

# Visions of Paradise

## #119: *Halcyon Days*

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### Trinlay Khadro

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*May 5, 2007*

Milwaukee fan Leah Fisher, one of my first friends when I moved to Milwaukee, came down with shingles at a con about a year ago. She's doing fine, and I managed not to catch it despite sitting next to her at a social night just before she left for the con.

Megumi and Seimei are getting along fine. If one is lucky, one might catch them snuggling or grooming each other...but nothing they'd admit to. ☺

*September 30, 2007:*

On the UP side, we'll soon be moving from our micro-apartment to a small house, which is about 1 bedroom larger, and has a basement! So I'll probably wear myself out, and have trouble recovering, but this time it's for ME and I'll have lots of friends helping with packing, moving and unpacking. Do let people know I'll be getting to Windycon, and maybe a few other cons over the next year or so... and need information about cons so that I can send things to the art

shows, even if they're too far for me to get to.

[Jean and I have always thought that Misty and Tiger, who never socialize together when any of us are around, sometimes stay together when we're on vacation, mostly out of loneliness and the need for companionship than true friendship. But when they have people around, the antagonism—mostly on Misty's part—returns.]

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## **Sheryl Birkhead**

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June 24, 2007

As you may know, **John Purcell** did indeed ask **Alan White** for artwork, and it graced the cover of his second ish. Man—his zine came out of the chute all ablaze—#1 sported a lovely **Brad Foster** cover and #2 was crowned by the White cover.

*McCaffrey*: if I remember the title correctly, **Merlin** is a juvenile non-sf book. The cobwebs prompt me to say I enjoyed it—all I remember is a white German shepherd. I have stuck with the library selection for so long I hate to admit I was unaware of the passing of the mantle. I need to take some time and poke through the sf at Borders and see what second generation names I can find.

**Lloyd Penney**: Talking to/with pros can be intimidating. I have not been to a con in quite a few years and freely admit that, even those I did attend, I was petrified most of the time. At one of those cons (a Worldcon, if I remember correctly) I was asked to chat with a pro in the green room while waiting for a panel or some such. I actually had some things to talk about that were not sf in nature, but this author (whom everyone says is such a great guy) nearly bit my head off and informed me that I did not know what I was talking about—end of conversation. That ended my talking for the duration of the convention. Ironically, it seems to me that the best way to talk to pros is to speak to those you already know...but exactly how you get to know them is the problem!

In this county we have one day or one case for jury duty. Once you have been notified (or served), then your name comes out of the juror pool for two years. I have served on one jury and been called three times—but never had to show up. They have a call-in number and you are given a reference number to locate—telling you whether to actually show up at the courthouse or not.

**Robert Kennedy**—it seems that Larry, the Shuttle-riding scientist from *Numb3rs*, may be sliding out of the show. His return to terra firma on the show was a small ripple, but I hope he turns up again. Then too, I like his role in *24* and maybe he will have a recurring spot there as well. I guess that in acting, as in many other professions, it is often feast or famine.

Over in *The Passing Scene*, I see you were torn between English and Math as a major. I ended up with a Chemistry major and a Math minor. It would have been a double major except Math Physics was a requirement for such a major and, at that point, I was not on the best of speaking terms with Physics (as an aside—during my Masters courses, Solid State Physics was a required

course, and when told I had an A in the class, I refused to believe it until the secretary produced the grade sheet).

I agreed pretty much with your answers to the *SF Signal Meme* up to the last five questions—those I punted. The “Bookmark or Dogear” took me a moment. Once I figured it out, I realized the reason it eluded me is that I would **never** think of anything other than a bookmark!

My sister-in-law intends to retire after next year (she teaches in Kentucky where they go to school year-round). She will end up with four retirements and social security, so she shouldn't have any worries. Add to that, my brother has said they no longer have any financial worries—but he has always said, and meant it, that he feels teachers are overpaid!! She has taught in at least three school systems and retired (for one day, then called back into teaching in another system) from one of them.

Around here, the property taxes will have tripled in another year—meaning in the 8 years since I bought this house, and the electricity bill will also have tripled, despite my best attempts at conservation. Here the county found some not-so-small loopholes— they are prohibited from increasing the assessment more than 10% a year, so they did that and coupled it to a small rate increase—all of which boils down to a huge increase in the bottom line. I've already started thinking I will need to look for other spots to live where the basic costs are not so astronomical. We'll see.

As always, *The Lighter Side* chuckle-filled. Pray continue!

[It's not just speaking to pros that is a problem at cons, but speaking to fans I have not met in person previously can be just as intimidating, not to mention approaching total strangers! I'm sure this is not a problem for most people, but it surely is for some.

[I'm a bit confused. Did your sister-in-law get pensions from 4 school systems? That is impossible in NJ where teachers' pensions are controlled by the state, so all school systems are tied into one pension. Or does she just have so many years in education that her pension will be large as a result?]

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**John Purcell**

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Jul 13, 2007

Read and enjoyed your latest **VoP**, *The Passing Scene*, and naturally there are a few things that piqued my interest.

I completely agree with George R.R. Martin that *Forbidden Planet* is one of the greatest science fiction films of all time. Not only is it entertaining, but there are layers in it that a casual viewer won't catch. The importance of *Star Wars* is, in my mind, because of its winning combination of special effects, action, likeable characters (no real depth to them at first), and the marketing strategies that developed around the movie and its resultant franchise. *Star Wars* turned science

fiction movies into mega\_bucks generators if you followed that basic formula, and the trend shows no sign of abating. If anything, it's getting worse, but that could be a fan article lurking in the back of my mind if I ever feel like writing it. Someone's probably said it, though, somewhere out there in the Great Wasteland.

At any rate, of the other SF movies that Martin felt were superior to *Star Wars*, I agree with them, too, especially *Charly*, which still moves me every time I watch it. It is simply a powerful movie. I would even add a couple more to this list—we SF fans certainly love lists, don't we?—like, as you said, *Blade Runner*, maybe even *Bicentennial Man*. I suspect many would disagree with me about this latter film, but I think it was well-produced and made some provocative commentary about the human condition. There are spots in that movie that are quite poetic and moving. This is, of course, my opinion, but I consider *Bicentennial Man* superior to *Star Wars* because there is a lot of character depth and social commentary that a big\_bucks block-buster like the first *Star Wars* couldn't touch. Later films in the SW canon explored themes and character depth to varying degrees of success, which I guess was to be expected.

You mentioned *Dark City*; I don't think I have ever heard of that movie. Interesting. This requires some research on my part to see what it's all about.

Anything else of note in here? Maybe the fact that your diary of dealings at your high school makes me glad that I am no longer teaching at the high school level. I was just offered—and accepted—a full\_time faculty position at the community college I have been an adjunct instructor at for the past two years. Now I am going to have to deal with some college politics and so on, but at least at the community college level they are nowhere near as nuts as the politics I ran into at the university level while teaching at Texas A&M University for two years. Nuttiness abounded there. Oh, well. You run into something that will drive you batty no matter where you work.

[I have never seen *Bicentennial Man*, but your rave review of it makes it worth looking for. I have never been a *Star Wars* fan, considering it juvenile space opera at best. As time passes, I find more and more people agreeing with that opinion. ]

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**Brant Kresovich**

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July 17, 2007

RE **The Sopranos**. In 1970 or 1971, I read **Murder, Inc.**, a 1951 account by an Assistant DA of Kings County, Brooklyn of investigations and prosecutions of Syndicate figures. The book taught me that not all organized crimes figures were Italian. The Brownsville Jewish hoods were Dutch Schultz, Bugsy Siegel, and the chilling Lepke Buchalter, who ordered up to 30 people killed when he thought they were going to testify against him. The account was also an effective inoculation against the idea that these cold-blooded bastards had a nodding acquaintance with romance, honor, or struggles with conscience, as movies about the mob would have us believe. So when *The Godfather* was released in 1972, I already knew not to take it seriously, that murder was just a way these guys got things done.

RE book-buying as disease and failure to resist book sales. I regularly acquire books though it is hard to justify in terms of space for storage and time to read, both of which are limited. In the last 10 months or so I've been acquiring a lot of books. I minimize the expense by buying used books or new ones at a wholesaler called Book Depot that sells remaindered and shop-worn books. I never buy new books at bookstores and I don't buy books on the net. I do belong to an internet trading site, receiving about 65 books and sending about 70 since October 2006.

I still want to frequent used book stores and sales because, for me, it's the only way to find out of print gems, say **Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman** or **Julian** or **Creation** by Gore Vidal or Jakob Burckhardt's first important work **The Age of Constantine the Great** in a vintage paperback. Funny, I've got a respectable university library literally a stone's throw from my desk at work, but I rarely check something out. I tell myself that when I clear my own shelves, I'll become a library patron, but I don't know how I'll clear my shelves if I don't stop buying books. It's a quandary.

RE *stretching in the morning*. I'm too cold to stretch at that time of day. Three times a week I stretch after throwing weight around and doing 40 minutes of cardio on the elliptical machines, treadmill, stair master, or stationary bike. I statically stretch my ham-strings and lower back muscles and then do physical therapy-type back strengthening dynamic stretches. For me, both static and dynamic stretches are intended to relieve post-exercise aches and pains. I have no scientific evidence that says stretching works but I feel better. Stretching reduces my perception of discomfort, anyway.

RE *yoga*. What is a better example of static stretching—moving slowly into a position and holding it—than yoga? I do yoga everyday, but there are whole seasons that go by when I don't do it. I hope this doesn't sound odd, but I figure that yoga will always be there, even if I don't practice it for a long period of time. My worry is that I'm not doing those fricking forward bends right and asking for lower back pain. I've heard that old yoga enthusiasts drop forward bends from their routines. Hmmm, I wonder if we'll hear in 20 years of yoga fallout just like we are hearing now about the repetitive stress injuries caused by 1980s style of aerobics à la Richard Simmons.

[There are no used bookstores or remaindered bookstores around here, which is probably a good thing. Whenever we travel though, I always managed to find a few, which is bad (but enjoyable!).

[Can you tell us more about the Internet trading site? It sounds interesting.]

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**Lloyd Penney**

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July 27, 2007

Many thanks for the trio of fanzines you've produced lately...it's time for me to catch up.

116...I used to buy my copies of **Locus** at my local SF bookstore, but as the price reached Can\$10, I decided that as much as I wanted to keep up with the field, I couldn't justify the rising cost. Rising costs also meant that as much as I wanted to nominate and vote for the Hugos, I did not purchase a supporting membership to Nippon 2007 or Denvention 3. The costs are too high for me to justify. Still, I'd like to help out friends on the ballot with a vote. The Aurora ballot should be out in three weeks, and I'll see a bunch of friends there, too.

I still can't find the time to watch television; I'm usually busy job hunting online or writing these locs. On August 14, I have a job interview with an advertising agency downtown. If I get this job, I'll get rid of my evening job, and have a regular working day like most people. Then, I'd have to make the decision of what shows I would want to watch, if any. With this in mind, I am looking forward to the anthology series *Masters of Science Fiction* on ABC. It's four episodes long, and some of them will tackle classic SF short stories. Given that among my own favorite shows are *Twilight Zone* (original and 80s CBS version) and *Outer Limits* (more recent version), *Masters of SF* should fit right in with what I like.

I see so many people with earbuds or headphones, listening to their iPods, to music I can hear plainly. They have cut themselves off from every day life, and they can't hear me when I try to get past them to get off the subway or streetcar or bus. I have to push past them, and they get upset. These days, I have to tell them, "Turn off the iPod!", and they get more upset. I have no time for this nonsense. I keep a cellphone with me at all times, but I don't have the time or money to spend on chatting with everyone I might want to talk to. It usually stays in my briefcase.

**John Purcell** is right, nothing like the A. Bertram Chandler *Rim Worlds* space opera. I miss that kind of writing, and need to find more Chandler stuff to read. I know I have a few gaps in that part of the collection. I guess my initial foray into SF was with spaceships and time travel, and that still holds a place in my heart.

117...I haven't read any of the new space opera you mention, but as mentioned above, space opera was an early love.

I agree with you about the media, especially seeing I am a journalism grad. Reporters have a set opinion to report on, especially the opinion of the senior editor or the owner of the paper. The objectivity of the press is largely mythological, which could be one reason why I wasn't able to pursue a career in journalism.

I don't get many remaindered books because they are rarely on sale here. These books are often pulped or shipped back to the ware-house for redistribution. Cheap books are often not an option.

118...So many good authors, and only so much time to enjoy them. I'm afraid the only Leigh Brackett book I have on my shelf is **The Long Tomorrow**. I did remember hearing that the screenplay for *The Empire Strikes Back* was completed not long before she died, and that she never saw the finished movie.

I am pleased to be able to say I've read a good number of the novels you comment on, but I really can't add more without having any particular memories of any of the individual books. Just read and enjoyed, and that is usually the breadth of my SF experience.

[The SFBC has gathered all the Grimes stories and novels into 6 omnibus editions. Having finished one of them—**Survey Captain**—I would like to read more of them. They are fairly simple stories overall, but fun reading after a long day at school.]

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## Joseph Nicholas

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Thanks very much for **VoP**: 116: *Halcyon Days*, 117: *The Passing Scene*, and 118: *Wondrous Stories*.

It's a bit difficult to respond to letters from people commenting on letters from people who were responding to someone else's remarks about....whatever, because the whole thing is so recursive that by the time one's reached the third or fourth iteration of the subject one has forgotten exactly what the original statement which sparked the discussion might have been. But I did notice some observations by **Richard Dengrove** in **VoP** 116 on the cyberpunks, saying that they "lacked imagination" because "their technology was the technology of the time. I read one book and wondered why the people of the future needed to look at computer screens or listen to audio. Couldn't there be a more virtual or more direct path to our brains?"

Well, yes, in that particular instance; and perhaps if Dengrove had read more than the one cyberpunk novel (frustratingly, he doesn't say which one or by whom, leaving it open to the question of whether it was a piece of derivative hackwork or one of the handful of novels which shaped and defined the sub\_genre) he would know that it was standard to directly interface with a computer via an electronic jack in the brain stem—before the internet, it was the only way to access cyberspace (which did not mean then what it does now). But otherwise, saying that cyberpunk fiction reflected the technology of its time is true of science fiction of any period: writers can extrapolate, but almost by definition they can only extrapolate from what they can see around them, from the prevailing cultural zeitgeist, from the theoretical papers appearing in refereed journals (and other source). To expect science fiction writers to imagine in detail a technology which no one else has been thinking about strikes me as perverse. For example, the desktop PC and the laptop notebook computer are now ubiquitous, but as late as the mid\_1970s computers were still thought of as giant mainframes operated only by large corporations, because the cost of the etching process which has given us the silicon microchip hadn't fallen far enough to make them affordable.

So with cyberpunk. The defining works were written in the 1980s, when much of what we now accept about distributed computing, nanotechnology and genetic modification was still largely theoretical. Then, to access data on another computer, one had to physically dial\_in to its remote location; now, in the age of wi-fi, data is all around us. (Which change will inadvertently provide an amusing moment for anyone who reads William Gibson's **Neuromancer** now:

at one point, Case asks his compadre Maelcom if the computer on his spaceship has a modem attached to it. Right idea about data connections, but wrong idea about the bit of equipment used to make them.) Ditto with nanotechnology: even in the mid\_eighties little more than a theoretical concept, because the micro\_scale engineering required to produce nanomachines did not exist—but those writers who did extrapolate from the theory assumed that progress in Artificial Intelligence meant that nano-machines, when they arrived, would be intelligent too....whereas in the real world AI has gone nowhere and unintelligent nano-machines remotely controlled by humans are increasingly used for a range of medical purposes, such as scouring plaque from arterial walls (and thus that the "grey goo" which so worries some people will remain in the realm of fiction).

"Still, I believe the Cyberpunk era was not a total loss," says Dengrove. "The Cyber-punks did us a service by bringing the Underbelly into science fiction. Now we need someone bringing the Middle Class in." But there are some critics who will tell you that science fiction is an inherently middle class literature—what do the majority of protagonists aspire to, if not a steady job and a comfortable lifestyle?

Meanwhile, over in **VoP** 117, you [Bob] say that you haven't seen the film *Aliens*. Dude! This is one of the two defining films of the science fiction cinema of the 1980s! The other is *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*, capturing the Cold War premonitions of the first part of the decade and the fear that, post\_apocalypse, we'd be reduced to scattered tribes scabbling in the ruins for the last working remnants of the civilisation we'd destroyed: the Gucci Arabs in their refinery enclave, the outsiders trying to pry them free of the last supplies of oil; the one man who can make a difference (just pray he's out there somewhere) and who looks as though he could have stepped straight from a spaghetti western: a ruthless loner, handy with a gun, devoid of scruples, playing everyone against themselves. *Aliens*, by contrast, captures the high capitalism of the middle and later part of the decade: its unshakeable confidence in itself, the inherent superiority of its means of ordering of the world \_\_ the obsession with corporate reach ("That's an atmosphere processing plant. We manufacture those too, by the way") and with money for its own sake ("The cargo cost us forty million \_\_ in adjusted dollars"), and the coolly rational imperial\_style politics behind the colonial marines being sent it to kick alien butt (a clear analogue for uppity Third World butt). Rent or buy the DVD now!

Finally, in **VoP** 118, you say of the examination of religious belief in Iain Banks's **Look To Windward** that "[it]was published in 2000, a year before 9/11, and Banks himself lives in Scotland, so I suspect its impetus springs from the struggles in Northern Ireland rather than in the Middle East". I suspect the impetus may spring less from Northern Ireland than from Scottish politics, which is just as tribalist, with the religious divide between Protestants and Catholics nowhere better expressed than in the rivalry between supporters of Rangers and Celtic football teams. (Assuming I've got them the right way round—not being interested in either religion or football, I pay no attention whatever to the various points of dispute other than to note that they exist.)

[I have a simpler reason why I did not particularly like Cyberpunk: too near-future, too similar to the present, too depressing.



[I'm not so sure that AI has "gone nowhere," unless you mean it has not achieved its intended goals so far. That is the field in which Fei Fei is working, her specialty being computer vision involving robot development. AI is still a developing field in the research community.

[I've always thought of the *Alien* series as glorified thrillers disguised as sf. Perhaps I should get a copy of *Aliens* at Blockbuster in hopes it is better than the overrated *Alien*.]

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## **Robert Kennedy**

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August 17, 2007

Thank you for **VoP** #116, #117, and #118. I continue to be astonished. With your otherwise very busy schedule where do you find the time for VOP?

I have now watched some 38% of the *50 Sci Fi Classics* DVD's. They range from horrible to rather good. There are some very famous actors involved. Ones like Raymond Burr, Basil Rathbone, Mamie Van Doren, Rod Taylor, John Carradine, Peter Graves, Steve Reeves, James Earl Jones, and Jackie Coogan. There is a pre Buster Crabbe Flash Gordon—Steve Holland. In the *Colossus and the Amazon Queen*, one of the lead actors is Dorian Gray. Where's his picture?

Trying not to have more books piled up, I have donated all the SFBC books purchased and read to the Camarillo Library. (Also, I will admit that sometimes I use the listings of the SFBC books to order books from the library.) If the library does not keep the books donated, they are then given to the Friends of the Camarillo Library for sale. Funds from sales go to help the library.

We have a wonderful new library that opened earlier this year. The old library could fit in one corner of the new library. There is a separate room for the book sales. There are Community Rooms, Meeting Rooms, and a Conference Center. Soon there will be a Café and a Patio Dining Area.

There are three TV programs that I find so enjoyable that even the reruns are watched—*Bones*, *NCIS*, and *Numbers*.

I thought that the first *Star Wars* (actually Episode #4) movie was the best. My then wife and I went to see it one evening. Then, when she was working an evening I went back by myself to see it again. The theater was the old kind—huge with a balcony. It was packed both times.

It looks like the SF I enjoy most is Space Opera.

Well, the mafia is/was Italian (or more accurately Sicilian). There were Jewish and Irish gangsters too. But I don't think much about it when Irish gangsters are portrayed. Now there's Russians, Armenians, Mexicans, and who knows what others. Not having HBO I haven't seen *The Sopranos*. I didn't care for *The Godfather*. *Raging Bull* was a great movie.

It seems to me that Corzine should resign as Governor. Laws and common sense are for others, not him.

Excellent listing of the best All-Time Science Fiction Novels prior to 1990. I've read most of those of those listed. Yes, *Speaker for the Dead* is outstanding. So is *Ender's Game* and *Speaker* could not have been written without *Ender's Game*. Anyway, a case where the sequel is better than the first one?

Very good jokes as usual.

**Lloyd Penney:** What about the mercury in the compact bulb-shaped fluorescents? Until they can give me 50/100/150 equivalent watts, 200 equivalent watts, and all single equivalent watts can be operated with dimmers, I am not interested.

**Richard Dengrove:** All our founding fathers were not Freemasons and neither were all the notable people in Europe. Of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, only 9 can be definitely identified as Freemasons (none of whom was Thomas Jefferson). Of the 40 signers of the Constitution, only 9 were Freemasons. Of our 43 presidents, 14 were Freemasons. The most recent presidents who were Freemasons were FDR, Harry Truman, and Gerald Ford. There are some nutcases who claim that all our presidents with the exception of JFK were Freemasons. Obviously false. They also claim that all the Prime Ministers of Great Britain except Margaret Thatcher were Freemasons. In Canada the Prime Ministers who were Freemasons is something like 6 out of 20. I can't find the actual figures for Great Britain, but they are probably similar to the figures for Canada and the United States.

In the early days of Freemasonry they usually didn't have their own buildings for meeting places. They did often meet in taverns and no doubt drinking did occur. In the United States today Freemasons usually have fixed meeting places in their own buildings. Drinking is prohibited. (If you want to drink, join the BPOE.) Although to become a Freemason one has to express belief in a supreme being, there are two subjects that can never be discussed in Masonic lodges— politics and religion. Well, all this is probably more than you wanted to know.

[I believe **Speaker for the Dead** was written first, but Card realized he needed backstory for it, and that the novelette "Ender's Game" was the logical prequel. So he wrote the novelization **Ender's Game**.]

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**E.B. Frohvet**

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Sept 9, 2007

*The Passing Scene:* I suppose that the **José Sánchez** art was inspired by the Tarot card, the Devil.

In agreement with George R.R. Martin, I can think of a lot of films better than *Star Wars*, which remains reasonably well-executed 1930's pulp.

If space opera is set in space, and planetary romances are set on planets, how do you reconcile something like Cherryh's **The Faded Sun**, which includes both? For that matter, two of the *Foreigner* sequence take place mainly in space. One could name other examples. I fear the distinction is too simple.

Supposing that purchasing books you won't have time to read for years is reasonable, I still wonder if (as I've said before) you have taken on so many obligations as to cut into your time available for reading. Consider the virtue of saying "No."

*Wondrous Stories*: I forget which book I once reviewed, which I described as suggesting "a bad Flash Gordon parody as written by Leigh Brackett in an especially fervent mood."

I don't read **Locus** (I skim it sometimes; Howard County central library subscribes) and consider it far from "indispensable" for a fan. It's a trade journal. So is **Psycho-therapy Networker** and I find that a lot more interesting. The list of **Locus** "best novels" indicates people with no great imagination. Of course, most of those novels are classics. I'd rather see a list of great novels with which no one is familiar.

Unlike you, I was a "Heinlein's Child" and entered SF largely through his juveniles. Having said which, **Farnham's Freehold** was one of my least favorite Heinlein books, and I discarded my copy long ago.

The joke about Mother Superior was cute.

*Halcyon Days*: I will have to agree with you and disagree with **Sheryl Birkhead**. The cost of a Supporting Membership at Worldcon just to vote on the Lost Causes is not a sound use of one's time or money.

I defer to **Sheryl's** vegetarianism, but I am not bound by other people's moral imperatives. My cousin's elder daughter Emma has "called" the right to hold Thanksgiving dinner this year (for years it alternated between my place and her mother's house). Emma is vegetarian; I have told her I have no problem with a vegetarian Thanksgiving, and have many vegetarian recipes I can fix. So long as wine is served. Unfortunately, **Sheryl**, people have been eating rabbits for centuries—see in Bujold's **The Spirit Ring**. From family tradition I hear *sauerhasse*, sour rabbit, was one of my grandfather's favorite dishes; if I can obtain some rabbit, I plan to attempt it.

As regard's **Alex Slate's** comments, I am probably not the best person to answer the question about sinful thoughts. In the Protestant tradition in which I was raised, "sin" was seldom specifically defined. But as to lustful thoughts: if we are sexual beings, which is pretty obvious, then we must be so because God made us that way. It seems like cheating to design people as sexual beings and then condemn them for being sexual.

Haven't we been over this department: Sorry, **John Purcell**, but people who write fan fiction

generally don't succeed at writing professionally-saleable fiction. Partly because obviously they want to write fan fiction, and mainly because they are not getting any useful feedback on what they're doing wrong.

Pasta maker: saucepan, water, stove. For what purpose do you need a special gadget? I doubt if Samuel R. Delany will return to writing SF at this late date. Maybe he just isn't interested in writing fiction any more. I agree that his SF novels actually hold up pretty well.

**Lloyd Penney:** Actually, I would like it if there was an Olive Garden in this area. Their food is passable, good value for the price, and they have a liquor license.

Where I was going: you are entitled not to like military fiction. My point was: where would you be without the United States Army? I mean, you, literally. You might not be. There might not be a United States. All our ancestors might not have come here. You could be herding goats in Tuscany. It amazes me that someone with such a firm grasp of reality, and an interest in alternate history, fails to recognize that military history is an essential part of history.

[I reconcile **The Faded Sun** the same way I reconcile George R.R. Martin's "Sandkings" and "Nightflyers" being both sf and horror, or Jack Vance's **The Dying Earth** being both fantasy & sf, or Isaac Asimov's **The Caves of Steel** and **The Naked Sun** being both sf and mystery. Overlap and cross-pollination are the lifeblood of genre fiction. It makes sense in a way to define various segments of the sf genre as "space opera" or "planetary romance" as a handy way to describe them to a potential reader, but I agree it does not make sense to take such descriptions too seriously. One could go as crazy trying to define sub-genres as trying to define sf itself!

[My many activities surely cut into my reading time, but I actually enjoy each of the activities I undertake, so simply saying "No" to some of them will deprive me of more pleasure and sense of accomplishment than sitting home reading more sf would do. Besides, in a few years many of those obligations will fade away forever when I retire, so I want to enjoy each moment of them now while I still can do so.

[I never said **Locus** is indispensable to a fan. It is indispensable to a serious reader of sf. Many fans do not fall into that category. Nor have I ever believed **Locus** is all-embracing in its coverage of the sf field (in fact, I spent some time in these pages lamenting their total ignoring of multiple-award nominee Robert Sawyer, and I could probably say the same for one of my favorite writers Jack McDevitt.) But no other publication, written or online, covers f&sf as extensively as **Locus** does, so it remains my prime source of information for reading and book-buying.

[Ursula K Le Guin returned to writing SF after several decades away. Both Fritz Leiber and Theodore Sturgeon returned when they were thought gone forever. I will not give up hope of Samuel R. Delany's return to SF until he is permanently gone.

[Hmm, one of your prime requirements for Thanksgiving dinner is wine, and you like Olive Garden because of their liquor license. There seems to be a pattern here. ☺

[I think you are showing a bit of paranoia in your ranting that I do not “recognize that military history is an essential part of history” because I do not enjoy reading military fiction. Those are totally unrelated facts. I appreciate advances in modern medicine which have done so much good for my health, but I have absolutely no interest in reading biology. Of course I recognize military history is an essential part of history, but it is one small part of a vast canvas, and I should be allowed to read and study the portions of that canvas which interest me without being lectured on some imagined fact which is certainly untrue.

[By the way, if my ancestors chose not to come to America, I might be living in Brazil where my great-grandmother was raised after her parents emigrated there, and my grandfather emigrated as a teenager. They were married there before deciding eventually to come to America. ]

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I rate Heinlein highly not because of his importance to SF, not because I like (or dislike) the opinions of his characters, but because I think he at his best wrote very well. **Starship Troopers**, for instance, is wonderfully made, with people and events just what would be found in his invented world. I put his juveniles highest.

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