

Visions of Paradise

#131



Visions of Paradise #131

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Out of the Depths

I have been a faithful reader of **Locus** for 37 years, and I still consider it a valuable guide to both upcoming sf and reviews of current books. Their most valuable issues are their quarterly *Upcoming Books* guide and their annual *Year in Review* issues. But over the years, I have noticed a subtle arrogance has sneaked into the pages of **Locus**. Gradually it has drifted away from being content to report on the science fiction field to trying to dominate and influence the genre. Consider the following:

Locus has always had a snobbishness in choosing certain authors' books to review and publicize, while totally ignoring others. And that does not necessarily reflect those authors' popularity. In the past decade Robert Sawyer has been nominated for 10 Hugo Awards, winning Best Novel in 2003, while Jack McDevitt has been nominated for 12 Nebula Awards during that period, winning Best Novel in 2007. But if you read only **Locus** for reviews and overviews of the sf field, you might not realize those two authors even existed since Sawyer is never reviewed, and McDevitt is rarely mentioned.

Locus makes a big deal of their annual **Locus Awards**, which have a larger voting base than either the Hugos or Nebula Awards. However, in recent years the editors of **Locus** have taken great strides to make sure those awards represent their own views rather than the uninfluenced views of their readers/voters in a very sneaky manner: the awards are voted online, and each category has a drop-down menu listing all the works recommended by the editors of **Locus**. While there is also the option of "writing-in" a different name, we all know the likelihood of a write-in winner beating one of the listed nominees is slim, if not nonexistent.

But **Locus** made the mistake of opening the voting to anybody who visits the *Locus Online* website, rather than restricting it to readers of the magazine. So this year the number of voters of the Locus Award who were not readers of the magazine apparently skewed some of the results away from the recommended stories pushed in the pages of the magazine. So as to minimize such free-thinking influence on the awards, the editors of **Locus** decided after the voting was completed to count the votes of **Locus** subscribers as double the value of non-subscribers.

That decision made a difference in several awards. Connie Willis is a personal friend of the editors of **Locus**, and obviously one of their favorites, but she would have come in second place for the Locus Award without the doubling to Cory Doctorow, who has a rabid following online. How dare he take an award from an insider? *tsk tsk*

Quite frankly, the Locus Awards do not matter much in the sf field compared to Hugo, Nebula, World Fantasy, John W. Campbell, Theodore Sturgeon, Philip K. Dick, etc, but pretending the Locus Award is more representative than the others in the broad realm of fandom is contradictory when the award is not-so-subtly influenced by the presenters of the award. Just as claiming to be "the magazine of the science fiction & fantasy field" is a bit of an invalid claim when its coverage deliberately ignores important aspects of the f&sf field.

Fortunately, in this internet age, **Locus** is no longer the sole newsletter devoted to the genre. Sites such as *SF Scope* and *SF Signal* carry daily news items as well as links to other sites, and there are numerous bloggers who discuss f&sf regularly. Some websites, such as *SF Site* have their own annual awards and, to separate their own opinions from that of their readers, they have two parallel awards, a set of winners from their editors and contributors and another set of winners from their readers. Maybe that is something **Locus** should consider doing rather than skewing their supposed "democratic" awards.

The Passing Scene

July 2008

On the first day of summer vacation Jean had her third arthroscopic knee surgery which initially seemed to go well. The surgeon believed he finally removed the lump of cartilage which had been bothering her, plus he cleaned up a few other areas. However, within two weeks the floating cartilage which had given her the most trouble popped out again, and has been doing so fairly regularly since. When it is out, she cannot bend her leg and it is very painful. Of course, it was not out the day she returned to the surgeon who told her he needed to see it himself before he can take any other action. He also told her she has lots of arthritis around the knee, and eventually will probably need a full knee replacement. Sheesh...

My weight at the start of summer was about 5 pounds higher than I should be and about 10 pounds higher than I would like ideally. I was very lazy about exercising the last few months of school, so this month I have been taking a brisk walk every morning as well as going to the YMCA with Jean three times per week in addition to my nightly abs strengthening exercises which I do faithfully since they have really helped my back. I should do more—we have an exercise bike and an abs machine—but so far those have been good intentions.

I made a routine visit to my doctor who now has me taking a *zyrtek* every night for my allergies/congestion (which so knocked me out the first two nights I slept for 9 hours each night), wearing an elbow wrap for tendonitis (as well as icing my elbow; if it does not heal he will inject a steroids shot which will ruin my chances of switching careers to major league baseball ☺), taking a higher dosage of blood pressure medicine once each day, as well as scheduling me for an overdue complete physical at the end of August. This is why I usually avoid doctors!

Mark learned that starting in August he will be working in NYC on a fulltime basis rather than splitting time with Newark for the second year of his three-year rotation. While that is more inconvenient for him (the train which goes to Newark also goes to NYC but he will have to follow it with a subway), and will cost him money in both transportation costs and taxes, hopefully it will improve his chances of moving up the corporate ladder.

Mark and Kate moved into their new apartment outside Princeton since that location is closer to where Kate works and convenient for Mark to take the train from Princeton Junction each day. The apartment is also close to Fei Fei's apartment, so that will be convenient for all of them.

There has been a lot of eating this month:

- Rick and Barb came for a barbecue. We made shish kabob, zucchini bread and pasta salad, then sat around chatting and eating for 7 hours;
- We celebrated our 29th wedding anniversary by going to lunch at Red Lobster where we ate a seafood platter containing shrimp scampi, breaded shrimp, and baked flounder. Red Lobster also has delicious cheddar biscuits that are almost as good as the rest of the meal;
- Mark and Kate went to Perona Farms, the site of their wedding reception, to meet with potential photographers, musicians and florists, as well as a “tasting” of food for them to

- consider for their reception;
- We spent an afternoon at the pool with my brother Mike's family, then ordered supper at a local pizzeria. Jean, Mark and Kate ate stromboli, Andy had a sausage parmigiana sub, and I had a calzone;
- We visited our friends Frank (the photographer with whom I am collaborating on the Route 46 book) and Marilyn. Between selecting pictures from the several hundred he took, we had another delicious shisha kabob dinner;
- We went to a belated dinner for Mark's birthday. He has the same simple taste that Jean and I have, so we went to IHOP where we all ate breakfast food;
- We took a trip to the Chinese buffet with Alan and Denise.

Now that we have Optimum Online's triple package of cable tv, computer, and phone, we have free movie tickets every Tuesday. In the past we have rarely gone to the movies, but for free—what the heck? Jean wanted to see *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, which was splendid visually but virtually no plot. Still it was worth every penny for paid for it. ☺

We tried to see *The Dark Knight* but it was sold out, and we cannot reserve tickets using the Optimum Online free card, so instead we saw *Wall-E* which was one of the better sf movies I have seen in a long while, as well as a really cute love story.

My former students help me keep from getting bored while I am sitting home working on the computer. This month I have chatted online with Sun Hee, Padma, Antonio, Christina, Kai, Marwa, Aishwarya, Preeti and Shiva, as well as gotten email from Joshi and Hyun and played Facebook Scrabble with Rabbit and Marwa. What would I do without them?

My students have received their AP scores in the mail, and while the AP Statistics scores are my best ever, I was a bit disappointed in the AP Calculus scores. I am used to 95-100% 4's and 5's, but this year I only had 75%, a very low total for my classes. I am not sure whose fault that is, this year's students who have a tendency to panic, or mine for somehow not preparing them as well as usual? The BC test is a lot harder than the AB test with a national rate of about 16% 5's, but that does not ease my disappointment. Hopefully we'll rebound from those scores next year.

Fei Fei is back from a month in China. She and Silvio spent the first two weeks in Chengdu visiting her family and volunteering at a nearby school recovering from earthquake damage. The second two weeks she went to Beijing where she visited friends and gave five talks on vision science, three of them at universities and one each at the Microsoft and Google research centers. Silvio is currently in Sicily teaching a summer program.

Jean's brother Peter and his wife Susan are in Dallas where Susan has started her new job as a director of overseas studies at SMU. She is renting an apartment but they are looking for a house to buy. Peter is returning to South Carolina though since he needs three more years at Winthrop to qualify for a pension.

Jean and I visited Adrienne and her baby Jack. While we were there, Adrienne and Jean went over the Prob Stat & Discrete Math curriculum which Adrienne has taught the past 7 years and Jean is taking over all 3 sections next year. Jean and I teach all the Statistics at school, and I

teach the AP classes, so we will be very hard to replace if and when we both retire.

Although I am a Yankee fan, I do not really enjoy going to sporting events for various reasons: the crowds, stadia are not particularly comfortable, and I don't like devoting several hours to watching a game when I can be reading. However, when my friend Alan got 2 tickets to Yankee Stadium for what would undoubtedly be my last game there before it is torn down, how could I resist? Not only do I always enjoy spending time with Alan, but it is nice every few years to actually see Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez, and Mariano Rivera in person. The last Yankee game I saw live their right fielder was still Paul O'Neill.

However, the day we went was 95° and we sat in the blazing sun for 5 hours since the game went 12 innings (which the Yankees won when their backup catcher was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded). I drank 3 bottles of water and put on sunblock 3 times, so although I was uncomfortable most of the afternoon, I did not burn or dehydrate. ☺ I am not sure how all the women wearing scanty outfits did not burn, burn, burn, but at least they brightened up the stadium a bit.

A bunch of teachers, including Jean, are spending two days at school getting training on using the *Tablet PC* in the classroom. It is a fascinating laptop which, among other things, projects onto the front of the classroom and converts a teacher's handwriting into print. One of the days I went with Jean so I could open boxes of supplies in the Math Lab, then we went to lunch with two other math teachers Mary and Deanna, so that was nice.

My plan to buy an MP3 player was sidetracked when Mark won a new one at work (in a bowling competition between employees and interns), so he gave me his old one. I'll figure out how to download music and use it on my Wave stereo system before making a decision on it.



Wondrous Stories

For readers of science fiction, there are certain acknowledged classics which all serious fans eventually read (**Dune**, **Foundation Trilogy**, **Martian Chronicles**, etc.) The same is true for readers of historical fiction, and one of those recent classics is Ken Follett's **Pillars of the Earth**. Follett is primarily a writer of contemporary thrillers, certainly one of my least-favorite genres, but many people have told me good things about his historical epic, and its premise about the building of a medieval cathedral in England also intrigued me. I knew eventually I would read the book, and my interest was spurred even higher recently when he published a quasi-sequel **World Without End** which also garnered very positive reviews.

There are several main characters in **Pillars**, most of them dedicated to the building of the cathedral, some whose lives interact with the builders, and two who are dedicated to the destruction of the cathedral:

- Prior Philip is the dynamic prior of Kingsbridge Monastery who spearheads the plan to build the cathedral and spends the rest of his life carrying out those plans;
- Tom is the “master builder” who works hand-in-hand with Philip until his unfortunate death threatens to derail the entire project;
- Jack is Tom's stepson who is a wild card early in the novel but who during his travels across Europe becomes as enamored with Kingsbridge Cathedral as Tom and Philip;
- Ellen is Jack's mother who is considered a witch by most other characters in the novel for reasons which remain the novel's overriding mystery until its very end. Initially she and Jack live in the forest until she falls in love with Tom and follows him to Kingsbridge;
- William is the son of the Earl of Shiring who does whatever is possible to destroy both the cathedral and the entire town of Kingsbridge which, under Philip, has grown from a tiny village to a thriving community rivaling Shiring in importance;
- Bishop Waleron is initially Philip's supporter in the building of the cathedral, but soon his own greed turns him against Philip as he becomes an ally of William. Waleron is also deeply involved in the mystery surrounding Jack's mysterious father;
- Aliena is the daughter of the original Earl of Shiring who makes the mistake of supporting Queen Maud in the civil war with King Stephen of England, while William's father supported Stephen. Aliena's father is killed and she falls under the protection of Philip.

Obviously Follett is a master plotter, and while **Pillars** shows evidence of his thrillers, it is primarily a long, detailed saga. The people are varied and interesting, not only the main characters but many of the secondary ones as well. Only the villains—William, Waleron, and Tom's elder son Alfred—could have used more shading as they were all fairly one-sidedly evil.

Follett does an outstanding job of creating 12th century England by showing its people, their activities, and their environment. The way the civil war between Maud and Stephen affects the lives of ordinary citizens is shown in numerous ways, some subtle, some important to the overarching story of the cathedral. While I am not a historian, I truly felt absorbed into the life of medieval England.

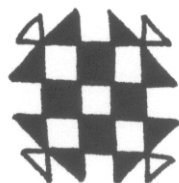
Follett is a master at writing exciting sequences, such as the burning of Kingsbridge, the collapse of the cathedral, and the defense of Kingsbridge against William's second attack. But what really raises the book above the level of a simple-plotted adventure is the cathedral itself, since it is the real main character of **Pillars**. Through nearly 1,000 pages we watch the cathedral grow and fall and its effect on the lives of the people involved with it as well as on the entire community of Kingsbridge. The fact that Philip, Tom and Jack all love the cathedral gives the novel a focal point which helps make **Pillars** greater than the sum of its various parts. While I cannot guarantee that all readers will be enamored either with the cathedral itself or, as I was, with the characters' love of the cathedral, still **Pillars of the Earth** is an exciting and fascinating look at life in 12th century medieval England.

*

I was impressed with Lisa See's **Snow Flower and the Secret Fan**, a coming-of-age novel about two girls in 19th century China. The novel revealed a lot about Chinese culture and history, as well as the rigidity of Chinese society, including the roles of both women and men and their relationships with parents, older siblings, younger siblings, spouses and in-laws. Lily, the book's narrator, was born into a working class farming family, while Snow Flower came from a richer family. Still they became *laotong*, special friends for life, a very formal relationship which is actually much closer than even husband-and-wife. Their lives are intertwined from then on. They undergo footbinding together (which is particularly gruesome in its details), engagement, and marriage, the latter which changes both their lives and their relationship. Lily, partly because of her perfect feet, marries into a rich and powerful family where she eventually becomes Lady Lu, the most important woman in a large village. Snow Flower, however, is forced to marry a butcher, a particularly lowly profession considerably below Lily's new status.

The novel follows their pregnancies and births—of boys, if possible, since they are precious while girls are useless and good only for marrying out. As is typical of historical Chinese novels, the happiness is intertwined with tribulations such as a county-wide typhoid plague which kills many people, including Lily's and Snow Flower's own family members, and also the evacuation of entire villages into the mountains during the Taiping Rebellion, where the villagers huddle in the snow and cold with little food for three months, many people dying during this ordeal.

While the novel's focus is on the entire Chinese society in the 19th century from the point of view of its women, much of it is narrowed upon the relationship between Lily and Snow Flower, who as young girls become truly best friends, and who struggle to maintain that relationship their entire lives in spite of the forces pulling them apart. **Snow Flower** is a moving novel which I recommend highly.



Halcyon Days

Eric Mayer

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June 23, 2008

I don't know much about the current sf scene. Just out of curiosity -- do you have any idea, have all those Hugo noms translated into sales for Charlie Stross? Is he one of the best selling sf authors as well as the most nominated?

I skipped my senior prom when I was in high school and I am sure that had I become a teacher I would've continued to skip them! But you should at least attend the year you retire!!

Statistics...the only statistics I know are about baseball. I hate to tell you how bad I was at math. I am reminded of when I lived in Rochester and orienteered. I had good friends one of whom taught high school math, one of whom taught college math, while the other taught junior high gym. And I had flunked math and skipped gym.

It must be difficult to go through an endless cycle of getting to know students and then seeing them leave. Although, a few years ago, at my dad's funeral, most of the attendees were former students.

I'd need to be more knowledgeable about current sf to say anything intelligent about your categories, but they seem to make sense. I was reminded that often I hear sf referred to as a literature of ideas, and often I have seen the genre dismissed as being about ideas rather than people, which always strikes me as odd -- as if somehow there is something wrong with writing about ideas or as if ideas were just not worth writing about.

Re your comment to Lloyd about cons...I've never been to an sf convention. I enjoy "socializing" via the written word. I am no good at it in person. Just thinking about going to a con, to join a bunch of people to socialize makes me sweat. I'm not even sure how you do it. Socialize, I mean, not sweat. Sweating comes naturally.

Intriguing cover, by the way, even though **Brad [Foster]** got the title wrong, and a delightful penguin on page five.

[I have no idea how well Stross sells, but since several of his books always seem to be on the shelves at bookstores, I assume he sells fairly well.

[What makes it tolerable watching students I have known well for three years graduate is that there are always other students behind them. I have no idea how this will affect me when I retire and have no other students.]

John Purcell

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June 27, 2008

Read your latest effort on efanzines.com, and you said a few things about science fiction *gasp* and I believe I have a few things to say about them. Whether or not my comments make sense remains to be seen. Here goes.

Your tabular categorization of science fiction is an interesting concept, one that makes sense to a certain extent. I guess the big problem I have is definitional when it comes down to genre vs. non-genre sf. I am not sure what you mean exactly by "non-genre" science fiction; are you saying that non-genre sf is sf written by people who are not part of the "accepted" crowd of known science fiction writers? Using authors for example, Jorge Luis Borges and Evelyn Waugh would be considered non-genre sf writers who wrote science fiction, as opposed to the "acceptable" Asimov, Sturgeon, Heinlein, and their ilk. Where does that place Vonnegut then? He wrote mostly in science fictional settings and used common sf plot devices and all, claiming over and over he was not a science fiction writer, yet he still used sf as the vehicle for his satirical visions.

I dunno. All I really know is that many writers use science fiction as a vehicle for expressing their particular opinions or visions of the world. By this definition, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist utopian novel **Herland** is thus non-genre sf. I wonder what she would have thought of your pigeon-holing. (Don't answer that; it's a rhetorical question.)

The breakdowns of sf that is people-oriented or plot-oriented, escapism or literature, and science-oriented or history-oriented are much easier to understand. Personally, I think all literature is escapism to various extents, but this is because I am rather Newhartian in that all fiction, by its very button-down definition, is fantasy, albeit by degrees of fantasy. An author can make that fantasy as realistic as possible or swing completely to the other side of the spectrum and make fantasy as unrealistic as possible. So here I go again, wondering what in the heck constitutes literature or escapism or fantasy. Round and round we go...

All in all, though, an interesting idea. It will be interesting to see what other folks think of that table of yours on page 8. You certainly do like to create lists and charts, don't you? Well, I have to admit, it can be a lot of fun, and sometimes helps to spot trends if one is into such mental gymnastics.

Thanks for letting me know about the posting of the zine. Pretty soon I have to get cracking on the 9th issue of *Askance*. It should be a lot of fun again.

[The splitting of sf into "genre" and "non-genre" is pretty much as you described it, but keep in mind I did not intend for it to be qualitative in any way. 90% of everything is crap, whether genre-written or non-genre-written. And the fact that Vonnegut disavowed his genre leanings to Senator Joe McCarthy's Committee on Un-American Activities in no way changes the fact that he was a pure genre writer until he got uppity!]

Gene Stewart

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June 27 2008

Another good issue.

SF Categories - Every reader who acknowledges genre fiction and SF in particular knows the feeling of trying to decide if this latest book just read is genre, or not. Is it really SF? We go by cover, publisher, and still aren't sure. Content doesn't help much; is a speculative element enough to warrant a classification?

We delve into tropes and topos; we parse patterns. Is this latest book we've read patterned like canonical SF?

I know a writer whose first novel sold brilliantly inside but mostly outside the genre markets, due to a neutral, mainstream cover, but had the misfortune to be published by Tor, which meant that, while the first novel's sales far exceeded expectations and led to a second printing, his next book under his Tor contract could not be patterned the same. No, it had to be rewritten from the ground up so it will conform to "genre reader expectations" he's been told.

Trouble here is, A) there is nothing wrong with how he writes his books, B) the sales far exceeded expectations, (I'm speaking on the order of 25,000 for a first printing, and another printing being necessary, versus selling 5000 in genre), so doesn't Tor WANT more sales? and C) forcing his square peg into their round and merciless hole will cut off the very corners that make his work stand out.

He would have done better in the first place to have sold his first novel to a mainstream publisher, so he could work in peace.

So these category questions are more than just a diverting reader game. They are vital to the continued growth, maturity, and expansion of fiction of all kinds. And if we're to be forced into the established patterns, what hope of producing anything new can there be?

McDevitt's Books - Having not yet read his work, I'm grateful to you for the head's up. I would prefer the historical mysteries myself. I'm weary of the whole Academy notion in so much fiction.

Thing is, I'm growing impatient with the same-old crap in all categories. Change or die, you idiots.

[Marketing is a major problem in publishing these days. Once you're seen as belonging to a niche, it is very hard to get out of it for most authors. That's not a problem for authors who do not sell a damned thing, of course!]

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July 7, 2008

Many thanks for **VoP** 130. I do not think I have any work by either Jack McDevitt or Charlie Stross on my bookshelves. The only advantage that Stross might have is that he makes his books available as a free eBook download that I can read on my PDA.

I think that I was never involved in anything social at my high school. First of all, I could never afford anything the school offered socially; the price to any event was always out of my reach, and my parents could never afford these events, either. Because I was not one of the cool kids, they made sure that I felt unwelcome, and I sure did. Their rich parents, in turn, made sure that my parents were made to feel unwelcome too. Those were two reasons that eventually led to our leaving town and moving to the west coast for a fresh start, and it was the best thing we'd ever done. We felt more welcome to take part in things on the west coast.

I'd find it difficult to keep track of all the divisions within the SF&F genre, and tastes vary with each reader. I keep it simple...there's stuff I like, and stuff I don't, and in the long run, I'll read what I please. Besides, if there's a division system in place, books will come about that will straddle a division line, or be simply unclassifiable.

My letter...The Phoenix Martian Lander has had much success, proving there is water ice in the soil. Recently, I went on a tour of MacDonald Dettwiler & Associates in Brampton, Ontario, which created the lidar-based weather station that is on the workbase of the lander. They are very proud of the lander they helped to create.

Not long ago, I was being carded in bars, as little as five or six years ago. That's because they can't see my bald spot from the front. Now, my joints hurt, the odd medical problem rears its head...I feel like I was a kid and I feel old, but never at any time have I ever felt like I was an adult.

Spent part of my weekend traveling to see friends near the Ontario/Michigan border, and to tour the Crown Royal Whiskey bottle plant in Amherstburg, Ontario. Interesting to see how fast they can fill thousands of bagged sand boxed bottles. Yvonne works for Diageo, and Diageo owns this plant.

[There's another categorization I should have included which, I agree with you, is the most important: books I like and books I don't like! ☺

[I was not putting "a division system in place," merely describing different types of sf books. While I rarely consider a book's niche before buying it, in some cases it helps me to do so: *I'm not in the mood for yet another high tech book. Oh, wow, a wondrous planetary romance. Another darned thriller?* Sometimes I am not in the mood for a pure idea book, while other times a fast-paced romp appeals to me in lieu of another slow-paced character study. Of course, always limiting oneself to a very narrow type of reading offers the likelihood of missing a lot of

fine books. I am not usually a fan of space opera, but I try them occasionally and discovered that I really like the novels of Alastair Reynolds and Stephen Baxter in spite of their designation as "new space opera," while several other authors in that area bore me.

[One side-effect of having been so solitary most of my life is that I have never been carded in a bar at any age. I don't know if that's something to bemoan or to be proud of.]

Brad Foster

July 9, 2008

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Coming off a week of a nasty bout of cold/flu combo, and trying to catch up on the mail here. I remember the good old days when, if I felt bad, I'd just sack out for about 24 hours and my body would manage to heal up. Now it can take days or weeks to get rid of stuff. Stupid growing old!

Anyway....

Going through your Listmania in #129, of the 73 titles you have there, I believe I have read, at the most, only 20. I am not worthy.

Your comment about considering Ray Bradbury one of the "Big Three" of sf reminded me of how I used to hear that the "classic ABC of sf" was Asimov, Bester and Clarke. For myself, being a huge fan of Bradbury, I usually listed him in place of Bester. Some years ago on an episode of "The Simpsons", class smart geek-kid Martin was running for class president. One of the planks of his platform was to make sure that the school library was well stocked with the ABC's of science fiction, and he listed the first three. Another kid asked "What about Bradbury?" to which Martin, with a dismissive wave of his hand, replied "I'm aware of his work." Yep, he lost my vote with the comment! I've come across some of Ray's mystery novels in recent years and have enjoyed those very much as well as his older fantasy works.

Loved all the jokes in these issues. Even with my sore throat I insisted on reading several out loud to Cindy. Humor is supposed to be good medicine, so I'm sure that is helping, too.

[Deepak Chopra claims we should never blame anything on our growing old, because that is a non-reversible condition. Rather we should blame it on something else which we can overcome, and then proceed to do so. That is a good philosophy, but it is a lot easier to accept it theoretically than to actually put it into practice.]

John Hertz

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July 21, 2008

All science fiction can be divided into two categories, the kind that can be placed in one of two categories, and the kind that can't.

My latest book review has been posted at www.collectingsf.com.

The In-Box

Zines read online or received so far in 2008

Alexiad / Lisa & Joseph Major / 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204-2040 / very regular reviewzine, lots of reviews

Askance / John Purcell / available at <http://www.efanzines.com> / very good online genzine.

Ben's Beat / Ben Indick, 428 Sagamore Ave., Teaneck, NJ 07666 / personalzine with an emphasis on plays and books.

brg / SF Commentary / **Scratch Pad** / Bruce Gillespie / <http://www.efanzines.com> / 59 Keele Street, Collingwood VIC 3066 / Bruce's personalzines, among the very best currently being published

Celtic Seasons / Rita & Richard Shader / 2593 Chapparral Drive, Melbourne, FL 32934-8275 / fascinating glimpses at Scottish history and culture.

Challenger / The Zine Dump / Guy H. Lillian III / P.O. Box 53092, New Orleans, LA 70153-3092 / available at www.challzine.net / one of the finest genzines being published.

Chunga / Andy Hooper, Randy Byers, carl juarez / 1013 North 36th St., Seattle, WA 98103 / probably the most traditional fanzine currently being published.

The Drink Tank / Chris Garcia / available at <http://www.efanzines.com> / perhaps the most regular online personalzine.

File 770 / Mike Glycer / <http://www.efanzines.com> / 705 Valley View Ave., Monrovia, CA 01016 / fannish news and reviews; check the daily blog for regular updates.

For The Clerisy / Brant Kresovich / P.O. Box 404, Getzville, NY 14068 / chockful of interesting book reviews.

The Knarley Knews / Henry Welch / 1525 16th Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017 / available at <http://www.efanzines.com> and <http://people.msoe.edu/~welch/tkk.html> / very regular genzine.

Lofgeornost / Fred Lerner / 81 Worcester Ave., White River Junction, VT 05001 / personalzine with a penchant for international travel.

Opuntia / Dale Speirs / Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E7 / reviews, articles, and letters.

Quasiquote / Sandra Bond / 7 Granville Road, London N13 4RR, UK / genzine

The Reluctant Famulus / Tom Sadler / 422 W. Maple Ave, Adrian, MI 49221-1627 / long-running genzine.

So It Goes / Tim Marion / c/o Kleinbard, 266 East Broadway, Apt 1201B, New York, NY 10002

Some Fantastic / Matthew Appleton / available at <http://www.somefantastic.us/> / zine devoted to f&sf

Southern Fandom Confederation Bulletin / 470 Ridge Road, Birmingham, AL 35206-2816 / clubzine with news, conreports and reviews.

Steam Engine Time / Bruce Gillespie and Janine Stinson / P.O. Box 248, Eastlake, MI 49626-0248 / <http://www.efanzines.com> / genzine with lots of reviews

Vanamonde / John Hertz / 236 S. Coronado St., No 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057 / two-page APAzine with brief comments on a variety of topics.

Vegas Fandom Weekly / Arnie Katz www.efanzine.com / online genzine



On the Lighter Side

Jokes sent me by Robert Kennedy

A newly-minted school teacher was visiting the barber in his community. The barber was as expansive in his talk as is commonly assumed for those of his trade, and the teacher was confronted with a comprehensive inventory of the town's ills. It wasn't long before the barber began on the youth of the community, whom he clearly held in general disrepute.

"I tell you," said he, "the youngsters here are so irredeemably dumb that they've past all hope of education."

"I just don't understand how you can say that," replied the teacher.

"Here, let me show you," said the barber, spying a particular boy on the street. After calling the fellow over, the barber proclaimed, "Now boy, I have something for you, but you'll have to tell me what you'd like to have. Would you like this old dollar bill, or would you rather have these two shiny quarters? Eagerly, the boy took the quarters and went on his way.

The next day at school the teacher, who knew the youth to be anything but stupid, asked why he had taken the so obviously bad end of the encounter.

Somewhat dismissively, the boy replied, "Oh, it's simply a matter of cash flow. He asks the same question every time he sees me. But the first time I take the dollar, the game's over."

*

Mark Kowalski, a notorious duffer, unwound on the first tee and sent a high drive far to the right. The ball sailed through an open window. Figuring that was the end of it, Mack played on.

On the eighth hole, a police officer walked up to Mark and asked, "Did you hit a ball through that window?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, it knocked a lamp over, scaring the dog, which raced out of the house on to the highway. A driver rammed into a brick wall to avoid the dog, sending three people to hospital. And all because you sliced the ball."

"I'm so sorry," moaned Mark. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Well," the officer replied, "try keeping your head down and close up your stance a bit."

*

Two guys left the bar after a long night of drinking, jumped in the car and started it up. After a couple of minutes, an old man appeared in the passenger window and tapped lightly.

The passenger screamed, "Look at the window. There's an old ghost's face there!"

The driver sped up, but the old man's face stayed in the window. The passenger rolled his window down part way and, scared out of his wits, said, "What do you want?"

The old man softly replied, "You got any tobacco?"

The passenger handed the old man a cigarette and yelled, "Step on it," to the driver, rolling up the window in terror. A few minutes later they calmed down and started laughing again.

The driver said, "I don't know what happened, but don't worry; the speedometer says we're doing 80 now."

All of a sudden there was a light tapping on the window and the old man reappeared. "There he is again," the passenger yelled. He rolled down the window and shakily said, "Yes?"

"Do you have a light?" the old man quietly asked.

The passenger threw a lighter out the window saying, "Step on it!"

They were driving about 100 miles an hour, trying to forget what they had just seen and heard, when all of a sudden there came some more tapping. "He's back!"

The passenger rolled down the window and screamed in stark terror, "WHAT NOW?"

The old man gently replied, "You want some help getting out of the mud?"