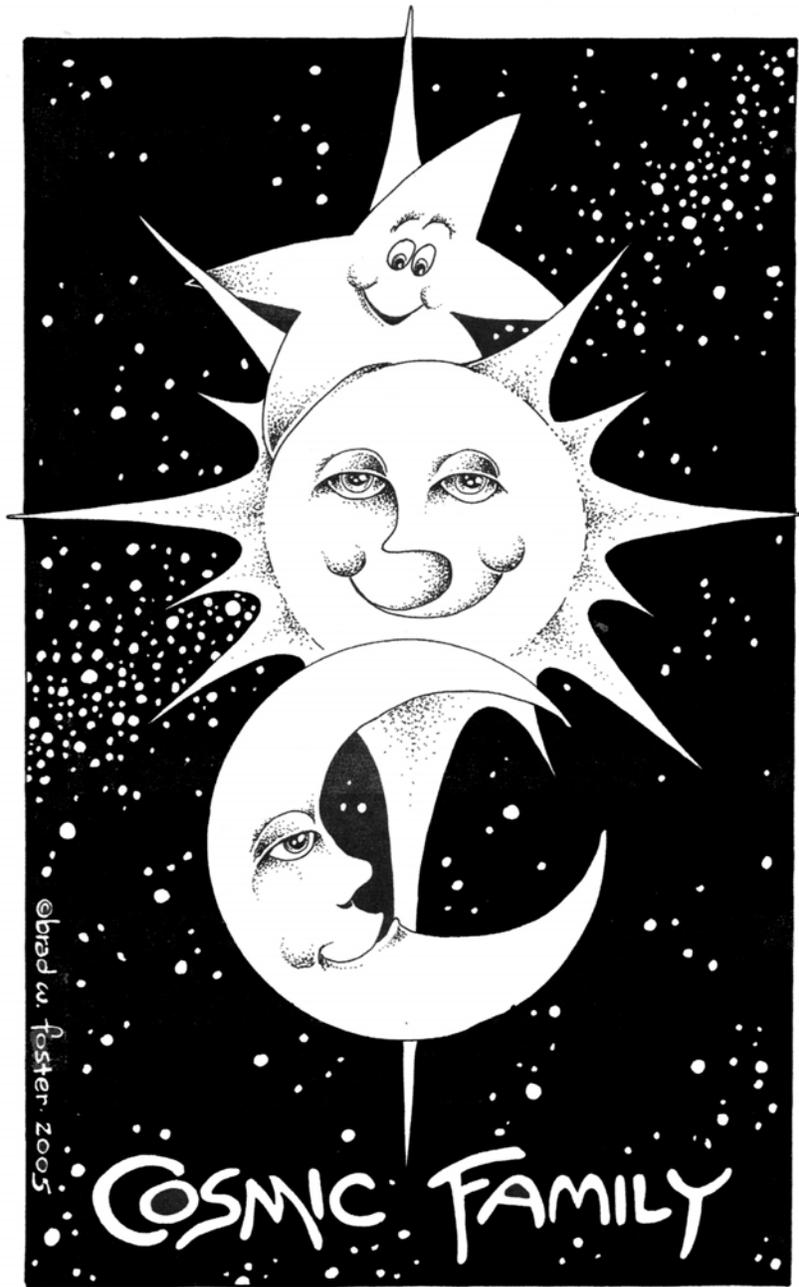


Visions of Paradise

#123



Visions of Paradise #123

Contents

The Passing Scene.....	page 3
<i>October 2007</i>	
Wondrous Stories	page 5
<i>Deepsix</i>	
Listmania.....	page 6
<i>Best All-Time SF Novellas</i>	
Halcyon Days	page 8
<i>LoCs by Major, Kennedy, Foster, Purcell and Dengrove</i>	
On the Lighter Side.....	page 14

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Robert Michael Sabella

E-mail: <mailto:bobsabella@nac.net> bobsabella@optonline.net

Personal blog: <http://adamosf.blogspot.com/>

Sfnal blog: <http://visionsofparadise.blogspot.com/>

Available online at <http://efanzines.com/>

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Artwork

Brad Foster	cover
Terry Jeeves	page 4
Sheryl Birkhead	page 5
Trinlay Khadro	page 7

The Passing Scene

This is a crazy year of school because of all the construction taking place in the building. They have gutted the science labs and are rebuilding them from belowground up, so at times it is so noisy across the hall I had to call the vice-principal and ask him to quiet them down while we are trying to teach. That is usually unsuccessful as the construction workers are either incapable of understanding the need for quiet in a school, or else uncaring about our concerns at all.

Our supervisor has gotten increasingly heavy-handed and narrow-minded in the past year. When she joined the district three years ago she was totally open to different methods of teaching, telling us that what works for some people does not necessarily work for everybody. But as her time in the classroom fades farther behind, her favorite teaching methods more and more become the only acceptable methods for everything from classroom management to planning, and she is becoming more of a control freak than a support to the learning process. The sad part is that more supervisors move in this direction than do not.

Adrienne is my right-hand person in the department who helps me with everything, including advising newer teachers (although Adrienne has only been teaching 7 years herself). While she and I were walking down the hall one afternoon, we saw another teacher's daughter in the main office, and Adrienne commented to me, "Maybe in June I'll bring my baby to school." I looked at her blankly for several seconds before realizing what she meant: she is pregnant, which she has been trying to do since last spring. Of course I gave her a kiss! ☺ She is due in April, which means she will likely be leaving in March, possibly never to return since she commented to me awhile ago that she would feel too guilty leaving her baby with a babysitter or daycare all the time. I will really hate to lose her, both because of her value to the department and also because she is such a close friend. How will we possibly replace her?

Not unexpectedly, my weekends have been very busy lately writing and grading tests, preparing my three AP classes (although admittedly my Honors Algebra 2 and ESL Math classes require less work on my part), editing students' college essays and writing college recommendations for them. I have a lot of really good, dedicated students this year, which always raises the number of recommendations I need to write. Last year was a relatively light year, only 49 total recommendations. Already this year I have surpassed 40 recommendations.

Both Jean and I have gotten sick already. Jean had a severe sore throat for about 10 days, so bad she could barely swallow. As soon as she got better, I got a head cold which lasted 10 days as well. The Math Lab has been crawling with germs since it has no ventilation at all, so many of us have been sick already.

This year's math team should be a good one. Last year we finished #9 in the New Jersey Math League from about 190 competing schools. My brilliant junior Mimi—who took AP Calculus BC as a sophomore last year and is taking AP Statistics and Independent Study Multivariate Calculus with me this year—finished in the top 25 individuals in the state from about 10,000 competing students. My other brilliant junior finished in the top 25 two years ago as a *freshmen!* So I expect the school to finish in the top 10 again this year, maybe higher. In the mid-1990s we finished in the statewide top 5 three consecutive years (from about 200 schools), winning the

entire state in 1994-1995. It would be nice to do so again, but I don't expect us to be that good.

This year's seniors are particularly motivated, perhaps aided by the fact that I teach a lot more girls than boys in AP Statistics and AP Calculus. The Math Lab is always hopping from 7:00 am when Sun Hee is sitting outside my door waiting for my arrival, through all three of my free periods, until after school when Jean and I send them all home about 3:30. Most of the time I am tutoring people, or occasionally counseling. The seniors are under a lot of stress right now with college applications and essays in addition to their AP-heavy course loads. Several of them have used the tissues sitting on my desk already, and I have ordered a few to take a day off and stay home sleeping and writing college applications.

Sun Hee is definitely my most delightful student this year. She is in both my AP Statistics class and Jean's Calculus class. She is a cheerful optimist and a bright bundle of energy who does the weather report every morning on the school's televised morning announcements. She and I spend a lot of time working and chatting every day. I haven't spent this much time with a student since Padma graduated 4 years ago or perhaps even since Fei Fei graduated 13 years ago. But she is a joy to work with, and I regret that she will only be my student for a single year. Between her, and all the highly-motivated students crowding the Math Lab, this is already one of my very favorite years teaching.

One of the authors of **Nanking 1937** asked me a few years ago to send his royalties via international money order, but the cost of purchasing one of those surpassed the amount of royalties he was owed for his last 3 royalty payments. Fortunately, Jean's sister-in-law Susan spent a week in Tokyo this month visiting her son Gabe who is attending graduate school there. Since Prof. Onuma is at the University of Tokyo, she offered to hand-deliver his royalty payments in cash. That was convenient, but I hope he doesn't expect hand-delivery of all his royalties from now on! ☺

Fei Fei and Silvio went to Rio de Janeiro for 10 days for a conference followed by some sightseeing. She said this was the first conference she has attended anywhere in the world where she felt unsafe, since over a dozen vision scientists she knows were robbed at knifepoint! That is certainly scary. She also returned from Brazil with a flu virus.



Wondrous Stories

Even the finest sf writers do not write a masterpiece everytime, but they are always entertaining even with their weaker novels. Jack McDevitt is one of my favorite writers with such superb novels as **Infinity Beach** and the entire Alex Benedict series (**A Talent For War**, **Polaris**, **Seeker**). His *Academy* series is one step below that series, although **The Engines of God** was a worthy first entry, replacing the fascination with history of the Benedict series with archaeology. **Deepsix** is the second novel in the *Academy* series, and it is mildly disappointing.

Deepsix is a world which was first explored twenty years ago, but was totally abandoned when the initial survey team met disaster after being attacked by a horde of killer birds. Now the world is about to be destroyed by a rogue gas giant headed directly for it. Teams of spaceships head for Deepsix to observe the unprecedented catastrophe, but two unlikely events occur almost simultaneously: one of those teams lands on the planet and discovers ancient archaeological ruins which indicate intelligent life had lived on Deepsix millennia ago; and the team becomes stranded due to a rather unlikely series of events.

The basic plot is the attempt to rescue the stranded team before the gas giant destroys Deepsix. Much of the plot has the form of a thriller, along with the leaps of logic associated with that form, and the actual rescue struck me as highly unlikely and complicated. Fortunately, McDevitt has not abandoned his love of the past as the stranded team uncovers more archaeological ruins which gradually build up a view of Deepsix's lifeforms and history. McDevitt has also created an interesting group of strandeers, especially a famous journalist MacAleister whose acerbic personality immediately alienates the others, and scientist Randy Nightingale who was a member of the ill-fated expedition twenty years previous, and who was skewered in the press as the culprit for the failure, especially by MacAleister. The growth of these two men's personalities and their relationship is one of the highlights of the book.

Deepsix should satisfy fans of sf thrillers without alienating those who like wondrous and thoughtful science fiction. I just hope subsequent novels in the series rise more to the Alex Benedict level.



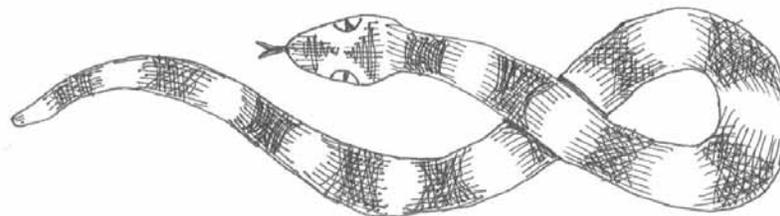
Listmania

In 1998 and 1999, **Locus**'s annual poll included several categories of Best All-time Science Fiction and Fantasy (restricting the results to works published prior to 1990). In *Wondrous Stories* #118 I listed the Best SF Novels, so here are the results for Best All-Time Novellas. Happy reading!

1	Vintage Season	C. L. Moore & Henry Kuttner	1946
2	The Time Machine	H. G. Wells	1895
3	The Persistence of Vision	John Varley	1978
4	A Boy and His Dog	Harlan Ellison	1969
5	The Man Who Sold the Moon	Robert A. Heinlein	1950
6	Houston, Houston, Do You Read?	James Tiptree Jr	1976
6*	Who Goes There?	John W. Campbell	1938
8	The Last of the Winnebagos	Connie Willis	1988
9	By His Bootstraps	Robert A. Heinlein	1941
10	The Fifth Head of Cerberus	Gene Wolfe	1972
11	Enemy Mine	Barry B. Longyear	1979
12	The Dead Past	Isaac Asimov	1956
13	The Big Front Yard	Clifford D. Simak	1958
14	He Who Shapes	Roger Zelazny	1965
15	The Mountains of Mourning	Lois McMaster Bujold	1989
16	Home is the Hangman	Roger Zelazny	1975
17	The Moon Moth	Jack Vance	1961
18	R&R	Lucius Shepard	1986
19	The Word for World Is Forest	Ursula K. Le Guin	1972
20	Behold the Man	Michael Moorcock	1966
21	Weyr Search	Anne McCaffrey	1967
22	Born with the Dead	Robert Silverberg	1974
23	Green Mars	Kim Stanley Robinson	1985
24	Ill Met in Lankhmar	Fritz Leiber	1970

25	The Last Castle	Jack Vance	1966
26	Eye for Eye	Orson Scott Card	1987
27	PRESS ENTER[]	John Varley	1984
28	Seven American Nights	Gene Wolfe	1978
29	The Dragon Masters	Jack Vance	1962
30	A Planet Named Shayol	Cordwainer Smith	1961
31	The Death of Doctor Island	Gene Wolfe	1973
32	Nerves	Lester del Rey	1942
33	A Song for Lya	George R. R. Martin	1974
34	The Call of Cthulhu	H. P. Lovecraft	1928
34*	Dragonrider	Anne McCaffrey	1968
34*	Hardfought	Greg Bear	1983
34*	The Queen of Air and Darkness	Poul Anderson	1971
38	Surface Tension	James Blish	1952
39	Nightwings	Robert Silverberg	1968
40	The Brave Little Toaster	Thomas M. Disch	1980
40*	Soldier, Ask Not	Gordon R. Dickson	1964
42	The Gold at the Starbow's End	Frederik Pohl	1972
43	Cascade Point	Timothy Zahn	1983

My favorite novellas did not fare too well on the above list: “The Persistence of Vision” was the highest finisher at #3, while “The Last Castle” was #25, “Nightwings” was #39, and “We, In Some Strange Power’s Employ, Move On a Rigorous Line,” by Samuel Delany, “The Girl Who Was Plugged In,” by James Tiptree, Jr., and “Her Habiline Husband,” by Michael Bishop did not place at all. *sigh*



Halcyon Days

Joseph T Major

1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204_2040

jtmajor@iglou.com

November 6, 2007

Believe me, I know Assateague. Mostly for the books about its ponies, **Misty of Chincoteague** and sequels. Lisa read them when she was young. After Worldcon in 1998 we went to Chincoteague. Lisa found it rather sad; she had grown up on the isolated ambience of the place, as described in the books, and here was an accessible vacation spot. Nevertheless it is very pretty, though I don't doubt it's pricey. We had hoped Ocean City would get the 2007 NASFiC so we could go back.

I had felt that **Satan's World** was Anderson's goodbye to the Polesotechnic League; the frontier is closing and unbridled capitalism is giving way to the governmental corporatism of the Empire, van Rijn and Falkyn are passing on and Flandry is coming.

I must admit to mixed feelings about Robin Williams. He has a surprising depth playing creepy characters, i.e., "One Hour Photo". And what he said in "Robin Williams: Live on Broadway"! At the same time, his non-creepy characters end up being somehow creepy, not to mention that he comes across as, "Who needs Multiple Personality Disorder when you have Robin Williams?"

Actors and cons . . . I remember reading about the time J. Michael Straczynski brought several of the lead actors from *Crusade* to a con. The report I read said that everyone noted how they went around in a group and never talked to anyone else. I thought that that sounded like the "guests" at a CreationCon. That was JMS was still the golden boy of media fandom, who filled the biggest room at a WorldCon. Twice in a con, even. Then *Crusade* tanked and it was over. (Yes, I know he has comic books, movie deals, and did *Jeremiah* and is working on *The Silver Surfer*. But he isn't The Man, the one who can casually suggest that WorldCon hire a professional manager, and then feel it's wrong when that isn't done.)

I do hope that **Lloyd Penney's** job works out. Like so many fans around here, his job path has been less than smooth. Which is why I have remained unadventurously at the Air Pollution Control District for so long. And then there are my medical bills. If his job works out we might see him. There's Anticipation, naturellement/naturally but that's a one_off. He's shown interest in the Sherlock Holmes/Arthur Conan Doyle Symposium in Dayton, which is something like a day's drive from his home.

Meanwhile, we have had Grant McCormick in the front room ever since March. He's going to register to vote in this precinct.

I haven't heard from **Tom Sadler** in some time, and he's going to move, if not next door, within a reasonable distance of here. Whether that will lead to anything I don't know.

"Daniel loves fantasy with lots of humor and action." Sounds like a Pratchett fan to me.

Especially after what I found out what the meaning is of the name for the number puzzle that Lord Vetinari does in his head in the new Discworld book, **Making Money**.

[I actually took a teaching job in 1973 to give me financial security while spending my summers writing. I don't think I could handle the stress of not having a secure job. I was extremely fortunate that I became a much better teacher (I hope!) than I ever was a writer.]

Robert Kennedy

1779 Ciprian Ave, Camarillo, CA 93010-2451

robertk@cipcug.org

November 16, 2007

Every Sunday on C-SPAN I watch *Q&A* with Brian Lamb. (I also watched his previous program, *Booknotes*, that was replaced by *Q&A*.) On Sunday, September 30, the person he interviewed was Wendy Kopp, CEO and Founder of *Teach for America*. (As a small item of interest, Kopp was never a teacher.) In less than 30 minutes Kopp said "you know" more than 40 times. I almost turned it off because that was driving me nuts. Brian kept asking her what's wrong with our school systems. Kopp did a lot of talking, but never answered the question despite Brian's repeating it. The same happened when Brian asked about tenure. Kopp was evasive to several direct questions. I thought that this might interest you being that you are a school teacher. I do not know anything about *Teach for America* other than was heard on *Q&A*.

I receive **Archaeology** magazine and don't seem to have a problem with its delivery.

So, your son Mark works at Prudential. I retired from Prudential after 35 years. When I started at Prudential in 1958 one of our fringe benefits was an excellent lunch. For a long time it was my main meal of the day. Apparently this started during the Depression because the company wanted to make sure its employees had at least one good meal each working day and they continued the practice after the Depression ended. During the 1980's, as a number of regional offices were closed and new offices opened, the company-furnished lunches ended. Those of us working at Prudential at the time received an increase in pay to offset the loss of the lunches. But, after taxes it only partially offset the loss. However, the company was not obligated to do anything so the increase in pay was appreciated.

You eventually might have cataracts? I had cataract surgery on both eyes a couple of years ago. It was excellent and I only need to actually wear glasses to read, and not always then. My driver's license no longer says that I have to wear glasses.

The Daughter of Time (1951) by Josephine Tey is an excellent book. Around 1960 my friend Margaret O'Grady loaned me her copy and I couldn't put it down. Thomas B. Costain had reached the same conclusion concerning Richard III. He planned to include it in one of his books and did so. He did, however, give Tey full credit for beating him to the punch.

[Unlike Ms. Koop, I could bore you with a very long explanation of what is wrong with our school systems. Instead I will suggest two worthwhile books which explain many of the flaws

much better than anything I might say: **The Learning Gap**, by Harold Stevenson and **Savage Inequalities**, by Jonathan Kozol. We require all of our *Target Teach* students to read both books, and we spend considerable time discussing them.]

Brad Foster

wfoster@juno.com

Nov 21, 2007

Been a while since I locced, but I'll try to make up a bit for that by including the attached "Cosmic Family" illo. Speaking of art, loved the flying supercat on the front of #120! And speaking of that issue, I feel like such a slacker every time I get one of these and see the six hundred things you do every week!

But I promise to try to do better. In fact, I'm going to wrap this up right now, and go start on a new drawing!

[Thanks for the illo. As you can see, I used it immediately as this issue's cover.]

John Purcell

j_purcell54@yahoo.com

Nov 23, 2007

Well, howdy-doo, Robert, and here I am doing what **Lloyd Penney** usually does: playing catch-up. Today is a good day to this, too; it's the morning after Thanksgiving and two kids are gone (one at work, the other at a friend's house), the older daughter is still asleep, as is my wife. Time, therefore, to catch up on loccing zines.

Changing around a fanzine's appearance/arrangement of material is an on-going process. I hope that I never really get too stuck in a rut with how I put together **Askance**; the basic structure will always be there – editorial, three articles, fanzine reviews, lettercolumn – but each issue's particular layout may be different. As far as appearance goes, so far I haven't really found a font-style I really like, for example, although Gautami and Trebuchet are nice, clean, readable fonts. I dunno. It is all a learning process; that's the way I look at zines. It's a fun hobby.

You and I are alike in our reading tastes. Even though I enjoy reading novels, I think the short novel format (novellas) is my favorite. It gives the writer enough room to work up characters and their motivations, develop thoughtful, interesting plots, and so forth; at the same time, it is not as restrictive and condensed as short stories or novelettes, plus the novella also saves the reader from an author getting long-winded, preachy, and running out of steam. I really don't like novels that seem padded. When a writer tells a story that's interesting with good, solid characters that I care about, then includes great ideas, that's the kind of reading I enjoy. The last book I read that really held my interest is the one I just re-read: **A Canticle for Leibowitz**. I had forgotten just how wonderful that novel was, and glad I decided to re-read it.

In any event, Jonathan Strahan's anthology **Best Short Novels 2007** sounds like a book right up my alley. I have read absolutely nothing by any of the authors in this book. That can be a good thing. Your review makes me want to check out the Half-Price Bookstore (or Amazon.com or some other on-line book buying service) and see if I can get a copy of this book. It certainly appears that you enjoyed it a great deal.

That site **Brant Kresovitch** talks about in his loc – www.PaperBackSwap.com – may be worth checking out. Interesting system he describes. It definitely sounds like a very good way to do some book-weeding. Thank you for sharing this site, Brant. I shall have to go there and peruse.

How's the job going, **Lloyd**? Judging by your loc here and recent e-mails to me, it is certainly keeping you busy. I am hoping that they will retain your services so that you can drop the part-time gig at the **Globe and Mail**, which means you will then have the time to write your fanzine review column for **Askance**. Not that I mind writing fanzine reviews, but...

With that, I shall bid you a fond adieu, and wish you a happy holiday season. The semester is winding down, so most of my time from here on out is basically grading; not much in the way of lesson planning, except for keeping the lads and lasses on task for getting their research projects finished on time. Such fun!

[Obviously, one of the strengths of **Canticle for Leibowitz** is that it is actually three novellas which combine to tell a larger story, more evidence of what you and I see as the strength of that mid-length fiction.

[Finding **Best Short Novels 2007** at a used bookstore might be a problem, since it was released by the Science Fiction Book Club and is not available elsewhere. But Strahan's annual volume is always worthwhile reading. This is the fourth volume and I've enjoyed them all.

[While I would never trade the joys of having students fill Math Lab all day, I do feel a twinge of jealousy at the length of the college year occasionally. ☺]

Richard Dengrove

2651 Arlington Drive, #302, Alexandria, VA 22306

Fri, 23 Nov 2007 20:56:46 _0500 (EST)

RichD22426@aol.com

Once again, I am very much behind on my LOCs. Here, I am going to try, in one fell swoop, **Visions of Paradise** #116-22.

Vision of Paradise #116: *Halcyon Days*. You to Me: Unlike your co-worker, I wasn't told anything about diet or emotional level after I was diagnosed with MS. On the other hand, each case of MS is different. I have been able to control mine with a shot once a week of Avonex, a moderate dosage of interferon. It has only mild side effects. I hear there are stronger dosages and some must take them daily. Their side effects are often not mild, and I cringe at the thought of a regimen like that. To answer your question about Interlaken, NJ, it is a hop, skip and jump

from Asbury Park. Walking distance. Easy walking distance. Of course, you probably wouldn't want to walk in a lot of the city because it has basically been deserted.

I sympathize with **Sheryl Birkhead** about her father. I used to complain a lot about my father. However, I am sure he was nothing compared to Sheryl's. My father would not conceive of abandoning his family. In addition, he could be generous and warm. The problem was moods where his anxieties would come to the surface. It was then, and only then, that nothing could please him. I doubt even he himself could. In fact, I suspect he was convinced his whole world was falling apart.

Visions of Paradise #117: *The Passing Scene*. This is a good time for me to give you my spiel about the Mafia. There is one reason the association between the Mafia and Italians has survived and prospered during this era of political correctness: the Italian Mafia is regarded as romantic. It is hard to believe considering how violent and despicable they are reputed, but it is the case.

That is why so many Italian-American actors have played Mafioso roles. I have two stories showing how romanticized the Mafia is. The first concerns a woman I dated in Boston thirty years ago. Maybe more. While she was very pretty, it was obvious she wasn't the woman for me. She struck me as too demanding, and I am sure I struck her as a loser. As part of being demanding, she was a social climber. And where did she want to climb to? I let her pick the restaurant and she picked a place called Joe Valachi's. The big selling point was that Mafia gangsters were supposed to eat there. Although the food, if I remember correctly, was OK, that the Mafia ate there seems to have been its big selling point. One would think that would be patrons would be afraid of being sprayed by machine gun bullets, but that wasn't the case.

One last thing: this was obviously a faux Mafia restaurant. If I also remember correctly, Joe Valachi was a guy who squealed on the Mafia to a Senate Committee. A Mafia restaurant named after him? Come on. The next story about the Mafia as romance concerns the theme from **The Godfather**. It was written by a composer in Italy, Nino Rota. He had first written the music for the movie **Fortunella**. Dino De Laurentiis produced that film. Later, Rota used the same notes for **The Godfather**. De Laurentiis sued for the royalties. However, he couldn't produce the contract. There apparently hadn't been any. So what does this have to do with the Mafia being romanticized? The music in **Fortunella** sounds nothing like **The Godfather** theme. **The Godfather** theme is slower. More significant, it is also more romantic.

Visions of Paradise #118: *Wondrous Stories*. It was too bad that Leigh Brackett couldn't keep on writing about the humanoid nations of Mars. Supposedly what killed the Mars of Leigh Brackett and Edgar Rice Burroughs was Mariner IV, which, in 1965, photographed Mars' barren surface. I know that convinced the last holdouts for intelligent life and canals there. However, why should it have affected fiction? It is supposed to be made up anyway. I imagine the Mars of Leigh Brackett was fiction, and fun; I know the Mars of Edgar Rice Burroughs was. Editors have disagreed, however. A friend of mine told me that, when he was very young, he wrote a story about grass huts on Mars. Perhaps not fun in his case, but, in my book, fiction. The editor wrote back: "Grass huts on Mars!!!"

Visions of Paradise #119: *Halcyon Days*. **John Purcell**. I think John forgets one of the original

attractions of the Star Wars series; namely, that it was tongue-in-cheek. That was appropriate to its basically comic book tone. Later on, Lucas succeeded in trashing the series by making it dead serious.

Joseph Nicholas. I didn't know my letter was supposed to be scholarly a dissertation, like Joseph Nicholas claims. Since I guess it is, I will name the Cyberpunk novel where there was no interface between the mind and the computer. It was not one novel but three, Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* trilogy. Whether that's hackwork or not is a person's opinion. As for science fiction not depending on the technology of the time, Victorian science fiction had anti-gravity drives. Of course, I am going to have to cite my sources: **Honeymoon in Space** (1900-01) and **Edison's Conquest of Mars** (1898). In fact, **Edison's Conquest** had disintegration rays as well. Maybe these marvels were predicted by Victorian science but certainly were not part of Victorian technology.

Robert Kennedy. Robert argues that the Founding Fathers were not Masons because only 16% of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and only 23% of the Signers of the Constitution can definitely be identified as Free Masons. In addition, only one-third of all Presidents can. I doubt that closes the matter even for now. I doubt there was a census of Free Masons with which we could eliminate the rest as Masons. Wasn't their mystique that it was a secret organization? I am not certain that the historian was any less accurate who claimed that, by rule of the thumb, all the Founding Fathers were Masons.

Visions of Paradise #120: *The Passing Scene*. There is a place nearby where I live, in the D.C. area, that has a museum devoted to Byzantium, Dumbarton Oakes. In fact, it is in D.C. proper. It gives some history, although the idea seems to be it was much of the same. It was in a holding pattern until the Turks took it over. Where the interest lies is in all the items collected from different parts of that empire.

Visions of Paradise #121: *Wondrous Stories*. Maybe I'm reading things wrong here. The Atevi in Cherryh's **Inheritor** are not human because they are divided into tribes and fight a lot among themselves? I thought that that was very human. Fortunately, that doesn't happen much in modern day America. The Middle East and the Middle Ages have been another thing entirely. In your review of **Best Short Novels 2007**, you come down on the side that things are getting worse because we're becoming more technological. It is intellectual to disparage technology and yearn for a simpler, more cerebral time. There is some truth to that; technology can be a pain in the neck, especially when some people are in charge of it. However, we all love our technology: our computers, our printers, our microwaves, our automobiles: and couldn't do without them.

Lloyd Penney. I hope the Canadian National Institute for the Blind keeps you on; and, for your financial problems, the light of day is at the end of the tunnel.

[I grew up in a town where Mafia connections were common. Do you recall the scene in *The Godfather* where Al Pacino killed a rival mobster in a restaurant, after hiding his weapon in the bathroom? That was based on a true incident which happened within walking distance of my house.

[I did not miss the planet Mars in Leigh Brackett's later fiction at all, because the exotic setting she used for her Eric John Stark trilogy, beginning with **The Ginger Star**, was just as exotic and wondrous, so it did not matter that the setting was not Mars.

[Sorry, Robert, but Simmons' *Hyperion* series hardly qualifies as Cyberpunk. It is set in the far-future and has few of the qualities of Cyberpunk, which is a near-future extrapolation of current technological and political trends.

[You misunderstood me twice. The atevi are different from humans in various ways, mostly in beliefs and emotions, but fighting among themselves is certainly not one of the differences. Nor do I believe that things are getting worse because of advanced technology and that "simpler" times ahead will necessarily be better. I just think a collapse is likely to happen. I did not claim that would be better.

[And you don't think modern-day Americans don't fight among ourselves? Think about life in the inner cities before you make that statement]

On The Lighter Side

Heisenberg is out for a drive when he's stopped by a traffic cop. The cop says, "Do you know how fast you were going?"

Heisenberg replies, "No, but I know where I am".

*

An elderly man in Phoenix calls his son in New York and says, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing; 45 years of misery is enough."

"Pop, what are you talking about?" the son screams.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the old man says. "We're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her."

Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like heck they're getting divorced," she shouts. "I'll take care of this."

She calls Phoenix immediately, and screams at the old man, "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?" and hangs up.

The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. "Okay, they're coming for Thanksgiving and paying their own fares. Now what do we do for Christmas?"