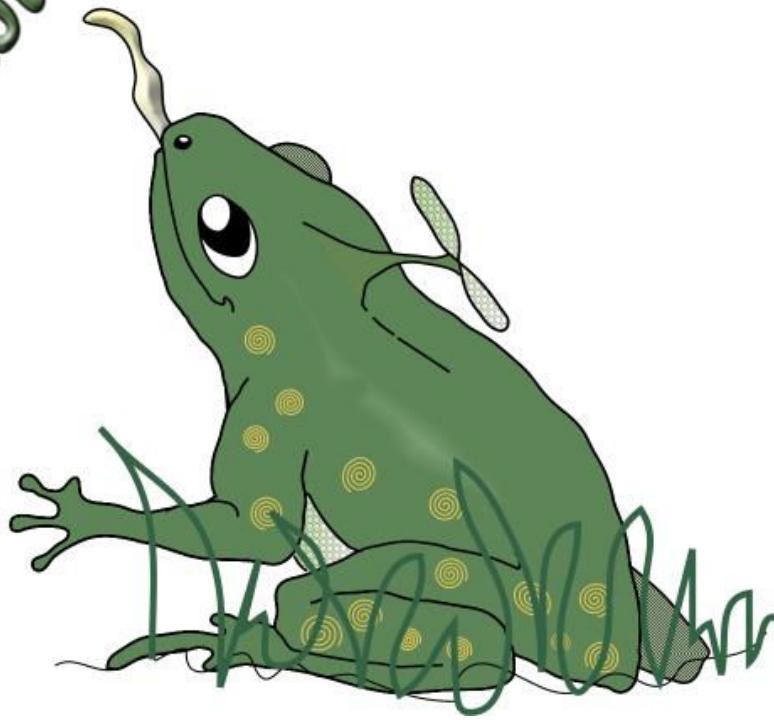


# Visions of Paradise



# Visions of Paradise

## #127

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#### Artwork

Sheryl Birkhead.....cover

Trinlay Khadro.....page 3, 15

Terry Jeeves.....page 7

# Out of The Depths

It has become commonplace in recent years for people to lament how few *science fiction* books are published compared to fantasy and horror. For somebody who remembers how little sf was published 40 years ago by comparison, that lament is almost ludicrous. According to the February *Year-in-Review* issue of **Locus**, in 2007 2,723 genre books were published, 1,710 new and 1,013 reprints. That is the highest number of genre books published in any year ever. By comparison, in 1997 1,816 genre books were published, 999 new and 817 reprints.

Breaking down the original books published by category in 2007, 250 original science fiction novels were published, compared to 460 fantasy novels and 198 horror novels. There were also 90 anthologies and 100 collections published, which combine all three categories. Assuming the latter followed the same percentages as the novels, that breaks down to approximately 50 science fiction anthologies/collections to 140 fantasy and horror, for a total of 300 original sf books and 800 fantasy/horror books.

In 1999, the oldest year listed in **Locus**, 251 original sf novels were published compared to 275 fantasy novels and 95 horror novels. So while the latter categories have basically doubled in popularity, science fiction has remained steady.

300 original science fiction books published in 2007 is a lot of original science fiction. While I don't have statistics for publications 40 years ago, I suspect far less than 100 original sf books were published the entire year. So while the total number of original sf books might pale besides fantasy and horror, how many of those 300 sf books can a single person read in a year (assuming they read zero fantasy/horror books, which is probably a rare occurrence among genre fans)?

That does not take into account quality, of course. If only 20% of the original sf published in a given year appeals to an individual reader, that is 60 new books, which might not be a lot for some avid readers. But surely some fantasy must appeal to those same readers. If only 5% of the fantasy appeals to that same reader (and no horror), that would be another 30 books.

Nor do these figures include all the short fiction available in prozines, semi-prozines and online, an estimated 2,109 stories in 2007 according to **Locus** short fiction guru Mark Kelly. So if 90 books is not sufficient reading for one year, surely an average of nearly 6 pieces of short sf per day would augment that reading considerably.

Overall, there is not much doubt that a sufficient amount of original sf is published each year to appeal to any genre fan, perhaps requiring a bit of work to find some of it online. Overall, that sounds like a good deal to me though.



# The Passing Scene

March 2006

This was HSPA testing week, when all juniors in the state took Math, Reading and Writing over three days, a mandatory graduation requirement. I was frantic getting the calculators ready since we did not have enough classroom sets of calculators for all 260 juniors, so Adrienne and I collected 60 calculators which we had loaned to our Statistics students (she teaches the regular *Probability, Statistics & Discrete Math* and I teach the *A.P. Statistics*) for the year. Fortunately, everything went all right, but the hard part was returning the same calculators to students again, which was a major nuisance.

This was Adrienne's last month teaching, as she is pregnant and due in April. While I tend to refer to several female students as my daughters, I have actually been closer to Adrienne than any of my students except Fei Fei. Adrienne joined the Math Department at age 22 fresh out of college. She was bright, cheerful, outgoing, a ray of sunshine in the department. Over the years she also became one of its very best teachers, and my right-hand person running the department. Since she was not much older than my students when I first met her, and I served as one of her mentors in the department, I instinctively began treating her like a daughter, a situation which she reciprocated and seemed to enjoy.

Now she is 29 and pregnant with her first child, a boy who is due in April. Bidding farewell to her was far sadder than any graduation day bidding farewell to my students. We hugged, cried a lot, reminisced, and assured each other that we will say close via phone and email. And I thought it was bad losing students when they graduated! ☹

\*

As usual, I had a lot of late nights at school this month: three meetings for *Target Teach* (one session selecting next year's students from the applicants, one planning session, and our usual class). The *Indian Culture Club* had auditions for their annual show, and the *Asian-American Club* had two game nights (which, because of scheduling difficulties, were both on Thursday nights until 9pm, which made the next day rather tiring).

I surpassed my 100<sup>th</sup> student recommendation of the year this month, a personal all-time record! \*yee-hah!\* It's a lot easier writing college recommendations than recommendations for scholarships, which I am doing now, because often I am writing for two students who are competing against each other for the same scholarship, so my letter might actually make a difference as to which student wins it. That's a scary responsibility.

Not surprisingly, many of my seniors plan to attend *Parsippany South* next year, better known as Rutgers University. That group includes Sun Hee and Hyun, who will both attend Rutgers Pharmacy School and also room together, a very nice match. Shiva plans to major in Finance and—maybe!—mathematics at Rutgers.

\*

When Jean, Mark and I were in Italy, Silvio's father taped our voices reading roles for the *Anacapri: The Dream* game they were creating. Recently I ordered the game and Mark played

it, mostly looking for our characters. He found the character in *Anacapri: The Dream* whose voice he did, but it was voiced-over by a different person. Too bad. Jean and I are listed in the credits, so our voices are still there, although Mark has not found them yet.

\*

People who have been reading *The Passing Scene* for the past decade have encountered many of my students in these pages. But after they graduate, I rarely mention them again. So here is a brief summary of what has happened to the students who were the most important contributors to *The Passing Scene* when they were my students.

**Fei Fei** probably needs no introduction, since she is still an important part of the life of my entire family. After spending a year in Tibet researching Tibetan medicine after graduating from Princeton, she earned her doctorate in Computer Vision at Cal Tech. Then she spent a year as an assistant professor at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign before returning to Princeton where she is teaching/researching now. Jean, Mark and I attended her wedding on the Isle of Capri last summer, a very enjoyable vacation.

**Veda** had a very difficult time in college due to her father's refusal either to trust his daughter—who was probably the most honorable, trustworthy student I ever had—or to accept her Chinese boyfriend. Still she endured, and a few years after she graduated from college I attended their wedding. I missed the Chinese ceremony due to family obligations, but I was fortunate enough to attend a gorgeous Indian ceremony, where I learned that the phrase *Indian Standard Time*, which my Indian students always use jokingly, is actually true since Jean and I arrived at Veda's wedding on time, only to wait nearly two hours before anybody else showed up for it!

**Amin** graduated from Yale with a degree in Physics and is currently earning his doctorate in Finance at Columbia. His graduation was a frustrating day since George W. Bush was the speaker, so everybody attending had to spend several hours waiting in line to pass through security before finally entering the quad where the ceremony took place. Then we listened to President Bush give a speech praising his failure to learn much while at Yale.

**Denise** graduated from Brandeis College with dual majors in Biology and Spanish and is now attending medical school. As a senior in high school, she had decided that sleeping during the week would hinder her education, so I spent many Friday mornings pulling her out of her 1<sup>st</sup> period class in a comatose state and putting her to sleep in the back of the Math Lab. Knowing the rigors of medical interning, I suspect that she has since eliminated her need for any sleep at all.

When I first started teaching in my current high school 28 years ago, the most prominent ethnic groups were Italian and Jewish, a situation which changed drastically as the Asians descended on the town soon after I did. **Antonio** was a throwback though, one of the last of the brilliant Italians in my classes. After earning both his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Computer Science, he and his family abandoned New Jersey and migrated to Alabama. Fortunately he is my most faithful IM chatter, so it does not feel as if he has gone away at all.

**Padma** graduated from college last fall where she did very nicely in a Computer Science-related field. Now she is working so hard though that we rarely have time to chat anymore, which saddens me somewhat, although, of all my former students other than Fei Fei, I am confident I will never lose touch with her totally.

**Preeti** probably spent more time in the Math Lab than any other student, three years as my unofficial hostess. At one point we even renamed the Math Lab after her! Her college essays revealed her first visit there as a fear-filled one until she realized that I was actually much nicer than my reputation. Preeti is in a seven-year medical program.

\*

Adrienne and I were recently discussing the fact that while most teachers who have been working 30+ years tend to “wind down,” I seem to be busier than ever. Activities I am currently involved in at school include:

- *Asian-American Club*: about 50 active students, mostly from China, Taiwan, and Korea, whose main activities are bi-weekly gatherings after school to play games; Game Nights which run from 6pm–9pm; a Spring picnic; and occasional dances;
- *Indian Culture Club*: about 75 active students whose main activities are a Family Diwali dinner in the Fall; a well-run musical spring revue which entails tryouts, rehearsals, and lots of writing/organizing/editing time for the students; and occasional dances;
- *Math Team*: we compete on the conference, state, and national level, about a dozen competitions per year; I used to be chairperson of the conference math league, a very time-consuming job which I gave up a few years ago;
- *Student of the Month*: this was completely created and organized by me, a chance to recognize three-to-four outstanding students each month;
- *Faculty Scholarship*: another brainchild of mine; I organize most of the fundraising as well as the selection of the winning student (or two) each year;
- *Target Teach*: this is a class in which students work with a mentor teacher one period daily, then attend a monthly evening seminar; I am one of the organizers as well as a teacher of the seminar;
- *PTHEA vice-president*: I am the district publicity chairperson, writing/editing the monthly newsletter, but I also deal with many of the problems which arise in my building during the school day, which often eat up a lot of my time at school.

Don't get me wrong: I enjoy all of these activities, but combined with the several hours per day I spend with students outside the classroom, it is not surprising why I spend my entire weekends catching up on schoolwork.

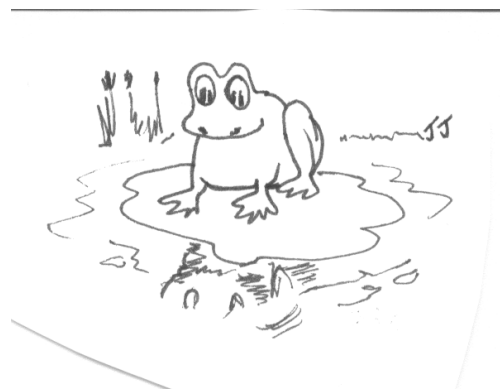
# Wondrous Stories

A few weeks ago I was looking to buy a science fiction book at Barnes & Noble, using one of the several gift cards I got from students between last June and this past Christmas. I browsed the sf shelves awhile and decided which book I wanted to buy, but I still had some time to spare since Jean had dropped me off in the car while she went shopping elsewhere. So I decided to browse the historical fiction awhile.

Since I love both history and books, a novel which has intrigued for several years is Ross King's **Ex-Libris**, but I had never actually seen a copy of it anywhere. Until that night at Barnes & Noble where it was sitting peacefully on the shelf. Immediately I grabbed it, all thoughts of a science fiction book gone from my mind. The novel is set during Restoration England where a bookseller named Isaac Inchbold—who lives above his shop on London Bridge—is hired by a mysterious Lady Marchamont to locate a missing book *The Labyrinth of the World* which vanished along with her entire collection during the Cromwell years when her house was overrun by Cromwell loyalists destroying all remnants of Royalist supporters.

A secondary plot-line which was told in alternating sequences took place forty years earlier during the Catholic-Protestant wars when the king and queen of Bohemia fled along with their own extensive book collection. This section illustrated more of the importance of books in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and also provided background information on how the missing *Labyrinth of the World* arrived in England originally.

While the novel is ostensibly a thriller, that aspect was secondary to the book's main concerns, its discussions of rare books and their importance to that era. The historical setting itself was absorbing, displaying the feel of Restoration London and the decadence of the nobility. Overall **Ex-Libris** was a good combination of plotting and history, culminating in a long, over-the-top scene in which Inchbold and Lady Marchamont frantically flee three Spanish agents intent on murder through the corridors of an ancient house sitting atop an underground river which is rising to the surface and claiming the house in the midst of a horrendous rainstorm. While they flee, she explains the history of the *Labyrinth of the World* which involves the Protestant Reformation, Galileo, Copernicus, Sir Walter Raleigh, popes and Spanish kings, a sprawling historical epic which carries enough elements of truth to be fascinating and makes the scene rapt reading and the entire book highly recommended for both book and history lovers.



# Halcyon Days

**E.B. Frohvet**

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Nov 17, 07

The other week I was re-reading my copy of **Who Shaped Science Fiction?** Can't say I read every word, but there are people included who would never have made my list. Allowing for that, there are still areas in which I differ from your assessments. I would have put both Zelazny and Delany ahead of Theodore Sturgeon (whose work, I regret, never much interested me); and Ray Bradbury ahead of all three. And I would also have ranked Andre Norton far higher than you did; second perhaps only to C.L. Moore as the archetypal role model for women writers of sf/fantasy.

*Wondrous Stories*: I have not read the Dan Simmons book. >From your description, the first comparison which occurred to me, as to you, was Zelazny's **Lord of Light**; C.L. Moore's "Vintage Season" also crossed my mind. In general, I agreed with your take on **Inheritor**. My reservation is: there are already six more books in the series; if it took you over a year to get through **Inheritor**...well, to use the apposite cliché, "You do the math." The account of **Crystal Rain** calls to mind the second or third, I forget which, of John Barnes' "Springer" series, which I especially disliked.

*The Passing Scene*: "Folk-rock is distinctive in that there is usually nothing bluesy about it." Numerous exceptions come quickly to mind: some early stuff by the Stone Poneys, The Incredible String Band, Richard & Mimi Farina ("Mainline Prosperity Blues", "Hard-Loving Loser"); one could certainly make a case for Creedence as more folk-rock than art-rock. The ur-source of blues and, oddly, doo-wop, both lie in *a capella* African music: see Paul Simon's fusion thereof with American folk-rock, notably the **Graceland** album. Simon was influenced far more than most people realize by a childhood admiration of Elvis Presley.

I've been with the same medical practice for years, but am now on my fourth doctor. I didn't much like the first one; the second (a woman) left; recently the third left.

Finches nest every year in the overhang of my patio balcony. They tend to fly away when I go out to water plants, but I guess eventually they recognize I don't mean them any harm.

Slightly surprising that math teachers still use graph paper. Don't you do all that on computers now?

Enjoyed the "Church group bloopers", especially the one about the Self-Esteem Group.

*Halcyon Days*: very sad comment by **Sheryl Birkhead** about speaking to a nasty writer. In general, my experience was that it was better to approach someone after a program even in which they were involved; though yes, there have been exceptions. Much more often than not, I've found SF writers pleasant and glad to speak with readers. It may be a question of



experience, **Sheryl** admitting she does not attend many cons. I was called locally for jury duty; we have the same one-day-or-one-trial rule (I didn't get a case); I was summoned last year for federal jury duty, but the case was plea-bargained before going to trial.

**Robert Kennedy:** Obviously not all presidents or Prime Ministers were Masons. However, considering the number of Freemasons as a percentage of the population, a fraction of 1%, the numbers are still significant. Look on the back of a dollar bill for obvious Masonic symbols. In SF/fantasy, I guess they figure most prominently in Katherine Kurtz' urban fantasy series **The Adept**.

Fair enough, that recognizing military history does not automatically translate into an interest in military fiction. But too many civilians ignore both. I never had much sympathy for Heinlein's view that voting should be restricted to veterans; but there's some validity to the argument that at least there you get people who have demonstrated loyalty to something higher than personal interests. Of the historical value of the US military, I once observed to an Australian fan that "You negotiated your independence from Britain; we had to fight for ours."

Yes, I drink. I like a glass of wine with dinner at times. I'm in good company: Jesus drank wine; Edgar Allan Poe was a drinker, also Dylan Thomas and Ulysses S. Grant. You're right: **Locus** is for "serious" readers of SF. The genre has moved on and my taste hasn't changed as quickly as that of publishers; I spend more time re-reading older SF than exploring new. In my defense, there is more published than any one person (except perhaps **Joseph Major**) can keep up with.

Vegetarian Thanksgiving did not happen due to my cousin's daughter breaking up with her boyfriend. The holiday reverted to my cousin's house. She did not feel like doing a turkey this year, so we had grilled tuna, a spinach-and-Brie-flavored dressing (seemed to me more like a vegetable lasagna than a usual dressing), salad, and red wine because we all like red wine.

[I guess you are probably the only person I know who actually re-read **Who Shaped Science Fiction?** Personally, I prefer Delany and Zelazny to Sturgeon, but the book was not intended to be a ranking of preference but rather of influence. Otherwise, I would have placed Zelazny before many of the people ahead of him.

[We rarely use computers in our math department, preferring graphing calculators since every student can easily carry their own. Laptops are banned in the classroom anyway because of how easy they would enable students to cheat. And since most colleges expect students to be able to do calculators and graphing "by hand," we would be negligent not to teach it that way ourselves.

[I do not understand how veterans who were drafted into the military against their wishes "demonstrated loyalty"? I know several people who were forced to do a job they did not want to do and who have decidedly negative feelings toward their military experience—especially those who served in the Vietnam War. And what was the point of your comment to the Australian fan? That somehow America is a better nation because we fought and they negotiated? I'm not sure I see the connection.

[I recall when I was a member of APA-45 in the early-to-mid 70s, Don D ‘Ammassa read every new SF book which was published. I wonder what year that task became impossible for him?]

## **Sheryl Birkhead**

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Dec 28, 07

I suspect by the time you get this it will be a new year—just remember to make all new mistakes. No one likes to think they don’t learn from their mistakes and remember there is a plethora of new ones out there.

I am trying to remember which childhood virus spawns the adult shingles. Regardless, I tend to think that an adult who was never exposed before will get a disease similar to a child and not actual shingles, but don’t quote me on that. If I remember correctly, the virus is a lifetime passenger, but is only expressed as shingles in a sub-population. Again, don’t quote me. When I have time and internet access, I may see what I can find.

When I moved from the farm I had the portable pods stored until I was ready to unpack. As I prepared for the day, I made snacks and got sodas, etc.—unfortunately, only one teenager (vet crew at the shelter) and her friend showed up. They had to leave in an hour, so I actually did all the original packing and then all the unpacking...and had all the food leftover. Somehow I never envisioned throwing a “party” and not having anyone show up. I hope **Trinlay Khadro** has boatloads of help in her move.

About my sister-in-law and retirement money—she taught in the public school system and then in private schools (each of which offered separate retirement plans)—so she qualifies for social security along with retirement from each of the private schools. I presume you mean that in NJ all the public schools are tied together, right? I neglected to mention there were multiple systems involved that were private.

*Dark City* was a movie I heard about enough times that I actually got it through Netflix. It was from ’98 and the actor I remember the most was Keifer Sutherland. I remember it as being interesting but (ahem) very dark. **John Purcell**: if for no other reason, you ought to watch it and see what you think. I was not as enamored of it as those who wrote the reviews, but to each his/her own.

I’ve been taking *Tai Chi* for over a year now on the suggestion of the cardiologist. I am presuming the point is to relax. Unfortunately, I am so stressed in simply trying to remember the simplest of moves and not even anywhere near making it look good—*I must relax, I must relax*—which I somehow feel defeats the whole process. I spend about two hours most mornings riding one stationary bike and working on the preliminary exercises. Then, if I still have time, I try to run through the little bit I know. Later on, most days, I spend a half-hour on the treadmill and then into the sauna for forced relaxation. Amazingly, I found that suddenly the sauna was not relaxing when I moved to this house and had the single sauna installed (instead of going to

the gym), and realized it was the simple fact that the telephone was sitting right there. I unplugged the phone and relaxation was back.

I never read **Wrinkle in Time**—but just listened to the book on cassette. I had to chuckle a bit over the computer that filled the room. Then, I was felled by simple technology—I simply could not make the player continue with the tape in three places. So I think I listened to most of the story. I then tossed in a Bujold fantasy to see if it will engage my interest. So far, no.

**Robert Kennedy**—I watch the three shows you mention and also back up with tapes in case the pesky phone rings. Today I actually got to watch the dog show that followed the Thanksgiving Day parade—so I am only a bit more than a month behind in watching the TV shows. The two shows that I will stop and watch (with the trusty taping backups) are *Heroes* and *House*.

There is now at least one dimmer-friendly compact fluorescent. I have the 50/100/150 compact bulb—but it does not do its thing—so I settle with one wattage. I have compact floodlights in both the kitchen and basement—this house is extremely dark. I must admit that now the kitchen is very bright—it takes a bit for these bulbs to gear up, but when they do...and I chose a white spectrum as a special order bulb to get the brightness. No one seems to be addressing the disposal problem. Packaging says to dispose of them in the manner prescribed by your area—but I am guessing it will be a while before we have to worry about disposal.

I've never eaten in an *Olive Garden*—the closest one is several miles away. It sounds like a great idea—and I am presuming there would be plenty of pasta dishes for vegetarians—as I find to be the case in the traditional Italian restaurants.

Whose flying feline is gracing the cover of #121?

At the risk of heresy, I am not a music fan. That is not to say I do not enjoy music, merely that I know nothing about it and use it mainly as background. Hmm—something like an sf reader versus fan. As a result, I get incredulous looks and often comments of disbelief from people discussing music...I simple have nothing to say.

How do you like your new Jeep? From the ads I've seen on TV, this is a brand new model—right?

*Lighter Side* is always a pleasure to read.

[Shingles come from the chicken pox virus, and while everybody who had chicken pox has the virus in their system, not everybody gets shingles, and those that do can have widely varying symptoms from it. My father was in considerable pain when he had it, but Mark only had a rash.

[Jean and I had different pensions at Paul VI H.S. than we do in public school, but neither of us was there long enough to qualify for a second pension. All K-12 public schools in New Jersey are in the same pension. Jean was in a different pension at County College, but it was transferable to the one she is in now.

[We installed fluorescent bulbs in several rooms and have gotten used to not turning off the light whenever we leave the room.

[One of the traditional ways to eat pasta is covered by vegetables, so a vegetarian pasta is probably more common than a meat-covered one.

[Trinlay did the feline on the cover of #120. I assume that is the issue you are referring to.

[Your reaction from people when they are discussing music mirrors the reaction I get from people whenever they discuss TV. I don't know the difference between characters on *Seinfeld* and *Friends*, or *Lost* and *Heroes*, and people look at me strangely when I admit my disinterest in the shows. The only show I actually enjoy watching is reruns of *M\*A\*S\*H* on TV Land.

[I like the Jeep Compass, which is a new model. Since Jean has much more interest in cars than I do, she picked it out.]

### **Richard Dengrove**

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January 31, 08

**VoP #123:** *The Passing Scene*. I have had control freak bosses, like your supervisor. Fortunately, except for me, no one is interested in the actual workings of my one-man agency library. In the early days, a control freak would come in, have me re-arrange the furniture, and then be satisfied that he put me in my place.

*Halcyon Days*. You comment to **Joseph Major** that you wanted to be a writer and became a teacher for financial security. Then you found out you were a much better teacher than writer. I am sure I am a much better librarian than I am writer. Nonetheless, I plan to spend my retirement working on books. They will be nonfiction rather than science fiction, which, in years past, I hoped someday to make a living on. Also, not that I don't intend to send them out; but, if writing them satisfies me, that will be enough.

I apologize for misunderstanding you. When I disagree with someone, I should do a closer reading. Either that or, when I am rushed, like last time, I shouldn't disagree with anyone. On the other hand, you misunderstood me on one small item. I didn't say that Americans don't fight among themselves at all. I said it didn't happen much. In short, I hedged my bets.

**VoP #124:** *The Passing Scene*. Unlike you, I am sure I could adjust to being retired. I have my hobbies (of course, so do you). On the other hand, people now look to me for expertise in finding their journal article, news article, media list, or bit of information. It is a good feeling, which I am sure I will miss. However, I want some extended vacation time before I fall apart. And, by rule of thumb, I figure I will get it if I retire at age sixty-seven.

*Wondrous Stories*. In Poul Anderson's "The Big Rain," Venus is a desert world being terraformed under the guidance of a totalitarian government. In Victorian times, the theory was

that Venus was a young planet, and mimicked Earth during an earlier period. It had heat, moisture, jungles and dinosaurs. What spaceflight stories there were then concerned big game hunters. Poul's tale seems to lie between that view of Venus and the current view of scientists, that it has no water and an atmosphere that is mostly carbon dioxide, and is infernally hot. I remember Carl Sagan had a conception more in line with our view. He said it resembled Hell; and, tongue-in-cheek, its inhabitants resembled devils.

*Halcyon Days*. I guess this comment is also in partial reply to **Brant Kresovitch's** letter. **John Purcell** agrees that the original *Star Wars* series was lighthearted and fun. However, he disagrees that Lucas actually trashed the series later on by making it serious. While he admits that things got heavy-handed when Lucas started delving into psyches and mythologies, he still found it enjoyable. I confess I feel the same way. When I said Lucas trashed the series, I was guilty of hyperbole.

*Feb 23, 2008:*

**VoP#125:** World building, like Jack Vance does, makes his novels so much more realistic, and you can identify with them so much better. The same, I hear, is true of Chabon's **Yiddish Policemen's Union**. Real people have a past, they interact with other people and things, and they have elaborate likes and dislikes. If the world being built is in another planet, time, or universe, there could be other beings as well. The only problem is that you have to stop world building at some point or you have actually built the world you are building.

I am thinking of rewriting an old manuscript of mine. I created an elaborate world for it and I am thinking of making it an even more elaborate world. It takes place in the Alt, short for Alternate Universe. Neanderthals, Polynesians of different stripe, Cambodians and Celts have entered it over fifty thousand years, developed along different lines than in our world, and made it what it is. Now a small group of Americans and Europeans have come there to make money and serve as mercenaries. Also, the main character was a Vietnam vet, a mercenary, a mercenary in the Alt, and a developer of the Alt's technology, which is very different from ours. He is currently a merchant for arms from our universe. I better stop here before I get carried away.

**Robert Kennedy** claims I'm not a real historian because I say we don't know what we don't know. I doubt I am not a real historian for that reason. Can the rosters of Colonial lodges be found with any certainty? Or can references to their membership be found with any certainty in their letters, diaries and memoirs? Certainly in the 17th Century, references to the Masons cannot be. There is a lot of speculation that the Masons predated the first known lodge in the 1640s.

However, **Robert** is right that the Masons have not been a secret organization but an organization with secrets. Living in Northern Virginia, I see their National Masonic Temple in Alexandria everyday. A little ways down Route 7, I can see a Scottish Rite temple. Not only are they not secret; it is, as **Robert** says, their secrets aren't very secret. I remember reading that their main rituals have been published since the 19th Century. According to Mark Carnes' **Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America** (1990), it was found people joined then if you had the right ritual. It was also found those rituals went by the boards if orally transmitted.

One last thing: you admit the conspiracy theorists can't claim Maggie Thatcher has been a Mason because she is a woman. Do they claim she has been a member of Eastern Star?

[I have mostly written nonfiction the past twenty years with a small amount of success—two books published so far. But writing fiction is my true love, and I have kept up with it at a much slower pace. My retirement plans include both fiction and nonfiction, the former for my own pleasure and the latter with the goal of publication.]

**Lloyd Penney**

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February 10, 2008

I have been buying fewer books than ever, and I still have a big stack yet to go through. Books keep rising in price, and many of the used book stores I know of are no longer taking trades. People are getting rid of their books, and not buying more, at least from the used book stores. I have a huge box of paperbacks to take in, and I'd like a credit for them to take books home.

As with Andy, I am still job-hunting, but I still have my evening job at the *Globe and Mail*. It means I still have some money coming in, even if it isn't in the hours I'd like it to be. I am coming up on three years at the G&M, a lot longer than I ever thought it would be. February will have a long weekend for us here in Ontario. Family Day is our newest holiday, on Monday, February 18.

I hope **John Purcell** is enjoying his *Red Green* tapes. The most recent episodes were taped on the top floor of the CBC building in downtown Toronto. We went to a taping one time; complete but organized chaos. Red Green has made Steve Smith very comfortable, and I think Smith and his wife are now retired somewhere in the southern US.

DuPont Canada treated Yvonne so badly that within the space of one week she asked to return to Diageo, and they readily took her back. She's happy again. Panasonic has shortened my assignment due to lack of work, and I should be done there February 22 or 29.

[Have you considered <http://www.paperbackswap.com/index.php> as a place where you can exchange your unwanted books for other people's books? **Brant Kresovitch** speaks highly of it; Check out the website or contact Brant if you need more information.]

**Terry Jeeves**

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Feb 20, 2008

Loved the cover of **VoP** 122 by **José Sánchez**. It is a real professional piece of work.

Best Novels of 2007: I have not been a new reader of SF in years...reading is hard work for me.

*Passing Scene* continues to amaze me at all the activities you pack into your life.

I love making lists, but here again I have read few of the ones listed. But Dickson sounds like my kind of tale.

**John Hertz**

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Feb 25, 2008

Thanks for #122-124. Glad to see Gondwanaland re-united ... Hooray for salt water taffy ... Your math teaching tales are good. I hope you can continue. We certainly need good math teachers.

[I do not plan to continue past a few more years, although as that door gets closer I get more and more anxious about giving up my students, so there is no guarantee I will actually pass through the door when the time arrives. ]



## The Lighter Side

Jokes sent to me by Lloyd Penney

A gas station owner in Mississippi was trying to increase his sales, so he put up a sign that read, 'Free Sex with Fill-Up. Soon a local redneck pulled in, filled his tank and asked for his free sex. The owner told him to pick a number from 1 to 10. If he guessed correctly he would get his free sex.

The redneck guessed 8, and the proprietor said, "You were close. The number was 7. Sorry. No sex this time."

A week later, the same redneck, along with a buddy, Bubba, pulled in for another fill-up. Again he asked for his free sex. The proprietor again gave him the same story, and asked him to guess the correct number.

The redneck guessed 2 this time. The proprietor said, "Sorry, it was 3. You were close, but no free sex this time."

As they were driving away, the redneck said to his buddy, "I think that game is rigged and he doesn't really give away free sex."

Bubba replied, "No it ain't, Billy Ray. It ain't rigged. My wife won twice last week."

\*

### The Stranded Irishman!

One day an Irishman, who had been stranded on a deserted island for more than 10 years, saw a speck on the horizon. He thought to himself, "It's certainly not a ship."

As the speck got closer and closer, he began to rule out the possibilities of a small boat and even a raft. Suddenly there emerged from the surf a wet-suited black-clad figure. Putting aside the scuba gear, there stood a drop-dead gorgeous blonde!

The glamorous blonde strode up to the stunned Irishman and said to him, "How long has it been since you had a good cigar?"

"Ten years," replied the amazed Irishman.

With that, she reached over and unzipped a waterproof pocket on the left sleeve of her wetsuit and pulled out a fresh package of cigars. He took one, lit it, and took a long drag.

"Faith and b'gorrah," said the man, "That is so good. I'd almost forgotten how great a smoke can be!"

"And how long has it been since you've had a drop of good Powers Irish Whiskey?" asked the blonde.

Trembling, the castaway replied, "Ten years."

Hearing that, the blonde reaches over to her right sleeve, unzips a pocket, removes a flask and hands it to him. He opened the flask and took a long drink.

"Tis the nectar of the Gods!" stated the Irishman. "Truly fantastic."

At this point the gorgeous blonde started to slowly unzip the long front of her wet suit, right down the middle. She looked at the trembling man and asked, "And how long has it been since you played around?"

With tears in his eyes, the Irishman fell to his knees and sobbed. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Don't tell me you've got golf clubs in there, too!"