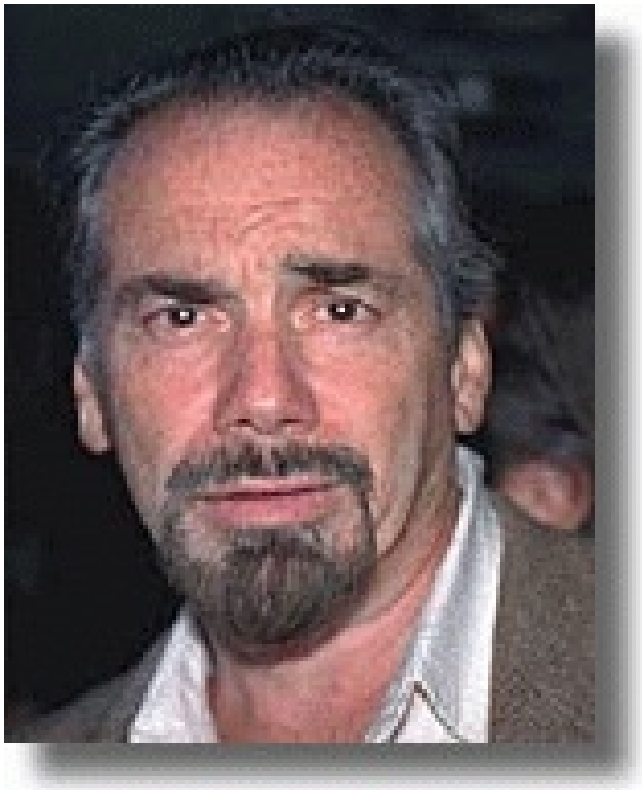
Visions of Paradise #103



50 Wondrous Years of Robert Silverberg

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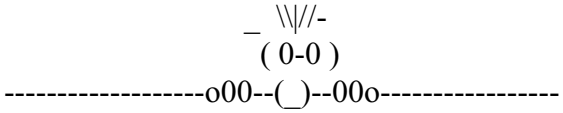

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Out of the Depths

I first published **Visions of Paradise** as a college student participating in APA-45, whose membership was restricted to youngsters born no earlier than 1945. Most of those youngsters, myself included, have passed fifty years old now.

I published the original run of **VoP** for three years before deciding that writing nonfiction was not how I wanted to spend my life. I devoted the next fifteen years exclusively to writing science fiction. I spent no time on either fannish writing or socializing. That determination lasted through five novels and dozens of pieces of short fiction, whose resounding lack of success eventually convinced me that perhaps I was more suited to writing nonfiction than fiction.

I returned to nonfiction in two ways. In the past fifteen years I finished two nonfiction books and revived **VoP**, first as a bi-monthly zine for MIShAP, then as a quarterly for FAPA. A few years ago I also started two blogs as a way of keeping in touch with my readers and friends on a more frequent basis than just quarterly.

During this fifteen year period I have written less than one science fiction story per year. Recently my urge to return to fiction writing has grown stronger. Briefly I considered discontinuing both **VoP** and the two blogs entirely and devoting myself to writing fiction again. But I dismissed that idea since I enjoy writing nonfiction as much as I do fiction, and I also enjoy the social aspect of people reading my writing and commenting on it, whether through mailing comments or locs.

So my compromise is cutting back the frequency of **VoP** from quarterly to semi-annually. That will cut my workload considerably, hopefully giving me time to work on fiction inbetween. As for the blogs, I only post them twice a week, and nearly all their contents are either revised for **VoP** or are edited from the zine. It is really little extra work with the advantage of keeping me in frequent contact with a lot of people. And anybody who enjoys my writing and cannot wait six-months to get a fix of it–God help the poor souls!– can continue to read my blogs in the interim. One bit of bad news for John Hertz and other "Reunite Gondawandaland" fans: because issues of **VoP** will be less frequent, I anticipate the issues will be larger and thus generally subdivided into two-volume issues Sorry, John ☺.

*

Much modern f&sf falls into the category of *slipstream*, which is one of several names for fiction which walks the border between mainstream and f&sf. It appears frequently in original anthologies such as **Polyphony, McSweeney's Enchanted Chamber of Astonishing Stories**, **Trampoline**, and Small Beer Press's semi-annual prozine **Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet**. While those collections contain some very fine stories, and probably some of the best writing in f&sf, I often finish reading such books with a vague sense of dissatisfaction. It took me awhile to figure out what caused me to feel that way. It was not because of the stories themselves. While not all of them were worthwhile reading, I have grown used to erratic quality in anthologies and

prozines alike.

Eventually I realized the problem was that slipstream stories are invariably set in the present time. I began reading science fiction decades ago as a way of escaping the contemporary world in which I lived and where I was not particularly happy. To some extent that is still the reason I enjoy fantasy and science fiction, even though my dissatisfaction is no longer with my local world but with the greater world at large. The fact that my second favorite fiction is historical fiction tends to support this theory. As far as I can see, there are basically four settings for f&sf.

The first setting is the past. While this tends towards historical fantasy and alternate history, some pure science fiction is set in historical times (time travel stories such as **Lest Darkness Fall**, for example).

The second setting, and my least favorite, is the present time: alien beings make their first appearance on Earth (Clifford D. Simak's **Way Station**); cutting edge technology makes an incredible breakthrough (**Frankenstein** and its offspring); urban fantasy; rural fantasy. For other examples, read any issue of 1950s **Galaxy** and you will be inundated with sf set in the world at that time.

The third setting, and perhaps the least common, is settings outside the real world entirely. This tends to be primarily fantasy rather than sf, but not exclusively. Where is **Lord of the Rings'** Middle Earth? Or **Gormanghast**? Or Phil Farmer's **Riverworld**? Do any of them take place in the world as we know it, whether past, present, or future?

The final setting, and my personal favorite, is the future. This is the traditional setting for science fiction, and gives the authors the most gist for their creative processes. It ranges from near-future cyberpunk to far-future end-of-the-world settings (Jack Vance's **Dying Earth** and Gene Wolfe's **Book of the New Sun**). It includes many sub-genres of science fiction, such as future history (stories about how civilization develops due to evolutionary or technological changes); world-building, both the Hal Clement "hard science" type and the sociological/ anthropological/political types of Kim Stanley Robinson, C.J. Cherryh and Ursula K Le Guin; space opera; planetary romances.

I have no pithy conclusions to end this discussion, just another comment that fantasy and science fiction really do have something for every reader, even so-called "literary" readers, as the slipstream anthologies show. And since that symmetry is probably as good a closure for this discussion as possible, I guess I'll stop right here.

*

The gulf between genre f&sf and mainstream literature has always been a wide one, with some writers, critics and fans on both sides of the gulf trying to bridge the gap while others building fences intended to keep the evildoers on their own side. But not all "literary" writers are automatically prejudiced against "genre" fiction.

One person who is actively trying to bridge the gap between genre and mainstream is Michael Chabon. According to his interview in the December, 2004, **Locus,** he grew up loving fantasy and comic books, two loves which he has neither abandoned nor disavowed in light of becoming the darling of the *literati*. His novel **The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay** was a wondrous evocation of comic books. After that novel won a Pulitzer Prize, Chabon followed his own muse. He published **Summerland**, a young adult fantasy, edited two original anthologies intended to blend literature and genre fiction, **McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales** and **McSweeney's Enchanted Chamber of Astonishing Stories**, and wrote the script for a comic book series based on **Kavalier and Clay,** *The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist.*

But Chabon is apparently not yet finished blending genre and non-genre. A few months ago sfnal blogs were all a-flutter over the announcement that Chabon is editing this year's edition of the prestigious **Best American Short Stories**, and that he has put his reputation squarely where his beliefs are by selection three genre short stories for the volume: Kelly Link's "Stone Animals," Tim Pratt's "Hart and Boot," and Cory Doctorow's "Anda's Game." While the first two could safely be disguised as slipstream, the last story fits squarely in the middle of the sf genre.

Recently I read an interview with Kazuo Ishiguro, another award-winning literary author, whose newest novel **Never Let Me Go** falls in the genre/lit overlap area. About halfway through the interview, the interviewer popped the big question: "Some reviews have called this book science fiction. What do you think of that label?" I gritted my teeth and plowed into Ishiguro's response:

"I don't really know what you'd call this book, but I have nothing against science fiction. There is a pulp version of science fiction, but there are also many distinguished versions. Some of the greatest movies have been science fiction, like Fritz Lang's **Metropolis** or Stanley Kubrick's **2001: A Space Odyssey**."

Ironically, right beside the interview was a review of the new collection of essays and reviews by Margaret Atwood, who has previously hinted that science fiction is beneath her. In the middle of that article the reviewer mentions that her reviews in the book "include appreciations of the more interesting thriller writers, both contemporary and in the past, such as H. Rider Haggard and Elmore Leonard; a biographical musing on Dashiell Hammett, the prince of the mystery story; and reviews of some science fiction, notably that of Ursula K Le Guin."

Does this mean that Atwood's attitude is mellowing as her works increasingly cross the great divide? A recent article by Atwood in **The Guardian** has the subtitle "Margaret Atwood on why we need science fiction," and seems to show that she has come around from her earlier denials of writing anything resembling that evil sci-fi! Ishiguro and Chabon probably would approve of that. So do I.

*

It is highly unusual for me to write a conreport since I have attended three conventions total in the past 24 years. But this year Lunacon, the regional convention sponsored by the New York

City-based fan group the Lunarians, was held at the Sheraton Hotel in the Meadowlands, which is less than an hour away from me. Email from fellow FAPAn Peggy Rae Sapienza encouraged me to attend it, so I decided to give it a try. But only for a single day, since I did not want to give up an entire weekend of schoolwork.

I arrived at the hotel about 10:00 in the morning. I immediately went to the Dealers' Room to browse the f&sf books, which is always one of my favorite parts of a convention. They had Sean Stewart's new novel **Perfect Circle**, which I had never seen in a bookstore since it was published by Small Beer Press instead of a major publisher. So I bought it eagerly.

I attended 5 panel discussions, which were all moderately interesting: Guest of Honor Michael Swanwick was on a panel comparing how writers, sculptors, musicians, and costumers tell the same story different ways; **F&SF** editor Gordon Van Gelder was on two panels, one about the decline of the prozines (which everybody blamed on the collapse of the magazine distribution companies in recent decades), and the other about what editors are looking for; another panel was a discussion of alternate history and historical fantasy.

The fifth panel was supposedly a discussion of contemporary fanzines, but only three people showed up: John Hertz, Ed Meskys, and me. John was very friendly and chatty, so the three of us discussed fanzines for an hour. That was the highlight of my day, since I rarely get to discuss any of my sfnal-related interests in person, nor do I meet members of my mailing list very often. It was worth attending Lunacon for the time I spent with John and Ed.

The only disappointment was I never found Peggy Rae anywhere, but at least that gives me something to look forward to doing next year when I go back.

*

*The **VoP** f&sf quiz:* How many stories can you identify from their first lines? Answers on page 29.

1	Jarvis stretched himself as luxuriously as he could in the cramped general quarters of the *Ares*.
2	Aton 77, director of Saro University, thrust out a belligerent lower lip and glared at the young newspaperman in a hot fury.
3	Carson opened his eyes and found himself looking upward into a flickering blue dimness.
4	"This is a slightly unusual request," said Dr. Wagner, with what he hoped was commendable restraint.
5	Dr. Strauss says I shud rite down what I think and evrey thing that happins to me from now on.

6	I was busy translating one of my *Madrigals Macabre* into Martian on the morning I was found acceptable.
7	When the man came to the F & O Bike Shop, Oscar greeted him with a hearty “Hi, there!”
8	Hiram Taine came awake and sat up in his bed.
9	There are always those who ask, what is it all about?
10	Toward the end of a stormy summer afternoon, with the sun finally breaking out under ragged black rain clouds, Castle Janeil was overwhelmed and its population destroyed.
11	Un and Sub, the giants, are grinding him for bread.
12	Roum is a city built on seven hills.

*

50 Wondrous Years of Robert Silverberg

1936 Born January 15 in New York City
1954 First published with "Gorgon Planet"
1955 First novel **Revolt on Alpha C,** a juvenile, published
1956 Receives Hugo Award as Most Promising New Author
1962 First collection **Next Stop the Stars** published
1967 Publication of **Thorns**
"Hawksbill Station” published in **Galaxy**
1968 Publication of **The Masks of Time**
Elected president of SFWA
1969 "Nightwings" receives Hugo Award as Best Novella
Up The Line published
Publication of **The Man in the Maze**
1970 “Passengers" receives Nebula Award as Best Short Story
Guest of Honor at Heidelberg World Science Fiction Convention
Publication of **Downward to the Earth**
Tower of Glass published
Publication of **Alpha One**, first volume of reprint anthology series
1971 Publication of **New Dimensions**, first volume of original anthology series
1972 **A Time of Changes** receives Nebula Award as Best Novel
“Good News From the Vatican” receives Nebula Award as Best Short Story
Publication of **Dying Inside**
Publication of **The Book of Skulls**

1973 Voted 4th best All-time Author in Locus poll
1974 Special Robert Silverberg issue of **Fantasy & Science Fiction**
1975 "Born With the Dead" receives Nebula Award as Best Novella
The Stochastic Man published
1976 Publication of **The Best of Robert Silverberg**
Shadrach in the Furnace published
1979 Publication of **Lord Valentine's Castle**
1984 Publication of **The Conglomeroid Cocktail Party**
1986 Receives Nebula Award for "Sailing to Byzantium" as Best Novella
Beyond the Safe Zone published
1987 "Gilgamesh in the Outback" receives Hugo Award as Best Novella
1988 Publication of **At Winter's End**
1990 "Enter a Soldier. Later: Enter Another"receives Hugo Award as Best Novelette
1991 **The Face of the Waters** published
1992 **The Kingdom of the Walls** published
1996 Publication of **Starborne**
1997 Publication of **Reflections and Refractions: Thoughts on Science-Fiction, Science and Other Matters**
1998 **The Alien Years** published
2000 Publication of collection **Sailing to Byzantium**
2003 **Roma Eterna** published
2004 Selected SFWA Grandmaster

*

A quick glance at the fifty year output of Robert Silverberg's portrays him as the quintessential genre writer, producing a seemingly endless series of stories based on the traditional topics and themes in science fiction. But a closer reading reveals an amazing depth and seriousness. What Robert Silverberg has done with incredible regularity is take the hoariest old cliches of SF and reshape them into serious, modern fiction. His influence can be seen in such writers as George R.R. Martin and C.J. Cherryh who have also embraced the long traditions of science fiction and updated them with great success.

Perhaps Robert Silverberg's greatest importance lies in the overall high quality of his fiction, perhaps the highest overall quality of any science fiction writer ever. He was first published in 1955 with the juvenile novel **Revolt on Alpha C,** and for the next half-decade was one of the stalwarts of the science fiction prozines. He churned out an incredible number of stories, under both his own name and numerous pseudonyms, filling the pages of nearly every minor science fiction magazine and several major ones as well. His overall quality was quite high considering his amazing proclivity. And yet, except for a Hugo Award as Most Promising New Author in 1956, he was not considered one of the major stars of the SF firmament.

In the mid-Sixties, after a brief retirement from science fiction, Silverberg upped his level of quality considerably with no decrease in his quantity of stories published. His metamorphosis from a writer of standardized pulp fiction into a prose artist was an accomplishment unparalleled

within the field. [Brian M. Stapleford, **The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction**, page 546]. During the period from 1967-1976, Robert Silverberg produced a body of work possibly unequaled by any science fiction writer in any ten year period *ever*.

Silverberg's decade of excellence began modestly in 1967 with the mosaic novel **To Open the Sky**, gathered from a series of novelettes originally published in **Galaxy**. While higher in quality than typical Silverberg to date, it gave little indication of what was to follow. Shortly thereafter came the novel **Thorns** and the novella "Hawksbill Station". Both were widely acclaimed as two of the most thoughtful and best-written stories of the year. A year later came the Hugo-winning novella "Nightwings" and the equally-acclaimed novel **The Masks of Time**.

The steady progression of major stories continued: the psychological adventure novel **The Man in the Maze**; the time-travel slapstick comedy **Up the Line**; the philosophical **Downward to the Earth**; the multiple character study **The Tower of Glass**; the Nebula-winning novel **A Time of Changes**; a novel examining the lure of immortality, **The Book of Skulls**; a classic study of telepathy and loneliness, **Dying Inside**; a serious look at reborn humans, "Born With the Dead,"; a story of politics and mental powers, **The Stochastic Man;** and, finally, his last novel before retirement, **Shadrach in the Furnace**.

It was a ten year period during which Robert Silverberg earned more major award nominations than any other writer ever. Overall, he received five Hugo and Nebula Awards during this period, before burning out and retiring in 1976.

But writing stayed in Silverberg's blood, and three years later he returned to science fiction with the adventure novel **Lord Valentine's Castle**. Slightly less serious than his stories prior to his retirement, it was still superbly written and served as a popular return of perhaps the genre's best overall writer.

In the twenty-five years since, Silverberg has alternated between science fiction and historical fantasies, earning three more Hugo and Nebula Awards in the process. His best stories of this latter period include the Nebula Award winner "Sailing to Byzantium," a look at bored future immortals. **Tom O' Bedlam** was an underrated tale of a group of humans awaiting the arrival of aliens on Earth. **To the Land of the Living** was a mosaic novel about the adventures of the historical king Gilgamesh in the afterlife. His short series **At Winter's End** and **The New Springtime** was a far-future saga about the resurgence of intelligent life on Earth long after a cataclysmic destruction of human civilization. **The Face of the Waters** and **Kingdom of the Wall** returned to the type of philosophical speculations of **Downward to the Earth** and **A Time of Changes**.

While Silverberg's production during this latter phase of his career has not equaled that of the first two phases of his impressive career, the quality has remained consistently high. Overall, it has been an impressive thirty years. Perhaps the highest tribute that can be paid Robert Silverberg is that more so than any other science fiction writer, readers and critics expect each of his stories to be as good as every other. Lesser writers, perhaps all other writers, are allowed to stub their toes occasionally. Robert Silverberg is not permitted such a luxury.

[A version of this essay appeared originally in **Who Shaped Science Fiction**, published by Kroshka Books, Commack, New York, 2000.]

*

Robert Silverberg's return to writing sf in the late 1960s coincided with my return to reading it. I first read sf in the early 1960s as a young teenager, from around 1962 to early-1964. Then for two years I stopped reading it–and I am still to this day unsure why I did that. When I returned to sf in early 1966, I returned to **Galaxy Magazine** and its stable-mates **Worlds of IF** and **Worlds of Tomorrow.** During those years Silverberg was the dominant author in those magazines, with a series of novelettes that were collected as **To Open The Sky**, an award-nominated novella "Hawksbill Station," and the three novellas that became the book Nightwings.

Nightwings was one of my favorite books of the 1960s, and one of the reasons I developed a liking for Silverberg. But like so much of my seminal sf, I did not read it again for nearly 40 years until I was spurred to do so by writing this brief Silverberg tribute and retrospective. I was apprehensive about rereading a book which meant so much to me as a late teen, but I should have let my trust in Silverberg assure me: it is an absolutely phenomenal book.

The first novella "Nightwings" tells the story of three travelers in a far-future underpopulated Earth. The aging Watcher belongs to a guild whose members study the skies four times daily seeking advance notice of an invasion from the stars. The young Flier Avluela is a delicate being whose nightwings enable her to fly only after the sun has descended. Gormon is a guildless changeling, a devil-may-care adventurer who is obviously smitten with Avluela.

Silverberg has always been fascinated by history, and his best fiction often revolves around historical explorations, both historical past to us and historical future, as well as tending towards travelogues in format. In "Nightwings" we examine the life of the city of Roum, a walled city filled with guild houses and public thinking caps which connect the users with networked brains which provide free information. We explore such wonders as the Mouth of Truth and we meet the Prince of Roum himself.

Silverberg has always been a master plotter whose plots are seldom, if ever, fueled by adventures and simple thrills. His characters generally seek some type of spiritual or philosophical fulfillment. His stories move slowly, but deliberately, leaving ample room for his examinations of the future and its history, as well as of the characters on whom he focuses. "Nightwings" is vintage Silverberg, as is the world he creates, so that its wonders envelop you as it does the three travelers.

The second novella, "Among the Rememberers" takes the former Watcher to Perris in company of a mysterious Pilgrim, following the climactic events at the end of "Nightwings" which resulted in the shattering of the guild of Watchers. In Perris he apprentices to the guild of Rememberers, so that this story is pure history, as the now-named Tomis studies his past–our future–and we learn about the splendors and hubris of humanity in the millennia ahead of us, and of the anticipated invasion which originally sparked the creation of the Watchers' guild. For a

lover of history, this novella is a delight. It also contains strong emotional writing as the novella centers around two people struggling with their emotional lives, eventually progressing to a stunning and unexpected conclusion.

The final novella, "The Road to Jorslem" is a tale of redemption, as Tomas becomes a pilgrim and travels to the most ancient and holiest city of Jorslem, seeking physical renewal and spiritual redemption. This is a favorite topic of Silverberg's, and one he handles very well. While it might not appeal to all readers, since the novel's climax is primarily philosophical, I enjoy such conclusions as much, if not moreso, than a mere tying up of loose ends.

Rereading **Nightwings** after three decades reminded me so much of why Robert Silverberg was my favorite author until his second retirement in 1976. His fiction contains what I consider the ideal combination of character introspection, historical exploration of both our past and our future, travelogue amidst a world of wonders, and tight, if not overly complex, plots. **Nightwings** is quintessential Silverberg, and shows him at the height of his talent early in the mature phase of his career. I recommend this novel very highly indeed, enjoying it even more this second time than I did when I was younger with simpler tastes.

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Silverberg's Nebula-winning novel **A Time of Changes** is in some ways a simpler book than **Nightwings** since it only follows one plotline instead of the multiple elements of the former. Basically it is a coming-of-age novel as one man grows emotionally and philosophically, searching both for himself and the future of his entire society.

Kinall Darivel is the younger brother of the heir to the throne of a kingdom in a rigidly-closed, religious-based society. A person's preoccupation with oneself is considered evil, so much so that the worst obscenities are the words "I" and "me". *Self-baring* is banned, and the only people one may share one's inner thoughts with at all are one's bondsister and bondbrother, both of whom are selected at birth and bound by a formal ceremony.

The citizens of this world are closed and suspicious-minded. Nearly all interactions require contracts between both parties. As Kinall reveals in the opening sequence of the novel, he undertakes the missionary role of opening up the entire society, ultimately becoming a pariah hunted by the forces of conservatism determined to resist such change.

Most of the novel is told in flashbacks as Kinall awaits his hunters. The story itself begins when Kinall is a youth whose father dies in a hunting accident, so that Kinall's older brother assumes the role of septarch. Because of the suspicious nature of the society, his younger brother is automatically assumed to be a threat to his power, so Kinall flees the country. For political reasons, he is rejected in the first country where he tries to settle.

Most of the novel consists of Kinall's travels and growth as a person and as a functioning member of society. Silverberg shows his typical strengths as the novel combines Kinall's introspection and growth with considerable travelogue and exploration of the world the author

has created. It is a fascinating society, and Kinall's travels through it never lag.

The novel's plotline accelerates when Kinall meets the Earthman Schweiz. Not being a native of the world, Schweiz has problems with the close-mindedness and forced selflessness of its people. He and Kinall engage in philosophical discussions of the Covenant established by the earliest settlers:

> *"The Covenant, yes. The pledge they made each to each, the pledge that each of us makes to all his fellowmen on his Naming Day. When we swear never to force our turmoils on another, when we vow to be strong-willed and hardy of spirit, so that the gods will continue to smile on us. And so on and so on. We are trained to abominate the demon that is self."*

Schweiz deliberately stokes Kinall's rebellion at this stricture, introducing him to a drug produced on the world's mostly-uncolonized southern continent which when taken by several people opens their minds to each other. He and Kinall try it together, and the wonders of sharing another mind changes Kinall totally.

Kinall fuels a conspiracy of self-barers, which widens to include some of the most powerful people in the world. But he continues to have self-doubts, and confesses his sins to a drainer–the equivalent of a catholic priest hearing confession–which ultimate-tely leads to the exposure of the conspiracy, and the sacrifice by the conspirators of Kinall who is the only member whose name is known to the drainer.

While not a masterpiece on the level of **Nightwings**, **A Time of Changes** is still a mature, fascinating look at individual growth and development, as well as a society which in many ways is the antithesis of ours. Another highly-recommended book

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Yeah, She's Hot...But Is She Human?

E.B. Frohvet

There's a separate fandom, which overlaps somewhat with SF fandom (all these borders are vague) called "furry fandom"; which concerns itself with drawing, costuming, and presumably writing about non-human species portrayed as if they are human. Regular readers of my late fanzine **Twink** will doubtless recall the work of Toronto fan artist Taral Wayne, whose drawings graced the covers of #14, #20, #29, also the computer-literate centauress whose likeness topped the fanzine review column for many issues.

Skipping briefly to the weekly Baltimore **City Paper**, which despite a high degree of commercial success still styles itself as an "alternate" or counter-culture journal. Very New Aesthetic, very eager to demonstrate its contempt for anything traditional, and to praise anything new, regardless of merit. The newspaper features a regular and highly explicit sex-advice column, "Savage

Love". The writer thereof is non-judgemental, almost the only thing he disapproves of is the sexual exploitation of children.

Recently a couple of columns were devoted to "furry sex", which is about people who like to have sex while wearing an animal costume, or while their partner is wearing such a costume.

In short, some folks get off on screwing someone/ something who is fantasized as other than human. Nor is this an unusual fantasy: see **Playboy** "bunnies", the sexual archetype for a generation of American males in the 1950's/60's. Or Catwoman in the Batman comic mythos. Or even the live-action film of *Josie and the Pussycats*--the sexual metaphor there almost too blatant.

By a not too circuitous route we have arrived at a clearly science-fictional trope: inter-species sex. What better place to begin than with Tolkien, who chose not to discuss sex openly, but was too honest to deny its consequences.

Elves are immortal, or effectively so. Why? Do not look to Tolkien for any answer beyond, "Because God made them that way." Nonetheless, it is apparent on that basis alone that elves cannot be strictly human, not *Homo Sapiens* as we understand the term. But equally clearly they must be members of that same genus.

The first documented case of inter-species sex in Tolkien is the case of Beren and Luthien in **The Silmarillion.** The author makes it clear that the two species are not only capable of sex, but amphimictic: capable of producing fertile offspring. Eirond is a direct descendant of the Beren/Luthien relationship. That's perfectly sound biology, well demonstrated in the genus Canis–dogs with grey wolves, the smaller red wolves with coyotes, etc. Jack London wrote whole books about that sort of thing, see **Call of the Wild** and so forth.

In the Beren/Luthien case we had human male/elvish female, with the immortality strain apparently gender-linked through the female DNA. Though Tolkien does not clearly state it, there must have been other crossings: Legolas recognizes the Prince of Dol Amroth as having elvish blood, and bows to him (and Legolas is practically a prince himself). It seems a plausible speculation that perhaps this lineage came among mortal men through an elvish male/human female cross, or more than one case.

Human taxonomy is a little unusual in that we occupy a genus *Homo* comprising only one extant species; our nearest collateral, *H. neanderthalensis*, having died out long ago. Of course the human genome is highly plastic; African pygmies, Vietnamese montagnards, Norwegians, and the freak show of WWF wrestling are all one.

As this discussion moves from the fantastical to the science fictional, it may be well to keep in mind some troubling points: First, that any "alien" species interfertile with *H. sapien* pretty much has to be defined as human, a closely related species in the same genus. Second, where this leaves us with respect to paleoanthropology, which appears to show humans originated on Terra, remains to be seen. As a corollary, how do you explain highly similar species on separate planets? Parallel evolution? Theoreticians advance apparently plausible arguments why the

hominid form is advantageous for intelligence: upright stance, forelimbs adapted for manipulation, binocular vision, and so forth. But the planetologists had all sorts of good reasons why every planetary system ought to be much like ours, small rocky planets inside, gas giants far outside (see "Heinlein's **Time For The Stars**)--and that has proved not to be the case. I suggest an open mind.

In the various *Ekumen* stories, Ursula K. LeGuin solved the first problem (at the expense of avoiding the paleoanthropology question) by stipulating that all of her peoples--the Hainish, the Cetians, the Terrans, even the bisexual Gethenians--were all human, having been "seeded" across this section of the galaxy a few million years ago from a common ancestral stock. Miller & Lee have similarly indicated that their Liadens are human, and interfertile with the Terran kind, having only such superficial differences as distinguish you and I from Koreans or Masai. The *People* of the Zenna Henderson stories don't even have that much difference, being interfertile (see Peter and Bethie in "Gilead") and indistinguishable from white Americans. Why this should be so, if one were able to ask the late Miss Henderson, one would probably get no further answer than divine will.

Robert Heinlein pretty much ignored the topic altogether, except at the end of **Glory Road**, where Oscar admits having been attracted to a girl who had soft plushy fur all over, "like a chinchilla". But she was probably "human" within our flexible definition --certainly Lord Doral and his household are. Other Heinlein characters dealt with various aliens (**Between Planets, Space Cadet, Red Planet**) but those were all pretty far from human. Heinlein may have preferred not to deal with the idea; or, being always commercially-minded, he may simply have concluded that a story involving inter-species sex was not salable in the 1950's/early 1960's.

Anne McCaffrey has likewise avoided the subject, except in the early soft-porn "The Thorns of Barevi" which involved a human female with a humanoid Catteni male. Many years later she used that as a sketch on which to construct the novel **Freedom's Landing**, which has since expanded into a lengthy series. I have read only the first book, so I don't know if the fertility question has been addressed in a later volume.

Asimov chose to confine himself mainly to humans and robots. He did have humans interacting sexually with robots, most obviously in **The Robots of Dawn**, but that hardly counts as the same thing.

The *Darkover* stories of Marion Zimmer Bradley featured humans mating with the hermaphrodite dtieri, most notably in **Darkover Landfall** (human female with a chieri functioning as male) and **The World Wreckers** (other way around). But there are hints all through the series that certain characteris-tics, notably the psychic talent of laran and the hexadactyl, six-fingered hands, came into the Darkovan gene pool from the chieri. Oddly, this interbreeding is generally fertile–but generations later some recombination of genes results in asexual persons, emmasca, who never achieve sexual maturity. (This does occur, rarely, in H. sapiens.)

In the non-series book **Hunters of the Red Moon**, Bradley's Terran hero manages variously to get it on with two different extraterrestrial females, though both of those appear effectively

human and would cause little comment in most public places in the United States. The fertility aspect is not addressed.

One SF writer who has dealt with the subject from the very beginning of her career is C.J. Cherryh. It was evident in her first novel **Gate Of Ivrel** and through the remaining books of the *Morgaine* cycle. Worlds are linked by Gates which span space and time (technology rather than magic, therefore SF though it reads more like fantasy), and Morgaine is destined to close them. She is, or at least appears to be, of the humanoid qhalur, a race occasionally interfertile with humans. The relationship of qhalur with humans varies from place to place.

A stranger case is seen in the author's **Brothers of Earth**. Humans have come before to the world of the nemet, and so it is known by experience that the two races cannot interbreed. But Kurt Morgan, alone and lost and with no hope of finding his own world again, chooses to be nemet. (an obvious recurring theme in Cherryh's work.) Oddly, the fertility issue is dealt with in nemet custom. The producing of heirs is so important that if a husband is incapable of fathering any, then it is discussed in advance (calmly, over tea), a suitable substitute chosen, and the whole is written into the marriage contract before witnesses.

In Cherryh's **The Faded Sun**, there is insufficient evidence to consider fertility between humans and mri, kel Duncan being the only apparent test case. On the first occasion that he has the opportunity to be with a mri woman, he elects not to although the kath'ein was willing, even curious. A similar case is seen in the more recent **Foreigner** series, where the human Bren is sleeping with his atevi bodyguard. The atevi appear disturbingly humanoid, except for their greater stature, but are "hardwired" differently--which may or may not be intended to suggest enough difference between the races' DNA to prevent interbreeding.

One further obvious example would be the relationships between humans and the centauroid Titanides in John Varley's *Gaea* Trilogy, especially the love of Chris and Valiha in **Wizard**. But this is a special instance, and the Titanides were deliberately engineered to be sexually compatible with humans. The whole elaboration of Titanide sex-and-fertility issues is clearly a case of Gaea (Varley) showing off her (his) cleverness.

No doubt many other examples of inter-species sex could be found in the SF/fantasy literature.

So far, despite the rantings of saucerite cranks, humanity has not had to face dealing with another, or several other, sentient species. When and if the problem actually comes to pass, there will be a horde of new problems *H. sapiens* will have to address. Many of these problems will be technological, linguistic, even philosophical or religious. If the Others are anything like us (read: more or less humanoid)–possibly even if they're not--the question of inter-species sex may have to be addressed. Not too soon to start considering our options now.

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This column sprung from a comment Milt Stevens made in a recent mailing of FAPA. Milt said, "Jack Williamson has retained the position of most senior practicing science fiction writer for an incredibly- long time." Considering Jack's age, and the fact that he was first published in 1928, that is certainly a true statement. But it raised two questions in my mind:

- Who was the most senior living writer until his/her death passed the title to Williamson?

- Who is the 2nd most senior living sf writer currently (and the person most likely to take the "title" when Williamson passes away?)

For reference, I used my book **Who Shaped Science Fiction?** which has a chronology for each person discussed which includes the date each writer was first published. Not all science fiction writers were discussed in the book, however, only the "most important" 100 writers/editors (in my opinion, of course). But that's no problem either since only major science fiction writers should qualify as "most senior" practicing writer. Herb Nobody who published a story in a low-circulation prozine in 1930 and is still alive in a nursing home somewhere should not qualify as "most senior" writer. Only biggies may apply!

So who was the most senior living writer until his/her death passed the title to Williamson? To answer that question, I looked up all the major writers who were first published prior to Williamson's publication in 1928 but lived into this century. The list was as follows:

Name	**First Published**	**Death**
Jules Verne	1851	1905
Arthur Conan Doyle	1879	1930
H.G. Wells	1888	1946
Garrett P. Serviss	1897	1929
George Allan England	1905	1936
Edgar Rice Burroughs	1912	1950
A. Merritt	1917	1943
Murray Leinster	1919	1975
H.P. Lovecraft	1922	1937

Unless my math is wrong (and wouldn't that be embarrassing for a high school math teacher?), the title of "most senior living sf writer" took the following progression:

Name	**Senior Most Living SF Writer until...**

Jules Verne	1905
Arthur Conan Doyle	1930
H.G. Wells	1946
Edgar Rice Burroughs	1950
Murray Leinster	1975
Jack Williamson	present

Arthur Conan Doyle and Murray Leinster had the longest reigns, 25 years, until Williamson set the new standard of 30 years (which is still growing).

Assuming Jack Williamson does die eventually, who is the 2nd most senior living sf writer likely to take the title at that time? Here is the list of major authors who have been active the longest:

Name	**First Published**	**Date of Birth**
Frederik Pohl	1940 *	1919
Ray Bradbury	1941	1920
Jack Vance	1945	1916
Arthur C. Clarke	1946	1917
James Gunn	1949	1923

Frederik Pohl's earliest publications were pseudonymous fiction published to fill the pages of semi-professional magazines such as **Astonishing Stories** and **Super Science Stories** which he was editing himself. While this might be unfair for consideration as most senior living sf writer, I will leave that judgment up to you. His first published fiction under his own name was in 1953 in Galaxy Magazine in collaboration with Cyril M. Kornbluth.

Good luck to all writers on the list. Hopefully you will all survive long enough to be "most senior practicing" sf writer someday.

*

Wondrous Stories

After I finished reading Michael Chabon's anthology, **McSweeney's Enchanted Chamber of Astonishing Stories**, I was left with a vague sense of dissatisfaction. It had nothing to do with the quality of the stories, since overall it was a good collection. It took me awhile to figure out that what caused that sense was the fact that every story in the book was set in the present time.

I began reading science fiction 40 years ago as an escape from the real world in which I lived, and I still prefer fiction set either in the past or in the future. Plus the stories in Chabon's anthology all had a similar grimness which, read consecutively, tended to mute their individual effects.

So I decided to follow that book with a colorful far-future sense of wonder tale, and who better to turn to than Jack Vance? I selected the second of his *Demon Princes* series, **The Killing Machine.**

Briefly, if you are not familiar with that series, they concern Kirth Gerson who as a child watched his entire community invaded by space pirates who either killed or kidnapped everybody, destroying everything that remained. Only his grandfather and he survived, hidden at a site from where they were able to watch the devastation.

The attack was organized by five interstellar criminals known as the Demon Princes, and Gerson's grandfather spent the rest of his life training Kirth to exact revenge on the five criminals. In the first book, **The Star King**, Gerson sought Malagate the Woe, a member of an alien race known as star kings, and killed him. In the second book he goes after Kokor Hekkus, the killing machine.

As usual, this novel is part mystery since Hekkus keeps his identity concealed for security reasons, so that Gerson spends much of the novel seeking Hekkus' hideaway on a distant planet so lost in legend that very few people even know of its existence, and very few of its inhabitants even realize there are other worlds than their own. Once there, Gerson must then discern the identity of Hekkus.

The novel is also part adventure, as Gerson travels from world to world, indulging Vance's sense of wonder which is his strongest trait. One subplot involves a place named Interchange where kidnappers bring their victims for safekeeping at a combination prison-resort. The victims remain there, cared for almost as guests, until somebody pays their ransom. If nobody does, then their price gradually lowers until somebody ransoms them as slaves.

One of the inhabitants of Interchange is Alusz Iphigenia, who against her wishes has become desired by Kokor Hekkus. Fearing him, she realizes that her only safety lies in Alliance, where she, in effect, kidnaps herself and sets such a high price that nobody in the entire galaxy could afford to ransom her.

Thus Kokor Hekkus begins a series of kidnappings of the children of rich people, intending to raise enough money to ransom Alusz Iphigenia. Meanwhile Gerson realizes that his best chance of finding Kokor Hekkus lies in his ransoming Alusz Iphigenia himself, even though he could not possibly raise a fraction of the ransom price.

The pace of **The Killing Machine** never lags, nor does its sense of wonder. Vance is not a deep writer a la Ursula K Le Guin or Kim Stanley Robinson, but for a break from seriousness, or a relief from the workday, you can never go wrong with Jack Vance. This book is highly

recommended fun.

*

Good authors tend to fall into two categories (yeah, yeah, I know, *everything* falls into two categories, and there are an endless series of what those categories are): storytellers and artists. An occasional writer can combine both aspects successfully, but primarily a writer who knows his or her strengths and sticks to them produces more satisfying fiction than one who strives for more than they can successfully accomplish.

Carlos Ruiz Zafón is a natural storyteller, and his acclaimed Spanish novel **Shadow of the Wind** succeeds very well on that level. But Zafón also tries to be an artist, and he is less successful in that regard.

Shadow is a melodramatic mystery sparked when a young boy named Daniel is taken to the Cemetery of Forgotten Books by his bookseller father where he discovers an obscure book entitled **Shadow of the Wind** by the even-more obscure author Julian Carax. Daniel immediately becomes obsessed with Carax–a bit too easily, and a bit too unconvincingly–and sets out to learn as much about the author as possible. Almost immediately this opens up a veritable Pandora's Box of mysterious events, especially when Daniel learns that nearly every copy of every book written by Carax has mysteriously been destroyed. Determined to learn the reason behind this seemingly bizarre series of events, Daniel becomes involved with:

- Cara, the blind daughter of a respected bookseller, with whom Daniel falls head over heels in love, and to whom he spends many months reading Carax's book
- Fermín, a beggar who soon becomes a valued employee of Daniel's father's shop and Daniel's cohort in uncovering the mystery
- Lain Coubert, a character in the book **Shadow of the Wind** who in real life is a badly-disfigured night stalker trying to retrieve Daniel's last copy of the book
- Fumero, the evil police official who is seemingly responsible for the scars riddling Fermín's body, and who is also seeking the mysterious Julian Carax.
- Nuria Monfort, a former lover of Carax who seems to be involved in the entire mystery, and obviously knows more about it than she is revealing

The story has aspects of a thriller, as well as a mystery, and the pace never falters as plot complications become more and more complex. Daniel falls in love with the sister of his best friend, which somehow turns her entire family against him. 300+ pages in, the plot seems so complicated that it might never unravel.

And then abruptly it unravels completely when Daniel receives a very long letter–90 pages long, in fact–from Nuria which explains the entire mystery to him. This was a bit of a cheat, since

everything Daniel and Fermín were trying so hard to decipher was suddenly handed to them on a platter. It still left another hundred pages of denouement, since knowing the *why* of everything did not resolve the *what* of it all.

The ending itself was melodramatic, offering few real surprises by that point. But every plot element was tied up successfully, and fairly neatly at that.

Overall, I enjoyed reading **Shadow of the Wind** because of Zafón's storytelling talents. It was when he tried to be an artist that he got in trouble, although fortunately his storytelling skills saved him in the end. I recommend this book mostly as a break from more serious reading, especially for readers who enjoy old books and their mysterious authors.

*

Like most readers, I have certain likes and dislikes which guide my reading. I do not usually enjoy pulp adventures where the characters are little more than chess pieces moving around in what is obviously a pre-designed game manipulated by a calculating author whose main concern is assuring that everything works out slickly.

I do not like mysteries, which resemble elaborate puzzles, whose *raison d'etre* is figuring out whodunnit in the face of endless clues and red herrings. I especially dislike mysteries involving crimes of any type.

Having said that, I enjoy James White's *Sector General* series of stories about a giant hospital in space whose purpose is serving alien beings from the entire galactic sector. The stories are medical mysteries involving a doctor whose deductive powers are nearly super-human on the level of Sherlock Holmes, always reaching a brilliant diagnosis from the slightest anthropological evidence, often to the extent of being *deus ex machina.*

At least the stories are not crime mysteries, and the cast of hospital personnel are colorful alien beings, ranging from elephantine to water beings to a telepathic insectoid. The patients are equally colorful aliens, and their medical dilemmas are always interesting.

There are also fascinating cultures to be visited. **Star Surgeon** involves a downtrodden world which serves as a dumping ground of diseases for a starflung empire. **Major Operation** involves a world one of whose inhabitants is a world-sized living being resembling a crawling fungus. The former novel develops from a medical mystery to an intergalactic war novel, which is a bit surprising at first since the Sector General series is strongly humanitarian; after all, its raison d'etre is saving lives in a sfnal space hospital. Happily the inhabitants of Sector General restrict themselves to defensive fighting in an attempt to save the hospital from the empire's fleet, and the novel's denouement is as satisfying as a war novel could possibly be. The latter novel is actually a hard science (biological) mystery which White keeps interesting throughout.

I would not read these novels during a vacation when I have time to indulge in deeper, more thought-provoking fiction. But during school reading is restricted to precious minutes during the

week, so light reading is more desirable than at other times.

The series' flaws are typical of such simple fiction: very broadly-drawn characterization without much depth; functional plotting serving to buoy up the mystery more than anything else; solutions so deft they often left me shaking my head in disbelief.

But both books were loads of fun. As I said earlier, I do not read war novels, or blatant pulp fiction, and rarely mysteries, but when I finished this three-in-one collection, entitled **Beginning Operations** by the Science Fiction Book Club, I was very pleased I had read it, although I have not decided if I want to read the next book in the series.

*

Science fiction is frequently called a "genre," but I do not believe that is a fitting designation for it. It might better be called an "umbrella" since it contains many diverse genres under its spokes, many of them differing in everything except their warping of reality as we know it.

Thus, whenever I read a best-of-the-year volume, whether science fiction or fantasy, I realize I will probably not like every story in the book. Certain stories will invariably fall into my personal "blind spot" that I do not particularly enjoy. Thus it was with **Science Fiction: Best of 2004**, the latest in the series edited by Karen Haber and Jonathan Strahan. I do not enjoy hard science stories which are totally dependent on the wonders of scientific extrapolation and high-tech, especially when the storyline itself is little more than a framework for either examining those wonders or, as in the case of two stories in this book, primarily concerned with bombarding the reader with those extrapolative wonders.

A prime example of this is Charles Stross' "Elector," a stories from his *Accelerando* series. This series is primarily concerned with portraying life after a Vingean sequence, a topic which has always bored me. Stross' stories in that series have been showing up in best-of-the-year volumes regularly, and I have been unable to finish reading a single one of them. "Elector" was no exception, and I stopped reading about halfway through. If you enjoy Stross' fiction, or bombardments of technological wonders, my inability to finish this story should not be considered a criticism of it, merely a result of the story falling into my personal blind spot.

I do not like action thrillers, and the first scene of Paolo Bagiagalupi's "The People of Sand and Slag" gave every indication of it being a mindless thriller. The only reason I read farther was recalling Bagiagalupi's wonderful "The Fluted Girl", perhaps the best story in last year's Haber & Strahan volume. I was pleased that I did read further, because this story was neither thriller nor adventure, but a sensitive story reminding us that no matter how advanced our race might become technologically, the human element is still our most basic motivation. In this case, the cyborg-like post-human soldiers discover the last surviving dog in a war zone and, despite their instincts not to waste time nor money on it, they are inevitably attracted to the dog.

I hated the ending of the story considerably, even though I understand the author's cynicism in writing it that way. It was almost like he decided at the last moment to discard all the

hopefulness which he had portrayed in the rest of the story.

Easily the most frustrating story in the book was Christopher Rowe's "The Voluntary State." The first time I tried to read it, I abandoned it halfway. It seemed like all flash and color, similar to Stross' "Elector", a display of future change and technological wonders. I only returned to it because it is perhaps the most acclaimed story of the year, making it onto virtually every recommended reading list, as well as being a Nebula nominee one full year sooner than most stories make that list. Surely it deserved a fuller try.

"The Voluntary State" sparkles with pizzazz and superb writing, as well as a brilliant concept of how inanimate objects in our world, such as cars, telephones, and virtually everything else, become a form of animal life in Rowe's future vision.

But the story itself did not rise to the level of its writing and concept. It tells of a painter from Tennessee who is kidnapped by terrorists from Kentucky for some nefarious reason involving breaking into the capital of Tennessee...and it goes really nowhere important from there. So while I enjoyed reading the story, and the animal cars were delightful, ultimately it was shallow beneath the surface luster. I am not sure why it has won over so many critics as an instant masterpiece.

Gene Wolfe's "The Lost Pilgrim" was a time-travel tale from **The First Heroes**, an anthology of original stories set during the Bronze Age. The story's title character was sent awry on his trip through time, ending up onboard the Argo along with Jason and the Argonauts. It was an offbeat look at the time trave-ler's striving to fit in with the sea culture of that era, serious yet entertaining, as Wolfe stories tend to be.

Stephen Baxter's "Periandry's Quest" is a Romeo and Juliet variation in a sfnal setting: a long-lived race of nobility are served by a short-lived race of servants. There are some interesting concepts in the story, particularly in the temporal differences between the two races, but ultimately the plot is a simplistic one as a long-lived youth becomes infatuated with a short-lived servant girl, only to learn the true relationship between them. Nothing particularly original here beyond the basic scientific concept, which is really not vital to the story's conclusion. This could almost have been an **Upstairs Downstairs** episode.

The most readable story in the book was Walter Jon Williams' closing novella "The Tang Dynasty Underwater Pyramid," an entertaining combination of con game and murder mystery, involving an entertainment troupe–containing a water ballet team and a band of Mexican folksingers–on a cruise ship modeled after Tang Dynasty China. I enjoyed this story a lot more than either Rowe's story or Stross' story although, in some ways the stories had more similarities than differences.

- All three stories had glib plots which were mostly excuses to hang the wonders on;
- All three stories featured thin characteri-zation, mostly intended to portray points of view rather than being developed as people

- All three stories were well-written, so that the joys of the individual sentences were as important as the plots themselves

So why did I enjoy "Dynasty" while tolerating "State" and abandoning "Elector"? I guess it goes back to my personal blind spot again. I reject stories based primarily on technological wonders (Rowe and Stross) while I enjoy stories based on more non-scientific wonders (the cruise ship, the con which involved deep-sea diving). I enjoy stories which contain the above three ingredients for other than technological wonders, such as society-building (of the serious C.J. Cherryh or Ursula K Le Guin type or the lighter Jack Vance type) or future-history (Silverberg is probably the master of this type).

In any case, I think I have gone far off-track here. I do not read best-of-the-year volumes expecting them to actually be the "best" stories of the year, since each editor's opinion of what is best differs from every reader's opinion. I buy them expecting to read a good anthology, knowing some stories will fall into my acceptable zone (such as the Wolfe, Baxter and Williams stories), while others might not. But overall, I enjoyed reading this book and will definitely buy next year's volume again.

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K. J. Bishop's **The Etched City** received amazing reviews for a debut novel, and I started reading it with two frames of mind: How could it possibly be as good as every reviewer claimed, and what if it actually was?

It did not take me long to realize what the reviewers saw in the novel. **The Etched City** is an absolutely wonderful novel, the best I have read since **Perdito Street Station.** Bishop has an amazing way with words, as well as a mastery of scenery and setting and an ability to draw the reader into her world effortlessly and completely. Almost from the first page I felt part of her Old West-type world, traveling with Raule and Gwynn, two former soldiers on the losing side of a war, escaping the victorious army's moping-up action.

Bishop also demonstrated a deftness with characteri-zation, easily walking the fine line between showing Raule and Gwynn as stereotypical Old West outlaws and two unfortunate people whose civilized nature is unable to grow in their harsh circumstances and surroundings.

They manage to escape their pursuers, and find their way to Ashamoil where Raule became a mostly-unpaid female doctor in a charity hospital in the midst of the city's worst tenements, while Gwynn becomes a strong-arm bully for the wealthy figure Elm who rules much of the city's underworld

Much of **The Etched City** combines a detailed look at life in the underbelly of the city with many philoso-phical asides as nearly all the characters, no matter how depraved they might be, are seemingly wont to break into philosophical discussion–and while this is the least believable of the book's several aspects, it provides it a thought-provoking nature that I found fascinating

even when I knew it was highly unlikely.

In **The Etched City** we meet such people as:

- Marriott, a former companion of Gwynn who greases his way into the underworld, but who is much more distressed about the nature of his activities than Gwynn would ever be;

- The Rev, a priest assigned to counsel the sick and pray for the dead in Raule's hospital, who meets Gwynn one day a week to share a meal while arguing the existence of God;

- a boy Bellor Vargey who dies in a pointless knife fight with a rival gang member;

- Beth Constanzin, a mysterious artist who uses a glimpse of Gwynn in her painting, thus becoming the object of his obsession;

- Jacope Vargey, brother of Bellor, who upon the death of his mother assumes responsibility for the welfare of his sister Emila.

Most of the book concerns the activities of Raule and Gwynn, and how they fit into the everyday life of Ashamoil. Each of them finds emotional symmetry in a lover whose attitude towards life seems to balance their own: Raule with Jacope Vargey, if only briefly, and Gwynn with Beth Constanzin, much longer and considerably deeper.

At times I was reminded of the movie **Gangs of New York** with the novel's burrowing itself into the nitty-gritty details of a seemingly-amoral city. **The Etched City** offers a rich tapestry which is at times brutal and shocking, while at other times hopeful as well. But while Ashamoil might be amoral, **The Etched City** is not. Death is never cozy, or easy, always bringing with it a price, whether psychological or emotional. This book is not a glorification of death–as novels designed as action thrillers seem to be–but a refutation of it.

And the philosophical moments, especially the luncheon conversations between Gwynn and Rev, while interesting asides early in the book, become more and more important as the book progresses, so that by its conclusion they are ultimately the very core of the novel.

This is not a book for readers seeking well-developed plots to the exclusion of setting and characterization, as the latter two aspects dominate **The Etched City**. There is a plot of sorts, but it comes late in the book. A sideshow strongman named Hart provides evidence to the authorities against Elm, and whose wife is murdered by Elm's bullies in revenge. Elm decides to avenge himself in turn, and the chess-playing between Elm and Hart becomes the major focus of the novel's last hundred pages.

If I were to list all the aspects of the "perfect" novel as I see it, **The Etched City** contains all of them in varying degrees. It is the type of novel which comes along too infrequently, and which I recommend wholeheartedly.

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When Karen Haber and Jonathan Strahan took over the **Best of...** series in 2003, there was only *Science Fiction*, no *Fantasy*, so I was pleased when this year saw the appearance of Fantasy: Best of 2004. I read this volume soon after **Science Fiction: Best of 2004**, and a couple of thoughts occurred to me while reading the book:

The average story quality in **Fantasy** is slightly higher than **Science Fiction**, but there are more high points overall in **Science Fiction** than in **Fantasy.** The former might possibly be due to **SF** containing several stories in sub-genres which I do not particularly enjoy (the high-tech stories I discussed) but not so in **Fantasy** (which contains no stories which are primarily sword and sorcery or imitation Tolkien fantasy). However, I doubt there is any intrinsic reason for the latter, except coincidence in this year's volumes.

There is better writing overall in **Fantasy** too, and I wondered why that is. Many of the same writers flit back and forth between the two sibling genres. For example, **Fantasy** contains stories by Michael Swanwick, Gene Wolfe, Robert Silverberg and Jay Lake, all better known as sf writers. So that eliminates the possibility that fantasy tends to attract *writers* while sf attracts *thinkers*. However, it might partially be due to the nature of the two siblings, in that sf is primarily about ideas and concepts, while fantasy is about mood and emotions, which lends itself more to better writing.

In spite of all the name authors, the best story in the book was by a relatively new author. Jeffrey Ford's "The Annals of the Eelin-Ok" is the story of a pixielike being called a twilmish whose existence only lasts during the brief interval that a sand castle on a beach survives between its building and its erosion due to tidal waves. The story is the journal of one such twilmish, and it succeeds in being warm and touching in spite of its outrageous premise. As I discovered with "The Empire of Ice Cream," 2003's best story overall, Ford is the finest short fiction writer working in the genre right now.

Two stories about unfortunate marriages to wizard husbands were very similar in concept but totally different in execution, and together were two of the finest story in the book.

Kelly Link's "The Faery Handbag" was a strong story of a woman armed with simple witching spells trying to protect her daughter who falls hopelessly in love with a powerful wizard who, apparent only to the mother, is not as wonderful as her daughter and husband and seemingly everybody else who knows him believes.

Deborah Roggie's "The Enchanted Trousseau" was a fairy tale about a poor girl who attracts a powerful wizard as a husband, although her mom has suspicions about the man's suitability for her daughter. What follows is a mother-in-law versus bad husband domestic tale combined with a powerful wizard versus humble domestic witch confrontation. Very enjoyable.

Neil Gaiman's "Forbidden Brides of the Faceless Slaves..." reads like typical Gaiman: a slick, well-plotted story written as an homage to one of his literary forebears, in this case gothic horror

stories. Cute, but I find his stories on the slight side.

Four old veterans provided strong stories which, if not the finest they have ever done, were still ample evidence as to why they have achieved their lofty status in f&sf.

Robert Silverberg's "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" displays the author's ability to tell a strongly-plotted story based on human relationships. In it both the sorcerer and the apprentice are 30ish, but she is very successful at her career while he has failed at several before deciding to apprentice himself. He is also hopelessly in love with the sorcerer who wants nothing to do with him romantically, and lets him know so in no uncertain terms.

Peter Beagle's "Quarry" begins right in the middle of a chase, as a man is fleeing two deadly pursuers, aided only by another fugitive who is fleeing a different and equally-deadly hunter. Both the adventure and the interrelationship of the two fugitives are successfully done.

Michael Swanwick's "The Word That Sings the Scythe" is his latest attempt to make dragon stories less fantastic and more sfnal, and he succeeds in this quirky tale of a man who rescues a strange, ageless child who is more burden than delight.

Gene Wolfe's "The Little Stranger" is the tale of a witch–although her true nature is not apparent until the very end of the story–protecting her house from a strange group of squatters, all told in the form of a series of letters.

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I was a big fan of C.J. Cherryh starting with her debut novels **Gate of Ivrel** and **Brother of Earth** in 1976, followed by another twenty-two books over the next two decades. When I took a year's sabbatical from reading science fiction starting in mid-1995, she had the nerve to release the first volume of what eventually has grown to 7 volumes, with 2 more planned for future publication. That first novel was titled **Foreigner** and, like the subsequent novels, was well-regarded critically.

Since the novels in the series are not endless, but fall into groups of three, I decided recently to read the first trilogy (**Foreigner** is followed by **Invader** and **Inheritor**) and decide from there whether I wanted to read the subsequent trilogies as well.

Suffice it to say that **Foreigner** finds Cherryh at the top of her form. The basic premise is that a colonizing starship from Earth jumps into normal space and realizes that it is totally lost and in dire trouble. Eventually most of the would-be colonists decide to emigrate to the nearest habitable world, which happens to be inhabited by a race called the atevi.

The atevi do not welcome the humans, and the unexpected invasion eventually leads to war between the two races. The atevi win, but the humans have considerable negotiating chips in the form of advanced science which they dole out to the atevi slowly in exchange for the humans being allowed to live autonomously on a secluded island.

All of that is background and the plot of **Foreigner** takes place two hundred years later. Atevi culture has changed considerably due to interaction with humans, but there are considerable differences between the two races, especially in their overall attitudes. The main character of the novel is Bren, a human who serves as intermediary with the atevi. His role is that of a diplomat, interacting mostly with aiji (ruler) of one country which is a monarchy with a powerful legislature as well.

Some quotes from the novel might give you a flavor for the tenuous relationship between humans and atevi.

> *That was why humans preferred their enclave on Mospheira. Mospheira was an island, it was under human administration... and laws didn't have bloodfeud as an alternative.*
>
> *Sane, law-abiding atevi simply avoided argumentative people.*
>
> *The atevi hadn't quite mastered steam when the humans had arrived on their planet, uninvited and unwilling.*
>
> *Not in a system where assassination was an ordinary and legal social adjustment.*

As the main storyline begins, an assassination attempt is made against Bren, which causes a whole lot of political wheels to start spinning. While no cause for the attempt is known either by Bren, or seemingly by his atevi patrons, there are many potential enemies who either fear or hate humans, and wish to drive them off their planet. To make matters worse, no member of the guild of assassins registered an intent to kill Bren, so he was the target of an apparently-illegal assassination attempt.

Much of the first half of the novel is taken up with Bren's striving to avoid being assassinated, while trying to learn who his potential assassin is. While his atevi security also strives to achieve both goals, they are so typically close-mouthed and stoic that Bren receives absolutely no information from them either as to the progress of their investigation, or any subsequent attempts against him.

As is typical of Cherryh, **Foreigner** is very slow- paced as she explores both the culture of the atevi and its relationship with humans, while studying Bren in-depth, both his character and his activities as "paidhi" (which describes him as a combination diplomat and intermediary). Tabini, who is the aiji dealing with Bren, mysteriously sends him off to his country's royal hunting lodge where Tabini's grandmother is in residence. Except she is no harmless old lady, but another political figure who had been passed over as aiji twice by the ruling legislature in favor of her son–Tabini's father–the first time, and Tabini himself the second time. In effect, she and Tabini are mortal enemies, yet Tabini sends Bren into her hands during a time when his life is seriously endangered.

The entire middle portion of the novel takes place at Malguri, the lodge, and involves Bren's

dealings with Tabini's grandmother. It is the most fascinating part of the novel, and it gradually builds into a complex and fast-paced thriller the last hundred pages. Probably the most intriguing part is Bren trying to determine the atevi's motives in the assassination plot. Who exactly was on his side? Who was serving the rebels trying to overthrow Tabini? And, most importantly for his own survival, who could he trust?

In some ways **Foreigner** has the structure of an entire trilogy: the first third sets up the background, the middle third is slow-paced development, and the final third brings all the previous strands together in a rousing conclusion. In some ways, it represents the best of both styles, being a careful analysis of cultures and society wrapped around a thrilling plot. C.J. Cherryh has proven to me at least that she has lost none of her edge as a writer, so I await the story's continuation in **Invader** eagerly.

*

Tidbits

Recently we have been watching more videos than we ever watched before, mostly because we have been getting free rentals through our Discover credit card. Jean and the boys watch most of them, but occasionally I rent one for myself.

Since this week is Spring Break, I knew I had ample time to watch a few videos, so I have gotten two videos which ironically both deal with the question of what does being a real hero imply?

The first video was **The Incredibles**, which was a delightful Pixar movie about a forcibly-retired super-hero couple, Mr. Incredible and Elasti-Girl. In an era in which super-heroes are relocated because of lawsuits resulting from their previous exploits, two main problems linger as a result: Mr. Incredible (and his closest buddy Frozone) cannot totally give up the "rush" of fighting crime, and the two children of Mr. Incredible and Elasti-Girl have inherited super-powers of their own, which they are anxious to use although their parents forbid them to show any hint of abnormality.

The Incredibles is a fairly light entertainment, so I do not think I am spoiling anybody's viewing pleasure by revealing that the movie's climax involves the entire super-family going to battle against equally-super-baddies. It's all fun, with a twinge of thoughtfulness included.

A much more serious take on being a hero is Zhang Yimou's **Hero**. I am not normally a martial arts fan, so this movie would not have interested me at all except for the fact that it was directed by Zhang Yimou, one of my favorite directors. His **Raise the Red Lantern** and **Red Sorghum** were both wonderful movies, combining thoughtfulness with characterization and absolutely gorgeous cinematography.

Hero was typical Yimou with its beautiful scenery and numerous well-choreographed scenes. It told the story of four assassins conspiring to kill the king of the Qin kingdom who is trying to unite the six warring kingdoms of China two thousands years ago into one country under his

control. There are plenty of martial arts scenes, but even they were done in typical Yimou-style, so that rather than the fantastic fighting being the focus of those scenes, rather they were the centerpieces of much larger tapestries. And the assassins' quest is also a small part of the examination of such things as patriotism, the true meaning of being a hero, and the relationship between calligraphy and swordsmanship. Overall, **Hero** combined equal parts visual splendor with thoughtfulness with a mystery plot, all wrapped around an action thriller.

You do not need to enjoy thrillers to enjoy this movie; in fact, if action is the only reason you watch martial arts movies, this might not be the movie for you. I was tepid towards **Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon**, and I thought **Hero** was vastly superior. I recommend it highly.

*

The Science Fiction Book Club has been offering collections of Robert A. Heinlein young adult novels from the 1950s. I have three of the novels in my collection, so I read **Time for the Stars**, which was familiar so I must have read it originally 30 years ago when I bought it, and **The Star Beast**, which I had not read previously.

I was not particularly excited by either of the books. They are straight-forward stories, which is all right during school when I do not have the time or energy for much deeper fiction, but neither of them had any thoughtfulness at all. Perhaps I just selected two weaker examples of Heinlein's juveniles, but the next time I want some "easy" reading, I'll stick with Jack Vance who at least Vance has a lot of thoughtfulness and sense of wonder in his fast-paced future travelogues.

*

The In-Box

Palmetto & Thistle / Rich & Rita Shader / P.O. Box 3325, Melbourne, FL 32902-3325 / This is the six-page clubzine of the Scots-American Society of Brevard, Florida. Besides club news, it regularly contains interesting short articles on Scottish history and culture. Highlights include a remembrance of Scottish participation in D-Day, a review of historical Scottish mystery **Death at Glamis Castle**, an article on the Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens, an introduction to seeking one's geneology, the discovery of 1,500-year old Christian burial site Scotland, a Scottish pronunciation primer, a history of the British "red phone box", and the story of Alexander Selkirk. I do not know if this zine is available for trade–the editor's wife is my cousins–but it is one of my favorite regularly-published zines, and a boon for history fans.

Alexiad / Lisa & Joseph Major / 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204-2040 / review of books, magazines and candy bars!

As the Crow Flies / Frank Denton / 14654 - 8th Ave. S.W., Seattle, WA 98166 / personalzine by one of the grand old fans; so why isn't Frank a member of FAPA?

The Blind Man's Rainbow / Melody Sherosky / P.O. Box 1557, Erie, PA 16507-0557 / www.bmrpoetry.com / poetry and art

Chunga / Andy Hooper, Randy Byers, carl juarez / 1013 North 36th St., Seattle, WA 98103 / Hugo-nominated genzine featuring a "Monster Island Jamboree," with articles about classic horror movies by James, Whale, among others.

Emerald City / Cheryl Morgan / http://www.emcit.com / webzine devoted to reviews, always a valuable resource for sercon fans

Erg / Terry Jeeves / 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough, YO12 5RQ, United Kingdom / last issue of a long-running fanzine

File 770 / Mike Glyer / 705 Valley View Ave., Monrovia, CA 01016 / newszine

For The Clerisy / Brant Kresovich / P.O. Box 404, Getzville, NY 14068 / discussion on books, with a recent emphasis on babes and hunks.

Galactic Route / Guy H. Lillian III / P.O. Box 53092, New Orleans, LA 70153-3092 / Guy's TAFF report done in his usual conversational style

The Horsed Vassal / John Berry / 4 Chilterns, So. Hatfield, Herts AL10 8JU / very funny novella-length article on his experiences in the British army 1944-1948

It Goes on the Shelf / Ned Brooks / 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, GA 30047-4720 / book reviews, primarily of really old, esoteric books

The Knarley Knews / Henry Welch / 1525 16th Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017 / genzine; Knarley spumes, Sue Welch travels, and Terry Jeeves' memoirs

Littlebrook / Jerry Kaufman and Susanne Tompkins / 3522 N.E. 123rd St., Seattle, WA / genzine, including articles on country music and fan critic Peter Weston.

Memphen / P.O. Box 820514 / Memphis, TN 38182-0514 / gorgeous collection of past Memphen covers

MOZ / Murray Moore / 1065 Henley Rd, Mississauga, Ontario L4Y 1C8 Canada / Anzapa personalzine

Peregrine Nations / Janine Stinson / Box 431304, Big Pine Key, FL 33043-0314 / genzine with an article on the Society for Creative Anachronism and reviews of books and films

The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette / Garth Spencer / online personalzine with lots of letters

So It Goes / Tim Marion / c/o Kleinbard, 266 East Broadway, Apt. 1201B, New York, NY 1002

/ one-person genzine with lots of reviews

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

Steam Engine Time / Bruce Gillespie & Janine Stinson / reviews and articles by Greg Benford, Darrell Schweitzer, and Andrew M. Butler

Vanamonde / John Hertz / 236 S. Coronado St., No 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057 / two-page APAzine, succinct commentary on Julius Schwartz, Dr. Seuss, John Erskine, and Moondog, and mailing comments; John also belongs in FAPA!

*

Answers to the quiz on page :

1	A Martian Odyssey, by Stanley G. Weinbaum
2	Nightfall, by Isaac Asimov
3	Arena, by Fredric Brown
4	The Nine Billion Names of God, by Arthur C. Clarke
5	Flowers for Algernon, by Daniel Keyes
6	A Rose for Ecclesiastes, by Roger Zelazny
7	Or All the Seas with Oysters, by Avram Davidson
8	The Big Front Yard, Clifford D. Simak
9	“Repent, Harlequin!” said the Ticktockman, by Harlan Ellison
10	The Last Castle, by Jack Vance
11	Riders of the Purple Wage, by Philip José Farmer
12	Nightwings, by Robert Silverberg

On the Lighter Side

Three couples, an elderly couple, a middle-aged couple and a young newlywed couple wanted to join a church. The pastor said, "We have special requirements for new parishioners. You must abstain
from having sex for two weeks."

The couples agreed and came back at the end of two weeks.

The pastor went to the elderly couple and asked, "Were you able to abstain from sex for the two weeks?" The old man replied, "No problem at all.

Pastor." "Congratulations! Welcome to the church!" said the pastor.

The pastor went to the middle-aged couple and asked, "Well, were you able to abstain from sex for the two weeks?" The man replied, "The first week was not too bad. The second week I had to sleep on the couch for a couple of nights but, yes, we made it."

"Congratulations! Welcome to the church!" said the pastor.

The pastor then went to the newlywed couple and asked, "Well, were you able to abstain from sex for two weeks?" "No Pastor, we were not able to go without sex for the two weeks," the young man replied sadly. "What happened?" inquired the pastor.

"My wife was reaching for a can of paint on the top shelf and dropped it. When she bent over to pick it up, I was overcome with lust and took advantage of her right there."

"You understand, of course, this means you will not be welcome in our church," stated the pastor.

"We know," said the young man, "We're not welcome at Home Depot anymore either."

*

The following comments are from science test papers submitted to science and health teachers by elementary, junior high, high school, and college students.

"The body consists of three parts - the branium, the borax, and the abominable cavity. The branium contains the brain, the borax contains the heart and lungs, and the abominable cavity contains the bowels, of which there are five - a, e, i, o, and u."

"Nitrogen is not found in Ireland because it is not found in a free state."

"H2O is hot water, and CO2 is cold water."

"To collect fumes of sulphur, hold a deacon over a flame in a test tube."

"When you smell an oderless gas, it is probably carbon monoxide."

"Water is composed of two gins, Oxygin and Hydrogin. Oxygin is pure gin. Hydrogin is gin and water."

"Three kinds of blood vessels are arteries, vanes and caterpillars."

"Blood flows down one leg and up the other."

"Respiration is composed of two acts, first inspiration, and then expectoration."

"The moon is a planet just like the earth, only it is even deader."

"Artificial insemination is when the farmer does it to the cow instead of the bull."

"Dew is formed on leaves when the sun shines down on them and makes them perspire."

"A super saturated solution is one that holds more than it can hold."

"Mushrooms always grow in damp places and so they look like umbrellas."

"The pistol of a flower is its only protections against insects."

"A fossil is an extinct animal. The older it is, the more extinct it is."

*

A woman awakes during the night to find that her husband was not in their bed. She puts on her robe and goes downstairs to look for him. She finds him sitting at the dinning room table with a cup of coffee in front of him. He appears deep in thought, just staring at the wall. She watches as he wipes a tear from his eye and takes a sip of coffee.

"What's the matter, dear?" she whispers as she steps into the room, "Why are you down here at this time of night?"

The husband looks up, "Do you remember 20 years ago when we were dating, and you were only 18?" he asks solemnly. The wife is touched to tears thinking that her husband is so caring and sensitive.

"Yes, I do" she replies.

The husband pauses. The words are not coming easily. "Do you remember when your mother caught us behind the couch making love?"

"Yes, I remember." says the wife, lowering herself into a chair beside him.

The husband continues... "Do you remember when she shoved a shotgun in my face and said, 'Either you marry my daughter, or I will send you to jail for 20 years?"

"I remember that too." she replies softly.

He wipes another tear from his cheek and says..."I would have gotten out today."

*

Joe's headaches pained him for years and years, and no matter what he tried they would not ease. Finally he went to a doctor who told him, "Joe, the good news is I can cure your headaches. The bad news is that it will require castration. You have a very rare condition which causes your testicles to press on your spine, and the pressure creates one heck of a headache. The only way to relieve the pressure is to remove the testicles."

Joe was shocked and depressed. He wondered if he had anything to live for. But he headaches were so brutal he had no choice but to go under the knife. When he left the hospital he was without a headache for the first time in 20 years, but he felt like he was missing an important part of himself. As he walked down the street, he realized that he felt like a different person. He decided that he should make a new beginning and live a new life.

He saw a men's clothing store and thought, "That's what I need–a new wardrobe to go with the new me.." He entered the shop and told the salesman, "I'd like a new suit."

The elderly tailor eyed him briefly and said, "Let's see... size 44 long."

Joe laughed, "That's right, how did you know?"

"Been in the business 60 years!" he said.

Joe tried on the suit. It fit perfectly. As Joe admired himself in the mirror, the salesman asked, "How about a new shirt to go with it?"

Joe thought for a moment and then said, "Sure."

The salesman eyed Joe and said, "Let's see, 34 sleeve and 16-1/2 neck." Joe was surprised, "That's right, how did you know?"

"Been in the business 60 years!" Joe tried on the shirt, and it fit perfectly .

As Joe adjusted the collar in the mirror, the salesman asked, "How about new shoes?"

Joe was on a roll and said, "Sure."

The salesman eyed Joe's feet and said, "Let's see...9-1/2 E." Joe was astonished, "That's right, how did you know?"

"Been in the business 60 years!" Joe tried on the shoes and they fit perfectly.

Joe walked comfortably around the shop and the salesman asked, "How about some new underwear?"

Joe thought for a second and said, "Sure."
The salesman stepped back, eyed Joe's waist and said, "Let's see...size 36."

Joe laughed "Ah ha! I got you! I've worn size 34 since I was 18 years old."

The salesman shook his head, "You can't wear a size 34. A 34 underwear would press your testicles up against the base of your spine and give you one heck of a headache."

*

Sister Mary Katherine entered the Monastery of Silence. The Priest said, "Sister, this is a silent monastery. You are welcome here as long as you like, but you may not speak until I direct you to do so."

Sister Mary Katherine lived in the monastery for 5 years before the priest said to her, "Sister Mary Katherine, you have been here for 5 years. You can speak two words."

Sister Mary Katherine said, "Hard bed."

"I'm sorry to hear that," the priest said, "We will get you a better bed."

After another 5 years, Sister Mary Katherine was called by the priest. "You may say another two words, Sister Mary Katherine."

"Cold food," said Sister Mary Katherine, and the priest assured her that the food would be better in the future.

On her 15th anniversary at the monastery, the priest again called Sister Mary Katherine into his office. "You may say two words today."

"I quit," said Sister Mary Katherine.

"It's probably best," said the priest, "You've done nothing but bitch ever since you got here."

*

In the wake of the Exxon/Mobil deal and the AOL/Netscape deal, Hale Business Systems, Mary Kay Cosmetics, Fuller Brush, and W.R.Grace Company have decided to merge and become Hale Mary Fuller Grace.

*

Several cannibals were hired by a big corporation.

"You are all part of our team now." said the HR rep during orientation. "You will get the usual benefits and you can go to the cafeteria for something to eat, but please don't eat the other employees." The cannibals promised to leave the other employees alone.

Four weeks later their boss remarked, "You're all working very hard, and I am satisfied with your work performance. However, one of our secretaries has disappeared. Do any of you know what happened to her?" The cannibals all shook their heads no. After the boss left, the head cannibal turned to the others and said, "Which one of you idiots ate the Secretary?" A hand was raised hesitantly, and the leader continued...."You fool! For four weeks we've been eating managers and no one noticed anything, but noooooo, you had to go and eat a secretary!"

*

When Bill Clinton and Hillary Rodham first got married, Bill said, "I am putting a box under the bed. You must promise never to look in it."

In all their 30 years of marriage, Hillary never looked. However, on the afternoon of their 30th anniversary, curiosity got the best of her and she lifted the lid and peeked inside.

In the box were 3 empty beer cans and $81,874.25 in cash. She closed the box and put it back under the bed. Now that she knew what was in the box, she was doubly curious as to why there even was such a box with such contents.

That evening, they were out for a special anniversary dinner. After dinner, Hillary could no longer contain her curiosity and she confessed, saying, "I am so sorry. For all these years, I kept my promise and never looked into the box under our bed. However, today the temptation was too much and I gave in. But now I need to know, why do
you keep the 3 beer cans in the box?

Bill thought for a while and said, "I guess after all these years you deserve to know the truth. Whenever I was unfaithful to you, I put an empty beer can in the box under the bed to remind myself not to do it again."

Hillary was shocked, but said, "Hmmm, Jennifer, Paula and Monica. I am very disappointed and saddened by your behavior. However, since you are addicted to sex, I guess it does happen and I guess 3 times is not that bad considering your problem."

Bill thanked her for being so understanding. They hugged and made their peace.

A little while later Hillary asked Bill, "So why do you have all that money in the box?"

Bill answered, "Well, whenever the box filled up with empty cans, I took them to the recycling center and redeemed them for cash."

*

The Lone Ranger and Tonto went camping in the desert. After they got their tent all set up, both men fell sound asleep. Some hours later, Tonto wakes the Lone Ranger and says, "Kemo Sabe, look towards the sky, what do you see?"

The Lone Ranger replies, "I see millions of stars."

"What does that tell you?" asked Tonto.

The Lone Ranger ponders for a minute then says, "Astronomically speaking, it tells me there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, it tells me that Saturn is in Leo. Time wise, it appears to be approximately a quarter past three in the morning. Theologically, it's evident the Lord is all-powerful and we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, it seems we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. What's it tell you, Tonto?"

Tonto is silent for a moment, then says, "Kemo Sabe, you are dumber than buffalo shit. Somebody stole our tent."

*

A man and his wife, now in their 60's, were celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary. On their special day a good fairy came to them and said that because they had been such a devoted couple she would grant each of them a very special wish. The wife wished for a trip around the world with her husband. Whoosh! Immediately she had airline and cruise tickets in her hands.

The man wished for a female companion 30 years younger..... Whoosh....immediately he turned ninety!!!

Gotta love that fairy!