

Visions of Paradise #138



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Out of The Depths

In the late 1970s, one of my correspondents was a guy named Ed Byers. Ed contacted me out of the blue and asked if I would like to exchange manuscripts for critiquing. Since I was spending most of my non-working time writing fiction then, the chance to have my mss. critiqued was too good an opportunity to pass by.

For the next half-dozen years, Ed and I exchanged mss. His were very professional, and my comments were usually few and mostly relegated to occasional word choices and sentence structure. Every ms. of his I critiqued invariably sold to **Analog**, sometimes with my suggested changes, sometimes without them. None of my stories which Ed critiqued sold, even though I always incorporated Ed's suggestions into them. But it was not Ed's fault, since I had never sold any story previously, so how could he be expected to turn a sow's ear into a silk purse?

In 1980 Ed suggested that we collaborate on a story. At first I was intimidated; after all, by then he had quite a few stories published in **Analog**, while I was still unpublished. Nor was there any doubt that he was a much superior writer to me. But perhaps the chance to collaborate with somebody on Ed's level would help my writing, and what did I have to lose by trying? So I agreed.

Ed proposed a plot for the story, as well as an outline. The format of the collaboration was simple: he would write the first scene, then I would edit it and write the second scene. We would continue this process until the story was finished, after which Ed would give it a final going over. I agreed, and Ed sent me the first scene. It was superb, and needed absolutely no revision by me. I struggled to write a second scene that would at least come close to his level. Eventually, not totally satisfied, I sent it back to him.

When Ed sent me the third scene, I noticed immediately that he had altered about 75% of what I had written for scene two. The germ of it was still there, but not a lot else. And, of course, he had improved it considerably. His third scene was also superb. So with considerable trepidation I wrote the fourth scene, and sent it back to Ed who to write the last scene.

When Ed sent the completed story back, my fourth scene was almost unrecognizable, much better than it had been, and Ed's concluding scene was also very good. I waited awhile before contacting Ed, then I sent him a letter telling him that my conscience would not allow me to accept 50% of the credit (as well as half any money, although that was a secondary consideration) for a story which was about 90% his work and only 10% mine.

Ed was somewhat dismayed by my letter, but when I basically insisted he went along with my request. He submitted the story to **Analog** and sold it under the title "The Misfits." It was published in 1981 and received fairly widespread acclaim, finishing 5th in the annual *Analytical Laboratory* Poll.

Of course, when I saw "Misfits" in **Analog**, I immediately regretted my pangs of conscience and wished my name had appeared on the story, but that's life. At least Ed recognized my small

contribution to the story. After he died prematurely of cancer a few years later, nobody else knew of it until now.

2008 update

This past summer I inventoried my science fiction collection. In addition to my books, I also had 1,400 prozines, mostly **Galaxy** (the complete collection of 247 issues), **F&SF** (407 issues), **Asimov's** (207 issues), **Worlds of IF** (165 issues) and an assortment of others. I have read nearly all of them, the exception being the 1950s **Galaxy** which I bought a few years ago from Chester Cuthbert and have been going through very slowly.

I also had 155 **Analog** from the late 1960s through the early 1980s. Those are the magazines I realized I was least likely to reread, so why shouldn't I give them to somebody who might enjoy reading them himself? My friend George is a Physics teacher at my school, and a big sf fan with whom I discuss sf regularly. I asked him, and he told me he was interested in the **Analog**. I gave him about 100 issues, keeping those with stories I was likely to read again by such writers as Robert Silverberg, George R. R. Martin, Gordon R. Dickson, James H. Schmitz, Joan Vinge, and, of course, Ed Byers.

But I totally forgot about "Misfits," and two days after I gave George the issues of **Analog**, I went running upstairs and quickly scanned through all the remaining issues. There were many fine stories by Edward A. Byers, but *no* "Misfits." I had given away my only copy of my only (almost) professional publication! Argghh!!

Fortunately, George is a gentleman who found the 14 September 1981 issue and returned it to me. Immediately I reread it, and it was definitely too damned good for me to have written. I was correct to remove my name from the story.

*

25 random facts about me...

1	I still enjoy reading comic books, mostly DC Comics from their "Silver Age" of the 1960s
2	Although I don't watch current television shows, I watch dvd's of <i>M*A*S*H</i> and <i>Star Trek: the Next Generation</i>
3	I attended my first science fiction convention in 1967 in New York City where I witnessed two screaming arguments, the first between Harlan Ellison and John Pierce about the New Wave, the second between Lester del Rey and Alexei Panshin about an editor's right to alter a story as he sees fit.
4	The first science fiction magazine I read was the January, 1963 issue of Worlds of IF
5	My first election was 1972 when the choice was Richard Nixon or George McGovern. *ugh*

6	While in college I decided I wanted to be a professional science fiction writer
7	I attended <i>Clarion West</i> in 1972 and was told by Harlan Ellison to give up writing
8	I decided to become a teacher because I believed it would give me lots of time to write
9	I turned out to be a considerably better teacher (I think!) than a writer
10	I have a stack of unpublished manuscripts which I wrote before computers and which only exist in a single typewritten copy each
11	My favorite writer has progressed from Clifford D. Simak to Robert Silverberg to Michael Bishop to Kim Stanley Robinson
12	I grew up listening to WABC-AM rock and roll radio as a child and still love rock music
13	My favorite artist progressed from Dion to the Dave Clark 5 to the Moody Blues to the Kinks to Bruce Springsteen to Chris de Burgh to Richard Thompson
14	I prefer <i>progressive rock</i> to any other type of music
15	For me science fiction is about future history much more than science or technology
16	I generally prefer planetary romances to space opera
17	I have created my own future history and have set much of my own fiction in it
18	I should spend more time writing fiction, even though it has no readership while my nonfiction has a regular audience
19	I have two big regrets. One is that I have never been able to publish any science fiction
20	My other regret is that I have always been unable to make personal connections in sf fandom
21	How can I possibly retire when I love spending time with my students so much?
22	I do not meditate nearly as much as I should
23	Most people are too selfish to care about the common good, or spend time and effort doing anything unless it benefits themselves, which is the leading cause for most of the troubles in the world
24	I am friendlier with more people I have never met in person than with people I have actually met
25	Too many books too little time

Some random thoughts...

I have enjoyed reading science fiction magazines most of my life, but a decade ago I let all my subscriptions lapse because I no longer had time to keep up with monthly magazines. Still I've always missed getting an sf magazine in the mail periodically, so when the best surviving magazine **Fantasy & Science Fiction** recently cut back their publication from 12 times per year (at 160 pages each issue) to 6 times (256 pages), I took the opportunity to renew my subscription to it. I await much great reading.

I've been thinking lately about two kinds of people: those who are mediocre in their career or personal relationships and those who excel in one or the other. When people are mediocre and blend into the crowd, others tend to overlook them and have few strong feelings towards them. But when mediocre people strive for the limelight, they incur a lot of ridicule behind their back. I know two people who certainly qualify in this latter category. One is a principal of a nearby high school and he is the subject of so much ridicule that, if he ever knew, he would be mortified for life. The other is just clueless and really believes he is admired by others, while in fact he is viewed precisely the opposite.

When people excel and blend into the crowd for whatever reason (personal preference, insecurity in their talents), they are often missing opportunities to succeed at a higher level and perhaps earn greater happiness. But usually they are content within themselves, enjoying the warm feelings of their peers without aspirations for anything else. People who excel and are in the limelight tend to be the leaders and movers around which other people orbit, which incurs high demands on those people's time and talents. I'm not sure which situation I would prefer to be in, so long as I could excel rather than be mediocre.

As the stock market keeps free-falling, and I regret my decision several years ago not to pull out of it, I realize that my decision to spend my last thirty years in a profession with relatively low salary but guaranteed pension and medical benefits actually made good financial sense in addition to being fulfilling years for me.

I have not seen any of the movies nominated for an Academy Award, but when they are released in video I hope to see both *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Frost/Nixon*. I have the least interest in *Benjamin Button* since it is a *very* old fantasy concept (going at least as far back as Merlin the Magician) which will probably disappoint me as most movies based on f&sf do.

Why is it that the students who spend the most time with me in the Math Lab tend to be those who suffer the most in my class? I feel a bit like Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde as I counsel them for their stress which I am probably as much responsible for as any other teacher.

My current car came with satellite radio a few years ago, which will expire in April. Now they want me to pay \$11.00 month to retain it, which seems exorbitant except that is the only radio which actually covers the entire spectrum of music and plays lots of great stuff. But I do not do enough driving to justify \$130 per year for music. I will probably start downloading cds onto my Ipod and listen to it and several local college stations instead.

The Passing Scene

February 2009

It started snowing Tuesday night, Feb 3, but it left only 4" of snow on the ground, quite a decrease from the original prediction for 2 feet of snow. I snow-blowed and shoveled after supper, but because it barely snowed at all overnight, I did not even get a delayed opening.

Eighth Grade Parents Orientation is when dozens of incoming parents visit PHS at night to talk with teachers about their children's prospective schedules. It's a long night, but one I do not mind. A less enthralling night was our quarterly *Target Teach* grading session, which is tedious and very long because the other graders spend as much time chatting as grading, while I would prefer getting finished as quickly as possible.

I've been chatting a bit with Anjana recently. She is lonely at college and wants to live with her parents and commute. Some of this is a reaction to her mom having stayed in India working all three years Anjana was at my school, while her sister was away at college, so she lived alone with her dad. I think she misses her mom and wants to be with her again. The problem is that her dad is a consultant whose contract expires at the end of this month, so he does not know where he will be working afterwards. Anjana has to wait to know which schools to apply to, but application deadlines for most schools are approaching. I hope things work out for her.

The regional *Academic Decathlon* competition was held recently, and Li Li won the gold medal in most of the individual categories, so our school was regional champion for the first time ever. However, when the individual results were tallied, the judges made a big mistake which cost Li Li 600 points so that she finished in third place. She noticed the scoring error herself, and told the advisor who contacted the judges. Not only was her gold medal at stake, but \$200 as well. Fortunately the Ac Dec director corrected the error and Li Li will receive her gold medal and money at the forthcoming state competition.

My former student Isis has been going to school for massage therapy, and is currently doing her 120 hour practicum to become fully-certified. Since Jean and I enjoyed the massage she gave us at our house a few months ago, I went after school one day for another massage. She gives a very good massage, including the lower back which feels as good as what my chiropractor does for me. I immediately recommended her to Andy when I got home.

I am really fond of one of my Honors Algebra 2 classes which is the most brilliant class I've had in nearly a decade. Several of them spend time in the Math Lab doing math or chatting with me. Recently they came to discuss their schedules for next year, but eventually the conversation drifted around to Li Li and eventually Fei Fei and some of the things she has accomplished since she graduated high school. Ironically, all of my regular visitors this year are Chinese, instead of the usual cross-Asian mix I get there. Mei spends more time in the Math Lab than anybody since Preeti graduated three years ago.

The thought of not teaching this class AP Calculus in two years because of retirement already

saddens me. If next year is another good year, I don't know how I can possibly make the decision to retire, if I will ever be able to do it.

There are a lot of germs traveling around school, especially in the Math Lab which has no windows or ventilation. Nearly everybody who spends time there has gotten sick, including Jean who was so miserable at school she stayed home one day. We have decided that the germ vector must be Li Li since she is the only person in there who has not gotten even a cold the entire school year. Apparently her marvelous brain protects itself by sickening all the people around her (kind of like Kate Wilhelm's 1999 story "The Happiest Day of Her Life" in *F&SF*). (

I rarely get comments at my *VoP* blog, but my post "If I Selected the Hugo Awards" got comments from 5 people. This is how I find new blogs to read and occasionally new correspondents as well. I'll definitely reprint that posting here sometime.

Perona Farms, where Mark and Kate are having their wedding reception, has a periodic showcase for bridal parties looking for bands, tuxedos, wedding gowns, florists and photographers. At those occasions they also have a food-tasting, and Jean, Mark, Kate, and Kate's mom so enjoyed the last one that our entire two families went this time. It was wonderful, a very good sampling of what they have available for the wedding menu. Their specialty is salmon which is so renowned they shipped a lot of it to the recent Super-Bowl.

I am the new Official Editor of FAPA, so the past few weeks I have been sorting zines into 40 hanging folders in a four-drawer file cabinet in my basement. With less than a week to go until the deadline, I received a surprising email from FAPA member **Peggy Rae Sapienza** who told me she would like to hand-deliver her zine while she and her husband John were traveling to Boston, and also take Jean and me to dinner. Jean was not feeling well all week, missing one day of school, so I went to dinner alone with Peggy Rae and John. We ate at Enzo's, a typical New Jersey pizzeria which is also a full-menu Italian restaurant. For somebody whose personal contact with other fans is virtually nonexistent, I really enjoyed chatting with them about sf, fandom, and FAPA, overall a very enjoyable two hours, which made me realize how much I miss by indulging my insecurity and rarely attending any cons the past thirty years.

I've begun thinking about where we should vacation this summer, so I was browsing locations online and think we should go either to Cape Cod or Outer Banks, NC. Obviously we are not making an instant decision on this. **Tom Sadler** and I have also mentioned that perhaps we should both get back into con-going, so that is something to consider if there is a summer con somewhere between Kentucky and New Jersey.

My *Indian Culture Club* had their traditional Winter Dance and, as usual, it went well because the kids put a lot of work into it, especially the officers who occasionally act like drill sergeants. Of course, Jean and I did not get home that night until 11:30 but for me at least, it was worth it.

Wondrous Stories

I am not a particularly big fan of westerns. They tend to be routine adventures with a minimum of characterization. When I am in the mood for some light reading, I may choose a Louis L'Amour novel, but not on a regular basis.

But there is one western author who defies the above description, Elmer Kelton. Nor is that just my opinion. Kelton has won far more awards for his writing than any other western writer, including the much more popular L'Amour. The Spur Award is selected by the western writers themselves, the equivalent of sf's Nebula Award. Kelton has won it 7 times, while other leading authors such as L'Amour, Larry McMurtry (**Lonesome Dove**), Leigh Brackett (**Follow the Free Wind**), Richard Matheson (**Journal of the Gun Years**) and Chad Oliver (**The Wolf is My Brother**) have only won it once each. Loren D. Estleman has won it three times, and a few authors, including Tony Hillerman have won it twice.

The best description I can give of Elmer Kelton is that his writing style is to western fiction what Kim Stanley Robinson is to science fiction: slow-paced, deliberate, very low-key emotionally, emphasis on the characters of the western people doing their best to survive amidst all the difficulties of life on the frontier. **The Day the Cowboys Quit** was about a cattle drive in which all the paid hands went on strike for better wages. **The Wolf and the Buffalo** examined the relationship between a black cowboy and a Native American.

But the best Elmer Kelton novel I have read so far is undoubtedly **The Time It Never Rained**. It is set in 1950s Texas and examines the struggles of ranchers during a drought which lasts several years. The main characters are Charlie Flagg, a 50ish rancher who survived the drought of 1933 and who is so stubbornly self-sufficient that he refuses to take money from the federal government, even when it is free and can help him afford to dig another much-needed well during the drought; his long-suffering wife Mary whose relationship with Charlie has cooled considerably over the years so that at times they seem as much working partners as spouses; his son Tom whose dream is to participate in rodeos and who abandons his father's ranch during the height of the drought to seek his dream.

Kelton explores several relationships in the novel, including that between Charlie and his family, as well as that between the ranchers themselves and that between the ranchers and the people with whom their work brings them in frequent contact, such as government representatives, the local banker whose loans keep many of them afloat during the drought, and the *chota* who are border patrol police.

Perhaps the second most important set of relationships Kelton examines after that of Charlie and his family is that between the *anglos* and the Mexicans. Charlie's land has two ranch houses, one for his family and one for the family of Lupe Flores, an American citizen who is Mexican and who would be considered Charlie's manager if their ranch was large enough to employ more than just the two of them as full-time employees. Charlie considers Lupe's family as his own second family, and he treats them with corresponding care, but their relationship displays the subtle racism of *anglos* dealing with Mexicans. Lupe and his family all refer to Charlie as

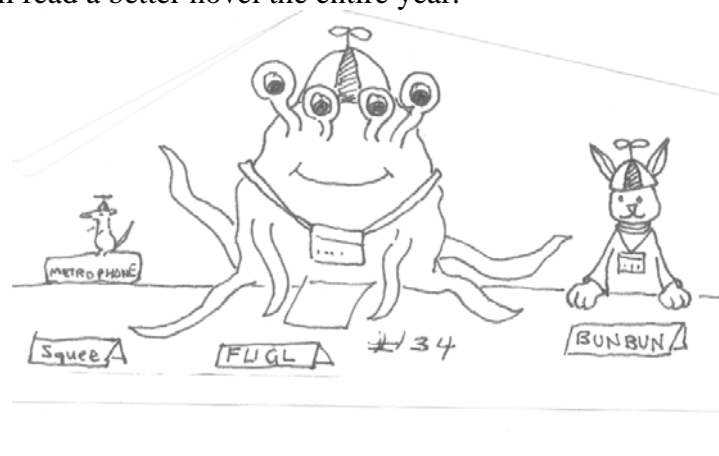
“Mister Charlie,” while his family refers to them by first names only. Charlie makes all the important decisions for both families, including occasionally taking care of Lupe’s family in situations they are perfectly capable of handling themselves. But Charlie never realizes he is condescending, believing he is doing what is best for his employees and close friends, even when Lupe's son rebels against Charlie's attitude towards him.

A third group in the novel is wetbacks, illegal Mexican immigrants whom Charlie will not hire, partly because of fear of the *chota* who are always nosing around seeking out illegals, and partly because the legal Mexicans resent when illegals are given the same treatment and benefits which they have earned legally themselves.

Most of the novel is concerned with the drought and how it affects Charlie’s ranch and his relationships. We watch his large herd of cattle winnow down steadily in size, since cattle are the least profitable animals compared to sheep and even goats, which are the most profitable but considered insulting animals for a rancher to raise. Still Charlie adapts slowly, and somewhat reluctantly, at times forced to make changes by the banker who refuses to extend Charlie’s credit another year unless he take steps to minimize his losses. Charlie is debt-free at the beginning of the novel—and the beginning of the drought—but as the novel progresses, he becomes just another struggling individual who owes his soul to the bank.

Kelton writes some powerful scenes which fit well into the novel. The “wolf hunt” for two coyotes who have been killing Charlie’s sheep; the time Charlie fell off his horse and sprained his ankle, and was unable to return home without the aid of a frightened wetback; the death of young Manuel Flores’ young horse. While the novel’s emotional level is tightly-controlled, the emotions do surface at times and are more effective because Kelton does not indulge in them any more than Charlie himself would do so.

The Time It Never Rained is a masterpiece that should be enjoyed by anybody who enjoys either great historical fiction or strong character studies. While Kelton is basically a writer of westerns, the novel’s 1950s settings escapes all the negative aspects of the genre (no good guys vs bad guys, no shootouts, no cowboys vs Indians) while retaining all that is strong about it. I recommend this novel very highly. It is the first novel I finished reading in 2009, and it is hard to imagine that I will read a better novel the entire year.



Listmania

This is a listing of f&sf writers by their number of Hugo and Nebula nominations through 2008 in fiction categories only. The list has a few surprises on it, at least for me. While I expected Robert Silverberg to top the list, I did not expect Mike Resnick and Michael Swanwick to be among those tied for second place. I make no comment on how this list relates to an author's relative talent.

Name ... Total nominations

Robert Silverberg ... 45	Kate Wilhelm ... 23	Jack Dann ... 14
Connie Willis ... 37	Lucius Shepard ... 21	Vernor Vinge ... 13
Ursula K Le Guin ... 37	James Tiptree, Jr. ... 19	Vonda N. McIntyre ... 13
Mike Resnick ... 37	Joe Haldeman ... 18	Michael Burstein ... 13
Michael Swanwick ... 37	Lois McMaster Bujold ... 18	Terry Bisson ... 12
Harlan Ellison ... 33	Samuel R Delany ... 18	Geoffrey A. Landis ... 12
Gene Wolfe ... 30	James Patrick Kelly ... 18	George Alec Effinger ... 12
George R. R. Martin ... 29	Greg Bear ... 17	Karen Joy Fowler ... 12
Roger Zelazny ... 28	Jack McDevitt ... 17	Maureen McHugh ... 12
Frederik Pohl ... 28	Greg Benford ... 16	Thomas M. Disch ... 12
Poul Anderson ... 27	Gardner Dozois ... 16	Joanna Russ ... 11
Larry Niven ... 27	Howard Waldrop ... 16	John Kessel ... 11
Fritz Leiber ... 24	David Brin ... 15	R.A. Lafferty ... 11
Orson Scott Card ... 24	Walter Jon Williams ... 15	Charles Stross ... 11
John Varley ... 24	Isaac Asimov ... 14	Gordon R. Dickson ... 10
Kim Stanley Robinson ... 24	Robert A Heinlein ... 14	Allen Steele ... 10
Michael Bishop ... 24	Clifford D. Simak ... 14	Jerry Pournelle ... 10
Bruce Sterling ... 24	William Gibson ... 14	
Nancy Kress ... 23	Robert Sawyer ... 14	

Here are the top nominees by specific award. First the Hugos...

Mike Resnick ... 26	Poul Anderson ... 15	Robert Sawyer ... 11
Robert Silverberg ... 23	Orson Scott Card ... 15	Lois McMaster Bujold ... 10
Connie Willis ... 23	John Varley ... 15	Nancy Kress ... 10
Michael Swanwick ... 21	Roger Zelazny ... 14	Michael Burstein ... 10
Ursula K Le Guin ... 20	Fritz Leiber ... 13	Robert A Heinlein ... 10
Larry Niven ... 19	Kim Stanley Robinson ... 13	Clifford D. Simak ... 10
Harlan Ellison ... 18	Bruce Sterling ... 13	Charles Stross ... 10
George R. R. Martin ... 16	David Brin ... 12	James Tiptree, Jr. ... 10

And next the Nebulas...

Robert Silverberg ... 22	Connie Willis ... 14	Fritz Leiber ... 11
Gene Wolfe ... 21	Roger Zelazny ... 14	Mike Resnick ... 11
Frederik Pohl ... 19	Jack Dann ... 13	Kim Stanley Robinson ... 11
Kate Wilhelm ... 18	Nancy Kress ... 13	Bruce Sterling ... 11
Ursula K Le Guin ... 17	George R. R. Martin ... 13	Samuel R Delany ... 10
Michael Swanwick ... 16	Lucius Shepard ... 13	Karen Joy Fowler ... 10
Michael Bishop ... 15	Poul Anderson ... 12	Joe Haldeman ... 10
Harlan Ellison ... 15	Greg Benford ... 12	James Patrick Kelly ... 10
Jack McDevitt ... 15	Gardner Dozois ... 11	Walter Jon Williams ... 10

Here is the ranking by total number of wins. Notice that Silverberg, the top overall nominee, is tied for 7th place here, while Poul Anderson and Joe Haldeman, who are among those tied for second most wins, are in 11th and 23rd place in nominations respectively. Obviously the relationship between being nominated for a major f&sf award and winning one is a tenuous one.

Connie Willis ... 16	Joe Haldeman ... 10	Roger Zelazny ... 8
Poul Anderson ... 10	Ursula K Le Guin ... 10	Lois McMaster Bujold ... 8
Harlan Ellison ... 10	Fritz Leiber ... 9	Robert Silverberg ... 8

And finally here is the unfortunate list of the writers with the most nominations without any wins...

Michael Burstein ... 13	Jerry Pournelle ... 10
Thomas M. Disch ... 12	Norman Spinrad ... 9

**HUMPTY DUMPTY
WAS PUSHED!**



Halcyon Days

Eric Mayer

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Feb 8, 2009

Always good to see a new **VoP**. Terrific cover by **Brad Foster**. Remarkable how he manages to create such a quantity of great covers and illos. I'm amazed he can come up with so many interesting ideas let alone execute them all.

This winter has been a bear hasn't it? It sounds like you have had more snow in New Jersey this year than we've had in Northeast Pennsylvania which is quite unusual, I think. However we've had endless small storms brushing us and the temperatures have been far below normal, with the result that the snow which has fallen has stayed. I haven't been able to get the car out for more than a month. Luckily Mary and I work at home. One great thing about working at home -- or retirement -- is that there's no need to commute. Not only is commuting a pain in the rear it also consumes a lot of time.

I can't see how I'd ever be able, financially, to retire, but really, working at home, not having to be under supervision at an office, not needing to commute, setting my own schedule, being free to refuse to work with people I don't want to work with (which I've had to do on a couple of occasions, unfortunately) ...I have nothing to complain about. I'm already enjoying many of the benefits of retirement.

Besides, I wouldn't want to try to fill all my time with fanac! Still, it is pretty hard to completely gafiate these days what with all the zines readily available in electronic format. In the old days, if you failed to loc for long enough, paper zines stopped arriving and you'd have to make an effort to get back on mailing lists. Today, even if I were "gafiated" I'd likely find myself thinking maybe I'd pop over to eFanzines to see what's up with **Bob Sabella**, or **Chris Garcia** or **John Purcell**. But I make no effort to "keep up" with fandom. I don't read fanzines that concentrate on topics that bore me, like what we all did at this or that convention 40 years ago. Most convention reports, I skip, to be honest. I might read one as a personal report by an acquaintance of what he's been up to, but I have no interest in cons per se.

Glancing at the loccol I see Barack Obama referred to as a radical leftist. Yeah, I wish! I'm not sure that his moderate approach to the disaster created by years of right wing governance by mythology and lies is going to be enough. I'm kind of afraid he'll do just enough to get the country back on its feet so the selfish crooks who got us into this mess can take over and start looting again.

I can see similarities between sf and historical fiction. Sf is usually set in a different time than the present. The past times and places of history might as well be alien worlds, and, let's face it, sf authors have drawn on history to imagine their futures. But it's funny how all books slip into the historical category. I just read John Updike's **Rabbit Run** and am now in the middle of

Appointment in Samarra by John O'Hara. Both were contemporary novels but both, for me, are now filled with interesting historical detail about the fifties and 1930. I doubt that the authors intended those details to attract much interest. At the time they were probably part of what readers took for granted.

[Winter is not ready to give up yet. As I write this, we are in the midst of the worst storm of the season with as much as 12" of snow predicted for today, and it's March ... I don't make any attempt to "keep up" with fandom either, only reading zines which interest me, otherwise my own minimal writing time would vanish totally. Fortunately, as a zine publisher myself, I do not need to worry about loosing zines if I am too busy to do so ... At **Historical Fiction Review** awhile ago there was a discussion as to what constitutes "historical fiction," and the general consensus was that it must be set 50 years in the past from when it is written. That seems an artificial requirement to me, since works by Dickens, Scott and Dumas satisfy all the requirements I need in my historical fiction.]

R Graeme Cameron

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Feb 9, 2009

Great cover by **Brad Foster** on the theme of the Mexican Day of the Dead. They sell chocolateskulls & such. Macabre to North American sensibilities, but part of Mexican culture predating the conquest. Thus the "happy face" aspect of the skulls is appropriate.

You see, to the ancient Mesoamericans the symbol of death was a rotting corpse, whereas bones freed from the contamination of flesh were seen as the seed kernel from which life would begin anew (the Aztecs and Maya believed in reincarnation). The bones contained the soul, or so they believed. So a pyramid festooned with carved stone skulls was a potent symbol of rebirth and new life. Likewise the infamous skull racks, once the flesh had rotted off. All in all, bones are a cheerful lot, in their tradition.

An extra nice touch that **Brad's** illo shows them floating about like so many helium-filled balloons.

Seems like everyone is having an unusual winter this year. Where I live on the West Coast of Canada we normally get a week of snow at most, this year more than a month's worth. Even so, nothing compared to the rest of Canada. Most of British Columbia gets months of snow, in some areas people have to dig to keep their houses clear, never mind their driveways. An old trick is to pull up your coat so that you're breathing air warmed by your body, makes a world of difference in extreme temperatures. Even better, stay inside with a glass of hot toddy. Works for me.

I agree that history is at the core of science fiction, at least in as much as most science fiction is a form of alternate history, including possible future history, as well as extrapolations from current history in the making. Or as Bill Gibson says, the best science fiction is really about today.

I don't know which stirred my 'sensa-wonda' first, reading about the ruins of Rome or about Martian ruins..... the tragic wonder of dead civilizations has equal appeal in either case. And of

course history is an endless source of non-modern viewpoints to be applied to alien mindsets by authors..... I would be very surprised to meet SF fans who are NOT interested in history..... Both the study of history AND the enjoyment of SF are useful exercises in escaping the rigid structure of the contemporary construct of what is 'normal'..... frees up the imagination. A worthwhile goal I says.....

Like **Lloyd Penney**, I too was a loner in my youth. I was lucky though, I had a mother who encouraged me to read, and who even understood that comic books were an excellent start! She was actually proud when I started collecting the 'Classics Illustrated' series, guessing rightly that soon I'd want to read the actual novels in question. I could always escape from dish duty if my mother saw I was reading a book. My brother, who rarely read books, was quite chuffed about this. On the other hand, no matter how good the TV show I was watching, it was scruff-of-the-neck off to the kitchen to wash the dishes. So I learned to ask immediately after dinner if it was okay to go off to my room and read. Ghu help me though if my mother sneaked upstairs in soft slippers and caught me playing with my toy soldiers instead! Anyway, still love reading. Great fun.

Lloyd also talks about retirement. I'd retire instantly if I won the lottery. In reality, with but a small union pension in the offing, I'll have to keep working past 65. I find it impossible to save. I live paycheque by paycheque, and if I lose my job I lose everything. Got no savings. Seems hardly fair, since apart from basic bills my money mostly goes towards food rather than exotic entertainment; my wife and I never eat out, rarely go to movies, rarely buy clothes, etc., etc., yet we're always broke. I hate being working poor. Growing up in my father's household, he being an officer in the Royal Canadian Airforce, I always assumed I was middle class. But now my wife and I earn one third of the average family income, which puts us close to the official poverty level. Still, my wife's E-novels are earning some money. As she often says, "If my writings hit it big, you can retire and be my boy-toy." I'll settle for that, yes indeedy. A life of leisure, rather like that of Cicero with his numerous villas, is what I've always aimed for. Pity it's not going to happen. Oh well.

[I share the love of history that many sf fans have, and have done so my whole life. I can recall spending many hours in high school trying to figure out how Roman culture evolved into feudalism, and being frustrated that none of my high school history courses explained it.]

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What a terrible way to spend Christmas Eve, sick with a stomach flu. For many areas, this has been a very snowy winter, even snowier than last winter. We thought we'd be getting a ton of snow here, but right now, we're in a warm spell, and much of the mess is melting away. I'm tired of winter, and it's just past its halfway point. We're praying for an early spring.

Interesting that Pandora Books is in North Dakota, but has a Canadian suffix (.ca) for their web address. I seem to remember a Pandora Books store in Victoria on Vancouver Island when I

lived there.

I guess that historical fantasy would describe steampunk, given that in steampunk novels the Victorian times described in those novels is complex and beyond the historical fact. I have to admit that I'm getting more and more interested in this subgenre, and will have to do some serious reading to understand it further.

My loc...I am still working at SGS, and they have still not offered me a contract extension. I am not certain if there's a future there, but for the moment, I am working, and they are giving me paycheques.

Eric Mayer sums up my own reading tastes. For me, science fiction was from the beginning of the genre to the 80s and perhaps 90s. More modern SF just hasn't really caught my eye or my interest. I guess I will just continue to read my science fiction, and let others read the newer stuff.

I am thinking of reviewing your zine in my next fanzine review in **Askance**...I need to make commentary on a fanzine I'm fairly familiar with, so I think I'll add it in. In the meantime, off this goes to you, and see you next issue.

[Historical Fiction Review's article on steampunk is mostly concerned with movies, including *Moulin Rouge*, *The Matrix*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Edward Scissorhands* (I guess Johnny Depp is their "king of steampunk") and *Firefly*.]

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VoP #134: *Out of the Depths*. As a kid, I was as captivated as you were by a science fiction magazine I received. I believe I was twelve at the time. In fact, like you, it might very well have been **Worlds of If**. Unfortunately, I wasn't as much of a reader. I don't know what stories I actually read. I remember one that concerned a second Civil War with atomic cannons. It was over Racial Integration of Public Schools, a big issue in 1957. While I don't know what stories I actually read, I took it everywhere. Finally, I took it to an Uncle and Aunt's house, forgot about it when I left, and they threw it out.

Wondrous Stories. I like steampunk. However, recently, I have been reading actual Victorian science fiction: e.g., **Honeymoon in Space** by George Griffith and **Journey to Mars** by Gustavus Pope. Obviously there are no anachronisms. No computers in the Victorian era in these the real McCoy. Instead, their problem is a foggy crystal ball: the tendency is to have anti-gravity ships, currently considered an impossibility. On the other hand, only H.G. Wells thought to provide a radio for his intrepid explorer, in **The First Men in the Moon** (1901); something which we consider an everyday reality. That these stories are irrelevant to us turns off a lot of people. However, it turns me on because I enjoy trying to figure out where the authors' heads

were at.

Halcyon Days. A comment to **Lloyd Penney**. I don't have a Facebook page myself. I know an older man who was forced into one. Everyone at his organization was ordered to have one. He was not a happy camper. He certainly wasn't going to make the mistake a lot of young people make. They think it is where you badmouth your boss. That is until the boss logs in. Usually, however, the personal stuff has nothing to do with one's boss. When I happened to peer into my niece's, it had a lot on a rock band. It makes sense: her boy friend belongs to one.

VoP #135: *Wondrous Stories*. When, in some SF story, aliens are incredibly stupid, and the humans defeat them with one hand tied behind their back, it shows a lack of imagination. Also, a lack of consistency: how did the humans get into that mess to begin with?

So I'm not the only one. You too found **I Will Fear No Evil** almost unreadable.

I liked **Joe Major's Heinlein's Children**. I wasn't exactly a Heinlein Child. In my childhood, I probably read no more than one or two of his works. As I said, I wasn't a big reader then. However, now that I am interested in discovering the "world" of my boyhood, I am more interested in Heinlein. And in Joe's book. Now, I care that Heinlein was smack dab in the middle of the movements of his time. Civil rights, for one thing: a careful reading of one novel shows that the hero was Black, and a careful reading of another shows that the hero was Filipino. Also, **Starship Troopers** was a misguided effort to answer SANE, an anti-nuclear group. Even his early, confusing, mediocre effort, **Rocket Ship Galileo**, was in the middle of his time. What he said about the Nazis was what I heard as a kid. Also, what must have been on adult minds.

"Slick Willie's Used Car World," part 1. Your story about Slick Willie wasn't bad. Could Bill Clinton have been a master used car salesman and Jimmy Carter a failed one? You bet. Just a little change in events probably could have done it. So much of the universe is so poised that it could easily go one way or the other. Of course, the story sounds like the time traveler wants to make the timeline his, and our, timeline; in short, more like our idea of even keel than change.

VoP #136: *Out of the Depths*. I read only one Keith Laumer novel. I am afraid I was reading it a little faster than perhaps I should have. This is what I remember. Retief is caught among different aliens, including one species with wheels and Jewish accents. Then Retief makes a daring escape, which I couldn't understand. Thinking about it recently, I concluded because most 'daring' escapes are lame, it might be best that I didn't understand it. On the other hand, when I described my memories of the plot to someone who had been a Retief fan, he disagreed. He remembered Laumer's plots as making total sense.

Wondrous Stories. I think I read several of Farmer's *Riverworld* series. They were OK and the idea was fabulous. However, the last one was pretty bad, **Gods of Riverworld**. For a time, it was making conspiracy theories out of conspiracy theories. There were so many convolutions the plot stood on its head. Also, I found it a great anticlimax that Charles Lutwidge Dodson was the one who started Riverworld?

"Slick Willie's Used Car World," part 2. I once figured out that, logically, only two time travel scenarios have no paradoxes. In the first, time branches out in alternate timelines, and any travel back in time is only to an alternate timeline, where the traveler can't marry his grandmother, exactly – although perhaps someone like her. In the second scenario, the old timeline disappears forever, replaced by the timeline the time traveler has created. The time traveler who marries his

grandmother might remember his mother, father and childhood; but they have effectively disappeared.

Most writers, if they consciously use any of these, use the latter scenario. John Brunner used it in **Times without Number** (1969). If I remember correctly, his hero destroys pasts until he inadvertently gets the current present. However, you seem to be using the former scenario. Gonzalez has gone back to an alternate timeline, which he wishes to remake as close as possible to this one.

[I haven't gotten past **The Fabulous Riverboat** yet, but I always thought **Gods of Riverworld** was a side-work, with the main storyline ending with **The Magic Labyrinth**. I guess I'll find out when I get that far.]

On The Lighter Side

An atheist walking through the woods, enjoying the sights and sounds of nature. As he was walking alongside the river he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. He turned to look and saw a 7-foot grizzly charge towards him. The atheist ran as fast as he could up the path. He looked over his shoulder and saw that the bear was closing in on him. He looked over his shoulder again, and the bear was even closer. He tripped and fell on the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up but saw the bear right on top of him, reaching for him with his left paw and raising his right paw to strike him. At that instant the Atheist cried out: "Oh God! Help me!..."

Time stopped. The bear froze. The forest was silent.

As a bright light shone upon the man, a voice came out of the sky: "This is God! For your whole life you have denied my very existence but now because your life is in danger you ask for help?!"

"Well, yes." replied the atheist.

"Well, I will help you but you must promise to become a Christian and follow a Christian life and example."

The atheist replied, "How about this God? I will remain an atheist but YOU make the BEAR a CHRISTIAN."

"As you wish." replied God.

The light went out. The sounds of the forest resumed. And then the bear dropped his right paw, brought both paws together and bowed his head and spoke: "Lord, bless this food, which I am about to receive from thy bounty through Christ our Lord, Amen. "