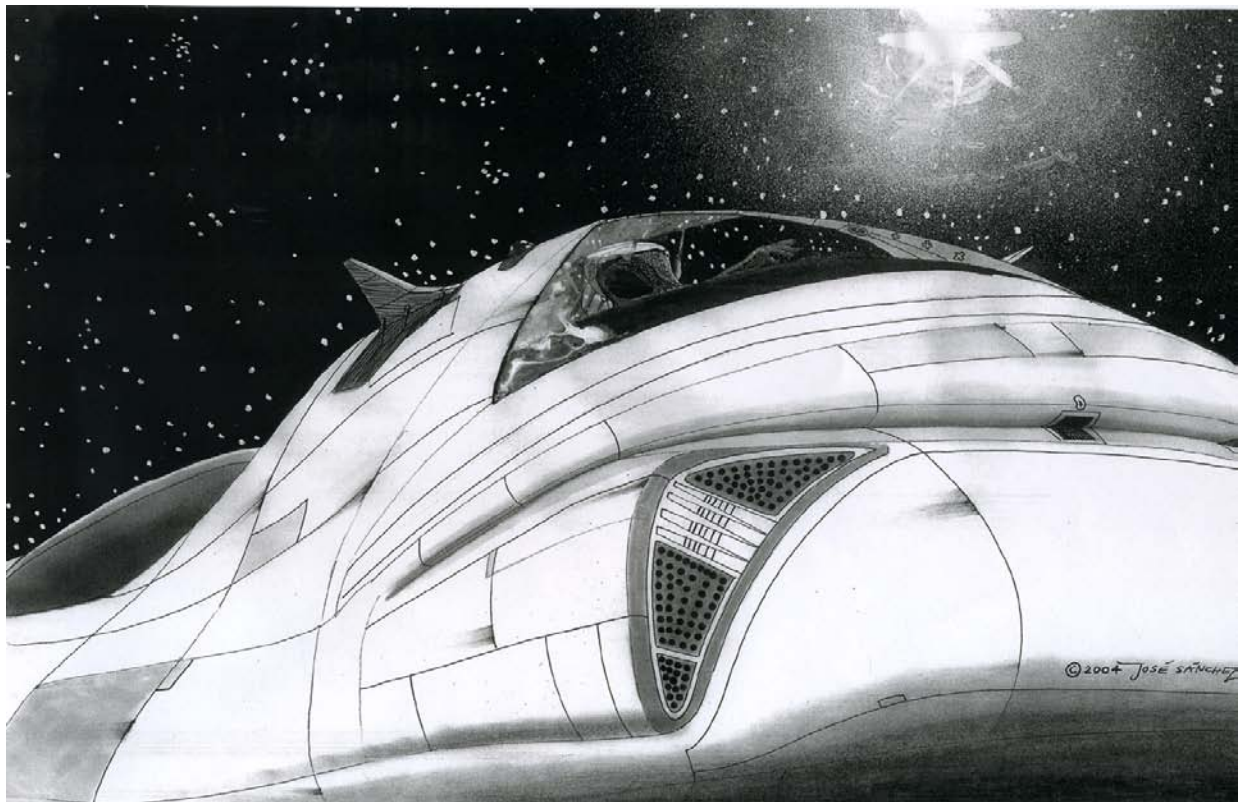


Visions of Paradise

#122



Visions of Paradise #122

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Artwork

José Sánchez cover

Trinlay Khadro page 5

Out of the Depths

Every few years I change the format of **VoP**, sometimes because I get bored with one particular format, and sometimes for the sake of not getting trapped into one rigid format so that publishing **VoP** becomes a chore rather than pleasure. Two-and-a-half years ago I subdivided **VoP** into its three component parts with #103. Since then the format has been fairly rigid. *The Passing Scene* has included the editorial “Out of the Depths,” monthly journal excerpts, and “On the Lighter Side.” *Wondrous Stories* has included a lead article, “Listmania,” the reviews themselves, “The In-Box” and more “On the Lighter Side.” And *Halcyon Days* was exclusively letters.

One effect of all those compartments has been stretching the length of the monthly issues so that I have been writing/editing 20-25 pages each issue, more than I really have time to do on a regular basis. Publishing online has saved me some time, but I would like to cut the size of the issues in half to save even more. And the easiest way to do that is by changing the format of **VoP** again.

So for the foreseeable future, **VoP** will hopefully have a fairly fluid format. Each month I will write/edit whichever departments strike my fancy at the time. There will generally be some journal excerpts for those of you who enjoy the soap opera of my life, and reviews for those of you who, like me, consider sf the heart of a fanzine. Other departments will come and go without any particular pattern, and letters will probably be interspersed among everything else.

Until I get bored with this format. Enjoy.

The Passing Scene

September 2007

School started a week late this year due to construction begun during the summer, so Jean and I took a trip to Ocean City, Maryland, starting the Saturday before Labor Day. Mark and Kate drove down separately, since they were only staying until Tuesday because of work. We met them in Delaware at Golden Corral Buffet, which was a very good meal. Then we drove to Wan Mar condo on the border of Ocean City and Fenwick Island, DE. We were on the third floor and had a large kitchen-dining area-living room area, two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a deck with a view of the ocean three blocks away. There was also a pool which was supposed to close Labor Day, but one of the permanent residents kept it open all week, which was convenient.

Overall it was a relaxing week, doing nothing much more than the usual mindless touristy things. We ate breakfast every morning in the condo, and most of our lunches, but went out for dinner every night. After we arrived Saturday afternoon, we spent a few hours on the beach, after which we walked Ocean City’s boardwalk filled with restaurants, souvenir stores, and musicians performing for donations. The view of the ocean was superb, so it was a pleasant and relaxing few hours. After our huge buffet lunch, the four of us only split a pizza for dinner.

Sunday we went to a craft show at the convention center which had a lot of fascinating stuff for sale. We split the afternoon between the ocean, the pool, and walking through Fenwick Island which is a beautiful area somewhat less touristy than Ocean City. We stopped at a used bookstore where Jean bought two mysteries and I bought an Iain Banks *Culture* novel. Mark and Kate went to Holiday Inn for a formal dinner at their upscale restaurant, while Jean and I returned to the Boardwalk where I ate a meatball sub and Jean ate a cheese-steak sandwich.

Monday Mark and Kate went bike-riding in the morning while Jean and I walked along the bay side of the narrow peninsula on which both Ocean City and Fenwick Island lie. Many of the houses built on the bay have their own boat docks. The four of us met at Paul Revere Restaurant on the boardwalk for a fairly-good buffet dinner. Afterwards we returned to the condo where Jean read one of her new mysteries and I read John Brunner's **Children of Thunder**.

Tuesday the four of us drove in two cars to Bethany Beach, DE, to shop in their outlets, after which Mark and Kate drove home.

Wednesday morning the beach was mostly empty since the majority of vacationers left after Labor Day. Those of us there were lucky enough to see three dolphins swimming not far from shore. That was a great sight. Afterwards we went to lunch at Panda China Buffet on the mainland of Maryland, then we drove to Assateague Island which is famous for 180 wild horses which live there. We saw dozens of horses who are so used to people they ate grass calmly while we approached to within a few feet of them to take pictures.

At night we returned to the boardwalk for burgers and Thrasher's fries, a very popular item there. They were actually pretty tasty. We also bought salt water taffy to take home.

Thursday morning we took a long walk through the southern edge of Fenwick Island, then returned to the condo unit and used the pool awhile. After lunch we drove home. We had a huge pile of mail and newspapers, as well as email, which I started sorting through, but did not expect to finish until the weekend.

*

School began on Friday, Sept 7, with a superintendent's meeting of the entire district faculty and administration, over 800 people. Last year I skipped that meeting to work in the Math Lab, but this year I went, fortunately, since the assistant superintendent called up all the past distinguished faculty winners to the front of the auditorium to be applauded. Imagine if I had not shown up for it, especially since I had a *Target Teach* meeting with her in the afternoon! *whew*

My family is taking over the math department this year, with my wife joining my brother and me there. She is teaching Calculus and senior Algebra/Trig. David is teaching Honors Precalculus, Algebra 2, and remedial math. I have the best schedule, 2 sections of AP Statistics, 1 of AP Calculus, 1 of Honors Algebra 2, and ESL Math. Two-thirds of my students are girls this year, a particularly nice group that I am looking forward to teaching. Many of them have already begun drifting to the Math Lab from dawn to dusk, working on their math, getting advice on college applications and life, and keeping me from getting any work done. But I enjoy every minute working with my Asian girls, so how can I complain about it?

The opening of the school year has been chaotic for several reasons:

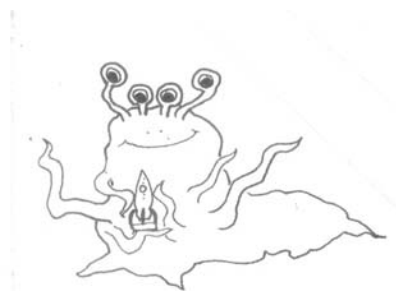
- ▶ scheduling problems, including students assigned different classrooms than their teacher; a class of 25 students in a room with 12 little tables; gross imbalance of sections;
- ▶ computer problems, specifically teachers unable to log on; computers not working; the computer teacher not having work folders for his Visual Basic class;
- ▶ copying problems: we were supposed to have 2 copiers this year, but one did not work until early October, while the other had no toner the first 3 days since the Business Administrator now controls all such items herself rather than let the principals have it;
- ▶ the ongoing construction, which has loud noises coming from across the hall all day while we are trying to teach; yesterday they were using a power saw while I was trying to teach AP Calculus. ☹

My classes are fine, but Jean's two lower-level classes are fairly rambunctious, mostly because many of those kids have not had any real math teachers the last two years. They had three subs two years ago after a new teacher quit the first day of school, then the second half of last year a teacher broke her leg so they had another sub who was a total novice with absolutely no training. Jean is slowly reining them in though. Her 2 Calculus classes and third Alg 2/Trig are fine.

*

Book Purchases in September-October

Use of Weapons	<i>A Culture</i> novel by Iain Banks
She, King Solomon's Mines, Allan Quartermain	a three-in-one from Dover Publications
Showcase Presents Adam Strange Showcase Presents Challengers Showcase Presents House of Mystery	three 550 page trade paperbacks collection vintage DC comics in black-and-white
Roma	Steven Saylor's historical novel
The Yiddish Policemen's Union	Michael Chabon's recent acclaimed novel, purchased through a <i>50% Deal</i> at History Book Club
Collected Stories of Louis L'Amour, Vol. 4: the Adventure Fiction	another <i>50% Deal</i> through the Discovery Channel Book Club



Wondrous Stories

Best Short Novels 2007

edited by Jonathan Strahan

I am a lover of novellas, so this is the best-of-the-year anthology most anticipated by me. Since no editor's taste is totally similar to mine though, I do not take the collection's title "best..." too seriously, but rather consider it an annual anthology of new novellas. Under that expectation, I have not been disappointed in the series yet.

Kage Baker is a natural storyteller who shows up in "best of the year" volumes regularly. So far I have liked all the stories of hers that I have read, whether *Company* stories, her "Anvil of the World" fantasies, or her two tales about colonizing Mars. "Where the Golden Apples Grows" is set in the same world as "Empress of Mars" and is as good as that award-nominated story. It is the tale of two boys growing up on Mars. Ford belongs to MAC, a group struggling to terraform Mars, while Bill is the son of Billy, a largely-irresponsible independent long-distant hauler, who travels to the poles fetching water to sell to MAC. When Ford runs away from his family after his father and older brother have a fight which is broken up by Mother's Boys security, he is rescued by Billy and joins them for a long-distance haul.

Bill and Ford are opposites. Ford is a dreamer who loves the wide open spaces which he has never experienced. Bill is a strait-laced know-it-all who is hoping to get a real education. When Billy has an accident, the two boys are left to complete the haul alone, each one getting a chance to learn life from the other's perspective. The story combines the boys' joint coming-of-age with an adventure on the Martian surface. It was originally written for Gardner Dozois and Jack Dann's young adult collection **Escape From Earth**, but the only concession it makes to that format is the juvenile protagonists. Ultimately it is a story all readers can enjoy.

Robert Reed's "A Billion Eves" is one of two outstanding novellas he published in 2006 (the other being "Good Mountain") and a deserving Hugo winner. Its premise is that scientists invent "rippers," machines capable of opening doorways into alternate universes which are created continuously from events in our world. An undergraduate physics major has the inspiration to put a ripper in a truck which he nestles against the wall of a female sorority, opens the doorway and immediately sends himself and dozens of young women into another universe where he anticipates living happily with his harem. While events there do not go precisely as he anticipated after his mass kidnapping, ultimately it leads to a progression of societies created by other "Fathers" creating their own worlds using rippers, many as parts of groups of volunteers, others by kidnapping wives in the same manner as the First Father.

The societies created in the alternate universes all have a rigid religious foundation based on the fervent belief that founding new societies in alternate universes is the primary function of people. Another assumption is the rather simplistic belief that because the first world was settled by one First Father kidnapping a group of women, then all subsequent worlds will adapt the same *laissez-faire* attitude towards such kidnappings. "A Billion Eves" is not long enough to explore the reasons behind these assumption, so the story needs to be taken with some serious suspension of disbelief. Fortunately, Reed's story is fascinating and, once I accepted his assumptions, I was

able to enjoy it without questioning its foundations too much.

“The Voyage of *Night Shining White*” is part of Chris Roberson’s *Celestial Empire* alternate history series in which the Chinese empire is the pre-eminent power in the world, and how it expands its empire into space. This novella tells of a fleet of ships traveling to Mars in an attempt to colonize the planet. The ship *Night Shining White* is captained by Zheng Yi, a totally-inexperienced sailor whose main qualifications for the role seems to be his abilities as a conductor and his being a eunuch from the Forbidden City. The relationships among the 7 men on the ship—three officers and 4 crewmen—follows strict Confucian principles, and Physician Xiang Du is a Daoist as well. Xiang becomes Zheng’s confidante when they each discover that the other is an accomplished musician, so they spend their subsequent evenings playing together (which is probably not an accidental similarity to Patrick O’Brien’s *Maturin-Aubrey* books).

Halfway to Mars, *Night Shining Light* experiences a serious problem which requires two men to enter the radioactive core to repair, sacrificing their lives in the process. Afterwards, the remaining 5 men are trapped in two forward compartments as protection against rising radiation levels. At first they bond from the closeness, and the rigid Confucian protocols slowly drop away, but gradually, with the two men lying dying elsewhere in the ship from radiation sickness, their camaraderie twists into resentment.

“The Voyage of *Night Shining White*” is stronger emotionally than Baker’s story, and without the logical flaws of Reed’s. Its ending is strong and fitting, and the twin philosophies of Confucianism and Daoism serve the story well. This is the second story in Roberson’s *Celestial Empire* series that I have read and liked a lot. I hope to read some novels in the series as well.

Science fiction writers generally postulate two diverging near-futures. The technophiles believe science and technology will continue to thrive and grow stronger and more dominating in our lives. William Gibson was in the forefront of that movement until time caught up with his future. Vernor Vinge and Alastair Reynolds are two other adherents to this viewpoint. But some writers see an inevitable decline in our future. They foresee some economic or ecological crash tearing down the fabric of modern civilization, forcing a simplified lifestyle through decreased population and lessened sources of energy. I am definitely not a technophile, preferring to read about change rather than “more of the same but worsened”, so I usually find the latter futures more thought-provoking and, to some extent, inevitable.

Robert Charles Wilson’s “Julian: A Christmas Story” portrays such a future. It hints at the causes with the statement “Millions had died in the worst dislocations of the End of Oil,” but that is not the crux of the story. It is a coming-of-age story involving a working class youth Adam and his best friend Julian, a member of the elite ruling class whose family has controlled the presidency (which is really a dictatorship) for generations. Julian’s uncle is the current president, and he has forced the execution of Julian’s hero father, fearing him a threat to the uncle’s power. Now he is looking to eliminate Julian as well.

The United States has expanded into Canada, indicated by a 60-star flag and an ongoing war in Labrador against the invading Dutch. Government reserves come to Adam’s hometown to forcibly enlist youths into the military, so Julian and Adam flee, since if Julian entered the army it

would give his uncle an easy opportunity to arrange his death. “Julian” is a good story which reads like an unfinished opening of a novel. I look forward to reading the rest of the story.

I have always thought that Michael Swanwick writes fabulous scenes, but his stories generally do not hold together very well either structurally or conceptually. In this regard, he is the final heir of Roger Zelazny, who suffered from the same weakness. Still, both authors’ stories usually offer so much pizzazz and wonder it is easy to forget the logical flimsiness and just go along for the ride.

“Lord Weary’s Empire” is quintessential Swanwick. It opens with a silly fight scene between Will, a protagonist whose essence contains some type of “dragon-darkness within him”, and a big, hulking brute of low intelligence. I rarely enjoy stories built around such violence, and the only reason I continued reading at this point was because I decided to trust Swanwick.

I was glad I did. “Empire” is the story of a ragtag band of fantasy beings, elves and the like, whose actions are decidedly human. They live beneath a teeming city in subway tunnels and deeper, imagining themselves the Army of Night and dreaming of fomenting a rebellion against the government aboveground. Sometimes such pipedreams make quirky but fascinating reading, and that was the case here. The characters in the self-proclaimed army were fascinating, although most were underused. Some of the scenes were fairly inventive though. Captain Jack Riddle, a disguise used by Will to torment the aboveground authorities, was the highlight of the story, but after one dynamic use that identity was mostly abandoned. I think the story might have been stronger if it concentrated a bit more on Captain Jack Riddle.

I had mixed thoughts about the story’s ending, partly finding it fitting, partly thinking it a cliché copout. Overall “Lord Weary’s Empire” was a fun story which could have been better thought-out as well as expanded somewhat.

In some ways Cory Doctorow is at the cutting edge of sf, with his nonfiction concerned with cutting-edge technology, and his embracing the internet for publishing fiction. But in other ways his sf is very traditional. “After the Siege” is a story about a city at war. All of its citizens are gradually drawn into the war, including the main character’s parents. First the father goes, then the mother, although since the war is taking place at the outskirts of the city, they both return home periodically. As the war worsens, 14-year old Valentine is also drafted, first into carrying water to elderly people, then digging trenches, eventually burying dead bodies. Meanwhile Valentine is caring for her baby brother, which partly consists of finding sufficient food to feed both of them, since food rations in the city are decreasing to the point where all its citizens are starving. Zombies also roam the bombed-out city, although they are not dead people, but soon-to-be-dead people who have been infected by the enemy with a deadly disease. One of them attacks Valentine and manages to bite her shoulder, their usual method of infecting another person with their disease.

Valentine encounters a wizard, but not the type usually found in fantasies. Instead he seems to be immune to all the trauma taking place around him. He provides meals to Valentine, prints out clothing for her, and has cures for many of her problems. But even he is not as reassuring as he might be, since Valentine suspects he is a traitor working for the enemy.

“After the Siege” actually takes place during the worst of the long siege, and is a strong story studying how people survive during catastrophic times, while also questioning how people in safe, wealthy nations accept devastation in third world countries without trying to do something to help those inflicted by it. I really enjoy Cory Doctorow’s fiction.

When I think of the writers who best combine f&sf with literature, I think of Ursula K Le Guin, Michael Bishop, Kim Stanley Robinson, Michael Chabon, and Jeffrey Ford. Ford’s “The Cosmology of the Wider World” and “The Empire of Ice Cream” are two of my half-dozen favorite pieces of short fiction this entire decade. “Botch Town” is not far behind them.

Like “Julian,” “Botch Town” is a rite of passage story, but this one is set in the past, concentrating on a family in the 1960s. The narrator—whose name is never mentioned; at least I have no idea what his name was—has an older brother Jim in middle school and a younger sister Mary. His father works three jobs to keep the family fiscally above water, and the mother works one job, then comes home and proceeds to get drunk every night while the father works his night job. But don’t get the idea this family is either dysfunctional or stereotypical. Ford is much too good a writer to fall into that trap. The family is loving and fully-supportive, although it does have some disputes typical of such families, especially occasional sibling rivalries.

The main plot of the story concerns a prowler who is seen periodically peeking in windows around town. The three siblings act as detectives trying to find the identity of the prowler. They achieve a breakthrough of sorts when the narrator realizes that Jim’s miniature town in the basement—the Botch Town of the title which contains all the town’s houses and neighbors in miniature—also contains a prowler who mysteriously moves to wherever he is seen in the real world.

“Botch Town” is a very spooky story, much more effectively emotional than a blood-and-gore horror story. The scene when the narrator encounters the prowler in the library is genuinely scary, as is the story’s climax. But the story is much deeper than only an excuse to be spooky. Ford fully develops both the characters and the town itself, so that “Botch Town” lives and breathes as if its setting is a real place. Rarely do I finish a story and wish it were longer, but this was one of those cases. For the second year in a row, Jeffrey Ford has written my favorite novella of the year, both instances with pure fantasy stories, while I am primarily an sf fan. In my mind he is the heir to Michael Bishop’s position as my current favorite literary sf writer.

*

Tidbits

Poul Anderson’s **Satan’s World** is a 1968 Polesotechnic League novel in which the unlikely group of heroes—fat, rich old merchant Nicholas Van Rijn, Kirk-like young explorer David Falkayn, Buddhist dragon Adzel, and predatory feline Chee Lan—encounter a race of vicious herbivores resembling minotaurs. The novel contains mystery, adventure, and Anderson’s typical strong world and culture-building. Good fun.

Halcyon Days

Brant Kresovitch

October 18, 2007

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You asked about the internet book trading site that I use. It is <http://www.PaperBackSwap.com/>. My page there is <http://buffalosavage.paperbackswap.com/profile/index.php>.

In September 2006, I listed 9 books on the site (you now have to list at least 10 books to get in the club) and I got 2 or 3 free book credits to get me started. Greedy, I ordered books right away and was mildly surprised when some books I posted were ordered right away because I thought nobody would be interested!

When another member selects one of my books that I have listed, I mail it to them. I pay for the postage. Then I get a book credit and I can select a book that I want. So another Club Member returns the favor and mails me one of their books free of charge. For every book I mail out, I get another book in return _ a true shared system! In the last year and a month, I've spent about \$220.00 in postage, but saved about \$550.00. I know because I use Amazon to see how much it would have cost me if I'd bought it and had to pay postage and handling.

And when someone requests one of your books, you only have to print a two page document on regular paper from your printer, and use it to wrap the book or use it as a mailing label on a padded envelope. The wrapper includes the mailing address and the amount of postage, which may or may not be correct. I take it to a contract station nearby, but other members slap stamps on it and then drop the package in the outbound mail.

Right now the annual club membership is free. Eventually the founders will ask everyone to help contribute to pay for the upkeep of the web site, but for now the annual club membership is free. The annual dues will probably be between \$10 and \$20 based on the number of people in the club. Right now you don't even have to pay any dues for one year if you become a Charter Member.

Yes, a lot of hooley is posted but with smart searching strategies you can find excellent stuff. And if you do sign up, please list my email in the referral section because then I get another free book credit. Book gluttony has made me shameless so I bluntly ask. This is a fine service.

[I've glanced at the site, and it does look interesting, but as you indicated, greed could easily cause me to select too many books. But whenever I decide to cull my book collection again, I will certainly keep that website in mind. Thanks for the info.]

Lloyd Penney

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Oct 29, 2007

Three issues of **Visions of Paradise**, all at once. It took me a little bit to get to them, but here I am with some comments.

119...Hello to **Trinlay**! Many years ago, Yvonne and I had a micro-apartment, the smallest one-bedroom I'd seen in some time. (I've since seen smaller, and wondered if they are legal.) We had a three-bedroom in Brampton, and we live in a two-bedroom now. To be honest, I'd like something three-bedroom again, but I'd need a serious lottery win to do that.

I do talk with the pros from time to time, but it's often safer to talk about things other than their profession. There's more of an equal footing. I think the guy who bit your head off might have had a bad day. I figure most SF authors like being at SF cons because they meet their audience. Actors would rather be at home or on a set somewhere...I think their tolerance for the fanboys is a little low. Some fans I see in the hallway look like they are about to burst in indignation, and the least bit of attention sets them off.

Kudos to **John Purcell** for adding the movie *Bicentennial Man* to his list of great SF films. Robin Williams seems to be in lots of sleepers, and I must admit he's good in small doses, but when he is disciplined enough to put in a performance in a movie, it's great. I thought the stories the movie was based on were great, so it was such a surprise to see the movie was just as good. I will add to that list another Williams movie, *What Dream May Come*, based on a Richard Matheson classic.

It's been some time since the last three issues...Montreal has won the 2009 Worldcon, we have decided to attend, we also decided to come out of conrunning retirement to help out. Employment ...I now have a full-time job, but not with that advertising agency. I am now an editorial specialist with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, or CNIB. I've been there for five weeks now. I still have my evening job, but will resign from it should the CNIB decide to keep me after my three-month probationary period, and I think they will. In the meantime, I am getting two paycheques, and Christmas should be very good this year. Yvonne has temp-to-perm work now with Diageo Canada, distributors of fine liquors like Tanqueray gin, Johnny Walker, Guinness and Bailey's. This job is also a ten-minute walk north of where we live. I hope the employment gods have finally smiled upon us... I did see Masters of Science Fiction, three of the four, anyway, and I liked what I saw. Nothing beats a good TZ episode, though...

There are many books I say no to. So many books, so little time. However, I can't say no to them all, so I do have a shelf and a half of books to be read, and another dozen book made it to the shelf in the last two months. Some books were rescued from people who didn't want them any more, and sometimes, we make a trip to our favorite used book store, and do a little trading.

120... I've read a lot of Poul Anderson, always enjoyed them, and I have a few I could get to fill out my collection. See above, though...never enough time or money.

I am a little behind most people when it comes to computer technology, but I am finally learning more about USB flash drives, and a 4Gb drive is on sale at our local Staples/Business Depot. It's on my Christmas list.

In 1998, we purchased a demo model Suzuki Esteem station wagon, the top of the line Suzuki made that model year. It has gotten us to several Worldcons, dozens of out_of_town cons, and helped us to schlep lots of con suite and other equipment back and forth across great distances. In many ways, this is the car we always needed, and it was one of the best purchases we ever made. Now that it is over nine years old, it's had some major repairs lately, and it is getting near time to replace it. We regret that; it's easily the best car we've ever owned, and we have brought it to our Suzuki dealership faithfully. I fully expect that our next car will be a Suzuki, and will be because we will still get a good trade_in for the station wagon, and given our loyalty, we are certain they will cut us a great deal for something new and comparable, like their SX7. We should be able to get one more year out of the Esteem.

One of the good things about working at the CNIB is that because the entire organization is vision_oriented, they will pay 100% of my vision costs (should they keep me after three months, of course). Given that I could use new glasses already, and that I will be visiting with my ophthalmologist in November to see if my eyes have gotten any better or worse since my operation last year, I think I am in the right place to be when it comes my future sight needs.

121... Thanks for the article on Poul Anderson...this will help me with the books I need, as mentioned earlier in this letter.

The article on the Cherryh trilogy...I am certain the hardcore Cherryh fans would like to read it. **Jan Stinson** (*Steam Engine Time, Peregrine Nations*) also produces a Cherryh zine...she'd probably like it for a future issue.

I am still hoping that I might see **Tom Sadler's** new fanzine. Last time I was in communication with him, he said he was planning to .pdf them and place them on eFanzines.com. Still waiting, Tom...I'd still like to see your latest work.

[The mainstream reviews of Williams' two sf movies were mostly negative, but that is often irrelevant compared to the opinion of the sf press. Now I regret passing those movies up when they were televised, but I'll keep them in mind for the future.

[Your ongoing employment problems make me realize how fortunate I've been to have a job I love and which pays decently for so many years. Good luck with your current job.]

John Purcell

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Oct 30, 2007

Robert, your zine comes at a sort of slack time in my schedule. Granted, I have some grading to do –only 16 papers, that's not too many–so here's a short loc on your latest posting to our favorite website, www.efanzines.com. (Bill Burns is my hero!)

#119 _ Like **Lloyd Penney**, many of my first forays into sf were the space operas, like the Rim World novels of A. Bertram Chandler. Those were so much fun to read, as were Jack Williamson's *Legion of Space* stories. Gawd, but sometimes I still just want to read a mindless

shoot_em_up set in deep space. Stories like that are simply fun to read.

I agree with **Joseph Nicholas**: you really must rent *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* and *Aliens*. Those are fun movies that are so indicative of the times that produced them. Go, rent, watch, and enjoy. Then review.

Robert, your response to **E.B. Frohvet's** loc was dead_on. Military History is not everybody's favorite reading topic. I like it, but you have to remember that was my undergraduate minor at Iowa State University. Every once in a while I will get in the mood to read books that deal with military technology, and they could eventually lead to a short story. But your statement that reading military history is not your cup of tea is so true. To each his or her own.

#120 _ Your alphabetic commentary in letter D matches how I have felt for much of my life. One of my life's goals is to publish a story; it doesn't matter whether it is fantasy, science fiction, horror, or mainstream. Just to say that I have published a story would be something that would be personally very satisfying. Now that I'm a college English teacher, it is so funny to me to actually apply what I am teaching to my own writing: critical reading skills, revision, rewriting, and so forth. In its own interesting way, my career as an educator is making me a better writer. I can live with that.

#121 _ Love that **Steve Stiles** cover! I really have to ask him again for a future cover for *Askance*. He is so doggone good!

How well I remember Poul Anderson from Minicons in years past. Thanks to him, I finally learned how to properly pronounce James Branch Cabell's name, and had oodles of great conversations with him about Norse mythology and science fiction fandom's history. He was a wonderful gentleman, and I have always enjoyed his writings. What a great man! **Tau Zero** is still one of my favorite books, and for Christmas this year—ssh! not so loud!—I'm giving my son a copy of **Three Hearts and Three Lions**. Daniel loves fantasy with lots of humor and action, so I think he'd love this book. Dan is twelve years old, so he's ready for the Good Stuff finally.

Dan Simmons is an author that I am completely unaware of. Thank you SO much for making me put more books on my "to be read" shelf. Now I know I'll be reading well into the next life...

As for the rest, excellent overview of C. J. Cherryh, whom I met at IguanaCon all the way back in 1978. It is good to see that she is still writing top_flight material. Will you please do me a favor and stop making me want to read books that I really have no time to read?! It really is quite frustrating.

[Thanks to Lloyd and you, my *Recommended Movie* list has grown by 4 movies, a list I dip into even less than my *Recommended Reading* list, since I always choose the book over the movie.

[I must publicly apologize here to you for not loccing the past two issues of *Askance*. I have a four-day weekend upcoming due to Teachers' Convention, so I hope to catch up on some locs then. Be assured that I do enjoy reading *Askance* in spite of my negligence.]

On the Lighter Side

Jokes by Robert Kennedy

Mrs. Johnson was the wife of a successful business owner, and he didn't have much time for her. On her birthday, however, he gave her a special gift: to have her portrait painted by a famous artist.

When the artist arrived and set up for the sitting, she told him, "Paint me with diamond earrings, a diamond necklace, emerald bracelets and a ruby pendant."

"But madam," he said, "You are not wearing any of those things."

"I know," said Mrs. Johnson. "My health is not good and my husband is having an affair with his secretary. When I die, I'm sure he will marry her, and I want the bitch to go nuts looking for all the jewelry."

*

Three blondes die in a car crash trying to jump the Grand Canyon; they're at the pearly gates of Heaven. St Peter tells them that they can enter the gates only if they can answer one simple religious question: "What is Easter"?

The first blonde replies, "Oh, that's easy! It's the holiday in November when everyone gets together, eats turkey, and thanks God for their blessings."

"Wrong!" St. Peter shakes his head in disgust. "I'm sorry; you must go to the other place!"

He turns to the second blonde, and asks her the same question: "What is Easter?" She replies, "Easter is the holiday in December when we put up a nice tree, exchange presents, and celebrate the birth of Jesus."

St Peter looks at the second blonde, bangs his head on the on the pearly gates in dismay, and tells her she's wrong, too. She is not welcome in Heaven.

He then peers over his glasses at the third blonde and asks, "Do YOU know what Easter is"?

The third blonde smiles confidently and looks St Peter in the eyes, "I know what Easter is."

"Oh?" says St Peter. "Do tell."

So, she begins: "Easter is the Christian holiday that coincides with the Jewish celebration of Passover. Jesus and his disciples were eating at the last supper and Jesus was later deceived and turned over to the Romans by one of his disciples. The Romans took him to be crucified and he was stabbed in the side, made to wear a crown of thorns, and was hung on a cross with nails through his hands and feet. He was buried in a nearby cave which was sealed off by a large boulder."

St Peter smiled broadly with great relief. But the third blonde continued... "Every year the boulder is moved aside so that Jesus can come out and, if he sees his shadow, there will be six more weeks

of winter."

*

A distraught senior citizen phoned her doctor's office. "Is it true," she wanted to know, "that the medication you prescribed has to be taken for the rest of my life?" "Yes, I'm afraid so," the doctor told her.

There was a moment of silence before the senior lady replied, "I'm wondering, then, just how serious is my condition because this prescription is marked 'NO REFILLS'."

*

An older Jewish gentleman was on the operating table awaiting surgery and he insisted that his son, a renowned surgeon, perform the operation. As he was about to get the anesthesia, he asked to speak to his son.

"Yes, Dad, what is it?"

"Don't be nervous, son; do your best and just remember, if it doesn't go well, if something happens to me, your mother is going to come and live with you and your wife...."

*

First old guy, "Sorry about that. I'm looking for my wife, and I guess I wasn't paying attention to where I was going."

The second old guy says, "That's OK, It's a coincidence. I'm looking for my wife, too. I can't find her and I'm getting a little desperate."

The first old guy says, "Well, maybe I can help you find her. What does she look like?"

"Tall, with red hair, blue eyes, long legs, big bust, and is wearing short shorts. What does your wife look like?"

To which the first old guy says, "Doesn't matter, let's look for yours."