

*Peregrine*

*Nations*

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**Art credits:** Amy Harlib (cover, 18), Alan White (masthead), Trinlay Khadro (3), Alexis Gilliland (5, 16), Brad Foster (11, 17),

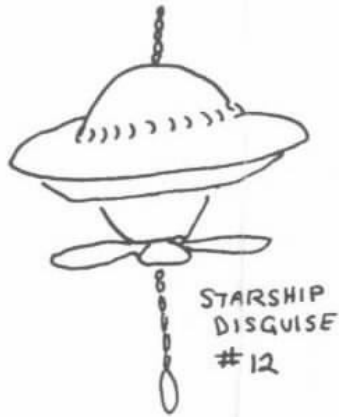
**This issue is dedicated to:** All the artists who've ever graced the pages of my fanzine with their considerable talent and imagination. I cannot thank each of you enough for your generosity, so I won't try, beyond a simple thanks. Please keep sending me your stuff!

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**Next editorial deadline: Oct. 10, 2007.**

***Peregrine Nations* supports HANA.**

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## Silent eLOCutions

*[Editorial comments look like this.]*

**Sheryl Birkhead**

I love the cover [PN 7.1] and faunch after both the ability and the know-how to create such nice stuff; thank you for getting and running it! *[On Lyne's behalf, I thank you.]*

Did you get a chance to see **Brad Foster's** cover for the first

issue of **John Purcell's** *Askance*? The guy has talent...and lots of it (then take a look at the cover for issue #2 by **Alan White**...sigh). *[Each of you have signature styles, Sheryl; yours is quite distinctive, so pat yourself on the back for me, eh?]*

I second...the enjoyment of **Lyn McConchie's** writings. It is always a pleasure to see something by her appearing in a zine.

**Brad Foster:** The majority of fanartist Hugo nominees are, for now, fanzine artists, with (as you point out) Frank Wu being the primary exception. One point up for current speculation is, how long (as the trend seems to be to go to electronic zines) will this be the case? As in the fanzine itself, looking at the requirements for nomination, artists who appear in the various venues listed there (but not in zines) are still eligible. It is ironic that the original roots were in fanzines but artists who display at conventions have a much wider audience than any *regular* fanzine ever had. Now that electronic zines are also in the running, that potential pool of readers is no longer limited by the paper circulation.

Perhaps **John Hertz** will consider doing some sort of

convention report for you after he makes the return from Japan. I am certain he will put out some sort of "formal" report, but hope he also provides some comments on the trip to other zines. *[Oh, I should be so lucky. John, I would genuflect many times in a westerly direction if you'd send something along these lines. Safe travels, good sir.]*

**Cy Chauvin**

Regarding your review of The Armies of Memory by John Barnes. I think you are right that even a series-ending novel should make you want to read the others, or at least be self-contained enough to be satisfying in and of themselves. But then I think of LOTR: could anyone read just read The Two Towers alone and get anything out of it? (And no, it's not the same, and still no excuse.) There is also the possibility that the series may be continued, and that's why the author's ending is so lackluster. Or maybe the reverse: the author planned to end the series earlier, but was asked to continue it by the publishers and readers. (Another example: the fourth Earthsea book was really quite weak, almost an afterthought.)

**Lyn McConchie's** review of Posted to Death by Dean James makes the book sound interesting (I'm a sucker for novels set in small English villages for some reason), but I have to wonder why an author would write a novel about a "vampire" who doesn't have to suck blood and stay in during the day? I mean, if you take away the characteristics of a vampire, what do you have left? (Now of course, I do understand that vampires might appreciate a drug that alleviates their blood sucking and day phobia!) Perhaps of course there is some reason, only Lynn left it out of her review.

I enjoyed the **Chuck Connors** travel piece (like you, perhaps, I'm a sucker for fan trip reports, or articles about life experiences in other countries, or even books about personal

travel experiences), although I liked the previous installment better because it seemed less negative. This is hardly his fault: he should tell it like it is. I'd read a book much earlier in the year which was about a journalist's travel experiences to the remaining British colonies, and Gibraltar was one of the ones visited, but Chuck's articles were far more vivid and real.

And on dividing or editing letters column by subject matter: certainly an advantage might be that the editor will quickly notice redundant comments, and delete them. This might result in a more pungent and hard-hitting lettercol (assuming that is one's goal!). But sometimes you lose more than redundant comments that way (the sum being more than the total of its parts), particularly if a loc writer is clever and stitches his letter together with with a running joke about vampires flocking to quiet English villages and sucking up fanzine trip reports instead of blood, or something silly like that!

**Brad W. Foster**

<http://www.jabberwockygraphix.com>

Interesting computer-collage cover, though I have to agree with what Lyne [Masamistu] herself said about this piece on her website. In regards to the large background, she noted it was a piece created by another artist, bob4artist, and she said when she added her signature, "... I think the sig should be AND bob4artist too! :) ..." It's like when I talk to kids about learning to draw or paint. There is nothing wrong with copying another artist to learn, but certainly don't then sign it as an original piece. That becomes more and more problematic with computer graphics, with so many things to copy-n-paste from. Lyne has a lot of good stuff on her site, but this piece really isn't an example of just her work. (The alien craft, which IS her work, is a killer piece of computer art. Like to see more of her core art, less of the composite stuff.) *[I can see your point.*

*I'll try to get more 100% Lyne for future covers.]*

Thanks for explaining that cover caption from the previous issue. Though your explanation of how "when you gonna make up your mind?" came to your head when reading about Hawking changing his views on a theory has me wanting to go a bit deeper: Is the Hawking piece one where he says he can see it both ways, or is not sure, or one where he has changed his views on something due to new evidence since he first formulated it? *[The latter, as I recall.]* The first might be an example of not making up his mind, but if he changed his opinion, he simply changed it.

Guess I'm sensitive on this point from hearing certain people whine about how other certain people "waffle", when it just means they came up with a new opinion, rather than holding onto an old, outdated idea come hell, high water, or new information.

Geez, what a whiny little loc. I'd better go do something good now! *[Eh, no big deal. You made valid points.]*

**Alexis Gilliland**

4030 8th St. S., Arlington, VA 22204 / June 21, 2007

Lyne Masamitsu's cover is well executed and nicely composed. A couple of comments: If the foreground is airless -- as the stars showing in daylight suggests -- the sky ought to be black and the stars sharply defined. The palette of colors she deploys is good, but she [could have included] a tiny spot of red (perhaps on the tri-legged machine) [to provide] a focus for the viewer's eye and [energize] the rest of the picture.

*[Hope the radiation treatments work, and more best wishes for a complete remission.]*

**Mark Plummer** makes a valid point about injecting your comments in the locs you publish. A long interjection sometimes makes it hard to follow the reader's comments. One

solution would be to use end notes, letting Mark, for instance, have his annotated say, with all you commentary at the end of the letter. *[Yes, and other faneds do so. I consider it a style issue, and as you see, will continue to stick my 2 cents' worth wherever I deem it should go.]*



### Lyn McConchie

Very pleased to see that so many people enjoyed "Murder in Much-Piddling-in-the-Marsh." **E.B. Frohvet** wondered how true to life many mysteries series are that are set in small rural villages and the quick answer is that some are, and some aren't. And if you live in a small village it can be quite easy to tell which is which. The Miss Seeton series started years ago by Heron Carvic (continued by Hampton Charles a.k.a. James Melville, and completed by Hamilton Crane a.k.a. Sarah J. Mason) is one of the genuine ones. I'd always thought so but in communication last year with Sarah I discovered something I hadn't known, that Heron Carvic had actually lived

for years in a small rural village in Kent and hence really did know what he was talking about. Something which explains how he got the background so very right.

But odd events occur in any small village. I am currently considering suing my next-door neighbor for paternity. She's a pleasant woman, but she appears unable to keep most of her animals on her own land, something which annoys all of us nearby. In the last few months I have had a phone call to say that my cow was out on the road. She wasn't, it was dusk and investigation showed that it was half a dozen cows and all from next door. Then a furious chap -- completely unknown to me -- hammered on my door and when I opened it delivered an angry lecture on keeping my dog off the road. That was next door's golden labrador, Bowen. And now this. *[I hope those people apologized.]*

I wandered out to feed the feathered creatures their evening meal and heard a loud chorus of agitated peepings from the shearing shed. I investigated, to discover that Gold-neck the bantam had hatched six chicks. How on earth had she managed that? I was currently without a rooster. This on the verge of winter and what was more, the idiot had hatched them in a large old deep box -- waiting for my friend to whom it belongs, to remove it -- on top of the old clothes dryer in a corner of the shearing floor. (Dryer is used as storage.) The chicks couldn't get down to join their mother and unless taken to floor level, would die quickly from starvation and thirst.

We then had an episode that would probably have made "America's Funniest Home Videos," of me trying to carry six chicks down a ladder, while fending off their furious mother who was convinced I had evil designs on them, and without dropping one of the tiny babies or falling off the ladder. I made it to the ground, returned the babies and took a deep breath. I then had time to look at them properly and blinked. Most of them were an odd shade of reddish/goldy-brown. Ah ha! Anne's mostly

bantam who is a red/gold had been spending a lot of time at my place this past few months. In fact I hadn't known he WAS a rooster for a fair while as he doesn't seem to crow... but apparently he does other things. And what do you bet that most of the six (if they survive the winter) turn out to be roosters as well -- after I've fed them for months in case they're hens. Oh, well. Village life. [*Free eggs!*]

**Joy V. Smith**

<http://journals.aol.com/pagadan/JoysJournal/>

Great cover! Mixed media? [*Sort of.*] Computer created? [*Yup.*] I enjoyed the artwork on page 3 also. (Was that flipped? Her name reads backward.) [*Whups! Sorry, Lyne!*]

Re: **Chuck Connor's** LOC, was Dennis Kitchen connected with Kitchen Sink Press? I have/had some of their comics. (I just went to look to see what I had left of my comic collection, but couldn't find them. All my books, etc. are scattered all over because we're putting in new floors, and I'm not reshelving everything so I can find stuff until we're done, and the bookcases are back in place. See my blog for my flooring project reports.)

Re: **Dick Ellingsworth's** LOC (cats and water), years ago I had a cat named Simba, and he would run forlornly back and forth in the rain until we called him into the house. Here's the door, Simba! (He wasn't our brightest cat.)

Re: **E. B. Frohvet's** LOC, I agree that Andre Norton's best work was earlier, and mostly I didn't care for all the wandering around in dreams.

Thanks to **Joseph T. Major** (LOC) for his Lovecraft quote. And I enjoyed the book reviews. A couple possibilities there.

I really, really enjoyed **Chuck Connor's** Gibraltar report. EEK! EEK! EEK! And curses on the beast... uh, miscreant who

stole his bike. I hope he and his new bike had a fun time together.

Re: Hugo nominees (your editorial), Michael Flynn's novelette "Dawn, and Sunset, and the Colours of the Earth," which uses online posts (some of which are from Flynn's AOL SF Author's folder, when he asked for contributions from folder regulars for the story {I'm Pagadan and Velvet}), which he integrates with posts from one of the story's characters, has been nominated for a Hugo. (Boy, I'd hate to parse that sentence.) Also his novel, Eifelheim, is nominated. Btw, the novelette is in the anthology, Year's Best SF 12.

I hope you've started your novel, whichever one you decide on. [*Not yet, but it's still on the list.*]

**WAHF:** E.B. Frohvet (not included here due to lack of time and editorial stupidity, many apologies; future locs will be put where they can be *found*; John Hertz (a USPS-mangled pocsacrd, but the gist was comprehensible), Paul Di Filippo (under deadline pressure, but he still sent a giftie, bless 'im).

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# *A Feast of Jackals:*

book reviews by divers hands

## **World War: In the Balance** by Harry Turtledove, 1994

I couldn't resist, although I knew it would be trash: This is an alternate history in which aliens invaded the earth in 1942, just after the United States enters World War II. The novel is told with the same multi-story split character method as the Greg Bear novel mentioned in my previous review, and suffers for the same reasons.

The threads of the novel cover the crew of the alien flagship; a couple of minor league baseball players; a Jewish family in Warsaw; the nuclear bomb project in Chicago; a couple of German tank commanders in German occupied Ukraine; the female pilot of a Russian biplane; and a Chinese woman whose village is invaded first by the Japanese and then by the aliens. The stories gradually become intertwined (to a degree, but this is only the first book in the series). Some stories are dull (Turtledove throws in some sex to try to spice things up, and then some spice too as an alien addictive drug), or are ones I don't care about, but I think I wanted to keep reading because of the story plots I was interested in: Those of the ball-players, the Chicago nuclear project, and the Russian biplane pilot.

The aliens were amusing in the beginning but became ponderous and terribly predictable. I am sorely tempted to read the next book in the series although I know it will be another sausage-link novel, and half of it at least will be nothing but sawdust. Alternate history novels are more interesting when they have bits of real history in them (I delight in the bits of

obsolete technology that Turtledove finds to defeat or discourage the technologically advanced aliens). And, of course, any novel is more interesting when they focus enough to have a few real, developed characters as well. ---Cy Chauvin

## **Bring the Jubilee** by Ward Moore, 1955

This is the classic sf novel of an alternate world in which the South won the Civil War. Or is this less a true classic, and more the first novel to exploit our interest in the past and in particular the Civil War? It seems that Harry Turtledove's novels have more detail, but Moore's novel is written in a more classic vein in that it is focused on one person (Hodge Backmaker) and how events affect him. It is also more science fictional in that nearly all of the novel is set in this alternate world, rather than a historical past with a few alterations.

The novel opens very well, in a rural pastoral setting; the remains of the United States is impoverished from paying reparations to the Confederate State of America, and because the U.S. has decided to restrict immigration and population growth. Many people indenture themselves to companies rather than seeking the risk of employment. Some of the details of the alternate world seem unlikely (electricity is not used except for telegraphs), but the gas lighting and steam-powered minibiles -- small, trackless locomotives -- give the alternate future a certain charm.

Somehow, I don't feel as impressed as I should be by the novel, maybe because I didn't have the time to read it straight through all at once. I had the rare feeling that the novel should have been longer; that the strongest female character, Barbara Haggerwells, is simply unconvincing in her irrational jealousy toward Hodge and other men; and the ending seems as though it could have been handled better (the major portion of the novel is revealed to have been a manuscript by a long time

family farm hand found in the attic, shortly after his death). And I don't think the novel has the real science fiction addictive *frisson* that good hard science fiction novels have in abundance, the stuff that makes you want to blow away the characters and just find out *what on earth is going on?* But the beginning is a real hooker: "Although I am writing this in the year 1877, I was not born until 1921. Let me explain." Hodge wants to be a historian. And the scenes set in Gettysburg, during the famous battle, have the perfect atmosphere and a repressed tension that makes you want to scream, "Get out of there, Hodge!"  
---Cy Chauvin

**Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell** by Susanna Clarke, 2005

As soon as I read what this book was about (a historical novel about two magicians, set in Jane Austen's time) I was intrigued; as soon as I read the first page (in some sort of pre-view advertisement), I knew I had to read the book; but when I saw (without warning) the actual 800 page bulk of the book at the store, I was stunned and left without buying it. Still, I overcame my shock.

Clarke's style is close to Jane Austen's (she even uses much of the same spelling, such as "surprized" and "chuse"), and the character's manners and speech take you to that time period, even if Clarke's characters are static and change little as the book progresses. The magical acts and events in the book are original and wonderful, and their attraction is so strong that (like the science in hard sf) anything that leads you away from the *faire* and the fantastic seem a distraction. I have never been fond of multi-plot, multi-characters novels, but Clarke's strands are less forced and seem natural for the size of the work.

The novel also has footnotes (which often contain side fairy tales or legends; some seem so mannered and "period" you wonder if the legends aren't ones Clarke found rather than invented) and illustrations. In a novel of this size, there is likely to be much that isn't necessary, and the story of Strange's second trip to Europe to fight Napoleon falls in that category, and the chapter about Mr. Norrell making Strange's new book disappear from bookshelves and customer's homes is simply silly.

The book gradually picks up intensity and focus in its latter half, the climax of the novel is really wonderful, as the two magicians work together (despite their dispute) to bring the Raven King back to England, and free Strange's wife from her enchantment in *Faire*. Stephen Black, the black butler, becomes king, Lost Hope is transformed, and the story has a crisp brittle blackness that makes you not want to stop despite nearly 800 pages. It most certainly deserved its Hugo award.  
--- Cy Chauvin

**Blindsight** by Peter Watts, 2006

Canadian SF writer Watts has ventured into outer space with this novel, which muses on what might occur if an extra-terrestrial civilization showed up to take our picture -- the entire Earth's picture, that is. Of course, it's not just a photo shoot and humans must find out who's behind it all. Someone is watching us, what's their intent? Do we shoot first or ask questions first? Are they comprehensible?

Kiri Seeton is a synthesist, a person able to read the surface communication clues of human body language and recognize the various patterns therein, and report back to his bosses on Earth what he learns. He's one of a decidedly different crew aboard a spacecraft sent to find what's at the source of a signal originating beyond Neptune, two months



post-photo event. His crewmates are a linguistic specialist who's been surgically induced with dissociative disorder (once known as multiple personality), a biologist who's more machine than man, a soldier who has a 'bot army at her beck and call thanks to an onboard fabricating plant (and a pacifist attitude about using them), and a vampire to run the show and be the intermediary between meat crew and the A.I. Captain. But not just any vampire. This one is *Homo sapiens vampiris*, which diverged from our line about 700,000 years ago, and lasted until the beginning of recorded human history. They were brought back by humans to do things human couldn't do, and humans made sure to leave in certain limiting factors like the Crucifix glitch (vampires have a severe aversion to right angles, and have to take medication to be able to go around in human areas due to all the right angles they see in those areas [buildings, primarily]).

There's more -- the aliens, the relationship between Siri and his crewmates, the creepiness of Jukka Sarasti, vampire. But none of the characterization is sacrificed to the science, which is as hard as steel and twice as deadly, the way Watts wields it. His exploration of consciousness and conscience, the possibilities of non-verbal communication and what we hide in what we say, and depiction of alien life that is completely different from anything I've read in other SF novels (they aren't even humanoid, and that's a rarity) produces a novel that is dense yet comprehensible, scary but hopeful (though the hope is a long shot), realistic and romantic. This is easily his best novel so far, and I am freaking nuts about the Rifters books. Get this book as soon as possible; it's worth experiencing.  
---J.G. Stinson

**This Witch for Hire** by Kim Harrison (omnibus edition, SFBC)

Bounty hunter and witch Rachel Morgan is Harrison's

series character in this first of two omnibus editions from the Science Fiction Book Club. This edition contains the novels Dead Witch Walking and The Good, the Bad, and the Undead.

Lyn McConchie reviewed the former of this pair in the Jan. '07 *PN*, and she didn't much care for it. Which proves the point that everyone has a different perspective, as I liked these novels and have the second omnibus edition already.

Granted, Morgan seems a bit witless at first, but then she's recently been canned from her job and has had to go into business for herself, and that would make anyone a bit witless for at least a little while. Having a vampire business partner who has serious bloodlust-restriction issues doesn't help her much, and a new boyfriend thrown into the mix during her first major investigation makes it even messier. But she's determined, I'll give her that.

Her blindered focus on her Baddie of the Week person gets onerous at times, and seems heavy-handed. But I like the mix of characters, and thought the suspense created between Morgan and her vampire associate was valid and believable. I liked the pixie, too. Blame it on Emma Bull; I thought War for the Oaks was great.

--- J.G. Stinson

**Diana Tregarde Investigates** by Mercedes Lackey [omnibus of Children of the Night (1990), Burning Water (1989) and Jinx High (1991)]

Diana Tregarde is Misty Lackey's supernatural detective (she has wizardly powers, calls herself a witch too), and I'd already read Burning Water in paperback, so I was eager to read the other two novels included here. Of the three, BW is clearly the best. Children is next best, introducing Andre the vampire and giving Diana's ex-lover, Dave Kendall, a courageous exit. The third novel is about as sophomoric as its title.

BW comes out on top because it employs Aztec and other indigenous religious myths from Central and South America, areas not often explored by U.S. fantasy writers.

## *Big Apple Bites*

by Jim Sullivan

Contrary to the experience of aspiring actors who come to the Big Apple to take a bite out of it but, instead, are ignored or, worse, bitten back, I found myself (just hours after arriving there) acting on national TV.

Don't get me wrong. I wasn't looking for fame, not even the 15 minutes that Andy Warhol talked about. Actually, I was just in New York, New York to sightsee. My life, until then, thanks to my basic shyness, has been one of avoiding the limelight at all costs.

I came to the city in the autumn of the year but the spring of my life. I was just 23, married to a young woman from Connecticut, and the proud father of a baby girl. My wife's relatives in Wethersfield, Conn., wanted to see our new child. So we obliged them, driving there from our home in Saginaw, Mich. My spouse's auntie agreed to babysit our daughter for a whole day if we wanted to go anywhere ourselves. And that's how we came to visit the Big Apple.

Boarding the *New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad's* passenger train, we rode across the state into New York. Upon arrival at Penn Station at 11 a.m., we took a cab to the U.N. Headquarters and enjoyed hearing, through interpreters, speakers from foreign lands.

A quick hotdog lunch nearby and another cab ride took us to Rockefeller Center. I wanted to see where the people skated in all the movies I'd ever seen about New York City. We followed that up by going to Radio City Music Hall to watch the Rockettes.

Afterwards, we toured the NBC Building. At the tour's conclusion, an NBC executive, judging by the fact that he wore a tie, came up to our group, perhaps 30 adults, not counting myself, and said, "We need extras for a courtroom scene at a trial on our popular soap opera, 'Young Doctor Malone.' Would any of you care to be on TV?"

Not surprisingly, several hands shot up. Some people raised both. I, however, kept mine at my side. Show business wasn't for me. But my wife raised one of my hands for me. And before I could drop it, we were all herded into a studio set and given stage directions.

First, no one was to smile while the camera was on us. That, I thought to myself, wouldn't be difficult. In addition, when the witness on the stand made dramatic revelations, which the director would cue us on, we were to turn to the person sitting next to us and move our lips, but say nothing. This, too, was okay with me because I couldn't have memorized a line if I had to. Anyway, a voice-over recording of humans, babbling on, would be used to give the semblance of our talking.

At this point, the director split us up, husbands from wives, friends from friends, and placed each of us in a particular courtroom seat. I was put on the far right of the first row. Three women were seated to my left, filling up the bench. My wife was placed elsewhere; I knew not the location until after the show.

Various "Young Doctor Malone" cast members kindly came over, one at a time, to chat with us courtroom volunteers. Details about the show and its characters were explained. The actors were humorous and put us, for the moment, at ease.

When the last cast member left, I got nervous all over again. I don't know about the others, though several were chewing their fingernails. After all, I was thinking, this show was going to be seen by millions of viewers. It was, in fact, my national debut. Certainly, I had good reason to be anxious.

Probably to calm down a little, we all got busy now groom-

ing ourselves: combing hair, putting on fresh lipstick, and the like. I, of course, only did the first, using the rest of my time to brush the dandruff from my clothing.

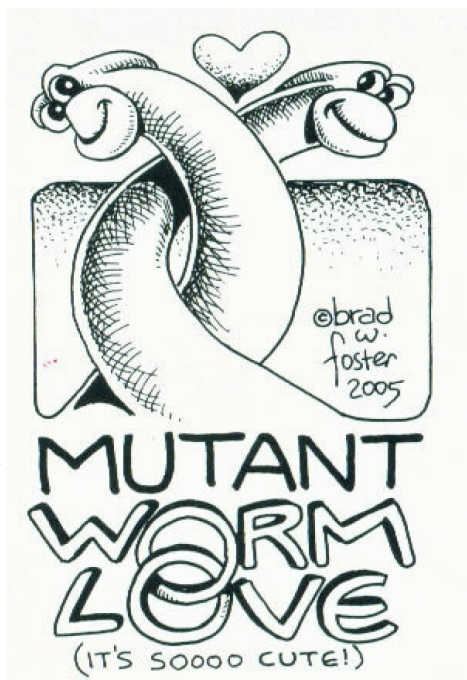
Finally, the TV cameras' red lights went on for the show to begin. And I was ready. But as I listened to the witness test-ify, my mind began to wander. Suddenly, it occurred to me, this might just be more fun than I thought it could be. As I mulled it over, I started to get exhilarated.

When the director cued us to turn to our neighbor and move our lips, I did so.

Admittedly, I made a tiny slip up. Turning to my right, I did what I was supposed to. Unfortunately, no one was sitting there.

Realizing my mistake, I spun around to my left and repeated myself, at least the lip movements. The woman sitting there, who'd apparently been pretending to talk to the back of my head, now got a startled look on her face, which I took to be a fine bit of acting for an amateur. Anyway, the camera's lights soon blinked off.

After the soap opera, my wife and I visited St. Patrick's Cathedral then walked around Times Square. While there, and being in a medical frame of mind, thanks to our recent TV work, we bought tickets to see the movie "The Young Doctors," starring Ben Gazzara and Dick Clark. We knew it probably wouldn't get to Saginaw for another six months.



When we returned to auntie's house in Wethersfield, it was after midnight, and everyone was asleep. Yet we had a difficult time containing our excitement. I also had a difficult time with my neck, which was horrifically stiff from staring up at all the skyscrapers in the Big Apple. But, putting all pain aside, we woke auntie, telling her, even before she could open her eyes, everything we'd done in the city, especially the part about "Young Doctor Malone."

Though she usually watched it, she said that she hadn't that day because our daughter had kept auntie very busy. So, for the next two hours, we regaled her with what she'd missed. Inadvertently, we woke our four-month-old daughter. I, therefore, picked her up and told her everything, too. I elaborated on how her mommy and daddy had been on a live, national TV show. Naturally, I did so in babytalk so she'd understand. But she didn't seem impressed. But then, neither bad auntie. Perhaps it was the late hour.

Our friends welcomed us back home to Michigan. But no one ever mentioned seeing us on "Young Doctor Malone." This dismayed us, for we couldn't really bring up the subject. Such talk would have been deemed bragging, which was strongly frowned upon.

Eventually, I called the network TV's local affiliate station. The manager verified that the particular soap-opera episode was aired locally. However, he added, it had been shown opposite the Yankees and Reds World Series game. I'd completely forgotten about that. No wonder no one saw us. Once more, the Big Apple had bitten back, only this time, my wife and I had been its victims.

Oh, well, a few months later, that TV show went off anyway. I trust it wasn't because of my acting mistake. In any case, since then, I've considered auditioning for a local play. Of course, it would have to be for a nonspeaking part. I think that's my acting strong suit.

## **A Personal Reflection: *In the Days of the Comet* by H. G. Wells**

by E. B. Frohvet

Mary Shelley notwithstanding -- Frankenstein was a singular event, not the beginning of a trend -- the true founders of science fiction were Verne and Wells.

Verne was a favorite writer of my childhood. It was not until my twenties that I actually started reading H.G. Wells, distinct from merely being vaguely aware of what he had done.

Wells' science fiction especially (in fact he abandoned that fairly early and spent his later years writing ponderous clunky mainstream novels now largely forgotten) has proven remarkably durable and plastic. I attribute this mainly to the scope of his ideas. Invisibility, time travel, antigravity, alien invasion -- if Wells did not entirely invent all of these out of whole cloth, he certainly did most to popularize them in the public mind.

In some ways the impersonality of Wells' books has contributed to their vigor. The characters are generally not memorable -- the central figures of The Time Machine and War of the Worlds don't even have names! (Don't take my word for it, look it up for yourself.) For this reason, it's fairly simple to extract the central idea, update the setting and characters to suit yourself, and proceed. As early as the 1930's, in the author's lifetime, Orson Welles adapted War of the Worlds as audio drama, injecting jazz, radio, and New Jersey, none of which appear in the original.

Wells' novels were also political; perhaps we had better say "sociopolitical." Wells was a socialist, a religious skeptic, with scant regard for usual custom. He was himself of common background. For all his popular and commercial success, he

was never a "gentleman" as English society defined it, and his resentment toward the establishment remained deep and bitter all his life. Of his early science fiction, at least, this is nowhere more apparent than with In the Days of the Comet.

Comet is by deliberate intent a heavy-handed, preachy book. More than the rest of Wells, it reads as a period piece, a picture of a society so distant as to be hard to grasp for the modern reader. (And yet, though the youth of today can barely imagine a world without the Internet, there are people still alive who can remember horse carts in the streets of major cities, and radio as a principal source of news and entertainment.)

More than half of Comet, 125 of 221 pages in the Bison/University of Nebraska "Frontiers of Imagination" series trade paperback, is a painfully detailed denunciation of Victorian/Edwardian society and its manifold injustices. This is the world in which H.G. Wells grew up, and he never forgave it. Fair enough, there was (and remains) much cruelty and callous indifference even in civilized countries; though the author seems content to pound incessantly on the negative, and not admit to any virtue at all in his own world. All this takes place a century and thousands of miles removed from me: a place nearly as alien as Burroughs' Mars.

So why is it that of all Wells' science fiction, this is the one that resonates for me, the one to which I feel an immediate connection, however strained, lacking in the others?

I think it's because this tale, the most autobiographical of the author's SF, brings with it a degree of human involvement that lifts it above its many real shortcomings. The story is told in first person from the viewpoint of Willie Leadford, with the gimmick that it is actually recounted as the 73-year-old man looking back to his early life before the Great Change. The elder Leadford professes to be "out of touch with my youth," but in fact he reconstructs his life prior to the Change in such detail of his misery that, as Ben Bova says in his introduction, "I can-

not imagine anyone wanting to be Willie Leadford.”

The youthful Willie was a rebel with a cause: he says of his early life that, “It was a life hardly worth living... It was a life in which contentment would have been disgraceful.” Yet he was also too much a loner, too caught up in the self-pity of his personal grievances, to be an activist on any broader scale. If the narrowness of Willie’s vision is more pitiful than admirable, it is also more realistic and identifiable. Thus I would take issue with Bova’s statement to this extent, that while I would never have wanted to be Willie Leadford, still I felt more empathy toward him than to any other Wells character.

The one positive in Willie’s life was Nettie. She herself understood that she was his promised reward, “. . .better than anything he had ever had.” He needed her desperately, far more than she needed him. When Nettie [SPOILER ALERT] ran away with someone else, not merely another man, but one of the spoiled rich gentry who were to Willie the hated source of all evil in his bitterly circumscribed life, it was more even than a personal betrayal. It was a class betrayal, and the “final straw” that pushed Willie over the edge. (Yet his plan to track down and murder Nettie and her lover, and then kill himself, however mad, was too methodical, too well planned and carried out, to be the product of a true psychotic break. It was not so much a complete loss of control, as intolerable rage channelled in a direction he knew was crazy, but just didn’t care any more. Everyone has their limits.)

If at this point you’re thinking it can’t get any worse -- well [SPOILER ALERT again], you’re right. Enter the Change, turning the entire story upside down as the gaseous comet collides with Earth and alters the atmosphere. To agree with Bova, this gimmick, for which Wells has provided the reader a bare minimum of preparation, is a *deus ex machina*, a convenient miracle the author simply pulled out of his hat. It requires the reader to make a major paradigm shift. And

another when you recognize the inherent negativity of the premise: Wells concluding that only a miracle can save humanity from itself.

Yet the Change manages to avoid alienating the reader’s interest altogether, to the extent that it’s a miracle but not a perfect miracle. Everything is better but everything is not perfect. Nettie acknowledges that she still thinks her abandonment of Willie was “treachery”. Willie has not forgotten, and continues to feel guilt over, his poor treatment of his ageing mother. A very minor character, old Mr. Pettigrew the landlord who refused to fix the leaking roof of Willie’s mother’s shabby house, bravely faces up to his shortcomings: “I’m ashamed.”

Even after the Change, even as the world (or England: Wells seldom appeared much concerned with events beyond England) is re-made, Willie admits to feeling “enormous melancholy” when he thinks of Nettie. And once he hears from his dying mother a strange and pitiful tale utterly new to him, of the sister he might have had, who died as a toddler before he was born; and goes off in a “black rage”, grieving not merely the particular loss, but all the wasted lives and needless deaths. Even as he writes of it decades later he adds, “Indeed that old spirit of rebellion has not altogether died in me...”

If even in Utopia we cannot be entirely happy, what’s the good of it?

Of course I get it. It is precisely that absence of perfection that enables the story to retain its humanity: This is a tale about Earth, not about Heaven. And my own attitude regarding the book has changed over the years. It is now Willie’s reasoned resignation, more than his inchoate anger, that I find more admirable.

H.G. Wells’ other science fiction books interest me for their ideas. In the Days of the Comet, despite all its flaws, is the one I care about.

# Granite Of The Apes, Part 3

## Gibraltar in the 1990s

by Chuck Connor

The weather's getting a lot warmer these days (thankfully) from the winter chill of 9 or 10° of an afternoon -- though it still has to be said that La Vantias (La Vantii?) are still hanging around the top of the Rock and the nights, after midnight, take on an almost frost-inducing cold. The rains have sort of come and gone -- though with so little rain this year it looks like general water rationing will be in force. That's where the local Police Force use lengths of hosepipe on the civilians who have been using theirs. The sewage system out here is via salt water (and yes, there are two kinds of plumber out here, one for either system, but not for both) but I'm overshooting myself here. First let me describe the flat where I'm living at the moment.

Well, first off, I should really be living in barracks, but as the mess and quarters are under contract for refurbishment the mess members (those not married accompanied, the singlies and the livers in) were moved out into the joys of Britannia House.

I suppose that what we have is considered better than what we could have had in Rooke, but when you realise that the flats we are in were designed and built in 1965 and show every single day of their 30 years' existence, then you can start to appreciate that things are not all that they could be.

Take, for example, the doors. Once upon a time there were carpets which had a fair thickness of underfelt to them. To accommodate this the bottoms of the doors were sawn so that the doors could work properly. Now, what with budget cuts and the like the new carpet has been installed without underfelt. Yea! Let's hear it for modern technology that they can produce man-made fibres that don't need to be protected from the concrete floors on which they rest. And let's also hear it for the drafts that now come rocketing between the bottom of the doors and those self same carpets.

Okay, so a little wind never hurt anyone (even after a large

lunch) but when you consider that we are somewhat exposed here, and that a gale warning can be issued for the centre of town (no wind barriers so it's gale warnings down the highstreet) you'd appreciate that these things are funny only the first time.

The flats are two-bedroom, sep. bath/toilet, lounge, kitchen, sep. utils room and a hall (sorry, read long passageway). It's been stripped out which has meant that Topsy (the other singlie I'm sharing with at the moment) and I have been making like a pair of Romany Businessmen scrounging furniture, fixtures and fittings. This has served to highlight how much people tend to leave behind when they move. I have a fair range of china and glass now, cutlery is no problem (though it seems that such things as kitchen knives are kept, which means I'm still having to make do with just two little kitchen devils — wicked little things, but all I could get my hands on out here). There is even a gas heater (without gas bottle, alas — they are expensive and refillable out here which makes them attractive for resale) which Martin Simpkins (in Flat 5) asked if we wanted. I said yes, and set about repairing it for flogging off on the NAAFI Notice-board once they have gone (and once the colder weather comes again) — well, I think it's a little impolite to make money out of something someone else has given you, isn't it? Especially when they are still around to tell people that they gave it to you for free in the first place....

So, we have things like a fridge, a small cooker (two small rings, a tiny oven, but it does the business), 2 kettles, a toaster, 2 steam irons, 2 Hoovers (very important items those!) and a washing machine. The TV is rented (splashed out and bought myself a video machine to help with the OU, so there are now a fair few tapes kicking around) the wall clock runs fast, the smoke detector hasn't worked since Topsy hit it with a broom handle (don't worry, I'll come to that later), the toilet handle is broken, there are drafts around the bath that I cannot find the source of.

I also bought myself a radio-cassette machine (I cannot survive without the ability to listen to something while I work — after 20 years it's a bit difficult to break the habit now) and joined the local library, which is a two minute walk away from Brit. House, if that. I had to buy a fan (expensive out here in some respects; this is one of the things I couldn't buy and smuggle over the border) but we now

seem to have acquired another two and what I'm going to do with my one in the UK I don't know (nope, I'm not leaving it here! For one thing it still works!)

But making do seems to be the way of life out here. Before I acquired the cooker I was in Flat 7 with a guy called Phil Lampton (a Sgt. Bandmaster, Royal Marines), a little guy of no fixed hair colour who had a wonderful sense of humour but had been sheltered for too long by married life. The person who had Flat 7 before us was Jill Dawson (a woman? Well, almost, if rumour be true — slap my legs!) who had a microwave rather than a cooker proper. She left an old Rowenta 4-slice toaster which, with a little bit of encouragement and a non-stick T-Fal pan, I was able to do noodles, pasta and other basics on. Yes, cooking on a toaster is easy once you have the settings worked out.

Phil didn't really understand this concept, and it wasn't until one Friday lunchtime did he finally get twitchy about being in the Kitchen. You see, basic cooking can also mean boil-in-the-bag stuff, and as there wasn't quite enough transference of heat with the toaster to keep water boiling continuously, it was just a case of getting a bag of something (in this case it was a cod fillet in white sauce), boiling the kettle, taking the lid off, dropping the bag in, putting the lid back on and then regularly re-boiling it (my 'simmer' mode) for however long it was supposed to take to cook.

Whatever, come this particular Friday I'm off shift and doing lunch and in walks Phil. I'm in the lounge watching TV (cup of coffee, feet up on the sofa, watching some soap opera on TV — the whole housewife thing in fact) so don't know what he's up to until he lets out a squeal as the corner of my cod fillet bag pokes itself out of the spout of the kettle while he's trying to make himself a cup of tea.

For the remainder of his stay at Flat 7 he treated the kitchen as if it were a boobytrap zone. Hell, I didn't complain about him dismantling saxophones all over the place, did I?

He went back to the UK at the end of last year and I got given Topsy for Christmas (which was also about the same time I went out and got Beatrice Lily — a Dutch *Spatiphyllum* — who throws up large white flowers (single petal 'cups') which seem to be very prone to the vicious atmosphere out here. Poor thing was badly pot-bound when I got it and I've tried to save it beyond the usual Christmas time flow-

ering period. So far it is growing and throwing up two more blooms, so I think it might just be a success!

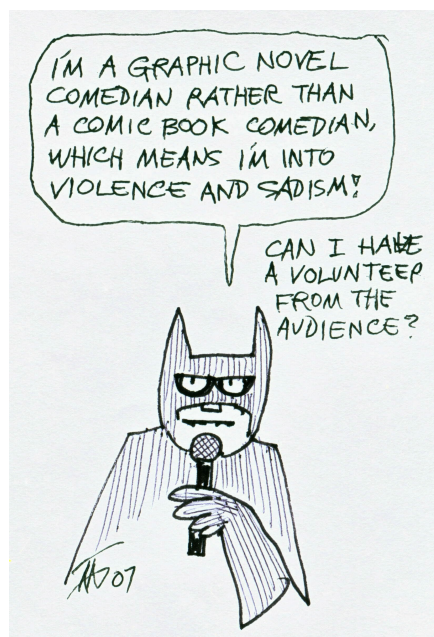
Then, of course, we had to move from Flat 7 over to Flat 13 — 'The Flat From Hell' (c'mon, even the number on the front door is put on skewed, as if the guy was pissed out of his skull when he put it on in the first place) — well, I had to arrange the move, and do most of it myself, mainly as Topsy had a 'previous engagement' and didn't really want to break it. Thanks, bastard, and for your next vanishing trick?

Topsy's not that bad a person, though I have to admit that he's certainly showing a lot of Northern Man traits (he comes from Glasgow, I think, though seems to be carrying a cross [aren't we all?! Sorry!]) between Mancunian & Geordie accents. I think, as a child, he was viciously abused by a bowl of washing up, mainly as he rarely goes near it (except to add teaspoons after using them only once — why?!) and has difficulties in the concept of drying up after himself. Okay, so I'm no saint and I know for a fact that my teacup is so caked with residue that it makes him gag, but things like hoovering once a week, washing the kitchen floor now and again (it's tiled in lino) or wiping down the toilet seem to appear to him to be 4th dimensional abstract concepts.

Yes, he does a lot of good around the place — he normally goes out and gets the newspapers (true, it's either *The Sun*, *The Daily Star* or *The Mail* — six of one & half a dozen of the other, as they say), gets bath cleaners, gets Andrex toilet tissue (as opposed to just nicking it from work), is a nice guy to know and we get on well together. But, for practical things, he leaves a lot to be desired.

A classic example is that when the handle broke on the toilet cistern — hey, it only took 4 weeks for someone to come and look at it — and you were left with a choice of either using what was left of the handle (simple enough, no big engineering concepts here) or taking the lid off the cistern and activating it by hand. The problem with this method was the ill-fitting water spigot, which allowed water to escape in an upward direction instead of down into the tank. Prior to the handle breaking off, this shower of salt water was contained by the lid. Can you now see the flaw in taking the lid off and operating the flush manually? Topsy bloody well couldn't, and I'm damned if *I'm* going to be the one to shift all the salt crystals from off the walls. The





amazing thing is, having removed the lid seemed to be the easy part, putting it back on was beyond him.

I suppose the one consolation is that we don't have those little 'tiffs' or 'domestics' that marrieds have (PMS? You ain't seen or heard nothing when I get a bitch on.)

Whatever, the block of flats is set almost on the roadside, and on a particularly nasty blind bend. Some evenings we have spent helping out at accidents that occur with frightening regularity on this stretch of road. A lot of it is caused by the unregulated mopeds driven by any gormless geek with no road sense (okay, so that also encompasses a lot of drivers

as well, but let's just keep to one brand of thick animal at a time, okay?). The cyclists are careful out here because of the road conditions, but the scooter drivers are forever overtaking on the inside and outside, barging into gaps (I've lost count of the amount of times I have been in slow-moving traffic and had to slam the brakes on because some mush-head on a Honda Vision has cut me up on the wrong side), riding three-abreast chatting to each other, white line riding down the centre of the road — all stupid tricks that look good to someone with only one braincell to play with. No, this time it's mopeds, *next* time it'll be the turn of the motorists. I am, at present, contemplating getting a copy of Beethoven's 9th, 4th movement (sung in German, naturally), slapping it on the car tape machine, and have it blaring away when one of those little sides starts coming alongside me — and crank up the volume as I force the little cretin into the path of oncoming traffic.

Anyway, there is a nice view from the front of the flat — mostly of deserted dockyard to the left and an abandoned power station on the right, but at least it's a view. There is a fine block of flats on some

of the reclaimed land which have even better views than ours — theirs looks into the opposite block of flats' lounges. Supposed to be better than television. Out the back we have a nice view of the Gibraltar schools' Hockey Pitch (tarmac'd — the only grass around here comes in little baggies and gets sold for £'s per ounce) which is nice if you've just come off the night shift and love the sound of 'screamers'. During the summer months it does have the advantage of being a perfect vantage point for admiring those lovely Mediterranean teenage schoolgirls (but that's enough of that for the moment...). Looking up from the pitch is the rest of the Rock, which, as views go, isn't that depressing — though I have to admit that the whole thing looks much better from over the boarder from the Spanish side.

Still, all in all, despite the doors that don't close because of the thickness of the paint, the cramped bathroom where the shower is designed for midgets — or normal sized people to wash only the lower halves of their bodies (oddly enough, we had a broken glass in the multi-window we have in the bathroom [bit like the old Venetian blind using glass] and it wasn't until several days had gone by did Topsy realise he was exposing himself to the people in the office blocks across from the Hockey pitch. Me? I stick to baths and sod the water shortage), the washing machine that vibrates more than Shirley Valentine's ("It's the spin-rinse cycle that's the best."), dust pollution that you could polish diamonds with (knocks the guts out of white cotton in less than 24 hours, no joke) and prices that make you wonder where the world has really gone to (it'd be cheaper for me to smoke and drink myself to death than to try and buy food on a regular basis), the place isn't so bad. Quirky and infuriating at times, but aren't we all?

Consider the concept of a car chase in Gibraltar. On one side you have the open sea and the shoreline, on the other you have a big lump of rock. Roads are poor quality at best, and most of the roads (when not leading nowhere) go round and round (or up and over as the case may be.) Car insurance is minimal (normally just Third Party) so big cars (the GTI's, the Turbo's etc). are there for status only — a bog-standard 1.6 is wasted power in 99.9% of the places, and the other 0.1% is inaccessible by road anyway.

Got all that? Good. Now cop this.

I've mentioned before that my 'mate' Victor has done a bunk. He apparently got out while the going was good, for we seem to be entering into what I can only describe as a gang war, but with some weird rules of engagement.

I'm not sure how it started, nor how long the undercurrents have been building, but a couple of nights ago three of the big Winston Runner boats (smuggling craft) were liberally treated to a petrol bath and a baptism by fire. They got torched — the marina is only about 500 yards away from our front window and that kind of display was somewhat eye-catching.

Okay, we thinks (the we in this case are the people around Brit. House and the mess in Rooke) so there's been a bit of non-payment or a bit of a power struggle. It now transpires that several 'underlings' (Mr. Perez, the supplies guy for Rooke, used certain expressions I shall not repeat here) in one of the rival gangs took it upon themselves to try for a bit of promotion and torched some of the opposition. Normally this sort of thing would have been dealt with by the police, but family connections are known to hold sway in many respects. Very much a case of not what but who you know. So little was done — apart from gathering up the two geeks who committed the act and locking them up for their own protection.

That was until this morning (27/April/95) when, even before bail had been set, the police let the two out of prison on the promise that they would appear for the trial when the date was known.

The two 'boys' were brothers (the De Rosso family) and no sooner had one stepped off the prison steps than his face was re-arranged with the aid of a boat oar. Said oar was, apparently, broken in two on the first swipe, and the gentleman doing the swiping then tried to stab the poor brother through the chest with the broken shaft.

Not to be outdone, the second De Rosso brother legs it, steals a car, and starts to head a 6 car 'train' that goes chugging through all the lights down Queensway (impressive as one double set involved some roadworks as well) around Catalan Bay, and is destined to run on through the major tunnel except that someone (as yet unnamed) had their brand new Merc limo and themselves pointed in the opposite direction.

One head-on crash later and the Merc is shoved up the side of

the Rock (and if they get enough bits to put it back together again, I shall be impressed) while De Rosso's car has its back end over the edge of the cliff barrier supposedly like the ending of "The Italian Job." Trouble is, De Rosso manages to get out and starts running for places unknown, rapidly followed by the contents of the other five cars — the cars themselves are now abandoned in the middle of the road causing all sorts of problems for the police and the ambulance (who decide to turn up to treat the driver of the Merc — most probably for disillusionment amongst other things....)

So, as I type this into the machine, one of the De Rosso brothers is in hospital under intensive care (as Mr. Perez says "His mother, she won't f\*cking recognise him again!") and the other one is still on the lamb somewhere either on the Rock, or done a runner over to Spain with a forged passport (about £35 to £40 for a cheap red Euro thing, normally nicked off one of the passing tourists and with the photograph changed or just altered.)

The remarkable thing is, in this day and age of the Uzi, the one-shot .38 'long' single-shot zip-gun, and the S&W clones coming in from the Eastern European countries, not a single firearm was used or brandished about. Knives, machetes and the like, yes. Guns? No, where's the fun in that?

As the Gibraltarian government says "Smuggling is not a problem in Gibraltar."

## Will the Real Swamp Thing Please Stand Up?

I figure I've run that headline enough times that readers know this is the editorial column of *PN*, so I'm dispensing with the subhead.

I hadn't completely read through the file Chuck Connor sent me, so I didn't realize until this that "Granite of the Apes" has six parts. Since the first



two installments were well-received, I'll be running the entire series in future issues. Thanks, Chuck, for the idea and the material.

Fanac has been a major element of my days in the last two months. After climbing out of the Hole of Despond that appeared last January (took til late May to do that), I looked around and said, "Holy sh\*t! Lookit all the stuff I let lapse!" So I've been rabbitting through it all, and with this of PN, I have one more task left on the fanac to-do list and I can rest a bit. That'll be about 24 hours, after which I have to kick into high gear to get ready for the September 9th craft show that's part of Manistee's Port City Festival. Oi, the things I do to keep myself busy!

So, since the beginning of the year, I've edited and designed two issues of the N3F fanzine, same for PN, co-edited SET #6, caught up my eAPA fanzine *Slow Blog*, decided to revive the C.J. Cherryh journal *Ribbons* (it'll be available as a PDF only on efanazines.com, but paper copies can be had on an as-asked-for basis from me for \$3 a copy), and gone to Penguin in April. Yes, I have been a busy little fan.

On the personal front, visits to a therapist continue, and are worth doing so. The local July 4th celebrations and annual Forest Festival were occasions to get out and about, and I did so. Did some rock-picking on the Lake Michigan shore by its confluence with Magoon Creek, and just sat and watched the water glide over the sand in waves for a while. That was when I realized I'd been indoors way too much.

Writing has happened every day, most times, but not always for payment purposes, as the fanac list above attests. But I've managed to get three reviews pubbed in *NYRSF* so far this year, and if *IROSF* comes back from its summer hiatus, my latest interview with Hugo nominee Peter Watts will be in their next issue (and I hope it's pubbed before the Hugo awards, otherwise I'll have to revise it). Other markets are available, but

I haven't tried them yet, being occupied with fanac catch-up (no fries with that, thanks).

No fanzine review column this, sorry, but instead, a list of fanzines received and enjoyed: *Argentus* 6, *Askance* 1-3, *Alexiad*, *Banana Wings* 28-30, *De Profundis* 408-414, *Fanzine Fanatique Winter & Spring*, *File 770* #150, *Finland*, *Knarley Knews* 122-124, *Plokta*, *Procrastinations*, *Tortoise* 24, *Vanamonde* (many), *Way*, *Weirdness Before Midnight*. I have others yet to read, including *el* 31, *Pixel* 12-15, *No Award* 16, and *Visions of Paradise* 115. I can't keep up with Chris Garcia any more, so I read an issue of *The Drink Tank* every now and then.

I'm out of book reviews, so anyone who wants to review any SF, fantasy, horror or mystery novels, collections, or anthologies can send them to me. See the colophon for details. Any of my readers are also welcome to send in a fanzine review column if they feel so inspired, as I may not have time to do mine for every issue.

Until the leaves begin their riot of color, I bid you adieu.

