

The Mystery Hose

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Pippin's Birthday

We had a fairly busy weekend — it was Pippin's birthday on Saturday. For his birthday meal, he requested chili, mashed potatoes, and roasted broccoli. So, Grace and I made a large quantity of chili. I started it while she ran the first of our Saturday errands, frying up two large onions and a mix of spices. She brought back a bunch of stew meat, and browned that up. We added diced tomatoes, crushed tomatoes, tomato paste, and black beans. Then it went into the slow cooker for several hours, which slowly made the chewy stew meat tender enough to enjoy. Then we ran more errands — our egg pickup, and grocery pickups from GFS and Target.

For his cake, Pippin had asked for a cake flavored with blood oranges and cherries. So, Grace put canned cherries and orange zest into a cake batter. Grace made a homemade blood orange marmalade in order to spread it between the cake layers, and an icing made with canned orange juice and orange zest. It was quite a cake! Grace and I didn't think the combination of cherry and blood orange was actually all that good, so we probably wouldn't make this exact recipe again, but it was by special request. The cake baked up a bit dry and a bit over-sweet from the canned cherries. It softened up and got better after half of it sat in the cake carrier overnight. We have a large jar of homemade blood orange marmalade left over.

Pippin's birthday was also on a Saturday, which is our movie night, and we watched two films featuring dragons. I'll describe those later.

The Last Bookcase

Also on Saturday, I built the last of the IKEA HAVSTA bookcases we had on hand downstairs. The planned shelving for the basement library is all in place now. I actually had this sketched out when we moved in, back in 2017 — when I packed up all the books and movies for the move, I kept a spreadsheet estimating the amount of shelf space we would need. Back then I had hopes of having some custom shelves made. That hasn't worked out for various reasons, but instead

we have twenty identical white wooden HAVSTA bookcases. We should finally be able to move the last of our books out of the storage unit.

Since our library has grown since I made this plan, I'm not sure I'll be able to fit everything. Aside from the books, our movie collection has grown more than I anticipated it would. We have not gone into a movie theater since early 2020, so instead of watching movies in theaters with the kids once in a while, we have our own movie nights. The acquisitions fall into three broad categories. I get older TV shows and movies on Blu-ray, mostly from eBay sellers. I get occasional new releases such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe movies, purchased from Best Buy or Target. And a couple of times a year, during their 50% off sales, I order movies from the Criterion Collection.

I think we'll be able to manage with the shelving we've got for some time, though. I have additional storage space planned for the windowless room in the basement that was serving as my office. There are two black wire shelving units in there from U-Line, and I'm planning to get one more. They will hold some things that are boxed up, like "overflow" CDs that won't fit on the shelves, items that I still need to go through to decide whether to keep or get rid of, and items I've decided to get rid of, but have not yet found a good home for.

The Kids Finally Clean Their Room

Sunday was extra-tiring. Grace and I managed to clean up our bedroom. That doesn't sound like it should be that hard, but our room has been a disaster for a long time. I also made many trips up and down the stairs rearranging books between the bookcases in our bedroom and the library bookcases in the basement. The donated set of Thackeray's works went into the library. So did most of my novels by Greg Egan. Our bedroom contains the Library of America books, most of my prized science fiction first editions, and some special children's books that were significant to me as a kid. These children's books will probably wind up in the library, as I want them to be accessible to the older kids.

We haven't had a working vacuum cleaner in a while — they keep getting destroyed in various ways. One blew up because an outlet upstairs was actually wired to put out 220 volts. Several burned up because the kids used them to vacuum up things they shouldn't have. So I have ordered yet another vacuum cleaner, which should be here in a couple of days. If we like this one, I'd like to eventually get another one for the upstairs. Larry the robot vacuum is doing a bang-up job downstairs. He's a little sensitive, though. We have moustraps downstairs and on Sunday he bumped against one of them and set it off. He immediately made a beeline to the opposite end of the basement and continued vacuuming over there. I guess they have sound sensors, or something, and if they detect a loud noise they leave the area? The poor thing seemed very upset.

We had an appliance repair guy out and he evaluated our dishwasher and refrigerator. They don't have fuses he can replace. To get them to power up, he'd have to replace the control panels, which would cost about \$500 per item.

And there would be no guarantee that they wouldn't need more expensive work after that. So he recommended just replacing the appliances completely. So we will have a refrigerator and a dishwasher to dispose of along with a fried laser printer. I also got two replacement ceiling fans; they are still boxed up, waiting for installation.

Too Badly in Need of Coffee to Make Coffee

I was so tired Sunday night that when I set up the coffee maker so we'd have coffee ready to drink this morning, I forgot to put in the ground coffee. So we had hot water this morning. I added instant espresso powder to the hot water and so had a strange form of coffee, but since I had to be in a Zoom meeting in ten minutes, I was in no position to complain and guzzled it down to try to get some neurons firing.

I have a presentation later this week.

Tonight's dinner is a baked potato bar.

Car Repairs

The Element started giving us trouble again. The transmission was not working right — it wouldn't up-shift past second or third gear, and the "D" light on the dashboard was blinking. This is Honda's generic way for the transmission to report that it is having trouble. The last time I saw it was on our Odyssey, right before we had to replace the whole transmission. So naturally I was concerned. The car still seemed to be driveable enough to get it to the dealer. They determined that the source of the problem was actually corroded wiring, so replaced some wiring, and after that the transmission seemed fine. So that was a bit of a relief. But the front suspension was finally giving out — it's been getting worse for years. Living on a dirt road full of potholes will tend to do that. So they did a whole lot of suspension work. It all came to almost \$2,000, which we were not too happy about. But overall, we still have not had to put all that much money into this car to keep it running, and we've had it since 2015, so I can't complain *too* hard. Ultimately, I need a job that pays health insurance, though. COBRA is eating the money that I might be otherwise setting aside for things like car repairs or car replacement.

The Mystery Hose

There's a plastic hose attached to our old refrigerator which supplies water for the icemaker. However, we've never used the icemaker. What I'd like to do is just turn off the valve and remove the hose. Ideally I'd shut off the valve, drain the hose, cap it off, coil it up and hang it on a hook on the wall behind the new refrigerator in case someone in the future had need of it. Right now, because there is no valve, I'm hesitant to try removing it from the old refrigerator, because I'm not sure I'll be able to completely stop the flow of water.

There ought to be a valve under the kitchen sink, or at the point where the hose enters the kitchen, or *somewhere* accessible. But as far as we can tell, there's no valve.

Once again, we find that the previous owner did things in a half-assed way. The hose just runs into a small gap in the hardwood floor. He must have left a little space for it when he installed the floor. We think that it must go into a bump-out in the basement ceiling, where the pipes run. I'm not expert, but I'm pretty sure that running the thin polypropylene for the refrigerator water supply is *not* up to code. How it connects to the cold water supply which ultimately comes from the well pump is a complete mystery. We can see the cold water pipe entering the "bump-out" on their way to eventually connect up with the kitchen and bathroom plumbing. We can shine a flashlight down into the "bump-out" a little way, but that doesn't tell us anything.

I suspect the only way to get this up to code would involve tearing open the basement "bump-out" and maybe *also* the wall behind the refrigerator. Maybe there is a way to just remove it and cap off whatever connection exists without tearing open at least some part of our wall or ceiling, but I doubt it. And the basement "bump-out" is right over some of our new bookshelves. Not that there's any *good* place for a slow leak in a ceiling, exactly, but that's a particularly bad place.

So, we want to have a plumber out to look at the situation. Maybe they can advise us. But again, it's more people coming into the house and potentially sharing a COVID reinfection.

An Old Person's Guide to King Crimson, Part Two: 1971-1972

A couple of newsletters ago I wrote a general introduction to King Crimson and then wrote extensively about the version of the band that recorded *Discipline*, *Beat*, and *Three of a Perfect Pair*, and toured to support those albums. I planned then to cover some other "incarnations" of King Crimson. The next version of King Crimson, chronologically, was the "double trio" that recorded *Vroom* and *THRAK*. This consisted of all four members of the early-eighties band with two members added, and so I thought it would be more interesting to set aside this version of the band and dive further into the band's past.

King Crimson during the period from 1968 to 1975 was a wild and wooly place. The lineup and style changed considerably during this period, with a lot of "churn." In fact I think one can reasonably debate where to place the dividing lines between different versions of the band, or even ask whether one should try to do so at all, rather than seeing the history as a continuous evolution and refinement with some notable points of major change, as opposed to years of punctuated equilibrium.

However you decide to understand the complicated history of King Crimson,

there is general consensus that during these years they also recorded work that is pretty unanimously recognized as the band's best and most influential, and also recorded work that isn't nearly so appreciated by posterity. But there isn't much disagreement about the band, or bands, as a live touring act, or acts. They were incredible.

To dive into this period and try to make sense of it, I'm going to begin with one specific configuration that toured in 1971 and 1972, and also, along with a variety of guest musicians, recorded the album *Islands*. This group consisted of Boz Burrell on bass and vocals, Mel Collins on saxophone and flute, Robert Fripp on guitar and mellotron, and Ian Wallace on drums. It also had Peter Sinfield, who contributed VCS3 synthesizer parts when the band played live, but not in the studio. Sinfield had an interesting role — he was never one of the main musicians, but is considered one of the original group's founders, wrote lyrics, designed the album cover, and ran sound and lighting on tour.

And I wasn't there and can't speak for the players, but it seems to me that the this configuration was destined for trouble. It seems the bandmates may not have been quite in agreement on musical direction. Several of the members might have been happier doing more conventional jazz and blues material, whereas Fripp, while acknowledging his influences, always wanted to do something that would startle (and maybe even risk alienating) audiences, in pursuit of his muse.

I believe that Fripp simply didn't want King Crimson to sound like other bands. In a press release he famously wrote "When music appears which only King Crimson can play, then, sooner or later, King Crimson appears to play the music." In comparison, his bandmates seem to have been more comfortable playing music that *other groups could play*. Listen to *Earthbound* (discussed further below) for confirmation of this; at some points, the band sounds like a fairly conventional blues/jazz/rock band. Other groups might not have been able to play these songs quite as well, or with the same style, but they could play it. And I suspect that this bothered Fripp. I note also that he didn't include any live recordings with Boz's scat singing on the *Ladies of the Road: Live 1971-1972*, which he assembled years later, to represent the band's live work during that period.

Just *how* the wheels came off this configuration, they did, and the experience left several of the bandmates dismayed and traumatized for years. Some of them seem never to have reconciled with Fripp.

***Ladies of the Road: Live 1971-1972* (2002 King Crimson Live Album)**

I will take as my starting text, my jumping-off point, one specific album, the live album *Ladies of the Road: Live 1971-1972*. You can find the whole album on YouTube if you want to listen along while you're reading.

There are a *lot* of live recordings of King Crimson playing live, although very few recordings of their early years that are also of high technical quality. This

album in my opinion hits a real sweet spot — the recordings (multiple — it is pieced together from various shows) are very good for the time, only suffering by comparison to the crystal-clarity of all-digital recordings that were to come much later, and the selected performances are terrific.

“Pictures of a City” We begin with this jazz-rock track, which features some gorgeous lock-step playing between saxophone and guitar, propelled by an enthusiastic rhythm section. It’s almost hard to believe that this is a live track. The timing is so tight that you couldn’t slip a sheet of paper between the parts, until suddenly it’s *not* and the band goes loose to change things up during the extended saxophone solo section. Boz Burrell does a decent job as a singer, although he is a bit pitchy on this track; remember that this was long before in-ear monitoring. He may simply not have been able to hear himself very well on stage. Also, it’s no small feat to sing these lines while holding down the low end on bass, and doing a great job of that. Mel Collins plays a mean saxophone on this track — I mean “mean,” literally. His solos are aggressive, squealing, and brain-melting, a huge contrast to the smooth synchronized melody.

“The Letters” Burrell’s vocal performance here is much more subtle and melodic than it is on “Pictures of a City. I would prefer that he didn’t try to copy Lake’s style so precisely, as opposed to putting his own spin on the song, but I am impressed by how good he sounds. Contrasting crazily with the sweetness of the melody, the lyrics make this a dark and weird Crimson song:

With quill and silver knife
She carved a poison pen
Wrote to her lover's wife
"Your husband's seed has fed my flesh"

Sinfield periodically brings in blasts of synthesizer noise, which fit pretty well given the murderous mood of the song’s narrator. The saxophone pans wildly between left and right at times, and Fripp comes in with waves of overdriven high-speed strumming.

“Formentera Lady” Again, Burrell does a credible job with a sweeter vocal style, on this laid-back track. Collins plays flute. The original track, on *Islands*, features some spooky wordless singing, and we get some of that. Is Burrell contributing that, singing a wordless falsetto? He might be. Collins switches back to saxophone for a jamming dialogue with Fripp while, again, the amazing rhythm section propels the song right along. This track cuts directly into the next one. I think tracks from different shows were edited together to match the sequencing of the original album.

“Sailor’s Tale” This is one of my favorite King Crimson instrumental tracks, and this may be my absolute favorite live recording of this track. It’s so damned good that I’m left nearly speechless. I was only about four years old at the

time, but I'm immediately jealous of the folks who got to attend these shows, a whopping fifty-two years ago. The recording quality on this track is not as good as some of the others, but the performance makes up for, especially when Fripp brings in the mellotron, and then the band accelerates into the wild finale. Actually, I'm not sure what is going on. How was Fripp playing mellotron and guitar simultaneously? Did Collins take over on mellotron?

“Circus” Next up we have this oddball track from *Lizard*, one of Crimson's lesser-known albums. They seem to be playing it a bit slower than the album track. Burrell's singing on this track is not terrific, but that's OK. We get several different mellotron tones — I'm not quite sure how that works, since I think it wasn't easy or quick to change sounds. Did they have two mellotrons on stage? In any case the breakdown and finale of this track gets pretty wild and I'm not always clear on who is playing what. The whole song not as beautiful or as energetic as “Sailor's Tale,” but it's still impressive.

“Groon” This track was not on any of the band's studio albums. It was a B-side to the single “Cat Food,” which became part of their live repertoire. It's a relatively simple jazz-blues instrumental. This live version features Fripp getting — well, I hate to say “funky,” but he's getting funky. I don't think he's using a wah pedal. If he is, he isn't “working” it a lot like a typical funk rhythm guitarist; he has it “cocked” into a fixed position. Or it may be some different kind of effect. Burrell's bass playing is excellent on this track. This is impressive given that from what I've read, he had played rhythm guitar only, not lead, and had never played bass before he joined the band, but was tutored extensively by Fripp and Wallace, and proved to be a quick study.

“Get Thy Bearings” This track exists only in live recordings from the Crimson archive, not on any of the studio albums. It's actually a cover of a song by Donovan. It's a “framework” song with a typical jazz structure — an melody that bookends some solo parts. The sung melody contains some unusual jazzy intervals. The solo section features a drum solo that slows down so much, at one point the audience begins to applaud, thinking that the song must be over. But Wallace dives back in, Sinfield begins adding waves of synthesizer, and the song takes off again, with Collins adding some aggressively atonal sounds. Then everyone piles back in for the closing round of the melody. It's *almost* a free jazz song, and quite strange. I don't especially love it, although there's a lot of great playing in it.

“21st Century Schizoid Man” Next up we get a nine-minute version of this crowd favorite from the band's hugely influential first album, *In the Court of the Crimson King*. They do the first part of the song somewhat slowly, but it accelerates during the solo sections. I like Burrell's singing on this track. He does not try to copy Greg Lake's original vocal track, but makes it his own. The

long jam that fills out most of this track’s running time is one of the best jams that I’ve heard any configuration of King Crimson do.

“In the Court of the Crimson King” OK, I was *not* expecting this. The album ends with a short fragment (only 48 seconds) of the band doing “Court” as a traditional blues song. It’s wild. I’m guessing that the tape ran out at that point. What a shame! Because what we did get to hear of that version was hilarious.

Part Two: Schizoid Men The second disc in the same set is subtitled *Schizoid Men* and consists of one giant “megamix,” in which parts from 11 different live performances of “21st Century Schizoid Men” are grafted together to form a single 54-minute song. Most of that runtime consists of a continuous series of solos, fit neatly together to make the mother of all solos. The recording quality is poorer than most of the tracks on disc 1. The musical chops displayed are incredible. I find it fun to listen to, in my headphones, as there is enough variety on display to keep it from becoming monotonous, but I completely understand if other folks balk at listening to this Frankenstein’s monster of a track.

How to Hear More of the 1971-1972 King Crimson

If you want more, there is more. There’s a lot more. There aren’t a lot of regular live albums available; there’s the live album *Earthbound*, which I haven’t bought yet, because it has notoriously poor sound quality, and did not seem indispensable. You can find *Earthbound* on YouTube. Listening to it supports my hypothesis that Boz, at least, might have wanted to take the band in a direction Fripp wasn’t ready to go. His singing on a couple of tracks makes him sound a bit like a male Janis Joplin.

Besides *Earthbound*, there are Collector’s Club CD releases one can find on the used market. I haven’t heard any of these to date. And then, there is also a monster boxed set called *Sailors’ Tales (1970-1972)*, released in 2017.

Sailors’ Tales (2017 King Crimson Boxed Set)

Not to be confused with “Sailor’s Tale” (Singular), the song, *Sailors’ Tales* contains a whopping 21 CDs, 4 Blu-ray discs, and 2 DVD-A discs (all audio, no video). It includes the contents of the three studio albums, *In the Wake of Poseidon*, *Lizard*, and *Islands*, along with the live album *Earthbound*, all with bonus material, and archival recordings from a *lot* of live shows, sometimes including two shows recorded in a venue on the same day, in various states of quality and completeness. It also includes a lot of *outtakes* — maybe all the surviving raw tapes from the studio sessions. There are audition tapes. There are rehearsal tapes. There’s a show described only as “unidentified 1972 show,” originally recorded on cassette (and which probably sound pretty terrible).

I have some of this material already, in the form of tracks that were included with the 40th anniversary CD and DVD-A releases of *In the Wake of Poseidon*, *Lizard*, and *Islands*. And so, I'm... (deep breath)... not going to buy this set. Ever. There's also the small detail that it's out of print and used copies are scarce. So, no.

Probably not.

I mean, do I really want to hear 56 different recordings of "Sailor's Tale," 47 of "21st Century Schizoid Man," 39 of "Goon," *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera* (and rarely was there a better place to use that little latin phrase?)

No.

I think.

***Islands* (1971 King Crimson Album)**

So, now I want to talk about *Islands*. I'll start by quoting from the Discipline Global Mobile site:

Islands, the fourth album by King Crimson was released 51 years ago today. The only studio album to feature Fripp, Mel Collins, Ian Wallace, Boz, and Peter Sinfield, it was laid down in a series of guerilla-style raids in between their gigs around the UK at London's Command Studios.

The bulk of *Islands* was recorded in September, with most of the overdubbing and mixing completed in early October. "It is difficult to convey the level of exhaustion during this last week" explains Fripp. "I'd get home about 3-4 in the morning from the studio, pull out a pencil and write orchestral parts for "Song of the Gulls," before getting to bed anywhere between six and eight. Up around ten to leave for the studio for noon. The final night began around 18:00 and never ended for me — Peter bailed in the early hours and I carried on. Richard Williams came in to listen to the playback/run-through the following late morning, then the van arrived after lunch. I got in, fell asleep, we drove to the first show of the tour, and I woke up shortly before we arrived."

I've done stretches of work like that, except in software, not music. Being young can be *amazing*. It doesn't last, but from my perspective, middle age has a lot going for it, as well — like being smart enough *not* to push myself that hard.

The DGM article references another article published on the Louder Sound prog-rock site here, entitled "King Crimson and the Making of *Islands*." Here's a clip:

For a long time, the *Islands*-era band were very much the forgotten King Crimson, a group overshadowed by 1969's groundbreaking debut

and eclipsed by the brilliance of the magical *Larks' Tongues* era that followed. This part of Crimson history was represented by an album hurriedly recorded on the hoof in between gigs and, until the 2000s, a live legacy that could only be found on the infamous *Earthbound*, whose dubious bootleg sonics meant that Atlantic Records declined to even release it in the country where it had been recorded.

Continuing with the DGM article:

Following his remix of the album in 2010 as part of the 40th Anniversary series, Steven Wilson noted, “I always thought of *Lizard* and *Islands* as being of a pair in a way, but when you sit down and start working with the tapes, you realise they are completely different things, mainly because of the economy and the space in the recording of *Islands*. It has a quiet, stately beauty and elegance about it that you do appreciate the more you hear it. With *Islands*, you’ve got the two tracks at either end of the record which are very spacious and jazz-like, and then you’ve got probably the most macho thing King Crimson ever did in the middle of the record followed by an orchestral piece! It’s possibly the most diverse record they ever made.”

I agree with Wilson — it is certainly the most “diverse” record; one might also call it the most eclectic, as opposed to simply the weirdest (which might be *Lizard*... or might not).

So, let’s tour the *Islands*, shall we?

“Formentera Lady” Right off the bat we get a song calculated to upset our expectations of what a King Crimson album sounds like. Beginning with the melody played simply on a bowed double bass, we get a plaintive, simple vocal melody and sparse instrumentation, with swirls of piano and percussion punctuated by swooping flute. A subdued groove begins. There are bits of harmonizing guitar that add ear candy to the track, but this isn’t really a guitar-forward song *per se*. The entire song goes from beautiful to a bit spooky with sustained, wordless soprano vocal lines floating over multiple tracks of strings and violin. It’s not my favorite King Crimson song, as I feel that it noodles on for far too long, but it’s a bold, intriguing one. The band simplified the arrangement considerably when playing it live, out of necessity. This song runs straight into the next one.

“Sailor’s Tale” This may be the single greatest instrumental track that King Crimson ever recorded in the studio. I’ve heard it many times, but it still sends tingles up and down my spine, and something in my lizard brain screams “turn it up!” It features a pretty basic groove for the first part of the song, with great sax and guitar playing, forming some yuuuuge, beautiful chords, and startling shifts in tone, with Fripp’s fuzz guitar sounding remarkably like a muted saxophone

for a while, and then we get to the middle section.

In this middle section, there's a soft, low-key mellotron part, over a simple bass and drum groove, and on top of that, Fripp takes his guitar somewhere entirely new, playing it like a flaming banjo from hell, with some kind of slap echo and a gate effect tone nerds, check out this discussion on Reddit, playing some of the fastest, most aggressive strumming I've ever heard.

If there is a heaven, this is the music that should accompany one's journey there. Bringing everything gradually back down to earth, Fripp slows his mad strumming back down, and the track fades out on a series of low, ominous mellotron notes. Maybe heaven isn't our destination after all, but Davey Jones's locker? In any case, it's quite a journey.

“The Letters” This song starts out very quietly, creating a huge contrast in volume level from the peak of “Sailor’s Tale.” This highlights just how very *dynamic* this album is — what a big range there is between the quietest and loudest songs.

The melody here is adapted from “Drop In,” a song played live by the original configuration of King Crimson, and which appears on the live album *Epitaph*. Burrell sings this song beautifully, his performance reminding me of Greg Lake's singing. It's a sort of dark folktale... and then, the brain-melting doubled baritone saxophone parts kick in. Then, in the third verse, we get Burrell really belting the vocal part, through what I think is a plate reverb.

After the collapse of the 1971-1972 touring band, King Crimson didn't perform this song live until the 2010s, when Fripp and Mel Collins patched things up, and Collins joined the touring band. They began performing tracks from *Islands* for the first time in 42 years. The hardcore fans in the audience, especially the older ones, must have just about collapsed with joy to hear this material played live again after waiting so long. Talk about playing the long game!

“Ladies of the Road” I'll just say up front that I like the music to this song, but not the lyrics. It is a song about the band members and all the things they did with the women they met while on tour. The lyrics are pretty misogynistic. One of the “ladies” refers to herself as “the school reporter.” It sounds like some of the ladies the song speaks of may have been a bit young to be hanging around backstage. In short, this song hasn't held up well. And what's up with Burrell's vocal part? Well, according to the Louder Sound article:

Given that Collins, Burrell and Wallace were fond of a post-gig drink, mornings weren't always the time when they were at their best. If you've ever noticed the strange halo around Boz Burrell's voice on “Ladies of the Road,” it was achieved not through some elaborate effect but by having the microphone positioned next to his head as he leaned over a metal fire bucket held in place in the event of him having to vomit.

It seems oddly appropriate. As for the music — it’s fun, but there’s nothing really groundbreaking here like there is on some of the other tracks. There’s a melody bit in the sax soloing that reminds me of the song “I Know What Boys Like” by The Waitresses — I wonder if, years later, The Waitresses sarcastically quoted this fragment of melody?

There’s one more thing. The compilation album I discussed earlier, called *Ladies of the Road*, doesn’t even have this song on it. So why did Fripp use that title for the album? I think it is for the same reason that, according to Politico,

Long after racist language was banned from training, drill instructors regularly insult male recruits by calling them “ladies,” “pussies,” “girls” and worse.

Is that really what he had in mind? I don’t know. But it does make me think that I might not have liked that 1971-1977 Robert Fripp very much, or even the 2002 Robert Fripp who chose the album title decades later, and perhaps his bandmates who bailed out had good reasons to leave.

“Prelude — Song of the Gulls” “And now for something completely different,” we have a little bit of musical whiplash. If the different songs on *Islands* are islands themselves, they are *very* different places. After the fadeout of the extremely earthy “Ladies,” suddenly there’s a graceful ensemble in my ears: strings, oboe, and cornet. Including this song on a rock album was, itself, a pretty radical move. It’s very pretty, but “Song of the Gulls” really is mostly a prelude to “Islands.”

“Islands” This is a twelve-minute track — most of a vinyl record side — with an introductory section consisting of saxophone, piano, and vocal, again with the reverb. In the second part, the reverb gets more spacious, and we hear piano and Fripp’s guitar coming in, using a soft, rolled-off, jazzy tone. Then we get a variety of guest musicians playing cornet, double bass, and oboe. There’s a buzzy-sounding pedal harmonium, and mellotron, and bass flute. This makes it sound complicated, but it all evolves very slowly, so the instrumentation is always supportive, just the right thing at the right moment, taking turns as accompaniment and solo instruments, and never jarring. The song slowly builds to a beautiful conclusion. It’s absolutely gorgeous. It is one of the few songs capable of leaving me in tears.

There’s a little oddity in the track. After the song ends, after a full minute of silent, we hear a moment of studio chatter, of Fripp telling the group that they are going to play through the song twice more, and then the band tuning up for another run-through. It’s interesting that Fripp decided to include this little bit of the session audio on the album. No matter why it was included, it eventually became part of the “walk-on” audio for the band’s live shows, starting in 2017.

In the 40th Anniversary release, we get some bonus tracks, including a partial run-through of “Islands” with the oboe playing the melody more prominently, a

different introduction to “Formentera Lady,” and entirely different recordings of “Sailor’s Tale,” “The Letters,” and “Ladies of the Road.” These are qll quite interesting, but it’s possible to hear why the album tracks were chosen instead. I may not get my hands on the huge *Sailors’ Tales* boxed set, but I already have quite a few of the bonus tracks that are on that set.

So, What Have We Learned?

I’ve learned that this particular, underrated configuration of King Crimson really was *its own thing*, and quite different from all the other configurations, both before and after, but especially after. But also, it was inextricably tied up with the whole history of the band, as shown by Collins rejoining the touring band in 2017.

What became of the other?

- Raymond “Boz” Burrell went on to play bass with Bad Company for a number of years, but sadly died in 2006 at the age of 60.
- Ian Wallace worked with a number of acts including Bob Dylan, Foreigner, Ry Cooder, and Don Henley, but also died at the age of 60, in 2007.
- Peter Sinfield went on to produce Roxy Music’s debut album, and has written lyrics for a number of different artists over the years, including Emerson, Lake & Palmer.

This configuration of King Crimson had a rough time of it, and has lived in the shadows of the more famous configurations. But in my view they were one of the best, if not the best, live configurations of the band, even if they could not stay together for very long. I highly recommend *Ladies of the Road: Live 1971-1972* as opportunities to hear what this group, despite all their egos and conflicting interests and struggles, was capable of. It’s impressive! There’s a hell of a lot of music packed into this album. And don’t overlook *Islands*. And remember that if you don’t find yourself loving this configuration of King Crimson, there are plenty of others to choose from!

Monday, May 8, 2023: Library Update

My tinnitus is loud today. This seems to go along with not getting enough sleep last night. I’ve also got painful sore spots on my scalp. It looks inflamed in patches. These seem to show up along with itching if I go more than 48 hours without washing my hair, or use conditioner. But if I wash it that aggressively it becomes a big ball of frizz. This is making me feel, again, like I should just give myself an extremely short haircut with clippers. I don’t want anyone to have even the briefest impression that I have fascist sympathies, though.

Despite all this, and insufficient sleep last Thursday night, last Friday I was able to do a pretty decent job giving a presentation on memory management in C. I was hoping to get some discussion going on whether the topic was too detailed, or not detailed enough, and whether there were other C programming topics my

teammates might like to better understand. I haven't gotten much feedback so far, except from a few people who told me they enjoyed it.

We had a busy weekend, and I'm happy to report that we actually finished most of the things we planned to do. I started a process of bringing all the older people downstairs to review the video library. The idea is that anyone can vote to keep a movie or TV show, and if no one votes to keep it, we will give it away. We went through the first rack of DVDs and Blu-ray discs. Only a small handful of discs were "voted off the island." But it served another useful purpose — it reminded everyone of what we have already, so we made a stack of things that people were excited to watch, and we will plan to watch these over our next few movie nights.

I proposed to the kids that we get rid of about a third of the Marvel Cinematic Universe films, because there are thirty on the shelf, they take up a lot of space, and many of them aren't very good. A couple of the kids were OK with this plan, but one really wants to keep a complete set, for a future marathon re-watch. So, I think my compromise plan, somewhere between keeping them all shelved and getting rid of some, will be to keep half of them on the shelf and put the other half in a box in our basement storage room. I'm already going to be doing this with some of our CDs.

Something is making a little bit of a grinding noise in the freshly repaired Element. It sounds to me like an issue with a spring, although I'm no expert. I'm hoping it's just the new suspension parts breaking in, not breaking. We'll keep an eye on it. Well, an ear on it.

I Want to Be a Paperback Reader

On Sunday, Grace and I went to the storage unit and brought back eight boxes of books. This leaves only 16 boxes left — out of more than 200 boxes we originally had in storage!

The boxes we brought home all contained mass-market paperbacks, mostly science fiction but some literature and nonfiction as well. Some of these boxes have been sealed up since 2010, when we moved from Ann Arbor to Saginaw.

In Saginaw, we never really were able to set up enough shelving for everything. This was partially due to our spending priorities, but mostly due to the lack of suitable spaces to place bookshelves. Our family room was huge, but had a lot of windows and doors. The master bedroom upstairs had a lot of windows. My little attic office suite had sloping ceilings and several walls contained built-in hidden drawers, or built-in shelves, which I didn't want to block. So in that large house, there just weren't that many places to put books.

The biggest reason the paperbacks were still in storage is that the paperbacks expand the most when unpacked. A 12" by 12" by 12" box will hold a minimum of one shelf-foot of hardcover books, plus maybe six inches more of books depending on how they are shaped. The same box will hold four stacked columns

of these mass-market paperbacks paperbacks, with the gaps in between stuffed with crumpled packing paper to prevent the books from shifting around and damaging each other, for a total of up to four shelf-feet of books per box.

This means that these eight boxes unpacked to almost 32 shelf-feet of books. One HAVSTA bookcase has six shelves, that each hold up to two feet of books (arranged in a single row; I could make double rows or vertical stacks of books to fit more per shelf, but I try to avoid that because it is hard on the books). So each bookcase holds up to 12 shelf-feet. That means these paperbacks alone take up over two-and-a-half bookcases out of the twenty currently in our basement.

I had some plans to try to improve this situation by getting some custom floor-to-ceiling bookshelves made for us with shorter shelf spacing, just for mass-market paperbacks, but that didn't happen, so we're using the standard HAVSTA bookcases. If these were a little more modular and flexible, I'd be able to buy a few spare shelves and rearrange the shelf heights to fit two more shelves per bookcase. But one shelf is fixed, and there isn't enough space below it to fit two shelves instead of one. So the best I could do would be to have four shelves above the fixed shelf instead of three.

If I could buy three more shelves, I could dedicate the top shelves (above the fixed shelf) to these paperbacks, and use the shelves below the fixed shelf for the nonfiction hardcover section. That would help. But as far as I know, you can't buy spare shelves. Also, to mount these shelves, I'd likely have to drill more holes. That's not actually a big problem, but it would "uglify" the bookcases a little bit. The existing design cleverly makes most of the holes hidden.

Still, adding three shelves to three bookcases to save half-a-bookcase of space seems like a good idea, so I will look into it. I'll see if it is possible to order spare shelves. If not, I'll consider what it might take to make shelves that would fit, even if they wouldn't match the existing shelves.

I'll also consider putting some of the paperbacks that we definitely want to keep, but don't necessarily want to fill up shelf space with, in boxes in the basement storage room, like the Marvel movies.

Meanwhile, here are some highlights of the new/old paperbacks.

Paperback Highlights

***The Illuminatus! Trilogy* by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson**

I found a rare copy of these books in very good condition, at an un-remembered used bookstore an unknown number of years ago. These are the trilogy in its original form, consisting of the three volumes *The Eye in the Pyramid*, *The Golden Apple*, and *Leviathan*. I first read this trilogy in the early 1980s in the form of a trade paperback omnibus edition. According to Wikipedia:

The trilogy is a satirical, postmodern, science fiction-influenced adventure story; a drug-, sex-, and magic-laden trek through a number

of conspiracy theories, both historical and imaginary, related to the authors' version of the Illuminati. The narrative often switches between third- and first-person perspectives in a nonlinear narrative. It is thematically dense, covering topics like counterculture, numerology, and Discordianism.

It's definitely dated, but I think the strangeness and humor holds up pretty well. I often find myself wishing that Robert Anton Wilson was still alive. I had a cassette recording, courtesy of my friend Art, of one of his lectures. I'm not sure exactly which one it was, but you can find a number of lectures by, and interviews with, Wilson on YouTube. Contemporary libertarians have given the libertarian political philosophy a bad name, but his anarchic and generous spirit really resonated with the younger me. One of the "catmas" (as opposed to dogmas) of the Discordian Church is that every member of the Discordian Church is infallible, but only on the subject of what is going on in their own nervous system.

***First Lensman and Spacehounds of IPC* by E. E. "Doc" Smith** *Spacehounds of IPC*, from 1947, was the first story to use the term "tractor beams." *First Lensman*, from 1950, is the second book in the Lensman story arc. These are vintage space operas, a strange mix of archaic and visionary.

***Last and First Men and Star Maker* by Olaf Stapledon** These date from 1930 and 1937, and so can be considered works of science fiction from the "Radium Age." Where *Last and First Men* contains a history of the human species, *Star Maker* contains a history of the universe.

***Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* and *That Man on Beta* by Addison E. Steele** Buck Rogers originated as a comic strip, not a novel. These two books are novelizations based on episodes of the 1979-1981 TV series: the first one follows the plot of the pilot, and the second was adapted from an unproduced script from the series.

***Slan, The World of Null-A, Planets for Sale, and Other Books* by A. E. van Vogt** These books, published between 1946 and 1984, are some of van Vogt's best-known works. I first came across *Planets for Sale* when it was offered as a selection of the Scholastic Book Club; I was probably in third grade. I remember my teacher telling me that she thought the book was "a good choice for me."

Various Books by Philip José Farmer These are classic pulp novels, not particularly well-written but quickly written. Our library includes the first five volumes of the World of Tiers series. I once owned and read Farmer's Riverworld series, but I no longer have copies. There's also a copy of *Fire and the Night*,

an early pulp novel about an interracial relationship, and *Venus on the Half-Shell*, published under the pseudonym “Kilgore Trout,” a fictional character that appears in the works of Kurt Vonnegut. The plot, in which Earth is destroyed and the protagonist travels in search of the “Definitive Answer to the Ultimate Question,” inspired Douglas Adams’s *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. It also cost me a question in a High School quiz game broadcast locally in Erie, PA. The question asked us to identify the painting *Venus Rising* by Boticelli. I, of course, confidently slammed down the buzzer and called it “Venus on the Half Shell,” which I had recently read. Fortunately my team was pretty far behind, so answering that question correctly would not have prevented our defeat.

Various Books by David Gerrold David Gerrold is best-known for writing “The Trouble with Tribbles” for the original *Star Trek* TV series. He also worked on the children’s TV show *Land of the Lost*. He’s credited with writing three episodes, and co-writing two more during season 1. Accounts vary; some sources call him the season 1 story editor, and some call him the head writer. In addition to his work as a screenwriter, he also wrote a number of influential science fiction novels including *The Man Who Folded Himself*, a time-travel story, and *When HARLIE Was One*, about an artificial intelligence. He later revised this book into *When HARLIE Was One, Release 2.0*, which is also in our library.

Jim Butcher’s Dresden Files Novels All seventeen volumes of the Dresden Files are now in the library; most of them are in the mass-market paperback section, but there are also some hardcovers, filed with the hardcover science fiction novels.

John Christopher’s Tripods Series This series consists of three novels, *The White Mountains* (1967), *The City of Gold and Lead* (also 1967), and *The Pool of Fire* (1968). In this post-apocalyptic story, humans are ruled over by giant tripods (three-legged walking machines), similar to the tripods described in *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells. I read this series as a young child, although I don’t recall it very well. I think it would feel very familiar if I read it again, though. For one thing, it contains a lot of story beats that we’ve seen repeated in countless movies and TV shows, such as the “secret surgically-implanted tracking device.” We’ve seen this trope used in *Stargate: Atlantis*, but it’s also in *The Matrix*, *Spy Kids 2*, *Black Widow*, and “The Blessing Way,” an episode from Season 3 of *The X-Files*. We should be getting a used set of Season 3 DVDs in the mail soon.

That seems like as good a place to stop as any. Have a great week!

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