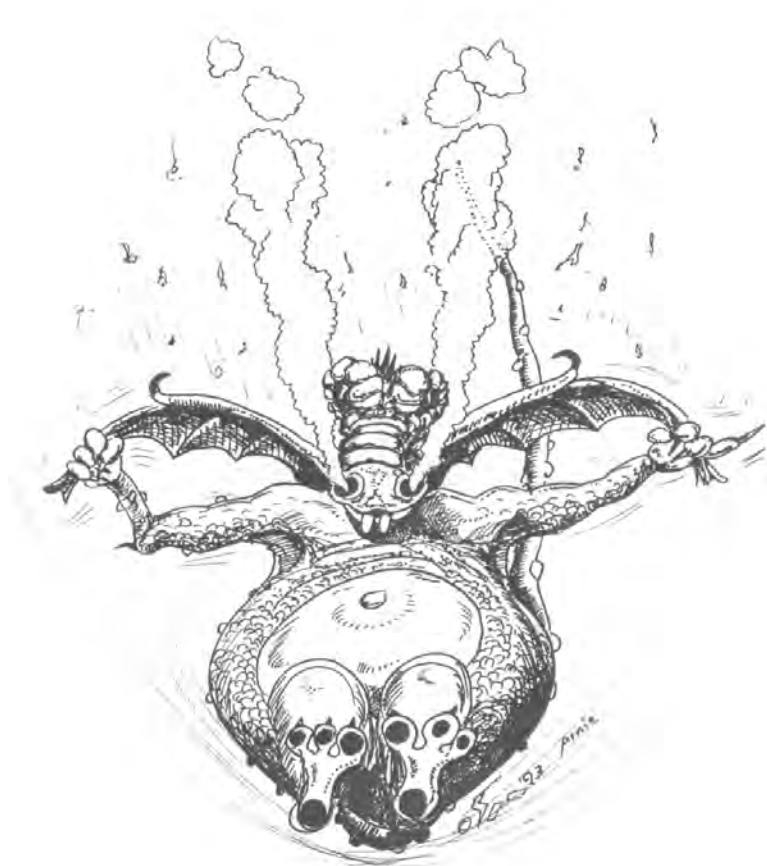


VISIONS OF PARADISE

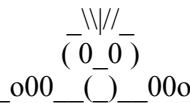
#133



Visions of Paradise #133

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Artwork

Franz H. Miklis.....cover ("Falling Dragon")

Ye editor.....page 4

Terry Jeeves.....page 8

The Passing Scene

September 2008

I had several long IM chats with Sun Hee who is anxious about college because of her intense Pharmacy program even though her background is weaker than many of her classmates, never having taken AP Calculus, AP Chemistry or AP Biology (although she did take Calculus and AP Statistics). I have no doubts she will be fine though, since she is both bright and incredibly motivated. We chatted awhile, and hopefully I calmed her down a bit.

I also chatted with Shiva who is enjoying college so far. She was not totally pleased with her schedule though since she placed into Intermediate Italian which she does not feel prepared for, so she wanted to drop it and take something else such as Sociology. She is also taking Discrete Math and would like to take Multivariate Calculus as well, in anticipation of perhaps minoring in Mathematics. *yay*

School started a week later than usual for me due to the end of construction at most of the district's schools. The first few weeks of school are always very tiring because of the physical exertion of teaching 5 periods, plus not being used to waking up at 5:15 every morning. I did not get much of my own work done because of both being tired at night as well as the steady stream of school work which must be done evenings and Saturday. Our first *Target Teach* seminar was the first Monday of school, which exhausted me for the entire week, worsened by some kind of virus I picked up at school almost immediately. Bah.

My ESL class is already 10 students, one of whom is doing Algebra 2, another who just finished the Algebra 1 book and starting Algebra 2 as well. The others vary from some in the middle of Algebra 1 to a boy whose skills are so weak I have him doing Middle School pre-algebra. Needless to say, I am exhausted after running around for 44 minutes trying to get to every student who needs me! Their areas of origin are China (3), Thailand (1), Middle East (2), India (3) and South America (1).

With Sun Hee gone, Yun has "moved into" the Math lab, using it as her locker and visiting me two-to-three times per day to discuss life, school, her emotional state, and her future. She is also the president of my Asian club, so we have a good working relationship.

Jean and I eat lunch everyday with Damaris, who is my closest friend on the faculty (except for Sabellas, of course ☺), so that is very enjoyable. In some ways she is almost like one of my students since she is closer to their age than to mine, and she originally came to this country as an ESL student from Puerto Rico.

I also talk to George each day as well, which is also pleasant because our discussions always revolve around sf. George belongs to Audible.com so he is always in the middle of both an audio book and a reading book, finishing double as many books as I do!

Recently I was chatting with a new 6'7" English teacher who is a big science fiction fan (pun

intended) who also writes poetry and fiction. He asked to look at a copy of **Who Shaped Science Fiction?** so naturally I brought him one. How could I resist a rare fan? ☺

Fei Fei had a scary incident while kayaking with Silvio in Michigan, falling into the river when the kayak capsized and being unable to do anything against the current but float downstream until she caught onto a log in the water where she waited for Silvio to arrive in the kayak. Fortunately, the only loss was her cell phone and purse.

Mark & Kate made reservations on Maui for their honeymoon. Mark has always wanted to go to Hawaii, so it is no surprise they are taking their honeymoon there. They also sent out postcards announcing their wedding date with “formal invitation to follow” written on it.

Andy and Kate took trains into NYC one Friday night to meet Mark and Drew (who both work in the city) to see a Yankee game before Yankee Stadium closes at the end of the season. However, the game was rained out, so Andy and Drew returned Saturday night to see the game. Since Andy worked during days that weekend, I am sure these nightly trips exhausted him!

We had two Jewish holidays off at the end of the month during which I caught up on some work, including submitting “Richard III” to *Space and Time*, a semi-professional sf magazine; critiquing an essay for Sun Hee; finishing the current issue of **VoP** and posting it online; and beginning **Ride the Lightning** which I want to mail out to FAPA at the end of October.

I also need to repair one of the bookshelves in my office. This past Sunday night four shelves abruptly crashed, taking all the books onto the floor with them, damaging a few slightly. Ironically, one shelf had collapsed a few days earlier, and I thought I had fixed it. Jean, who is much handier than I am, suggested we buy wooden braces to put under the shelves, so we are in the process of doing that.



Wondrous Stories

Summer is my prime reading season, and I finished 10 books the past 10 weeks, a typical pace for me. I enjoyed most of the books I read, but none was an “instant classic” like last summer’s **The Judgment of Caesar**, by Steven Saylor. So here are the books I read this summer in roughly descending order of enjoyment:

Title	Rating	Author
Snow Flower and the Secret Fan	B+	Lisa See
Roma	B+	Steven Saylor
Year’s Best Science Fiction 23 rd vol	B+	Gardner Dozois ed.
Pillars of the Earth	B+	Ken Follett
The Alien Years	B	Robert Silverberg
One for Sorrow	B	Mary Reed & Eric Mayer
Flatlander	B	Larry Niven
The Sky People	B	S.M. Stirling
The Dragon’s Nine Sons	C	Chris Roberson
Use of Weapons	C	Iain M. Banks

While I enjoyed **Roma**, its wide spectrum drained it of the depth Saylor was able to indulge in his more narrowly-focused **The Judgment of Caesar** and **Last Seen in Massilia**, which is why it was a bit less successful;

Year’s Best Science Fiction must be rated on a harsher scale than the other books since the editor had the entire year’s output of f&sf to choose from, and while I enjoyed the book overall (especially Robert Reed’s *Great Ship* mystery “Camouflage”, Harry Turtledove’s alternate history “Audubon in Atlantis”, Chris Roberson’s bittersweet *Celestial Empire* tale “Gold Mountain,” and, especially, Alastair Reynolds’ classic “Zima Blue”), there were too many stories in the book which were good but not deserving of a “year’s best” designation.

While I really enjoyed **Pillars of the Earth**, the author’s thriller tendencies made parts of it melodramatic and not totally-believable. Still, I look forward to reading his other historical epic **World Without End**.

Probably the most successful book overall was **Snow Flower and the Secret Fan**, which fell just short of being an A book. I am looking forward to See’s other acclaimed novel **Peony in Love**.

*

It is easy to forget what a good storyteller Larry Niven was in his prime. In the past twenty years he has published twelve collaborations with numerous partners, 2 novels in the Ringworld series, and only 2 original solo novels. Prior to that he was one of the more prolific storytellers in the field, and his *Known Space* series was one of the most interesting future histories.

Flatlander is a collection of the *Gil "the Arm" Hamilton* stories, mostly novellas. Gil Hamilton was a miner in the Belt who accidentally lost his right arm in an accident. Since neither prosthetics nor transplants were readily available in the asteroid belt, Hamilton developed a psychokinetic third arm which did everything a normal arm could do plus reach through solid objects. By the time Hamilton returned to Earth and got a transplanted arm, he began working for ARM, the police outlet of the United Nations, but his third arm remained.

Most of the stories in **Flatlander** involve Hamilton's investigation of organleggers who kidnap people to sell their organs to hospitals and other less-scrupulous outlets. They also deal with a populace which, increasingly dependent on transplanted body parts, passes laws requiring the death penalty for more and more minor violations—too many traffic citations, cheating on taxes—with the body parts of the convicted being used for transplants to keep the increasingly selfish population alive and healthy. As a result, the life span of most *flatlanders*—people living on Earth rather than in space—has grown well past one hundred years. But with Earth's population exceeding ten billion people, there are still not sufficient body parts available, hence organleggers.

What is interesting about these stories is not the solution of the murder mystery—which might be my own prejudices speaking—but what they show about the society itself, particularly the relationship between transplants, organleggers, and the selfish populace. As Hamilton investigates each mystery, Niven gradually expands his society, slowly creating a wider and deeper world.

"Death by Ecstasy" involves a mining partner of Hamilton who is found dead in a particularly gruesome manner: electric current addicts frequently become so addicted to the ecstasy of currents directly entering their brain that they ignore such simple tasks as eating and drinking. Hamilton's old partner is found chained to a chair in the throes of current ecstasy, dead after nine consecutive days of not eating or drinking. Not believing his partner would suicide, Hamilton investigates the possibility of his having being involved with organleggers.

"The Defenseless Dead" involves corpiscles, people in suspended animation either because of severe injuries or mental diseases. *The first freezer law* has already mandated that anybody frozen who does not have sufficient assets to support themselves if resuscitated be sent to the organ banks. While that sated the public's demand for body parts temporarily, and put a big crimp in the operations of organleggers, demand for body parts has again surpassed supply. So now the United Nations has proposed *the second freezer law* which mandates that any corpiscle with mental disease be sent to the organ banks. Except many of these people have rich relatives waiting for those deaths so they can inherit their estates. Naturally this involves Gil Hamilton

who anticipates kidnappers seeking out the people most likely to inherit the most money upon the passing of *the second freezer law*.

The longest story in the book is “The Patchwork Girl” which was originally released as an independent novella. It involves a conference on the moon between *lunies*, *belters* (miners in the asteroid belt) and *flatlanders* to update United Nations laws concerning the moon. This has caused a lot of resentment among the *lunies* who strongly resent having only 4 delegates of the 10, thus being the minority members of a conference determining their own future. Before the conference even begins, one of the *flatlander* delegates is shot and the only suspect is a former lover of Gil Hamilton. Halfway through the story it is unclear what the murder has to do with the conference, or what the title—an obvious reference to organ transplants—has to do with anything. But as the mystery continues to develop, so does Hamilton’s understanding of lunar society which, to me, is the most interesting part of the story.

While the stories in **Flatlander** are not great as future history, as a combination of society-building and mysteries they are fine storytelling, and an incentive for me to go read some of Niven’s even better works such as **A Gift From Earth** and **Neutron Star**.

*

It has been several decades since I first read Clifford D. Simak’s **A Choice of Gods**, one of a loose trilogy of philosophical books he wrote—along with **A Heritage of Stars**, and **Project Pope**—late in his career which examined humanity’s need for religion and search for a higher entity guiding our existence.

I approached **A Choice of Gods** tentatively, since sometimes novels which shine in one’s memory do not retain that aura upon rereading. Its setting is a far-future Earth which has been mostly depopulated for two reasons: the vast majority of its eight million inhabitants were mysteriously removed several thousand years previously, and most of those who remained developed the ability to teleport elsewhere, which they did. Left behind are one family which chose not to leave with the others, a tribe of Native Americans who have returned to their traditional ways, and all the robots which had been built to serve humans and now seem to be trying to fill in the gap left by their absence. Virtually all remnants of Earth’s vast technology has been lost, and the remaining residents of Earth live a simple, rustic existence, the type which Simak obviously loved and portrayed in much of his fiction.

Much of the book consists of long discussions between its main characters:

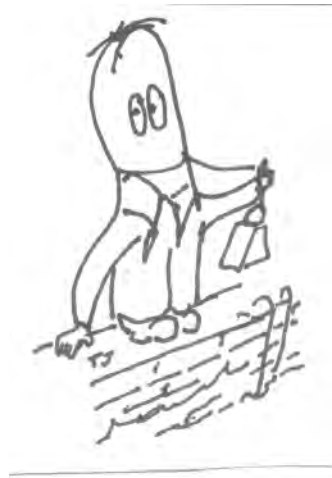
- ▶ Jason, the patriarch of the remaining family;
- ▶ Horace Red Cloud, the chief of the Native American tribe;
- ▶ Hezekiah, a robot who has undertaken the role of head of an ancient Christian monastery and who is obsessed with his quest for a deity;
- ▶ Evening Star, a Native American girl whose desire for reading leads her to stay with Jason’s family and read Jason’s vast collection of books.

The interaction between these people are the basis of the book, but the plot takes a dramatic turn

when Jason's brother John returns from the heart of the galaxy. He tells Jason about an entity he sensed there which he calls the Principle which does not seem to be a deity, but rather something observing the galaxy and perhaps experimenting on its various life forms, since John believes the Principle might be responsible for removing most of Earth's population.

In addition, John encountered the descendants of Earth's population who have been living on three adjacent worlds where they have continued their technology and even advanced it to the point where they have located Earth and are sending a survey ship to it, presumably for the purpose of deciding whether the billions of humans wish to return home.

Readers who enjoy a slow-paced novel which mostly consists of conversations and speculation will enjoy **A Choice of Gods** as much as I did. I recommend it highly.



Halcyon Days

Joseph Nicholas

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Jul 31, 2008

Reading your golf joke reminds me of my old golf joke, which can be extended to cover all eighteen holes of the game and go into as much detail about bunkers, irons, chips, greens, flags, etc. as the listener can stand, but essentially revolves around two points: (1) that two pairs of golfers spend so much time swearing and shouting at each other as they play their round that they've been told if they do so again they'll be permanently barred from the club, and (b) that on the final hole one of the pairs drops dead of a heart attack and his partner tells the professional, when the latter comes rushing out of the clubhouse to remonstrate with him for swearing and to bar them from the club, that "he had a stroke and these bastards want to count it".

Sally Syrjala

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Aug 3, 2008

For more time than I care to recall, I have been immersed in care-giving and dealing with the deaths of immediate family. Momma's decline was probably the worst of it. Then came Ike's death and her death. Then I become the care-giver for my father-in-law. His passage from home to assisted living to nursing home was not easy. He died at age 94 this past Friday, August 1st, so now the care-giving days have come to an end. He was the last of the immediate family so I am now truly alone with the cats.

It will take me awhile to get things to a place where I put the blocks back in place for the life. Things will be in free fall for a time as I figure out how things will come together. There is the job. There are the cats. They are the family. There is the pretty picture taking. Maybe I can get back to loc writing. It was something I once enjoyed.

The burial will be on Tuesday morning. I have emailed the church how I want the service to be—the pieces of scripture I want included, etc. This final duty and then I will try to find some order to put life into again.

[Condolences on the death of your father-in-law. Adjusting to life after the death of loved ones can be traumatic, and I hope your family of cats continue to bring you happiness. And do get back to loc-writing. We fans are family as well and need to stick together as much as possible.]

Eric Mayer

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Aug 6, 2008

Sorry to hear about Jean's knee. Knees can be problems and when you have to go through a procedure you really expect to have some relief afterwards.

Great that you got to Yankee Stadium. I recall reading about that game. How many times do you get a "walk off" hit batter? I'm a Yankee fan but have never been to the Stadium. I have to admit we don't even have a television set these days but I still follow the team via the Internet. Kind of peculiar, I guess. The point should be watching the contests but I follow the storyline instead.

I haven't read **Pillars of the Earth** but I just finished **World Without End** (a sequel of sorts set a couple hundred years later), a very very long book for me. Everything you said about **Pillars** goes for **World Without End**. I found I had to keep reading it and I guess I enjoyed the book but it made me squirm. Man, talk about your evil characters and unjust society. Maybe it just pressed the right buttons for me.

[I am much more likely to read about sporting events in the newspaper than actually watch them.]

I doubt if you are missing much, if anything, not having a tv, since I do not watch it much myself except when sitting with the rest of the family reading a magazine and occasionally looking up. Otherwise it would interfere too much with my reading/writing activities, which I prefer.]

Lloyd Penney

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Aug 17, 2008

It's been a long time since I purchased copies of **Locus**. I used to buy it in an attempt to know what was coming up in the SF publishing world, but gave it up when costs of buying it from my local SF bookstore approached \$10 a copy. I am not sure what **Locus** has against Rob Sawyer or Jack McDevitt; I could ask Rob next time I see him. I will have to check out *SF Scope* and *SF Signal*; never heard of these sites before. I used to buy **SF Chronicle**, too...

We see few movies, but we've now seen *Wall-E* twice, and we do intend to buy the DVD when it is released. Great animation, great characters, great story, with lots of important messages to heed. The ruination of the Earth, the cluttering of space around the Earth, the obesity and laziness of the human race, so much more. It seems Pixar can do no wrong.

As did **Eric Mayer**, I missed my senior prom from high school. I had arrived on the West Coast the day of the prom. Just as well, I wouldn't have been able to ask anyone to go with me; I was completely dateless in high school, and I was well rid of the place. I was one of the few from my graduation class who went to the school anniversary reunion event in 2001. It will be interesting to see if there's a similar event for the school's 50th anniversary in 2011. I did say I have nothing by Charles Stross on my bookshelf. However, I have several of his books on my PDA.

Work arrangements...Yvonne's contract at Diageo expired, and she now works for the Ontario Realty Corporation, an arm of the provincial government. We are hoping this will be the last place she ever works for. As for me, I now work daytimes for the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. We'll see what happens there. I may have some other offers soon.

Brad Foster won a Hugo at Denvention! Way to go! **Tom Sadler** now lives somewhere in the southern States, and no longer in Michigan. I'd like to see the zines Tom has produced since his move, but I think they need to be scanned to .pdf.

There's about a month left in the summer, and I hope we get to see some of it...we're usually too busy to enjoy much of it. If nothing else, we'll be training up to Montreal for this year's annual con there, to talk about our responsibilities for the Worldcon next year. We can now say that Montreal is next. Take care, and see you next issue.

[Add me to the group of people who went dateless in high school—and college—and never attended my senior prom. I doubt if I missed much in either case ... Good luck with your jobs. You always remind me how thankful I am to have had steady work my entire working life ... I

don't know if Tom makes **TRF** available online, but I'll encourage him to do so. I have resumed my column for his zine, although under a new title *The Old Kit Bag*.]

Richard Dengrove

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Aug 21, 2008

Vision of Paradise #126 no. 1. *The Passing Scene*. You seem to be a great combo: supervisor, teacher and friend. You may be introverted as a person but you are also concerned about people as a person. I wonder how many teachers remember their past students and supervisors their past subordinates. I doubt most care, but you still keep in touch.

Wondrous Stories. The King of Bohemia who fled to England must be Frederick V. No one previously disputed his rule of Palatinate, but Catholics did a Calvinist ruling Bohemia, an important principality in the Holy Roman Empire where the previous emperor had had his capital. Frederick was defeated in battle and had to flee. Frances Yates wrote about him in **The Rosicrucian Enlightenment**. The reason was he was associated with the occult: he allowed a press in his realm that published the Rosicrucian manifestoes, and the name Rosicrucian has rung out in the occult to this day. Also, the press published the works of the English occultist Robert Fludd, very important in the history of the occult. While I do not know whether there was anything mystical or occult about Frederick himself, Yates seems to think so.

Visions of Paradise #126 no. 2. *The Passing Scene*. I can well understand how the main office could have neglected to make out a purchase order for the American Math Exam. I was trying to get a requisition through. I was not the only one who wanted that; one of the most powerful people in the office did. Nonetheless, it refused to go forward without some pushing. I had to re-explain the requisition to my office director several times before she signed it. Then my office sent it on to the budget office. The budget office approved and, after that, it seemed to have fallen into a black hole. Fortunately, there were copies; and when we finally traced the requisition to a dead end, we could use those copies to purchase the item.

Wondrous Stories. If the galaxy is full of intelligent beings, it would be a very great coincidence if, in any galactic empire, we didn't play second, and maybe even third and fourth, fiddle, to more technologically advanced, more numerous, more intelligent extraterrestrials. Of course, that is not very comforting. I can see why, nearly all the Galactic empires in Brian Aldiss' anthology have humans at the head or as competitors. I once had the idea that extraterrestrials exile us from Earth and instead populate the Earth with intelligent birds they had evolved. We later had trouble with engineered beings evolved from insects.

Visions of Paradise #128. *Wondrous Stories*. About the story of Roger and Eileen in Robinson's **The Martians**, do memories have limits like Robinson says? It makes sense. Of course, an alternative exists: we can stretch them so they can go on for an eternity. If they all took up the same space, we couldn't. As one psychologist said, they are more an art than a science. Often, we remember blanks we can fill in with the normal, or what we want or fear.

Halcyon Days. About your comment to **Eric Mayer**. So you're an introvert who doesn't fit in? Maybe at one time. However, that doesn't jive with "The Passing Scene" now. There, you seem to be a person who not only socializes with people but—what is much rarer—who cares about people. Anyway, certain people. You have your family. You have a multitude of friends from school. You have neighbors. If you don't talk much to people whose conversation you like, that is par, even for career extroverts.

Visions of Paradise # 129. *The Passing Scene & Wondrous Stories.* Who can predict who will die? It's not good to plan your retirement because someone died prematurely. The only criteria is if you are retiring when you want to. Prediction eludes us. It eluded Ray Bradbury. He failed to predict five decades ahead in "The Million Year Picnic." There hasn't been an atomic war yet. We haven't gotten to Mars yet either. Of course, Ray wrote the story he wanted to write. The story many readers wanted to read. At base, that is what science fiction is, the sensibility of the future not a prediction of the future. Similarly, fantasy is the sensibility of the past.

Halcyon Days. My heart reaches out to **Lloyd Penney**. I remember my days searching for jobs. The worst job I ever had. On the other hand, I have known people who made a career out of being temps. They made good money flitting from job to job. It helped, of course, that a temp agency with benefits employed them.

Visions of Paradise #130. *The Passing Scene.* This seemed to be food-oriented this time. You talked a lot about banquets and sometimes mentioned specifically what you ate. I may never have remembered what I ate that well, or had a very discerning palate to begin with. However, I used to love food. Old age has slowed that down. I can only eat so much; and I can't tell, from one moment to the next, how much that is. An additional curse of old age is that I have lost not an ounce from this attitude.

"Science Fiction Categories". You divide science fiction into plot-oriented and character-oriented. A manual I once read said that you should depend on character to make your plot. Your plot should be your characters acting in character. Under that definition, romance novels are both character-oriented and plot-oriented. They have a formula that depends on the characters having a certain character. The heroine has to be ready to listen to her heart and not her head, or ready to be swooped down on and carried away by the daring hero. Pornography is just the opposite: there are sex and kinks but I don't think there is either plot or character. As someone said, you red-pencil everything that doesn't concern the hero and heroine getting into bed with one another.

Visions of Paradise #131. *Out of the Depths.* In other words, what **Locus** was saying is that this is a democracy and I am the dictator. Pretty infantile but par for many people's course.

Halcyon Days. I didn't have quite the problem **Lloyd [Penney]** did. My parents had some wealth so any activities that required cash were not a problem. However, I suspect my parents were seen as arrivistes. For various reasons, people did not take potshots at them out in the open. For one thing, my mother was a very talented artist; and the tinhorn elite in my community

wanted their portrait painted. On the other hand, people took potshots at me as a kid: desperate for approval and basically a coward, I must have been a great target. Also, although my parents believed in their unlimited clout, when push came to shove, they had very little. Whatever I and my brother and sister got in life, we got without friends in high places. Maybe that's the way it should be.

In your comment to **Brad Foster**, you quote Deepak Chopkra that we should never blame old age for our problems because we can do nothing about it. That has nothing to do with blame. We blame people for murder but can't bring the body back to life. On the other hand, a more modest and attainable objective is in order: we should try not to be consumed with anger over old age because we can't change it. Also, we should try to keep illness and disease at bay as long as possible.

[I don't think anybody is actually retiring because of one person's death, but it did make some people think about their plans, which is not necessarily a bad thing.]

Henry L. Welch

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September 3, 2008

Thanks for the latest few issues of **VoP**. So much for keeping ahead of you in issue numbers as I'm just now publishing TKK 129 :-)

I think you should list teaching and mentoring to your lists of passions.

Congratulations on Mark's engagement. Now for the fun of wedding planning.

You have an interesting multi-axis classification of SF. I'd like to see a broader combination of books and readers to see if your "predictions" of preference would turn out to be reliable. When will you be undertaking that study?

[Much as a broader study might be fun, I doubt if I have either the time or the inclination to do it currently. But that attitude might change in the future.]

Eric Mayer

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Sep 6, 2008

Thanks very much for running the article, and the snazzy cover! I hope the piece turns out to be of interest to someone. I'm not sure I'm an expert at talking about writing. Mary will mention this issue on her lists and I'll get a link up on our webpage and we'll also mention it in our next newsletter which comes out every other month. I spent today working on a scene for the eighth book. The last week the words have come awfully hard for whatever reason but I finally got

something written, although it might have worn my brain out!

By the way, since Mary and I are vegetarian I should avoid reading about all your food.

I don't envy Mark that commute. Reminds me of the year I lived in Weehawken, right across the river from Manhattan. I worked in Jersey City and then took night classes at New York Law School. So I'd take a bus to get to work. Then after work take the PATH train to the World Trade Center not far from my school for class. After class I got the subway at Canal Street, and took the bus from the Port Authority back to Weehawken. At least the bus stopped right in front of my apartment house.

For some reason the name Wildwood rings a bell. I think some relatives used to vacation there back in ancient days. I've only stayed by the sea a few times and loved it. I still remember walking the beach at dawn, listening to the waves and the seagulls. I once visited an aunt who took me on a day trip to Atlantic City. All I recall about the Boardwalk is that we went into a little touristy place where they had an aquarium where they had on display a fish with feet.

Cape May is another place I've never been, but know by name. One of my dad's best friends and his wife retired to a house they owned there.

The Peace of Pizza shop reminded me of the pizza joint near here which for many years had a sign out front: Give Pizza a Chance.

Wow. Congratulations of the distinguished faculty award. One of only six in fifty years! Impressive!

Sadly, I don't think McCain lost his mind picking Palin. The sort of people who hold her kinds of views generally don't judge people by their experience or competence, or anything else except whether they hold the correct views on the handful of issues that rile them up. What I think is sad is that Obama can't cite the fact that he was president of the Harvard law review as evidence that he has the intelligence to deal with the problems facing this country. (As opposed to McCain, the idiot. How the heck does anyone finish 794 out of 799 students?) A lot of voters seem to consider intelligence as a detriment, as if problems can be best solved through stupidity. It's frightening.

Thanks for featuring **One For Sorrow** too. I am more interested in the history than the mystery but the mystery is important because I'm not good at plotting and it gives us something to hang our history on. I recall that when we were writing the first book we weren't sure until near the end who the murderer was and we changed the solution a few times along the way.

Good luck researching Buddhism. Sounds like you have an ambitious sort of book in mind. Some writers find it easier and more profitable to just make religions up!

We got some rain from Hannah today but not all that much. I reckon you got a lot more. Hope you aren't flooded or have any other problems from it.

[I suspect that McCain's low ranking in college will actually earn him more votes than it loses him. And what does that fact say about this country? ... I am also weak on plotting, which is why I mostly write novelettes and novellas rather than full-length novels (and might explain why I do not sell any of my fiction either). I envy your ability to sell your historical novels which is an area I also enjoy. I'm still thinking about the viability of expanding "Richard III" into a novel, but, as usual, plotting remains the hangup.]

Sheryl Birkhead

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Sept 26, 2008

I keep thinking I am going to catch up, but then life gets in the way. Ah, but that is the way it works for all of us!

Congrats to Mark and Kate.

Be careful what you wish for! Attending cons and having your in-school personality might be a surprise! Knowing that I am paralyzed at cons and yet confident with things related to veterinary medicine makes me wonder if I might regret a switch if it were artificial. Either I will grow to be comfortable etc. (*highly* unlikely) or not, the fact that I pretty much stopped going to cons some time ago kinda renders such an increase in my comfort zone unlikely. Right now I feel that anything that *looked* like comfort and ease to others would not be real and probably more effort than it was worth in the long run. Of course, it might be that by making that first transition, eventually the confidence and ease would follow, but that would be a gamble. For now (having no money helps make the decision easy!), I like the *lack* of nervousness over con attendance. True, I have traded in the anticipatory excitement—but that is an easy exchange for the upset with myself over not being a party person and not being able to get out there and socialize. But, what seems right for me is not necessarily right for anyone else—go for what feels right for you!

I tried to watch some of the *Corflu Silver* online, but my computer/online connection made it impossible. Ah, yes, one of these days...

Brad [Foster]'s website is fun to look at! (Congrats on the fanartist Hugo from Denvention3!)

If I recall correctly, the night of my National Honor Society induction was a bit...um...er... different. The faculty advisor was a new teacher who told us to call her by her first name. We all really liked her, but the guys picked up her VW bug and actually carried it up the steps and into the front hallway of the main building. Yeah, right, mature academic behavior! (As an aside—I actually forgot to go to the rehearsal for the induction because JFK had just been assassinated— yes, one of those things we will always remember.)

Congratulations to **Lloyd and Yvonne [Penney]**!

I am again reminded that I need to take out some of the newer SF audio books. I keep saying that and forgetting!

Ah, yes, the desired trepidation of new students—no two ways about it—you have to start with a strong rein, then loosen up if you wish, but it will **not** work the other way around. Kids are like predators...they can sense any weakness and go in for the kill!

I checked Netflix to see if *Masters of Science Fiction* was listed there as an available offering—don't think it was. I'll try to remember to check back again periodically.

I don't exactly enjoy (heck, I have a severe case of *whitecoatitis!*) doctor visits (and extend that to dentists), but I feel that when I tell my clients it is best to have their pets examined once or twice a year *especially* when they have no complaints—I need to extend that to the owners (or more PC—caregivers)—so I should follow my own recommendations. As with a lot of people, medical premiums and costs is by **far** the largest item in my expenditures, but I have always made sure I had insurance. I *did* look elsewhere when the premiums for me alone reached \$11,000— somehow that makes the stress of a doctor's visit even worse! Ah, but I digress.

I asked my brother how my sister-in-law is doing now that she is a lady of leisure. Getting five different retirement checks helps—but they are well enough off not to have to worry. My concern is that she is 5 points above being legally blind (severe bi-lateral *ambleopia*—I think that's the right spelling) and doesn't drive. He makes quite a bit more now than he did before retiring from GE. In upper management—from contracts all over the world—hence he is not home a very large portion of the time. Apparently she has really embraced the retired bit and works out at home and a nearby gym at least several hours a day. Hmm, while a nice perk, if I had enough money to do what I wished with my time, that would not make my top 10...maybe top 20...

Well, calling it quits for tonight—plumber coming tomorrow after I get back from the shelter cats. Ah, that nifty smell of an electric motor burning itself out Saturday morning gave me a clue that things were not quite right in the basement. A quick trip to the circuit box, tripping one, and I was ready to call around and see if someone...this is the first time I have had a plumber say he would come and give me an **estimate**. Cringe. Hmm, wonder if I still have to pay the call charge? Well...it was just a thought.

[I doubt if I will be attending any cons in the foreseeable future and, if I do, adopting my in-school personality does not seem to be something I would be able to do. Nor could I possibly *fake* a personality that is not real, much as it might fool other people into thinking I am somebody that I am really not ... I am extremely fortunate in having a reputation at school so that my students come in so anxious I need to put very little effort into creating a strong rein. If anything, I need to assure some of them to relax a bit! ... I have trouble devoting myself to working out frequently. In the summer we go to the YMCA three times a week, and I try to either take a brisk walk or bike ride the other days, as well as my back exercises every evening. But that's about all I do.]