

# VISIONS OF PARADISE



# Visions of Paradise

#130

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Artwork

Brad Foster ..... cover

Trinlay Khadro ..... page 5

# Out of the Depths

Jack McDevitt and Charles Stross have some kind of award-setting competition going. Each has been nominated the past five years for a major Best Novel Award—McDevitt for the Nebula and Stross for the Hugo. Here are the facts:

## Jack McDevitt

Chindi	2004
Omega	2005
Polaris	2006
Seeker	2007 (won the award)
Odyssey	2008

## Charles Stross

Singularity Sky	2004
Iron Sunrise	2005
Accelerando	2006
Glasshouse	2007
Halting State	2008

If there is a pacesetter here, it is **Robert Silverberg** who more thirty years ago had 6 nominations in 4 years!

Up the Line	1970
Tower of Glass	1971
A Time of Changes	1972
The World Inside	1972 (withdrawn)
The Book of Skulls	1973
Dying Inside	1973

Ironically, Silverberg did not win the award for any of those 6 nominations, nor has Stross so far. Only McDevitt has a Best Novel Nebula to show for his frenzy of nominations.

\*

# The Passing Scene

June 2008

June is always a busy month filled with school-related activities, many of which are fun. This month began on June 3<sup>rd</sup> with the annual teachers' association executive board dinner which was held at a good Italian restaurant. I had chicken breast stuffed with mozzarella and spinach as well as my share of the many appetizers we ordered.

June 4<sup>th</sup> was the county valedictorian-salutatorian dinner to which I was fortunate enough to be invited as the guest of Joshi and her family. This was my 12<sup>th</sup> time attending the dinner since 1992 and 14<sup>th</sup> overall invitation (since I was invited by both students twice). It was a very nice affair, and again I ate chicken breast, although there was no choice except for vegetarians like Joshi's family who ate ravioli. The ravioli looked so enticing I almost went vegetarian for one night!

The senior prom was June 6<sup>th</sup>. The faculty are invited to the first hour to see the kids, but I have never gone because it is always so far from where I live (twice as far as school is), plus no students have ever shown any interest in seeing me there (and my insecure side wonders why they would particularly want to see me there anyway?). Then Jean told me the day after the prom that her Calculus girls had bugged her to go with me to see them, so maybe they are less hesitant to invite a female teacher than a male teacher. If Jean had told me prior to the prom, I would seriously have considered going.

My Honors Algebra 2 students spent two days delivering their Statistics presentations in class, and several were very good. The intent is for them to teach statistics to the class in a role-playing manner rather than boring lecture style. The best presentation consisted of a trial in which the students used statistics to convict the ownership of Six Flags of having unsafe roller coasters.

June 9<sup>th</sup> was the *Target Teach* celebration. Thirty students worked with a mentor teacher one period a day for the entire school year, scattered through district elementary, middle and high school classes. One night per month a group of 5 of us ran a college-level seminar for them, giving them insight into becoming teachers. The majority plan to major in education in college, and probably half will become teachers (if past experience is any indication; this is the fifth year of the program). The celebration is fun. We invite parents and mentor teachers to what is basically a party for the kids, the highlight of which is a slideshow of their experiences in the classroom.

June 10<sup>th</sup> after school was the *Target Teach* grading session for the 4<sup>th</sup> marking period, followed by the PHS *Senior Awards Night*. I gave the *Math Student of the Year* to Sabrina, the second consecutive non-Asian to win it after only Asians winning it the first 12 years. I also gave *Excellence in Math* certificates to three runnersup. The *Faculty Scholarship* was shared by Sun Hee and Joshi, which pleased me immensely, since they are both deserving winners (not to mention two of my favorite students ☺). While I ran the award and the fundraising, the faculty did the actual voting for the winners.

While I was at the *Target Teach* celebration, Jean picked up Ceil at the airport so she could attend Mark & Kate's engagement party Saturday, June 14<sup>th</sup>. The engagement party was at the swim club and went very well, with lots of food (a 6' Italian sub, 4' turkey sub, 3' roasted vegetable sub, sausage and peppers, and 6 huge homemade salads) and 51 people. The kids all used the spring-fed pool and people played soccer and croquet on the huge grassy field. After we got home, Mark and Kate opened dozens of gifts, most of which came from their "registry" at Bed Bath & Beyond, while Drew (our surrogate "third son") took pictures.

On Wednesday, June 18<sup>th</sup>, Preeti stopped by school and we chatted for over an hour—in fact, I missed nearly the entire Sunshine Club luncheon, but it was worth it! Preeti is still a faithful friend even though she is not a much better correspondent than I am. Whenever she is on break she returns to the Math Lab where she practically lived from her sophomore through senior years of high school. And when we chat, it feels like no time has passed at all. I was probably closer to her while she was a student than I have been with any other student.

I was emotionally down on Thursday, June 19<sup>th</sup> which was graduation day, because it was my last day seeing many wonderful students. This was a wonderful class that I will miss a lot.

After graduation was the annual Retirement Banquet at which three teachers were honored after an average of thirty years at the school. I wonder what their emotions were like giving up all their students forever. I will probably be an emotional wreck when my retirement comes.

The last weeks of school are traditionally big eating days. We had four faculty breakfasts during exams and a Sunshine Club sub sandwich luncheon the next day (all with food provided by faculty members), and the Retirement Banquet, in addition to the Engagement Party and our traditional visit to the Chinese Buffet with Alan and Denise whenever Ceil visits. Since summer is traditionally a weight-gaining time, this is not a particularly good start to it.

Twice each year I send a long email update to selected former students, which is a way of keeping in touch with those who are not frequent correspondents. Having added a few new students each year, including Kruti, Shiva, Hyun, Joshi and Sun Hee this year, I now send the update to 36 students, all of whom have graduated since 1996. That's an average of 3 students per year with whom I have stayed friendly (some moreso than others). I still consider myself fortunate indeed with regards to my students.



# Science Fiction Categories

All science fiction can be divided into two categories...

Uh, yeah, that's true, but the problem is what two categories are they? There are probably as many different categorization breakdowns of science fiction as there are definitions of it. And since I've never been afraid to offer my own definitions of sf, why should I shrink away from categorizing it either? So here goes...

All science fiction can be divided into genre versus non-genre. I know in this day and age that sounds a bit like a marketing category rather than a solid demarcation, but it really does make a difference in the type of science fiction being read. Genre science fiction is the offspring of Hugo Gernsback who isolated sf into magazines devoted to it during a time when all the pulp fiction magazines were fragmenting and genre-type fiction was either finding its own special niche or dying out. Gernsback's definition of science fiction was a rather restrictive one, a restriction shown by the name itself which was coined by Gernsback, but it served the purpose of allowing true fans of science fiction, both readers and writers, to devote themselves to it divorced from outside influences. This concentration of efforts enabled science fiction writers to examine its ideas far beyond what could possibly be done in a more-scattered mainstream, as well as to explore those ideas in considerably more depth. Even though there were several dozen sf magazines being published at various times between 1927 and the present, most serious writers of the genre were familiar with virtually everything being done, certainly with everything important being done, so that writers regularly took an idea introduced by somebody else and expounded on it considerably. This feedback loop gave genre sf a wealth of well-developed ideas, many of which might be stunning to an outsider approaching the genre for the first time.

This might be one of the factors why science fiction which appeals to "outsiders" or the general reading public tends to be old-fashioned to genre insiders—think **Star Trek** or **Star Wars** here—since its ideas are somewhat simpler and more easily accessible. But to a devoted insider, science fiction to some extent is ideas. Thus it is not surprising that even the finest examples of non-genre sf often appears weak in ideas or examining aspects of ideas which have been done decades ago and probably numerous times in genre sf. Look at two relatively recent examples of non-genre sf: Bakis' **Lives of the Monster Dogs** and Russell's **Sparrow**. Both are excellent novels which examine fairly standard genre ideas, one going back pre-genre to the seminal **Frankenstein** and the other at least as far as James Blish's groundbreaking **A Case of Conscience**. Both received some resistance from lifelong insiders because they offer nothing new in the way of ideas but instead are purely literary examinations similar to what has been done in-genre decades ago. This is certainly not unprecedented, even in-genre, as writers continually examine traditional genre ideas with new foci. The main difference is that genre writers tend to explore more deeply ideas related to their topic that have floated through the genre for decades while non-genre writers show an obvious ignorance of them. Thus their works often demonstrate a naivete with regards to a topics that to a genre insider seems simplistic or even condescending. This seeming condescension along with its dearth of new, exciting ideas makes it unsurprising that some insiders reject non-genre sf as reflexively as

some mainstream writers reject genre sf because their own primary image of sf comes from non-genre filmmakers warping and dumbing-down of the finest genre works.

All science fiction can be divided into *people-oriented* or *plot-oriented* fiction. This is not a judgmental categorization although on first glance people-oriented sounds a lot nobler than plot-oriented. But aren't all Harlequin romances people-oriented? And, perish the thought, where does pornography fit into these two categories? I don't think even the most rabid erotic fan would consider that plot-oriented! And what about fiction in which the idea is central (which is certainly true in some science fiction, such as Olaf Stapledon's galaxy-spanning epics)? For the sake of simplification, idea-oriented is an obvious sub-category of plot-oriented, since both are concerned more with the *what* than they are with the *who*.

All science fiction can be divided into *escapism* or *literature*. This distinction is actually symptomatic of all fiction. I feel obligated here to remark that I am not referring to that narrow restriction of literature which is fiction accepted by the literary establishment, but rather literature in its broadest sense, which is all fiction about the human spirit. This categorization is a lot less definitive than genre vs. non-genre, especially since one reader's escapism can sometimes be another reader's literature. Consider a novel such as **Dune**. To many people this is the quintessential "good read," which sounds like plot-heavy escapism. But it has also won numerous science fiction polls the past thirty years as the best sf novel ever written, and I'm sure a lot of those voters consider it true literature. The solution might lie in the twilight zone where escapism and literature overlap. After all, can't a novel be primarily concerned with the human spirit yet still contain large dollops of escapism? Charles Dickens might be an excellent example of this. His novels were written for the general populace as serializations, intended—to paraphrase Alfred Bester—to grab the readers by the lapels and hit them repeatedly in the face until the author's arm grew tired. There was a genuine element of escapism in every Dickens novel, yet who would deny that they are not great literature?

All science fiction can be divided into *science-oriented* and *history-oriented*. Surely there cannot be much controversy here? Either an sf novel is concerned with science—Stephen Baxter, Larry Niven, et al—or it is concerned with historical development—Ursula K. Le Guin, Robert Silverberg, Kim Stanley Robinson. Oh, yeah? What do we do with the fact that the name "science fiction" is merely an antique creation of Hugo Gernsback who insisted that all fiction printed in his pages must not only be about science but must be designed to teach science to his young readers? Within a few years after he made that proclamation **Amazing Stories** slipped out of his control and immediately the breadth of genre science fiction began growing. F. Orlin Tremaine made no such claim for **Astounding Stories**; nor did John W. Campbell, Jr. a decade later, although both their tastes ran towards science-oriented stories. **F&SF** and **Galaxy** did not insist on such a restriction two decades later, and when genre science fiction began spreading into original paperbacks courtesy of Ace and Ballantine Books in the 1950s, it's safe to say that "speculative fiction", the name championed by New Wave devotees in the late 60s, was a more apt description of the field, in spite of the resistance of purists who insisted that "science" was a necessary ingredient in sf. To which I point to Ray Bradbury, Jack Vance, Walter M. Miller, Jr., Roger Zelazny, Samuel R. Delany, Philip K. Dick, Robert Silverberg, Ursula K. Le Guin and Michael Bishop as counter-evidence. Every one of them is accepted as a full-fledged member of the genre sf fraternity, yet all are less

concerned with science in the majority of their fiction than in future history. So unless we're willing to declare that any accepted aspect of the real world is a form of science, "science" fiction is a sub-genre of the speculative fiction category rather than the main emphasis of it.

So what's the point of all these categories? Individually, probably not much, but combining the four categorization groups into one grid we can get a fairly accurate description of a particular story's emphasis by how it fits into all four categories, so that a reader might have a better idea if a story appeals to his or her taste than simply by a rather amorphous description such as "literary space opera" or "fast-paced urban fantasy". Let's try placing a few stories as an example.

Story Title	Genre vs non-genre	People vs Plot	Literature vs Escapism	Science vs history
War of the Worlds	non-genre	people	literature	history
<b>Childhood's End</b>	genre	plot	literature	science
<b>Canticle for Leibowitz</b>	genre	people	literature	history
<b>Lord of Light</b>	genre	plot	literature	history
<b>Forever War</b>	genre	plot	escapism	science
<b>Neuromancer</b>	genre	plot	escapism	science
<b>Brittle Innings</b>	genre	people	literature	history
<b>Mars trilogy</b>	genre	people	literature	history

Considering my personal preferences, I'm much more likely to choose a novel such as **Canticle For Leibowitz** or **Brittle Innings**, because of their people/lit/history orientation, than **Forever War** or **Neuromancer** with their plot/escapism/science orientation. Not that I don't appreciate the latter books, but I would not want a regular diet of such types (while I could probably go several months reading books of the other type). While my categorizations above are not intended to be totally black-and-white, they do give an overall description of a book which might serve as a reader's guide of sorts, especially since book reviews have an otherwise built-in weakness: the prejudices of the reviewer. Presumably readers of **VoP** have read enough of my reviews to know my taste, and thus know how much to be guided by what I like or dislike, and that's probably similarly true of regular reviewers in other publication as well.

But since most zines are irregular, and most reviewers are virtual unknowns to the reader, unless each review contains a detailed description of the particular reviewer's taste and prejudices, reading one or two reviews by a person might be a futile experience, causing a reader to select an acclaimed book that they quickly learn after a few dozen pages might be outstanding but does not necessarily appeal to their own particular taste. I've done that a few times myself.



# Wondrous Stories

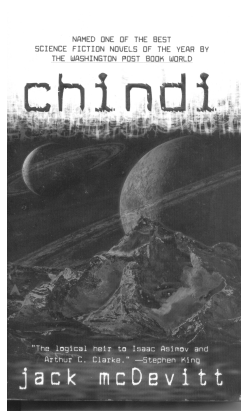
While Jack McDevitt is one of my very favorite current sf writers, I prefer his *Alex Benedict* series of historical mysteries to his *Academy* series of space operas. **Chindi** is the third book in the latter series and it illustrates both the strengths and the weaknesses of the series.

Protagonist Priscilla Hutchins—Hutch—wants to retire from the Academy but is encouraged to go on one last mission, taking members of the First Contact Society on a wild goose chase looking for aliens. Her passengers consist of a variety of alien seekers, including George, the wealthy owner of the yacht and organizer of the trip; Alyx, a gorgeous actress who immediately attracts the interest of the men on the trip; and Tor, an artist who still loves Hutch years after their brief relationship ended.

All three of these main characters start out as stereotypes but gradually develop more depth and believability as the novel progresses. Their hunt for aliens leads them to a series of stealth devices watching a neutron star which are sending a series of transmissions which Hutch's group follows across the galaxy. First they discover a dead world in the aftermath of an ancient nuclear war, then they hit the jackpot when they find a world inhabited by angels with fangs and claws who behave in a decidedly un\_angelic manner. Their most important discovery is a huge spaceship—a chindi—which seems to be the hub of the information\_gathering system involving the stealth devices.

As usual for an *Academy* novel, at its heart is a scientific mystery involving the source of the stealth devices and the chindi, as well as artifacts from ancient races on the various worlds they visit. But unusually for McDevitt, the mystery does not rise to the forefront of importance but fades a bit into the background in favor of the exciting scenes which always spot a McDevitt novel. In this instance though, those scenes grow uncontrollably until they dominate the novel, particularly the final rescue scene which is the entire focus of the novel's last hundred pages.

So while I recommend **Chindi** as enjoyable reading, it does not have nearly the depth of interest as such novels as **Polaris**, **Seeker** and **Infinity Beach**. It is mostly an interlude between other, better McDevitt novels.



# Halcyon Days

**Gene Stewart**

May 25, 2008

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Ever read **The Book of Joby** by Mark Ferrari? I think you'd enjoy it, if you haven't come across it already. It shares many of the strengths you cite in Jeffrey Ford's novel. My review of it can be found here: <http://www.moreauvia.com/?q=node/92>

Another good issue; bravo.

[**Joby** got numerous recommendations as the best f/sf book of 2007 and is already on my *Recommended Reading* list, that black hole of books, alas.]

**Lloyd Penney**

May 28, 2008

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Today's a special day...I just came back from Yvonne's office with a big bouquet of flowers. Today is our 25th wedding anniversary! However, I am still at home jobhunting, so I have a little time before I pick her up and off we go to our anniversary dinner tonight, so here are some comments on **Visions of Paradise** 128 and 129.

128...Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars Trilogy* is one of the best series I've read. Perhaps it was because I read them one after the other, not sure, but if we ever do get to Mars, I suspect life there will be much like Robinson describes it, and once again, science fiction will become science fact. I hope the recently-landed Polar Lander has as much luck in its operations as the Rovers have had. I must find **The Martians** to make the reading of this trilogy complete.

Some of the folks at the Indian Culture Club may be familiar with the large Krishnan Hindu temple recently opened in the northwest part of Toronto. We toured it recently...the entire temple was designed and built in over 12,000 sections in India, and shipped to Toronto for assembly. Every piece is intricately detailed, and the whole is a feat of human handiwork.

Being at Corflu Silver was a great time, and the opportunity to meet so many people I'd only corresponded with over the decades. I am mostly an outsider, too, but I tried to push myself a little further in, and I think I succeeded. Going to Vegas was our anniversary present to ourselves, and in some ways, Yvonne's present to me to get more in touch with the fanzine community.

I have a LiveJournal page as an experiment, keeping all my locs on there, and I also have a Facebook page. They have their uses, but I don't need any assistance when it comes to socializing. I think so many kids are so under\_socialized, they need some assistance to meet people and make friends, and that's where Facebook and MySpace come in. It's sad they are needed the way they are.

I don't think *Masters of Science Fiction* is out on DVD just yet, and seeing they weren't all that popular, it may never be. But, I will keep an eye out for it. It's amazing what does make it to market.

Besides the anniversary today, in less than a week is my 49th birthday. Never thought I'd get this old, but does anybody? The teacher's husband who died of a heart attack...I wonder if the retirement brought on the heart attack? I keep reading that retirement is such a change to the system, it increases the chance of heart attack and stroke. Keeping your regular schedule may help your health.

[ I hope to reread the *Mars Trilogy* sometime, perhaps as soon as this summer. I have not yet bought Robinson's *Science in the Capital* series, but it also garnered positive reviews (although nothing as shining as the *Mars* books did). Still, second-tier Robinson is probably better than most authors' first-tier books.

[ I can totally empathize with students who need social network websites to help them socialize, since they would definitely have helped me when I was a student, and perhaps even now. I'm not sure why kids today are "under-socialized," but I certainly understand the difficulty of making friends at any age.

[As for Corflu Silver, even having exchanged zines with several con attendees would not guarantee that I could socialize with those people if I ever got to a Corflu. I've tried at numerous conventions, and it has never gotten easier. That's why I shy away from cons because the frustrations I encounter there is usually not worth the anxiety of going.]

**Eric Mayer**

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Jun 11, 2008

Downloaded **VoP** 129 and am trying to get back to sending an occasional LoC. I think I burned myself out last year, although the number of LoCs I wrote wouldn't have been even a warm up for **Lloyd Penney**.

Please don't remind me of standardized (if that's what you'd call them) tests in school! Well, I took very few, to be honest. In high school I got away with taking no tests except the SAT test once but I can still recall how stressed I felt. I don't blame you for turning down that supervisor position. My dad loved teaching. He quit a year after he became a supervisor. He wasn't teaching any longer and he hated not working with students.

I also don't blame you for avoiding doctors. I go to the doctor when I have some sort of unmanageable discomfort (theoretically...I'm not sure when that was last) or when I need my prescription for my blood pressure pills refilled, which is every six months, but I usually manage to get the doc to prescribe a few extra months worth before he demands to see me. I always feel great the day of my appointment, so he doesn't get the idea of inviting me back for tests. I suppose I'm not getting my money's worth out of my health insurance but I don't enjoy medical procedures. For my one mother\_in\_law they seemed to be a form of recreation.

.rss is pretty much a mystery to me. I use Bloglines to keep track of blogs and, indeed, yours don't seem to have feeds, which is kind of peculiar. They look good.

Sixty! You're a little more than a year ahead of me. Where did the time go? Whoever thought I'd be old enough to be saying "where did the time go?" Sheesh. Seems like just yesterday I was being "carded." Yeah, I always looked young for my age. Then the white started to show up in my beard. No way am I going to use any dye. Pisses me off though! But we never really know how far along our own continuum we are so, in that sense, age doesn't mean much.

With "frivolous" writing—for example LoCs, blog entries, zine articles—I seem to go through cycles. Sometimes I am gung\_ho to write, and then I feel like doing something else. I've just gone with the flow lately. I have spent too much time doing things I had somehow made myself feel obligated to do that didn't really need to be done. However, I doubt that my "frivolous" writing interferes with my serious writing. In theory I could be writing a chapter for the newest book right now, but, realistically, at this time of day, I'd more likely be reading baseball news.

As for jury duty, which **Brad [Foster]** mentions. I was called once. I was asked what I did for a living. I replied quite honestly that I wrote articles for legal encyclopedias. End of my jury duty.

By the way—I love the Kinks and some of their old albums really hold up well IMHO. The two you mention are particularly fine and I also have a soft spot for *Muswell Hillbillies*.

[Where did the time go indeed? It's scary that I have been reading sf for 45 years, and writing it for nearly 40 years, and I'll be fortunate to have half that amount of time remaining to me. *Too many books too little time.*

[ Objectively, I realize that my nonfiction writing (blogs, **VoP**) are not frivolous since they are likely my better writing and the ones that attract an audience, small though it may be. It is just that my lifelong dream has always been to write science fiction, so that's the writing which gives me the greatest amount of satisfaction even though it is the writing which has probably been the most responsible for my hermit-like lifestyle. ]

# The Lighter Side

## Jokes by Robert Kennedy

A husband was in big trouble because he forgot his wedding anniversary. His wife told him, "Tomorrow there better be something in the driveway for me that goes zero to 200 in 2 seconds flat."

The next morning the wife found a small package in the driveway. She opened it and found a brand new bathroom scale.

Funeral arrangements for the husband have been set for this Saturday.

\*

Jesus returned home after a journey and was met by his friend Reuben. Reuben says, "Jesus, your robe is sure taking a beating. Let me make you a new one."

"That is very kind of you," Jesus replies.

Reuben makes a beautiful robe, and Jesus wears it the following week. By the end of the week his robe looks very ragged. Reuben again offers to make another one. But the next week, Jesus returned with his robe looking ragged once more.

Reuben says, "Look, I don't mind making robes for you, but I would like for you to help me out. After all, we're both men of the cloth, so to speak."

"What do you have in mind?" asks Jesus.

"I'd like for you to promote my robes when you speak to these large multitudes," says Reuben. "That way I can cover my costs for these robes I'm making for you. We could even go into business together. How about 'Reuben and Jesus' for a business name?"

Jesus furrows his brow briefly and offers, "How about 'Jesus and Reuben'?"

They discuss the merits and benefits each would bring to the business for several hours. For several hours, it goes back and forth: "Reuben and Jesus, Jesus and Reuben, Reuben and Jesus..."

Finally, Reuben offers a brilliant compromise: "How about 'Lord and Tailor'" And the rest, as they say... is history.

\*

A noted psychiatrist was a guest at a gathering of humor editors, and the host naturally broached the subject in which the doctor was most at ease. "Would you mind telling me, Doctor," he asked, "how you detect a mental deficiency in somebody who appears completely normal?"

"Easy," he replied. "You ask a simple question which everyone should be able to answer easily. If there is hesitation, that puts you on the track."

"What sort of question?"

"Well, you might ask, 'Captain Cook made three trips around the world and died during one of them. Which one?'"

The editor thought a moment, then said with a nervous laugh, "You wouldn't happen to have another example, would you? I must confess I don't know much about history."

\*

The new supermarket near our house has an automatic water mister to keep the produce fresh. Just before it goes on, you hear the sound of distant thunder and the smell of fresh rain.

When you approach the milk cases, you hear cows mooing and witness the scent of fresh hay.

When you approach the egg case, you hear hens cluck and cackle and the air is filled with the pleasing aroma of bacon and eggs frying.

The veggie department features the smell of fresh buttered corn.

I don't buy toilet paper there any more.

\*

A small boy was lost at a large shopping mall. He approached a uniformed policeman and said, "I've lost my dad!"

The cop asked, "What's he like?"

Without hesitating, the little boy replied, "Jack Daniels whiskey and women with big boobs."