

Visions of Paradise

#116: Halcyon Days

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Sheryl Birkhead

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Jan 25, 2007

I have several binders of **Locus** and I even have a copy of #1 that Charles Brown offered as a premium (among several) for re-subscribing at one time. I have not subscribed since it went from the mimeo form...I think. Of course, I have seen the much newer glossy format which lost the look of a zine a long time ago.

I understand your quibbles with the Hugos—similar one specifically for the fan categories—those who read only are not exactly fans, so many (or may not) vote in areas with which they have no experience. Now, if only those who were informed voted, at least the results would be more valid than when there is a free-for-all voting on the ballot just because it is there. It is mystifying to realize that every year there are loads of post-voting/result comments from fen...who read and now vent a lot about both areas...**but** who are not Worldcon members and, hence, cannot vote. It doesn't seem right to have such comments when you did not participate in the procedure—instead of creding, do your own joining/voting. Most years I have a supporting membership solely so I can nominate and vote. Some years the concons send out nice packages of materials to those of us who are only supporting, but usually it is the program book and not a whole lot more. I suspect that it is not spelled out what supporting members get other than PRs and nominating/voting rights. It just feels nice when I open the envelope and a stack of miscellaneous gifts pour out—daily news updates, informational sheets—doesn't take much to make me happy. Yeah, I'd

be much happier if there was a cheaper way to vote—but every time it is brought up (when there is heavy criticism that not enough people vote—let’s have a voting only fee), the specter of ballot stuffing rears its ugly head when the cost drops. So, I live with things the way they are. **If** I were willing to actually do something about it, I’d actively try—but since I am not...

[I don’t consider **Locus** a fanzine, but it is still a valuable resource as a newsletter and review magazine. Of course, with the proliferation of online zines and newsletters, it has become less necessary, which is probably a good thing, since the Post Office has stolen the last 3 issues and seems unable to find them when I complain to them.

[The cost of becoming a Supporting Member at worldcons nowadays is so high—it is currently \$40 for Denvention in 2008—it is not worth the cost merely to be one voter out of thousands for the Hugo Awards. I don’t wish to spend that much money for so little return, much as I would like to participate.]

E. B. Frohvet

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February 9, 2007

VoP #110: *Halcyon Days*: If it happened there was a company which delivered unusual foods by mail order, I would consider that. **Lloyd Penney** says he does not like military SF. Yes, well: civilians just don’t get it. The relevant point, as I was at some pains to make clear, was that Cordelia should have known better. If she had been a mere civilian with no military background, I would have cut her more slack.

The last SF bookstore in this area was run by fans. I agree with **Lloyd** about U.S. / Canada border crossing requiring passports, but money is not the point (paranoia is).

John Purcell: thank you. And, Panera is good casual food. If only they had a beer license...

Fair enough, about meeting people at conventions. It certainly helps when approaching a writer to have a specific question or comment in mind. Yes, one noticed Rutgers’ success in football this year. I think the theory is, athletics are a relatively cheap way to buy attention for a school.

Joseph Nicolas says: “Bullies are cowards at heart, and usually respond to challenges by retreating.” I guess **Joseph** never got the crap kicked out of him at school for no reason.

#112: *Wondrous Stories*: Wondrous, if gravity-defying, cover by **Brad Foster**. I regret that often I can’t find a lot to say about this section. Your taste appears to lean to anthologies, while I read almost exclusively novels. The discussion of “far future” SF is interesting, except that in many cases it is very hard to relate a story to a specific timeline. (For obvious reasons, **Tau Zero** is the farthest far-future SF story I can think of.) Some writers make an effort to detach stories from any actual point of history, and in many cases where they don’t, it works out that way anyway.

[I hardly consider the millions of dollars of taxpayer's money put into Rutgers' football team the past 5 years, coinciding with millions of cuts elsewhere in the university, as **cheap**.

[I too dealt with bullies during my junior high school years, and don't believe they necessarily retreat in the face of challenges. Some of them thrive on challenges.]

Sheryl Birkhead

February 18, 2007

As a professional, I get a batch of different magazines gratis as something to put in my (non-existent) waiting room. One of the magazines was **Archaeology**—which I really enjoyed (as opposed to the newest batch which includes **Hot Rods** and **Yachting**—and I seriously thought about subscribing when the trial of 6 months as a freebie was up. I didn't get around to it and when I thought about it again, there were other demands on the money, so it didn't happen. Several times I have been a member of the Science Fiction Book Club, but not for a long time—I got very tired of sending back unwanted selections...but that is one thing I may rethink in the next few years.

You might want to watch an episode or two of *Heroes*—although you might pigeonhole it other than SF. Enjoyable, at least to me, so far. I watch *Numb3rs* and enjoy it thoroughly—do you watch *24*? One of the *Numb3rs* actors is currently the presidential advisor on *24*—they actually had him leave to go on a spaceflight for 6 months to lay the groundwork for his leaving suddenly—you would have to have been watching for the month or so before he left to understand the quirkiness of the exit (hopefully temporarily).

Are you ever right about the passage of time accelerating! Each year it seems to go more and more rapidly. As a child, time crawled, and now I cannot slow it down.

My last teaching schedule was a looong time ago—but very interesting. There were 7 periods but only 6 per day, and they rotated, so you had to keep track of where you had to be when, and it always worked out that you had one free period a day. It got to the point that I would just sit and see who showed up and then go from there.

Condolences to you and your family on the loss of your mother. I still (gads, has it really been 15 years??) wake up every now and then thinking she is sleeping in the next room. My father was nothing like yours. I would have people who knew him in a work context tell me how lucky I was to have him as my father, and what a great guy he was—maybe so, but not to family (not physically abusive, but not emotionally there). He yelled a LOT and nothing you did was ever good enough—my mother, on the other hand, everyone loved. She was the same to everyone and always patient. When my father left, she had to go to work, and her co-workers just assumed she was a widow since she was so great no one in their right mind would leave such a woman.

E.B. Frohvet—the Giant grocery stores used to carry frozen rabbit, but I have not had any reason to check the specialty frozen meat section in quite a few years. I raised rabbits for awhile, and was horrified when I realized that some of the people who had bought parts of the litter were

actually *eating* them.

Panera—no, I partake of things dairy, although I prefer to avoid them. Unfortunately, quite a few restaurants simply use (usually) beef stock as the soup base—yes, even their vegetable or onion soups. That makes life simple for them and only one item to keep on hand. It is interesting to watch how the question about the ingredients goes up and down the chain of command when asking for dietary information—no one seems to know the answer and asks someone else who asks...

Whoeee—**Brad Foster** surely “put together” a babe for your *Wondrous Stories*.

I have **The DaVinci Code** on my *Netflix* list—one of these days RSN! Sounds as if it was not as bad as the critics would have us believe.

[For the past decade I have had the option of not receiving any dated forms from the SFBC, thus I never receive unwanted books. You should write and request that same option.

[I have never seen any of the shows you mention above—not surprisingly, considering how little tv I watch. Friends have recommended both *Heroes* and *Numb3rs*, and I’ve considered watching them, but whenever the time comes to do so I cannot give up my limited amount of reading. I’m hoping this summer to spend a bit of time watching the videos I have received as gifts in the past year, such as the 1st season of **Babylon 5** and **Lord of the Rings**. We’ll see.

[Since my blood pressure is relatively high, I never buy soups at restaurants, Panera included, since the salt content of one bowl of soup pretty much surpasses my entire day’s allotment. However, Jean still orders soup while I eat a sandwich and salad, wondering how much sodium I am actually saving in the trade-off.

[Thanks for the new illos you sent with your loc. I hope to use them in the issues I have planned for this summer. And I really love your super-hero stamps! I have always been a DC Comics fan—which is probably another reason I should watch *Heroes*.]

Richard Dengrove

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February 24, 2007:

What this letter is about is accounting for taste. Sometimes, there is no accounting for it—not even for mine. You commented to **John Purcell** that you can never find the time to watch SF shows on TV. I can never find time to watch much TV either, except with my wife on Sundays. On the other hand, maybe I would walk a mile for nostalgia. I recently was sick and decided to watch a \$1 DVD from Wal-Mart. While it was entitled *Classic Suspense*, it was more like seven TV shows chosen at random from the ‘50s. In short, shows from the time I was a kid even though I may not have watched those particular shows. I enjoyed some thoroughly; I got a lot for my \$1. The program I liked most was *Lights Out*, which had the sole job of scaring the pants off you. Whatever the problems with plot and character, the actor Otto Kruger, age about 65,

made a superb villain. *Dragnet* wasn't a bad show either. I noticed it made room for actual acting, although not from Jack Webb. *One Step Beyond* was not bad either, a show based on the premise that strange things happen in this world.

Let's face it, though. I even liked the terrible shows. *Captain Gallant*, starring Buster Crabbe, could not make up its mind whether it was an adult or a children's show. However, I was impressed that it was made in cooperation with the French Foreign Legion—in Morocco. Even more abysmal was *My Hero*, a situation comedy starring Robert Cummings. I enjoyed that by remembering the woman who played a great 'foreign' blond actress, and blanking out the rest.

There is no accounting for my taste when it comes to literature either. I disagree with **Brant Kresovitch** here. I know, in literature, coincidences are supposed to bother readers, but they don't necessarily bother me. I might very well find Rafael Sabatini a great read. I know plaster saints are supposed to bother me too, but they don't necessarily do that either. If there are a lot of other good things, neither will stick out at all, much less like sore thumbs they are fabled to.

Sometimes there is accounting for taste. **Joseph Nicholas** complains that the Labour and Conservative Parties in Britain don't differentiate themselves from one another. He's right. It's probably because, in good times, people don't want parties that are too different. Small, even minuscule differences, are enough. Forget about ideological clashes. On the other hand, in bad times, when extremists take control, there is no room for ideological clashes either. The extremists always talk a good game about ideology, but the governments they form never look the slightest bit like it. Great political ideologies belong in the realm of literature and art rather than politics.

Another thing that is easy to account for is why the Lost Civilization (Lost Race?) literary genre is passé: we are one world and any Lost Civilization would be quickly discovered and exploited. That is what **Joseph Major** pointed out to **Chester Cuthbert**. Could the genre continue in a modified form? One possibility is the Lost Civilization would be a secret of people who trace their ancestry to it, but who have become integrated into the One Culture. What do you think?

Still another thing that is easy to account for is why my niece and her boy friend loved China Miéville's **Perdido Street Station**. Miéville is a Trotskyite, as **Chester Cuthbert** points out; and she and her boy friend are both anarchists and social activists. I guess the 21st Century U.S. equivalent of a Miéville Trotskyite. I am glad I gave them the novel.

Yet another thing that is easy to account for is why we sympathize with **Sheryl Birkhead**. She is an incredibly nice person, but she has constant muscle pain. I am lucky in that way. While my fingers periodically hurt from arthritis as well as various spots on my upper back and muscle pain, it's nothing. I cannot claim any sympathy at all from anyone, even myself. It is true I am not as lucky in another way because I have two time bombs ticking away, diabetes and multiple sclerosis. However, they are in remission right now, and I could not ask anyone to sympathize with me. Still, I am sure Sheryl, being the good person she is, would. I, of course, wish her a lot of luck in getting rid of that awful muscle pain, either a cure or remission. Fingers crossed.

[In sf, Lost Colonies are one version of Lost Civilizations, in which planets were settled

hundreds or thousands of years ago and have evolved into forms totally different than civilization As We Know It. A. Bertram Chandler was fond of such stories in his *John Grimes* series, some of them very interesting, others stretching believability a bit too much.

[Good luck with the two “time bombs.” My carpool partner has MS which is also in remission, although she visits her specialists regularly and carefully watches both her menu and her emotional level. I hope you’re doing the same as she is.]

Alexander R. Slate

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March 22, 2007

I'm with you regarding Roth's novel. It is definitely alternate history. The history isn't wrong, it's deliberately changed to determine the effects those changes would have made.

As regards your bad thoughts about people, it's sort of like Jimmy Carter's lust in his heart statement. But as regards this, in the Jewish tradition actions are what count, not our thoughts. In fact, purposely overcoming any natural tendency to say those bad things that you think is more worthy of praise than the person who never has those bad thoughts in the first place. God does not expect man to be perfect, only to try. Even the tzaddiks had their failings.

[In Catholicism, bad thoughts are every bit as sinful as actions themselves, although I'm not sure how Protestants' view of thoughts, whether Jimmy Carter is overreacting or a victim of childhood brainwashing.]

Lloyd Penney

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March 30, 2007

It's a day off from the usual job-hunt and a day to catch up with letter-writing, so here's some words about **VoP** 113. There doesn't seem to any fast software with which to open a .pdf. I recently downloaded Primo PDF in order to make .pdfs. I think this is what Bill Burns uses to make .pdfs for eFanzines.com.

John Purcell mentions you're turning into another **Chris Garcia**? Can we stand two hairy crazies publishing their ish every few hours? We can barely get along with one! Kidding aside, all the zines we can handle and more is a sign of health in fan publishing, and although I'd rather have paper, the publishing medium doesn't matter, as long as we write.

I recently cleaned up my bookshelves, and started to gather together all the books to go on the *To Be Read* shelf. Those books filled that shelf, and there's s stack of seven or eight books on the shelf above. I've got to get reading faster. Maybe if I could win a lottery, I'd have the time.

Congratulations to **Joseph Major** on his Hugo nomination for Best Non-fiction Book for his book on Robert Heinlein's juveniles. There's lots of familiar names on the Hugo ballot this year.

I'm afraid I am from an older school that enjoys a complete story in a full book. Instead of picking up a great wadge of paper labelled Part 3 of 7, I'd rather pick up a thin novel, like the ones Cliff Simak used to write, and get a full, imaginative story in the space of 120 pages. But then there's lots of writers who get paid by the word, so why not pad it out? However, there is also proof that editors fail to edit because they would be seen to be taking money out of a writer's pocket by trimming a story down.

I may not be raising a family, but Yvonne and I are aunt and uncle to several kids who are now adults. Our niece Nicole, who we used to take to conventions, and was a member of Magicon in Orlando in 1992, is now 31 with a child, and is separated from her second husband. I sum that up, and wonder, what the hell happened while I wasn't looking?

[Crazy? Me? I don't think so. I am the most boring, introverted person you are ever likely to meet. Only my opinions are crazy. ☺]

[I don't keep my unread books on a single shelf, since there are way too many—currently 112 of them. Instead I keep a list of titles on the computer, categorized into SF novels (34), SF short fiction (16), Historical Fiction (37) and Nonfiction (25). At my current rate of reading 25-30 books per year, it would take me 4-5 years to catch up on all the reading if I did not buy another book in that interval. That's not going to happen.

[There are probably more people I know personally—if you count via email as personally—than ever before on the Hugo ballot. I wish them all good luck in the ongoing balloting.]

Brant Kresovich

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April 4, 2007

I'll always remember when I heard that Richard Nixon resigned. I was in a Chinese restaurant in Chicago. My father had treated my sister and me to a trip by train. Fun. I was 18 and getting ready to go away to college that August. It was an exciting time.

What's strange is that in the 1960s everybody with brains knew Dean Martin and Tony Bennett were Italian even though they had Anglo-sounding names. Not only they changed their names so as not to sound Italian. Bronx-born Ann Bancroft was Anna Maria Italiano, which can't get much more Italian. Connie Francis was born Concetta Rosa Maria Franconero in Newark. Paula Prentiss, best known for the wickedly sexy Nurse Duckett in **Catch-22**, was Paula Ragusa. Let's hand it to Yvonne DeCarlo for going in reverse: she was born Peggy Yvonne Middleton. Plus, she took the part in that unfunny monster sit-com because she had to pay the medical bills for her stuntman husband who was severely injured during the filming of **How the West Was Won**.

Immigrant parents forcing their kids to learn about the old country, including speaking the

native language at home, is a pole with two ends, as the Latvians would say. For one, some stint on educating their girls because they don't see the point to educated females. For another, speaking the language at home gives the parents no chance to practice English in a more or less friendly environment. They sometimes have to depend on their kids to communicate with the outside world, which kids naturally exploit in their own interest.

I like Clifford D. Simak, mainly when he castigates organized religion and childish conservative thinking. But while I read his novels, I feel that I ought to be wearing granny glasses and love beads. They feel so much like the Sixties: the ecology, the rugged individualist, looking for the kingdom of heaven within. Well, heaven knows that's better than the bleak cynicism and power worship of other SF writers.

People in education are often good talkers so they shine as interviewees. You're right that prospective administrators often give better interviews than they in fact perform on the job later. The problem is that during searches, sometimes the hiring committee has no choice but go with The Least Bad or The Probably Tolerable because there is no Ideal Candidate.

I work on a university campus. Whenever I walk around between classes about 2/3's of the students "walk around with phones glued to their ears like another appendage." I can't help but eavesdrop and can confidently report that usually they have nothing to say beyond, "Where are you" and "See you in class." And sometimes the serious life issues they discuss amaze me that anybody would put such personal business on the street. It makes me think they are the same people that post on the web videos of themselves committing crimes like smoking marijuana and reckless driving and then are put out when people call them morons.

Re *Deal or No Deal* and the importance of understanding statistics, studies show that people have a weak grasp of probability too. This is serious stuff, considering weighing risk in terms of probability and magnitude is key when thinking about medical treatment. I daresay that doctors probably need training in explaining risk better, but people should be smarter. More intelligence in a population where 30% still think whatever DumDum W does is fine by them will happen, guess, post-Second Coming.

Re *Earliest Memories*. When I was a university student, I glibly used to think this was a good date question, but since I've learned that the first memory of people who have been physically abused is the abuse. In research studies that asked people about their early memory, more than fifty percent of respondents get teary-eyed or break down utterly when asked this.

Concerning people more comfortable wrapped in ipods or using their cellphones, a Spanish woman told me she was shocked when she visited a park in the Big Apple. She said everybody on the benches were into gadgets: the kids with hand-held games, the adults with cellphones, runners and walkers with MP3's. She said nobody was talking with people who were right there.

[Concerning probability and medical treatment, I do an example in my AP Statistics class in which I prove to the students that for some medical tests, receiving a positive result is considerably more likely to be an error than being correct. Then I try to convince my students to always get a second opinion before undergoing any radical treatment, which usually results in

many of them giving me that “deer in headlights” look.]

John Purcell

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April 9, 2007

As always #114 was an enjoyable issue, notable mainly for the 32 points you realized. I have never done anything like this over the course of my life. I mean, I remember where I was when JFK and RFK were both shot, also watching the moon landing on live television—nobody thought of that mundane aspect of the deal in their fictional accounts of moon trips throughout the 20th century—and so on. We have seen some momentous moments in our lives, haven't we? Such as the birth of our children, watching them grow up, graduate, and all that.

Your response in #113 to **John Thiel** about defining "fan fiction" sounded perfectly reasonable to me. Science fiction or fantasy stories written by fans that is intended for publication in a fanzine is my definition of "fan fiction." Of course, if such a fan is inclined to work hard at it, he or she can eventually break into the professional ranks. It has happened before, and will again. It is funny that you and I feel the same way in that we both will consider ourselves successful writers when and if we finally make that crucial first sale. That's my goal, too, and it's a worthy one. Someday I would like to say that I have sold fiction and poetry professionally.

Of course, with my luck it will happen long after I'm dead and gone. The literary field is so fickle.

Hey, I like the idea of doing a Golden Age Science Fiction Quiz. If you're ambitious, you could break it down by decades or editorial eras: Gernsback, Campbell, Gold, etc. That might take a lot of work, but think of the service you'd be running. Conventions from near and far will want to use your quizzes as bases for trivia contests. They have to get their information from somewhere, you know.

Lloyd Penney's loc reminded me of those great *Rim* novels by A. Bertram Chandler. Gee, but I loved that stuff way back when. It captured me then, and that's the kind of feeling I look for when I run across a current novel that looks interesting. I think I will always have a soft spot for good, old-fashioned, shoot-'em-up space opera. Such fun stuff.

In #115, **Terry Jeeves'** reminiscences about all of the neat inventions that have come and gone over the years was a fun read, and made me think of various gadgets I've owned over the years. The latest one we actually bought for household use was the Pasta Maker(tm). All you have to do is place the pasta of your choice in the container, pour in a quart of boiling water, put on the lid, let it sit for something like three or four minutes (or maybe five, if you're finicky), and viola! you have delicious, slightly al dente pasta. We couldn't believe it; the dang thing actually worked!

I have always loved the Buck Rogers flying rocket belt. Dang, but I'd love to have one of those! It would be so easy to get up and over traffic jams, crowded sidewalks, shopping malls,

etc., and I'd love every minute of it. If the rocket belt—or backpack, depending on your preference—caught on, though, we'd have a whole 'nuther kind of traffic jam, only this time x-number of feet in the air. That would be interesting. Add in the stupidity factor of human beings, and the problem becomes even more compounded.

Sonuvabitch. I think I just got a great idea for a modern space opera story. Unless—of course—someone has already written this story. *sigh* I think I'll try writing it anyway.

Moving along here, you and I are in complete agreement about wishing that Samuel R. Delany would start writing science fiction again. Way back when, I read **The Fall of the Towers** trilogy and **Babel_17**. Loved them all.

Delany's short fiction showed the same thorough working of ideas and situations, and his characterization got better over time. He stopped writing fiction too early, I think. It is most certainly past time for this man to write science fiction and/or fantasy again. Delany is too good to not write.

Looking through your "Listmania" was fun again. I was pleasantly surprised at how many of the Campbell Award winners I have actually read over the years. Recently I have fallen off, but of the first 15 years on this list, I have read 15 of them. Pohl's novels were great, but I think the one that has really stuck with me over the years is Clarke's **Rendezvous with Rama**. That one scene where the astronauts get their first view inside Rama is one of the most mind-croggling descriptions I have ever read. Even writing this brings back that initial reading. Simply powerful writing, nothing finer.

Finally, I have to tell you that I cannot wait until this semester is over so I can read something by Alastair Reynolds. So many people have written burblingly positive reviews of this man's work that I really have to check some of his books out. Unfortunately, I don't know where to begin. You list so many titles of his in this issue; any suggestions?

[OK, this summer I will definitely do a "Golden Age SF Quiz". But in return you must take the quiz and report your score here. ☺

[I've actually read four A. Bertram Chandler Grimes novels recently, three of them in the Science Fiction Book Club collection **Survey Captain**. They make great light reading during school. I've posted reviews of them at my blog, but will reprint them all in July's *Wondrous Stories*. They were fun light reading and recommended.

[When Andy had an apartment his senior year at college, we bought him a Pasta Maker and he used it regularly. Surprisingly, it really does perform as advertised (why does that amaze me?)

[Delany has published a new novel, a trade paperback entitled **Dark Reflections**. It is being described both as "contemporary mainstream fiction" and "alternate autobiography," the latter because it the story of a black, gay writer who spends his career struggling as a poet, which the critics assume would have been Delany had he not written sf instead. I enjoyed Delany's mainstream book **Atlantis**, so I might seek this book out sometime.

[If you have the time for three books, the series **Revelation Space / Redemption Ark / Absolution Gap** is the way to go. Otherwise, he has several acclaimed standalone novels (which I have not read) such as **Century Rain** and **Pushing Ice**. Or perhaps the collection **Galactic North** which contains novellas in the *Revelation* universe and is very good.]

Robert Kennedy

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April 17, 2007

When last writing I said that I have belonged to some book clubs in the past; but now I do not belong to any book clubs. Shortly thereafter a mailing was received from the Science Fiction Book Club. It was an offer that I had a hard time turning down. So, I signed up and ordered five books. (That now puts my To Be Read pile well beyond any chance that all of them will ever be read as it continues to increase.) Another two books have also been ordered. Anyway, in the first order there were two books published just for the SFBC.

Down These Dark Spaceways, edited by Mike Resnick was read first. I didn't much care for David Gerrold's "In the Quake Zone" and didn't think that it really fit the concept of the book. I had a minor problem with another story, but it was nevertheless enjoyable. Liking five of the six (83%) sounds good to me.

The next book read was **Forbidden Planets**, edited by Marvin Kaye. I had a problem with one of the stories. Otherwise the book was also enjoyable.

Then read was **Eddie Bear, Private Detective** by Robert Rankin. It was not what I expected. The sex was a big surprise. Another enjoyable read.

The last two books are **Here Comes Civilization: The Complete Science Fiction of William Tenn, Volume II** and **The Space Opera Renaissance** Edited by David G. Hartwell & Kathryn Cramer. The latter book I may get to someday as it is 941 pages long.

For some time I had been trying to obtain **Dead in Dixie** by Charlaine Harris from a library with no success. So, when the book was offered by the SFBC along with her **Dead By Day** and **Definitely Dead**, I ordered all three books. I am currently reading **Dead in Dixie**. Again not quite what I expected. Vampires (expected) and more sex (not expected). I'm not sure that my aging body can handle reading about so much sex. But it's worth a try. ☺ The last book received is **Command Decision** by Elizabeth Moon whose novels I greatly enjoy. The last item ordered and received is a DVD of *50 Sci Fi Classics*—over 62 hours. Looks good and someday I may get around to watching. That's it, no more orders from the SFBC for some time.

Well, a book was just received from Interlibrary Loan so the SF reading has to be postponed.

You remember where you were when you heard that JFK was shot, but not where you were

when Richard Nixon resigned. The same for me. But, I also remember where I was when I learned that Ronald Reagan had been shot as well as where I was when I learned that the Pope had been shot. Also, I remember where I was when LBJ announced that he would not be a candidate for reelection.

I agree that Jimmy Carter was the worst president in my lifetime. I can't agree that he was the "finest person to be president". A large part of his actions and activities (with the exception of Habitat for Humanity) since being defeated for reelection are even worse than his presidency. Several Republican friends of mine consider George W. Bush to be a great disappointment, to say the least. One of them considers him to be worse than Carter. However, I rather suspect that their opinions of Bush the Younger (and, for that matter, mine) are not based on the same reasons as yours.

Concerning cell phones—People yakking on their cell phones drive me crazy. Why do these people think that those around them are interested in their personal conversations? Twice I have told someone to take their conversations elsewhere. They both gave me stunned looks. I don't do that anymore because the person may be a nut case. In the Post office a couple of days ago I asked someone to not talk so loud. They did lower their voice for a short time. Question—With the hands-free cell phones, how do we know that someone is actually talking on a cell phone and not with the voices in their head?

Reading your commentaries in "The Passing Scene" it is quite understandable why you do not have much time to watch television. You have to be one of the busiest persons I know.

You recommend getting rid of an incompetent teacher by putting the teacher on a list of possible trades with another school? What good does that accomplish for teaching?

Concerning the teacher charged by an over-reacting Mother with inappropriate touching of her child—shades of the McMartin case! There have been a number of such cases. **Joe Major** has extensive knowledge of them and could make good commentary.

This is a good opportunity to recommend that you and anyone else voting for the Hugo's vote **Joe Major's** *Heinlein's Children: The Juveniles* as #1 for Best Related Book.

[While I do not agree with every position Jimmy Carter has taken since leaving the presidency, he has devoted his entire life to humanitarian causes, which I have not seen other former presidents doing. That alone makes him a "fine" person in my mind.

[🗨️ *What good does that accomplish for teaching?* Tenure laws do make it possible to remove incompetent teachers, but they are rarely removed because administrators tend to be incompetent as well, and don't follow through on the actions necessary to remove bad teachers. What tenure laws do is provide protection from removing teachers for political reasons, since many Board of Education members either have personal agendas or friends/relatives looking for teaching positions. So administrators must provide evidence that a specific teacher is incompetent in the form of improvement plans unfulfilled by the teacher and evaluations showing their incompetence. Most administrators are unwilling to do these things though. What

is easier to do for administrators is making life difficult for incompetent teachers, warn them that they are under scrutiny and that lack of improvement in attitude/performance/whatever will not be tolerated. That is the first step in most teacher removal programs anyway. Moving a deficient teacher to a different school with a warning that this is a fresh start and/or a last chance, often serves as a wake-up call for those teachers and has been known to turn them around. It almost never hurts their performance.

[I hope you enjoy all those new SFBC books. I'm glad to see that I am a bad influence on at least one of my reader's book-buying habits. ☺]

Greg Benford

XBenford@aol.com

April 22, 2007

I always read **VoP** but seldom comment.

The Campbell Award is the only big prize decided by a panel of academics, me included, and we discuss the novels through the year, voting in June. I've quoted you to them about several novels.

Agree about novellas, & wish there were better markets for them...

Lloyd Penney

April 30, 2007

I've just finished a long assignment with my agency, so I am so far behind...here are comments on issues #114 and #115 of **VoP**.

I am finding that as Yvonne continues her immersion in space advocacy, my interest in space is not necessarily increasing, but perhaps my interest in SF is decreasing. Maybe it's a function of getting older, or just needing to spend more time making a living. Just did my taxes...I've got to make more money!

I am not certain that Jimmy Carter was completely unqualified to be president, but he does have the redeeming quality of being a good man and someone who still works for the benefit of humanity. I cannot say that about Dubya. One funny thing I see regularly is people apparently talking to themselves. Then, they turn around, and they have a miniature cellphone tucked into their other ear.

There's a lot of things I failed to do, too. I wish I'd been able to do them, but instead of dwelling on my failures, and identifying myself with them, I prefer to dwell upon and identify with my successes. If you were a success at everything, you'd be terribly bored, and I suspect, quite lonely.

I miss the Olive Garden restaurants...they were here for a while, but just didn't make it in this market. Other restaurants like Chi Chi's and Fuddrucker's also tried to establish themselves here, without success.

With all the consultations you're asked to take part in, it looks like the logical thing to do is become a principal or vice-principal. I'd think the only way you'd get all that work done is to drop your teaching, and become a school administrator. That kind of thing happened to my sister-in-law, now retired.

Karl Schroeder lives in Toronto, and has had lots of local exposure for his writing. A nice fellow, too, and I can usually run into him at Ad Astra most years.

115...I haven't read the *Funky Winkerbean* cartoons in a long time. Looks like Tom Batiuk understands our collective mania just fine.

Terry Jeeves understands the disappearance of the razor blade. We all remember the rotary telephone, and now comes the soon-to-be-disappeared light bulb. In some jurisdictions, including the province of Ontario, the incandescent light bulb will soon be outlawed, to be replaced by the compact bulb-shaped fluorescent light. More expensive, but lasts longer. Somehow, I think Mr. Edison would be a little disappointed, yet interested in what will take his famous invention's place.

[I have been asked to apply for an administrative position by several principals and supervisors, but that is nothing I would enjoy. Those jobs deal exclusively with teachers, and virtually nothing to do with students, which is why I love teaching.]

Jason K. Burnett

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April 30, 2007

First of all, let me offer my condolences on losing your mother. It sounds like the last quarter of 2006 was a pretty rough time for your family, but it seems like you all did a great job of pulling together and supporting each other.

I found particularly interesting your comments about the "head of family" sort of duties you had to take up now, as far as staying in touch with other branches of the family. I've gotten interested in family dynamics and how families differ from one another ever since I met my in-laws. My wife and I joke that *My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding* is really about us. Her family are fairly recent immigrants (her grandparents and great-grandparents, depending on what side of the family you were looking at) and still retained cultural ties to the old country, whereas my family have been Americans practically forever—I have an umpteenth-greats grandfather who served under Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans. Needless to say, spending time with my family versus spending it with hers makes for a completely different experience.

I read **The Da Vinci Code** before watching the movie and thoroughly enjoyed both. (Then again, I'm apparently much more fond of thrillers than you seem to be.) Personally, I don't have a problem with authors of fiction mangling history for their books, as I recognize that the requirements of fiction and history are entirely different. What does get my hackles up as a historian, though, is "pseudohistory" books such as **Holy Blood, Holy Grail** that present a completely warped view of history that is not at all backed up by the evidence that the theory is supposedly based on. I know that I could read these books and separate a fact from a supposition which, while it's not contradicted by any of the facts, isn't supported by any of them either; unfortunately, a lot of people cannot. I blame a lot of this on the way that history is taught: until you get to the upper level collegiate classes (which most people never take), history is taught as a collection of facts—you go to the library, read a history book, and then you know history—with no effort made to teach historical methodology or evaluation of sources. And I'll get off my soapbox now.

I've enjoyed reading your book reviews—I've now got a list of books to look for. I'm considering rejoining the SFBC, so may try to get some of these books from there.

Congratulations on being asked to do the Route 46 book—that sounds like it will make for a great project. Another travel book that sounds like it would be right up your alley is **Travels with a Medieval Queen** by Mary Taylor Simeti. She retraces the 1193 journey of Constance of Sicily as she and her husband travel from the Holy Roman Empire, down the length of Italy, in order for her husband Henry (son of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa) to stake a claim to the throne of Italy. Simeti's writing bounces back and forth between Italy as Constance would have found it and Italy as it is today.

I'm sure it's annoying when you're trying to get your work done and the administrators and the other lead teachers are constantly coming to you for advice, but it speaks very well of you that so many people value your opinion so highly. My mom is retiring from teaching at the end of this year (first in junior high art, then 6th grade, and finally in 3rd grade), so I've seen firsthand what teachers go through. I've got nothing but respect for people (and you seem to be one) who take the profession as seriously as it deserves to be taken and go all out for their students. My hat is off to you, sir.

"On the Lighter Side" was even better than usual this time. I printed out a second copy to send to my grandfather-in-law, who loves jokes of all sorts.

I'm sure you'll get to it in a later "Passing Scene," but I'm curious to know: What has happened to the plan to reduce property taxes by (essentially) stealing the teachers' pension funds?

[My wife's family has also been here since the early-to-mid 19th century, so we have experienced some of the same family issues you have. If nothing else, they make life interesting.

[I enjoy reading history, but am a total amateur at it, having my entire college background in mathematics. So at times I am concerned that what I am reading is subjective, not objective, and that I might be accepting pseudo-facts in place of real facts.

[**Travels With a Medieval Queen** does look fascinating, so I have added it to the black hole of recommended reading lists where, alas, most books are never to be seen again.

[So far Governor Corzine has kept to his campaign promise to protect teachers' pensions, thankfully. But when we have a Republican governor, things might change, since it was Republican Governor Whitman who started the process of not funding our pensions to fund her annual tax cuts instead. *sigh*]

Alexander R. Slate

<mailto:alex.slate@brooks.af.mil>

May 3, 2007

Thanks for the latest issues of the 3-part zine. I intended to reply much earlier than this, but ... (shrugs)

First the news. I will be departing San Antonio of 21 May. As of 15 June my new address will be 2014 Columbia Pike, #14, Arlington VA 22204. I'm not sure how long my current e-mail (this one) will be good for and not sure exactly what my new work e-mail will be. Will let you know when I know.

Chip Delany is one of those writers who's writing, in the 70's, just sort of hit me in the gut. **Dhalgren** is one of those books that from time to time I go back and re-read. I can't tell you why it has such an effect on me. Perhaps when I first read it the somewhat bleak yet not quite hopeful world view just jibed with mine. I'm pretty sure I first read his stuff in the early part of high school. High school for me was a time of change (as it probably was for many of us). I was always a very chubby kid and short. In high school I was still short, though not overly so, but I became a wrestler, and the chubby part of my persona went away. I graduated high school at just under 5'7" and almost exactly 135 pounds. I was also bench-pressing 200 pounds. I have never considered myself good-looking, yet I did have some reasonable amount of success with girls during high school. Still not sure how to this day. Yet at the same time I was also on the speech and debate team, an athletic geek; go figure! Well enough of the reminiscing.

I have noticed how little 'classical' sf there seems to be these days. Most of the books, or at least most of the ones I seem to read, tend to fall into three categories: alternate history, alternate reality types that feature a lot of vampires and other creatures of the 'dark' (a la Laurel Hamilton, Kelley Armstrong, etc), and space opera. Or the 4th, just plain fantasy. Of course these categories existed back in my older days (except for perhaps the newer Buffyesque vampire books), but there was always other books as well... more 'pure sf', for lack of a better term.

Robert Silverberg's Nightwings is pure sf masquerading as fantasy, but Clifford Simak's **City** is a good example. Heck, even Delany's **Dhalgren** fits the bill. I'm not complaining (well, much anyway), I enjoy the books I read. But I do miss books of the type I describe.

Ohh, one more thing. I forgot to mention this in my other locs to the other zines, but my next set of articles is coming out in Defense AT&L Magazine. The next article will be pubbed in the July-August issue and the one after that will probably be in the Sep-Oct issue. Anyone interested

can view these (or my earlier articles) online by going to www.dau.mil <<http://www.dau.mil/>> , then publications in the menu, and then Defense AT&L.

[Your high school experience sounds more interesting than mine was. While high school was not as disastrous as junior high school, I was still introverted and remained a loner all four years, not socializing beyond chatting with a single friend on the school bus and at lunch. I did not participate in any activities other than a bowling league freshman year, nor did I socialize at all outside of school. Probably the best description of my high school experience is boring.

[Actually, considering the vast number of sf books published nowadays compared to the 1970s, there are probably more books of the type you and I prefer being published than previously. The problem is that their percentage is so much smaller compared to the other types you mention above, particularly fantasy, that they are harder to find. That is why I read so many reviews, mostly online. It is actually easier to keep in touch with the entire sf field now than it ever was previously because of the proliferation of online sf reviews and interviews.

[I'm looking forward to reading your new articles. Congratulations! I read "A Suggestion for the Improvement of Performance Risk Assessment" and much of it made good sense to me. What was the overall reaction to the article?]

Jason K. Burnett

May 19, 2007

Just finished reading **VoP** #115 and want to congratulate you on another issue well done. I'm particularly enjoying your book reviews, even though I almost never have time to go out and actually read the books you recommend. I was particularly impressed by your article on novella collections. Given my current reading time (or lack thereof), I think that could be the way for me to go. I don't really get into short stories much, because if the author has done well, I'm left wanting more of their characters/setting/story, and if they haven't, then I feel like I've wasted my time, and since authors tend to try gimmickry at the short story length, they often don't work well. On the other hand, I really don't feel like I have time to devote to reading novels much—about halfway through I start feeling impatient because I'm devoting so much time to one particular story and consequently I don't really enjoy the second half so much because I'm feeling rushed to get through it. I think novellas would be just the thing for me. I'm certainly going to look into getting some of the collections you recommended. In the meantime, I've been reading *Star Trek* novels: The level of difficulty, familiar setting, and reasonable length (no doorstops here!), mean I can get through them quickly enough that reading one doesn't feel like work. They're a guilty of mine, but not really *that* guilty: Being spared the need to reinvent the wheel by doing all the world-building from scratch, the authors are able to get right down to story-telling, and some of them do a really good job.

[If you enjoy *Star Trek* novels, then you should like A. Bertram Chandler's *John Grimes* novels, all of which are currently in print at the Science Fiction Book Club. I recommend you try one of them.]

Terry Jeeves

56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough N. Yorks, YO12 5RQ United Kingdom

June 13, 2007

Many thanks for **VoP** which is as good as ever. It was nice to see my illo used as a cover. I enjoyed “Out of the Depths” and the meme, and had fun comparing my own answers to yours.

Your diary was as comprehensive as ever, and it was a surprise to see my article had been used. As for books, I only read items from my collection.

[Many of the books I review are not current, but “classics”, so it is not unlikely some of them are actually in your collection already. One of the reasons I really want to cut back on my book-buying is to have time to reread more classics as well.]

E. B. Frohvet

June 15, 2007

Whatever Happened To... by **Terry Jeeves**: Terry has pretty much answered his own question. Either the items never existed in the first place, as the permanent light bulbs (though I have one over my bathroom sink that I know for a fact has been there for the eleven-plus years I’ve lived here); or technology has overtaken them; or tastes have moved on. A hobby that was probably dying even in my childhood was collecting “radio cards.” If you could tune in to a radio station far away, and confirm it by telling them exactly what they were broadcasting at a specific date and time, they would send you a card confirming your reception.

Not sure I would call the list of Campbell Memorial novels “traditional.” The phrase “grimly serious” comes to mind. Or “ponderous.”

Of “Out of the Depths” ideas, I agreed with some, disagreed with a few, and was not much concerned with some. Of “*Signal Meme*,” the online survey, I read much more Heinlein than Asimov; none of your “favorite genre books” or “favorite genre series” would make my list; otherwise, I mostly agreed with you. I have seen a number of interesting birds around here, including once an indigo bunting (very pretty); but never anything sufficiently rare to inspire hobbyists to come to my door.

Teaching seems like an underpaid, overstressed profession. I sometimes wonder whether people find it genuinely rewarding, or do it from a misplaced sense of responsibility, as “It won’t get done (or won’t get done right) unless I do it.” Well, you know, maybe it won’t. The world is an imperfect place.

You wrote to **John Purcell**, “Send me a piece of fiction.” I am not doing articles for publication, and certainly not fiction. However, if you want to see some of my stories, for your eyes only, let me know.

To **Lloyd Penney** you wrote, “I share your dislike of purely military fiction.” Let me list some names for you, stop me when you see a pattern: Lexington, Concord, Bunker Hill, Trenton, Yorktown, Fort McHenry, New Orleans, San Jacinto, Chancellorsville, Antietam Creek, Gettysburg, San Juan Hill, the Marne, Anzio Beach, Normandy, the Bulge... Do you see where I’m going?

Joseph T. Major: The scene you cite in **Emergence** was almost at the end of the book. And I believe it was specified the bomb-ship was made of a nonconducting, ceramic/glass material. What are heat shields made of? If that’s the worst objection you can find with the book, I suggest you have not read it very attentively.

Daedalus Books is here in Howard County, and has a warehouse store (True, SF is not their strong suit). If you were passing through, I would be glad to take you there; I took Lyn McConchie when she visited. Same offer to **Alex Slate**. Lunch is on me.

[I genuinely love teaching, although at times I do feel as if the stress is killing me, and other times the profession’s overall lack of respect bothers me. And while I don’t feel like “it won’t get done,” if I were not teaching, I believe that my students do need me, which is enough reason to keep doing it. The world may be an imperfect place (an understatement, for sure), but I’d rather be part of the solution than part of the problem.

[I have no intention of turning **VoP** into an outlet for fan fiction, but if somebody sends me a story good enough—at least borderline professional quality and appealing to my taste—I might do another issue like **VoP** #109, which was only posted online and whose total contents was a story of my own.

[Concerning, *Do you see where I’m going*, not at all. So you’re listing famous battles. What does that have to do with my not enjoying reading purely military fiction? Are you suggesting that I should enjoy military fiction because war is so prevalent? If so, I could probably give you an equally-long list of famous artists, but that is not going to convince me to become a painter anymore than a list of battles will convince me to enjoy military fiction. Or am I missing the point totally?

[This week my three brothers and their families are spending a week in Ocean City, MD—the males are golfing while the more fortunate females are relaxing. We could not go since Jean is currently on crutches following her arthroscopic surgery three weeks ago, or I might have been able to take you up on your offer. How far is Howard County from Ocean City?]

Richard Dengrove

Jun 17, 2007

#111: *The Passing Scene*. In a way, it was horrible; in a way, it was a blessing that death came quickly to your mother. The same was true of my father because he also deteriorated fast. He noticed he was jaundiced around Valentine’s Day and he was dead by March 9th. I wish the same had been true of my mother. This is not to say that death didn’t come fast to her. At the

end she caught a respiratory ailment, and that killed her within a couple of weeks. The worst must have occurred near the very end because a photo we have still shows her smiling the day she died. However, the respiratory ailment was not the beginning of the horror. No, the horror began decades before. It took her that long to go from suspicions here and suspicions there to full-fledged paranoia. Then, in many ways, something worse happened to her, Alzheimer's. It was painful to see this once vigorous woman, and accomplished artist, turn into a human vegetable. Alzheimer's set in slowly at first. Then, after my father died, the deterioration was at breakneck speed. In a few weeks, her state more closely resembled Alzheimer's than paranoia. In a short time, she did not know enough to be paranoid, just unhappy. Then one good thing happened: her caregivers started giving her antipsychotic drugs. Now she was happy despite her condition. We of the family, of course, couldn't be.

I wish I could, in all honesty, praise my parents as you do your mother. My problem was that I wasn't the son my parents really wanted. They wanted carbon copies of themselves. I was supposed to be a go-getter. I was supposed to become a doctor and marry a beautiful woman in the arts. I was supposed to be thin. I wasn't up to any of this. On the other hand, they could be generous and loving. I received some very expensive presents, and inherited equally with my siblings. Also, my parents were people who achieved a lot; my father as a psychiatrist and my mother as an artist. An added extenuation is, near the end, my father partially reconciled himself to me. At times, he didn't think I had done too badly with my life even though it wasn't his.

Now for my comments on #113, *Halcyon Days*. In your response to my letter, you say you only find text important; and, for that reason, your zines have contained few illos. I can't fault you for that. However, I am interested in illos as well. Thus if I opted for email, I would have the problem of emailing someone a fully illustrated zine. Such a PDF could come to six megs and more. While I could receive a PDF that large on my cable modem and someone else would have no trouble with it on DSL, it would be difficult on dial up. Maybe in a decade or two, receiving a fully illustrated zine will not be problem for anyone.

For **Ned Brook's** letter, I have this comment. I was told another problem with Foxit, besides printing PDFs out, was saving them. Or can you save them in the latest version? As for Acrobat Pro, my problem was not the long time opening; my problem was the expense. Instead, I have PDF_XChange. It does a lot of the things Acrobat Pro does at a much lower price. It's, I guess, the Foxit of Acrobat Pro.

In your response to **Lloyd Penney**, you said you have accepted your lesser talent as a science fiction writer. I have accepted my lesser talent as a science fiction writer to such an extent that I write mainly nonfiction. Also, I publish mainly in the amateur world. Very often, I self-publish. I am not completely beaten yet. Someday I might send in my material to a publisher. However, it will be to a small publisher. Big publishers won't even read your work anymore.

In your response to **Lloyd Penney's** second letter, you give websites needed for keeping in touch with the science fiction world. I am not the enthusiast I once was, but I made three of those into bookmarks.

Concerning **Joe Major** on Cyberpunk Writers, I agree: they lacked imagination. Their

technology was the technology of the time. I read one book and wondered why the people of the future needed to look at computer screens or listen to audio. Couldn't there be a more virtual or more direct path to our brains? Also, I had an idea where genetic engineering would mean the end of democracy. And modern day dictatorship and totalitarianism. Still, I believe the Cyberpunk era was not a total loss. The Cyberpunks did us a service by bringing the Underbelly into science fiction. Now we need someone bringing the Middle Class in.

You tell three of us, and **Robert Kennedy**, what you found wrong with the novel **The Eight**: Thomas Jefferson was not a Freemason. I thought all the founding fathers were, and all the notable people in Europe. Not that there was some sort of conspiracy. As far as I can tell, the Freemasons were mainly a place to drink, socialize and pretend. Mainly drink.

Next, my comments on #114: *The Passing Scene*. You say in "Out of the Depths" that you started reading comic books in the late 1950s with *Tales of the Unexpected*. I remember being in camp, and reading *Superman* and *Captain Marvel*. I remember Captain Marvel bashing invaders from Neptune. The year must have been 1953. I gather DC stopped Fawcett from publishing *Captain Marvel* in 1953, and I couldn't read comic books until then. Also, in "Out of the Depths," you talk about your first memory. My first memory was set in my parents' first house, in Interlaken, New Jersey. I was walking down the steps to the kitchen. While I was doing that, I was wondering whether I would prefer to be a cowboy or a spaceman. I concluded I preferred being a spaceman. A little later that day I noticed I was knee-high to the adults in my life. Unlike your first memory, mine was not traumatic in the least. Why I have remembered it I don't know. I guess that memory had lucky synapses. You say part of you will be a failure if you don't publish science fiction. Of course, you don't mean self-publication or the small press; you want the modicum of fame and modicum of fortune that comes with publication by a big biggy. A sizable chunk of me demanded that at one time, too. However, more and more, that chunk has shrunken. This is all part of the process where my expectations shrink to meet my achievements. Perhaps I achieve less but I'm happier.

In your diary for December 29, you mention a friend who wants to do a history of a New Jersey highway. I once had an idea for an article on New Jersey history. It would be on Great Sea Day. I came upon it in a history of the Central New Jersey Shore, where I was brought up. The holiday was only native to that area. On Great Sea Day during the 1880s and 1890s, farmers farther inland would hitch up their wagons and go to the sea. However, the holiday ended abruptly in 1908 because there was a scandal over gambling. In 1950, there was an attempt to revive the holiday, but it didn't catch on again. For January 20th, you mentioned that your blood pressure was high, 92. I remember when 92 was not considered hypertension; 95 was the border. This is typical. In schools, people talk about grade inflation; in health, it has been the other way around, health deflation. 140 on the glucometer was once OK for diabetics. Now I think it has to be 100. Also, I remember when 240 was the border between high and low cholesterol. Now it is 200; and, for me, as a diabetic, much lower. These draconian standards have one saving grace, though: doctors often fudge them.

Now for my comments on #115: *Wondrous Stories*. **Terry Jeeves** writes about inventions that somehow never arrived. I remember when I was a kid, there were comic strips in the local papers that claimed to reveal the future from current trends. They often repeated themselves. I

remember solar power and the electric car being frequently predicted. They haven't arrived yet. One that arrived was paper dresses. They didn't stay too long. A girl friend told me they ripped.

In "Shapers of Science Fiction," you talk about Samuel R. Delany. I have a somewhat different take on Delany. He was weird. **Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand** shows how weird he was. I suspect the novel was meant to be pretentious. However, that didn't stop Delany from being inventive, like it would have stopped other writers. Delany had the opposite problem: he inserted so much invention in his novels that at times they became surrealistic or, worse, confusing.

In "Wondrous Stories," you review an anthology called **Forbidden Planets**. That got you to thinking about the 1956 movie *Forbidden Planets*. Also, it got you naming other famous science fiction movies of the 1950s. Among them was *The Day the Earth stood Still* (1951). That inspired religious flying saucer aliens, the Space Brothers, and religious mystical contactees. The contactees would meet beautiful, often Christ-like aliens who were trying to save Earth and mankind. While such aliens and such contactees were a much bigger phenomena during the 1950s they remain with us. Another story you talk about is "Me-Topia" by Adam Roberts. It concerns Neanderthal scientists whose rocket ship crashes on the surface of a planet. I am wondering if evolution had taken another turn, the Neanderthals might have become the Homo Sapiens who conquered space. There have been all sorts of theories about why they died out. All anthropologists agree their problem wasn't intelligence, although some talk as if that was what it was. My take is that there weren't enough Neanderthals being born. If evolution had tweaked their sexual plumbing a little, I bet the first flight to the Moon would have taken place thousands of years ago. At one point you discuss novellas. You think many novels are padded, and would be better as novellas. I agree a lot of novels are padded with things that should be taken out: situations not adding to the suspense, boring expositional lumps, wearying descriptions, uninteresting characters, etc. However, I was told you can pad novels with what makes them more attractive. A how-to book I read suggested that you could pad them with people's reactions: your reactions, characters reactions, bystanders reactions, etc. As long as whoever reacts is interesting. Also, you can pad your novel with your views as long as your views are interesting. I read a novel from the 1890s that should have been overlong, but the novelist had curious views. In fact, he could have dispensed with the novel, which was a banal melodrama, and just written about his views.

[My father was very dissatisfied with my career choices as well. He told me openly that I was wasting my time writing, and—fearful of confronting me directly—he argued with Jean repeatedly about my getting out of teaching and going into the business world where, with my background in mathematics, I could earn considerably more money. He did not give up until the normally soft-spoken Jean actually yelled at him.

[Is Interlaken near Asbury Park? I grew up in Bergen County and now live in Morris County, which are the opposite end of the state from Interlaken.

[Actually, my friend just took pictures without any thought of the history of Route 46. He told me I have *carte blanche* on the commentary, so the history is my idea.

[A novel can basically be padded with anything so long as the author does it interestingly. I guess the keyword in selling any book is its ability to be interesting, whether that be an interesting plot, interesting characters, or interesting descriptions, ideas, writing style, whatever. Maybe this means I'm just an uninteresting kinda guy. Who knows.]

On the Lighter Side

Some jokes sent to me by Lloyd Penney

A man and his wife were having some problems at home and were giving each other the silent treatment. Suddenly, the man realized that the next day, he would need his wife to wake him at 5:00 AM for an early-morning business flight. Not wanting to be the first to break the silence (and LOSE), he wrote on a piece of paper, "Please wake me at 5:00 AM ." He left it where he knew she would find it.

The next morning, the man woke up, only to discover it was 9:00 AM and he had missed his flight. Furious, he was about to go and see why his wife hadn't wakened him, when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed. The paper said, "It is 5:00 AM. Wake up."

Men are not equipped for these kinds of contests.

*

A couple drove down a country road for several miles, not saying a word. An earlier discussion had led to an argument and neither of them wanted to concede their position. As they passed a barnyard of mules, goats, and pigs, the husband asked sarcastically, "Relatives of yours?"

"Yep," the wife replied, "in-laws."

*

"Cash, check or charge?" I asked, after folding items the woman wished to purchase. As she fumbled for her wallet I noticed a remote control for a television set in her purse.

"So, do you always carry your TV remote?" I asked.

"No," she replied, " but my husband refused to come shopping with me, and I figured this was the most evil thing I could do to him legally."

*

I know I'm not going to understand women. I'll never understand how you can take boiling hot wax, pour it onto your upper thigh, rip the hair out by the root, and still be afraid of a spider.