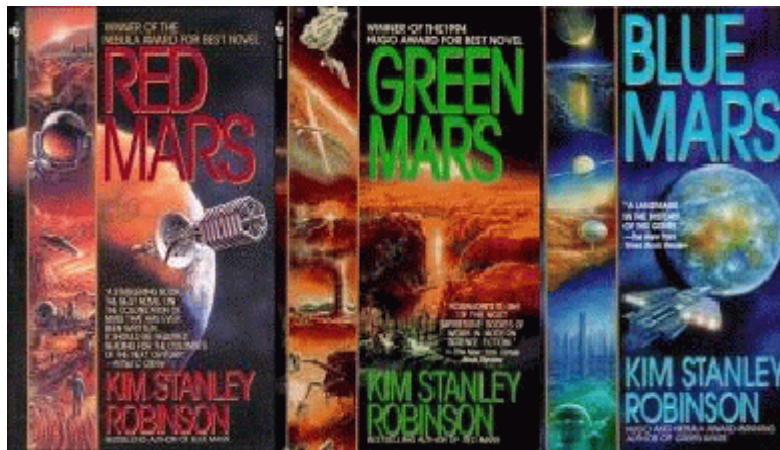
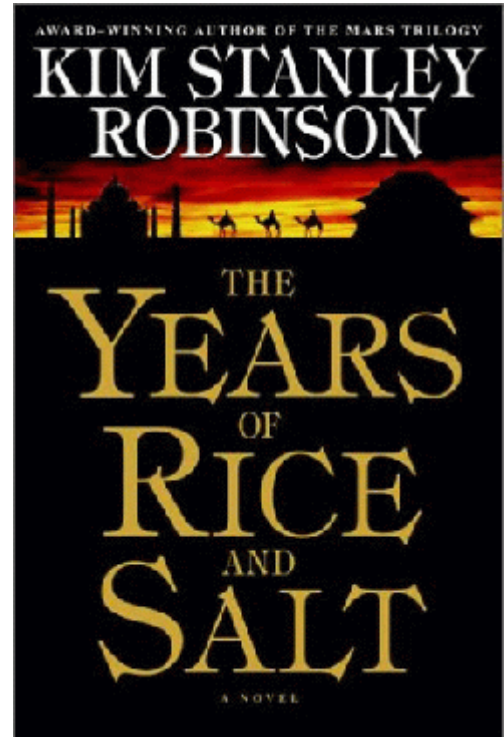
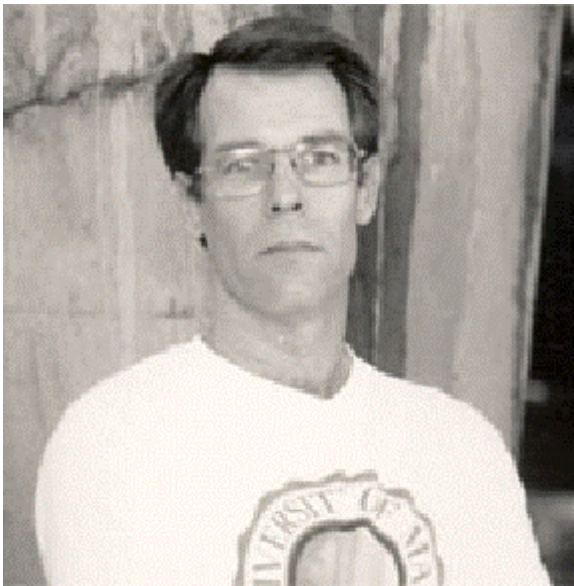


# VISIONS OF PARADISE



# Visions of Paradise

## #128

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Robert Michael Sabella

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

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

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

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Artwork

Louis Wain ..... Page 18

# The Passing Scene

April 2006

The first week of April was very busy and very stressful. The *Indian Culture Club* had rehearsals Wednesday (until 5:15pm) and Thursday (until 7:15pm) for their annual show which was held Friday night. The show went very well, all of it written, choreographed, and stage-managed by my officers. As usual, there was lots of dancing, especially president Kruti and vice-president Dhara who did a one-on-one dance fight which was superb. Another highlight was the finale which featured five boys and five girls doing a fabulous production number. The rousing applause at the end indicated how much the audience of several hundred people enjoyed the show.

Jean picked up her 87-year old aunt Ceil at the airport for a longer-than-usual stay of three weeks. Fortunately we had an abbreviated Spring Break (Wednesday through Sunday) her first week, and Andy was home most days since he leaves for work at 2:30pm and we generally arrived home from school about 4:00pm, so she spent very little time alone (not that she cared much, since she is a dedicated reader who barely looked up from her books to greet us when we got home).

This year's Spring Break was short due to construction forcing the start of school having been a week later this year. I actually had less work to do than usual though, consisting mostly of grading an Honors Algebra 2 test and AP Statistics activity, doing my third marking period grades (it is amazing that the third marking period is over already!), writing a PTHEA newsletter, and scholarship recommendations for Joshi, Sharan, and Sun Hee. Being able to work without interruption made it relatively stress-free work.

Spring Break also included a traditional visit to the Chinese Buffet with Jean, Ceil, Mark, Kate, Alan and Denise. I ate too much, but it was all delicious! I also went to the Budd Lake First Aid Squad to get paperwork for donating Mark's car to them so I could mail it to the IRS before my tax payment was sent on April 14.

I was doing very well with my goal of only buying one book per month this year, and also reading more books than I buy, until Spring Break when the rotten Book-of-the-Month sent me a brochure asking me to rejoin their club. Their carrot was 7-count 'em, 7!-books for joining and a commitment of only one more in the next year. I foolishly decided to browse their website to see if they had any books on my Recommended Reading lists available. And wouldn't you know it? I found 7 of my recommended books there:

- ▶ Jeffrey Ford's **The Shadow Year**, the expansion of his wonderful novella "Botch Town";
- ▶ Lisa See's **Snow Flower and the Secret Fan**;
- ▶ Ken Follett's **World Without End**, sequel to **Pillars of the Earth**;
- ▶ **Three Days To Never**, by Tim Powers;
- ▶ **Burning Bright**, by Tracy Chevalier;
- ▶ Robert Harris' **Imperium**;
- ▶ the heralded new translation of Alexandre Dumas' **The Three Musketeers**.

So what began as browsing ended up with me rejoining the Book-of-the-Month Club so that I have now gotten 11 new books this year. \*sigh\* But what a wonderful bunch of books they are!

Adrienne phoned to tell me that her son Jack was born a week early on Thursday, 4/10, about 5:30pm, weighing 7 lb. 7 oz. We chatted about her labor, the birth, and the immediate future. Unfortunately, we were unable to visit them until Ceil returned home two weeks later.

In a two-week period Jean, Ceil and I made three day-trips to Central Jersey about an hour away. The first was to the Flemington outlets do some shopping. The second was for my nephew (and godchild) Chris & Keri's baby Ava's christening. The third was to spend a day visiting with Fei Fei at Princeton. We spent the day playing with her two cute kittens Kiki and Toto, visiting the nearby Sculpture Garden with its gorgeous scenery and lake, and ending the day at the delicious All Star East Buffet with Mark and Kate, who met us there after spending the day apartment-hunting in that area. Kate works in Princeton, and Mark expects to be transferred to Newark this summer for his second year at Prudential, so it will be more convenient for him to take a train from Central Jersey than drive to Newark from Budd Lake every day.

I've also been writing lots of scholarship recommendations (bringing my total for the school year over 120) as well as reading scholarship essays for Sun Hee. The poor kid has taken over most of the household cooking and cleaning chores due to her mother's unexpected illness, and she is under a considerable amount of stress as well! Nor is that likely to change in the near future. ☹

Joshi invited me to the annual Valedictorian-Salutatorian dinner with her and her family. This is my 14<sup>th</sup> invitation to the dinner since 1992. Besides being valedictorian, Joshi is one of my finest AP Calculus students and was the soloist singing at this year's ICC show. She is also one of the two winners of this year's Faculty Scholarship, Sun Hee being the other. I created this scholarship over a decade ago, and I spearhead both the fundraising and the voting every year, so I am very pleased that two of my very favorite students won it this year (and, yes, I only get one vote myself!). Last year's winner was somebody I had never met prior to giving her the award at the Senior Award Night.

The last Sunday of the month Mark went to Kate's house, and when they returned together she was wearing an engagement ring! While Jean and I have been expecting that for awhile, it is still exciting when it actually happens. Mark is our younger son, 22 years old, but they have been dating since freshman year at TCNJ and are a very well-matched couple. They have no wedding date yet, but there is no rush for that.

I watched some of the *Corflu Silver* convention in Las Vegas online, and think the concommittee had a great idea streaming it live. I got a bit emotional at times watching, because I knew many of the attendees at that convention, having read their zines, and some having locced **VoP**, and I would like to have been there. Of course, it would have been very intimidating going since most of the attendees knew each other very well and, as a relative outsider, I would have been insecure and inhibited amongst all those people I did not know personally. A week ago in my blog I commented that it is time for me to eliminate the insecure side of my personality and really concentrate on adopting my in-school personality fulltime. I definitely need to do so before I

retire if I expect to avoid a lonely and frustrated retirement, which was how I was before I began teaching. Perhaps I should seriously consider attending a convention and trying my hardest to actually interact with other people in spite of my insecurity. But it is soooooo scary... ☹

## Shapers of Science Fiction

Kim Stanley Robinson.

Anybody reading Kim Stanley Robinson's first published stories in 1975 knew immediately that he was equally comfortable in both the science fiction pulp tradition and the literary tradition. His stories straddled both genres, concentrating on characterization and mood, but were also well-plotted with strong science fictional foundations and sense of wonder.

"Venice Drowned" was a look at life in the fabled city at a future time when the seas had risen to swallow it. "Black Air" told the story of the Spanish Armada from the point of view of a young boy able to sense the impending death of other people. "The Lucky Strike" was an alternate history story of the dropping of the first atomic bomb at Hiroshima.

The story that most resembled core science fiction was "Green Mars," a tale of colonization, politics, and mountain climbing. The story belonged fully in the science fiction tradition, yet was as literary as all of Robinson's works.

In 1984 Robinson's first novel **The Wild Shore** was released as the first of the revived Ace Science Fiction Specials edited by Terry Carr. A rite of passage novel, it was set in a near-future California struggling to recover from a limited nuclear attack against the United States. The novel had the misfortune to be released in the same year as William Gibson's groundbreaking **Neuromancer**, denying it of much of the attention it deserved.

That same year Robinson released **Icehenge**, a science fiction mystery involving space exploration and the discovery of strange structures at the edge of the solar system.

Not content to fit into any mold Robinson stretched his talents with his next two novels. **The Gold Coast** and **Pacific Edge** were both near future novels set in California, but they were philosophical opposites, the first being a realistic dystopia while the latter was a hopeful utopia.

The greatest acclaim came for **Red Mars**, **Green Mars**, and **Blue Mars**, a trilogy examining the colonization and terraforming of the red planet. Rich in both characterization and political intrigue, the first two novels in the series received awards for Best Novel in the same year. The trilogy was followed by a collection **The Martians** which filled in gaps of the trilogy itself.

Next came two stand-alone novels. **Antarctica** told a story similar to the *Mars Trilogy* in miniature about near-future colonization of Earth's frozen continent. **The Days of Rice and Salt** took as its premise that the Black Plague wiped out nearly 100% of Europe's population, so that

the history of the past 500 years was dominated by Islam, India, and China instead of by Western Europe. The novel was strongly influenced by the classic Chinese novel **Journey to the West**.

Robinson then released a near-future trilogy about the conflict between science and politics in dealing with the impending ecological crisis. **Forty Signs of Rain**, **Fifty Degrees Below** and **Sixty Days and Counting** combined the best aspects of Robinson's political insights (strong element of both his *Mars Trilogy* and **Antarctica**), characterization, and ecological thriller.

For readers who enjoy the more literary end of the science fiction spectrum, as well as an interest in history, Kim Stanley Robinson is truly one of the genre's giants.

### Chronology

1952	Born March 23 in Waukegan, Illinois
1975	First published with "Coming Back to Dixieland" and "In Pierson's Orchestra" in <b>Orbit 18</b>
1981	"Venice Drowned" published in <b>Universe 11</b>
1984	First novel <b>The Wild Shore</b> published "Black Air" receives World Fantasy Award as Best Novella Publication of <b>Icehenge</b> "The Lucky Strike" published in <b>Universe 14</b>
1985	Publication of "Green Mars" in <b>Asimov's</b>
1986	Publication of first collection <b>The Planet on The Table</b>
1988	"The Blind Geometer" receives Nebula Award as Best Novella <b>The Gold Coast</b> published
1989	<b>Escape from Kathmandu</b> published
1991	<b>Pacific Edge</b> receives John W. Campbell Memorial Award as Best Novel Publication of <b>Remaking History</b>
1993	<b>Red Mars</b> wins Nebula Award as Best Novel <b>Green Mars</b> wins Hugo Award as Best Novel
1997	<b>Blue Mars</b> wins Hugo Award as Best Novel Publication of <b>Antarctica</b>
1999	<b>The Martians</b> published
2002	Publication of <b>The Years of Rice and Salt</b>
2004	Publication of <b>Forty Signs of Rain</b>
2005	<b>Fifty Degrees Below</b> published
2007	Publication of <b>Sixty Days and Counting</b>

# Wondrous Stories

*Here are reprints of two reviews of highly-recommended books by Kim Stanley Robinson*

Alternate history has become so popular in recent years that even serious historians have tackled it in books such as **Virtual History** and **What If?** Historians generally take the point of view of examining how the changes in historical fact might have affected the “real” world.

Writers of f&sf tend to tackle alternate history in two different varieties. Some stories are not much different than the nonfiction type, being sfnal examinations of the worlds generated by the changes. **Pavane** is probably the prototype of this type of story. In other cases, the historical change is primarily an excuse to tell a rousing story which could not have taken place in our real world. Harry Turtledove’s various series based on the South winning the Civil War are examples here.

Kim Stanley Robinson has always been interested in historical change, but usually in the near-future. His *Mars* trilogy is an examination of exactly how a possible future colonization of Mars might occur. His very loose *California trilogy* are examinations of possible near futures which might occur under different economic circumstances. Based on these examples, it is not surprising that when Robinson chose to tackle a novel-length alternate history it would be of the **Pavane** type.

Robinson’s premise in **The Years of Rice and Salt** is that instead of the Black Plague killing 30% of the population of Europe, what might have happened had it killed 99%? Or even 100%? Considering how less than two centuries after the Black Plague the Renaissance arose in Italy, setting the stage for European domination of the second half of the millennium, Robinson’s premise certainly bodes a different history for the entire world, a history best described by his original title for the novel—*A World Without Europe*.

Just as in **Pavane**, **The Years of Rice and Salt** is not a novel per se, but a mosaic of ten novellas, each one examining a different aspect of the world without Europe. Several are basically travelogues describing portions of the new world, while others show how key moments in “our” history might have occurred in his new history. Not all the novellas are equally successful, but that is to be expected in a project of this type.

The first story, “Awake to Emptiness” sets the tone for the book, but unfortunately it is one of the weakest of the stories. Based stylistically on the classic Chinese novel **Journey to the West**, it introduces two characters who reoccur throughout the book as spirits inhabiting specific characters during the following centuries. I never understood why Robinson chose this technique, and frankly it seemed unnecessary to the novel as a whole. And since the first novella served primarily to examine the personalities of those two characters, rather than specifically show the devastation caused by the Black Plague, the entire novella seemed pointless.

Fortunately, it was followed by a series of much stronger stories, each of which examined a different aspect of the alternate world some years after the point of change. “The Haj in the

Heart” showed how the Islamic Empire, which had been thwarted in “real” history when the Moors were driven from Spain in 1492, grew and spread. “Ocean Continents” was the discovery of America, this time by Chinese explorers crossing the Pacific Ocean.

“The Alchemist” told of the development of modern science by alchemists. While this was the most interesting reading as storytelling per se, it required a major suspension of disbelief in its presumption that two scientists, one of them a fake alchemist, were together responsible for numerous scientific discoveries themselves. If you can accept that, the novella’s depiction of the medieval scientific process, and how science must at times compromise itself with military purposes, was fascinating reading.

“Warp and Weft” was a short look at how Chinese relations with American Indians might compare with European relations with them in the real world. The story had a basic flaw in that the protagonist seemingly understood how the Europeans in “our” world mistreated and ultimately destroyed the Indians, for no explainable reason as to why he knew that or what purpose it served in the story.

Another outstanding long novella was “Widow Kang” which examined relationships between Buddhist Chinese and Muslims, including much discussion of afterlife and reincarnation. This was much more philosophical than the other stories, and it also raised the connecting material involving the recurring spirits from what had seemed like mere gimmick to a level of importance in the stories for the first time (although I still felt it was unnecessary).

“The Age of Great Progress” and “War of the Asuras” were both concerned with political dealings among the Chinese, Indian and Moslem empires. They were interesting, but war and politics are not my favorite reading areas, so these novellas were not as appealing as the previous two were.

“Nsara” was perhaps the finest novella in the book, being a story of hope. Following the 90-year war of the previous section, the world was basically subdivided into four political regions, three of them totalitarian—Islam, China, and India—and Yingzhou, the Native American nation. “Nsara” was the story of the birth of the modern world, telling several simultaneous stories. It told how nuclear physics was born to the great fear of the physicists studying it lest the military governments use it to complete the destruction of the world begun by the widespread destruction caused during the 90-year war. It also told how individual freedom arose, slowly and cautiously against totalitarianism, leading to a climactic scene in which the populace of one nation arose against a military coup d’etat, filling the streets by the hundreds of thousands in a nonviolent refusal to accept a military government. I was not sure in which direction Robinson was going, whether a bloodless overthrow as ended the Soviet Union, or a government massacre as happened at Tiananmen square. I was ready for either ending, but was surprised by what actually happened.

The concluding story, “The First Years,” is an extended meditation on history and historiography. It is actually a fitting conclusion for a book which attempts to revise the entire history of the past 700 years, and I found it fascinating considering that historiography is a subject I have dealt with a lot in editing the book **Nanking 1937: Healing and Memory**, which



was itself concerned with both history and historiography. This 50 page story was little more than one long expository lump, but since I read partly for learning, and partly for pleasure, I found this lump both fascinating and thought-provoking, a fitting conclusion for a very thoughtful book.

**The Years of Rice and Salt** will not appeal to everyone. Readers who enjoy historical process should find it fascinating, while those who prefer structured stories might find parts of it tedious.

\*

**The Martians** is a companion collection to his acclaimed *Mars Trilogy—Red Mars, Green Mars, and Blue Mars*. It consists of 39 stories and story-fragments, ranging from the novella *Green Mars* to several one-to-two page scenes. It features characters who appear in the much longer trilogy, some of them major characters, others walk-ons. Some stories are background information to various characters' lives, while others fill in the gaps between scenes of the trilogy. And some are alternate history versions of what Robinson might have written differently in the trilogy but chose not to.

Overall, this collection demonstrates the strengths of Robinson's stand-alone novel **Antarctica** with virtually none of its weaknesses. It is written in typical Robinson style, very dry, matter-of-factly, with no stylistic flourishes, and virtually no emotional displays. While this lends itself to slow, careful reading, its careful pacing also lends itself to depth of characterization, time to enjoy visual splendor, and depth of philosophical thought. And when something important happens, it tends to be more striking because of the deliberate fact-filled manner in which it is shown.

The book opens with *Michel in Antarctica* which shows the original 150 or so finalists for settling Mars being winnowed down during a year spent living in as Mars-like conditions as Earth can produce. We meet many of the important characters from the trilogy, and learn a bit more about them away from the plot machinations of Mars itself. This story resumes over a century later in an alternate history story *Michel in Provence* in which we see how the Martian colonization might have been different than it actually was. In both stories we view the unfolding relationship between Michel and Maya.

Maya also appears in a connected group of 6 stories examining her relationship on Mars with Desmond, the *coyote*. These stories then split off into two solo stories about Desmond's political days, *Coyote Makes Trouble* and *Coyote Remembers*. Together this sequence provides a close and informative look at the political passions dividing the Martian settlers.

The highlights of **The Martians** are the three related stories *Exploring Fossil Canyon*, *Green Mars*, and *A Martian Romance*. The first two are reprints from Robinson's early career, the third a coda to the story begun in them. Together they give wonderful looks at the natural beauty of Mars, including fossil climbing, mountain climbing, and iceboat sailing. They also examine the relationship between Roger and Eileen, who in the first story have a love affair as a pair of twentyish youngsters. In the latter two stories they are two hundredish oldsters who, due to medical life extension, are still robust and active. But, like all near-immortals, they have

learned that nearly all people have limited memory capacity, so that at age two hundred memories of events at age twenty are basically nonexistent. Rare sports like Roger remember everything about his young romance with Eileen while she does not even recall who he is. Together these are the most emotionally-satisfying stories in the book. The fact that Robinson's emotions are dry and careful make them all the more real and less like the machinations of a writer.

One trait which separates Robinson from other "serious" writers is his killer sense of humor. His collection of novellas **Escape From Kathmandu** was oftentimes hilarious—especially the cameo from Jimmy Carter which I'll never forget!—and he displays that humor in *Arthur Sternbach Brings the Curveball to Mars*. The story is precisely what the title claims, another in the long tradition of science fictional baseball stories, this time regaling how a group of Martian natives take up the national pastime, and one Terran immigrant realizes none of the Martians have ever seen a curveball although one of them throws a natural curve that just might come in handy in a game someday. A funny and delightful change of pace from the seriousness of other stories.

The book also contains some non-fiction sections describing the scientific and political background of the Martian trilogy, as well as thirty pages of poetry, and a brief concluding section entitled *Purple Mars* which chronicles the author's satisfaction when the entire trilogy was finally printed out and mailed to his publisher.

Obviously a book with such a variety of story types will appeal to different readers in different ways, but overall I found it a worthwhile companion to the *Mars Trilogy* for somebody familiar with Robinson's opus. However, somebody who has not read the trilogy will miss many of the allusions in this book which will erase much of its meaning. The Roger and Eileen trilogy and baseball story are all excellent stand-alones though, so even those unfamiliar with the *Mars Trilogy* should have a lot to enjoy.

## Halcyon Days

**Brad Foster**

[bwfoster@juno.com](mailto:bwfoster@juno.com)

Feb 26, 2008

Cindy and I spent a few weeks stripping books from most of the shelves, then sorting through them, pulling some, and putting the rest up in alphabetical order so we can actually FIND something when we go looking for it! I think we ended up with around 130 or so books pulled. Some were sold at a small local sf con this past weekend, the rest will be offered to a series of used bookstores in the area, for cash and credit.

Did end up with a lot more books to read, since there were books she had brought when we got married I wasn't even aware of. So, quite a pile at the bed side now. On average I probably read 5 or 6 books a month, so that pile should get me into the summer with no problems! (If

you're ever curious about my reading habits~ and I don't know why you would be, but what the heck!~ I've put up a section on my website for that. Mainly for my own reference, but leaving it up for the world as well. It starts at <http://www.jabberwockygraphix.com/readlist.html> I usually try to get in there and update it about once every month or two. I continue to be amazed at the amount of things you manage to work into the same 24 hours a day we are all given to work with. I count it a good day if I manage to get a couple of things on the ever-growing "to do" list crossed off.

[I check your websites periodically for your book listings and artwork. Keep posting!]

**Henry L. Welch**

welch@msoe.edu

Feb 26, 2008

Your teaching load sounds interesting. As more of an upper-division professor I seem to better enjoy the advanced classes.

Construction and the classroom are a dangerous mix. Downtown Milwaukee has suffered through the reconstruction of its major interchange for the last four years. The law school building is among the closest buildings to much of this work and aside from the traffic hassles the construction interferes in other ways. For much of the work they've been cutting into the hillside by pounding in steel barriers and sometimes pylons. Every time the crane does its pounding the entire building would shake.

Li Li sounds like she is about as far along academically as I was at her age. I took Calculus as a sophomore at my high school (this was before anyone really made the AB/BC distinction), but when I found out the pace didn't match that of similar college classes I simply switched over classes at the local college and got the college credit directly. In the end I got three semesters of college credit for calculus and one of statistics beyond what I received from the AP exam. In comparison, though, I doubt I was as humble as Li Li appears to be.

[Li Li recently scored 8 on the American Invitational Math Exam and got accepted into the Governor's School for the Science, both considerable achievements, yet she remains totally unaffected by any of it. Hopefully she will always stay that way.]

**Eric Mayer**

maywrite2@epix.net

Mar 8, 2008

I enjoy **Visions of Paradise** even if I don't read much sf these days (although I did just read **An Alien Heat** for the first time, so I still dip in now and then). There are enough other bits of interest.

Nice cover by **Marc Schirmeister**. That train which is either futuristic or alien obviously lacks a decent cow catcher as it is the cow doing the catching. Nice to see a **Terry Jeeves** cartoon too.

You've been involved in fandom longer than I have. I discovered fanzines in 1972, started my own zine **Groggy** in 1978, pretty much dropped out of fandom, except for publishing sporadic issues, in 1987. I think my last **Groggy** was in 1992. A couple years ago I decided to involve myself only with electronic fandom.

Being reminded of your blog I read your recent entries there. I guess if I read your blog I would know what was coming in **VOP** but if I read only **VOP** I won't see everything in your blog? I haven't figured out how to allocate materials between blogs, lists, zines, websites, and who knows what else ...except I avoid doing my own zine so at least that's solved! (By the way, I couldn't find an .rss feed. I would've thought Blogger would've created one automatically and I am probably too non-geekish to find it, but I suspect lack of such a feed might lessen the number of folks finding the blog)

I have avoided MySpace. I'm not even sure what "socializing" in such a context entails. Heck, I'm not even sure what socializing entails in much of any context. My journal on JournalScape isn't truly a journal. Mostly I use it for little essays, not necessarily of a very personal or revelatory nature. I mirror it on LiveJournal but I think it doesn't really fit in there. That's pretty much the story of my life--not fitting in anywhere. In my writing I do tend to talk at people rather than to them.

Speaking of socializing, the idea of working at Calculus via IM amused me!

The election choice you posit is, to an extent, easy. The warmonger should be immediately eliminated. Besides, experience doing wrong isn't necessarily a good thing.

Note on your blog -- I too am kind of intrigued by an old fashioned contested convention, even though I dread the damage to the Dems. Long ago I read a wonderful book called "Presidential Tiber" which detailed all the conventions through the years, with all the machinations, the delegate totals following each ballot and so forth. Fascinated me. I was hoping for a Republican dogfight with all those unliked contenders until I realized most of the states were winner-take-all. Five Republicans going to the convention, each with 20% of the vote would've been terrific.

The only newspapers I read are virtual ones but my favorite section, at least during baseball season, are the sports "pages." However, although I enjoy some professional sports, I do not think schools and universities should be paying so much attention on sports. Sad to say, far more people will hear about the Rutgers' sports programs than will hear about their academic side, but whether that might have any benefit to the university, I doubt.

[I am such a non-geek that I don't even know what a -rss feed is!

[Like you, I have never fit in much anywhere except at school. That's why my socializing is pretty much limited to this zine you are reading right here.]

**Alexander Slate**

Alexander.Slate@pentagon.af.mil

Mar 11, 2008

Congratulations on over 40 years of fanac, and 40 years of fanpubbing. I've still got a ways to go myself.

Don't have too much to say regarding the passing scene, except I am dealing with my first 'northern winter' in a while. Fortunately it really hasn't been too bad in terms of snow, freezing rain or sleet. Some days I handle the colder temperatures better than others... in fact some days I think I am acclimatizing just fine, until the morning when I walk outside and go "do I really have to wait for the bus?" Oh, well...

I didn't think that all of the books listed were f&sf. I can't comment on all of them, I will have to take your word for it, but I didn't think that **The Yiddish Policemen's Union** fit.

Enjoyed the humor.

[**Yiddish Policemen's Union** is alternate history, which is either sf or historical fiction, depending on your point of view. Since it recently won a Nebula Award, and is probably the favorite for the Hugo Award as well, at least some sf people accept it.]

**Lloyd Penney**

1706\_24 Eva Rd. /Etobicoke, ON / CANADA M9C 2B2

March 24, 2008

Many thanks for issue 126 of **Visions of Paradise**. I might be a little late in getting to it, but I am getting there. The Easter weekend has been a busy time for us, because next weekend is our local convention, and we've got a lot of equipment and food sitting by the front door, ready to go. Let's comment on this issue, I could use the break.

First off, congratulations on 40 years of fanac. I've just hit 30 myself. When I first found out about fandom, I enjoyed a Trek club, running conventions, entering masquerades, and a few parties. Yet, my university training was in journalism. It took me a few years to connect my training with my fanac, and that's why I'm here, I guess. I've now been 25 years in the letter column, and I'm still having fun. I'm working on the fan programming track, and Yvonne on the space and science track, for Anticipation, the 2009 Worldcon in Montreal, and I am also running their fanzine lounge. Also, I may be rejoining the committee of our local convention, which takes place next weekend. Still having fun...

You've probably seen the worldwide demonstrations concerning Chinese oppression in Tibet. I can only imagine what's going through Fei Fei's mind right now. There's been opportunities taken with the Beijing Olympics getting closer, and we would have thought these people foolish if they hadn't taken advantage. Supporters of a free Tibet have even disrupted the Olympic torch lighting ceremony in Greece. Now to see what the Chinese reaction will be. I fear it will be quite violent.

Another good list of zines. I need to write some more fanzine reviews for **John Purcell** and *Askance*, and I know that **Tom Sadler** has moved south; that's his old address in Michigan.

I've been getting a lot of joke files from Yvonne's brother-in-law Rick, so I'll dig a few up and send them along to you. Always good to have extra material for future issues. Take care, all done, see you next issue.

[It really hasn't been 40 years of fanac for me, since I gaffiated for an entire decade from mid-70s through mid-80s where I devoted myself entirely to writing science fiction. That means you and I both have 30 active years.]

### **Sheryl Birkhead**

25509 Jonnie Ct /Gaithersburg, MD 20882

March 24, 2008

I am guessing that the weather in your area is fairly similar to what is happening here. The trees have suddenly started looking as if Spring truly is here and those buds are going to pop. I am cat-sitting for the Lynches for a few days, and noticed a huge difference between one night and the next morning...it's gonna be a beautifool season!

I have in front of me #'s 122-124. The covers on all three are distinctive but the one on #122 is a stunner—get MORE! **Brad [Foster]'s** cover on #123—congrats Brad on the Hugo nomination! —just makes you break out with a case of the warm fuzzies. You, dear Ed, done well!

What did you think of the outlet stores in DE? Over the years I have only been to two outlet malls and, after the fact, was not at all taken by either location—that includes the prices and the chains represented. I keep hoping that, one of these days, some outlets will crop up that have both a stock that interests me and prices I can take seriously. My mother was from New Jersey and the main thing I remember, when we visited the boardwalk, was the salt water taffy. No trip was ever complete without...

I have always enjoyed math (was actually one of those geeks on the Math Team), but kept it as a college minor (Chemistry major). I gave serious thought to adding it as a double major, but balked at the required Math Physics (but—when I went on for my Master's—ended up taking quantum physics so I am not sure I got the better deal!). I have never quite understood it when people say they don't like math—after all, it is sublimely logical. If you go slowly enough, each step builds on the previous one—no actual leaps of faith. I cringed when I had to argue with a pharmacist about the dilution factors on medications I was prescribing—along with trying to get

my volunteer staff to figure out cat weights in kilos (and they still cannot figure out drug doses even when it is 10 mg/kg—I made the examples as easy as I could), none of this is brain bending, and yet...

I've solved the problem of having trouble talking to/with pros—simply don't go to conventions and the problem never arises.

**Lloyd [Penney]**, I have not been able to locate episodes of *Masters of Science Fiction*, so I guess it is not yet out on dvd (since I do not have cable, I already was fairly certain it would not show up on my regular tv watching).

I just got **Jan Stinson's** lastish (the final one) of *Peregrine Nations*—it was fun while it lasted, but when it becomes a chore to pub instead of a pleasure, it's time to close up shop.

I think **Tom Sadler** has gone back to *TRF* being *The Reluctant Famulus*—and I finally got around to commenting on the last issue devoting a lot of space to their move to Kentucky. With any luck Tom will get into this retirement thing and start pubbing regularly.

I have always enjoyed (sometimes more than others) performances by Robin Williams. I have his *Robin Williams: Live on Broadway* on my Netflix list, and I expect that to be different from anything else I have seen...yet.

Just before Christmas, my brother called, as he usually does, on his way to a mall, to ask which gift card I would prefer—Borders or Barnes and Noble—I told him Borders (since it is much closer). Of course, he gave me a gift card to Barnes and Noble!

I keep intended to try some newer sf in audio format. I did not care for whatever it was I started out trying to follow, but maybe if I give it another chance??? Right now I am on the road a minimum of three hours a day, but that may vary. I actually happen to have three James Patterson audio books sitting in the car, so it may be time to see what the library actually has sf-wise. I keep saying that, but now I need to do something about it—with enough time, I can even check online.

[I am not really a big fan of outlet malls, Jean being much more a shopper than I am. All I look for are remaindered book outlets and gourmet food shops.

[Physics did not particularly appeal to me either when I was a math major. Not being a science type, I preferred “pure” math of the Abstract Algebra / Topology types, rather than “applied” math of the Diff Eq / Analysis types. But I agree with you about math being “sublimely logical,” especially since Bertrand Russell “cleaned it up” early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

[It does not bother me as much that I cannot talk to pros at conventions as does my inability to talk to other fans, which make cons so damned frustrating. Even people I know casually through fanzine fandom scare me away unless they are a particularly close correspondent.

[It is sad that Jan Stinson is stopping *Peregrine Nations*. We have lost several major fanzines lately, something which I hope to avoid with **VoP** by adapting its format/frequency to my changing moods and whims. Yes, it would be nice if Tom Sadler would return to regular publication, which would spur me to write more columns for him as well. Because he changed his zine's title, I decided to change my column's title as well, so now he is back to the old title while my new title remains. So it goes... ]

**Robert Kennedy**

1779 Ciprian Ave / Camarillo, CA 03010-2451

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

[Amailto:robertk@gateway.net](mailto:robertk@gateway.net)pril 20, 2008

Thank you for VOP #125, #126, and #127.

You recommended **The Yiddish Policemen's Union** by Michael Chabon. I previously read the book and add my recommendation to yours.

You sound a bit dubious about voting for President. My choice is None of the Above. It seems to me that every four years our two major political parties choices for President get worse and worse.

In your "Listmania" consisting of some 37 books, I have read only three—**The Yiddish Policemen's Union, The Last Colony, and Making Money.**

I purchased **Galactic Empires** from the SFBC so found your comments interesting. These stories are not what I usually enjoy in SF. My favorite was "Owner Space" by Neal Asher (probably because of the destruction of the Collective) and I was unable to finish "The Six Directions of Space" by Alastair Reynolds.

Thanks for printing the jokes that I sent.

**Ex-Libris** by Ross King is in the Camarillo Library and I'll check it out the next time I'm in the library.

**Sheryl Birkhead:** I tape the shows that interest me and watch them at my convenience. I watch virtually no live television. I too watch *Heroes* and *House*. Also *Law & Order-Criminal Intent*, *New Amsterdam* (if it hasn't vanished), *Chuck* (if it ever comes back), *Burn Notice*, *24*, *Stargate-SG1* (until it ended), *Stargate Atlantis*, and *Flash Gordon* (if it returns). That's way too much TV. But, obviously they are not all on in the same weeks. From what I've read, disposing of the compact bulb shaped fluorescents requires a Hazmat team. And don't you dare drop and break one or you will really need the Hazmat team.

**Richard Dengrove:** I didn't claim that you re not a real historian. I have no idea what you do for a living or your hobbies. What I said was that the people who make the ridiculous claim about Presidents and Prime Ministers (except for JFK and Margaret Thatcher) all being



Freemasons are not real historians. (They are frauds with some agenda of their own.) I do not believe that you fit that category. As for Margaret Thatcher, even if she was a member of the Eastern Star that would not make her a Freemason. The Eastern Star is a Masonic related organization, but only the male members are Freemasons. What I call mainstream or regular Freemasonry that is a direct descendent of what began in Scotland is an all male organization. (Well, there were one or two females who became Freemasons because they overheard the ritual. But, they were an exception.)

[I do not read much current science fiction myself, usually being at least a year or two behind since I rarely buy hardcovers. So of the 37 books on last issue's list, I have only read a single book, Chabon's **Yiddish Policemen's Union**. ]

## The Lighter Side

### Excerpts from a dog's diary:

6:00 am - At last! I Go Pee! My favorite thing!  
8:00 am - Dog food! My favorite thing!  
9:30 am - A car ride! My favorite thing!  
9:40 am - A walk in the park! My favorite thing!  
10:30 am - Got rubbed and petted! My favorite thing!  
12:00 pm - Lunch! My favorite thing!  
1:00 pm - Played in the yard! My favorite thing!  
3:00 pm - Wagged my tail! My favorite thing!  
5:00 pm - Milk bones! My favorite thing!  
6:00 pm - They're home! My favorite thing!  
7:00 pm - Got to play ball! My favorite thing!  
8:00 pm - Wow! Watched TV with the people! My favorite thing!  
11:00 pm - Sleeping on the bed! My favorite thing!

### Excerpts from a Cat's Diary:

Day 983 of my captivity: My captors continue to taunt me with bizarre little dangling objects.

They dine lavishly on fresh meat, while the other inmates and I are fed hash or some sort of dry nuggets.

Although I make my contempt for the rations perfectly clear, I nevertheless must eat something in order to keep up my strength. The only thing that keeps me going is my dream of escape. In an attempt to disgust them, I once again vomit on the carpet.

Today I decapitated a mouse and dropped its headless body at their feet. I had hoped this would strike fear into their hearts, since it clearly demonstrates what I am capable of. However, they merely made condescending comments about what a "good little hunter" I am. Bastards!

There was some sort of assembly of their accomplices tonight. I was placed in solitary confinement for the duration of the event. However, I could hear the noises and smell the food. I overheard that my confinement was due to the power of "allergies." I must learn what this means, and how to use it to my advantage.

Today I was almost successful in an attempt to assassinate one of my tormentors by weaving around his feet as he was walking. I must try this again tomorrow -- but at the top of the stairs.

I am convinced that the other prisoners here are flunkies and snitches. The dog receives special privileges. He is regularly released - and seems to be more than willing to return. He is obviously retarded.

The bird has got to be an informant. I observe him communicating with the guards regularly. I am certain that he reports my every move. My captors have arranged protective custody for him in an elevated cell, so he is safe...for now...

