pew Internet report](#)—despite its title, “E-book Reading Jumps; Print Book Reading Declines.” *Of course* Pew would craft that title: Its bias toward “If it's digital, it must be better” is clear. And, technically, the title was correct for its time period (if you accept Pew's polling as meaningful, which for now let's do)—but the “decline” in print reading was essentially within the survey's error margin, while the jump in ebook reading still came from a relatively small base. As Carr notes:

Fully 89 percent of them report that they read at least one printed book over the preceding 12 months. Only 30 percent say they read at least one e-book—a percentage that, perhaps tellingly, has increased by only a single point since last February, when the survey was last conducted.

Carr notes that ebook sales *growth* has slowed substantially—and print sales are holding up pretty well. To me, all of this makes perfect sense: It's not that ebooks aren't important, but they're not going to sweep away print books. We won't know what the eventual balance will be (or if it will be a

stable balance), but the gurus assuring us that print books will only be art objects are increasingly looking foolish.

Carr ponders the reasons that ebooks are “falling short of expectations.” His possibilities:

- People are discovering that ebooks work better for some genres and reading situations than for others. Adding “and reading situations” is a nice touch: I’d almost certainly take fiction ebooks along for a long trip, but I’d rather read my fiction in hardcover when I’m at home. “The e-book may turn out to be more a complement to the printed book, as audiobooks have long been, rather than an outright substitute.” What a notion!
- Early adopters have already moved to ebooks.
- I’ve got to quote this one in full: “The advantages of printed books have been underrated, while the advantages of e-books have been overrated.” Ya’ think?
- Early ereader buyers loaded them up with lots of books—which may or may not have been read. “Novelty fades.”
- A shift from dedicated ereaders to tablets doesn’t help, because tablets offer so many other things to do. (I doubt that this is a huge factor. I could be wrong.)
- Ebook prices haven’t dropped as much as some people hoped.

Carr still believes ebooks will come to *dominate* book sales (I’d forgotten that he was a confident “the future is *digital*” pundit, if sometimes a regretful one)—but he’s less confident in that prediction and thinks it may take a lot longer than expected.

An interesting range of comments. One commenter thinks he has the genres reversed—that *nonfiction* makes more sense on ereaders because you can search them so rapidly. The next commenter says he finds nonfiction much easier to deal with in print (and, you know, *actual indexes* do more than just show where words are used, and require a *lot* of extra work to convert to usable ebook form). Carr returns with a note about how many people do book-based writing and research: You have *lots of books open around you*, which is tough to do with ebooks.

Clay Shirky comments with an absolutist scree that reminds me why I don’t pay attention to Clay Shirky any more—he’s certain the printed book is going away, but maybe books *as a form* will go away with it. Because, you know, *Clay Shirky says so*.

Carr takes issue with Shirky, suggesting that extended narrative is a worthwhile thing and not likely to go away...and negating Shirky’s assumption that record albums were *killed* by downloading: in fact full digital albums are selling very well. “Reducing aesthetic choices to ‘rehearsed reverence’ is a form of nihilism... Human beings can’t be reduced to utilitarian equations. Thank god.” Oddly enough, Shirky responds with a

long, long comment that reveals, among other things, that *he doesn't understand numbers very well*. To wit: He says total digital music sales in 2011 were 1.37 billion—songs plus albums—while 100 million albums were sold. Therefore, almost everybody buys songs. Well...at an average of 12 songs per album, you have 1.27 billion songs and 1.2 billion songs-as-albums, so *roughly half* the music sold as digital downloads was as albums. He also gets some “facts” *absolutely wrong*, as when he says “the presses have stopped for phone books and encyclopedias.” Odd: We still get two phone books delivered every year. And the presses “are stopping” for textbooks and newspapers—which is also pretty much nonsense. For Shirky, an 8% increase (in printed cookbook sales) is irrelevant, where an 8% decrease (I doubt that 8% of newspapers disappeared last year, and I'm pretty sure printed textbook sales weren't down that much) is *clear evidence that something's pretty much dead*. Pfeh. The odd thing is that in comparing media he compares movies with live theater—but not TV with movies, where the new medium simply did *not* destroy the older one. Because *that wouldn't fit his monotonic narrative*. In a later response, Carr calls Shirky's “rehearsed reverence” phrase “incredibly insulting and demeaning.” Sounds about right.

Confession: I'm Not Such a Reluctant e-Reader Adopter (Anymore)

Here's an interesting brief one by Krystal D'Costa [on January 28, 2013](#) at *Anthropology in Practice*. She must have changed the post's title, given this lede:

Okay, love is too strong a strong word. I've never quite gotten over the smell of paper and the comforting heft of a much-loved tome, but I'm not quite the reluctant adopter I was a year ago. Still, it seems I'm not alone in making this shift: According to a report from the Pew research Center, the number of readers using e-books increased seven percent in 2012, while the number of readers reading actual print books dropped about five percent.

Sounds like D'Costa was going to say she's learned to *love* ebooks, then decided that was too strong. I like this post because D'Costa offers *excellent* reasons (well, two of them) why someone who still clearly loves print books would also love ebooks. The first, and I believe for her the most important, is convenience—she commutes and used to carry “two or three books and magazines” while she now carries an e-Reader (I'm guessing a Kindle but can't be sure) with five or so new books and a bunch of favorites. *If you're commuting (not driving) or traveling a lot*, ebooks are an obvious and worthwhile option.

She also lists privacy—as both a good thing (you can read anything without inviting criticism) and a bad thing (you lose impromptu social interaction based on what you're reading). The third she calls “most important,” but is a trifle superfluous, as she notes: She has “an awesome

cover” for her ereader that makes it look like an old leather-bound volume. I’m guessing that “most important” is a joke...

Her close is, I think, absolutely reasonable (omitting a final question, and noting that D’Costa is “an anthropologist *working in digital media*”):

Still, I’m likely not going to be a spokesperson for these things anytime soon—I’m just more likely to admit they have their uses. Why is this important to acknowledge? Well, it’s a sign that overall tendencies are shifting, but also a sign that the divisions (print or digital) are blurring. And belonging in one camp over another isn’t necessarily regarding the degree of your intelligence or preferences for technology.

Or maybe, for many of us, there *aren’t* camps—we’ll read both. That seems to be the case with most of the commenters.

The Future of Librarians in an Ebook World

Sarah Goodyear posted this [on February 4, 2013](#) at *The Atlantic’s* Cities blog. Maybe it belongs in ebooks-and-libraries, but it’s not about how libraries use ebooks. It’s one of those “oh no, print’s *going away*, how will libraries remain relevant?” pieces that makes me a little nuts. Goodyear’s evidence that print books are going away—that this is a “profound reality”? Lots more people own tablets and ebook readers now than did in 2010.

That’s it. Full stop. Because tablets and ereaders are now reasonably priced and, by the way, tablets are useful for *lots* of things in addition to ebooks—*therefore print is dead*. Huh? Thus we get:

Libraries are responding to the decline of print in a variety of creative ways, trying to remain relevant—especially to younger people—by embracing the new technology.

“Especially to younger people,” because presumably *we all know* they don’t read print books. So she mentions libraries “reinventing themselves” as places to hang out and the Texas library without ebooks.

Oddly enough, this assertion without argument doesn’t factor into the heart of the piece: That libraries are “also about human beings and their relationships, specifically, the relationship between librarians and patrons.” And some grants from Paul G. Allen Family Foundation to Pacific Northwest libraries for initiatives such as smartphone apps and reader’s advisory. The rest of the post is quite good and worth reading, saying libraries and librarians aren’t going away because they’re essential. Too bad it starts with a *wholly unnecessary* claim that print’s going away.

What is it about books that matters?

Venessa Harris ponders that question in [this February 5, 2013 post](#) at *Books and Library Stuff*. Harris, the “ScarlettLibrarian,” pretty clearly reads ebooks—but in this case she’s talking about *material* books. She

discusses four aspects: marginalia, the history of reading (or lack thereof), copy-specific evidence and provenance. A specialized discussion, perhaps, but worth considering, especially given that there's no need for it to be one *or* the other. The closing paragraph:

It does seem that increasingly we are being seduced by the e-book...Kindles and the like are without doubt, a very handy tool for readers, and I am guilty as charged. However, I am also finding more and more fascination with having books, the object at hand and all of the animation of the senses that they bring. Help the [British Library continue successfully with their book conservation work](#) so that we may enjoy these unique editions throughout the century.

Harris is, in case it's not already obvious, a UK librarian.

9th Graders Prefer Print Books

This anecdote comes from Elisabeth Abarbanel [on February 28, 2013](#) at *Archipelago*. She's head librarian at an independent school in LA—one with resources enough that *all* high school students have iPads. And she's been steadily enlarging the library's ebook collection.

This semester's 9th grade students in Human Development class have a reading assignment. They are going to read a fiction young adult novel of their choice, as long as it has a human development-y theme (identity, sexuality, divorce, family issues, drugs, addiction, cutting, romance, teen pregnancy, etc). In a month or two we are going to have a book party with refreshments, where they will present creative interpretations of the books—slide shows, playlists, collage, painting, monologue—whatever they want to do to celebrate and share the book.

This week I have seen this as an opportunity to teach Axis360. I show them e-books in our collection to read by Chris Crutcher, David Levithan, and other important authors. I also have print books for the students to check out. Can you guess how many students decided to use the e-books? Answer: about three out of sixty.

Yes, it's anecdote, but it's also interesting: In an environment where 100% of these digital-generation students have iPads, 95% chose print books rather than ebooks. Which seems to disappoint Abarbanel. She provides reasons the kids *should* prefer the print books and, when a teacher says the students might like print books as “transitional objects,” thinks of that as comparing print books to comfort blankets. And agrees. Or is uncertain.

Providing e-books for this population isn't really taking off the way I had expected. But I am a bit delighted with their attachment to the print book.

The comments are quite interesting. She asked students why they preferred print books: they dislike iPad distractions and “they like actually holding the book.” Two of 15 in one morning’s class said they’d read on the iPad...but ended up checking out print books.

A fragmented reading experience: locally and anecdotally speaking...

We move from anecdota to a singular perspective (which we’ve had others of) from someone who thinks about these things—Lorcan Dempsey [on March 4, 2013](#) at his eponymous blog. It’s mostly a case where I’m pointing to the essay: Go read it!

Dempsey finds that “the pull of digital is stronger” for a variety of reasons, all of which make sense *for him and for his circumstances*—but he’s still buying print, also for a variety of reasons. He’d like the “bundling” option (where you buy the print book and it comes with access to the ebook), but isn’t sure how much he’d pay for it.

No grand conclusions, but some worthwhile anecdotes with enough perspective to make them worth reading.

Single-text e-reader review: a rising fad with long-term promise

Jamie Rigg wrote this fairly long piece [on April 1, 2013](#) at *Engadget*. It concerns a whole class of “ereaders” Rigg has encountered that offer very limited storage—one booklength text—but appear to have quite a few potential advantages.

Beyond that, well, you’d really have to read the lengthy, illustrated review. The close:

On the face of it, e-readers with such limited capacity sound like a hard sell. They lack the deeper functionality of hardware we’re used to, and yet large numbers are being purchased. Strangely, you can find every title under Sol in this new format—something big players in the space are unable to match. Maybe it’s the fact second-hand units can be found for under a dollar, or maybe people just like buying new things and establishing a collection. We can’t fault the budget displays too much, and besides, we applaud the battery life. All told, we found ourselves drawn to the unabashed simplicity. They’ve already proved valid competitors to established brands, and we see this continuing, with perhaps all e-readers eventually evolving into the single-text format. Companies see this, too, and if you disagree, ask yourself this: why else would the likes of Amazon and Barnes and Noble take to stocking them? It’s the future, that’s why.

Yes, Rigg does mention that the easy legal lendability of these single-text ereaders results in “government-funded institutions...that loan out the e-readers for a limited time, for free!”

You will not be surprised that the first comment completely missed the point of the review. So did others. One commenter notes that these

newfangled devices don't have to be powered down during airplane take-offs and landings. Do note the date.

Ebooks are actually not books—schools are among first to realize

This one, by Beth Bacon [on March 18, 2013](#) at *DigitalBookWorld*, is tricky. She's *not* saying ebooks lack some of the qualities that make print books special. Nope. Quite the reverse: She's saying that, because ebooks are software, they should be *so much more* than (print) books, which are objects and "limited by their physicality."

Bacon's discussing the education market—specifically schools, not colleges—and pushes the idea that an ebook (that is, the software) can be licensed once to be distributed to *all* the kids in a district. But that's not all: the ebook can be *multimedia*, which makes it so much better than a boring old book. She says ebooks should be regarded as software and sold the way software is sold—and, of course, you can keep updating the ebook...

Ebooks don't have any of the physical attributes of paper books—and they shouldn't have paper books' pricing and distribution models, either.

The very first comment notes that ebooks can also be spyware, which some don't see as a wonderful thing. The second offers real-world experience about using software-license e-textbooks: it's a sobering story. Another says (correctly) that most ebooks are *not* software—they're data files.

The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper versus Screens

This one's by Ferris Jabr [on April 11, 2013](#) at *Scientific American*. The tease:

E-readers and tablets are becoming more popular as such technologies improve, but research suggests that reading on paper still boasts unique advantages

Jabr begins with the [silly October 2011 YouTube video](#) in which a *one-year-old* seems to treat a magazine as though it was a broken iPad. In case you've forgotten the sheer stupidity of the video's creator, the title is "A Magazine Is an iPad That Does Not Work" and comes with this description:

Technology codes our minds, changes our OS. Apple products have done this extensively. The video shows how magazines are now useless and impossible to understand, for digital natives. It shows real life clip of a 1-year old, growing among touch screens and print. And how the latter becomes irrelevant. Medium is message. Humble tribute to Steve Jobs, by the most important person : a baby.

Riiggghht...because your average one-year-old “digital native” can read those digitized magazines just fine, but not the “impossible to understand” physical ones.

Jabr provides a commentary that perhaps treats the father more seriously than he deserves:

Perhaps his daughter really did expect the paper magazines to respond the same way an iPad would. Or maybe she had no expectations at all—maybe she just wanted to touch the magazines. [Babies touch everything](#). Young children who have never seen a tablet like the iPad or an e-reader like the Kindle will [still reach out](#) and run their fingers across the pages of a paper book; they will jab at an illustration they like; heck, they will even taste the corner of a book. Today’s so-called [digital natives](#) still interact with a mix of paper magazines and books, as well as tablets, smartphones and e-readers; using one kind of technology does not preclude them from understanding another. [Emphasis added.]

Absurd as the video is, Jabr finds it a useful jumping-off point:

Nevertheless, the video brings into focus an important question: How exactly does the technology we use to read change the way we read?

The rest of the article explores some of the studies in this area. Summarizing, the usual findings before 1992 were that people read slower, less accurately and less comprehensively on the screen—but since the early 1990s, results are more inconsistent (although a slight majority confirm earlier conclusions). But a variety of evidence “indicates that modern screens and e-readers fail to adequately recreate certain tactile experiences of reading on paper that many people miss and, more importantly, prevent people from navigating long texts in an intuitive and satisfying way. In turn, such navigational difficulties may subtly inhibit reading comprehension.”

That’s the first page (or portions of it). The second page is the bulk of the article, a detailed set of comments on findings from recent research and studies. It’s too long and too deep for me to summarize; you may find it worth reading. The conclusion is *not* that books should be read in paper form; it’s that different media work differently, possibly making print more suitable *in some cases for some people*. Oh, and there are some online “essays” that wouldn’t work well in print—but then, most movies and songs don’t work very well as books either.

The comments are generally worth reading.

Physical Books Are Dead—Long Live Physical Books

I must admit, I’d expect better of *Time Magazine* than the most tired of the “X is Dead” cliché variations, but here it is [on a May 2, 2013 piece](#) by

Matt Peckham. The tease: “The 2012 physical and digital book sales numbers are out, and they’re not at all what you’d expect.”

He’s quoting from “the Publisher’s Association,” an interesting way of crediting the Association of American Publishers—and he’s surprised by the numbers “given what we think we know about physical books.” Which is to say, the “sense driven by presumptions that physical books are doomed, to be assimilated by the Borg-like inexorability of the digital medium.”

Not so much. Total book sales (I’m guessing trade book sales—he links to AAP, but not to the specific report) were up 4%, a new record and following a slight decline in 2011. Physical (trade?) book sales were down, but only 1%—but physical book sales *for fiction* were up 3%.

Let me repeat that: *physical* book sales for fiction books, the hottest genre for ebooks, were actually up 3% in 2012 compared to 2011. (As for proportions, and here I’m nearly certain it’s trade books: 26% of fiction sales were digital, but only 5% of nonfiction sales and 3% of children’s books.)

Peckham’s a tech and videogame correspondent, so it may not be surprising that he nonetheless concludes that physical books will continue to decline and says preference for paper is “surely” generational. But even given his obvious predilections, “it’s a reminder that there’ll probably be some things digital readers will never be able to replicate about the reading experience in certain genres or styles, and for the moment, that’s keeping physical sales buoyant.”

The divide between two book ends: Print, digital

Quick: How many national newspapers still exist in the United States in 2013? The answer, I believe: One—and, unless you count the now-defunct (in print) *Christian Science Monitor*, there have never been any more. The one and only: *USA Today*, where this Bob Minzesheimer story appeared [on May 15, 2013](#).

It makes a point through three examples, a couple of quotes and a few figures. The examples: Two women, both in marketing, one of whom is “addicted to her Sony e-reader” and will buy or borrow a print book “only when it’s not available digitally”; the other “Kindle-less and Nook-less and happily so,” saying that after working on a computer all day “I want a book in my hand.”

The point? “Both have lots of company.” Sure, e-book sales grew 43% last year (depending on who’s reporting and how you’re counting)—but that’s an enormous slowdown, and ebooks account for about 20% of all sales (again, depending on how you’re counting).

Even as e-book sales have grown more than 4,000% since 2008, it’s unlikely that physical books will disappear the way records did in the music industry.

Of course, 4,000% over essentially nothing is less remarkable than it appears, but in any case the second half is a little questionable: Vinyl records have been growing in sales for some years now. They never actually disappeared, and companies are selling \$150,000 turntables to keep them spinning.

A Hachette VP loves ebooks...

But he also cites a survey from last year that found that half of all readers had no interest in buying e-books and that the vast majority of people who buy e-books continue to buy print books as well.

Thus the third example, Marilyn Johnson, who really wants both. Oh, and audiobooks as well. And why not?

The ongoing debate between the value of print & “digital” reading

Dean Giustini offers this brief piece [on June 5, 2013](#) at *The Search Principle*. He points to a study from the UK’s National Literacy Trust. The Trust issued a statement saying that, for the first time, children in the UK are said to be reading more on computer screens and other electronic devices than they are reading books, magazines, newspapers and comics. (That doesn’t mean they’re reading more ebooks than print books: I read a *lot* more on computer screens than in print books, but when I read books they’re mostly print.) The interesting part of [the statement](#), however:

This is potentially detrimental to children’s reading levels as those who read daily only on-screen are much less likely to be good readers than those who read in print. The National Literacy Trust is calling for a healthier reading balance using both books and technological devices.

Portions extracted by Giustini and quoted from his post:

- there seems to be a growing body of evidence that online reading is less engaging and less satisfying (even for “digital natives”). For those of you interested in generalizability of the above study, ~34,910 young people aged 8 to 16 were surveyed; 39% of children and teens read using electronic devices, but only 28% read print materials every day. Those who read only onscreen were three (3X) times less likely to say they enjoyed reading and a third less likely to have favourite reads.
- Young people who only read onscreen were two times less likely to be above-average readers than those who read daily in print or both in print and onscreen.

The National Literacy Trust welcomes “the positive impact which technology has on bringing further reading opportunities to young people” but says “it’s crucial that reading in print is not cast aside.” I’m guessing US figures would be considerably different (a higher percentage would read both print and digital daily), but I can’t be sure of that.

Soft Target

That's the actual title of [this June 20, 2013 piece](#) by Katie Arnold-Ratliff at *Slate*—but the page title, “Declining sales of paperbacks: Are e-readers killing the softcover?” is more provocative, in keeping with the apparent current mission of *Slate* to get more hits by creating phony controversies. The tease confuses things even more: “Have reports of the paperback’s death been greatly exaggerated?”

The story begins with quotes from a 2009 Penguin paperback that celebrated Penguin paperbacks:

This is a book about the most advanced form of entertainment ever. You can pause it at any time. Rewind and replay it if you miss a bit ... It'll fit in your pocket. It's interactive ... It's pretty cheap. It's completely free to share. And it lasts a lifetime. This is a book about books.

That seems like a pretty good statement, but that's not how Arnold-Ratliff sees it:

If that micro-manifesto sounds slightly defensive, it might be because that highly advanced form of entertainment is starting to look a tad outmoded. E-books are ever more popular, eminently practical, and pleasantly cheap; hardcovers may always have a degree of shelf-worthy cachet. But where paperbacks fit into the evolving publishing landscape is less clear. It seems possible that paperbacks may lose their spot in the marketplace altogether.

She says “That may seem hyperbolic, but look at the numbers.” I agree with the first half of that sentence—but it's interesting to note which numbers she emphasizes: The growth in ebook sales from 2010 to 2011—not the *much* slower growth from 2011 to 2012. She then claims that the BookStats survey said e-book *revenue* “outpaced that of print” for adult fiction in 2011, which is not what I've seen elsewhere (ebook sales in 2012 apparently represented 20% of the trade book market as reported by BookStats). Quoting still different sources, she says the *number* of trade paperbacks sold in 2012 fell by 8.6% from 2011 and mass-market paperbacks sales fell by 20.5%.

Sometimes she's quoting number of items; sometimes she's quoting net revenue; sometimes it's not clear what's being stated. The first few paragraphs seem to lump all paperbacks together, while the sales figures are sharply different. Then she comes to a conclusion:

Conventional wisdom holds that e-book sales eat into paperback sales but not those of hardcovers. So if e-book sales are growing exponentially, it seems fair to assume that paperback sales will plateau, dip, and eventually fail to justify the cost of printing them: So long, softcovers.

Um. First, *actual studies* don't show what "conventional wisdom" claims—they show that people with ereaders tend to buy more print books as well as ebooks. Second, ebook sales are no longer growing "exponentially." Third, it's not as though there's some magic number of books that *must* be printed: As long as individual titles are selling reasonably well, they'll "justify the cost" of printing them. Thus, the final sentence is the result of a deeply flawed train of "logic."

Ah, but then it gets interesting, as she quotes the Powell's book buyer claiming that publishers *want* to get rid of paperbacks—because they're commonly bought and sold second-hand, whereas there are no "used ebook" sales. There are other good reasons to doubt the "paperbacks are dead" narrative, especially as concerns trade paperbacks. There's also the discoverability issue, especially since impulse buying is more likely with paperbacks than with hardcovers.

The discussion continues, with even death-of-print (or "print becomes art") advocate Richard Nash thinking paperbacks will be around as long as hardcovers are (but, of course, he thinks books will become collectables after another decade or so, even though they "have a tremendous hold on our imagination." Apparently that isn't enough to keep them as a healthy business?)

A New CEO Will Totally Turn Around Barnes & Noble's Technologically Obsolete Business and Dying Industry

If the previous item was *Slate* at its most confusing, this one—by Matthew Yglesias [on July 8, 2013](#)—is *Slate* at its new norm: Pure linkbait, online magazine as troll. Given the title, you know what to expect. Yglesias informs us that bookstores are doomed because "the number of people who want to buy physical books is plummeting" and because, you know, *ebooks are so much better in every possible way*.

The only real value of physical books at this point is a kind of nostalgia-soaked experience, and people want to experience that at a friendly independently owned bookstore not an impersonal chain.

The piece is short, which given the quality of Yglesias' thinking is probably a good thing. He's *Slate's* "business and economics correspondent," and seeing his pieces is one of several reasons I took *Slate* off my favorites list.

I would quote from the comments—but either *Slate's* stopped accepting them or it's hiding them in some manner I can't figure out.

Poll Shows That 75% Prefer Printed Books to eBooks

A short item from an unlikely source—Attila Dimedici posted [on July 21, 2013](#) at *Slashdot*, quoting [a Rasmussen poll](#). The survey of 1,000 adults was conducted July 11-12, 2013. The quick results as excerpted and interpreted in *Slashdot*:

In a new Rasmussen poll, 75% of American adults would rather read a book in traditional print format than in an ebook format. Only 15% prefer the ebook format (the other 10% are undecided). The latter is a drop from the 23% that preferred the ebook format in Rasmussen's 2011 poll. In addition, more say they buy their books from a brick and mortar store than say they buy books online (35% from brick and mortar, 27% online). I suspect that the 27% who buy online buy more books, but these results are interesting and suggest that the brick and mortar bookstore is not necessarily doomed.

Possibly the most interesting part here is the *drop* in preference for ebooks. That may have something to do with the incessant hyping of ebooks as the only future during 2011 and 2012. The source being *Slashdot*, it's as much about the comments as the story itself. I was able to skim the first 100 (by deliberately never, ever opening up expansions); they're all over the place. Some interesting, some "I prefer x," some "it's generational," one oddball one questioning the survey because they didn't ask people whether they owned ereaders. "Lots of people don't, and would never buy one because they prefer print books." Which invalidates their preference for print books *how*? Apparently because *this person* finally purchased an ereader and Saw The Light. Except that they still buy print books when they want to keep something, so... One person, looking at overall sales rates in 2011 and 2012, surmises that ebooks might top out at less than 30% market share (of trade publishing, not all publishing).

Paper Versus Pixel

Nicholas Carr again, this time at *Nautilus Quarterly* (Issue 4), [sometime in 2013](#). It's decidedly an article, nicely formatted and illustrated, and not at all in reverse-pyramid journalistic form. The tease shows where Carr's coming from these days: "The science of reading shows that print and digital experiences are complementary."

While I sometimes poke fun at Carr, especially as a blogger, he's a polished essayist, as this essay shows. He begins with Cai Lun, the man who apparently invented paper, and continues with an 1894 version of "The End of Books" (in *Scribner's*), where Octave Uzanne was convinced that phonographs would inevitably replace books and periodicals. Here's a passage I have to love:

You have to hand it to Uzanne. He anticipated the arrival of the audiobook, the iPod, and even the smartphone. About the obsolescence of the printed page, however, he was entirely wrong. Books, magazines, and newspapers would go on being published and read in ever greater quantities. Yet Uzanne's prophesy would enjoy continuing popularity. It would come to be repeated over and over again during the 20th century. Every time a new communication medium came along—radio,

telephone, motion picture, television, CD-ROM—pundits would send out, usually in printed form, another death notice for the press. H. G. Wells wrote a book proclaiming that microfilm would replace the book.

Much as I hate the word “inevitable,” I do believe it applies to deathwatches. Carr jumps ahead to the 2011 Edinburgh International Book Festival, at which a Scottish novelist declared “within 25 years the digital revolution will bring about the end of paper books,” relying on the old generational argument (nobody younger than boomers actually read printed books, don’t cha know).

Carr looks at the changing facts of book sales and makes an interesting point: While 75% of U.S. book sales are still print, *that doesn’t include used books*, 100% of which are print. He says “periodicals have had a harder go of it” but that subscriptions seem to be stabilizing—and, in fact, there are still (literally) *hundreds* of millions of magazine subscriptions just in the U.S., and most magazines that aren’t the fifth horse in a four-horse race seem to be doing just fine. Indeed, another survey—this one of tablet computer owners—shows that three-quarters of them prefer to read magazines on paper. For that matter, some newspapers are even gaining print readers.

What’s striking is that the prospects for print have improved even as the use of media-friendly mobile computers and apps has exploded. If physical publications were dying, you would think their condition should be deteriorating rapidly now, not stabilizing.

Indeed. Then Carr gets into the science—that we’re learning that “reading is a bodily activity” and that differences between page and screen are a little more complicated than we might have thought. It’s an interesting discussion, and in the interests of not pushing fair use too far I won’t excerpt it; I recommend that you read it. But I will quote the concluding paragraph:

We were probably mistaken to think of words on screens as substitutes for words on paper. They seem to be different things, suited to different kinds of reading and providing different sorts of aesthetic and intellectual experiences. Some readers may continue to prefer print, others may develop a particular taste for the digital, and still others may happily switch back and forth between the two. This year in the U.S., some 2 billion books and 350 million magazines will roll off the presses. Something tells me Cai Lun isn’t turning in his grave just yet.

“350 million magazines” is certainly too low, since there are 300 million *subscriptions*, each of which results in 10-12 issues (more or less), plus tens of millions of newsstand/store rack sales; otherwise, this is a good statement.

Eighteen comments—and it’s ironic that, shortly after one person who loves both print books and ebooks says, *quite reasonably*, “I’m not sure why people make this out to be an either/or scenario. There is room for

and value in both formats,” another attempts to undermine all of Carr’s evidence, presumably believing Digital Conquers All. That commenter apparently thinks printed books are “dull,” so there’s that to take into account. One comment’s simply mysterious: “The find feature makes this fairly moot.” That’s the whole comment. Another teaches 17-year-olds and finds, gasp, that they’re not only reading plenty but prefer paper books (this person also thinks it’s and, not or).

E-book sales are leveling off. Here’s why.

This item by Neil Irwin [on August 8, 2013](#) at *The Washington Post’s* Wonkblog (hat-tip to *Retiring Guy’s Digest* for the link), notes the very slow growth of ebook sales in early 2013: up only 5% in the first quarter from the first quarter of 2012. Irwin calls it evidence that ebooks “are starting to become a more mature technology.” But here’s the telling paragraph, even if I believe he chooses the wrong comparison:

It was inevitable, of course. The question was always “at what share of the book market will e-books settle,” not “when will print books cease to exist.” Old technologies never die, they just fade into a smaller, niche offering; television supplanted radio as the dominant mass medium in the middle of the last century, for example, but radio is still a big business.

Apart from whether it’s reasonable to call radio a “niche offering” at this point, the realistic comparison is television and movies—and movies are doing just fine. I do agree with the conclusion: “the ratio of printed books sold to electronic books is going to stabilize at a higher level than it had seemed likely a year or two ago in the era of extraordinary e-book growth.”

Irwin links to [another Carr post](#) (the basis for the story), but the reasons elucidated in that post are from a Carr discussion I’ve already covered. There are some interesting facts in an update, however—apparently the market share of ebooks in Canada *fell* from the first quarter of 2012 to the last quarter of the year, with some suggestion that ebooks might plateau at 15% of the Canadian market. The same thing happened in the UK, but there it’s dropped below 10%.

Irwin focuses on Carr’s first reason—that is, that ebooks are well suited to some forms of reading but not to others. Or, in Irwin’s words:

Let me phrase it a different way: If you’re someone who reads a book every week during your commute, say a detective novel or romance novel, the e-book format is perfect for you. But those people have pretty much all shifted to e-books, and there are only so many of them. If you read a book of serious nonfiction a month at home, and maybe even put it on your shelf afterward as a bit of a trophy, printed books are pretty darn good.

Would it surprise you that the most recent comment, a pseudonymous one, claims that this person almost never sees anybody reading a paper book anymore and calls them “romantic vestigial remnants of the past”? No, I didn’t think so. “Legacy Publishers of both book and magazines are experiencing an Extinction Event because printed works are segwaying into POD.” I love the image of printed works driving Segways to print-on-demand systems; I’d expect someone who actually *knew anything* about books to know how to spell segue. Older comments cover a range of opinions and are generally less ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN of the future.

What do you think of reading on a Kindle?

Another purely anecdotal item, but a fun one—by Ann Krembs (high school librarian at Hong Kong International School), posted sometime [in October 2013](#) at *Dear Librarian (ask me anything)*. Krembs recently read her first book on a Kindle (she’s read books on her iPad, “usually when I’m travelling and need a new book because I’ve finished my printed copies.”

Here’s my first thought: I still like reading from a print book! I think it all has to do with the end in sight. I like knowing how many pages are left. Let me back up: I like knowing how many pages the book is! I also like looking ahead to see how much further I have till the next break or chapter.

I do that too, especially when I have limited reading time available. Krembs doesn’t find the Kindle’s progress marker as useful—but she’s going to give it another shot.

The most obvious point here, if it hasn’t already been hammered to death: *When you’re traveling*, ebooks make especially good sense—but most people don’t spend that much time traveling, although the percentage among pundits and journalists is probably much higher. (And, to be sure, people who commute via mass transit.) I’d bet there are millions of people who read on their tablets or phones or ereaders when traveling—and who still read print books when they’re at home. Complementarity.

Update on eBook Penetration

I found this one [on October 16, 2013](#) at *The Proverbial Lone Wolf Librarian’s Weblog* (John Lang)—but it’s just a copy of an infographic, “Printed Books Or E-Books.” You may know I don’t hold infographics in particularly high regard, especially those lacking good source information for their numbers, but let’s look at some of them.

The infographic asserts that 20% of Americans own ereaders and another 20% are likely to buy one during the next year—and then says this: “During 2013 alone, e-book sales grew 140% over the year.” Huh? 2013 isn’t done yet, and for Q1 2013 the growth was 5%, not 140%.

There's a cluster stating (without adequate background) that around 10% of ereader owners abandon print books entirely—but mostly they just read more, averaging 24 books per year as opposed to the measly 15 books a year of non-ereader-owners. I would love to believe that the average American who doesn't own an ereader reads 15 books a year. I'm not sure I do (and, of course, averages like that are like the 6 foot average depth of the Mississippi: possibly true, probably not meaningful).

Next we have repetition of a sort: 88% of people who read an ebook in the last year also read print books. Let's see: about 10% give up on print books, therefore... The next "fact" is, if true (which we can't determine), interesting: Of people with e-readers 49% are reading an ebook on any given day—and 59% are reading print books on any given day.

Some comparisons make no sense: 25% of people under 30 own ereaders but 60% of people aged 19-29 use libraries. Here's one that doesn't make a *lot* of sense if, in fact, 20% of American adults own ereaders: Over the course of a year, 17% read an ebook and 72% read a printed book. So 15% of ereader owners don't read *even one ebook* in a year? That's a lot of doorstops!

There's a little more (it's an infographic, so endless scrolling is guaranteed), but given the lack of verifiable sources for all of this, I won't bother.

Clicking on the infographic leads to "To read or not to read ebooks [infographic]" by Piotr Kowalczyk [on September 28, 2013](#) at *Ebook Friendly*. PK is very definitely in the "and camp":

Print books and ebooks are both great for different tasks, so there is no reason to use only one of them.

PK links to the apparent actual source of the infographic, Susan Heim, a writer and editor "specializing in parenting, multiples, Christian and women's issues."

Finish

Not really conclusions—I've scattered those throughout this roundup—but the finish line. There will *of course* continue to be "or pundits," those who insist that ebooks will wipe out print books or turn them into art objects. (I don't imagine there will be many who argue that ebooks are a fad that will disappear, but who knows?) But most people who think about the situation and are more interested in facts and people than in technology and triumphalism are, I believe, moving toward the "and view"—that print books and ebooks should coexist for decades to come.

I believe that will be true indefinitely. I could make an easy prediction, such as that by the time I die, print books will still be at least a ten-digit and probably an eleven-digit annual business (that is, billions or low tens of billions of dollars: ten-digit is a gimme, frankly). I could

posit a percentage, but how could I possibly guess what that percentage will be or whether it will be stable? Thirty percent of trade books? Thirty percent of *all* books? Or, for that matter, print books retaining 30% of the market, yielding 70% to ebooks? All plausible, none of them signaling the death of print books as a large, vibrant field. (Psst: And for public libraries, none of them suggesting that you ought to get rid of print collections—not if you want to stick around long enough to see what the future might hold!)

I also believe that any simplistic formulation of when print or e makes more sense is almost certainly wrong, with one possible exception: For traveling, ebooks (as long as they're not so DRM-bound that they disappear when your ereader crosses a border!) seem to make more sense for most frequent travelers. But if you say “nonfiction always deserves print, fiction should all migrate to ebooks” I'll laugh in your general direction on both counts, just as I will if you tell me that *The Digital Generation Doesn't Read (or like) Print Books*.

I could toss out narrower suggestions with a certain amount of snark. For example, I suspect most Big Business Idea books make sense in ebook form because you aren't wasting recycled plant matter on something of no real import—but actually, most of these books (at least the ones I've skimmed) would benefit even more from a Watson-based version of Word's Autosummarize function. (Unfortunately, Microsoft removed Autosummarize from Word2010; otherwise, I'd offer an example of this quirky but amusing function.) That is: Most of them are really articles padded out to book length—not all, but (I believe) most.

My best guess? Ebooks will claim a substantial portion of the *mass-market* paperback market, probably most (but probably not all) of it. Beyond that, I suspect there's increasingly good reason to believe that ebooks might increase the size of the pie rather than just grabbing market share from print books.

Media

50 Movie Gunslinger Classics, Part 1

Another 50-pack of movies, this time focusing (mostly) on gunslingers. Compared to the Western Classics, more movies are more recent, most are in color (31 out of 50), and a handful at least are of the spaghetti western variety. Judged according to the relaxed standards I've used elsewhere for westerns and “Eurowesterns” (to use the fancier term)—that is, an entertaining bit of fluff will get a pretty good review.

Disc 1

I'm afraid the set isn't off to an encouraging start, but things should get better...

Dead Aim (orig. *Arde baby, arde* [i.e., *Burn, baby, burn*]), 1975, color. José Bolaños (dir.), Glen Lee, Venetia Vianello, James Westerfield, Virgil Frye. 1:37 [1:27]

I'm tempted to say this spaghetti western (filmed in Mexico, an Italian/Mexican co-production) has continuity problems, but that would suggest continuity. It starts in the old west with a guy coming home, finding his wife and infant gone (and his wife's horse), riding out after them, and in the ensuing gunfight (she's ridden off with another man), everybody dying except the infant Johnny...who's rescued by John Applebee, a curious old roving undertaker.

Little Johnny grows up digging graves and wondering when the undertaker will cash in the receipts he gets for each body he buries—apparently at the end of the Civil War, when the government will pay him some amount for each receipt. Sometimes, when there aren't corpses handy, Johnny helps matters along by getting into bar fights (he's a crack shot of course) and creating new corpses to be buried. He thinks they should rob a bank so they could go build their own funeral parlor and cemetery (they mostly bury people in the desert), but Applebee doesn't go for that.

That's one plot. There's also a criminal duo, a former New Orleans prostitute and an incompetent robber; a black deserter from the Union army; a district commissioner who's pretty much a criminal himself and I'm probably forgetting a plot line or two. Johnny is haunted by dreams of the prostitute in her glory days (he'd never actually seen her then), to the point where—even though he and Applebee now have enough gold to build that cemetery—he leaves during the night to go find her. The film more or less ends as it begins, with a set of gun battles in which almost everybody dies, certainly including our—hero?

I think the moral to the story is: Virgins shouldn't dream of N'awlins Ladies of French descent; it will only get them into trouble.

Good points: Very good print, good cinematography, lots of scenery.
Bad points: Incoherent editing, unless that's the script, and not much in the way of acting. Maybe the missing ten minutes would make it better? Try as I might, I can't give it more than \$0.75.

The Devil and Leroy Bassett, 1973, color. Robert E. Perason (dir. & screenplay), Cody Bearpaw, John F. Gott, George 'Buck' Flower, James A. Ward, Dick Winslow, Elliott Lindsey. 1:25 [1:32]

I gave this piece of trash almost 45 minutes, then decided I'd rather be doing almost anything else. Seems there's an Indian (Keema Greywolf) who's killed a deputy and shot the sheriff because they were chasing him when he had a blowout as he was speeding, drunk, down the highway after getting married—and his wife died in the resulting rollover. He'd earlier saved the lives of a couple of drunken rednecks (actually two drunken rednecks and their psychotic evangelical brother), so they decide to break him out. There's banjo music when the rednecks are, variously, drinking, praising God, shooting people and driving. There's also a bunch of racist deputies and one wisecracking ladies' man-style deputy.

I just couldn't. Maybe I'm getting tougher, but I'd rather read, play video poker, work on a C&I article, stare at the ceiling, whatever. No rating.

Apache Blood—previously viewed and *absolutely worthless*. Almost certainly the worst Western ever made.

I'd be willing to watch this again for, say, \$1,000. Otherwise, forget it. I somehow own at least four copies of this garbage because Mill Creek uses it as filler on several sets: one of the few negative things I can say about Mill Creek Entertainment.

Boot Hill (orig. *La collina degli stivali* [i.e., *Boot Hill*], 1969, color. Giuseppe Colizzi (dir. & writer), Terence Hill, Bud Spencer, Woody Strode, Eduardo Ciannelli, George Eastman, Victor Buono, Lionel Stander. 1:40 [1:32])

The good: *great* cast (Hill & Spencer, Stander as the circus head, Buono as the villain), pretty good print except for some noise over the opening titles, an unusual approach to the Spaghetti Western (most of the movie involves an Old West circus troupe, and both little people and aerialists are involved in the big final battle!), some really good cross-cutting between circus performance and other plot elements. The less good: I found the first half of the plot somewhere between bemusing and impossible to follow. Maybe the eight missing minutes have something to do with that?

The second half's clear enough: A town full of gold miners is being taken over by an evil overlord who either buys out or kills off claimholders so he can create a mining company for the whole mine area; he also takes over retail in the town. Two iconic gunmen and the traveling circus disrupt the overlord's plans.

Not really sure what to give this; on balance, maybe \$1.25.

Disc 2

Cry Blood, Apache, 1970, color. Jack Starrett (dir.), Jody McCrea, Marie Gahva, Dan Kemp, Robert Tessier, Jack Starrett, Don Henley, Rick Nervick, Joel McCrea (briefly). 1:22.

Despite the common words, this is *not Apache Blood*, and nowhere near as bad—although it fails one of my tests for a movie I can actually *enjoy*, which is that there has to be at least one sympathetic character. Actually, now that I think of it, with two of the three words in the other flick, it's about two-thirds as bad.

The closest thing to a likable character here is the oldish Westerner who begins and ends the film, riding out with an old shotgun to look over a scene...which becomes the flashback that makes up the rest of the movie. His younger self was the least awful of five savages who first party among a group of Apache then slaughter them—leaving one young woman, who they bring along with them to lead them to gold (one of the Apache group had some gold nuggets). She speaks Spanish, and the younger version of the oldish Westerner also speaks Spanish and manages not to actually kill anybody in the massacre himself, although he doesn't prevent any of the slaughter or refrain from accompanying the rest of them. (Let's be clear: The five savages in this case are Anglos, not Apaches.)

As they're riding slowly toward the Arizona desert and the promise of gold, we're split between dealings within this odd nasty group and seeing the Apache who's returned to the camp, seen all the dead—and set out stalking the five. (Well, six, but he doesn't know his sister's still alive and with the others.) The five include, in addition to the bilingual less-vicious-than-the-rest “hero,” one fat sociopath who relies on glasses, his brother (I guess), a top-hatted cardplayer named Two-Card, and a “Deacon” who's pretty clearly a little off his nut. Along the way, we get one big fight in a running stream and a number of other incidents.

Eventually, the Apache catches up with them, releases their horses and does most of them in—with some viciously slow deaths that take away any chance for *him* to be the sympathetic character, even if was the most wronged. In the end...well, never mind. Good points: Good print, good color, *great* scenery (Arizona and Sequoia National Forest). Bad points: Except for possibly the young woman, who's not a major character, there's nobody likable in this lot. Most of the acting is pretty bad (including the not-very-graceful Apache); notably, the director and assistant director were also in the cast (and McCrea produced it). It got an R rating, probably because there's one scene with some distant partial nudity, involving another Indian woman—and we never do find out what happened to her. On balance, and concentrating on the scenery rather than the acting or plot, I'll give it \$0.75.

Deadwood '76, 1965, color. James Landis (dir.), Arch Hall Sr. (screenplay and producer), Arch Hall Jr., Jack Lester, La Donna Cottier, Arch Hall Sr., Liz Renay, Robert Dix, Richard Cowl, David Reed. 1:37.

Set in the near future in Deadwood, South Dakota, this movie eerily foretells a future TV series.... Nah, this one's set in 1876 when it was still The Dakotas and a territory, but the timing's right in other respects: The Black Hills gold rush is beginning and this *illegal* settlement—the Black Hills belonged to the Lakotas by treaty—was the heart of it. The movie's set in Deadwood (and has lots of great Black Hills scenery), but it's mostly about Billy May (Arch Hall, Jr.), a young man who's fast with a gun and out to make his fortune after drifting away from Georgia at the end of the Civil War (he enlisted at age 12). Things start as he comes along an old coot in a wagon full of cats (I'm not making this up) who's been accosted by a group from the local tribe—who don't shoot the old coot but seem to find the cats awfully amusing. Billy May gets the drop on them and takes away their rifles—but doesn't shoot them, to the old coot's dismay. (The old coot's from Tennessee, on his way to Deadwood to sell the cats to raise a stake to mine for gold and make his fortune.)

That's just the start of lots'o'plot, involving the local madame, the too-sleek gamblin' man, some locals who think they're mighty fast with a gun, the belief after Billy outdraws them that he's Billy the Kid (and Wild Bill Hickock's on his way for a showdown), some gold mining, a remarkably civilized and peaceful tribe that's now sheltering Billy's long-lost father, who has a harebrained scheme by which the Confederacy shall rise again, a young Indian woman who falls for Billy and, well, that's just some of it.

It does not end happily for all concerned. I've already included some spoilers. There is at least one interesting cliché reversal at the end of the film, but I'll leave that for those who watch it.

I have mixed feelings about this one. The intertwined plots are interesting if overdone, the scenery's good, the print's pretty good, it moves right along and there are remarkably few deaths (and very little blood) for the kind of movie it is, and the tribe is treated as civilized, not savages. Unfortunately, as with the two other Arch Hall-backed movies starring Arch Hall, Jr., that I've seen, I find Jr. irritating—this time he doesn't sing, but the smirk on his face gets real old real fast and he is just a bit shy of being a profound actor—if expertise takes 10,000 hours of practice, he appears to have about 9,990 left to go. All things considered, I'll give it \$1.25.

Jesse James' Women, 1954, color. Don 'Red' Barry (dir., writer, producer, star), Peggie Castle, Jack Bustel, Lita Baron, Joyce Barrett, Betty Brueck. 1:24.

The story is that Jesse James and his gang (eight men including one Robert Ford and one deaf woman who manages their hideaway) have moved to Mississippi, where he's triple-timing various women in a small town along with the world's easiest bank holdup. Various subplots, such as they are, lead up to James double-crossing everybody except his two closest cohorts and somehow making up for it by giving a bunch of loot to the local preacher before they ride off into the sunset.

I knew I was in trouble from the opening credits. Starring Don Barry. Screenplay by Don Barry. Story by Don Barry (and others). Directed and produced by Don Barry. He's got a nice smile, very obvious makeup (many of the actors are so made up they look artificial), no apparent acting skills, not a clue as to how this clown could be Jesse James.

The only similarity between Don Barry and the real Jesse James is that he managed to rob me of an hour and twenty-four minutes. Being very generous, and factoring in the lack of serious bloodshed (and one epic catfight among two of the women James is busy wronging), this might be worth \$0.75.

God's Gun, (orig. *Diamante Lobo*), 1976, color. Gianfranco Parolini (dir.), Lee Van Cleef, Jack Palance, Richard Boone, Sybil Danning, Leif Garrett, Robert Lipton. 1:34 [1:37].

Originally reviewed as part of the *small* set of spaghetti westerns (*C&I* 10.7). I didn't watch it again; you can read the full review where it first appeared. Despite an impressive cast, this was an awful, awful film—not as bad as *Apache Blood*, but remarkably crappy. I said that, although I thought it was worthless, dedicated Lee Van Cleef fans might give it \$0.50. Or not.

Disc 3

Yuma, 1971, color (TV movie). Ted Post (dir.), Clint Walker, Barry Sullivan, Kathryn Hays, Edgar Buchanan, Morgan Woodward, Peter Mark Richman, John Kerr, Bing Russewll, Bruce Glover. 1:14

Given a perfect print and the Aaron Spelling Production credit—and the fades to black at convenient plot points roughly once every fifteen minutes—it was fairly obvious this was a TV movie before looking it up. But it's a good'un, with Clint Walker as a U.S. Marshal sent to Yuma after the last three law enforcement types have either died or left within a week of arriving. Even before he can check into a hotel or visit his office, he must deal with an out-of-control stagecoach driven by two out-of-control cowboys, who start shooting in the air, go into a saloon to get even more drunk and keep on shooting. In the process (it's clear they hijacked a stage coach just for drunken

laughs), he winds up shooting one of the King brothers—admittedly *after* the brother shot at him three times.

Just the start of a moderately complex plot that is as much mystery as western. I won't bother recounting more of the plot, which involves corruption, the army, bidding procedures, a local tribe that's being cheated and more. It hangs together fairly well. It's particularly interesting that after you believe you know who the villains are, there's more to it...and none of it's trickery. Most of the performances are pretty good and the whole thing was thoroughly enjoyable. (One little problem: The credits say the film was partly made in "Old Tuscon," and I strongly suspect that was really Old Tucson.) A flick I may watch again. \$1.50.

The Belle Starr Story (orig. *Il mio corpo per un poker* [i.e. *My body for a poker*]), 1968, color. Piero Cristofani and Lina Wertmüller (dirs.), Elsa Martinelli, Robert Woods, George Eastman, Francesca Righini. 1:43 [1:40]

This story is roughly half flashbacks, half contemporary—as Belle Starr, that pants-wearing fast-shooting poker-playing outlaw, falls suddenly in lust with Larry Blackie, a local criminal, and tells him her background. The contemporary part: He wants to hire her for an audacious robbery; she refuses and sets out to do it herself (with a hired gang). Things do not go well.

This version of Belle Starr is young, beautiful, heavily freckled and a fool for lust (I keep writing "love" but...), with a back-story having almost nothing in common with the actual Belle Starr. The print's fairly good (the credits are widescreen, but, sigh, the rest of the flick is pan-and-scan), and other than an extended torture scene (involving Starr's lustmate) it's not too bad on the violence part. It's a Eurowestern, but an unusual one—one of few with a woman in the primary role (and nearly every frame) and almost certainly the only Eurowestern directed by Lina Wertmüller. A little baroque but not bad. (If you're one who watches spaghetti westerns for lots of violence and gunplay, you'll be disappointed.) \$1.50.

Joshua, 1976, color. Larry G. Spangler (dir.), Fred Williamson, Cal Bartlett, Brenda Venus, Isela Vega, Bud Stout.

Or "oshu" according to the on-screen credits, I think. I almost gave up on this one because, while the print is OK as far as it goes, it doesn't go very far: not so much pan-and-scan as stare-and-discard, the center portion of what appears to be a *very* wide-screen movie, such that you get people half off screen, none of the credits are readable and the sense of scenic grandeur that might have made this sad enterprise more tolerable isn't there. (IMDB says it *was* very wide-screen: 2.35:1, so I was seeing the center 57% of the picture.)

It's a Fred Williamson movie all the way: He wrote the story and screenplay and he's in almost every scene as the son returning from the Civil War to the Old West and a cabin where his widowed mother's cooking for a farmer, there with his much younger mail-order bride. But before he gets to the cabin, five riders appear at the house, say they need water and food, get invited in for supper...and, to show their gratitude, run off with the bride, shoot the guy when he protests (but don't kill him) and shoot the cook—Williamson's mother—because she reaches for her late husband's rifle.

Enter the son, Joshua. He hears about the situation (from the bandaged farmer), sees a group of lawmen arrive saying they lost the five in the hills, hears the note that there are five of them, says he killed twice that many in the war...and he's off.

The rest of the movie is riding. Lots of riding. More riding. Some stalking. Some really poor music, repeated endlessly. More riding. And, once in a while, Joshua offing one of the five men—or anybody else who happens to be in the way or is a nuisance of any sort. I lost count, but I think he avenges his mother's death by killing at least 20 people—including the kidnapped bride. (Who, after being raped a few times, somehow turns willing cohort of the kidnappers—Stockholm syndrome, I suppose.) He arranges several of the deaths in various nasty ways. Oh, and even though he apparently took after these outlaws with just a saddlebag (holding supplies enough for several days), the saddlebag apparently includes the bundle of dynamite sticks that I assume were standard issue for Civil War veterans. (Oh yes: And there's one big fistfight where each punch sounds like a kettledrum. I never knew flesh was that resonant.)

Pretty bad. For Fred Williamson fans and lovers of scenery, maybe, charitably, \$0.75.

Any Gun Can Play, 1967, color. Enzo G. Castellari (dir.), Edd Byrnes, George Hilton, Gilbert Roland, Stefania Careddu, Jose Torres. 1:45 [1:37]

This is more like it. The flick was filmed very wide screen...and that's how it appears here (once you use zoom setting). It's a good enough digitization that zooming in doesn't make the image unwatchable or less than VHS-quality. And the flick itself plays with Western tropes while being a pretty good (and moderately complex) spaghetti-style Western—part parody, part tribute, sometimes straightforward, with some nice touches along the way (e.g., spilling wine on the table to serve as a crude mirror to see what's happening behind you).

The opening is classic Western: three men riding slowly into the deserted streets of a town, sometimes filmed through a swinging wooden gate, with shots of townsfolk peering fearfully out their windows and the whole shebang. The Good, the Bad and the..well,

no, these three gunmen aren't important to the picture, as we quickly learn from a plot twist involving three coffins and the role of The Stranger, a bounty hunter (George Hilton). Then we move to a short train carrying \$300,000 to a bank and occupied by armed troops to protect the shipment, a bank employee (Edd Byrnes), and—oddly—one other passenger (guess who!). There's an unusual robbery and the plot's in motion. I can't even begin to describe the entire plot; it's fair to say that the somewhat-happy ending isn't at all what I expected. Some extended fistfights (with exaggerated sound effects), some gymnastics (really), lots of deaths but nearly all in the standard Spaghetti Western style (the person's shot, makes one sound, jumps up and keels over—with maybe a bit of ketchup on his or her shirt). Some humor, some playing with clichés, generally just enjoyable. Great scenery. (The IMDB synopsis is dead wrong, by the way.) Not quite a classic, but certainly worth \$1.75.

Disc 4

The Hanged Man, 1974, color (TV movie). Michael Caffey (dir.), Steve Forrest, Dean Jagger, Will Geer, Sharon Acker, Brendan Boone, Rafael Campos, Barbara Luna, Cameron Mitchell. 1:13.

Although I knew I'd seen this earlier (*seven years earlier*), I also knew I gave it an unusually high \$2.00 rating and decided it might be worth seeing again.

Which it was. The hanged man (Steve Forrest) is a gunslinger, probably wrongly convicted of murder; he's a cool customer during preparations for the hanging. Then he's hanged and declared dead. But he's not *quite* dead (maybe because the doctor gave him loads of laudanum?). In a parallel plot (joined because of a common lawyer, Dean Jagger), a woman (Sharon Acker) is in town with her son to bury her husband, who "accidentally" died at the mine she doesn't want to sell to the local silver baron (Cameron Mitchell). The silver baron will stop at nothing to force her to sell him the mine—and the hanged man winds up in the middle..

The movie moves at a natural pace. It develops toward an appropriate climax (although at the end we're left wondering what might come next; it was apparently a series pilot)—and it's even reasonably believable. I found it thoroughly enjoyable, for the scenery, the acting, the cast, the cinematography, the script. The print is about as perfect as you'll find on these sets. It's an unusual, moody Western, and I think it's worth the full \$2.00.

Trinity and Sartana...Those Dirty Sons of Bitches, (orig. *Trinità e Sartana figli di...* or "*Trinity and Sartana children...*"), 1972, color. Mario Siciliano (dir.), Alberto Dell'Acqua (as "Robert Widmark"), Harry Baird, Beatrice Pella,

Stelio Candelli, Dante Maggio (as “Dan May”), Ezio Marano (as “Alan Abbott”). 1:42.

In this case, I’d seen the flick *three* years ago—and it was *not* worth watching again.

The One-Eyed Soldiers, 1966, color. John Ainsworth (dir.), Dale Robertson, Luciana Paluzzi, Guy Degby, Andrew Faulds, Mile Avramovic, Mirko Boman. 1:23 (1:14).

A doctor with the UN Relief Medical Organization is being chased by bad guys and falls off a tower in a Central European nation. With his last breath he says something like “18 July one-eyed soldiers.” And with that, we’re off and running in a caper that takes place during one evening, one night and the next morning and afternoon. There’s a beautiful young woman (the doctor’s daughter), a journalist and a fat man—all on a train, all about to cross a border, but then the border’s closed. The plot involves a little person with bad teeth who’s a Syndicate head looking for the key to \$15 million in a Swiss lockbox (I guess); the doctor was acting as a courier but took off with the key. The fat man is after it. I’m not quite sure how the daughter and journalist are involved—but before the film is halfway over, they certainly are involved.

A fair amount of gunplay, nonstop chases and the like, and about as happy an ending as you might expect. It’s not exactly a classic (and I’m not even sure I have the plot right), but it moves right along, the print’s decent and it’s not a bad way to spend 75 minutes. It’s a Yugoslavian film. What it’s doing in a “Gunslinger” collection is anybody’s guess. \$1.25.

Mad Dog Morgan, 1976, color. Philippe Mora (dir.), Dennis Hopper, Jack Thomson, David Gulphil. 1:42 [1:38]

I suppose this Dennis Hopper showcase (if he’s not in every frame, it’s close) is a legitimate “gunslinger” item—he’s holding guns a lot of the time and it’s set in the Old VERY West—1850s-60s in Victoria and New South Wales, Australia (filmed in Australia). He plays Daniel Morgan, an Irishman who voluntarily moves to Australia to “seek his fortune” and, after not having much luck with goldmining, decides highway robbery is the way to go. He gets caught and sentenced to 12 years at hard labor in a horrifying island prison; he’s paroled after six years. (Before turning robber, he took delight in smoking opium in the mining camp’s Chinatown section. He gets his hand branded at the prison and he’s treated brutally...)

Post-prison, our upstanding hero becomes a “bushranger,” a kind of semi-lovable robber who only robs from those who have money (which makes sense—robbing from the impoverished is sort of stupid). Supposedly, he’s “vowed revenge,” but it’s not clear what that means. He kills people, but hey, none of us are perfect. He’s clearly a

bit around the bend—more than a bit as time goes on. Eventually, he's hunted down and killed. End of story. It's apparently based on a true story.

I kept waiting for this film to develop a heart or some plot beyond “lovable desperado eventually gets shot,” or for that matter some reason we'd love this “rogue.” Maybe I'm not sufficiently enamored of Hopper's acting? Maybe Australians will find this more interesting? Good scenery, but at most I found it mediocre and maybe worth \$1.00.

Disc 5

The Day of the Wolves, 1971, color. Ferde Grofé (dir.), Richard Egan, Martha Hyer, Rick Jason, Jan Murray, Frankie Randall. 1:35 [1:31]

I guess you can call any movie a “gunslinger” movie if guns are involved—and they certainly are in this odd movie about a sort-of perfect crime. Here's the setup: Jan Murray with a beard—who looks *exactly* like Jan Murray with a beard—recruits six men of low morals (all of whom have beards), flies them all to LA where they're variously met by “Acme Construction” station wagons (but no Roadrunner!) and told by tape recorder not to ask questions, not to talk, to put on gloves, a blindfold and dark glasses and that the trip will take about 2.5 hours.

They all wind up in this deserted structure somewhere in the desert, where Number One (Murray) introduces them as Numbers 2 through 7 and explains that no names are to be used, nobody is to discuss where they're from or take off the gloves, and they'll all find out why. Oh, and as per the letter, they'll get a minimum of \$50,000 for three days of their time. (That's roughly a quarter million in 2013 terms.)

The gig: A perfect crime. They're going to take over an isolated town on payday—knock out the roads out of town, blow the power and knock out the phone company, lock up all the cops, then rob the two banks, the two supermarkets and the major businesses in town. All very neat, over in three hours—and since nobody but the leader knows who any of them are and they're all disguised with beards and don't leave fingerprints, voila.

This assumes, of course, that none of the locals is armed and chooses to be a hero. Like, say, the upstanding police chief (Egan) who's just been fired the day before because the town council thought he was too upstanding, or something like that. Who also, of course, has a few shotguns at home.

Without giving too much away, four of the crooks do manage to fly out of town and the getaway's also designed to be perfect. Which it would be, even though one of the three crooks shot by the ex-chief didn't survive to be questioned. Unless, say, Jan Murray's regular gig

is as a clown hosting a kid's TV show who takes off his clown suit to tell stories, chooses (ahem) seven kids to help him, calls them by number and both looks and sounds *exactly* like Number One without his beard...

This “perfect crime” would be a lot tougher these days—you'd also have to knock out every cell tower within a fairly wide radius, and you could probably assume that every third resident of an Arizona town would be armed. (The flick was filmed in Lake Havasu City, with credits, and although they give the town a different name, “Havasu” can be spotted in at least one business sign.)

Oddly enough, it's a fairly entertaining if somewhat implausible flick. Given the costs incurred by Number One for plane tickets, the airplane to fly them in and out of the town, weaponry, the pilot, etc., etc., I'm not sure this would be a big enough heist to be worthwhile, but never mind. The print has vertical scratches at times. I'll give it \$1.25.

This Man Can't Die, (orig. *I lunghi giorni dell'odio* [i.e. *Long days of hate*]), 1967, color. Gianfranco Baldanello (dir.), Guy Madison, Lucienne Bridou, Rik Battaglia, Anna Liotti, Steve Merrick, Rosalba Meri. 1:30.

I saw this flick three years ago as part of the 20-movie *Spaghetti Westerns* pack—and of course it's also in the 44-movie *Spaghetti Western* megapack. I remembered it as being reasonably well done, and I watched it again—all the way through. It's an excellent print—no apparent flaws in video or sound.

At the time, I faulted it for sadism but gave it \$1.25. A second time around, I didn't notice *on-camera* sadism and upped the rating to \$1.50.

Dan Candy's Law (orig. *Alien Thunder*), 1974, color. Claude Fournier (dir. & cinematography), Donald Sutherland, Gordon Tootoosis, Chief Dan George, Kevin McCarthy. 1:33.

I could just say “couldn't finish, didn't rate,” since at about 1:21 there was a disc flaw that froze the movie. But that's not quite true. As I suspected, the flick is available (albeit in the shorter 1:15 version) on the Internet Archive; I watched the last 10-11 minutes there, so certainly didn't miss more than a minute or any significant plot points. This is, with rare exceptions, a slow, slow movie—and one where the “pan & scan” consisted of using the center portion of the flick regardless of content. Either that, or the direction and cinematography (by the same person!) were incompetent: There are frequent cases where the person speaking is invisible, and some where you see a table with a hand at either edge of the frame because *both* participants are off to the sides. It's also a grainy scan and portions are almost unwatchable. (The original was full Cinemascope ratio, 2.35:1. Cutting that down to

4:3 or 1.33:1 without paying any attention to what you're doing, as is clearly the case here, means throwing away 56% of the image—I was seeing less than half the picture.)

I looked this up (by the original title) after writing this review. Apparently you can now buy the movie in wide-screen, but the box copy may give you some sense of how incoherent this actually is: "He hunted his best friend's killer—while he hunted him." He him who wha?

Regardless of print quality, portions of this Canadian movie are almost unwatchable because of the acting, the directing, the cinematography and the plot, even if the plot is supposedly based on a true story. If you buy the Internet Archive synopsis, the true story is of the 1885 attempt by Dan Candy, Northwest Mounted Police Constable, to bring Almighty Voice (Tootoosis), a Cree who killed his partner, in for a fair trial after he's been a fugitive for a year. But it comes off as a manhunt—with both sides being hunter and hunted, until a huge mass of NMP (later RCMP) troops overwhelm the situation (after losing three or four men) by sheer force. The original crime? The Cree slaughtered a cow that was part of Her Majesty's Herd because his people were starving. He surrendered, and it was clear that he was going to be hung in the morning as an object lesson. Apparently (it's hard to tell from the movie) Candy removes the Cree's chains, making it possible for him to escape—and kill Candy's partner as he's doing so.

The partner, not there for that long, is long-time actor Kevin McCarthy doing a fine job as the Noble Mountie. Sutherland as Candy comes off as...I dunno. Crazy? Strange? Obsessive, even before the hunt? (Yes, he was young—but this was four years after he played Hawkeye Pierce in M*A*S*H, so I'll blame the director. I've now read that Sutherland considers this the worst movie he ever made.) Maybe I'm just not the target audience. (Chief Dan George is OK, but has very little to do. In fact, that's true of everybody...this is a *slow* movie that could readily be cut down to less than an hour.) I'd be hard-pressed to give this more than \$0.25.

Seven Alone, 1974, color. Earl Bellamy (dir.), Dewey Martin, Aldo Ray, Anne Collings, Dean Smith, James Griffith, Stewart Petersen, Dehl Berti. 1:37.

A heart-wrenching story of courage, as the disobedient eldest son in a seven-sibling family, on its way to Oregon in a wagon train, keeps the family together after both parents die and the train leaders say the kids should go back East—oh, and the rest of them should go to California because it's too late in the Fall to make Oregon. The kids sneak off (with Kit Carson's assistance), sneak along a day or so behind the small group who insist on going to Oregon, lose them...but of course it all

eventually turns out all right, even with an infant with no mother's milk, several days in untracked winter wilderness, etc., etc.

Apparently based on the true story of the Sager family, which should make me feel bad about calling this "family entertainment" a pile of crap. But...let's see. It's made clear that the appropriate way for the kid's father to deal with his pranks is to take off his belt and whup the kid. The kid helps make clear that a wife's place is to obey her husband (choosing carefully-selected never-wrong Bible verses). Thus it's clearly *appropriate* that immediately after the wife says they'd leave their pleasant Midwestern farm to go west "Over my dead body," the very next scene has her smiling alongside her husband driving their wagon, because, you know, *he's the boss*. (And she's pregnant again.) The kid continually ignores good advice, clear through to the end. We have "thieving Redskins." This is Family entertainment with a capital-F. Badly written, badly acted, badly directed. One review says this is great because you'll learn the history of the Oregon Trail. Really? Maybe the Sager story's worth telling—but not in such an awful movie. I guess the scenery merits \$0.50.

Disc 6

Savage Journey, 1983, color (for TV). Tom McGowan (dir.), Maurice Grandmason, Richard Moll. 1:36.

Since this set's already demonstrated that "gunslinger" means "any movie with a gun in it," I suppose a 95-minute chunk of propaganda for the Mormons is as suitable as anything—and that's what this is. It leads us from Joseph Smith being tarred-and-feathered sometime in the early 19th century through the many tribulations unfairly suffered by the always-good, always-just, never-vengeful, always-united Mormons (from this movie's perspective, Joseph Smith and his buddies destroying the printing press at a Nauvoo newspaper that said bad things about him is *fully justified and proper*), to the promised land in Utah, which somehow becomes "1,500 miles from the nearest food supplies" when locusts attack. (Didn't know it was 1,500 miles from Utah to any other part of civilization in 1847? Read up on History According to *Savage Journey*!)

That said, it's not a terrible picture. Even after it was obvious that it was an entirely one-sided simplification of the history of Mormonism, Smith and Brigham Young, I found it interesting enough to watch all the way through. I'll give it \$1.00.

Savage Guns (orig. title *Era Sam Wallash... lo chiamavano 'Così Sia'* or *His Name Was Sam Walbash, But They Call Him Amen*, although Google translates that as *It was Sam Wallash ... called him 'So Be It'*). 1971, color. Demofilo Fidani (dir.), Robert Woods, Dino Strano, Benito Pacifico, Amerigo Castrighella, Simonetta Vitelli. 1:28.

I have mixed feelings about this spaghetti Western—and make no mistake, that’s what it is. On one hand, it’s got an interesting score, lots of scenery, action sometimes so “natural” in pace that I used the 2x viewing mode to get through an excruciating “French singer” ballad and a boxing match faster, and cartoon violence. Oh, and it’s sort-of widescreen. My guess is it was filmed in very widescreen mode (based on credits missing parts of the first and last letters), then trimmed—but not to 4x3, rather to 16x9 (widescreen TV) mode.

There is a plot of sorts. A gang busts into a saloon, wearing partial masks, confronts the barkeep, forces him to drink tequila pouring out of a barrel they shot into, then shoots him *and everybody else in the bar*, afterwards burning it down. Except that one guy was shot in the arm, fell under a table and managed to escape. The rest of the picture consists of him hunting down and killing a couple of dozen gang members and, eventually, the boss man, Mash Flannigan (or Mash Donovan). (Along the way, we see a flashback with him as a child, in which his father and mother were gunned down in their home—for no apparent reason—by a gang that must have fired 70 or 80 shots to kill two people. It’s The Gang That Couldn’t Stop Firing.)

But the logic of the plot is so bad as to almost defy belief even by spaghetti western standards. Right after the opening scene, the evil honcho tells his gang that killing the barkeep sends a message to assure that nobody will ever rat on him again to the sheriff (which you’d think he would have sent more efficiently if he shot the barkeep but not *every witness*)—and then, as soon as he learns somebody may have escaped, he says “but if it’s not a bounty hunter, you can be sure he’ll go right to the sheriff.” Ummm... Later, a bunch of the gang surround the Lone Hero and beat him senseless—but don’t kill him. Still later, Walbash, who’s ridden off with a bullet wound and been robbed of everything at least once seems to have not only unlimited funds (and guns and ammo) but the wherewithal to, *overnight*, acquire a dummy U.S. Army paywagon with a hand-cranked Gatling gun and two wax dummies dressed in Army uniforms. Oh, and nobody in the gang finds it suspicious that this U.S. Army paywagon has two drivers and *no* guards riding in front or in back. The whole thing almost appears to have been written randomly.

One IMDB review calls Demofilo Fidani “the Italian Ed Wood.” I can see why. The song by the French chanteuse is remarkably awful in every way; there’s an introduction of three major killers partway through—but those killers, not part of the regular gang, *are never seen again*; and... oh, never mind.

It’s also not a great print. In the end, I can’t muster enough enthusiasm to give it more than \$0.75.

Death Rides a Horse (orig. *Da uomo a uomo* or *From man to man*), 1967, color. Giulio Petroni (dir.), Lee Van Cleef, John Phillip Law, Mario Brega, Luigi Pistilli, Anthony Dawson. 1:54.

Reviewed in June 2010 (C&I 10.7).

Riders of Destiny, 1933, b&w. Robert N. Bradbury (dir.), John Wayne, Cecilia Parker, Forrest Taylor, George 'Gabby' Hayes. 0:53.

John Wayne as a singing cowboy? Singin' Sandy, that is, the notorious gunslinger known across the states—except he's actually an undercover Federal agent.

He encounters a sheriff who's been shot in the back. He saves the sheriff. Cut to...he encounters a scene in which a woman on a horse has the horse shot out from under her by stagecoach drivers...who assume she's a highwayman. He saves her.

This all gets into a situation where the evil owner of a land and water company holds water rights to all the water in a valley—except for this woman's dad's ranch, which has its own well. The slick villain is trying to buy out the other ranchers for \$1 an acre, or will quadruple the price of their water. Meanwhile, his own people are robbing his own stagecoaches and passengers...

Anyway, Singin' Sandy concocts a quick scheme that saves the day for all concerned and, of course, gets the girl. Wayne is young, the movie's a classic cheaply-done B programmer, and I guess if you like Wayne at all it's worth \$1.00.

Finishing Part 1

So what do we have in Discs 1-6?

First, the ones that might be worth watching again. *Yuma* was a TV movie but a pretty good one (\$1.50). *The Belle Starr Story* was "a little baroque but not bad" (\$1.50). *Any Gun Can Play* did a good job playing with the clichés (\$1.75). *The Hanged Man* still deserved \$2.00 on a second viewing. I liked *This Man Can't Die* a little better the second time around (\$1.50). And while I didn't watch *Death Rides a Horse* a second time, it's probably still worth \$1.50. So I count one classic, one pretty close and four probably worth watching again. Add four more fair ratings (\$1.25) and three more mediocre or short-and-good-enough (\$1.00), and the total is thirteen OK movies totaling \$17.75.

Masthead

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