

Visions of Paradise #136



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Contents

Out of the Depths.....	page 3
<i>A Worlds of IF mystery</i>	
The Passing Scene.....	page 4
<i>December 2008</i>	
Wondrous Stories.....	page 6
<i>To Your Scattered Bodies Go</i>	
Slick Willie's Used Car World.....	page 8
<i>Conclusion</i>	
On the Lighter Side.....	page 14

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Out of The Depths

After discovering science fiction on Christmas Day, 1962, I read **Worlds of IF**, **Galaxy** and **Worlds of Tomorrow** until early in 1964 at which time I stopped reading all three of them until early 1966, after which I continued to do so until, one by one, they all ceased publication.

In the mid-1970s I completed my collections of the three magazines by buying used copies of the missing issues, but in the crush of new magazines I kept buying until the mid-1990s I never read them. Recently I have been alternating reading **Worlds of IF** with 1950s issues of **Galaxy** which I got from Chester Cuthbert a decade ago to complete my collection of that magazine. **IF** is a good magazine to read when I want light reading without any deep involvement, since it printed mostly adventures. Recently I read the November and December, 1964 issues.

I started with Keith Laumer's serial **The Hounds of Hell**, which I quit about 25 pages into it. I never particularly liked Laumer's fiction. His *Retief* stories were unfunny, somewhat insulting in their stupidity and, without seeming too politically correct, almost racist in how they belittled every alien race Retief encountered. **The Hounds of Hell** was not a Retief story, but a military adventure which also bored me considerably.

The novelettes in the two issues were better, by such writers as Thomas M. Disch—then a newcomer in the field—Frederik Pohl, the underrated Robert F. Young, and J.T. McIntosh, another **Galaxy/IF** regular. But what most struck my eye was the announcement on the bottom of page 39 in the December issue announcing the feature story in the January, 1965 issue, “the great new novel by Hugo-winning Jack Lance”, **The Killing Machine**. The author's name was a misspelling of Jack Vance, since the issue's editorial verifies that the upcoming serial was the second *Demon Princes* novel, following closely after **The Star King** which was serialized in the December 1963 and February 1964 issues of **Galaxy**. I've read all the *Demon Prince* novels in book form and they are among Vance's best novels.

The most interesting part of the announcement though is that **The Killing Machine** *never* appeared in **Worlds of IF**. So why was it advertised there? Neither did it appear in **Galaxy** as two other *Demon Prince* novels did (the third novel in the series, **The Palace of Love**, was serialized in **Galaxy** from October 1966 through February 1967). Did Vance perhaps not complete the novel on time? Could he have withdrawn it for some reason, perhaps because it was not scheduled to appear in **Galaxy**, the flagship of the magazines, but in the lesser **Worlds of IF** instead? Or did something in the novel perhaps offend either editor Fred Pohl or the publisher of **Worlds of IF**?

Replacing **The Killing Machine** in the next few issues of **IF** was the serial **Starchild**, by Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson, which might have been available as an emergency replacement for **The Killing Machine** since it was editor co-written.

If any of my readers correspond with Frederik Pohl, you might want to ask him about that mysterious situation. Just another of science fiction's little unsolved mysteries.

The Passing Scene

December 2008

Priscilla and Yun are the two students who visit me regularly this year to say hello and chat. Priscilla was born in Canada and she hopes to return there for college. She has a somewhat negative outlook on herself and her life which I have been trying futilely to change. Her brother who graduated six years ago was similar, which makes me wonder about what exactly is happening in their lives.

I spend a lot of time at school tutoring students in Calculus, three of whom are not even my students. Yun and Rima have Keki for Calculus while Arieta has Jean. All three girls are comfortable with me though, Yun because she had me as a sophomore and I have been counseling her ever since; Rima is my ICC president, and Arieta had me for AP Statistics last year and even started a Statistics club which seems to have faded away this year.

Three of my own students spend my free 7th period working with me as well, one on AP Calculus and two on Honors Algebra 2. The AP Calculus student has really been struggling in the class, but her pride will not allow her to drop it. So we are making a determined effort to bring up her grade before she decides. One of the other two girls is the first Uzbek student I have ever had, so I have learned a few things about that country which I never knew before.

Overall, I am very busy at school, but I am still having a happy year.

Our neighbor Steve works in a sausage factory and sometimes he brings us homemade pasta. Recently he gave us a box of lobster ravioli and another of manicotti, so I cooked them for dinner. The manicotti were delicious, although they tended to fall apart, while the lobster ravioli was a bit overwhelming. I prefer ricotta filling to meat or seafood, as did Jean and Ceil.

Before Ceil went home after her two week Thanksgiving visit, Jean, and I took her to Olive Garden for dinner, where the waiter screwed up my order and gave me chicken parmigiana instead of eggplant parmigiana, but I did not mind since I enjoy both of them. Afterwards Jean and Ceil shopped at the mall while I went to Borders and bought Jean and me cd's for Christmas. She got *The Mamas and the Papas Gold* while I got *The Condensed 21st Century Guide to King Crimson*, one of my favorite prog rock groups.

Every week the **Star-Ledger** has a conversation between former Republican governor Tom Kean and former Democratic governor Brendan Byrne, and the two of them invariably stick loyally by their parties. Kean has never said anything bad about George W. Bush, and he supported John McCain for president. However, in this Monday's column, they were both praising Barack Obama for his cabinet appointees so far. In fact, Kean even said, "It's good to see that brains are back again." If that was not a commentary on Bush, what else could it possibly have meant? Interestingly, they both agreed that Congress should not give the Big Three automakers a buyout.

Several seniors have heard good news recently from their “Early Decision” colleges: Li Li got accepted into the University of Pennsylvania, which is her first choice because her parents are relocating to China after she graduates, so she will stay with her uncle in Philadelphia while on her breaks; Jiang got accepted into Columbia and Shi into Cornell. I was happy for all three of them who deserved their admissions.

Sun Hee and Shiva had their first college final exams, and they were both fairly nervous about them. Since both girls are bright and hard-working, they did very well and finished their first semester with good grades overall. They visited school after they finished, along with several other former students, which was very nice.

We had some weather problems the last week before Christmas. Wednesday was a two-hour delayed opening, and Friday the schools were closed. Between the work spent snowblowing and shoveling, and the inconvenience this caused to my classes, it was not worthwhile having the time off one week before our longest vacation of the year—which is 12 days long this year. You think Mother Nature would be more cooperative!

Christmas was good this year, except my entire family got infected with a stomach virus by my nephew’s one-year-old baby, so we were all miserable from Christmas night through the weekend. Oh, well...

*

The Best of 2008

I did not read any books this year which I considered classics, but two of them rose above the pack in my estimation. My favorite book overall was Steven Saylor’s Roman mystery **Last Seen in Massilia** which was even a bit better than the book I read last year in the same *Roma Sub Rosa* series, **The Judgment of Caesar**. Nobody creates a historical society better than Saylor does, in my opinion.

The other book I enjoyed most was Jeffrey Ford’s semi-autobiographical novel **The Shadow Year**, which was the first novel of his I have read. Coming on the heels of such outstanding Ford short fiction as “The Empire of Ice Cream” and “The Cosmology of the Wider World,” I will definitely seek out more Ford books, either novels or collections or both. He is probably my favorite fantasy writer of this decade.

It was also a good year for music, but three of my favorite cds of the year were actually released many years ago so are not really suitable choices as my “Album of the Year”: King Crimson’s live **Cirkus**, Return To Forever’s jazz fusion masterpiece **Hymn Of The Seventh Galaxy** and John McLaughlin’s Mahavishnu Orchestra’s equally-superb **Birds of Fire**.

My favorite newer albums were three: Tom Petty’s album featuring his resurrected first band **Mudcrutch**, the Foo Fighter’s superb **Echoes, Silence, Patience & Grace**, and the best Strawbs’ album in 30 years, **Broken-Hearted Bride**.

Wondrous Stories

Recently I was thinking about some of my favorite all-time sf series. My favorite is probably Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover* books, but others include Jack Vance's *Galactic Cluster*, Jack McDevitt's *Alex Benedict*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars*, Alastair Reynolds' *Galactic North*, Dan Simmons' *Hyperion*, Anne McCaffrey's *Pern* and Philip José Farmer's *Riverworld*.

The thought occurred to me that it might be nice to re-read one of those series from start to finish. I decided to do so with one of the older series which I have not read in several decades, thus eliminating McDevitt, Robinson, Simmons, and Reynolds, all of which I have read fairly recently. And Bradley, Vance and McCaffrey's series are so long that each would be a multi-year project.

Which left Philip José Farmer's *Riverworld* series. While it is not future history in the pure sense, it is a possible future scenario for the human race, and while it does have an sfnal foundation, it reads like fantasy as much as sf.

It is also a series with a long, almost convoluted history. It was originally written as a novel *I Owe for the Flesh* which won a contest and should have been published as such, but somehow the publisher rejected it as too risqué. While the current series is not the least bit offensive, Farmer does have a tendency to write fiction which pushes the boundaries of sf in the area of sexuality. Consider his breakthrough story "The Lovers," such novels as **A Feast Unknown and Blown**, and his Hugo-winning story "Riders of the Purple Wage." All were somewhere between erotic and outright pornographic. So perhaps the original version of his *Riverworld* series was a lot more sensual than his published version. Or perhaps it was rejected because the publisher feared it would offend deeply-religious readers with its unorthodox views of the afterlife.

The *Riverworld* stories were originally published as a series of novellas in **Worlds of Tomorrow** magazine with titles "Day of the Great Shout," "Riverworld," and "The Suicide Express." The sequel to those novellas was the serial "The Felled Star in **Worlds of IF**, and all those stories were eventually published as two novels in 1971, **To Your Scattered Bodies Go** and **The Fabulous Riverboat**. The former won the Hugo Award as Best Novel—and was my own Book of the Year as well—while the latter showed very little letdown in quality, if any.

But, of course, I have not read either novel in 37 years, so there was always the chance my taste had changed and they would not hold up well at all, so I began rereading the first book with a bit of trepidation. I need not have worried, since it holds up extremely well. **To Your Scattered Bodies Go** sets up the foundation of the series in its examination of several aspects of human civilization and culture. The basic premise is that all people who ever lived on Earth, including Neanderthals, early humans and several alien visitors, have been resurrected on a world built around a long, virtually infinite river. People are born young, twenty-five physically, virginal, nude, hairless, and provided with only one artifact: a large grail-like object which, when placed in giant mushroom-like structures scattered every mile along the riverbank, are filled with food three times a day. Each group of people are resurrected around the mushrooms, and groups generally consist of about 60% of one type—such as Italians from the 19th century—30% from

another group, and 10% random people.

The first fascinating aspect of the novel is the sociological one as Farmer examines strangers with different beliefs, backgrounds and traditions learning to form a mutually-compatible society. Some groups take to this new scenario easier than others, so we see democracies develop as well as brutal dictatorships. Farmer examines some of the higher tendencies of humans, such as cooperation, as well as such lower tendencies as slavery which is revived almost immediately.

The book has its obvious theological implications since both atheists who denied any belief in an afterlife and devout believers have had their views shattered. While this aspect is not examined as much as the sociological ones, it is still a running thread through the novel.

Another aspect which I really enjoyed was the historical one. While Farmer is careful not to overload the book's cast with too many familiar names, several historical people do show up and are examined in the light of how their behavior and characters affect their actions on the riverworld. Hermann Goring is a major character who forms a Nazi-like dictatorship complete with anti-Semitism and slavery, with the possibility of expanding his power into neighboring communities.

Farmer chooses wisely by making Richard Francis Burton—the adventurer, not the actor—his main character. Burton's personality and leadership attract a group of followers very early in the book, and his adventurous nature is the impetus for his leading them on a sailing ship up the river, seeking the cause of the resurrection, which enables Farmer to explore other groups of resurrectees and their types of societies. While Farmer recognizes Burton's strengths, he is not blind to his personality flaws which affect both his relationship with his fellows and his actions, and form a major focus of the book. A flawed hero who is still primarily heroic is often the most interesting lead character, and Farmer does a good job developing Burton throughout the book.

To Your Scattered Bodies Go has its share of excitement as well, including a naval battle between Burton's group and Goring's followers, and there is mystery a-plenty in the quest to learn the truth behind the strange resurrection. This was a book which lived up to my prior memories of it, and upon completing it I immediately booked a ride on **The Fabulous Riverboat**.



Slick Willie's Used Car World

In the last installment, Jimmy Carter was working as a used car salesman at a dealership owned by Bill Clinton in Arkansas in 1974. Just after Bill concluded a deal with a local citizen, an explosion in the back of the dealership revealed a time traveler from the 28th century who claimed to have come back in time to study two former presidents, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton!

Conclusion

"Where is Gonzalez?" Bill asked Jimmy.

Jimmy dipped a french fry into ketchup and bit off the red tip. "I'm not sure. He said he wanted to take in the sights. Somehow he is attracted to rural Arkansas."

Bill laughed. "That proves he's either crazy or a real con artist."

Jimmy shrugged. "I guess so."

"Surely you don't believe his crazy story about being a time traveler?"

"At first I didn't, but it's hard to dismiss all the odd things about him. Every other explanation I try fits the facts even less. And once you've eliminated all the impossible explanations, what's left must be the truth."

Bill watched Jimmy thoughtfully. "What kind of odd things?"

"The way he appeared in the storage shed. And that bike of his. Did you look at it closely?"

"Not really."

"It was totally unlike any bike I've ever seen in my life."

Bill shrugged. "Maybe it was an import."

"It would have to be imported from some country far superior technologically to the United States."

"No country is superior to the good ol' U.S. of A."

"That's exactly what I mean. And what about his outfit? I've surely never seen anything like it in Arkansas before."

"Maybe he bought it in New York City."

"And his accent was unusual as well."

"So Brooklyn then."

Jimmy frowned. "What's most interesting is that nothing about him is really outrageous. It's like he tried to fit into this era as well as he could, but because his knowledge of us is incomplete, everything he did was just wrong enough to make him stand out a bit."

"I still think he's a con artist."

Jimmy shook his head. "That's the first impossibility I eliminated. Why would a con artist go to so much trouble to fool us: his clothing, the bike, the appearance in a cloud of smoke? And for what? To trick two used car salesmen out of a 1970 Mustang perhaps? And how would telling me I'm supposed to become president of the United States in the next two years possibly accomplish that?"

Bill stared at Jimmy for a long time, finally muttered, "Damn," and drained his cup of coffee.

The diner door whooshed open, and Gonzalez stepped inside. He looked around anxiously, smiled when he saw Bill and Jimmy in the corner booth. His face lit up at the sight of Jimmy's food.

"Are those really french fries?"

"Yep. Do you want one?"

Gonzalez took it eagerly. "I've read a lot about twentieth century food, and have been anxious to taste some." He bit off half of the fry and chewed it slowly as his face screwed up.

"It's dry," he said, "and mostly tasteless. Why are they so popular?"

"Dip it in the ketchup," Jimmy said.

Gonzalez did so, and bit it again. "Better," he said, "but still not good enough to account for their popularity."

Jimmy smiled. There was no accounting for taste. "Did you see anything interesting?" he said.

"Oh, yes." Gonzalez became animated again. "I spent most of the afternoon at the library. Events happened quite differently than our historians believe. I don't know how to explain it though. Records must have gotten changed during the Dark Years somehow. With all the computers wiped out, and all the surviving records on paper, I guess errors occurred."

He took another french fry and dipped it in the ketchup.

"Your President Lodge, for example. I've never heard of him. Where did he come from?"

"He was a Republican most of his life," Jimmy said. "When President Nixon retired in 1968, Lodge assumed he would be the GOP nominee, having been Nixon's vice-president for eight years. But an outsider named Goldwater packed the convention and stole the nomination from him. So Lodge jumped parties and ran on the Democratic ticket. The combination of Republicans who feared Goldwater's right-wing policies and Democrats who voted strictly party lines was enough to win Lodge the presidency."

"Is he any good?"

Jimmy shrugged. "Once a Republican, always a Republican. Sixty percent of the country is content, while the rest of it goes to hell in a handbasket."

"Along with the rest of the world," Bill said.

Gonzalez nodded. "That part's true enough. No American president was able to halt the economic slide that eventually led the entire world into the Dark Years. You were the only two who actually tried, but so many voters refused to sacrifice their own comfort for the sake of the common good that Congress resisted both your efforts and you were each followed by complacent Republican administrations." Gonzalez frowned. "At least that's what the history books claim."

"Perhaps this isn't your true past?" Jimmy said.

"What do you mean--?"

"Perhaps you accidentally entered a parallel universe to your own."

Gonzalez's eyes widened. "Where did you hear of such a thing?"

"I've read some science fiction in my day."

"*Science fiction*?" Gonzalez bit his lip. "What a strange phrase that is. But what you suggested is a very popular theory in my era. The great physicist Li Fei has theorized that time scooters do not travel in time at all, but rather cross dimensional lines into universes in which time moves at different speeds than in our universe. Yet they are so close to our world that differences between them and us are so minimal as to only be noticeable to historians. But because parallel universes move at different speeds, we actually enter the other universes at a time comparable to a past era in our own universe."

"How would that account for the time scooters losing power during the Dark Years?"

"According to Li Fei, the closer a universe is to us, the closer its timeline is to our own. In order

to reach your era I passed through hundreds of universes all stuck at some point in the Dark Years."

Gonzalez resumed eating french fries. When the last one was finished he eyed Bill's cheeseburger briefly. He seemed to be on the verge of asking for a taste, but instead he shook his head and stood up.

"I'd better get going," he said. "My existence here is quite unstable. The several hours I've been here is the practical limit I can stay and still hope to return to my century, or my universe, or whatever."

Jimmy and Bill followed Gonzalez back to *Slick Willie's Used Car World*. In the storage shed the time scooter lay in a broken heap. The time traveler tugged at it, frowning at its poor condition. He fussed with the scooter briefly, then sat on it and tried the controls. Nothing happened. After he fussed a bit more he tried it again, but still nothing. Finally he removed a few parts and examined them closely, muttering a curse as he did.

"What's the matter?" Jimmy said.

"These retrometers are shot. So is the antimene merculator. They must have broken in the landing."

"Can they be repaired?"

"I doubt it. Not in this era anyway."

"Why not?" Bill said. "If you explain to a repairman exactly what to do, why can't he make the necessary repairs?"

Gonzalez frowned. "If you took a computer chip to a twelfth century repairman, would he be able to fix it?"

"What's a computer chip?"

"He's right," Jimmy said. "There's no way our factories could possibly repair parts that won't be invented for eight hundred years." He turned to Gonzalez. "So what do you do now?"

He grimaced. "For starters, I can stop congratulating myself for successfully making a journey nobody ever thought possible. If I can't return home, nobody will ever know I actually reached the Twentieth Century."

"I'm sorry," Jimmy said.

Gonzalez shrugged. "I knew when I left there was a better than even chance I would be stranded in the Dark Years. At least I managed to reach the era I love most of all." He was thoughtful for

a moment. "And my being stranded here might actually be a blessing in disguise."

"How is that?"

"Whether this is my era's historical past or a parallel universe to ours, I am the only person in the late Twentieth Century who is aware of the upcoming Dark Years. Maybe my fate is to help prevent the four hundred year chaos awaiting us."

"How could you possibly do that?"

He smiled broadly. "For one thing, I am in the company of the only two American presidents who actually fought to prevent the Dark Years. Helping you two get elected would go a long way to fending off the disintegration of America during the next century."

"Now wait a minute!" Bill said. "How could Jimmy possibly become president two years from now!"

Gonzalez rubbed his jaw. "You're right, that's out of the question." He thought briefly until a smile spread slowly across his face. "There was never a President Lodge in my universe at all. The time frame might be different here. Jimmy Carter was a relatively young president in 1976. In this universe he might be a more seasoned president of 65 years old."

Jimmy laughed. "Become president of the United States in fifteen years?"

"I'm still not convinced any of this is true," Bill said. "What if you're a con artist trying to take us both for a ride?"

"C'mon, Bill," Jimmy insisted. "What other explanation fits all the facts?"

Bill shrugged. "There's got to be some better explanation than time travel."

"Universe travel," Gonzalez said.

"Universe, time, supernatural travel for all I care. I don't believe it!" He glared at Jimmy. "Do you?"

Jimmy took a breath. The Dark Ages were a logical extension of his own dark vision of the future. If that is what truly loomed ahead for America, was it not the moral responsibility of every righteous person to fight against the fall of night?

Gonzalez' claims also stirred a deep-seated feeling in Jimmy that something had gone wrong in his life, something that should not have happened. What else could possibly explain his frequent dreams that his destiny was not to sell used cars in rural Arkansas, but to have a positive impact on the future of America? A destiny that had somehow gone awry, either on the peanut farm in Georgia or in the years since. President of the United States was certainly far-fetched, but how

could he better fight against the upcoming Dark Years?

"I believe him completely," Jimmy said.

"Damn." Bill buried his head in his hands. "Even if he is telling the truth, why should I want to become president of the United States?"

"To make a difference," Jimmy said.

"He's right," said Gonzalez. "As president you can help prevent the Dark Years which ravaged this world for four centuries. Four centuries of suffering that the technology of the Twentieth Century might have prevented were it given the chance."

"By the time the Dark Years arrive, I will be long dead," Bill said. "Right now I'm making a nice little living here selling cars."

Smiling broadly, Gonzalez put his arm around Bill's shoulder. "Do you have any idea what the president earns in a year? Or what his expense allowance is? Or his pension for life after his term in office expires?"

Bill's eyes widened. "Is it that high?"

"It's probably higher than you imagine, my friend."

"This is our best chance to make a difference," Jimmy said. "I've pissed away twenty years doing everything from cooking omelets to selling used cars. Meanwhile the world is collapsing around us. *I must try to make some kind of a difference before I'm too old.*"

Bill watched Jimmy with narrowing eyes. "President of the United States would be the ultimate salesman job in the world. No offense, Jimmy, but you cannot even swallow your scruples enough to sell a used car to a redneck. How are you going to sell yourself to the American public?"

"Maybe the American public is ready for an honest man to lead them."

Bill shook his head very slowly. "I guess you can try to twist politics to your own image if you want, but I'd rather depend on good ol' salesmanship. Trying to sell myself to an entire country might be harder than selling sand to an Arab, but what a challenge that would be. How can a two-bit Arkansas salesman pass up the ultimate sale?"

A growing doubt knotting Jimmy's stomach suddenly rose up through his entire being. The ultimate salesman job? Maybe Bill had the talent to sell himself to the American public, but did Jimmy? All he had to offer the American public was his naked soul. Was that more likely to win their confidence or cause them to reject him entirely?

Jimmy sighed. "I think you'll do just fine," he said to Bill. "With Gonzalez advising you on policy, and your natural salesmanship, you just might be the best goddamned president this country has ever seen."

Gonzalez frowned. "Is something the matter, Jimmy?"

"Not at all. Bill is the perfect man to try and save the world from the Dark Years."

"And what about you?"

Jimmy shrugged. "I've failed at more jobs than I can remember, including two different salesman jobs. How can I possibly sell a lifelong failure to the entire United States of America?" He fought back a wave of depression. "Maybe it is time to stop fooling myself and head back home. Billy's kept the farm afloat these near twenty years and he doesn't have half the business sense I do. It'll take all my talent just to save one lousy peanut farm. If I'm fortunate I can make a difference in the lives of a handful of people. That's probably as close as I'll ever get to saving the United States of America!"

Bill put his arm around Jimmy's shoulder and held his gaze for several seconds. Then he nodded once and turned to Gonzalez.

"What say we start plotting out our plan of action, partner?"

Gonzalez smiled broadly. "That sounds good to me."

Jimmy watched until they enter the showroom, then sighed and looked around the car lot. His paperback novel was still folded open beside his chair. What the heck. Plains, Georgia, could wait until he finished his book. Jimmy sat down, picked up **Siddharta**, and began looking for the place he had left off.

On The Lighter Side

Jokes by Robert Kennedy

A sales rep, an administration clerk, and the manager are walking to lunch when they find an antique oil lamp. They rub it and a Genie comes out. The Genie says, 'I'll give each of you just one wish.'

'Me first! Me first!' says the admin clerk. 'I want to be in the Bahamas, driving a speedboat without a care in the world.' Puff! She's gone.

'Me next! Me next!' says the sales rep. 'I want to be in Hawaii, relaxing on the beach with my personal masseuse, an endless supply of Pina Coladas and the love of my life.' Puff! He's gone.

'OK, you're up,' the Genie says to the manager.

The manager says, 'I want those two back in the office after lunch.'

*

A woman went to her doctor. The doctor, after an examination, sighed and said, "I've some bad news. You have cancer, and you'd best put your affairs in order."

The woman was shocked, but managed to compose herself and walk into the waiting room where Sarah, her best friend, had been waiting.

"Well Sarah, we women celebrate when things are good, and we celebrate when things don't go so well. In this case, things aren't well. I have cancer. Let's head to the club and have a martini."

After 3 or 4 martinis, the two were feeling a little less somber. There were some laughs and more martinis. They were eventually approached by some of the woman's old friends, who were curious as to what the two were celebrating.

The woman told her friends they were drinking to her impending end. "I've been diagnosed with AIDS."

The friends were aghast, gave the woman their condolences, and quickly excused themselves.

After the friends left, Sarah leaned over and whispered, "I thought you said you were dying of cancer, and you just told your friends you were dying of AIDS.."

The woman replied, "Yes I did. I don't want any of them sleeping with my husband after I'm gone."

*

A young man goes into the Job Center in Downtown Los Angeles, and sees a card advertising for a Gynecologist's Assistant. Interested, he goes to learn more; 'Can you give me some more details?' he asks the clerk.

The clerk pulls up the file and says, 'The job entails getting the ladies ready for the gynecologist. You have to help them out of their underwear, lay them down and carefully wash their private regions, then apply shaving foam and gently shave off the hair, then rub in soothing oils so that they're ready for the gynecologist's examination. 'The annual salary is \$65,000, and you're going to have to go to Albuquerque New Mexico . That's about 620 miles from here.'

'Good grief, is that where the job is?'

'No sir --- that's where the end of the line is right now...'

*

A blonde goes to the post office to buy stamps for her Christmas cards. She says to the clerk, 'May I have 50 Christmas stamps?'

The clerk says, 'What denomination?'

The blonde says, 'God help us. Has it come to this? Give me 6 Catholic, 12 Presbyterian, 10 Lutheran and 22 Baptists.'

*

A man is getting into the shower just as his wife is finishing up her shower, when the doorbell rings. The wife quickly wraps herself in a towel and runs downstairs. When she opens the door, there stands Bob, the next-door neighbor. Before she says a word, Bob says, 'I'll give you \$800 to drop that towel.'

After thinking for a moment, the woman drops her towel and stands naked in front of Bob. After a few seconds, Bob hands her \$800 and leaves.

The woman wraps back up in the towel and goes back upstairs. When she gets to the bathroom, her husband asks, 'Who was that?'

'It was Bob the next door neighbor,' she replies.

'Great,' the husband says, 'did he say anything about the \$800 he owes me?'

*

A priest offered a nun a lift. She got in and crossed her legs, forcing her gown to reveal a leg. The priest nearly had an accident. After controlling the car, he stealthily slid his hand up her leg.

The nun said, 'Father, remember Psalm 129?'

The priest removed his hand. But, changing gears, he let his hand slide up her leg again. The nun once again said, 'Father, remember Psalm 129?'

The priest apologized 'Sorry sister but the flesh is weak.'

Arriving at the convent, the nun sighed heavily and went on her way. On his arrival at the church, the priest rushed to look up Psalm 129. It said, 'Go forth and seek, further up, you will find glory.'

*

A new pastor was visiting in the homes of his parishioners. At one house it seemed obvious that someone was at home, but no answer came to his repeated knocks at the door.

So he took out a business card and wrote "Revelation 3:20" on the back of it, and stuck it in the door.

When checking the offering the following Sunday, he found that his card had been returned.

Added to it was this cryptic message, "Genesis 3:10."

Reaching for his Bible to check out the citation, he blushed, then broke out in laughter.

Revelation 3:20 begins "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Genesis 3:10 reads, "I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid, for I was naked."

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A rabbi is walking slowly down the street when a gust of wind blows his hat from his head. The hat is being blown down the street, but he is an old man, using a cane, and can't walk fast enough to catch the hat. Across the street a young man sees what has happened and rushes over to grab the hat and then returns it to the rabbi.

"I don't think I would have been able to catch my hat," said the rabbi. "Thank you very much." The rabbi then places his hand on the man's shoulder and says, "May God bless you."

The young man thinks to himself, "I've been blessed by the rabbi. This must be my lucky day!" So he goes to the racetrack and in the first race he sees there is a horse named Stetson at 20 to 1. He bets \$50, and sure enough, the horse comes in first.

In the second race he sees a horse named Fedora at 30 to 1. He bets it all and this horse comes in first also.

At the end of the day he returns home to his wife. When she asks him where he's been, he explains how he caught the rabbi's hat and was blessed by him and then went to the track and started winning on horses that had a hat in their names.

"So where's the money?" she asks.

"I lost it all in the ninth race," he explained. I bet on a horse named Chateau and it lost."

"**Chateau** is a house, you idiot; **Chapeau** is a hat!"

"Aw, it doesn't matter," he said, "the winner was some Japanese horse named Yarmulke."