

Mil Mania

The Official Newsletter of WWW.ARTISTINSANE.COM

Volume 5, Issue 7 December 2009



Welcome To The December '09 Issue of Mil Mania!!!

Just when you were probably thinking *Mil Mania* (after two consecutive three-month-inclusive issues) was settling down for a long winter's nap, here comes a holiday edition winging its way down the chimney just ahead of Santa Claus.

Yes, this "most wonderful time of the year" is simply too great an occasion to let slip by without a whole newsletter dedicated to its joy -- and madness. So, here to join in your Christmas Eve celebration is a collection of articles, reviews, and the usual categories of insanity to provide a little additional food for thought. There's also much actual news to report, including an overwhelmingly successful launch to *The Rodent Reader Quarterly* (the magazine introduced in the Pet Peeves and Paranoia section last month) and a family member's homecoming sure to provide much material for the next newsletter -- whenever that might be completed. Frankly, I have no projected date on that as yet. But, rest assured that, just like Christmas, it will come.

In the meantime, though, speaking of Christmas -- it's practically here! With that in mind, I'd better finish off this intro and get this newsletter wrapped and on its way. Or, at least on its way...check out p. 3's Temporary Insanity column to see why the wrapping part might not be so advisable....Thanks again for reading. Hope you enjoy this mad literary "feast."

And, of course... Merry Christmas!!!!

Mil

ATTENTION Mil Mania Readers:

Once more, I want to extend an extra special thanks to all current subscribers — and encourage you to share *Mil Mania* with your friends. Feel free to forward this issue and encourage signing up for future ones (plus, newcomers can check out all back issues on the subscription page: www.artistinsane.com/news_sign_up.htm).

Let's make this a record year of readership!

Insanity's contagious — pass it on!!!

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Rat Assistance & Teaching Society

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Newsletter Spotlight

Merry Christmas

To All!!!

Photo: My tiny pet mouse, Austin



Music Mayhem



Brian Fitzpatrick has announced several new show dates for the upcoming months. Check myspace.com/brianfitzpatrick or look up his band's facebook page for more details. Also, I want to publicly extend my thanks to Brian for his heroic response to my last minute plea for graphic design assistance. He truly saved the day in keeping The Rodent Reader Quarterly's introductory issue on schedule and I am inexpressibly grateful!

Michael McDermott has also slowly been adding shows to his upcoming schedule -- including yet another East Coast date. His website has also continued to evolve, with much new material and merchandise. Go there for more info... www.michael-mcdermott.com



As always, feel free to drop by my "space" at



www.myspace.com/artistsane

AND My Profile at



<http://www.facebook.com/milscott>

More of my photos have been featured in *December's Magniloquence* — the monthly newsletter of my local Mensa chapter...

You can view them full size (plus explanations) at the following page:

http://www.artistsane.com/dec_09_magniloquence_pics.htm

Magniloquence

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Psycho Therapy

Disclaimer: I am not a "real" psychiatrist... nor do I play one on TV.

Dear Dr. Mil,

While waiting for my order at a fast-food restaurant recently, I found myself in line next to an impatient young woman. Though she was standing there with no companion she suddenly declared -- apparently for the benefit of me or the workers behind the counter or the universe at large -- "I'll be so glad when Christmas is over!"

Thinking I'd be exhibiting my own bit of un-Christmas-like cheer to stare at her in scornful disapproval or ask, "What the heck is wrong with you?" I pretended not to hear and took a long sip from the straw in my soft-drink cup.

What do you make of such a situation, and is there something more I should have said or done?"

Wrapped in Wonder at a Hungry Humbug

Dear Wrapped,

Clearly this woman needs to read Keela's column in this issue or go watch "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" or "Planes, Trains and Automobiles" (which, I know, is really about Thanksgiving, but which undoubtedly deals with concepts that apply to Christmas, too). It seems she's lost all sense of what Christmas is about -- and allowed herself to get caught up instead in the busy-ness or commercialization or completely external concerns of a deeply internal, deeply meaningful holiday.

What's more, it seems such an outburst taps into broader issues -- such as a need to be the center of attention, which perhaps she feels robbed of somewhat during a season when we're reminded to focus on the happiness of others. Sadly, because such needs speak to deeper mental and emotional problems, not cured by merely giving the person the attention she so craves, it's doubtful she'll feel any more satisfied once January rolls around. In fact, she may well find the anti-climax of no more holiday functions to attend and fewer (societally encouraged) reasons to give to someone besides herself actually heighten her tension level rather than relieving it. And, goodness knows, if she acts like that around everyone, she's not likely to have too many people tripping over each other to do things for her.

In fairness, it should be added there may be some arguably legitimate reasons this young woman was feeling stressed. Dealing with relatives we seldom see (and might prefer to see even less) or other unavoidable and difficult situations can prompt temporary bouts of irrational actions or desires. One would have to follow her around and become a bit more familiar with her overall personality and situation to make any accurate determinations of her mental state. Of course, if your experience with her proved the norm, I'm not sure that's a test to which you'd wish to subject your own sanity!

Given the short term nature of your interaction, I think you did the right thing to ignore her outburst. As a well known prayer states, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the ones I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." We may not know for sure which category this young woman falls into, but it's my hunch you guessed wisely.

Here's hoping you enjoy a Merry Christmas and a Happy New year of the very best mental health.

Dr. Mil

Comments on this topic or questions of your own? Send them to mil@artistsane.com. Thanks.

Temporary Insanity

Mangled Up In Tangled Up Knots



I've often openly expressed here in *Mil Mania* the fact I'm indisputably challenged in certain areas -- most notably social interactions and athletics. Given the season now upon us, however, I must confess another of these (in)abilities -- gift wrapping. Oh, yes, I know -- it seems such a simple process: a roll of paper, a pair of scissors, some tape and a decorative bow. A snip here, a fold there and voila...a beautifully wrapped gift. Or, in my case, a mass of bumps, wrinkles, rips and a taped curve of paper more closely resembling the S-turns on Virginia's Skyline Drive than the orderly train track on which glides The Polar Express. How can that be?

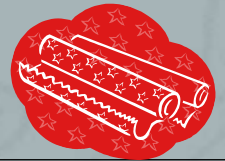
Frankly, I don't know. What's more, it seems to be a "talent" that's diminished rather than improved with greater experience. I remember wrapping gifts with my grandmother as a child. In fact, it was one of the aspects of Christmas I most happily anticipated. And, I don't really recall the whole process giving me such fits. Of course, that's probably because Grandma did most of the actual wrapping while I was distracted with sugar cookies and peppermint stick ice cream. But, still...

Despite the accuracy or lack thereof regarding childhood memories, it just doesn't seem like such a common thing as wrapping presents could really be that hard. I mean, you go to the mall and every other store or kiosk offers to do this for you within minutes of your purchase. And, I've never seen an ad noting a degree in Decorative Package Engineering as a prerequisite to these folks' hire. Neither is membership in Mensa. Yet I fulfill that one. Which just goes to prove again how fine the line between genius and idiocy. Or maybe, merely prove reinforcement of my individuality. Clearly, when it comes to gift wrapping, I'm very "special" indeed.

Whatever. It's always said in gift giving that it's the thought that counts. So, if you get a present in the mail with no tag (because I probably forgot that part in my losing battle with the bow), whereon the paper doesn't quite make it all the way around to the other side, or which has a strange red and green tumor erupting on one end, just ignore these superficial imperfections and remember how truly sincere the thought of you as its recipient *has* to be to let such an embarrassing representation of my (lack of) skills out of the house.

Of course, I could always pretend I've gone responsibly green and stop wrapping gifts altogether...which really might be the best thing to do. After all, when I'm done with it, there's not much chance of recycling the paper!

Merry Christmas!!!



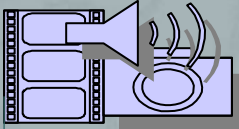
Musings of a Mental Case

I have a brief follow-up to last month's entry in this column, wherein you may recall I discussed a certain author's assertions that any writer starting out must possess equal parts of arrogance and ignorance (to which my reaction, in a nutshell, was -- poppycock!) You may also recall I noted that while this author receives *Mil Mania*, we might now find out whether she reads it. Well, I still don't have a definitive answer to that, but it seems an odd coincidence that her (arguably petulant-toned) follow-up blog dealt heavily with self-publishing (a major player in last month's column), and ultimately proves my point of how great the gulf fixed between an author long privileged with a conventional publishing deal and the choices considered or made by one going it alone. In the discussion her blog sparked, she asks, "What do self-published writers want?" And, later, she continues..."Here's the paradox I see: Almost every self-publishing success IN FICTION ends with a traditional publishing deal...So aren't we all on the same side. Don't we all want the same things?" And, the best comment of all (via which she defends her opinion that a certain award shouldn't include a category recognizing self-published works), "...I don't think Poe would appreciate it. (Poe tried to make a living as a writer, which is why he was frequently broke.)"

Clearly, the author speaking has missed the point. Ironically, I'm not even on the "other side" as she probably believes, in that I've never (at least yet!) made the effort to conventionally or self publish a finished fiction book. I merely have a strong sense of why *I* write, the attributes I believe have served me well (and/or which would not), and am always one to consider the plight of the "underdog" -- which category, to be sure, "great spirits" who've met with "violent opposition from mediocre minds" (including those at publishing firms) fall into. Obviously, to ask what all self-published writers want is to address a group too large and diverse to encompass specifics in a short answer. But, I daresay, it's safe to assume that first and foremost they simply want their work to be read by *someone* (outside their households or circle of friends) -- and in the unadulterated form it was intended. (Indeed, copy-editing is needful and appreciated. Bastardization of a created work for commercial appeal is another story.) In any case, if self publishing is the only way to achieve these goals, it's worth a try. What's more, when she speaks of those "successes" who end up in conventional publishing deals, anyway, I suspect they do so with greater artistic freedom than they would have enjoyed prior to their self-publishing success. And, I further suspect, many of these tried the conventional publishing route *without* success before forging ahead by other means.

As for Poe, it's the perspective expressed on him that really brings the whole matter into sharpest focus. Yes, he tried to make it in the conventional publishing world -- which makes one wholeheartedly agree he probably thought it the "right" thing to do. But, Poe died at age 40, spectacularly unsuccessful, and arguably mad. One can't help but wonder if to explore the option of self-publishing might have proved a better route. I mean, after all, could it really have proved worse?

Just one madwoman's thoughts -- or as the title of this column states, the musings of a mental case. Feel free to e-mail me with your own.



Ravings of a Mad Woman

This column corresponds with the Mad Ravings On... section of my website (www.artistsane.com/movie_madness.htm) and is dedicated to selected reviews of movies, television and books... most of which are unlikely to represent "the latest" in any of these categories, but rather a random selection that represents a new and/or noteworthy discovery to me.

A Christmas Carol: The Movie (2001) — You're probably thinking this is merely the same Dickens-based holiday film you've seen time and again, in each case merely produced with different actors. And, on one level, you're absolutely right. BUT, this version has incorporated several completely unique twists, that make for a new and I believe, very much worthwhile, viewing experience. For example, the action begins not as action at all, but an 1867 staged reading by Dickens himself (played by renowned British actor, Simon Callow). As he opens the book to begin the tale, a woman seated near the stage lets out a scream, prompted, as Dickens notices, by a tiny mouse scurrying past her feet. Deciding to use this incident in the story, he mentions the fact there were also mice in London at the time of its events, and suddenly we're transported to an animated world in which two mice not merely observe the characters, but interact with them, and even play a part in Scrooge's transformation. What's more, one of the mice is the companion of a character not featured in most versions of the story as we know it -- a woman from Scrooge's past, with whom he shared a relationship to be revisited as the film unfolds, and which the mice help insure will shape its final outcome. Because it's difficult to believe anyone so unpleasant as Scrooge proves at the story's outset might show kindness to such small societal outcasts as the mice, his uncharacteristic tolerance of them from the start is surely the most difficult aspect of the film to believe. Still, it's impossible to not appreciate the creativity and imagination of this very unusual telling of a very familiar story -- and, of course, from the perspective of a rodent lover, impossible to not cheer at the wonderfully positive manner in which these creatures are portrayed.

BONUS REVIEW NOTE -- A FOLLOW UP TO LAST MONTH'S ENTRY: You'll recall last month I reviewed the television show, *Monk*, starring Tony Shalhoub, and which was then in the midst of its two-part finale. Since the remainder of that episode has now aired, I have to report that not only did it conclude with nothing I'd feared, it wrapped up with more than I expected, and indeed all anyone who's come to love the show's characters could have hoped. While I won't give away the ending -- since I highly recommend you watch it (and it's not yet available on DVD!) -- I will say it proved a most fitting denouement (complete with a great new Randy Newman song), capping off a series I'm sure everyone involved was proud to be a part of. *Monk*, Natalie, Capt. Stottlemeyer and Lt. Discher will all be missed, but they will surely never be forgotten. And, I for one, will always cherish the reminder that a little insanity can be a very good thing, indeed.

Christmas Chaos



*Ornaments, from ribbons strung, on branches far and wide
Round the world serve as reminders that cheer everywhere abides
As the holidays approach, and small twinkling lights emerge
Til the nighttime sky is filled with their bright euphoric surge.
Greenery abounds, tinsel laced – silver and gold,
With red bows dotted throughout, all most striking to behold.
From all countries have we borrowed parts of our own celebrations
To create a great amalgam of new feasts and decorations;
From Mexico, Poinsettias, and Norway, the Yule Log.
From Great Britain, greeting cards; Jamestown's settlement – eggnog.
Candles across Ireland recall the need to light
A journey to a too-full inn upon one holy night.
There are pageants in the Congo during which carols are sung
And from Holland's clogs, now stockings are on fireplaces hung.
The Ukraine marks the season with a scrumptious twelve-course meal,
And of old St. Nick, or "Santa", many glimpses hope to steal.
Houses made of gingerbread and fragrant tall green trees
Waft throughout all corners of the globe, direct from Germany.
In Australia 'tis hot summertime when Christmas rolls around,
Meaning beach parties and barbecues way Down Under abound.
"Buon Natale" is the greeting for Italy's "birthday" bash,
And in Whoville a roast beast replaces everyday Who Hash.
France brings us "Noel" – a variation on "good news";
'Tis a reference to the gospel – a phrase that provides some clues
As to where all this is leading, what this poem represents --
Bringing us back to the shepherds and those famous three wise gents.
To a manger in a stable and a babe in swaddling clothes
A tradition of gift giving, and the night a new star rose...
Different cultures all united by one single shining guide
To a common destination wherein peace and joy abide,
To a spirit that transcends time and space and different tongues
Breaking barriers between diverse peoples, old and young.
'Tis a spirit of communion, and good tidings wished to all,
That can keep us celebrating throughout spring, summer and fall.
And lest anyone forget how these joyous notes are struck,
The reminder shines above – one need only to look up!*

Season's Greetings

Mil

Pet Peeves and Paranoia



A Christmas Homecoming

Though this is a story to be revisited in greater detail -- perhaps even in the next issue -- the fact its conclusion has become truly a part of the miracle that's Christmas makes it a tale too heartwarming and special to keep to myself. As a result, I'm sharing here in this holiday edition of *Mil Mania* that a once young upstart, now family patriarch, has made it home for Christmas. EJ Jabask, son of a Reserve National Champion stallion, about whom I could easily write an entire book of his own, arrived at the same farm where he spent his youth, on December 19th, 2009 at 10AM. On a day that surely started out uncertain for him, this glorious and beloved animal stepped off the trailer into territory it was clear he remembered well -- and which his whinnies of delight indicated he still dearly loves. It was time of laughter and joyous tears, which flow anew even as I write this brief report. Our father/brother/son -- friend, is home at last. And, his presence is a present for which we're grateful beyond words.

Welcome home, Superman. Merry Christmas.



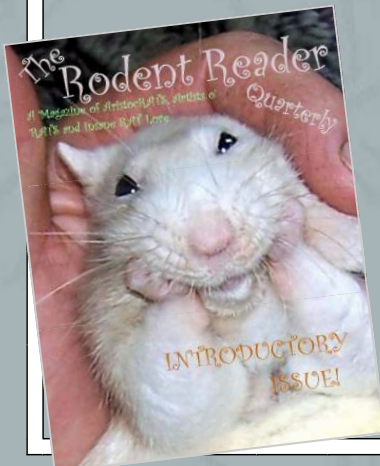
Update
on...

The Rodent Reader Quarterly,

the new pet rat magazine just launched in December!

The first few weeks have brought an overwhelmingly positive response -- in the form of individual subscriptions, vet office support and the addition to a local library's current circulation.

Visit www.rodentreader.com for more info and to subscribe. Gift subscriptions available, too!



Also, you can visit us on myspace and become a fan on facebook:

www.myspace.com/rodentreader

www.facebook.com/rodentreader

Thank you for your support!!!

Molly Madvises



MOLLY

As per the precedent set by *Dear Abby* which syndicated column retained that title when passing to its originator's daughter, so this column continues to retain the name of its originator though now written by another. The "madvice" currently offered herein is that of Keela, one of the "noisy neighbors" Molly (introduced in the Dec. 2005 newsletter linked here... http://www.artistinsane.com/Mil_Mania--12-05.htm) spoke of frequently — and who, like Molly, knows a bit about life as learned by her adventures as a rodent single mom. Also like Molly, she has a strong mind of her own with much rat wisdom to share. I hope you'll enjoy her commentary.



E-mail your "Molly Madvises" questions to mil@artistinsane.com and I'll pass them on to Keela. Thanks!

That said, on to this month's question...

Dear Keela,

Christmas time is undoubtedly my favorite time of the year. Sometimes all the holiday dashing and rushing and wrapping and packing and delivering can stir up quite a desire for a comforting cup of cocoa and homemade cookies. And I suppose "comfort" is the word that I really needed to grasp in an instance of a couple years back. I subscribe to an e-newsletter that a local parish delivers year round. At Christmas time in 2007, the Pastor placed an open call to subscribers to answer this question: "What child is this?" He offered no guidelines or "rules." All he asked was for all to contribute their thoughts. I wanted to answer, but I felt that my answer might be wrong or lacking in some way. It was a straightforward question. But I let my timidness exclude me from what turned into a beautifully orchestrated audio newsletter follow up. While I listened to the wide range of replies from children as young as 5-years of age to folks in their golden years, I became quite annoyed with myself for having bypassed this project. Of course, there could be no wrong answer! All the answers were comforting. So, Keela, in this, the absolute most wonderful time of the year, I ask you, "What child is this?"

Silent in the Night

Dear Silent,

Oh my, what an interesting question...though, as I suspect you know if you've read my column often, I find it hard to think with such images as cocoa and homemade cookies distracting me. Let me scamper to the kitchen for one of those apricot-topped thingies Dad bought at the bakery yesterday. And, I think Mom has some cocoa in the cupboard... I'll be back!

Mmm...yum...oh, apricot filling is so lovely... wait, let me wash my paw -- it's sticking to the keyboard. Okay, I think I'm settled. Now, let's get started on this question.

"What child is this?" Well, as you've already pointed out, if that's asked of a hundred different people, you're likely to get a whole lot of different answers. And, if you ask even the same ones at different points in their lives, you're likely to get very different answers, too. For example, Ebenezer Scrooge would have said one thing (probably Bah -- Humbug!) before all those ghosts scared him half to death one Christmas Eve. But the next day I think he would have had something else to say. And, while most people probably wouldn't have ever been quite that contemptuous, they might just be too busy to really give it much thought, or too preoccupied with other things in their day to day lives to care as much as they maybe should. And, some probably don't really consider the matter because they think they already know the "right" answer from something they were told when they were kids themselves.

From my perspective, as an animal, however, it's a pretty simple question. And, although I often get a bit confused about many human topics and words, this isn't one I have the usual problems tripping over. You may have read the story in the Bible about a man named Job, who goes through all kinds of terrible things because Satan didn't believe his in-teg-rat-y would hold up if he lost all the blessings he'd known throughout his life. So, God (who knew otherwise, of course) let Satan test him. Well, poor Job had no idea this was what was going on -- and neither did his friends. But, it became obvious pretty fast that his friends lived in a permanent state of confusion a whole lot greater than any I go through trying to get human names and words right sometimes.

Anyway, the point is, Job wasn't at all confused, and at one point when his friends were proving particularly dense, he said to them, "...ask the animals and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you...which of all these does not know?"

Okay, he wasn't technically talking about the specific question, "What child is this?" But, he *was* talking about that child's Father, and how the animals know Him and depend on Him to keep us going. Some humans (like Job's friends, I'm sure) might think that's crazy or silly or whatever, but here's an example. Neither I nor any of my neighbors here at my adoptive home have ever lived outside. And, the temp-rat-ure in our room is kept the same all the time by this thing on the wall I think I've heard Mom call a therm-o-strat. But, whenever it's going to snow or anything like that, the whole community gets to work. Oh, my goodness, I can barely think to write my columns on those nights, for all the paper shredding and insulation of all kinds being stacked around the walls of our bedroom boxes and igloos. Because we hear the "still small voice" that lets us know to prepare and helps us to survive. Oh, sure, we've got a few among us who are oblivious and sleep right through or who let others do all the work. And, I suppose if you asked them, you might not get an answer that made much sense. But, for the most part, in asking a member of a species disliked by Man for centuries, yet which God has helped survive -- well, you've come to the right place.

Of course, since you've come to a highly domesticated rat, who lives in a warm house -- with a TV! -- and who's therefore seen some wonderful movies and cartoons about Christmas like "It's a Wonderful Life" and "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" and such,

Mil Mania

Molly Madvises (cont'd)

I can't help quoting one of those -- the one who's given my very favorite answer to your question. I know technically, he was answering the question, "What's Christmas all about?" But, since the holiday itself is named for the child your own question speaks of, I think this answer -- by Linus Van Pelt -- is still the best.

"And there were in the same country shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them! And they were sore afraid ... And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not! For, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all my people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ, the Lord.'"

"And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the Heavenly Host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth peace, and good will toward men."

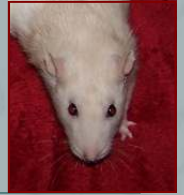
"That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

And, that's what child this is...if you ask me -- which you just did!!!!

Oh, I hope there are still some apricot cookies left...

MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!!

KEELA



P.S. I'm on facebook! Here's the link...

<http://www.facebook.com/findfriends/?code=1325151454#/profile.php?id=100000109802208&ref=profile>. If that doesn't work for some reason, just look me up! I'm under Keela Scott and the photo at right is my current profile pic. Add me!

Don't forget...



Including a 2010 Calendar featuring my pet rats !!! Plus, year round gifts, cards, postage and more.



AND just added -- Rodent Reader merchandise...



www.zazzle.com/artistinsane

In A Nutshell

"It is, indeed, the season of regenerated feeling--the season for kindling, not merely the fire of hospitality in the hall, but the genial flame of charity in the heart."

Washington Irving

*"At Christmas I no more desire a rose
Than wish a snow in May's new-fangled shows;
But like of each thing that in season grows."*

William Shakespeare

"There are some upon this earth of yours," returned the Spirit, "who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all out kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us."

Charles Dickens

"...for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty founder was a child himself."

Charles Dickens

December 2009 Vol. 5, Issue 7

The Official Newsletter of
WWW.ARTISTINSANE.COM

Thanks for reading this issue of Mil Mania! And, remember, this is a work in progress, subject to various changes — all aimed at an improved publication. Please send me your thoughts, including all suggestions. Thank you!!!

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