

Visions of Paradise #137



Visions of Paradise #137

Contents

The Passing Scene.....page 3

January 2009

Wondrous Stories.....page 4

Odds and Ends ... The Prefect

Halcyon Days.....page 6

Mayer ... Penney ... Kennedy ... Cameron ... Welch

On the Lighter Side.....page 16

Jokes by Lloyd Penney

\\//
(0_0)
o00_()_00o

Robert Michael Sabella

E-mail bsabella@optonline.net

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

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

Fiction blog: <http://bobsabella.livejournal.com/>

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

Copyright ©January 2009, by Gradient Press

Available for trade, letter of comment or request

Artwork

Brad Foster ... cover

Terry Jeeves ... p. 4

The Passing Scene

January 2009

Christmas Eve my entire family was infected with a stomach virus by my nephew's one-year-old baby, so most of us were sick by Christmas night. Mine lasted about 4 days, but on its heels came a head cold which kept me miserable for another week or so. So while I was only too sick to do anything at all for one day, I was slowed down considerably for two weeks.

The weather has been both colder and stormier than usual this January. On Jan 7 school had a two-hour delay due to icy roads, but Andy spent an hour getting up the driveway only to find out the road was a skating rink, so he stayed home waiting for a sanding truck to come (which promptly got stuck on the ice!). Jean and I stayed home all day, since by the time the road was cleared it was already noon.

We had another snowstorm the weekend of Jan 10, so I split my time between snow-blowing (since we had 8-12") and doing schoolwork (writing 4 tests, grading tests taken by my two first year Independent Study students—Li Li who is doing Math Analysis does not take tests—ordering supplies for the math department, and writing a teachers' association newsletter).

*

By Martin Luther King's birthday we were all sick of winter. The temperature only reached 30° once in January, and the ground was covered with snow the entire month. While that might be normal in New York State or Ontario, it is not normal for a Mid-Atlantic state which borders the ocean. I can only imagine what my heating bill will be this month.

We did get a lot done during the MLK three-day weekend. Friday night we did our weekly produce shopping at the farm store, then after supper I worked on mail and school chores.

Saturday Jean had a hair appointment in the morning, while I kept working. After lunch we went to the YMCA for the first time this month (being sick had interfered with it), after which we talked on the phone with Fei Fei. She has also been sick with a stomach virus which she originally caught in Naples at the end of her Christmas trip, but now she has a second one. Finally we went to dinner at the home of our friends Kathy & Dave.

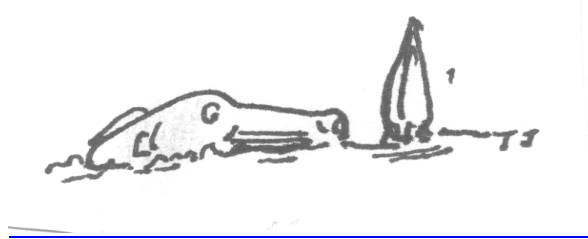
I spent Monday finishing my weekend chores: tying newspapers and cardboard; making granola; getting my car's oil changed; phoning my aunt who has been in the hospital for a week recovering from surgery for an abdominal blockage; cooking pea soup and pizza; vacuuming; and grading an AP Stat test. Even though I worked steadily both Saturday and Sunday, I only made a small dent in my chores before finishing them Monday.

Chinese New Year's Weekend featured lots of great eating. Friday night Jean and I went to Macaroni Grill for dinner, using a \$25 gift card we got from our Discover credit card bonus points. We both ate chicken breasts in a white sauce with capellini.

Saturday we went to Fei Fei's house with Mark & Kate to celebrate New Year's two days early. Her husband Silvio (who is a professor at Univ of Michigan) was there, as were her parents who live with her six months of the year, then live in Chengdu with Fei Fei's grandmom the other six months. Dinner was really good, with 7 delicious Chinese dishes (the best four were the roast duck, eggplant, braised fish and 10-treasure vegetables). Afterwards we chatted around the table for several hours before moving to the living room to watch videos of Fei Fei and Silvio's two-week Christmas trip to Naples, which were wonderful (especially all the great Italian food!).

The rest of the weekend was spent doing the usual chores: writing and grading tests, shopping, vacuuming, and going to the YMCA. I did find some time to read a 1999 issue of *F&SF*.

On Jan 28 we had another snow day, and again the trees were weighted down with ice. We have lost more trees due to icing this winter than any other year we can recall. Fortunately, we still have dozens remaining on our 1.25 acres.



Wondrous Stories

During the school year I have relatively little time to read books, but I need to do some reading every evening to keep myself sane. Here is some of the reading I do between books.

I finished reading the two issues of **Worlds of IF** from 1964 which I discussed awhile ago. The best story was Robert F. Young's "When Time Began." I do not remember many Young stories from the 1960s, but I definitely recall "Little Dog Gone" which appeared in **Worlds of Tomorrow** and was a deserving Hugo nominee. "When Time Began" was not on that level, being mostly an adventure of a time traveler to prehistoric times who is stunned to meet two youngsters who claim to be escapees from a repressive Martian culture. The story had a strong human focus and was good enough that upon finishing it I immediately looked up Young's entire bibliography at *Fantastic Fiction* (<http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/>). It listed two collections and several novels, including an expansion of "When Time Began." While they are obviously all long out of print, some might be available at used book outlets, particularly at my favorite site Pandora Books (<http://www.pandora.ca/>), so I might look a few of them up sometime.

I also read the current issue of **Historical Novels Review**, which is the **Locus** of the historical fiction field, filled with articles, interviews and reviews. Two sub-genres of historical fiction which they cover are *Historical Fantasy* and *Alternate History*, which are also sub-genres of science fiction. I definitely see merit in both designations as those areas fall into the wide

overlap between genres (and is another indication of why rigid definitions of any genre are always questionable, even though I am often guilty of such definitions myself).

In the recent issue of **HRN**, they discussed *Steampunk* as another area of historical fiction, which it certainly is. Somewhere deep in my memory I recall reading in **Locus** many years ago that its editor Charles Brown originally intended it to review both science fiction and historical fiction. And why does that not surprise me? After all, many people consider the core of science fiction to be history, myself included, and how many sf writers have developed “future histories?”

*

Although I enjoyed Alastair Reynolds’ trilogy **Revelation Space**, **Redemption Ark** and **Absolution Gap**, I did not read any of his other novels, only the collection **Galactic North**, which was also good. So recently when The SF Book Club had a *Buy One Get One Free* offer, I decided to order *The Prefect* as one of the two books (the other being Jack McDevitt’s **The Devil’s Eye**). This recent book followed much the same pattern as his earlier trilogy, being basically a thriller set within a well-developed future. Its setting is the same milieu as the *Galactic North* series where various human confederations struggle with each other as well as with spacebound Ultras. But at the core of every Reynolds story, as in this one, are always human emotions and interactions which make his space operas more approachable than most.

Tom Dreyfus is a prefect, a police officer in the *Glitter Band*, which is a collection of artificial space habitats which are home to millions of humans. As the novel begins, Dreyfus is dealing with two separate issues: a space habitat whose ruler has rigged local elections, and the slaughter of nearly one thousand inhabitants of another space habitat which has been totally destroyed. The former situation seems relatively minor as the habitat has been locked down so that all its inhabitants and visitors are forbidden to leave it temporarily. The latter situation is more dire as the spaceship which seemed responsible immediately fled for the Swarm, which is under the control of the Ultras, so Dreyfus contacts the Ultras and demands the return of the ship.

Meanwhile his assistant Thalia Ng is visiting four space habitats trying to make repairs related to the lockdown when everything goes berserk on the fourth habitat. Suddenly she and Dreyfus are involved in a plot to take over the entire Glitter Band by the mind of a person who has supposedly been dead for eighty years and who is being aided by one of Dreyfus’ superiors.

Reynolds is a master of interweaving plotlines which spread like an octopus tentacles. He avoids many weaknesses of thrillers, such as he never withholds evidence from his characters to maintain the thrill level. The characters learn things regularly as the case proceeds, and they use the evidence wisely. Nor do they take foolish emotional actions which forward the plot simplistically. And invariably when I think that some threat should not realistically hinder them for long, it doesn’t, and Reynolds moves on instead of milking that scenario.

Reynolds has matured as a writer since the *Revelation Space* trilogy. No longer did he incorporate scenes of senseless horror intended only to up the thrill ante. Reynolds’ characters are guided by the author’s mind, not his emotions, and all the plotlines come together relatively quickly and satisfactorily for a 400+ page novel. Overall, **The Prefect** was an even better novel

than the *Revelation Space* trilogy, and encouraged me to read more of his recent books.

Halcyon Days

Eric Mayer

maywrite2@epix.net

Nov 12, 2008

In "Out of the Depths" you remind me of all the time I spent walking to and from the local library, hauling arm-loads and book bags full of books. Hey I might have been a reclusive non-athletic bookworm but those library walks gave me a lot of exercise, particularly since the library was part way up a very steep hill. Over the years my reading -- of fiction at least -- has dropped off quite a bit. I'd like to read more. Actually I waste too much time looking at fragmentary stuff on the Internet. If you retire you can read more but it sounds like you'd prefer not to retire.

As to book and record collections, mine went, for the most part, with my ex-wife, but it was a small price to pay.

Your tapes and CDs (I almost said "albums"!) list reveals exquisite taste in music! My own all-time favorite band is the Kinks. Although I reckon Ray Davies and company might come first because they've been around so long and produced so much music. There is actually some good stuff on his latest solo effort. Maybe not so original or memorable as the old Kinks Klassics -- subtle and rewarding a close listen.

I noticed Edgar Rice Burroughs on your books list. This morning, when I did a few chores, I pulled up behind a car with a license plate beginning ERB. Immediately I thought of Burroughs and wondered whether the driver had any inkling of what ERB meant to certain odd-ball folks called sf fans?

We didn't get any snow from that October storm, although they were predicting we would. However, spots in the Poconos, less than an hour drive received more than a foot. I breathed a sigh of relief at the first -- much too early -- near miss. Our power did go out overnight, but it happened just as we were headed for bed so it didn't make much difference to us. I hope it isn't an omen of what winter's going to be like. I hope it *is* the winter! I hate snow and hate driving in it. I imagine those trees that came down still had their leaves. Disposing of fallen trees is no fun. We had to have one that was struck by lightning taken down a couple years back and it cost a small fortune.

That bear you saw makes me revise my vague mental picture of where you live. We saw a big black bear in back of the house a few years ago but then we're mostly surrounded by woods. It too had been attracted to a bird feeder, belonging to a neighbor. Bears sure do look different when you see them on the loose in your yard, don't they?

I don't read enough or keep up with what's new so I've only recently been hearing about steampunk which sounds interesting. I reread and enjoyed a couple of Jules Verne novels last year. A while back Mary and I wrote a Victorian era novel which didn't have science fictional

machines but did have demons and a steam powered vehicle. Since we weren't familiar with steampunk I suspect it is neither steamy nor punky enough to qualify.

Also it is probably too slow. I just read one of those supernatural mysteries that are so popular these days and it was mostly chasing and fighting. There were hints of interesting ideas and philosophy and I would've preferred more of that and less action and blood but I am way out of step with the times.

Re **Richard Dengrove's** comment about the continuation of the Roman Empire. My understanding is that what historians call the Byzantine Empire was, in fact, simply the Roman Empire. By the time the Goths took over Italy in 476, the focus of the empire had already turned to the eastern portion anyway. The Byzantine emperors formed a direct line from the preceding Roman emperors. Roman laws and institutions continued, although they evolved over the course of almost 1,000 years. The name Byzantine was applied by Victorian historians. The "Byzantines" called themselves Romans. So all that really happened in 476 was that the empire was reduced in size. Not very similar to what occurred when the Ottomans took over entirely. Not that there was much left of the empire by then.

Having said that, **Richard's** point about continuity is fascinating to think about. Empires, cultures, societies, ways of living, don't just vanish because a new boss takes over and puts his face on the coinage. The Ottomans continued to use existing buildings, for example turning the Hagia Sophia into a mosque. Over in Italy, Roman society and institutions continued. The Roman administration took orders from a Goth rather than a Roman. Changing borders and rulers don't necessarily tell you how much, if very much, the society changed.

As for Dumbarton Oakes. I have read a lot of papers from there in the course of my research.

Richard also mentions Jack Chalker, saying the way to write mysteries is to write the ending last. Well, since Mary and I try to put a fair, puzzle type mystery in each book, we basically know what the ending is, but if I actually wrote it first I think it'd be kind of a letdown. I'd feel like I was done before I even started.

[I agree with you that stories which are primarily "chasing and fighting" are basically boring. There is a lot of deeper stuff out there, but it requires reading a lot reviews (which I do) in order to find it. / I always thought that the Byzantine Empire was indeed the stepchild of the Roman Empire, with a major difference being the increased importance of Greek culture on it.]

Lloyd Penney

penneys@allstream.net

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

November 23, 2008

Many thanks for **VoP** 134. Even though it is the fall, according to the calendar, it is awfully cold already, way below normal temperatures for this time of year, and more snow is promised

tonight, so I'll happily stay inside and write some letters.

I would like to encounter a bear, at least with some measure of safety. I've met up with deer and skunks, and I should send you a .jpg of a photograph taken some years ago. It has Yvonne and I sitting on either side of a Bengal tiger named Qadesh.

In my own youth, I was a loner, and our family couldn't afford to travel far, so science fiction books were my way out of a dull, static existence and off into the far reaches of my imagination, and the imagination of my favorite authors. I also inhabited the public library, and got my card to the adult section fairly quickly. There was no incentive from my parents to read or not, but I have written before that my mother brought home SF anthologies to read between household chores, and I picked them up and was hooked. I cannot understand why people wouldn't have a passion in life; to me, it's a necessity. Those who do not have a passion refer to those of us who do as nerds or geeks. Having a limited amount of disposable income acts as a governor; otherwise, I'd be buying all the books I want, and I'd need another bedroom in our apartment.

Retirement is nothing I am prepared to consider, unless I win a lottery. It's just not an option I see available to me. But, if I was to retire, I'd factor in whether or not I like the job I'm in. If you are enjoying your job, and the stress levels are relatively low, I'd say put off your retirement until later. You've got the good feelings of your students to help keep you going, and besides, you'll continue to add to your retirement savings.

The steampunk sub-genre seems to have been around for a while, even before the word steampunk was coined. I'm told some of K.W. Jeter's first novels from the late 60s could be included. Part of the appeal of steampunk for many fans is the costuming part, and the accompanying return to a fictional, but certainly more genteel and respectable era. There is a non-fan, non-SF aspect to it, and that appeals to youth...I've seen steampunk raves advertised here and there. Remember *The Wild, Wild West* with Robert Conrad and Ross Martin? It has been described as a science fiction western, but with the right look, it could also be described as steampunk. We may be organizing a steampunk high tea for next year's spring SF convention, and we are also working on suitable costumes. We haven't costumed for about 20 years, but seeing there's a wide variety of what you can do, the appeal of creating a costume has returned, and I think we can have some fun with this.

My loc...still at SGS, still haven't had a look for John Scalzi's blog, haven't seen any movies since *WALL-E*. Actually, Yvonne has picked up our ordered DVD copy of *WALL-E* and we enjoyed it again last night. My Facebook page continues on, too often clicking *ignore* when friends want me to play a game with them. I should inventory my books, my fanzines, magazine, etc., etc., but these days, with two jobs on the go, free time is reserved for the weekend; I quite literally have no free time through the week.

Mike Deckinger wondered where I was buying **Locus** for \$10...at my local science fiction book store, Bakka-Phoenix. I have to qualify things...that \$10 was Canadian dollars, and at the time, C\$10 was worth about US\$7.50 to US\$8. The store had to make a few cents on stocking it and selling it. Same figures apply when I was also purchasing **Science Fiction Chronicle**. I haven't

bought **Locus** for a few years now, one of my indulgences I had to end to save some money.

I fully agree with **Eric Mayer**, 5:15am should be banned by law. But that is the time I wake each morning to go to work. I will find out in about five days if SGS intends to keep me or let me go...if they do keep me, I will resign from my evening job, and I will have my evenings back again, and I can do more things...like write more letters...

I have found a limited source of similar *Lighter Side* stories...I suppose I could instantly stuff your inbox with them, so I'll ask first if you'd like me to send some to you occasionally. There's not many, but they will fill the pages you devote to them. (And I will not claim authorship of the story about the loud-mouthed bastards...)

I think I'm done for the moment. I am still archiving my letters on my LiveJournal, and I have to wonder when LJ might ask me to upgrade, for I must be using a fair amount of storage space.

[Much as I enjoy teaching, the stress levels are very high, which is a major factor in my thinking of retiring soon. / Yes, keep sending me jokes before you split off your own "On the Lighter Side" zine.]

Eric Mayer

Nov 28, 2008

I'm heading over to my brother's for a few days so I'll try to get off a brief note on **VoP** 135 first. Sounds like you've been busy. In some ways too busy. I am glad to say we haven't had to shovel snow yet. My commiserations on your back problems. I have a kind of minor problem, which usually doesn't trouble me, although it keeps me from doing certain things, such as running. Snow shoveling is something I can get away with once in awhile if I am very careful. I avoid doing it if at all possible. Now if I could only avoid even seeing snow.

Good thing your wife was there to witness your losing that cell phone otherwise calling it and having a strange woman answer...!

Your mention of that Chinese restaurant with the Chinese diners reminded me of when I lived in Brooklyn near Atlantic Avenue and all the mid-eastern eateries. The one I went to regularly was the only one on the street without a copy of a newspaper review in the window. It was also the least expensive. And, in my opinion, from trying the other places, the best. I certainly was not qualified to judge Lebanese cuisine but I suspect "my" place was in fact the best in the sense of being most authentic. All the other restaurants were mostly filled with yuppies and tourists and...well...people like me. But The Tripoli (if I recall the name) was mostly frequented by people of middle eastern descent, very often whole families. Not just young couples but kids and grandparents too. Around this time of year they always brought in a band, with belly dancer, touring from Egypt.

Having said that I recall showing up for an early dinner at the nearly deserted at 4 pm Chinese

restaurant near my house in Rochester and seeing the owner's little kids sitting at a table chowing down on MacDonald's Happy Meals.

I read Heinlein. Heck, I read every sf book in the library, but I wasn't thrilled by them. Even as a kid I found **The Puppet Masters** creepy. The ending especially. The best of the lot, as I recall, was **The Moon is a Harsh Mistress**. I don't think I could stomach Heinlein's militarism today but maybe I ought to try to reread some. I just read a random Simak – **Cemetery World**. Slight but fun. Andre Norton was the author who appealed to me most, but I also liked Lester del Rey's juveniles, Jules Verne and **When Worlds Collide**. Not that I remember much of anything about any of them.

I'm with you, I don't care about action in books. I just read one of these urban fantasy/paranormal mysteries and most of the book -- the whole second half – was nothing but chasing and fighting and shooting. I don't mind action, in its place, but I don't think books do action all that well compared to movies anyway. Surely with sound and visuals, a movie is going to give a bigger adrenalin rush. To me, the trend toward books mimicking action movies is a misuse of the medium. Books are better at appealing to the intellect. One of my favorite mystery writers is George Simenon. His detective Maigret does hardly anything but talk to people, observe and ponder. Fascinating. But, OK, I am inconsistent, I do sometimes enjoy a Mickey Spillane, but he is so over the top!

Finally, very nice cover by **Sheryl [Birkhead]** and interior art by **Brad [Foster]**. And I got a kick out of the two presidents' story. Those two really come to life and I look forward to the next installment.

[While I read few “genre” mysteries, I prefer those which appeal to the intellect, such as Agatha Christie and *Brother Cadfael*. I've never read a Spillane, and really have no desire to do so.]

Lloyd Penney

December 2, 2008

Hallowe'en was just another day for us...if there were any Hallowe'en parties going on, we weren't invited, but that's okay...I am still working evenings, and we probably wouldn't have been able to go anyway. It was just another working evening, and when I got home, Yvonne said they'd had no one knocking at the door. I think the neighbourhood kids have been discouraged from trying to get into the building...they probably wouldn't be let in, anyway.

I have always been a fan of Isaac Asimov's, possibly since he was among the first SF authors I discovered. I've read so much of his work, probably because he wrote so much. I discovered Heinlein fairly late because I didn't have access to his juvenile novels, and since I haven't read much of his work because of his politics, among other things.

There's Slick Willie still trying to sell you a bill of goods, no matter what timeline he's in. Not being an American, I still agree that this past US federal election is very important...Barack

Obama will have to do a lot of apologizing on behalf of the US and Dubya, and start making friends again. There's a lot of burnt bridges to rebuild. If in the story, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton weren't presidents, I wonder who was? Stay tuned for Part 2?

[Among the numerous challenges facing Obama is that of rebuilding America's reputation around the world. That might actually be more difficult than dealing with the shattered economy.]

Robert Kennedy

1779 Ciprian Ave / Camarillo, CA 93010-2451 / (805) 987-2164

robertk@cipcug.org

Dec 12, 2008

John Purcell: You made reference to "Senator Joe McCarthy's Committee on Un-American Activities" (#131). I don't remember the name of McCarthy's committee, but that wasn't it. You have apparently confused it with the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

#134 – Excellent bear photo on the cover!

Lloyd Penny: What wrong with a "gun-totin' Hockey Mom"? Sounds like my kind of woman.

Eric Mayer: For 25 or more years I got up at 5:00 a.m. to go to work. One gets use to it. When in school I had several 7:00 a.m. classes. That was tough, but manageable. Now that I'm retired I'm lucky if I get up before 8:00 a.m. unless there is a real reason to do so.

#135 – Excellent commentary on **Joe Major's** *Heinlein's Children*. I have very much enjoyed my copy and recommend it to anyone interested in Robert Heinlein.

I have to agree with you that the recent election just may be the most important since 1932. It is certainly the first time since FDR that voters have elected a Radical Leftist as President. However, I think that the first seismic change in the presidency was the election of Andrew Jackson. Anyway, during the recent campaign we were told that a McCain election would be a third Bush term. It's starting to look like Obama's will be a third Clinton term. Overall his picks, with a few exceptions, for various positions do not look that bad. The Attorney General designate has baggage. The Homeland Security head is not qualified for the job. She is certainly qualified for other positions, just not Homeland Security. Then there's a Constitutional problem with Hillary as Secretary of State that I'm sure will be found a way to get around. What does bother me is a Vice President who thinks that "jobs" is a three letter word and that when the stock market crashed FDR got on television to calm the American people. Good lord!

"Slick Willie's Used Car World" is most interesting. I look forward to seeing where you are going with the story.

"On The Lighter Side" by Bill Sabella (a brother?) was great.

January 02, 2009

Thank you for #136. The cover by Julia Morgan-Scott is great. My all-time favorite cover by her is the "Armadillo Ladies" cover on *Mimosa 21*. Why she has never been nominated for a HUGO is beyond me.

[Ever since George H. Bush attacked Michael Dukakis for being a liberal, Republicans have targeted all Democrats as "Far Leftists." Obama is only moderately liberal, nor do I think a third Clinton term will be that bad either. Better than a third W. term. Obama's Cabinet picks are not any worse (or any better) than those of other recent presidents. We can find problems with nearly all of them. / What is the Constitutional problem with Hillary? The only problems I've heard are with people donating to her husband's charitable organization. / Bill Sabella is my cousin, although his mother was my mother's sister and his father was my father's brother, so we have very similar genes.]

Eric Mayer

Jan 10, 2009

This seems to be my month for dashing off short locs and explaining to those few who receive them that between winter, and deadlines and my growing awareness that I don't fit very well in today's fandom, I am heading towards total faanish fadeout.

I did enjoy reading your news. Sorry about Christmas. I still vividly recall my "sickest" holiday. My then wife and two grade school aged kids got up feeling dizzy. At first I figured, in the case of the adults, it was arising before dawn, but no. The kids managed to open their gifts, looked wistfully at them, started throwing up and retired to bed. The grownups followed. It was a totally debilitating bug. All four of us were pretty literally in bed for two days. Imagine kids staying in bed when the living floor is covered with new toys. Now that's sick.

I rarely read sf anymore, although occasionally I read, or re-read an old novel. Last year I enjoyed Michael Moorcock's **An Alien Heat** which I hated decades ago and never finished. Alfred Bester's **The Stars My Destination** lived up to my fond memory of it, as did Jules Verne's **From the Earth to the Moon**. I guess I just prefer old-fashioned sf. Currently, my project is to read some philosophy, although I don't now how far I'll get. I think understanding philosophy requires some guidance and discussion. I re-read Will Durant's **The Story of Philosophy** and read for the first time Bertrand Russell's **Problems in Philosophy**, trying to get some perspective.

Enjoyed the conclusion of your story. You're right, Bill is a better salesman than Jimmy. And Lodge as president, that's a twist I haven't read before. I admit, I supported Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge in 1960. I had a button -- "Experience Counts." I mean to say, Nixon had experience because he had been Vice President and Lodge...well..with a name like that...Hey, I

was ten. Ten year-olds are mostly authoritarians at heart. Well, used to taking orders at least, making them natural Republicans.

That cover is spectacular by the way. Now I'd better go and continuing gafiating.

[I have been publishing **VoP** regularly as an apazine since the mid-1980s, and I still do not feel that I fit well into fandom, yet that has not stopped me from continuing to publish. I doubt if you can be more of an outsider than I am, so don't go into total gafiation, whatever you do! **VoP** cannot afford to lose one of the few loccers it has. / Our stomach virus sounds much milder than that of your family. *ouch* / I enjoy rereading old fiction, which is one of the reasons I have been trying (mostly unsuccessfully) to cut back on my buying new books. While I do have some interest in philosophy, it pales next to my interest in history and archaeology, so I doubt if I will be doing much reading in that area in the foreseeable future.]

R. Graeme Cameron

Jan 11, 2009

rgraeme@shaw.ca

Beautiful cover by Julia Morgan-Scott. The orange and red makes it vivid, yet the blue backgroundscape is soothing and calming. Interesting juxtaposition of mood.

Your earliest exposure to SF included reading magazines on a regular basis. At about the same time, early 1960s, I concentrated on building up my pocketbook collection. Magazines I found disappointing, in that often none of the stories appealed to me. So I gave up. Never collected them. Instead, once I had found an author I liked, I would snap up any pocketbook collection of his/her (I liked Andre Norton) short stories. The only time I bought an anthology of assorted authors was when the theme appealed to me, such as all "First Contact" stories, or all "Landing on Mars" stories. Got much better results that way in terms of reading pleasure.

So to recap, in general I would "acquire" an author by picking up at least one of his novels and liking it, and only then turn to his short fiction. The one disappointment in utilizing that method turned out to be Frank Herbert; I thought his short fiction very poor.

Ah, ah, mustn't forget one important exception. I would buy anthologies by editors whose judgment I trusted; Pohl for instance, or Moskowitz. Never got steered wrong there.

I see **Chester Cuthbert** supplied some of your missing issues. Good old Chester. He was a generous source to many. The BCSFA/WCSFA archive owes its complete set of Norman G. Browne's **Vanations** (from the 1950s) to him, and several other rare donations as well. He successfully left his enormous collection of books and magazines to a local university, and I trust that includes his Harry Warner Jr.-like collection of fanzines also.

Farmer's *Riverworld* series I always liked. I'm a real sucker for alternate history, and what could be more fascinating than all the historical rogues in history interacting with each other? And all starting from scratch as it were. The series depends on character depiction, for otherwise the usual games of power & greed would tend to blend into a sameness after a while. Fortunately

Farmer succeeds in anchoring his readers interest on the various personalities involved.

Most of my reading in 2008 involved rereading books in my collection (I can't afford new ones), and most books read were ancient literature or books on archaeology. I think the only fiction I tackled was **I, Claudius & Claudius The God** by Robert Graves. And then, naturally, I read HIS principle source, **The Twelve Caesars** by Suetonius. Hmm, don't think I read ANY science fiction. Typical faned. No, wait a mo..... that's right, I did haul out H.G. Wells, namely **War of the Worlds & First Men In the Moon**. Not exactly cutting edge, but thoroughly enjoyable. My finances may tentatively be in better shape this 2009, so I may start picking up the odd SF pocket book or two. Offhand though, I'd prefer to revisit some of my favourite books of yore rather than take a chance on authors unfamiliar to me.

For years I kept a list of the books I read, but after a while I started feeling pressured to match the previous year's input. Once I got up to a book a day I realized I wasn't enjoying the experience anymore. So I threw out the list and slowed down. Lately, because of my heavy fanac load, I read maybe two or three books a month..... But I ENJOY them!

Though I like alternate history, I found "Slick Willie's Used Car Lot" rather sad and a bit depressing. But then all of us have probably done better in at least one alternate universe, and probably a lot worse in the majority of others. If true, it would be natural to possess a vague sense of disquiet over opportunities never presented, yet at the same time be somewhat happy because of the nagging feeling that things are a lot worse, somewhere, sometime, if only you could "remember". They say Nietzsche went mad because he feared to live his life over again. Imagine how much sooner he would have fallen apart at the prospect of an infinite number of lives much worse than he had already experienced! But then, he was never a jolly sort to begin with. At any rate, speaking for myself, one universe at a time is good enough for me.

[Two or three books per month is my reading pace during school, although I expand somewhat during the summer. Until the mid-1990s I read all the acclaimed sf each year, whether it appealed to me or not, feeling some stupid obligation to "keep up" with the field. Ever since then I only read books that suit my taste, which is much more enjoyable.]

Lloyd Penney

Jan 12, 2009

I've got a few moments to make some cutting remarks about **Visions of Paradise** 136. Hope you got that large joke file I sent to you.

Discovering SF...that was quite a Christmas present. I have a few pulps that go back into the 50s, and I have read them, but I don't think I'd want to collect them...I'd be too worried about keeping them in a suitable environment for such old paper. I wouldn't want them to flake apart on my shelves. And there's another problem...not enough shelves. Whenever I see something I might like to buy, I usually ask myself do I really want it, what would we use it for, and where would I put it. I have saved a lot of money over the years because of those questions.

Where in Canada was Priscilla born, and what college or university would she like to go to? I've

noticed that a lot of community colleges are now converting themselves into universities for added government funding, and the ability to issue degrees. I agree with the former governors on Obama's cabinet...there's a lot of smart people there, and many without party affiliation. Up here, we are pleased to see that Obama is going back to tradition and taking his first foreign trip as president to Canada and Ottawa. Relations with Dubya have been iffy, no matter who the prime minister has been, so I hope that will change for the better, and that Obama and Stephen Harper won't "misunderestimate" each other.

I tried to read Farmer's *Riverworld* series, I really did...but I failed. I know a series is bad when I actively want to avoid going any further, and that happened with the series. Robinson's *Mars* series was a good one, and I recently finished Philip Pullman's *Dark Materials* trilogy, and Wil McCarthy's *Queendom of Sol* series of four books, an excellent read. Currently, I am reading Nalo Hopkinson's **Brown Girl in the Ring**.

That Gonzales must have been a real salesman, to talk a used car dealer into running for the presidency. Such a convincing salesman must be from an alternate dimension; not sure we have anyone like that here, or anyone who could swallow that pitch so easily.

Ah, short but sweet. I hope the joke file makes up for it. Take care, stay warm (we are expecting temperatures of around -20C in a couple of days) and see you next issue.

[Priscilla is from Ontario, the child of immigrant parents; her mother is from China and her father is from India. Her first choice is McMaster's, but she does not expect to get accepted into it since she had to apply as a foreigner rather than a native since she is a permanent resident in the U.S. / It's interesting that we agree about the merits of the *Mars* and *Dark Materials* but disagree about Farmer's *Riverworld* series. I wonder if that means I should look into McCarthy's series or not?]

Henry L. Welch

knarley@welchcastle.com

Jan 22, 2009

My wife and I greatly enjoyed **Pillars of the Earth** and **World Without End** which we have as books on tape (or rather CD). I thought the later was a bit racier than the first and made it inappropriate fare when the children were in the car.

You do know that burning copies of DVDs (e.g. *Star Trek*) is a copyright violation. It is no different than someone making a photocopy of one of your books.

[Of course I know that, and I would never accept copies of any movie or tv series in lieu of buying it. But I have no intention of ever buying the original *Star Trek* series, so I do not feel that I am cheating anybody out of money by accepting the burned CD.]

WAHF: Alex Slate

On The Lighter Side

Jokes By Lloyd Penney

A Greek and a Scotsman were sitting in a Starbuck's cafe one day discussing who had the superior culture.

Over triple lattes the Greek guy says, 'Well, we Greeks built the Parthenon,' arching his eyebrows.

The Scotsman then replies, 'Well... it was the Scots that discovered the Summer and Winter Solstices.'

The Greek retorts, 'We Greeks gave birth to advanced mathematics.'

The Scotsman, nodding in agreement, says, 'Scots were the ones who built the first timepieces and calendars.'

And so on until the Greek comes up with what he thinks will end the discussion. With a flourish of finality he says, 'The Greeks were the ones who invented sex!'

The Scotsman replies, 'Aye, that is true, but it was we Scots who introduced it to women.'

*

The FBI had an opening for an assassin. After all the background checks, interviews and testing were done, there were 3 finalists; two men and a woman.

For the final test, the FBI agents took one of the men to a large metal door and handed him a gun. 'We must know that you will follow your instructions no matter what the circumstances.' Inside the room you will find your wife sitting in a chair . . . Kill her!!' The man said, 'You can't be serious. I could never shoot my wife.' The agent said, 'Then you're not the right man for this job. Take your wife and go home.'

The second man was given the same instructions. He took the gun and went into the room. All was quiet for about 5 minutes. The man came out with tears in his eyes, 'I tried, but I can't kill my wife.' The agent said, "You don't have what it takes. Take your wife home.'

Finally, it was the woman's turn.. She was given the same instructions, to kill her husband. She took the gun and went into the room. Shots were heard, one after another. They heard screaming, crashing, banging on the walls.

After a few minutes, all was quiet. The door opened slowly and there stood the woman, wiping the sweat from her brow. 'This gun is loaded with blanks' she said. 'I had to beat him to death with the chair.'