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isions of Paradise #110: Halcyon Days

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E.B. Frohvet

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June 8, 2006

There's a place in Florida owned by Ringling Brothers circus, and it amounts to being a stud farm. For elephants. The most recent birth was this spring: a bouncing baby girl elephant. 295 pounds at birth. These creatures are, of course, raised from infancy being around humans, and take that for granted; the little ones trot up to visitors with the amiable clumsiness of a puppy.

I'm not so much in favor of quarterly schedules, as I'm in favor of regular schedules. You can't fault, e.g., **Argentus**, it makes no pretense of being anything but an annual. Having said which, glad to see **VoP** more often.

Of your favorite novels, I have read six, but none would make my comparable list. Probably one Simak, but if I could pick only one, most likely **Mastadonia** or **The Goblin Reservation**.

I know what the "ideas" are, we studied it in Latin class in high school. Gaius Julius Caesar was murdered on the ides of March, 44BC ... yes, there are actually some TV shows worth

seeing, though one of the good ones, **Everwood**, was just terminated.

Endlessly fascinating, the role you play not only in your students' lives, but for years after. Best wishes to Fei Fei and Silvio, and I look forward to reading of your trip to Italy. My limited experience suggests that American tourists will do better if they learn at least a few basic phrases of the host nation's language. Drop me in Germany or France, I could get by. Italy, not so much.

I liked all the cover art, but the one of the unicorns makes me wonder if the dark unicorn is a female/mare, and the other is the male/stallion in pursuit? Perhaps you saw the cartoon where Noah's Ark is sailing off into the distance, and the one unicorn is saying to the other: "Don't worry, I traded in our tickets for first class on the next boat."

"Why SF?" indeed. It either interests one, or it doesn't.

I do think the "cast of characters" at the end of *The Passing Scene* is a good idea, though in retrospect I realized that I generally knew who most of them were ... we could go round and round on how, if neither Cheryl Morgan nor Dave Langford is doing a "fanzine," how are they "fan writers"? But it's a difference that makes no difference.

Sadly, you are probably right that everyone has some bad memory of school or teachers.

On publishing some of your own fiction in **VoP**: well, it's not something I would have done. You should keep in mind that, as in a workshop, if you put your work out there publicly, that's an invitation for people to critique it.

Joseph Nicholas: You know what, I'm tired of arguing with Joseph. He's right about the publishers, though I would surely argue that Clifford Simak was a more important writer than Edgar Pangborn. Of Fritz Leiber, I dug out the several volumes of the "Fafhrd & Grey Mouser" stories for the first time in several years. These were books I distinctly recall that I once liked a lot; now they seem to me silly and misogynistic and badly-written. That was rather a sad experience for me, though it's happened before.

Seen on a bumper the other day: "Frodo has failed. Bush has the Ring." Whatever one thinks of the president or his policies, you have to admit, that's clever.

I've been trying to recreate my great-grandmother's recipe for *sauerhassen*. Oddly, the most immediate problem is finding commercial rabbit. I remember I used to be able to find it frozen in supermarkets, but apparently not anymore. If you know some company that will deliver it, pass the information on. No, fandom, please don't send me a dead rabbit in a box. Among other things, that violates postal regulations.

[Since I have recently joined a small, professional writers' group, I will likely post my fiction there instead of in **VoP** at Efanzine.com. So enjoy issue #109 which might be my only piece of fiction for a long while.

[It's a good thing for your warning not to send you dead rabbits via the mail. Misty is regularly catching baby rabbits, but she no longer seems interested in eating them, so she delivers them to us whole. Are you sure you're not interested in a UPS package? ☺]

Lloyd Penney
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July 30, 2006

My own tastes in SF run to the old stand-bys of time travel, distant space travel to the Outer Rim, etc. Perhaps space opera, but I do like adventure and innovative ideas. I also don't mind a little fictional science in my science fiction. I have always like Isaac Asimov's writing, plus adventures from Poul Anderson, A. Bertram Chandler, and others who wrote about grand adventure in the heart of space. It's difficult to know who's writing what I like any more, so perhaps to be certain, I'll rely on the authors I like, and fill in the gaps in my collection that way.

Strips I read regularly...*Zits*, *For Better or For Worse*, *Sherman's Lagoon*, *Get Fuzzy*, *Ozy and Millie*, and *A Doemain of Our Own*. The last two are on-line comics only. I used to enjoy collections of political cartoons from daily newspapers, and there are a few websites that collect them and present them. There's a lot of biting wit and satire in those cartoons; I used to collect the cartoon compilations of Toronto Star cartoonist Duncan McPherson.

Rob Sawyer recently won the John Campbell award for best novel of the year, so he's now running out of awards to win. Very quickly, he is becoming one of the most honoured SF writers of the past 20 years.

I've been telling as many fans as possible that I am conducting an experiment. From the beginning of this month, as I send out letters of comment, I am also archiving those letters onto a LiveJournal account. You can see how busy I've been this month by checking out lloydpenney.livejournal.com, and reading my locs, probably before they appear in the zines they're intended for. Response to this has been largely positive so far, but the experiment is far from done. Take care, and see you when the paper version arrives.

Wondrous Stories 106... Another detailed article by E.B. Frohvet; he's very good at writing them. I wish I could offer some comment on this one, but I am probably one of the few SF readers never to have read any of the *Miles Vorkosigan* stories by Lois Bujold. I have never liked SF with a military aspect to it, and it is probably my loss. In the meantime, there's still plenty to read.

Reading your essay on culture building reminded me that it's been a while since I've read anything by C.J. Cherryh. I have so many of her books on the shelf, but nothing new for me in a few years now. I honestly do not know if she's published anything over the past five years, or

whether she's resting on her much-deserved laurels. I think something we could all use is a list of novels by today's and yesterday's top SF novelists, with series listed, and all books within the series. Sometimes, I find it difficult to pick up a book, and find it Part 3 of 5. If we could research what books are in what series, it would be easier to know what order to read them, and get the sequential story in full. I guess I'm having too much fun with fanzines to concentrate more on actual SF; that's my loss, but one that is easily rectified. So many books to read, and so little time.

I see a mention of A. Bertram Chandler. I have several of his Rim books, and enjoyed the space adventure in them; I'd like to get some more. I have a small want list, and those books are on it.

Halcyon Days 106... Trinlay Khadro mentions the Antiques Roadshow. AR is an old British tradition, and it's been shown on the CBC for quite some time. I remember a report that Morley Safer had on *60 Minutes* years back making fun of the old AR...and then, the American version came along, and for a couple of years, so did the Canadian version. Safer made fun of the show, but might have also piqued the interest of American producers who knew that the two foci of the show are the beautiful antiques that are shown on the programme, and the reaction of the antique owners when told by the experts how much they think their heirloom is worth. When the BBC AR was in Toronto some years ago, it was held at Casa Loma, the closest thing Toronto has to a castle.

Our local SF bookstore (hurray, we still have one!) has regular if not impressive sales...its previous owner told me in all candour that fandom provided him with less than 5% of his total sales. There are many SF readers who not only avoid fandom, but he figured that the majority of them did not even know of fandom's existence. It is unfortunate that even though we were friends, he thought of fandom as SF's lunatic fringe.

The BBC stations I listen to are available through the enormous BBC website at www.bbc.co.uk. Click on Radio, and then the main stations are available. You may have to dig a little more to get the regional stations like Radio Scotland. The site also has a player that will help you listen to the stations, but I think you have to have Windows Media or Real Player loaded up to hear them.

We're in the process of getting new passports ourselves. The total cost here is \$87, and given that the US government is proving to be totally inflexible in the matter, and the fact that \$67 passports in the US are not likely to be popular, I can see traffic across border points slowing down to a trickle. We think that to get to places like Buffalo and Rochester to go to cons and visit friends, the money is worth it. Now to see how the average American feels about having to buy a passport just to visit Canada. I think both countries will suffer financially.

The Passing Scene 107... As I got into reading SF in my pre-teens, I respected and admired the Hugos, and wondered if I'd ever see one, or hold one, or vote on one. I am lucky to have done all three, but am dismayed with how little regard modern fans hold the awards. It is easy to say that all awards are popularity contests, but I still have some respect for the silver rockets, and I'd like to see their shine return.

Ah, a trip to Italy. My sister-in-law and her husband have just returned from a trip to Italy, and visits with some of his distant relatives. We have still to go to their home to find out about their trip, and get whatever goodies they may have picked up for us while they were there.

[<http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/> is a website which does indeed list all of an author's works categorized by series and by year of publication. So for example, when I looked up C.J. Cherryh, I found the following list of her recent publications:

Fortress of Ice, #5 in the Tristan series, was published in 2006;
Forge of Heaven, #2 in the *Gene War* series, was published in 2004;
Three novels in the *Foreigner* series was published recently:
Destroyer, #7 overall, #1 in the 3rd sequence, was published in 2005;
Pretender #8 overall, #2 in the 3rd sequence, was published in 2006;
Deliverer #9 overall, #3 in the 3rd sequence, was published in 2007

[I strongly recommend that website for keeping track of individual author's works, especially series. I keep an extensive list of 54 series, mostly f&sf, all of it culled from Fantastic Fiction. That is helpful when I want to read books in a series so that I know where they fall overall, as well as when I want to buy new books in series. It eliminates all the guesswork for me.]

John Purcell
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Sun, 30 Jul 2006

I do so like your question leading off this issue. Indeed, where are the "new planetary romances?" This may be the germ of a new trend in science fiction. There is something completely child-like and appealing about that old "goshwhowsensawondah" we get from reading good, old-fashioned, rock 'em, sock 'em space opera. I readily admit my fondness for reading these mainly because they are so much fun. It's entertainment, and that really matters. Nowadays, I enjoy solid plotting, characterization, and thematic content, even relevance, in my sf&f reading, but once in a great while give me one of Jack Williamson's *Legion of Space* stories, or something by Arthur Leo Zagat, Eando Binder, or a "Doc" Smith *Lensman* novel. Gawd, those are fun books!

Those "cheat sheet" guides were very amusing. I may have to copy/paste some of these and ship them around the English department at the college I teach at. Let's pass these along to a larger, appreciative audience. This is fun stuff, and I thank you for including it.

The same goes for your comic strip synopses. Very enjoyable. Nothing really surpasses classic *Peanuts* strips, but I have a penchant for *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Doonesbury*, and *B.C.*, and I really miss *Bloom County*. If I read comics— which is rare lately—those are the ones I enjoy the most. Of course, *The Far Side* has long been a staple of the off-kilter view of reality. Gotta love it.

The only real comment I have about your Hugo and Nebula commentary is that I haven't read any of these stories and books mentioned. Not a one. Now, there are names I recognize herein, but they are far over-shadowed by the names I don't know.

Is this my fault? In part, yes, because I haven't been keeping up with current pro mags, novels, and on-line fiction pro/semi-pro zines. For the life of me, I have no idea how I could keep up with it all, stuff is published at such a rapid fire rate. Life was so much simpler back in the days when I was single and had no other responsibilities except my job. Being a family man, professional educator, and doctoral student really eat up my spare time. Some day I'll be able to read a lot for relaxation again. At the rate my doctorate is going, we're looking at some time in 2008. We'll see when we get there.

You mention Panera Bread as a favorite place to eat. Our 21-year old daughter's boy friend has now clued me onto this place, and he says the sandwiches are to die for. Haven't tried it yet, but maybe next week when we stop in the only Panera Bread in Houston that I know of, maybe I'll grab one of their sandwiches for the road. They sure sound good! All I know is that their bagels and cookies are wonderful.

E. B. Frohvet's commentary about literary clunkers applies across the literary board. There are many of these in "mainstream" fiction, probably just as many as in sfnal works. Once again, I hate to admit it, but I have never read anything by Lois McMaster Bujold. (Please don't shoot me! It's just that I really don't have the time to read, even for my school work sometimes.) But Frohvet's last line applies to every single professional writer: "the author should have known better," especially when getting to the denouement of the story. A wrong line at that point will totally destroy the story for me, and if it's a good read to that point, it is a truly heinous literary crime to commit.

[I can remember in the 1970s when I was a member of APA-45 that fellow member Don D'Amassa would buy and read every new science fiction book that was published. Since there are well over 1,000 new sf books published each year now—and that number might be way low—I don't think anybody can possibly keep up anymore even were it their fulltime job.]

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It is nice to be able to access **VoP** online. When you want to read its lines, it is easy to access and you don't have to try to remember in which safe and easily findable spot the latest issue has managed to wander.

In my effort to redefine life I think the best place may be where I always found much enjoyment

–fandom and fanzines. Life has returned to a point where I don't have to be caring for someone on a full-time basis and I am trying to find a way to keep the mind amused. Fanzines seem to be a logical answer.

Have you been watching the SciFi Channel this summer? They have a couple of neat programs.

Dead Like Me is a show that I am so happy they decided to air. I had never seen it or known it existed before and now I am sorry that it only saw two seasons of existence. *Eureka* is also a neat show. I like how Sheriff Carter likened a connection between himself and a truly mad scientist as rather like a Vulcan mind meld.

As to reading material, I have been reading mostly mysteries. They are a good cross word puzzle type of reading that allows you to figure things out and to observe people via text. However, unlike the list provided in **VoP**, I enjoy most all mysteries that feature cats. Of course, I like cats so that could be a reason for such a statement. Books of a light weight nature have a use as a form of meditation. You can get into one and calm the mind and lower the blood pressure. This is a good reason for the mystery class known as the cozy to exist. They are nice comforting pillows upon which the head can rest.

[I have considered watching some of the new series on SciFi Channel but, as usual, when the time comes to do so I retreat to a book instead. I think I am happier reading a book than I could ever be watching a tv show.]

E.B. Frohvet
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October 7, 2006

And we're back just in time to contemplate that urgent question: does white zinfandel really go with grilled cheese-bacon-and fried onion sandwiches? One potential answer: it does if you want it to, but maybe beer is a better choice.

Let the record show I am a being of my word. I said I would stop referring to the "Fan Hugoes" as lost causes if Steve Stiles, Claire Briarly or Guy Lillian received one. Well, we see how that worked out.

Useless facts about Italian food dept: "Turkey [in the original probably chicken] Tetrizzini Tetrizzini" was named in honor of the Italian soprano Luisa Tetrizzini, who toured widely in the U.S. but there is no evidence she ever ate it. It was probably invented in San Francisco in the 1920s. "Clams Casino" was created at the Casino Restaurant on Long Island. A society lady, a Mrs. Stevens, requested an original dish for a luncheon she was giving for friends. The staff created the dish with clams cooked with bacon. The *grande dame* asked what the item was

called; the maitre d' replied coolly, "It has no name, Mrs. Stevens, but we shall call it Clams Casino in honor of this restaurant."

I could nitpick several points about your Liaden review, e.g., as we have established that Liaden are interfertile with Terrans, we can hardly call them "aliens." In general, I agree that **Local Custom** is a "novel of manners"—but so is **A Civil Campaign**. Perhaps it lacks the action

content of **Agent of Change** or **Carpe Diem**. However, the authors have to walk a fine line between readers such as me who have read all the books, and you who is not familiar with the established subtext. I do share your taste for "culture-building" tales. For just that reason, I was disappointed with **Pretender**, the 8th volume of the *Foreigner* trilogy, exactly because it seems to have exhausted the interaction between human and atevi cultures that to me was the backbone of the series. I do think that if you continue with the *Liaden* series, you will find it grows on you. I've said much the same about **VoP!**

The In-Box: one sees a couple of titles there which I ought to have received...

On the Lighter Side: I often copy jokes from here into my letters to Lyn McConchie in New Zealand—and Lyn says she passes along ones she likes to her local newspaper!

The Passing Scene: It would be interesting if you would explain how a person who works hard and knows his subject is "not a good teacher at all". Is it the ability to maintain control of the classroom that's lacking? Inability to find a way to get students interested in the material? ... "Traitors instead of patriots:" well, you see what happened to Lincoln ... Absent any knowledge of the restaurant where Andy is working, I would guess he is a "line cook", i.e., someone who mainly chops vegetables. This is the traditional starting job in a kitchen ... I rather wish there was an Olive Garden near here, the food is quite passable for the prices ... I've been around **VoP**

so long that I recall Fei Fei as a high school student! Now she's teaching at Princeton. Congrats all around. I especially liked the picture of the happy couple with their parents.

Trinlay Khadro: I had to look up what "similar situation" we were talking about. Okay, that's sort of why I did that article. I have a platter which belonged to my grandparents, dated 1885 (under the glaze); someday I must take it to a local antique shop and see what they can tell me.

Joseph T. Major: Far be it from me to defend collegiate athletics; but in fact it is generally the larger schools—see Penn State, U Michigan—that are the athletic factories. Some schools with good academic reputations have done okay in sports—Stanford and Princeton come to mind. In any of those, the varsity athletes comprise a small portion of the student body ... I fear you have missed the point of **Emergence**, or at least parsed it too hard for logic to the detriment of appreciating its charm.

I was struck by Bob's comment that Michael Bishop is someone you'd like to meet, but would

be “too intimidated” to approach him. I gather you don’t go to many cons, since you would get over that in a hurry. My experience has been that with few exceptions, writers like to meet people who can talk intelligently about their books. One of my cherished memories of fandom is

meeting Ray Bradbury at Atlanta Worldcon, ‘86. He was walking around the con suite, and apparently no one else dared approach him. I walked up, introduced myself, and started talking about **The Martian Chronicles**. I would not have done that without my previous times meeting writers.

[There are several factors which determine the quality of a teacher, including such aspects as classroom management, maintaining students’ motivation and interest level, the ability to teach to the level of the students, being able to “think on your feet,” being able to assess and adjust while teaching, and caring for students. Many of those items can be learned through practice and experience, but some of them, such as being able to “think on your feet” are innate:

either you have it or you don’t. That is why some would-be teachers never really rise about the level of mediocrity while some rank amateurs are naturals at it.

[Andy did a variety of jobs in the restaurant, including stints as maitre d’, cook, waiter, busboy, and dishwasher. At Disney World he works primarily at the take-out counter.

[While I like Olive Garden, in Italian-rich N.J. the finest Italian food can usually be found at unpretentious pizzerias, which many patrons only use to order take-out pizzas while the more

fortunate few realize how outstanding their other menu items are and at a reasonable price compared to fancier restaurants.

[In recent years Rutgers University has striven to become a “major university” with an outstanding reputation. However, their approach to that has included cutting numerous programs and staff positions while drastically increasing the amount of money spent on football,

including raising their coach’s annual salary to \$1 million. Many of us in the state oppose those

steps and resent the acclaim Rutgers has received based solely on their football success.

[☞ *I gather you don’t go to many cons, since you would get over that in a hurry.* Sorry, that is not quite true. I attended worldcons regularly in the 70s, as well as several regional cons, and

I never got over my intimidation at approaching either known professionals or even fans whose names I recognized. That frustration was one of the reasons I stopped attending worldcons in the 1980s. Did I ever tell you the story of the time I encountered C.J. Cherryh in the dealers’ room? This was the 1980s, so I was with my wife at the time, which must have boosted my confidence enough that I approached Cherryh, told her how much I admired her writing, then the two of us stood staring at each other for several minutes as neither of us could think of a single other thing to say. I realized then she was as shy in public as I was.]

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Oct 8, 2006

Thanks for your latest bundle, which I read this morning while re-dyeing my hair. This is a fairly tedious but necessary—for certain values of "necessary"—chore which has to be undertaken every six to eight weeks, to cope with regrowth at the roots and fading of the colour due to the ordinary wear and tear of living in London. (It fades even quicker whenever we visit Australia, because of course the sunlight is much stronger—even in the Australian winter.) I dye my hair not because I'm vain but because I simply got bored with going grey—and having chosen to dye it, then picked a colour which would signal that it had been dyed. (In my book, if you're choosing a colour which will hide the grey hairs, by making them look the same as those which haven't turned grey, then you are vain.) Thus I sneer at all those "For Men" brands, and went for a L'Oreal shade called Darkest Burgundy Brown, although my underlying grey means that the resulting shade is more burgundy than brown. (But at least it's not purple, or green, or some other weird colour—that would have been a step too far.) Although I imagine that to dye one's hair such an electric colour would probably not be possible in the American workplace, which seems much more conservative than the British. Well, the British civil service, at any rate, where it sometimes seems that just about anything goes. At least to judge by the fact that I routinely leg about in mini-skirts and (very recently) have painted my toenails to match my hair....but then I'm bloody good at what I do, so can get away with this.

Anyway, as I meant to say before I was lured down that sidetrack, I appreciate your reasons for wanting to move **Visions of Paradise** online for all but your FAPA readers but wonder what it will do to your response rate. For myself, I never feel any particular obligation to respond to a fanzine which can be downloaded from e-fanzines.com (or similar), because I don't feel that the editor is making any particular effort to communicate with me personally. But perhaps that's just me, and others feel differently—I know that one of the reasons why I don't often read PDFs online is that we have no broadband connection at home, so would be racking up telephone bills copying them to my hard drive. (The UK has local call rates, as opposed to international rates, but all calls are charged according to their length. Ergo, heavy use of dial-up costs—unlike other countries such as the USA and Australia, where a local call rate seems to mean that one pays only a connection charge.) When I do look at online fanzines, it's usually in breaks at work, where we do have broadband—but rarely if ever print anything out to read later. But that may be because most of what's online is either PDFs of fanzines I've actually been sent through the mail (**Chunga**, for instance), or publications by people I've never heard of.

The obvious rejoinder to that last is that I should make an effort to read their stuff, so that I do acquire some knowledge of them. But then—as you know yourself—there's always too much to

read, so why add to the pile.... Still, we shall see how it goes with **Visions of Paradise**; having been reading the paper version for umpty-ump years, I feel sure I shall want to keep abreast of your doings—and responding to comments from Greg Benford, who accuses China Mieville of having ideas that little more than "warmed over 1970s style Labor Party notions". Hardly! The 1970s Labour government (I'm assuming that he's referring to the UK's Labour Party, not the Australian Labor Party, or ALP—note the differences in the spelling) was notable for its drift and indecision, and eventual surrender to the economic nostrums being peddled by Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives—while being attacked from the left for its surrender to these ideas, and its failure to set out a convincing alternative narrative. Mieville, who would have been a schoolboy at the time, would have been part of that left, for he is a Trotskyist, and thus would have been completely out of sympathy with the social democracy lite of the 1970s Labour government.

But **Benford** is at least right (perhaps without realising it) that we "haven't learned from that bad example", because Tony Blair's New Labour has fallen into exactly the same trap as the Wilson/Callaghan governments: failure to set out a convincing narrative, thus leaving itself vulnerable to attacks from David Cameron's Conservatives for the good things it has done, such as its social programmes for children from economically underprivileged households, to ensure they receive the education which will lift them out of poverty. Rather than trumpet such success, however, New Labour concentrates on further "reform" of public services—"reform" in this case meaning further privatisation and downsizing, thus playing straight into the hands of Conservatives who always want to shrink the state sector. But that's New Labour for you, and that's why they'll probably lose the next general election (still a few years away, but if New Labour doesn't address these deficiencies now, we'll be in for another period of Wilson/Callaghan drift and indecision).

But one has to laugh at **Benford's** assertion that the left never comes up with any new ideas. Isn't it conservatives who are supposed to be shy of new ideas? (Else why call themselves conservatives?) So to complain that their political opponents don't have new ideas smacks of huge pots and kettles.

I'd heard of the furore surrounding The Trial of George Bush, but was hitherto unaware that it was your school which was involved. (It was probably mentioned somewhere in the reports, but down in the small print where it was easily overlooked. Or I just forgot it.) US conservative reaction doesn't surprise me, but I feel moved to say that your response to same seems a little naive. Yes, democracy must allow for dissent from the government of the day; but you must surely have noticed that in their absolute intolerance of any viewpoint other than theirs, their relentless hatred of anyone who dares express any other viewpoint, and their violent desire to crush their opponents out of existence, US conservatives have minimal regard for democratic values. (Indeed, in their response to dissent, US conservatives exactly replicate the Stalinism which they profess to oppose. Try telling them this, however, and they immediately fly into a rage. These people have real anger management issues.) Their sole method of argument (if "argument" is what it can be called) is intimidation: the ad hominem bullying into silence of everyone else, so that their own nonsense goes unchallenged.

In any rational society, nonsense of Ann Coulter variety, in which every liberal is automatically

labelled as a traitor, would be laughed out of the room. (Mind you, Ann Coulter—who sounds as though she's still afraid of the dark—is probably an extreme example. A better one might be Rush Limbaugh, although he really is—as we say in the UK—"all mouth and trousers". His sort of radio programme would never work in the UK, because—apart from breaching broadcasting regulations on the impartiality of news content—his habitual incivility would never find a sympathetic audience. Shock jocks have been tried in the UK, and they all failed.) So it's really not worth attempting to argue with them on points of principle, as it seems your colleague Catherine may have done on the TV programme you mentioned, or even to engage them in rational argument at all: the only appropriate response is to hit them with the same bile and contempt as they shower on everyone else. They won't have a come-back: as is well-known, bullies are cowards at heart, and usually respond to challenges by retreating into whining self-pity. (And usually, nowadays, on their own blogs, where they can be safely ignored and have no influence over anyone but their own circle of admirers.)

Incidentally, the UK is shortly to have its own Trial of George Bush moment, in the shape of a fictitious documentary on the assassination, next year, of Dubya. Real footage will be spliced together with footage by look-alikes and post-assassination investigation by actors working from a script; US neocons are apparently already screaming the place down. These people are obviously so far up themselves that they can't distinguish fiction from fact.

(Just broke off to go and look out into the back garden, and bang on the window to scare off a pair of wood pigeons who were tucking into the last of our blackberries. Bloody scavengers! Normally, at this time of year, there wouldn't be any blackberries left, but it's been a quite extraordinarily mild autumn so far: the second weekend of October, and the temperatures are still in the sixties. There was a bit of a dip in the middle of last week, when we had several days of rain showers, but yesterday was glorious: hardly a cloud in the sky. The longer it goes on, the more vegetable produce we'll be able to lay down for the winter—yesterday, at the allotment, we harvested enough raspberries (the second crop, recovering from the effects of July's drought) to fill an ice cream container; the peas we sowed in August are beginning to develop flowers (so fingers crossed that autumn frosts will hold off long enough for pods to develop and fill); the dwarf beans and the tomatoes are still merrily delivering, the sticklebacks are still darting about the pond (testimony to the fact that fish eggs must be spread by birds' feet, since these are native fish that we didn't introduce ourselves), the broccoli and cabbages are swelling up—it's no wonder that we hardly ever have to buy vegetables in the shops, apart from items that we don't grow ourselves, such as celery.)

(Then just broke off again to check on the status of the laundry, which is approaching its spin cycle and will then have to be taken out and hung up. It's all go in the Nicholas-Hanna household on a Sunday, you know!)

Which means I should probably stop at this point—not least because we need to make another visit to the allotment this afternoon to complete a couple of tasks that weren't finished yesterday. (Breaking up an old fork-lift pallet to liberate the planks for use as new bed edging; laying some old carpet to replace the even older—and disintegrating—carpet removed from one of the paths.) There are weekends in our household where we feel more tired on a Sunday

evening than we do at the end of a normal working week....

[I assume I will lose some input by **VoP** being mostly online now, but that is a worthwhile trade-off for all the time and money I will save doing it in that manner. It will also force me to be a better loccer since editors who send me printzines might not consider notification of an online posting as equal value in trade.

[Several of my readers prefer receiving attachments containing **VoP** rather than seek it out online, and I would like to attach it for all my readers for the sake of those who have difficulty with connection rates, such as you. I haven't yet figured out how to attach the art since I do the zine in WordPerfect before converting it to Word, and I cannot convert the pictures easily.

[It amazes me that the furor over the mock trial of George Bush reached England. By the way, Catherine is not my colleague; she was a 17-year old student the commentator was belittling on the air. Is it any surprise my wife Jean and son Mark separately turned off the show in disgust?]

Chester Cuthbert
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October 9, 2006

I have just finished reading the three sections of **VoP** #106 and I still wonder how you find time to produce such fine material in addition to the hectic life you enjoy.

Don't worry about what you will do when your imminent retirement arrives. Every retired person I've known, including myself, wonders how we ever found time to do the job of making a living. I am always short of time to accomplish anything.

I must thank Trinlay Khadro for her kindly and considerate advice. Actually, Muriel and I have never enjoyed activities with groups of people because we both spend so much time reading and watching TV. Our only social gatherings are with family like today when we will enjoy Thanksgiving dinner at our older daughter's home where all four of our children and their families will assemble. Our fifth family member lives in Regina and visits Winnipeg often. The other four all live in Winnipeg so we are never short of company.

Your concern for your mother's failing health matches what we experience from our children. We grow impatient sometimes with our failing hearing and our simultaneous need to go to the bathroom, but we are fortunate to be living in our own home when so many of our friends are in seniors' residences or nursing homes.

The pictures you published indicate that you enjoyed your visit to Italy. You read more books than I do, but every reader accumulates more books than can be read; I have thousands.

Your fanzines and others less voluminous help us understand what other fans are doing and I am grateful that you continue to keep in touch.

[I am looking forward to retirement so I can hopefully accomplish many of the things I do not have time for while working. I realize there will be a natural "slowing down" at that time, but I cannot picture myself stopping entirely. We'll see...]

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October 11, 2006

The Passing Scene: Lost civilizations became harder to do when global satellite pictures became available. There were two or three "lost valley of cave people" novels in the nineties that each ended with the discoverers destroying the cave/tunnel/valley to the home of the cave people and swearing themselves to absolute secrecy, all so these pure innocents would never be corrupted by the evils of modernity.

In the real world all the members of the party would be fighting each other for the satellite phone to get it in first, there would be internet pictures within 24 hours, and by the end of the week the sky would be black with media helicopters. There's just no room for lost civilizations any more. (As I recall, I said something like "the batrachians of **The Moon Pool** are making sneakers for Nike for pennies a day, Shangri-La has an Internet provider, and there is a Starbucks in the Emerald City of Oz.")

"Magical Realism" is fantasy written by writers who don't want to be tarred with the brush of genre fantasy, and they know that as it's fantasy it doesn't have to make sense, so continuity, consistency, coherence, and so on all get tossed out the window. Fortunately, they have their own cliques to tell them they're so much better . . .

I sort of wondered why Michael Ondaatje made the patient of **The English Patient** Lazlo von Almaszy when he could have made him a fictional explorer with a similar background. Almaszy's real life biography was rather at odds with what the book made of him. (Frederick Forsyth did a review of the movie that showed how utterly absurd it was, but that's another matter.)

Wondrous Stories: While You Were Sleeping is a screwball comedy. All screwball comedies

are propped up with stupid lies that are bound to blow up, and sooner rather than later. For example, *Bringing Up Baby* would have ended with Susan Vance (Katherine Hepburn) in the hospital (if still alive) and facing a substantial financial penalty if not jail time for destroying a valuable paleontological exhibit. Similarly, I've read of real-life circumstances like in *House Sitter*, where Gwen Phillips (Goldie Hawn) moves into a strange man's house (Newton Davis (Steve Martin)) and by fast talking imposes the belief that she is his fiancée on everyone. This would be in the true-crime book of how Gwen Phillips looted Newton Davis's fortune and killed him.

I can't enjoy screwball comedies. This makes it hard for me to read (for example) Connie Willis. Cordelia Naismith has been imbued with the idea that the military is filled by people who can't make it in the real world. Therefore, military ideas are for lesser people, and it is an imposition to force them upon real people, such as herself; she can understand and study them, the way that anthropologists do research among the Primitive Protestant Baptists of the Darkest South, but accepting their values is another matter.

Local Custom: "Er Thom and Anne Smith tend to repeat obvious facts to themselves about their cultures purely for the purpose of reminding the reader in case they missed some subtlety." In other words, it's "*As I know,*' Anne thought, "*it is customary for lovers to place their mouths upon each others'. This is an erotic stimulant . . .*" Sounds like somebody needs to read (obviously, as new writers, Lee and Miller have never read any of that ancient stuff) "*Masters of the Metropolis*" by Randall Garrett and Lin Carter (**F&SF**, April 1957). It's a story about a man taking the bus into New York to go to work written in the gosh-wow isn't-science-wonderful, over-the-top, as-you-know tone of Gernsbackian scientification. Indeed, the hero is "Sam IM4SF+", a reference to Sam Moskowitz, Hugo Gernsback for whom SaM edited the magazine **Science Fiction Plus**, and Gernsback's own novel which pioneered that tone and that Display of Marvels, **Ralph 124C41+** (1929).

"Weyr Search" and the rest of the works that make up **Dragonflight** (1968) and **Dragonquest** (1971) were written under the prodding of John W. Campbell. "Anne, you've shown the dragons breeding, now how do they go fighting Thread?" and other such comments drove her to build the society. What she's done with it since JWC died is another matter . . .

As for **The Book of Dreams** I had problems hating Howard Alan Treesong sufficiently after seeing what had happened to him in high school (and how he made amends at the reunion). How embarrassed would we be if we had our juvenilia found and disseminated throughout the galaxy?

Halcyon Days: Trinlay Khadro: After a teacher mocked my handwriting in Third Grade, I gave up the idea of kindly teachers. (Of course, now I type or print everything.) And it encouraged the students.

Me: And now, as we speak, All Fandom is still reeling from the death, for real this time, of Bob Tucker.

Richard Dengrove: "Time-Travel, Futuristic, and Paranormal" Romances are becoming a big thing. There is some good work being done in them, but it comes from sheer volume rather than any deliberate effort or intent.

Reply to Alex Slate: "So far this year I have bought 15 books, not too bad." That would be a very bad month for me. Since the Slates are moving to Dayton, we hope to see more of them. Also, there are some good cons in that area.

Gregory Benford: Oh there's plenty of politicking in China Mieville's novels. If you're a sixties era Trotskyist from a group with seven members and fifty-three mutually hostile caucuses, where spending eleven days debating the meaning of a comma in the Sacred Writings is inadequate depth of dialectic, that is.

[The principal of my grammar school tried to force me to switch from writing lefthanded to righthanded. Fortunately, I resisted. It is my opinion that there are the same percentage of bad teachers as there are in any profession; it's unfortunate though that many people judge teachers by the worst of the profession rather than by the median or best of them.]

Alexander Slate
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Oct 19, 2006

Update first. The neck is pretty much fully healed. I have one more appointment with the doctor (many months away). I started playing racquetball again towards the end of July, but held off playing any basketball until mid-September. I have had occasional numbness in the shoulder area since, but this goes away immediately if I improve my posture.

I'm doing OK on my own, and it looks hopeful I'll be in Ohio by March. Laurel took a job with Wal-Mart. Sarah is happy with her studies so far and has discovered a love for fencing. Melissa decided she didn't like the coach and has decided not to run at Wright State (at least for freshman year). She has also decided to change majors and is currently looking at Nursing.

Like you, the comics are my favorite part of the paper, though some comics are now found in the editorial section or the business section. I have also found comics.com and msnbc.com/comics in order to get my daily dose.

Re your comments regarding the reaction to the mock trial at PHS, I have two comments.

One) the idea of tolerance, civility, and the ideals of compromise (the last of which is what truly has defined the US and Canada, in my opinion) are under attack and diminishing from both the nominal left and right. At least this is my impression; maybe I'm wrong and this is

only the perception of reality based upon the mass media. This is a case where I would love to be wrong.

Two) Many in power considered Martin Luther King to be a traitor in his day, but the larger media outlets did not. The press was more “liberal” then than now (mostly because the press was a smaller community than it is now).

I remember Schmitz’ **The Lion Game** as serialized in **Analog**. You are obviously reading old Analogs.

Love the pictures you took of the “wedding trip” to Italy. Looks like you had fun.

Finally, I understand the “death of the paper **VoP**, but wish it weren’t so. Please send me the email version rather than just the web reminder. I just don’t remember web e-zines. Example, I now about *Emerald City* and have visited its site a couple of times, but not regularly. However, I always read the email zines from Guy Lillian.

[As I mentioned above, I hope to send **VoP** attached to all my readers for the sake of those who prefer it in that format than going to Efanzone.com.

[Yes, I was reading issues of **Analog** edited by John W. Campbell, Jr. in the late 1960s. They were spotty, but still contained some good stuff by writers such as James H. Schmitz, Poul Anderson, Harry Harrison, and Gordon R. Dickson.]

John Purcell

Oct 27, 2006

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Here it is, 7:00 AM on a Friday, writing a quick loc to you while my son finishes getting ready for his school day. This is my favorite day of the school week for two reasons: one, is the fact that it is Friday; and two, I don't teach on Fridays. No doubt, I really love my teaching schedule this semester at Blinn College; two afternoon classes on Monday & Wednesday, so I don't need to go in until around 10 AM or so those days, and two early morning classes on Tuesday/ Thursday, so I'm done teaching by 10:30 AM. Then nothing on Friday. Oh, how I love this schedule!

So it is with great interest that I read your diary entries about the fun and games you regale us with that happen at your school. Love that one about the acting lead teacher of World Languages who's on a power trip and wants the lock on that one door changed, and that room in question doesn't even belong to the WL department, but to the Math department. Then there are your testing day hassles, and counseling students, and everything else in the public school political schemata. Man, am I glad I no longer teach at a high school! Of course, college

teaching has its own political quirks and all, but I don't feel nearly as constricted as at Willis High School.

I just flipped over *Halcyon Days* 106 and saw Fei Fei's wedding photos. All went well, it looks like. Good deal. Some year, if it ever happens, my wife and I would love to go to Italy and Sicily, Paris, London, Ireland, and Prague—but not in that particular order, of course—and enjoy the sights, sounds, and tastes of Europe. This probably won't be until all the kids are grown and out of the house, but I can wait, I guess. *gnash*

In *Halycon Days* 106, you asked me what I teach: College English. This semester I have four sections of ENGL 1301: Composition and Rhetoric I at Blinn College, and one Intermediate Level ESL class over at Montgomery College in Conroe. It keeps me busy, and I enjoy it. Problem is, here we are heading into the last six weeks of college classes, and I have three small papers and two major research papers to write for my Doctoral classes at TAMU. *sigh* Last night I drew up a Plan of Attack to address these demands, and on paper, it doesn't look so bad. The three small papers I could probably knock off in the next week, so I'm not too worried about them. It's the big research paper on "George Eliot's use of Dialect as a Narrative Device" that I'm most worried about (for ENGL 678). My research paper on aliteracy for my Reading Teaching Methods class (RDNG 650) isn't going to be that bad at all; I have a pile of material on hand already for that one, so it will be easy to rattle off a 10-15 page paper there.

Gregory Benford is coming to town to give a public lecture, Monday night, November 6th, under the auspices of TAMU's Chemistry Department. That might be interesting to listen to, but unfortunately, that's one of the nights I teach my ESL class. No matter. He e-mailed me last week and suggested we get together sometime while he's here. That would be cool. If I have time, I will run down to the Half-Price Bookstore before then and snag a couple of his books to get his autograph. That would be neat, so I'm looking forward to meeting him.

Your mention of A. Bertram Chandler reminded me that one of the first science fiction books I ever read was one of his: **Return to Yesterday**, and it was Ace-Doubled with Cliff Simak's **The Trouble With Tycho**. Enjoyable fare for a young teen to read; I think I was something like 13 or 14 when I read that book.

Many thanks for the zines. Your plans to go completely on-line are understandable; mailing out dead-tree zines does get expensive. This is why my zines are mostly on-line, but I will run off the exact number of copies that I need to mail out to folks who either (1) don't have access to a computer, or (2) much prefer getting a zine in the mail over on-line versions. I really can't fault them for feeling that way, either; there's something comforting about holding a zine in your hand after the thrill of opening that envelope which just plunked into your mailbox.

[I have fond memories of A. Bertram Chandler stories in **Galaxy** and **Worlds of IF**, and recently I reread his **If** serial **Edge of Night**. It was actually better than I remember it. I hope to buy one or more of the SFBC collections of his stories before they go out of print!

[I hope your evening with Greg Benford went well. None of my readers have ever contacted me on a trip to N.J. I guess this state is not a hot spot for travelers.

[I am definitely jealous of college teachers who have half-days and days off as part of their regular schedule. Fortunately, my dealings with my students are a fair trade for my schedule.]

Brant Kresovitch

Nov 11, 2006

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I would never discourage anybody from reading Rafael Sabatini. I mean, read at least one and see if it rings your bell. I'm all for historical novels and swashbuckling is just fine with me. But after a couple of novels not fresh, almost wearying are the coincidences, characters' unlikely withholding of information from each other (that dogs whodunits too), codes of honor only a saint could take seriously, and the stock characters—particularly the rascal-hero too irresistible to dislike. But by all means try **Captain Blood**, **The Sea Hawk**, or **Scaramouche**. Got to be in the right mood for high-flown language and—yuck—romance. I'm told that Sabatini's biographies of Cesare Borgia and of the Spanish Inquisitor Torquemada are worth reading. Drawn as I am to obscure works by famous writers, I may check them out of the local library.

Reading one novel by Dickens a year is a best practice. I'm not sure **Bleak House** is the ideal novel to start reading Dickens because it's grim. And **Our Mutual Friend** is downright bleak. Both were written after the massive success of early novels such as **The Pickwick Papers** and **The Old Curiosity Shop**. If you want a real good one among the late novels check out **Great Expectations**, its melodrama better balances bleak and cheerful.

Among the early novels, I'd recommend **Oliver Twist** but especially **Nicholas Nickleby**. In it a kindly money lender Ralph Nickleby enlists the help of his clients and friends to set his wanton and careless nephew Nicholas and ungrateful niece Kate upon the right path. No wonder Nicholas and Kate are so feckless since they were brought up by the atrocious Mrs. Nickleby, a brainless chatterbox people take seriously at their peril. However, Nicholas recruits a degenerate malcontent named Smike to his designs. Together they trash the idyllic boarding school of Wackford Squeers after Nicholas toys with the affections of the headmaster's winsome daughter Fanny. Termgent Kate and annoying Mrs. Nickleby are set up in house in London. Kate in bad grace goes to work for the kind and good Mantalini—Mr. Mantalini is, as Uriah Heep, one of those rascals you can't help liking. Nicholas and Kate are so beyond hope that even the benevolent Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Verisopht can't help them. No Dickens novel would be complete without a villain and this one has two: Charles and Ned Cheeryble. They reach into the lives of everybody around them and manipulate them to nefarious ends.

This huge novel is driven more by the characters than the sprawling story. Some individual chapters feel long, but Dickens never fails to charm. Dickens' magic (sorry, there is no other word) makes it impossible to consider putting the sprawling but never collapsing drunkard of a novel down. We forgive him even as we are rolling our eyes at yet another of Mrs. Nickleby's interminable gab-fests. The big scenes should be read with feeling to get the full measure of melodrama.

[One of the times I joined the Book-of-the-Month Club my offer was for 3 sets of novels by famous authors, so I selected Dickens, along with Hemingway and Steinbeck. Thus I have cheap hardback copies of **Tale of Two Cities**, **Oliver Twist**, **Great Expectations** and **David Copperfield**, the only one of which I finally read a few years ago was **Tale of Two Cities**. Thus if and when I start reading Dickens it will definitely be one of the other three books.

[I do intend to read a Sabatini novel, but the swashbuckler who really interests me is Samuel Shellabargar, particularly his **Princes of Foxes**, set in Renaissance Italy. His books are considerably harder to find than Sabatini's whose works are readily available in bookstores.]

Sheryl Birkhead
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Nov 12, 2006

I have discovered that, having the used laptop, the carry bag I have is a great storage area—and zines seem to sur around in there and I don't notice them. The best I can say is that at least it gets most of the zines into one spot. Sigh, I am still far behind... I look at your list of the *In-Box* and cringe—most do not stop by and still I am digging a deeper and deeper hole—gotta just sit down and write! Unfortunately, since I do not check out zines that are essentially e-zines, I am missing out on some of them. Sigh, this includes **Challenger**. I do not have a color printer and I do not spend that much time online or actually parked in front of the computer. This means that I cannot do justice to the nice touches that show up so beautifully online—so I stay with my nice paper zines (ah-how quickly technology changes our perception of the usual—before, a zine was just a zine...uh, so to speak).

I enjoy Bujold's *Barrayar* books. Guess I don't read closely enough to notice those moments that seem wrong.

As always, your *Lighter Side* is a smiler. Thank you.

I like Panera, even if I have not been there recently. They seem to (at least around here) have a problem with the word *vegetarian*. When I ask about their soups and which are vegetarian friendly, they do not always know how to answer. So, sometimes I just browse and hope that at the next visit someone will know which of their products are a go. Their nice thick crusted

bread is soooo tasty.

You are right—the blurb quote for the *Quality Paperback Book Club* comes very close to home—never a better friend than a good book!

I hope things went smoothly with the math teacher who is not a good teacher. It seems unlikely that he will turn around in 60 days since he has been teaching for awhile, but one can hope...

I figure that, since I actually make so little, Social Security will be a big step up and I will go for it as soon as I can—and continue not making money the same way I have been for the past ten years. In my case, the only thing that will actually change is that I will have an income!! This means I can slow down the depletion of my savings. I used to agonize over spending any money, but gave up. So I'll spend judiciously and hope I don't outlive the nest egg! Last year was the closest yet to being in the red—cleared \$1200! Ah, but I love doing what I do—just wish that I could actually live off the income! Yeah, and maybe some day I'll have to get a *real* job.

Trinlay Khadro—hope you are managing to rest a bit more. If memory serves me correctly, there is now a vaccine against shingles—can't remember what adult population was the suggested target. Fingers crossed for you and *Antiques Roadshow*. I tape it every week and try to get around to watching the pile of stuff that is recorded. I think I now have something like 25 tapes sitting around and am at least 3 weeks behind TV items. I'll keep a look-out—tell us what items you intend to bring...

For what it is worth, Trinlay, my family moved out to a small farming community when I was 9. We were the first outsiders to move in—not related to the current inhabitants (in fact, my father was often out of the country on federal business and when the house burned down after we had only been there a few months, only one neighbor across the street even came to help). I had learned to hold a pen and pencil in a way different than the class and the teacher made an announcement that the class project for the year would be to work on my penmanship. Just great for a horribly shy kid that just moved into an area and didn't know anyone and I continued not to know anyone.

I have constant pain—but it is muscle pain and not the more “traditional” skeletal pain. The good news is that not every muscle group is involved—but enough of them to make everything hurt. Ain't life grand!? The intensity is stress-related—so I merely need to stop stressing and...yeah... sure...

Interestingly, the chiropractor (which my GP nixed rather loudly—so I no longer get monthly spinal adjustments) did measurements and—sure enough one leg is slightly shorter than the other—put an orthotic in the shoe. Then the pain specialist had me walk with and without the orthotic and told me to take it out and not use it since it changed the way I walked and that was an added effect. All right, guys, let's all agree...

Tom Sadler let me know that the next *Reluctant Famulus* is soon to be pubbed and he is working on the one after that. I am curious to see his lettercol since a lot of fen seem to be saying they have not seen the new incarnation.

FYI—I also taught (for about 6 or 7 years)—grades 7 and 8 science and math. Then I went to veterinary school and never looked back. I enjoy teaching, but only those who actually want to be taught!

[I rarely buy soup at Panera—or any other restaurants—because of their high salt level, which is not good for my blood pressure. But Jean gets broccoli and cheddar soup or french onion soup, both of which are vegetarian. Or are you avoiding dairy products too?

[Stress is also an ingredient in my back pain, but much as I love teaching, it is incredibly stressful. My my back tends to improve during the summer after a year of up-and-down pain. My foot doctor discovered a few years ago that my right leg is slightly shorter than my left, but the arch of my left foot is mostly fallen. I would be lost without my orthotics.]

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November 17, 2006

#106 – Since you listed your six favorite comics I’ll give you my three favorites—*One Big Happy*, *Dinette Set*, and *Big Nate*. The first two appear in my newspaper. That is not the case with *Big Nate* and I access that one on the Internet. By the way, all three are actually funny.

I read **The Golden Globe** some time ago and agree that it is better overall than **Mammoth**. But, I greatly enjoyed them both.

I don’t remember having read **The Eight** so have obtained it from the library.

Richard Dengrove: My own reading is in agreement with your comments concerning the **Priory of Sion** and Pierre Pantard.

#107 – My “Books To Read” pile consists of some 32 books. It was 29 books, but I added three more a few days ago. Obviously, I will read a number of the books in the pile. But, it will never happen that all of the books will be read since more are added periodically.

When I read your suggestion that Charles N. Brown and Dave Langford should show some class like Neil Gaiman and request that their nominations be withdrawn my reaction was—Damn Right! For a number of years, after voting for other nominees I have voted No

Award and not included either of them. Obviously this has not had any effect.

No, it is not too soon to start politicking for next year's HUGO nominees. I suggest in the Best Related Book category *Heinlein's Children: The Juveniles* by Joseph T Major (2006, Advent:Publishers, Inc.).

Wonderful commentary on your Italy trip.

#108 – I can obtain **The Earth Book of Stormgate** on Interlibrary Loan and will do so in the near future. I'll see if I can find a copy of the movie *Proof*. I'm assuming that it is the 2005 movie with Gwyneth Paltrow and Anthony Hopkins. Have you watched the CBS TV program *Numbers*.

Dec 17th update: I was able to obtain **The Earth Book of Stormgate** on Interlibrary Loan. I had read most of the stories including *The Man Who Counts* previously. However, it was a real pleasure reading the stories again. Thank you for mentioning the book.

[I've heard good things about *Numbers*, but have never watched it. Is it any good?]

John Purcell
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Nov 17, 2006

Good gravy, Robert, you're new publishing schedule is making you into yet another Chris Garcia! This is getting dangerous.

#107: Loved the Alan White cover. Not only does this remind me of that old rhetorical question, "Do fat babies fart?", but this serves to remind me to ask Alan for some artwork for my zines. I have always loved his style. He did a cover for one of my old zines, *Bangweulu* #3, back in 1987, come to think of it.

Your reasoning for leaving print mailings behind rings resoundingly true in my ears. Going purely on-line has distinct advantages, plus disadvantages. In the next issue of **In A Prior Lifetime** my editorial musings run along this track, but at least here I can tell you that the financial burden of mailing zines can be quite high nowadays. What I've done is taken to making a dozen copies or so to mail out as needed to those who prefer receiving a hard copy in the mail. That minimizes both printing and postal costs.

But you wonder if you will "pick up a few more readers in exchange." Probably. Ask Bill Burns to place a counter on your zine. It is very interesting to see not only how many visits and views your zines get, but also to see where visitors/viewers are located. The problem is how many will actually respond; just like dead-tree versions, you're lucky to get a 10% return in the form of e-locs. Still, e-zines are much quicker and easier to produce, and the financial savings are substantial.

My "Books to Read" shelf has about 16 items on it, ranging from sf and f novels and magazines, to non-fiction, to mysteries and historical fiction. I don't bother to try to wipe them all out; it's a given that there will always be something to read on that shelf. (Actually, it's the right side on the top of my dresser, but it serves the same purpose.)

#108: Well... I tried the multiple choice quiz and completely bombed out. This kind of stuff is for those who actually read science fiction and remember what they've read. Some of these books I haven't read for ages and simply forgot character names for their accompanying titles. A bit humbling, this. So I have a suggestion for you, Robert: stop running quizzes in your fanzines!!! They make my brain hurt.

Great listing of titles by Michael Bishop, with a lot of agreement on its contents. There are some really awesome stories here. Some year after I'm retired from teaching and have a whole lot of extra time on my hands, I may get to some of these.

Your "Wondrous Stories" section has a main premise that is very true: there are so many talented writers out there who don't have the name recognition of some of the less-talented writers. This is too bad. I love the stories of Poul Anderson. One of my favorite stories of his is **Tau Zero**, and meeting him years and years ago at Minicons was one of the highlights of my early con-going years.

Thanks for the word on Alastair Reynolds. One of the things that I love about reading zines is when their faneds and contributors review and recommend books and authors that I've never heard of before, or have only a cursory knowledge of. **Revelation Space** sounds really fun, so here's another title to back-burner for future reference.

[I don't ever expect to finish all by Books-to-be-Read, but it would be nice to whittle the pile down a bit from its current level, if only because then I will have more time to go back and reread some of the thousands of books in my collection.]

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November 27, 2006

The protocol of responding to independent portions of what I had come to see (despite format) as a single fanzine, is unclear. Presumably I'll send some sort of a note on whatever aspects catch my attention.

Beginning with #107, "Out of the Depths," in which one strenuously disagrees with your description of **Locus** as "must reading for anybody who is a serious fan." Whatever it may have

been thirty years ago, **Locus** is a professional trade journal whose primary audience is writers, editors, and agents. Any attention to fans (I find little interest in it) is a secondary consideration.

I might also argue on **Locus** showing "critical depth" on both theoretical and practical grounds.

The Passing Scene: Is there a mountain in New Jersey? ... I like steak occasionally. Perhaps Mark, newly arrived at adulthood, sees steak as his present favorite adult food. Plenty of time for him to acquire wider taste ... Ah, on the Italy trip I see veal in white sauce. His palate is improving already ... I've read you talking about Fei Fei for so many years, I feel almost as if I know her, and enjoyed reading about her wedding. Clearly she is a daughter-analog for you ... Presumably hot dogs and apple sauce are a change from genuine Italian food, but interesting to see how quickly you re-adapted to normal life ... I also do not care about my birthday, although for different reasons.

Wondrous Stories: It seems superfluous to point out the obvious, that much (most?) of Michael Bishop's list is not sf ... Nothing much to say about "Wondrous Stories" as I have not read anything discussed here. Except perhaps to comment on the diversity of SF, that I am moderately well-read in the field, and you can write a whole column not overlapping my reading experience at all.

[Perhaps I should not have used the phrase "serious fan" in my description of **Locus**. Perhaps I should have described it as must reading for "serious students" of science fiction. But I'm not sure how anybody who has read the criticism by Gary Wolfe or Nick Gevers could question **Locus'** critical depth. Perhaps it is not on an academic level, but surely on a practical level it has critical depth.

[Mark has always enjoyed steak, particularly when we go to restaurants, but I do not think it is actually his "favorite" food.]

Chester Cuthbert

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Dec 12, 2006

My wife was taken to a hospital by ambulance two Wednesdays ago. Our older daughter, Ellen Kruger, has taken me to visit her every day and we are still hoping that she will become strong enough to return home. Her diabetes has kept her using a dialysis machine 10½ hours each night for the past two years.

[I hope your wife improves enough to return home. I am sure this is a very difficult holiday season for all of you, and that things improve in the new year. You are in my thoughts and prayers.]
