

Visions of Paradise

#105: The Passing Scene

Contents

Out of the Depths	page 2
Zine Schedule ...My favorite all-time novels and albums...	
Mathematical Definition of SF... some random thoughts	
Some Views on Science Fiction	page 5
Why SF?...New Space Opera	
Wondrous Stories	page 9
Mammoth...Down These Dark Spaceways...One Million A.D....	
Between Worlds...Brighten to Incandescence...The Eight	
The In-Box	page 20
On the Lighter Side	page 22

 _\\//-
 (0-0)
 -----o00--()--00o-----
 Robert Michael Sabella / 24 Cedar Manor Court
 Budd Lake, N.J. 07828-1023 / Tel: (973) 691-0733
 E-mail: bsabella@optonline.net
 Personal blog: <http://adamosf.blogspot.com/>
 Sfnal blog: <http://visionsofparadise.blogspot.com/>
 Copyright © March, 2006, by Gradient Press

Out of the Depths

It is traditional for fanzines not to follow their announced schedule, but in most instances that means publishing less issues than are announced. I am going in the opposite direction here because **I cannot stand a semi-annual publishing schedule!** Yes, it gives me more time to copy, collate and mail the zine. Yes, it takes some of the pressure off during the fall and spring when I have the least time available to work on **VoP**. But publishing only twice a year really bothers me.

So, after a single year, I am returning to a quarterly publishing schedule again. Ideally I would like to publish smaller issues of **VoP** monthly, which is something I will consider if I am not totally burned out by the time I retire. But for now, quarterly.

Ahh, it feels good to be back in the mail so soon after the last issue!

*

Back in the 1970s I periodically ranked my top 10 favorite f&sf novels and favorite rock albums. I have not done so in several decades, so what better time is there to do so again than the present?

Keep in mind that these lists are subject to change depending on my mood the next time I compile such lists. But the changes would probably be small, and mostly in positioning, since these are certainly my favorite books and albums. And the fact that there are 12 novels means I could not decide among the last three-or-four on the list.

Favorite Novels of All-Time

1	Brittle Innings	Michael Bishop
2	The Fall of Hyperion	Dan Simmons
3	Perdido Street Station	China Mieville
4	Lord of Light	Roger Zelazny
5	Gateway	Frederik Pohl
6	The Stars My Destination	Alfred Bester
7	Nightwings	Robert Silverberg

8	Speaker for the Dead	Orson Scott Card
9	Way Station	Clifford D. Simak
10	The Armageddon Rag	George R.R. Martin
11	Dying Inside	Robert Silverberg
12	No Enemy But Time	Michael Bishop

Favorite Albums of All-Time

1	The Dark Side of the Moon	Pink Floyd
2	Born to Run	Bruce Springsteen
3	To Our Children's Children's Children	The Moody Blues
4	Man on the Line	Chris de Burgh
5	The Yes Album	Yes
6	The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust	David Bowie
7	The Joshua Tree	U2
8	Bridge Over Troubled Water	Simon and Garfunkel
9	Led Zeppelin 4	Led Zeppelin
10	Damn the Torpedoes	Tom Petty & the

*

At least somebody likes my “Mathematical Definition of Science Fiction” which I originally published in Dick Geis’ **Science Fiction Review** 57 in Winter 1985. David G. Mead is a professor of English at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi who has written *An*

Encyclopedia of Jack Vance, 20th Century Science Fiction Writer. On his website at <http://falcon.tamucc.edu/~dmead/sfdefs.htm> is a page of definitions of science fiction by such people as John Boyd, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, L Sprague de Camp, Kingsley Amis, Darko Suvin...and Robert Sabella? Truthfully, I doubt if he would have even read my definition if it had not been quoted somewhere—although he does not state where—by Nancy Kress:

*"...science fiction accepts all the axioms of the universe and may add additional imaginary ones; fantasy deletes at least one axiom and may replace it with one or more imaginary ones. This means that something like the conjuring up of demons generally belongs to fantasy, because they are deleting some axioms of the universe as we know it--which is that you cannot conjure up demons by mixing eye of toad and newt. If, on the other hand, you try to contact life that merely exists in another dimension, using "approved" scientific channels, as I tried to do in **Trinity**, then you're writing science fiction because you're adding axioms to the universe as we already know it. I think it's a very good definition..." Robert Sabella, quoted by Nancy Kress*

*

Some random thoughts:

- Today is the ides of March. I wonder how many people even realize what the “ides” of March are anymore?
- I am not a television watcher, but I scan the tv page of the newspaper every day, and I cannot help but wondering how many programs are other than reality shows and spinoffs of **CSI** and **Law and Order**.
- Whatever happened to the great years of FM radio, when it was an alternative to AM top-forty radio and played a wide variety of music from all across the musical spectrum? Now AM seems to be primarily all talk and FM is narrowcasting at its most boring.
- Two non-sf authors I recommend highly are Andrea Barrett (who writes wonderful fiction about scientists) and Iain Pears (who writes historical fiction).
- The state of N.J. mandates that any students disruptive to the learning experience of others must be removed from a classroom. And I realize that there must be protection against overzealous teachers and/or administrators, but at least in my school a teacher needs to compile such an extensive paper trail that it is almost impossible to remove even the most disruptive students until the school year is almost over and the class has basically been destroyed already. And don't even consider getting a student out of a school entirely.
- With the state's freezing aid to school districts the past few years, boards of education have been scrambling to hold budgets at manageable levels that their citizenry might consider passing. I wonder what the ratio of teaching funds cut compared to athletic funds

cut is this year? Is anybody willing to bet against my belief that the ratio is greater than 1?

- Two singers I recommend highly are Richard Thompson (guitar-oriented folk-rock) and John Hiatt (good old-fashioned rock 'n' roll).
- What has happened to the Democratic party? As Bush's popularity rating sinks lower and lower as he antagonizes more groups of people, is there any loyal opposition anymore, or just a group of disorganized moderates running around like chickens with their heads cut off? There's a reason why the Democrats have only elected one president since 1976, and that was Bill Clinton whose charisma and body language made him an anomaly among politicians.

Some Views on Science Fiction

Part One: Why SF? (1996)

From my teens through my forties the vast majority of my reading was science fiction, occupying anywhere from 80% to 90% of my reading time. Somewhere during the 1980s my reading passed beyond the pleasure stage into the realm of obsession. I bought dozens of books and prozines that I considered required reading for any serious student of science fiction, and my pile of unread books grew accordingly. I read three science fiction books per month minimum. Four prozines regularly. Best of the Year anthologies. I don't think it ever entered my head that what had begun as a pleasant hobby twenty years previous had become a chore. Did I still enjoy science fiction? Yes. Did I enjoy reading all the science fiction I did? Often not.

In the meantime, I began buying a fair amount of non-SF, particularly in the early 90s when my reading taste began expanding considerably. I bought everything from historical fiction to literature to various types of nonfiction. How much of it did I actually read? Well, not much.

Inevitably, my overdosing on f&sf led to burnout sometime around 1995. So I cut back on my reading of science fiction. No more *required* reading. I let all my prozine subscriptions expire. My reading of science fiction decreased considerably, soon reaching the point when I could not read science fiction *at all*. Whenever I picked up a science fiction book I immediately became bored. Other books were calling to me, many of which had been sitting patiently on my bookshelf for several years and whose patience had worn thin. It was beginning to look as if thirty years of science fiction reading had burnt me out entirely. I was on the verge of joining the ranks of many other devoted fans who loved the genre as youngsters, but who gradually drifted away as adults. I was just much slower maturing than other fans.

And yet, as one year passed into another, I gradually found myself drifting back to science fiction again. Certainly nothing like my former obsession. Perhaps half my reading was science

fiction, the other half either historical fiction or nonfiction. No prozines. But still SF was important to me again, and the fact that I was reading it only for pleasure made it almost as exciting as it had been thirty years ago.

So the question I asked myself was: *why science fiction?* The other genres I had begun reading contain aspects which also excite me. Historical fiction is especially fascinating, particularly when the story is so integrated with the milieu of the period itself that I come away feeling like I've been immersed in a different culture. Non-fiction can be equally exciting. Straight history is probably my favorite type of nonfiction, but I also enjoy studies of other cultures. Books such as **Italian Days**, in which second-generation Italian-American Barbara Grizzuti Harrison spent several months living in her ancestral homeland discovering her lost heritage. Since I happen to be a second-generation Italian-American who has never visited Italy, this book was a vicarious experience that really spoke to me.

Chinese culture is a particular favorite of mine. I've read numerous works of fiction, both classics (**Journey to the South, Orphans of the Marsh, Story of the Stone**) and contemporary (**Red Sorghum, The Garlic Ballads**), historical nonfiction (**Wild Swans**), and straight history book (**The Good Man of Nanking, China: From the Long March to Tiananmen Square**). I've even co-edited a book on Chinese history (**Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing**).

But still, with all these exciting books I've read, their pleasure cannot replace the enjoyment I get from science fiction. Hence, the mathematician in me assumes there must be some logical reason why one particular genre beckons me so strongly. So I analyzed the specific ingredients I look for in a work of fiction:

- The story must be character-driven. That is far more important to me than stories which are exclusively about the plot (such as a mystery or a thriller tend to be). That is true for science fiction as well, since I shy away from SF that is primarily a fast-paced adventure with no depth. I am interested in human emotions, human concerns, human drives and failings.
- I prefer stories that are not set in the real world. I live in the real world twenty-four hours a day. Objectively, it has a lot of good points, such as a long lifespan, reasonably high health standards, and a general level of comfort far above that of most other cultures. But that's a rational opinion. Emotionally I love other cultures, the more exotic the better, whether they are fictional worlds set far away in time and space, or historical worlds far different from ours, or even contemporary cultures so far removed from modern America as to virtually be alien worlds themselves.
- I want fiction that is thought-provoking. Mindless plots that don't spark the thinking side of me at all ultimately bore me. There should be some food for thought in fiction, whether it makes me think about the characters themselves, or their society, or about some historical development far removed from routine daily life.
- I love *sense of wonder*, that *gosh wow* feeling that I get from settings or ideas or

creations so unexpected and so far removed from my mundane world that they make me feel like a teenager again discovering science fiction for the first time.

· Yes, I do like a well-constructed, involving plot as well.

Trying to find fiction that satisfies all the above criteria is not necessarily easy. Good fiction satisfies two of them. Great fiction satisfies three. An occasional masterpiece satisfies all five. For me at least, the best science fiction incorporates more of the four criteria than other types of fiction. Fortunately, I am knowledgeable enough in the genre not to be a victim of Sturgeon's Law. I keep up on favorite authors and book reviews sufficiently to eliminate most of the *crap* before I ever buy a book. That's not true in other genres where I am much less knowledgeable. I am much more likely to be satisfied with a random science fiction novel than I am with a work from some other genre.

But I doubt if my preference for science fiction is merely a matter of convenience. Quite frequently I find other fiction that satisfies three or four criteria to my satisfaction, yet still I keep returning to SF. Nor is my love of science fiction mere escapism from the real world I disliked forty-to-fifty years ago. I rather like the world I inhabit at this moment more than at any time in the past, and hope I can remain part of it for another three decades at least.

I guess the bottom line is that science fiction is a part of me. With all its warts and weaknesses, it's still my favorite reading genre. It has given me forty-five years of enjoyment so far, so it must have *something* going for it. I can only assume that my reading will continue to be dominated by science fiction for many years to come, and that is just fine with me.

*

Part Two: New Space Opera (2006)

By the 1990s the science fiction field had changed considerably from what it had been prior to the 1980s. I fell in love with science fiction because of its far-future expanses, its sense of wonder, alien worlds, and development of future history. Even many "New Wave" writers who tried infusing traditional sf with modern literature still emphasized the future, people such as Samuel R. Delany, Roger Zelazny, Michael Bishop, Ursula K Le Guin, and Harlan Ellison.

But the 1980s saw the "Cyberpunk" movement which dwelled in the very near-future, stories which were so close to the present that by 2000 we have actually passed most of those stories by, both in time frame and in technological development. Cyberpunk's main foundation was strict logical development that could reasonably happen in the foreseeable future. It was not interested in future historical development, nor any far-future theories. Where were we headed immediately, how would we get there, and how would we react to it?

Soon after Cyberpunk, three other developments had major effects on the shape of the fantasy and science fiction genres: alternate history, urban fantasy, and slipstream. Those three movements

started out slowly, but by 2000 had enveloped such a large portion of the genres that “traditional” future-based science fiction had become an endangered species.

Looking back at my sf reading in the past decade, after I returned from my one-year hiatus, the majority of it fell into one of the sub-genres listed above. I read so few far-future based novels that it is no wonder I have grown restless with what I am reading. In the past year I have read more “classic” sf from the 60s and 70s, writers such as Jack Vance, Robert Silverberg, and Clifford D. Simak, who set their stories in far-futures dripping with sense of wonder and future history. Several friends told me that traditional science fiction does not exist anymore, but I was convinced it still does. It is just not as popular as the alternate history/slipstream/fantasy sub-genres and so needs to be sought out a bit more carefully.

So recently I began seeking out more of the type of sf which I love the most. One type I have not read much of, if any, is “New Space Opera,” which started in England and gradually worked its way across the Atlantic. At first I ignored it since it brought back memories of E.E. Smith and *Star Wars*, neither of which I ever particularly enjoyed. But I liked some of the 70s Space Opera revival, particularly the likes of Greg Benford, C.J. Cherryh and Larry Niven. And some short fiction I’ve read recently by the likes of Stephen Baxter, Peter Hamilton, and Alastair Reynolds has been superb. So what if 90% of space opera is trash? Sturgeon’s Law applies everywhere.

But “New Space Opera” is not the only far-future, traditional sf out there. Spurred by reading Jack McDevitt’s mystery **Polaris** this past year, which I loved, I have found other far-future sf as well. I now have two groups of books on my “Recommend Reading” list, both “New Space Opera” and traditional future sf, several of which I hope to buy and read in 2006:

Traditional sf:

- **Ilium, Olympus**, by Dan Simmons
- **Infinity Beach, Seeker, Deepsix, Chindi, Omega**, by Jack McDevitt
- **Survival, Migration, Regeneration**, by Julie Czernada
- **Marrow, The Well of Stars**, by Robert Reed
- **Ship of Fools, Rosetta Codex**, by Richard Paul Russo
- **Cetaganda, Ethan of Athos, Brothers in Arms, Mirror Dance, Memory, Komarr**, by Lois McMaster Bujold
- **Local Custom, Scout’s Progress, Conflict of Honors, Agent of Change, Carpe Diem**, by Sharon Lee and Steve Miller
- **City of Pearl, Crossing the Line, The World Before**, by Karen Traviss.

New Space Opera:

- **Consider Phlebas, Use of Weapons**, by Ian M. Banks
- **The Time Ships, Coalescent, Exultant, Transcendence**, by Stephen Baxter
- **Learning the World**, by Ken MacLeod
- **Chasm City, Revelation Space, Redemption Ark, Absolution Gap, Pushing Ice**, by Alastair Reynolds
- **The Praxis, the Sundering, Conventions of War**, by Walter Jon Williams

With regards to the Lois McMaster Bujold books listed above, when I returned to reading sf in the late 1990s, I naturally drifted toward the serious stuff as opposed to the lighter, more adventurous stuff. Since that was the height of Bujold-mania, with her winning nearly every Best Novel Hugo, I tried several of her books and found them interesting, but not worth reading more. Now though, as I have drifted further toward more traditional sf, perhaps it is time to give her stuff another try.

To be continued later this year (hopefully!).

Wondrous Stories

Is it damning with faint praise when the best recommendation I can give to a novel by a major science fiction writer is that it was pleasant reading? Or is pleasant reading the norm I should expect in fiction, with anything better an unexpected bonus?

I am referring to **Mammoth**, John Varley's novel about a herd of mammoths which abruptly travels through time from the ice age to modern Los Angeles, arriving on the downtown streets and causing immediate chaos. The first half of the novel reads as if Varley intends to study the possibilities of time travel. It opens as an archeological team uncovers a frozen mammoth with a family huddled beneath it, apparently struggling for whatever warmth the huge body can give it. This would have been a major scientific discovery, except it became fantastic when the scientists also discover a boxlike contraption beside the man, who happens to be wearing a thoroughly modern wristwatch.

Perhaps my biggest complain with **Mammoth** is that it seems to have been written with the intent of being a bestseller. The early portions alternate between modern scientists trying to decipher the mystery— including a math genius trying to learn the secrets of the briefcase which is assumed to be a time machine of some sort—and scenes of the mammoth herd 10,000 years ago. The scenes set in the past are written entirely too cutesy, and they invariably end with an abrupt statement of foreshadowing which is usually dropped and never really explored.

In fact, the entire first half of the novel is written in an over-the-top manner which makes the novel hard to accept as serious. On his website, Varley states that **Mammoth** “was originally going to be a screenplay.” That might explain why most of the novel's thrills more resembled those of a blockbuster movie rather than the thoughtful sense of wonder of a science fiction novel.

The second half of **Mammoth** starts as if it will be a routine thriller as the baby mammoth's handler, who is one of the two main characters of the novel along with the mathematician, kidnaps it because she feels that he belongs in the wide open spaces instead of performing twice-daily at a glorified circus. The mammoth's “owner” is the

same billionaire who discovered the original dead mammoth, and naturally he is determined to get his property back. Fortunately, just when I was ready to reject the novel as totally shallow, the old Varley rears his head and the thriller evolves into some thoughtful speculation about time travel and predestination. The ending was somewhat surprising, although certainly not stunning, and satisfying.

So while I would never place this novel alongside Varley's major works such as **The Golden Globes** or **Steel Beach**, it was, well, pleasant reading. Just don't expect much more than a few hours' pleasure.

*

I first joined the Science Fiction Book Club in 1967 when I was young and starry-eyed about science fiction, having just discovered it a few years earlier in the pages of **Galaxy** and **Worlds of IF**. My first "main selections" were Harlan Ellison's new anthology **Dangerous Visions** and Roger Zelazny's novel **Lord of Light**. Talk about a great way to win over a new member!

Although my membership in the SFBC has lapsed occasionally, I have pretty much remained a member for the past 40 years. Their prices have remained very good relative to hardcover prices, and better than most trade paperback prices as well. What I have always liked best about the club though has been their exclusive club multi-volume editions containing two or three books in a series in one volume, which brings the cost down even more. Such recent volumes have included collections of Fritz Leiber's *Fafhrd and Gray Mouser* stories, A. Bertram Chandler's John Grimes space adventures, and Robert A. Heinlein's juveniles.

Recently the SFBC has spread its tentacles even farther by publishing anthologies of original novellas. I believe it started a few years ago with **The Dragon Quintet**, a collection of fantasy novellas about dragons, edited by Marvin Kaye. I had no particular interest in dragons, but two years ago they started a series of anthologies of science fiction novellas, six in each, edited by leading names in the field and containing stories by some of the best writers as well. First was Robert Silverberg's **Between Worlds** in 2004 which contained stories by Stephen Baxter, James Patrick Kelly, Nancy Kress, Mike Resnick, Walter Jon Williams and Silverberg himself. Two of the stories were reprinted in Gardner Dozois' **Best Science Fiction of the Year**, which naturally made me sit up and notice.

2005 saw the publication of Mike Resnick's **Down These Noir Spaceways**, a collection of future sf mysteries by Jack McDevitt, Robert Sawyer, Robert Reed, Catherine Asaro, David Gerrold and Resnick. 2006 has already seen the publication of Gardner Dozois' **One Million A.D.** featuring Robert Reed, Robert Silverberg, Nancy Kress, Alastair Reynolds, Charles Stross and Greg Egan.

Since I love novellas and sf set in the far future most of all, I bought all three of these books over a two-month period at the end of 2005 and read them all immediately. Suffice it to say I was not the least bit disappointed in any of them.

I had a bit of initial hesitation when I started reading **Down These Dark Spaceways**. I generally prefer historical mysteries rather than either thrillers or crime mysteries. At least the stories in this book are *noir* mysteries influenced by the mysteries of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, which have a certain charm to them that police procedurals tend not to have (at least in my eyes). And the authors in this collection of six novellas included Robert Reed and Jack McDevitt, two of my favorite authors, which is why I read this book first.

“The Big Downtown,” by McDevitt, is quite different from his novels which tend to be historical mysteries concerned with investigating ancient ruins and ships which vanish mysteriously. This story only has a touching glance with history, as one of the main suspects is a famous explorer of alien ruins. The rest of it is typical mystery: a death which looks like a hurricane-related accident, but the lover of one of the two victims is sure his girlfriend would never do anything so stupid as ride in a sailboat during a global-warming induced super-hurricane. So he hires the female P.I. protagonist who investigates for 60 pages before wrapping up the mystery in the typical glib tying up of loose strands of most crime stories. Or at least that is my take on crime novels. At least the scenery is interesting, and the pacing never lags, but this story is more of a pleasant time-passer than an involving story such as McDevitt usually writes.

Robert Reed’s “Camouflage” is set on his Great Ship, a huge interstellar ship larger than most worlds, filled with millions of beings from numerous worlds who are traveling on a millennia-long journey across the entire Milky Way. Some of Reed’s best stories, such as my personal favorite “The Remoras,” is set there, and it is one of the most wondrous creations in all of sf so that a story need only surround itself with the alienness and otherness of the Great Ship to be successful.

“Camouflage” concerns a former disgraced captain of the Great Ship named Pamir who has disguised himself for many decades to avoid being captured and punished by other captains. He is approached by a current captain who knows of his reputation as well as his current disguise and asks him to investigate a series of murders. It turns out that the ten husbands and former husbands—all nonhumans—of a human woman are being killed. The mystery is interesting, although irrelevant, since the real focus of the novella is the Great Ship and its alien races, and they keep the story interesting without caring about the identity of the murderer.

Catherine Asaro’s “The City of Cries” was a very pleasant surprise. I had always assumed she wrote romances based on her reputation, but this was a hard-bitten adventure mystery on a well-thought out alien world. Bhaaj is a detective hired by the royal family of her homeworld to recover one of the family’s princes who has apparently sneaked out of the family compound, which males are not permitted to do. The story combines Bhaaj’s dealings with the royalty who hired her—and who have the power to do anything to her they wish, should she displease them—as well as with members of the underworld in which she spent time as a youth. An old-fashioned adventure set on an

alien world in Asaro's Skolian Empire, this story is obviously the product of a natural storyteller, much more interesting than I had experienced. It made me realize it might be worthwhile seeking out more Asaro fiction.

The best story in the book is also the most frustrating one, David Gerrold's "In the Quake Zone." Set in a contemporary Los Angeles which has undergone a series of timequakes which serve as portals through a thirty-year period of time, the hero is a time-traveler (that's the correct spelling, btw) who travels through time saving people's lives from crime and accidents. The case he is investigating involves a serial killer who preys on young homosexual males. Most of the novella involves his investigation of that case as well as his own friendship with one of the young men, a friendship which seems to be gradually heading into a deeper, longer-lasting relationship.

What makes the story so frustrating is just when it seems to be reaching both its plot and relationship climaxes, it abruptly takes a left turn and becomes a totally-different story. While the second story was itself interesting, and did provide a resolution to the original story in an almost off-the-cuff way, I think the story could have been resolved similarly with less abruptness. Still it was a very good story, although it was a totally non-*noir* mystery considering the hero's emotional involvement was its primary focus.

*

As the book's title indicates, the stories in **One Million A.D.** edited by Gardner Dozois, are set in the far-future when human culture, and perhaps even human life itself, are considerably evolved from their current form. The far-future is not a common setting for most sf. Even prior to its "contemporization" of the past 20 years, most sf has been set in the near future when human culture could be extrapolated from modern life with one or two changes at most. The farther writers venture into the future, the more drastic the changes, and the less recognizable the culture becomes. Thus, the stories themselves become harder to write, since the more drastic the changes the more the writer must explain to the reader, thus making the trap of expository lumps and telling-rather-than-showing more inviting. The best writers of far future sf such as Jack Vance in his *Dying Earth* series and Greg Benford in his *Galactic Cluster* series not only avoid this trap, but somehow embrace its possibilities.

The opening novella in the book was "Good Mountain" by Robert Reed, who is one of the most reliable writers of short science fiction of the past few decades. Nearly all of his stories are worthwhile reading, many of them among the best of their given year, and he has produced a small handful of genuine masterpieces (highlighted in my mind by "The Utility Man" and "The Remoras"). I think it is safe to say that "Good Mountain" belongs in that select list of great Robert Reed stories.

In Reed's imagined future, humans live on a decidedly un-Earthlike world in which continents drift, forming and breaking apart regularly as islands clash and separate. The continents are inhabited by humans, giant worms which are used as transportation much

like trains with people riding inside them, and mockeymen who are bred as servants.

As the story opens, the continent on which it is set is in dire peril as huge fissures emitting geysers of poisonous flammable gas are opening. The gas and subsequent fires are spreading rapidly across the continent, consuming everything in their path, and killing everybody living along the way. Many people are trying to survive wearing gas masks, apparently a traditional safety device for humans on that world, but the fires are foiling such attempts this time.

The protagonist Jopale and his mockeyman are fleeing on a worm to a far-distant shore where ships are waiting to take select rich people to near-legendary New Isles. They began their journey soon after the first fissures opened when all life on the continent did not seem imperiled, but as they travel, the conflagration is following them, and what began as almost a quixotic flight has become a desperate attempt to survive.

Reed does a spectacular job of blending sense of wonder of his exotic world, the personalities of the refugees, tidbits about the world's background, and the gradually-developing thriller aspect of the story. The two most interesting characters are Brace, the worm's caretaker, and Do-Ane, a female scientist who has been studying a mysterious object buried beneath their destination of Good Mountain, which she and her colleagues believe might be the remnants of an ancient spaceship which brought humans to their world, a spaceship which she hints might be a place of security for the refugees.

In my opinion, "Good Mountain" contains all the elements of great science fiction, and should be a strong contender for next year's awards.

The other novellas in the book run the gamut from good to very good, although they pale a bit by comparison to Reed's masterpiece. Robert Silverberg can be described in similar terms to Reed—nearly all his stories are worthwhile reading, many among the best of their given year, and producing a handful of genuine masterpieces—although his masterpieces tend to be more regular over a longer period of time than almost any other sf writer. "A Piece of the Great World" is a companion to his short series **At Winter's End** and **The New Springtime** and examines how a group of scientists from the People who dominate the post-Winter age discover survivors from one of the six groups who dominated the pre-Winter age. Typical of Silverberg, its main characters' interest in and understanding of the history of his world is the driving force behind the story. While I had trouble accepting the protagonists' ultimate decision, it was still a thoughtful story worthwhile reading.

I have read a handful of Alastair Reynolds' novellas in various Best-of-the-Year volumes, stories such as "Great Wall of Mars" and "Turquoise Days" and I have always considered him a provocative and wondrous thinker who is also a grand storyteller. "Thousandth Night" has many of those same elements in its tale of one thousand clones of a famous progenitor who are virtually immortal and who gather every several hundred thousand

years to put on a thousand day celebration of their heritage, similarities, and differences.

This time, however, two members of the line discover that one of them has been concealing secrets about his own activities since the last gathering, and they fear it bodes evil for the rest of them. For awhile the story bogs down in a routine mystery about genocide, but once that is cleared up rather unexpectedly, the story becomes a bigger examination of people willing to undertake any means, no matter how brutal, to achieve what they consider desirable ends, as well as of absolute power corrupting absolutely.

As in the Silverberg story, I found the “Great Work” which was the desired goal to be somewhat far-fetched, but once I accepted that imaginative leap, I enjoyed the story a lot.

Nancy Kress’ “Mirror Image” takes as its basic premise the type of straightforward technological progression from current research that, quite frankly, seems less likely in lieu of the million year time span of the book’s title. But once you accept a worldwide AI named QUENTIAM with whom all people maintain instantaneous contact and which basically rules the world, although people do retain the right to make their own personal decisions, and also accept such items as changing bodies upon demand, the story is very interesting as it asks the question what happens if QUENTIAM shows the slightest hint of possible unreliability? And who would possibly believe you if it were true?

But that is the story’s theme, while its basic plot is of four clone-sisters whose fifth clone-sister was imprisoned on an alien prison world for destroying an entire inhabited star system. Kress manages to keep the story moving steadily while raising the philosophical issues which are its real purpose.

Charles Stross has always been a difficult writer for me. I tried to read about half of his *Accelerando* stories, but stopped reading all of them between one-quarter and one-halfway through. Same with his Hugo winner “Concrete Jungle.” They were just too much infodump with characters who were little developed, if at all, and seemed devised mostly to spout technobabble at each other.

So I approached his novella “Missile Gap” with considerable trepidation. It started out well, being less of a techy wet dream and more of an actual story. Its premise was that the entire surface of Earth soon after an alternate “Cuban War” of the 1960s was somehow sliced off the planet and placed onto a giant flat disk somewhere in the Magellanic Cloud. Besides all of Earth’s continents and population, the disk contains numerous other continents with strange life forms on them.

There are three main storylines: the first involves Yuri Gagarin and the Russian response to the crisis; the second involves Carl Sagan and some clandestine organization with ties to America and their response; the third involves normal Americans emigrating to one of

the new continents.

Not being particularly a fan of thrillers or political fiction, I liked the third plotline the most. Maddy was the assistant to an entomologist studying the lifeforms of that continent. When he encounters a particularly toxic type of termite, he almost loses his life. Meanwhile the termites seem to be more than first meets the eye, and threatens to become a major problem for all the émigrés to the continent.

But just when the third plotline is growing very detailed and interesting, the second plotline rears its head and brings the entire story to a crashing—and somewhat unsatisfying—halt. It renders all the other developments incomplete, and seemed more of a copout than a conclusion. Too bad, because for the first time I was enjoying a Stross story.

As an aside, I am not sure what Stross' story has to do with the "one million a.d." concept either, but that is a minor complain against considerations of a story's other qualities.

On the other hand, I've always enjoyed Greg Egan as a storyteller. His stories are also dense with ideas, but they never seemed crowded into the story for their own sake, but rather part of the background of what feels like real people undergoing real situations. "Riding the Crocodile" starts with a classic sf premise of two immortals growing weary of life and looking to end it all. But they prefer to go out with a big splash, and what better way than to be the first humans to infiltrate the galactic core where beings known as aloofs have rejected all human attempts to contact them?

There is a long portion of technotalk in the middle, but otherwise this is an enjoyable story about attempted first contact that falls somewhere in the middle of the book qualitywise.

*

Between Worlds, edited by Robert Silverberg, has the premise of futuristic sf with characters "between worlds" both physically and emotionally. While not all the stories satisfy that premise strictly, all are good enough to be at least interesting, with some quite good indeed.

Silverberg's own "The Colonel Returns to Space" tells the story of a retired hero of the Imperium who devoted his life to dealing with problems arising from the imperium's total control over its member worlds. After decades of success, and subsequent fame, he is finally living in a pleasant and well-deserved retirement until an official of the imperium arrives to tell him that his most hated enemy, his former protégé who turned against him and almost killed him, is not dead as has been believed for many years, but alive and fomenting a rebellion on a world which is attempting to secede from the imperium.

The official insists that only the colonel is able to deal with his former protégé, and while

he resists at first, his long unfinished dealings with the man who has been his supposed-dead enemy far longer than he had been his protégé convince him to accept the assignment and do what he can.

Silverberg tends to write two types of stories: well-plotted tales concerning historical trends, and character studies of people seeking emotional or spiritual relief. This story has elements of the latter as it moves steadily towards a classic confrontation of two long-time enemies, but it is primarily the former type as it examines the relationship between the two men and spends much of its time concerned with how the colonel will coerce his former protégé into giving up his intended rebellion.

This is an enjoyable and thoughtful story, containing scattered elements of vintage Silverberg, and ending in an unexpected, yet satisfactory, denouement.

Interestingly, the book's first three stories cover similar hard-science scenarios far away in both time and space. The running theme through the stories is visiting the galactic core (in two of them) and virtual uploads of human beings in all three. The stories treat these similarities in different manners though, and all are mostly successful overall.

Stephen Baxter's "Between Worlds" takes place after a galactic war when a virtual representation of a thousand year old messiah becomes a negotiator with a war refugee who sneaked a bomb onto a spacecraft, demanding that she be returned to her homeworld to see a daughter who, according to all records, never existed. Baxter ranks with Alastair Reynolds as the best storytellers among the newer hard-science writers, and this is a strong story by him. The story contains enough strangeness to feel futuristic, such as spiked, intelligent ships like the strangely-named *Ask Politely*, climaxed by the huge swarming of ships.

The characters are also fascinating, especially the virtual Poole and Futurity's Dream, the religious acolyte who is the main viewpoint character of the story. Like the Silverberg story, the climax is both unexpected but believable.

Nancy Kress' "Shiva in Shadow" tells the story of a ship's crew of two scientists and a captain-nurturer studying the core of the galaxy while releasing a probe into the core containing uploads of all three of them. The story is told in alternating sequences of the three humans on the ship and the three uploads on the probe. Kress does a fine job developing the characters of both groups, as they grow in parallel yet different manners as the stress of their studies progresses. From a literary point of view, this was the finest story in the book.

I have never been a huge fan of the fiction of James Patrick Kelly, considering him a journeyman writer who borrows from current trends rather than adding much to them. "The Wreck of the Godspeed" tells the story of a group of pilgrims on a ship whose intelligence seems to be breaking down, and they fear that it will never permit them to return home when their tour is finished. This is a bit of a subtle, psychological horror

story, which is mostly effective in its emotional impact.

Mike Resnick's "Keepsakes" has the most fascinating premise of any story in the book. A mysterious race of aliens known as the Space Gypsies periodically contact humans in trouble, always offering to solve their problem at a really low financial cost, but also demanding a small keepsake in each instance, which they will select after they complete their job. The keepsake always turns out to be something of such high emotional value that the human is highly distraught, sometimes to the point of being shattered for life. The protagonist is a government agent seeking out these aliens who so far have avoided all authorities. Unfortunately, the story is mostly a glib detective story, nearly all surface with only occasional attempts at any depth. That's too bad, since a story whose primary focus is emotional depth should have contained some of that depth as well. Too bad.

The best story in the book is Walter Jon Williams' "Investments," a political drama involving an interesting cast of characters which develops into a rousing adventure. Lord Martinez is a member of a heredity peer group who is given his first political posting on a world which he realizes before he arrives is a hotbed of corruption. Meanwhile, his junior officer Severin is not a peer but became an officer during a long war which was apparently detailed in Williams' *Dread Empire's Fall* trilogy. Severin is a member of the common people who, as an officer, is neither fish nor fowl, forced to live as a commoner while serving with the peers.

When Martinez goes to his posting, Severin is piloting another spaceship which mysteriously finds itself under attack from what turns out to be a pulsar, whose waves will next reach Martinez' posting and destroy most of that world, including all its inhabitants. The struggle to save the world is exciting, although the solution to the corruption problem is a bit too easy. Still this was a strong story overall, which convinced me I should read the entire *Dread Empire's Fall* trilogy.

Interestingly, the best 2004 novella I had read prior to this collection was Walter Jon Williams' "The Tang Dynasty Underwater Pyramid," giving him perhaps the two best novellas of that year.

*

For thirty years Michael Bishop has been one of my favorite science fiction writers, only equaled by Robert Silverberg in my personal pantheon. I have 23 of his books, including all his collections, and although I first fell in love with his science fiction of the 70s and 80s, my feelings survived his transformation into a writer of mostly contemporary fantasy in the 90s.

His recent collection **Brighten to Incandescence** contains stories ranging from the 70s to recently, with the majority published in the past decade. As usual for Bishop, they came from a wide variety of sources, including original anthologies, small presses and major prozines. I have always felt that Bishop cares more for his "art" than he does for

financial success, although possibly he made enough money from his movie sale for **Brittle Inning**—which was never actually made into a film—not to have any financial worries. In any case, while his choice of markets can be a bit frustrating since it makes the stories difficult to find, it always makes the release of a new Bishop collection a pleasant occasion.

Needless to say, I enjoyed all the stories in the book because of a combination of Bishop's wonderful writing, his feel for characters, and his thoughtfulness. Not surprisingly, some stories moved me more than others. "The Unexpected Visit of a Reanimated Englishwoman" was his introduction to a collection of Mary Shelley's fantasy stories, written as a spectral visit from Shelley herself while Bishop is trying to write the introduction. It takes the form of a discussion between the two of them about her fantastic writing. Not a story per se, it taught me things I never knew about Shelley's writings, and was very interesting.

"Chihuahua Flats" is the story of a drifter who falls in love with the owner of a chihuahua kennel owner in spite of the fact that her beloved chihuahua despises him. They marry and persevere in spite of that, until the wife develops cancer and the husband faces the prospect of living alone with the spiteful chihuahua. Many pet owners could likely relate to the story's premise, and Bishop pulls off a surprisingly moving story.

"Herding With the Hadrosaurs" tells the story of a family of four which relocates to a Late Cretaceous region slightly west of the Mississippi. The family learns how dangerous such a region is almost immediately upon arrival when the parents are both killed by a rampaging t-rex, and the two youngsters survive by adopting a family of duckbills who protect them from most prehistoric life, but not necessarily from other migrant humans who live by hunting creatures such as the duckbills. This story is unusual in that it is Bishop as the not-so-common storyteller.

"Simply Indispensable" has a premise which seems ludicrous, and would likely have failed totally in lesser hands. It begins as a conversation between four near-future religious leaders on a televised talk show set in the Middle East, but it turns into a visit from an alien entity apparently recruiting mankind into a higher cause. Joe Way, the alien entity, is the most intriguing character in the entire book, and provides much grist for thought in what over the years has been Bishop's periodic obsession with religious exploration.

Perhaps the book's finest story, and one of the finest of Bishop's career, is "With A Little Help From Her Friends," a story which successfully combines political torture with nostalgia in the guise of a living saint who spent her life tending the sick, was tortured brutally as a result, and now is dying in a home for former torturees run by Amnesty International. I was amazed at how Bishop made me feel both outraged and warm-hearted, sad yet hopeful, and even threw in a reunion of the three-surviving Beatles in 2013 (when the story was written, George Harrison was still alive). Anybody who could write a story this powerful and caring is certainly a great writer.

Which is why I love Michael Bishop's fiction, and recommend this book—and all his collections—as highly as possible.

*

Two aspects of fiction which appeal to me are historical tales seeped in the atmosphere of the era in which they are set, and stories about passionate people involved in some form of art or science. Katherine Neville's 1989 novel **The Eight** easily qualifies in both regards. What the characters are passionate about is the game of chess.

The premise is that during his reign Charlemagne was presented by eight moors with a gift as a token for his assisting them in Spain. The gift was a supernatural chess set which seemingly took over Charlemagne's mind while imbuing him with supernatural power. Fearful of the set's power, Charlemagne orders it hidden beneath the Montglane Abby in France.

The bulk of the novel follows two simultaneous storylines, both spearheaded by attempts to find the legendary Montglane Service. During the French Revolution the radical government decides to confiscate all Church wealth, including sending soldiers to Montglane to seek the chess set. The abbess is the only person who knows precisely the location of the service, knowledge which was passed down for one thousand years from abbess to abbess. She separates the set into its component pieces and orders various nuns and noviciates to take the pieces into hiding. This portion follows the activities of three people: the abbess who flees to Russia where her childhood friend has become czarina Catherine the Great; and noviciates Mereille and Veronica who take several pieces to Paris.

However, Paris is in the midst of turmoil and the infamous "Terror" during which chaos reigns and King Louis XVI is put on trial by the populace. The girls befriend Talleyrand, bishop of Autin and an important French leader, who assists their efforts to keep the chess set out of the hands of such dangerous people as Robespierre and Marat.

Eventually, Talleyrand brings part of the service to England, while Mereille flees to Corsica where she befriends another future French leader, Napoleone, and his family.

Simultaneously with this story, in 1972 Catherine Velis is a computer expert who has fallen afoul of the leadership of her "Big Eight" financial firm for refusing to participate in illegal activities, so she is transferred to Algeria to work as punishment. Meanwhile, she attends a major chess tournament with her friend, Lily, a rich, spoiled, flamboyant daughter of one of Catherine's dearest friends. Participating in the match is Solarin, the bad boy of Russian chess, who realizes that his opponent in their initial match is cheating. Solarin demands a recess in the match and confronts his opponent in a men's room. Shortly thereafter his opponent is murdered.

The Eight has a lot of strengths which make it fascinating reading. Neville is very strong

at creating setting and ambiance. Both revolutionary France and modern Algeria are breathtaking, with the former truly frightening in his chaos. The portions set in both countries are breathtaking and worth the entire novel. I also enjoyed the portions about chess, and the people who lived for it.

There were some typical thriller flaws in the novel though. In the 1972 portion, everybody except Catherine seems to know what is happening in the clandestine hunt for the Montglane Service. All her friends are seemingly involved in the plot, all giving her mysterious hints and clues rather than actually sharing any information with her. And the ultimate denouement is as much pseudo-science as an episode of **Star Trek**.

Fortunately, the novel's other strengths were so well-done that the thriller aspect did not hurt it much, although, for me at least, the novel might have been even stronger without the mysterious deaths and assassins. But that is my personal bias speaking, and the thriller aspect might appeal to other readers moreso than it did for me. In any case, this was an exciting novel about history and chess which I recommend highly.

The In-Box

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

Argentus / Steven Silver / 707 Sapling Lane, Deerfield, IL 60015-3969 / shsilver@sfsite.com / genzine

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

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

Challenger / The Zine Dump / Guy H. Lillian III / www.challzine.net / still one of the finest fanzines being published

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

Dancing and Joking / A collection of John Hertz' fanwriting, mostly fascinating stuff, published to celebrate his being Fan Guest of Honor at Westercon, and selling for \$5.00 as a TAFF fundraiser.

Emerald City / Cheryl Morgan / <http://www.emcit.com> / webzine devoted to reviews; EC is now a semi-prozine and Cheryl is requesting \$12.00 per reader per year. It's worth

the cost.

File 770 / Mike Glycer / 705 Valley View Ave., Monrovia, CA 01016 / fannish news and reviews

For The Clerisy / Brant Kresovich / P.O. Box 404, Getzville, NY 14068 / discussions on books

It Goes on the Shelf / Ned Brooks / 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, GA 30047-4720 / book reviews

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

MOZ / Murray Moore / 1065 Henley Road, Mississauga, ON L4Y 1C8 Canada / personal natter and reviews

Peregrine Nations / Janine Stinson / Box 431304, Big Pine Key, FL 33043-0314 / available through <http://efanzines.com/> / genzine

The Reluctant Famulus / Tom Sadler / 422 W. Maple Ave, Adrian, MI 49221-1627 / return of a long-dormant genzine. Welcome back, Tom!

The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette / Garth Spencer / <http://www.efanzines.com/RSNG> / personalzine with lots of letters

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 and Janine Stinson / available through <http://www.efanzines.com/> / genzine with lots of reviews

Vanamonde / John Hertz / 236 S. Coronado St., No 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057 / two-page APAzine with comments and obituaries.

On the Lighter Side

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

"The skeleton is what is left after the insides have been taken out and the outsides have been taken off. The purpose of the skeleton is something to hitch meat to."

"A permanent set of teeth consists of eight canines, eight cuspids, two molars, and eight cuspidors."

"The tides are a fight between the Earth and moon. All water tends towards the moon, because there is no water on the moon and nature abhors a vacuum. I forget where the sun joins in this fight."

"Equator: A menagerie lion running around the Earth through Africa."

"Germinate: To become a naturalized German."

"Liter: A nest of young puppies."

"Magnet: Something you find crawling all over a dead cat."

"Momentum: What you give a person when they are going away."

"Planet: A body of Earth surrounded by sky."

"Rhubarb: A kind of celery gone bloodshot."

"Vacuum: A large, empty space where the pope lives."

"Before giving a blood transfusion, find out if the blood is affirmative or negative."

"To remove dust from the eye, pull the eye down over the nose."

"For a nosebleed: Put the nose much lower than the body until the heart stops."

"For dog bite: put the dog away for several days. If he has not recovered, then kill it."

"For head cold: use an agonizer to spray the nose until it drops in your throat."

"To keep milk from turning sour: keep it in the cow."

"For fainting: Rub the person's chest, or, if a lady, rub her arm above the hand instead. Or put the head between the knees of the nearest medical doctor."

"To prevent contraception, use a condominium."

*

A priest walked into a barber shop in Washington, D.C. After he got his haircut, he asked how much it would cost.

The barber said, "No charge. I consider it a service to the Lord."

The next morning, the barber came to work and there were 12 prayer books and a thank you note from the priest in front of the door.

Later that day, a police officer came in and got his hair cut. He then asked how much it was.

The barber said, "No charge. I consider it a service to the community."

The next morning, he came to work and there were a dozen donuts and a thank you note from the police officer.

Then, a Senator came in and got a haircut. When he was done he asked how much it was.

The barber said, "No charge. I consider it a service to the country."

The next morning, the barber came to work and there were 12 Senators in front of the door.

*

A drunken man walks into a biker bar, sits down at the bar and orders a drink. Looking around, he sees 3 men sitting at a corner table.

He gets up, staggers to the table, leans over, looks the biggest, meanest biker in the face and says: "I went by your grandma's house today and I saw her in the hallway buck ass naked. Man, she is one fine looking woman!"

The biker looks at him and doesn't say a word. The other bikers are confused, because he is one bad biker and would fight at the drop of a hat.

The drunk leans on the table again and says: "I got it on with your grandma and she is good, the best I ever had!"

The biker's buddies are starting to get really mad but the biker still says nothing.

The drunk leans on the table one more time and says, "I'll tell you something else, boy, your grandma liked it!"

At this point the biker stands up, takes the drunk by the shoulders, looks him square in the eyes and says, "Grandpa,..... Go home, you're drunk."

*

Some Rodney Dangerfield One-Liners:

- I'm so ugly...I worked in a pet shop, and people kept asking how big I'd get.
- I went to see my doctor. "Doctor, every morning when I get up and I look in the mirror...I feel like throwing up. What's wrong with me?" "Nothing," the doctor said. "Your eyesight is perfect."
- I went to the doctor because I'd swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills. My doctor told me to have a few drinks and get some rest.
- With my old man I got no respect. I asked him, "How can I get my kite in the air ?" He told me to run off a cliff.
- Some dog I got. We call him Egypt because in every room he leaves a pyramid. His favorite bone is in my arm. Last night he went on the paper four times—three of those times I was reading it.
- One year they wanted to make me poster boy for birth control.
- I'm so ugly, when I was born the doctor slapped my mother.

*

Tim Marion sends the next joke:

Five surgeons were discussing who makes the best patients on which to operate.

The first surgeon said, "I like to see accountants on my operating table, because when you open them up, everything inside is numbered."

The second responded, "Yeah, but you should try electricians. Everything inside is color-coded!"

The third surgeon said, "No, I really think librarians are the best; everything inside them is in alphabetical order."

The fourth surgeon chimed in, "You know, I like construction workers...those guys always understand when you have a few parts left over at the end, and when the job takes longer than you said it would."

But the fifth surgeon shut them all up when he observed, "You're all wrong. Politicians are the easiest to operate on. There's no guts, no heart, no balls, no brains and no spine, and the head and the ass are interchangeable."

*

A flight attendant was stationed at the departure gate to check tickets. As a man approached, she extended her hand for the ticket, and he opened his trench coat and flashed her. Without missing a beat she said, "Sir, I need to see your ticket, not your stub."

*

A lady was picking through the frozen turkeys at the grocery store, but couldn't find one big enough for her family. She asked a stock boy, "Do these turkeys get any bigger?" The stock boy replied, "No ma'am, they're dead."

*

The cop got out of his car and the kid who was stopped for speeding rolled down his window. "I've been waiting for you all day," the cop said. The kid replied, "Yeah, well I got here as fast as I could." When the cop finally stopped laughing, he sent the kid on his way without a ticket.

*

A truck driver was driving along the freeway. A sign comes up that read "Low Bridge Ahead." Before he knew it the bridge was right ahead of him and he got stuck under the bridge. Cars were backed up for miles. Finally, a police car came up. The cop got out of his car and walked around to the truck driver, put his hands on his hips and said, "Got stuck, huh?" The truck driver said, "No, I was delivering this bridge and ran out of gas."

*

A college teacher reminds her class of tomorrow's final exam. "Now class, I won't tolerate any excuses for you not being here tomorrow. I might consider a nuclear attack or a serious personal injury or illness, or a death in your immediate family but that's it, no other excuses whatsoever!"

A smart-ass guy in the back of the room raised his hand and asks, "What would you say if tomorrow I said I was suffering from complete and utter sexual exhaustion?"

The entire class does its best to stifle their laughter and snickering. When silence is restored, the teacher smiles sympathetically at the student, shakes her head, and sweetly says, "Well, I guess you'd have to write the exam with your other hand."

*

A scientist from Texas A&M University has invented a bra that keeps women's breasts from jiggling and prevents the nipples from pushing out the fabric when cold weather sets in. After a news conference announcing the invention, a large group of men took the scientist outside and kicked the shit out of him.

*

A lady inserted an ad in the classifieds: "Husband wanted". Next day she received a hundred letters. They all said the same thing: "You can have mine. "

*

When a woman steals your husband, there is no better revenge than to let her keep him.