

# Visions of Paradise #125

## Contents

Out of the Depth.....	page 2
<i>Underrated rock and roll artists</i>	
The Passing Scene.....	page 3
<i>January 2008</i>	
Wondrous Stories.....	page 4
▶ <i>The Yiddish Policemen's Union</i>	
▶ <i>City of the Chasch</i>	
Halcyon Days.....	page 7
<i>Eric Mayer ... Brant Kresovitch ... Henry Welch ...</i>	
<i>John Purcell ... Joseph T. Major ... Robert Kennedy ...</i>	
<i>Lloyd Penney</i>	
On the Lighter Side.....	page 13

\_\\//\_  
( 0\_0 )  
o00 ( ) o0o

---

Robert Michael Sabella

E-mail: [bsabella@optonline.net](mailto:bsabella@optonline.net)

Personal blog: <http://adamosf.blogspot.com/>

Sfnal blog: <http://visionsofparadise.blogspot.com/>

Available online at <http://efanzines.com/>

Copyright ©January 2008, by Gradient Press

Available for trade, letter of comment or request

### Artwork

Trinlay Khadro.....page 6

# Out of the Depths

Second only to my love of books is my love of rock and roll. I have been listening to rock music for most of 5 decades now and, like many listeners, I enjoy most of the “giants” of the genre: Beatles, Kinks, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Simon & Garfunkel, Bruce Springsteen, Neil Young, Bob Dylan, Creedence, Van Morrison, Moody Blues; there are also several giants whom I do not particularly enjoy: Stones, Clapton, Skynyrd.

But the bulk of my listening consists of a handful of artists who are not as popular as those listed above, but who, in my opinion, are every bit as good, if not better in some instances. So here is my list of underrated rock artists whom I highly recommend to all fans of rock and roll music. In each case I have listed one or two albums which represents their very best:

Richard Thompson	forget Clapton; RT is as good a guitarist and a much superior singer-songwriter	Shoot Out the Lights; The Old Kit Bag
The Strawbs	David Cousins’ band runs the gamut from folk-rock to progressive rock, doing all of it well	Hero and Heroine; Bursting at the Seams
Dion DiMucci	abandoning his early “boy band” music, Dion became one of the finest folk rockers ever	Yo, Frankie!; The Road I’m On
Chris de Burgh	my choice for the most underrated singer-songwriter; think Moody Blues style music	Man on the Line; This Way Up
Jethro Tull	similar to the Strawbs, although a bit more folk, mandatory listening for any rock fans	Aqualung; Thick as a Brick
John Hiatt	covers of his songs have been hits for several artists, but nobody does them as well as Hiatt in his Dylanesque voice	Bring the Family; Slow Turning
Steve Forbert	outstanding folk rocker, a modern-day troubadour	Streets of this Town; Jackrabbit Slim
Frank Zappa	ignore the craziness, nobody blends progressive rock with jazz-fusion better	Lather; Have I Offended Someone?
Waterboys	more folk-rock with a big-band ambiance	Fisherman’s Blues; This is the Sea

# The Passing Scene

January 2008

I do not normally make New Year's Resolutions, since they are generally exercises in futility, but there are a few things I would like to do this year:

- Buy less books, and try to read more of the unread orphans sitting on my bookshelves;
- Exercise more, stress less.

We started the New Year the same way as last year, going to *First Night Morris* with our friends Kathy and Dave. We saw the wonderful Nai Ni Chen Dance Company again, although this year they did more music than dancing; The Dazzling Mills Family, a father and two children juggling with a lot of humor thrown in; and the Robert Murdoch Band, which played rock 'n' roll from the 60s, finishing with side two of *Abbey Road*; and the traditional fireworks. Overall, it was a pleasant evening.

I got a phone call recently from an Animal Rescue Shelter asking for a recommendation for Fei Fei who wants to adopt two kittens. Naturally I said good things about her, and she came home with two cute kitties whom she named Toto and Kiki. I told her that if she moves to another university in the near future, she can tell the cat, "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Princeton anymore!" ☺

Andy normally works the night shift from 3pm - 11pm five days a week (including at least one day on the weekend, usually both of them). Recently he has been working some day shifts as well which he prefers. He is still undecided whether he wants to stay in the hotel business or seek a job in marketing, but having better hours might make his decision to switch careers less urgent. At least he is fortunate enough to have a job while he is searching.

In a perfect world, all my favorite former students would stay in touch with me on a regular basis through email, IM, and occasional visits and phone calls. But life is not perfect, so I probably keep in occasional touch with about a dozen former students, perhaps one or two contacts per year each. Occasionally one of them surprises me with a visit, and that happened recently when Jessica (class of '99) showed up in the Math Lab after school. It was so nice to sit and chat with her for nearly an hour, catching up on her life and a bit of reminiscing. She is completing her Masters' Degree at Columbia this semester and hopes to work in Public Health in Texas, a long distance from New Jersey.

January had a three-day weekend due to Martin Luther King's Day, and I used it to almost (but not quite) finish editing the Tibet book in preparation for sending it to the publisher who wants to read the entire ms. The reason I did not finish was the need to do schoolwork, mail the latest bundle of **VoP** to FAPA, edited the January issue of **VoP**, plus Jean, Mark and Kate and I went to a Seton Hall basketball game at the new Prudential Center Saturday night. It is much easier to reach than their old home in the Meadowlands was, but the parking areas are not close except for Prudential employees such as Mark who can park in the adjacent company garage. I would

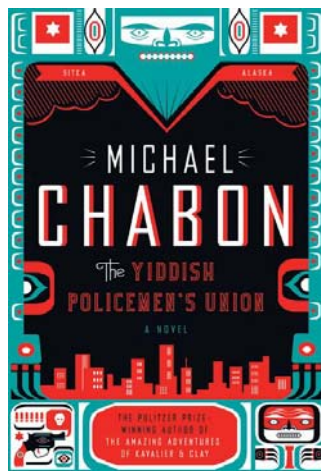
never go to a SHU game without him. ☺

Because our principal is retiring January 31, we have had a slew of parties for him recently. The lead teachers, myself included, catered a breakfast at our weekly Cabinet meeting a week ago, and a group of us arranged an after-school party for the entire staff to bid him farewell. I enjoyed working with Tony at PHHS in the late 70s through mid-80s when he was a guidance counselor, and the past five years when we have worked very closely together at PHS.

We also had a catered staff party last Saturday night at an American Legion hall. I don't usually attend such parties, but Jean and her friend Mary wanted to attend, plus we sat with my friend George, the Physics teacher who loves science fiction as much as I do. It was an enjoyable night, even though the vast majority of attendees were between 25-35 years old and who, for the most part, I barely know.

This month the AP Gov class had primary debates in which the students took the role of the candidates and debated along party lines in front of the auditorium. I went to see the Democratic debate first period with Shiva as John Edwards and Ela as Hillary Clinton. Both were well-prepared but were too polite to attack the other candidates. Second period I took my ESL class to see the Republican debate because I really wanted to see Sun Hee as Mike Huckabee. I knew Sun Hee was a good debater because of her success defending George W. Bush against warrentless wiretapping in December. Besides researching endlessly, she is smart enough to remember what she learns, understands how to use it and is quick enough on her feet to rebut the other debaters. I was proud of Sun Hee who, in my biased opinion, was the best debater of the day, speaking in brief, memorable sound bites about either the strengths of her position or the weaknesses of her opponents, without any long rambling. Once she even challenged the Mitt Romney student on an issue the other student did not even know her own candidate supported!

## Wondrous Stories



Michael Chabon's **The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay** was one of my favorite novels of the past decade, so I approached **The Yiddish Policemen's Union** with considerable anticipation. The novel was a combination alternate history / noir mystery told in Chabon's typically fine language that is itself worthwhile reading.

The novel is set in Sitka, Alaska, a Jewish settlement since their relocation there during World War II and when the remaining Jews were driven out of Israel in 1948. Except the Jewish relocation was originally set for 60 years, and it was never made permanent, thus it is due to end in a few months as most Jews prepare for another relocation to places such as nearby Canada, Argentina and Madagascar.

The protagonists are two sour homicide detectives Berko and Landsman trying to solve the inexplicable murder of a drug-addicted member of the local chess club, who was not only a chess-playing prodigy but might also be the Messiah. Berko is half-native, who control most of the land surrounding Sitka, while Landsman's father was a devoted chess player who inadvertently turned his son rabidly against the game. The novel's involvement with chess, while a major aspect, tends to be less passionate than most novels of this type because of Landsman's disillusionment with the game. The two detectives investigate the underbelly of Sitka and the eccentric members of the chess club as their superior, who is Landsman's former wife, insists that their unsolved twelve cases must be closed before the U.S. marshal takes over her office in another two months.

Chabon manages the rare trick of writing intriguing scenes—Landsman's visit with the Rebbe of the Verbover sect who are the novel's equivalent of mobsters, his "visit" to the Youth Camp—without losing the novel's main focus, the search for the murderer. As in many genre mysteries, the investigation gradually broadens into conspiracy theory as Landsman uncovers evidence that the murder is only a small aspect of a much wider plot involving the would-be Messiah.

But Chabon has a higher goal than solely writing a mystery. He is interested in relationships, both that of specific characters—Landsman with his former wife, his partner Berko with his father, the murdered man with his parents—and, to a lesser extent, the overall relationships of the Jews of Sitka with each other. He also tries to create a realistic setting, a job of world-building which is one of the key facets of good alternate history. All of these goals Chabon does with varying degrees of success and no blatant failures.

One of the novel's strengths is its immersion in Yiddish culture and terminology, a richness which helps create the setting and increases its level of interest. Admittedly there were times I did not totally understand the meaning of a particular word or phrase, but those moments were rare, and I was usually able to understand it through its context.

There were some weakness in the novel, primarily Landsman's uncanny ability to be rescued from several dangerous situations in the most unlikely ways, *deus ex machina* moments in a novel immersed in religious belief. They were minor distractions more than anything else, and since the novel's main focus was the characters and setting, those moments, although jarring, were not major hindrances.

Overall, I definitely enjoyed **The Yiddish Policemen's Union** and recommend it to fans of

alternate history, noir mysteries, and Chabon fans.

\*

**City of the Chasch** is the first of four novels by Jack Vance collected in book form under the unassuming title *Planet of Adventure*. It is a typical Vancean planetary adventure involving an Earthman named Adam Reith who is the sole survivor of a spaceship arriving on the planet Tschai which is populated by three alien races, the Chasch, Dirdir and Wankh, plus the native Pnume and numerous sub-species of each, as well as several types of humans. Each have differing cultures, and all are at various stages of warfare with each other.

Reith's shuttle is captured by the Blue Chasch and taken to their stronghold, although Reith escapes and sets out to recapture his ship. He joins a caravan for protection and meets a girl who calls herself Flower of Cath who is a prisoner of a group of nuns taking her to a bizarre anti-male ceremony at which she will evidently be maimed or killed. Reith spends half of the novel rescuing her until the caravan is destroyed in an attack by the Green Chasch, so Reith, the girl and two other accomplices, one human and the other a Dirdirman, travel toward the city of the Chasch.

Of course, they encounters other troubles along the way, most importantly when a dictator of the city Pera kidnaps the Flower of Cath. The humans living in Pera almost huddle in the city as fugitives, surviving by engaging in commerce with the nearby city of the Blue Chasch. After a series of adventures in Pera and in the city of the Blue Chasch, Reith becomes ruler of Pera and initiates improvements in the city which incur the wrath of the Chasch who launch an invasion.

**City of the Chasch** is vintage Vance, featuring a well-developed exotic world populated with diverse and fantastic aliens. Tschai is the true protagonist of the novel, and the adventure plot is mostly a device used by Vance to explore the world, its population, and the relationship between the alien overlords and the underling humans. On Tschai the humans are considered submen by the Chasch and Dirdir, and live such primitive lives there is little reason for the alien races to consider them otherwise. Reith, in accepting the leadership of Pera, determines to change that perception by helping the humans regain their pride and improve their standard of living. We also learn more about the Chasch, particularly the sub-races Blue Chasch and Green Chasch. Presumably, in latter books we will learn more about the other various races and sub-races.

Where the *Alastor* and *Demon Prince* series feature similar color, they are primarily mysteries whose worlds are not nearly as well-developed. So while **City of the Chasch** has less plotting, it is more satisfying since beneath its surface plot lies an anthropological delight. I look forward to exploring more of Tschai's wonders in subsequent novels in the series.



# Halcyon Days

**Eric Mayer**

maywrite2@epix.net

Dec 30, 2007

I've been delving into eFanzines this past week and came upon **Visions of Paradise** which I had somehow missed, possibly because I had heard about the sercon part of the zine. I don't read sercon zines too often simply because I've read hardly any sf in the past 30 years. I grew up on the stuff but I didn't much care for the new wave approach and wandered off. However I see you have some interesting things to say unrelated to sf so I should have checked **VoP** out sooner.

One complaint though...there's been a recurring theme in the past few Locs I've written, for one reason or another, and that is how I remain utterly confused as to what exactly to do with my writing given the variety of outlets we have today with the Internet. I'm not sure how to juggle stuff or when it is appropriate to re-use something. So now I am confronted by an apazine that is, or was, three rotating zines, and you also have, I see, two different blogs. At least you don't have a LiveJournal. I do but I abandoned it because I couldn't decide whether to mirror my stuff from my blog since Dave Burton often reprints my blog entries in **Pixel**. You seem to have figured out how to handle all this better than I have.

I was interested to see that you enjoyed the Stephen Saylor novel. I've read very little by Saylor and won't be reading anything soon not because I have anything against his work but rather because my wife Mary and I have co-written some mysteries set in Roman times (6th century) and we're frankly terrified of unconsciously plagiarizing something or being accused of it. We had just about finished writing a book in which our detective is sent to Egypt when we heard that the new Gordianus book would find him in Egypt! Well, if asked we can honestly say we simply don't read other Roman mysteries so any similarities are coincidental.

Your reading project sounds like a good idea. I don't like New Year resolutions but if I were making any one would be to read more books. I am actually more attracted to older books and for an English Lit major I am not very well read. I fear I neglected classics for skiffy in my wild youth. (Yeah, wild...sitting and reading endless books of the wrong kind!) So there are plenty of classics to catch up on. I just read **Crime and Punishment** so I'm serious about this!

I have neglected music even more. You say Richard Thompson has a new album. I didn't even know. I saw him at a little dinner club in Rochester New York about 1990. Just him and an acoustic guitar. I could not believe the sounds he got out of that thing. Incredible. And his songs are superb. Albeit many, at the time, were horribly depressing and seemed to be in some way about his breakup with Linda which suited me as my marriage was on the way down the tubes right then. I confess I had a fantastic bootleg tape of the concert made by an acquaintance on a kind of mini-recording studio. Of course my ex-wife got that. Ah well, I admit I have not yet heard Ray Davies' solo stuff and the Kinks were always my favorite group.

By the way, very nice cover by **Sheryl Birkhead**.

[John the Eunuch has gotten good reviews, so I hope to read one of your novels in that series sometime soon. While I have avoided reading historical mysteries for a long time, I am gradually discovering that in good hands the joys of the historical novel are not lessened by the mystery format, so I hope to read more in the future, particularly yours, Ellis Peters, and Jason Godwin's series set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire.]

### **Brant Kresovich**

biggestfatporker@yahoo.com

Dec 31, 2007

Re *college radio*. Commercial Radio and NPR are such nightmares that in the car I listen to a college radio station WBNY Buffalo's *Original Alternative*, which is also streamed in Windows Media Player. I must admit that the hiphop they play annoys me as much as Mara Eliasson, queen of the conventional wisdom. Also there seems to be a punky genre called noise, which encompasses a lot of, uh, droney stuff with angst-ridden lyrics. Hey, I read books, I don't need music for more angst. But WBNY's "roots of rock and roll" show on Saturday mornings is great – all Post-WWII regional blues, jump blues, country, and early rock, when local record companies were churning wacky stuff out, before anybody thought about categories. Elvis put a stop to all that, just like the Beatles knocked off the idol singers later. Oh, well, that fickle public!

Re *Atticus Finch at work, Mountain Man at Home*. I too am Life at the Party at work but at social gatherings I swing between The Tongueless Hermit and Luca Brasi rehearsing his wedding greetings. I think this kind of personality change is utterly normal, if not beneficial. It is salutary to have balance in life. After a day of dealing with staff members with varying senses of duty, faculty with different levels of get-up-and-go, and foreign students who express themselves in a wide variety of Englishes, I am drunk on people. At home, I need to sober up by dealing with My One and Only and no more people, please. Balance is a good thing. How this will shake out in retirement, I don't know. But I suspect that if I am Capt Queeg at home, My Bride will put a skillet upside my head.

Re *Kleenex for Crying Students*. At the risk of over-generalizing and sounding like an old guy, they do seem to cry more than they used to.

Re book on immigrants. Hell, there's already a book about immigrants in your neck of the woods. You should read **Suburban Sahibs: Three Immigrant Families and Their Passage from India to America** by S. Mitra Kalita. It is a very readable story of the personal and professional struggles and triumphs of three immigrant families from South Asia living in the New Jersey suburbs. I read it last year when I was experiencing a yen for American pluralism. Suggestion for a hook: plusses and minuses of the model minority stereotype.

[I've read several books about the immigrant experience in America, specifically Chinese and Italian, but none of them seemed to have the format or theme I was looking for. Perhaps I'll look up **Suburban Sahibs**.

[I am not introverted by choice out of school, since that is my normal personality which I made a determined effort to overcome my first few years teaching when I realized I was less effective



because of it. My love of my students makes it easy for me to maintain that alternate personality at school, but I instinctively retreat to my natural state away from school.]

**Henry L. Welch**

welch@msoe.edu

Dec 31, 2007

Thanks for the recent **VoP** issues. I agree wholeheartedly with your observations regarding students. It is one of my biggest regrets in leaving teaching to pursue my new career as an IP attorney. Hopefully my new clients will fill some of that gap as well as more junior attorneys I will interact with in the coming years.

**John Purcell**

j\_purcell54@yahoo.com

Jan 3, 2008

Well, who would have thought this would happen? My very first loc of the new year is to you, not in response to a zine produced by Chris Garcia. That has to mean something!

I am glad that the current school year is going well for you. It certainly sounds from your descriptions that your students are keeping you busy and reinforcing the joy you get from teaching. The seniors you have sure seem like good kids. When I taught at Willis High School, graduation hit me a lot harder than I thought it would. Like you, I got very attached to my seniors, especially the dual credit kids, who were some of the brightest youngsters I have ever had the pleasure to teach. In one sense I am very envious of them: so bright with so much promise ahead of them. Still, it is a frightening prospect for many of them. Now I've been at a community college for a few years, so I don't get as attached as I used to. However, there are always a few that I come to know a lot better than others. No matter what, though, I get a kick out of teaching and hope that they come out of my classes with skills that will do them well in the future.

As for your Christmas take, you got some good items. So far I have received Paul McCartney's new CD, *Memory Almost Full*, which is actually pretty darned good. It actually has a bit of an edge to it, and still maintains that listenability that McCartney somehow always has. I like it. The other gifts were a set of three VHS tapes of the *Red Green Show*. A great show! If you haven't seen that show before, I encourage you to do so. Funny, funny stuff.

This past year I actually read a lot more books for pleasure than usual, possibly because my doctoral work was lighter than previous semesters. That will be changing in this new year. But my favorite book of the past year was **London** by Edward Rutherfurd, a massive historical novel of the development of London from tribal times to the recent present (20th century). Despite the daunting size, it is quite readable and fascinating. I am becoming quite a fan of Rutherfurd's work; **Sarum** was also very good, and I now have three other novels by him on my shelves.

As for your top ten list of books you've read, I haven't read a single one of them. I have heard that **Roma Eterna** is really good, and you yourself recommend **Infinity Beach**, so okay, I will check them out--eventually. Research first, classes second, pleasure last. You know how that goes.

I am assuming that Bob Davis was one half of the Ziff-Davis publishing name. There is no mention of this as part of his career, so I am just curious. He published a lot of now-classic stories, that's for sure. Thanks for the quick background into Bob Davis.

[Graduation is always bittersweet for me. Already I'm missing Sun Hee and Shiva although there is still a half-year of school left!

[Jean has 3 books by Rutherford on the bookshelf: **Sarum**, **Princes of Ireland**, and **Rebels of Ireland**. I have eyed **Sarum** myself, but never got around to it. Perhaps I should try to do so more seriously (the same with the Clavell epics).

[I don't think Bob Davis has anything to do with Ziff-Davis, since he disappeared from sight in 1920. The name might be a coincidence.

[I've never heard of the *Red Green Show*. I'll have to look it up out of curiosity. From my family I got the first season of *Star Trek: Next Generation*, my favorite of all the *Treks* (and probably my favorite show next to *M\*A\*S\*H*, which Jean and I watch on tvland at night, the only show I currently watch). I've watched a few *TNG* and they've been fun.]

### **Joseph T Major**

1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204\_2040

jtmajor@iglou.com

Jan 4, 2008

*I read a total of 28 books:* that's an average month for me.

The review in **Commentary** of **The Yiddish Policeman's Union** contained a lament that Chabon, having entered the field of alternate history, was doing nothing with it. I was more than a little surprised and elated that a "mainstream" reviewer would say something like that. Myself, knowing the plot of the Chabon book, I ask the question, "When did they repeal the Fourteenth Amendment?"

Nevertheless, from what I've read **Gentlemen of the Road** sounds promising. (Chabon had wanted to title it **Jews With Swords** but was talked out of it.) And Vance's **Planet of Adventure** is yet another example of his brilliant world-building.

*Retirement:* May I suggest that Louisville has a substantial and growing Asian community. One of the engineers at work is Chinese and another is Thai.

It seems surprising that Sam Moskowitz had not discovered Bob Davis a long time before, particularly as SaM wrote a stirring (but usual Moskowitz caveats) history of proto-SF in the Munsey magazines. This was the good and the bad of Gernsback's methods: before then Science Fiction was not in a "ghetto", writers could combine SF and non-SF writings. As Gernsback's concentration created a medium for reinforcing and stimulating the speculative nature of the works, it also set them apart.

Nowadays everything's romance novels anyway.

*Robin Williams*: In one episode of "Mork and Mindy", Mork took some children to see **Popeye**. I understood the movie was, while not as bad as **Heaven's Gate**, rather overexpensive in the production side.

[Because schoolwork takes up so much of my time ten months of the year, I mostly read on weekends, and even then my days are pretty well packed with schoolwork and house chores, so two books per month is about my limit until I retire.]

### **Robert Kennedy**

1779 CiprianAve, Camarillo, CA 93010-2451

[robertk@cipcug.org](mailto:robertk@cipcug.org)

January 18, 2008

Thank you for **VoP** #123 and #124. In your **Listmania** I have read something like 10 of those listed with the highest being #2 *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells and the lowest being *The Queen of Air and Darkness* by Poul Anderson. By the way, what is the significance of the asterisks after some of the numbers?

I obtained *Savage Inequalities* from the local library and *The Learning Gap* from Interlibrary Loan. The later was especially interesting. It was noticed that the authors never made mention of vouchers or of Charter Schools. Perhaps the latter didn't appear until after the books were published. A number of years ago there was a voucher initiative on the California ballot. A meeting was advertised here in Camarillo claiming it would be a discussion of the issue. I went to the meeting. It was actually a teachers' union pep rally where they almost had a stroke over the issue and made several ridiculous claims about how vouchers would ruin education in California. (As if public education in California was not already, and still is, in big trouble.) One of the speakers went berserk and claimed that schools of witchcraft would be started. The Ventura County Superintendent of Schools also attended and took the side of the teachers union. They were scared witless of competition. I left early. The initiative was defeated.

**Richard Dengrove**: The idea that all the signers of the Declaration of Independence, all our Presidents except JFK, and all the British Prime Ministers except Margaret Thatcher were Freemasons is ridiculous. Masonic historians have been very thorough in their research and the figures I furnished are quite accurate. Anyone who claims otherwise is not a real "historian." Freemasonry may have been rather a secret organization at its very beginnings. However, that has not been the case for several hundred years. Many Freemasons openly wear Masonic jewelry. Meeting places are well identified. Grand Lodges produce magazines. Local lodges produce publications. Freemasonry is not a secret organization; it is an organization with secrets. Even those secrets can be found with a bit of diligent research.

[School vouchers have become such a "hot" political issue that it is hard to find rational discussion about it without both opponents and supporters getting very emotional and often out-

of-control. Personally, I believe that vouchers permitting students to attend any public school would be a good thing, since competition among schools is more likely to help them rather than hurt them. This is certainly not the official NEA position though. I have a bit of a problem with permitting vouchers to private schools though unless those schools have more stringent guidelines as to teacher qualifications, number of days required per year, and students taking state-required tests to assure at least some minimal level of learning (none of which private schools are currently subject to). Then there is always the thorny issue of should we be using public funding to teaching religion?

[The asterisks on the Best Novella list represent ties in the standings.]

### **Lloyd Penney**

1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON, CANADA M9C 2B2

January 20, 2008

Both Sirius and XM satellite radio have Canadian divisions, and there are satellite radio channels especially for the Canadian market. I must wonder, though...it's difficult enough to pay for digital TV channels. I don't know of anyone who has subscribed to the satellite radio services, other than yourself. If there are stations I'd like to listen to, I usually do it at home through the Internet. I often listen to BBC Radio 2. I do not have digital cable, as I cannot justify the cost of it, so the same would apply to satellite radio.

Christmas was a good time. I gave Yvonne *Ratatouille*, and she gave me the gigantic extended set of DVDs of *Lord of the Rings*. I just don't know when I'm going to get the time to sit and enjoy them. No time during the week, and not enough time through the weekend...I need a vacation from the stress of working 50-hour weeks and not much leisure time.

I need to go on a diet...the Christmas feeding frenzy was especially good this year, and a lot of clothes do not fit any more. The pounds are coming off, just not fast enough.

In your article about Bob Davis and **All-Story Weekly**, you mention that one of the last stories published is Ray Cummings' **The Girl in the Golden Atom**. I am reading that very story right now on my PDA as an e-book. I have been reading a lot of science fiction lately; it's been in e-book form.

My loc...so, did I get to stay at the CNIB? No, I did not. Just shy of the end of my three months' probation, I was brought into a boardroom and told that I just wasn't working out, which to my mind is nonsense. I was doing well, and enjoyed the work. I was told that the main reason was financial. I have learned since that many non-profit corporations will hire and fire someone within three months to get the work done without actual hiring, and there's also savings on benefits. I was able to land on my feet fairly quickly, and I am on a new three-month assignment with Panasonic Canada, deciphering Japanese-translated English on owner's manuals for Panasonic products, and putting it into North American English we can all understand. Yvonne ran out of work where she was working, Diageo Canada, so she has left there, and starts tomorrow morning with a one-year mat-leave assignment with DuPont Canada. It all sounds

good, but I wish our employment situation would firm up. I'm tired of just starting up as the newbie in the office.

[Keep in mind that I do not pay for Sirius voluntarily; it was a standard feature of my Jeep Compass, so I had no choice. Recently I have been listening to it online—which is a free side effect of having it in my car—which makes it more palatable should I choose to pay for it voluntarily next year, since I listen to music a lot more when I am working on the computer than when I am driving. I'll let you know if I decided to renew Sirius or not.

[I received the DVD of *Lord of the Rings* last Christmas, and while Jean has seen all of it, I have not seen any of it yet. I have just started watching the first season of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, but have only seen 2 episodes of it. A few years ago I received the first season of *Babylon 5* and have seen only a single episode of it! \*sigh\*

[Your job tribulations make me glad teachers have a seniority system where, unless a teacher is proven incompetent or insubordinate, cannot be dismissed unless all the people “below” on the seniority list are dismissed first. While some undeserving teachers do retain their jobs because of this system, prior to seniority Boards of Education were notorious for balancing their budgets by firing all the higher-paying teachers and keeping the newbies. The quality of education is generally better with experienced teachers guiding the newbies.]

## On the Lighter Side

The day after his wife disappeared in a kayaking accident, an Anchorage man answered his door to find two grim-faced Alaska State Troopers. "We're sorry Mr. Wilkens, but we have some information about your wife," said one trooper.

"Tell me! Did you find her?" Wilkens shouted.

The troopers looked at each other. One said, "We have some bad news, some good news, and some really great news. Which do you want to hear first?"

Fearing the worst, an ashen Mr. Wilkens said, "Give me the bad news first."

The trooper said, "I'm sorry to tell you, sir, but this morning we found your wife's body in Kachemak Bay."

"Oh my God!" exclaimed Wilkens. Swallowing hard, he asked, "What's the good news?"

The trooper continued, "When we pulled her up, she had 12 twenty-five pound king crabs and 6 good-size Dungeness crabs clinging to her."

Stunned, Mr. Wilkens demanded, "If that's the good news, what's the great news?"

The trooper said, "We're going to pull her up again tomorrow."

\*

Mrs. Keith Jones went into a pet shop and spotted a large, beautiful parrot. There was a sign on the cage that said \$50.00. "Why so little?" she asked the pet store owner. The owner looked at her and said, "Look, I should tell you first that this bird used to live in a house of prostitution, and sometimes it says some pretty risqué stuff."

The woman thought about this but decided she had to have the bird anyway. She took it home and hung the bird's cage up in her living room and waited for it to say something.

The bird looked around the room, then at her, and said, "New house, new madam." The woman was a bit shocked at the implication, but then thought, "That's really not so bad."

When her two teenage daughters returned from school the bird saw them and said, "New house, new madam, new girls." The girls and the woman were a bit offended but then began to laugh about the situation considering where the parrot had been raised.

Then woman's husband came in from work. The bird looked at him and said, "Hi Keith."

\*

Two old guys, Abe and Sol, are sitting on a park bench feeding pigeons and talking about baseball, like they do every day. Abe turns to Sol and says, "Do you think there's baseball in heaven?"

Sol thinks about it for a minute and replies, "I dunno. But let's make a deal. If I die first, I'll come back and tell you if there's baseball in heaven, and if you die first you'll do the same."

They shake on it and sadly a few months later poor Abe passes on. One day soon afterward, Sol is sitting there feeding the pigeons by himself when he hears a voice whisper, "Sol... Sol..."

Sol responds, "Abe! Is that you?"

"Yes it is Sol," whispers Abe's ghost.

Sol still amazed asks, "So, is there baseball in heaven?"

"Well," says Abe. "I've got good news and bad news."

"Gimme the good news first," says Sol.

Abe says, "Well... there is baseball in heaven."

Sol says, "That's great! What news could be bad enough to ruin that?"

Abe sighs and whispers, "You're pitching on Friday."