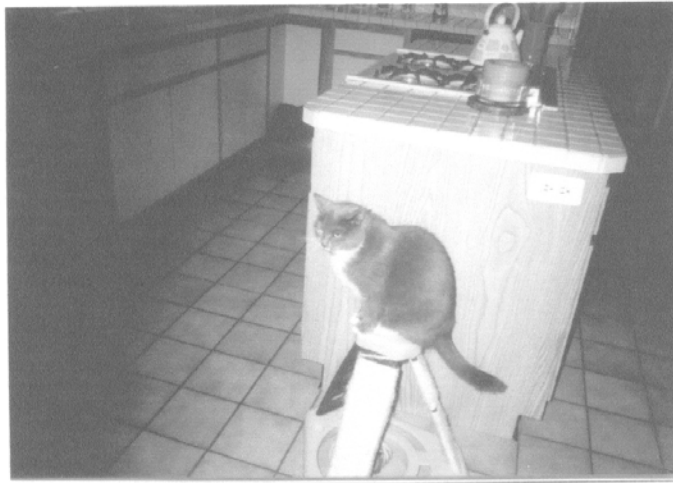


VISIONS OF PARADISE

#140



A young Misty



Tiger watching an ailing Misty



Visions of Paradise #140

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Cover

top ... a young Misty

bottom Tiger watching an ailing Misty

This issue is dedicated to Misty

1993-2009

R.I.P.

The Passing Scene

April 2009

I took off from school on the day immediately before our Spring Break, because it was the only day I could get an appointment with my eye doctor before he took a vacation himself. My left eye had been bothering me for about three weeks and fortunately he found nothing more than the usual wrong with it.

Right before the break the teachers in my district finally ratified a contract after being without one since last June. Considering the economic conditions, it was a fair contract which only required us to give up the “traditional” medical plan which about 1/3 of our members had, so that everybody will henceforth be part of the PPO. Since I have been in the PPO since it was first offered as an option ten years ago, I actually made out a bit better since the PPO was upgraded a bit as a balance to losing the traditional plan.

Spring Break was the week before Easter, which made it a bit busier than usual. Jean’s aunt Ceil arrived the prior Saturday, when it was so windy that her flight from Syracuse was delayed for several hours. Jean and I feared she would have to stay overnight in the airport, but she arrived early in the evening.

Jean bought a new book about maintaining a healthy lifestyle—not the first such book we have—and much of it encourages a vegetarian lifestyle, replacing meat and dairy products with fish, fiber and fruits/vegetables. Jean and I have decent, if not perfect, diets. My breakfasts consist of either granola or oatmeal with blueberries, strawberries or raisins and a glass of juice. Lunches alternate between rice or noodles with some topping (usually tomato-based) or turkey sandwiches and yogurt, always with a piece of fruit and some carrots/celery/fennel. Dinners have been totally meat-free the past week and always include a salad. Last Sunday and Monday was lentil soup and homemade pizza. Tuesday was fish sandwiches. Wednesday was a potato and egg frittata. Thursday was french toast. Friday we went to Red Lobster where we both ordered grilled seafood. Saturday was chili, the first meat of the week. Sunday was our usual soup, this time pea soup.

The biggest weakness in our diet is probably dairy products. I put milk on my breakfast cereal and drink another glass with dinner, although we always buy 1% fat. I eat low-fat yogurt about four times per week, and cheese occasionally. On a scale of 0-10 I rate our diet about a 7.5.

I definitely need to exercise more. Since school began last fall, I hardly walk except for weekends and vacations, and we only go to the YMCA once a week. Now that the weather is nicer, I am trying to walk or ride a bike more often. So far, my intent has been better than my execution though.

As usual, my family got together on Easter Saturday, this year at my brother Stephen’s house. Afterwards, Mark and Kate stayed at our house overnight, since they spent Easter with both families, going to her family for dinner and coming back here afterwards for dessert. Easter

dinner was quiet with only 6 people: Jean, Ceil, Andy, Fei Fei, Silvio and me. We had lots of food for dinner since Silvio barbecued chicken drumsticks and sausage in addition to the spiral ham Jean baked, plus we had mashed sweet potatoes, zucchini bread, broccoli and salad. It was almost a going-away dinner though since in another month Fei Fei will be leaving N.J. again as she relocates from Princeton to Stanford. ;

Returning to school after Spring Break was immediately hectic for two reasons: AP tests are in less than three weeks, and this is the time of year when I have evening activities several times each week. It started immediately Monday, 4/15, with *Target Teach* until 8:50 pm followed by *TTP* grading until 7:00 pm the next day.

Li Li invited me to the Valedictorian-Salutatorian dinner (which will be my 13th annual dinner), which made me very happy. Li Li has been my student 5 times since she has been at PHS: Honors Algebra 2 as a freshman—during which she also finished Honors Precalculus working in the back of the class with Jiang—AP calculus as a sophomore, AP Statistics as a junior, and 2 years of Independent Study junior and senior year during which she has done Multivariate Calculus, Differential Equations, Real Analysis and, currently, Advanced Probability. She is brilliant, having been ranked on the top 25 students in the New Jersey Math League (from among several thousand competing statewide) several times, and qualifying for the AIME every year of high school, with incredible scores of 7 last year and 6 this year (my typical student scores between 1 and 3 on that contest)! She is also very humble and highly-motivated, and I am hoping we will stay in contact when she goes to college.

The week of 4/20 was very busy at school because of rehearsals every night for the annual *Indian Culture Club* show. It was held Friday night, and was very successful, as it has been every year since the first one in 2007. I am also in the home stretch of preparing my AP Statistics and AP Calculus classes for the AP tests on May 5th and 6th. I think the classes are slightly better-prepared than last year, because I have been pushing them slightly more as well as refining my reviewing with them a bit. Hopefully the test results will reflect that.

Last summer the vet noticed that our older 15-year old Misty had a tumor on her chest which was inoperable. The past two months it grew so huge that she had trouble walking. On Friday, 4/24 the vet told Jean that the tumor was killing her, and that in as soon as two months Misty would not be able to walk anymore because of it. That news was like a jinx to Misty, because almost immediately she began deteriorating. By that weekend she was mostly lying down and sleeping, occasionally getting up for a brief 5-10' walk. She did very little eating or drinking, although fortunately she was not in any apparent pain, so we did not mind carrying her around a bit and caring for her like a baby.

She deteriorated steadily all week. Thursday her legs were so shaky that she was barely able to walk, and Friday morning she did not appear to be moving. Fortunately Andy was off from work that day, but Misty did not move the entire day. When Jean got home in the afternoon, Misty's body was stiff, so she was obviously dead for several hours. She and Andy buried her in a blanket in the woods behind the trampoline. Now we have two buried cats in the yard, since Fei Fei's cat Coki is buried beneath the pachysandra on the side of the house. Poor kitty...

Wondrous Stories

Roger Zelazny was probably the most frustrating of all my favorite sf authors. I can split his career into three distinct eras: from when I first discovered him in 1965 through about 1969 he was incomparable, towering over the sf field with such works as **This Immortal**, **Lord of Light**, **The Dream Master** and short fiction such as “A Rose For Ecclesiastes,” “The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth” and “This Mortal Mountain.”

From 1970 through 1978 he was a very good writer who never quite regained the brilliance of his first years. Highlights included the original *Amber* series, **Jack of Shadows**, **Today We Choose Faces** and **Doorways in the Sand**.

But after 1978 his fiction tended to be throwaways that he seemed to write without either thinking or revising. I totally disliked the second *Amber* trilogy, and most of his non-series novels were collaborations with Thomas T. Thomas, Fred Saberhagen, Robert Sheckley and Gerald Housman. Probably the only top-rank Zelazny-quality story he wrote in that period was the novella “24 View of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai.”

So when he announced in the 1990s that he was going to write two standalone sf novels, it was a major announcement, if a wary one, since there was equal likelihood the novels would be “latter-day” Zelazny rather than vintage Zelazny (or even 1970s Zelazny, which would be welcome as well). Then, of course, came the sad news that Roger Zelazny died in 1995 and his companion, writer Jane Lindskold, completed the two novels **Lord Demon** and **Donnerjack**. For years I did not read either one, memories of his collaborations with Robert Sheckley in my head. But when I found a copy of **Donnerjack** in a used bookstore, I figured I might as well give it a try.

Surprisingly, or maybe it shouldn't be, **Donnerjack** is a very good novel. The opening pages are typical Zelazny, if a bit dense, and the first few chapters are mostly scene-setting without much obvious purpose. But soon the story gets moving and there are echoes of 1970s Zelazny in it, circa **To Die in Italbar**. The story is set in two worlds, *Verité* (which is our world) and *Virtù* (an artificially-created virtual reality). The main character is John Donnerjack, a programmer in *Verité* but a legendary figure in *Virtù*. In *Virtù* he encounters Avra who is a being of that world rather than an avatar of a human from *Verité*, and whom he has the misfortune to fall in love with. Knowing that humans cannot interbreed with beings from the artificial world of *Virtù*. Donnerjack makes a deal with Lord Death to bring Avra to our world. The deal, of course, involves giving their first-born son to Lord Death, a deal which Donnerjack scoffs at because of the impossibility of a human from *Verité* mating with a being from *Virtù*, but which becomes the novel's main focus as Avra somehow becomes pregnant.

The plot becomes more developed as Donnerjack vanishes from its pages. His son Jay is raised in Donnerjack's Scottish castle (which he builds himself on the site of his ancestral home) by robots and “ghosts” from *Virtù*, while struggling to stay out of the grasp of Lord Death who wishes to claim his portion of the bargain made before John's death. Other characters enter the novel, including:

1. Lydia, a young girl from *Verité* who becomes impregnated by Ambry, a being from *Virtù* who is either one of that world's gods, or a legendary figure who has become godlike;
2. Link, a reporter investigating the Church of Elish, which worships the gods of *Virtù* who are apparently the same gods of ancient Sumer and Babylon and who, Link learns, are plotting to "cross over" into *Verité* where they can have another universe to rule;
3. Drum, a private investigator who works with Link on his investigations.

Link and Drum become involved with Lydia and Jay in what is a full-scale war brewing between deities in *Virtué*. While it sounds confusing, the book's near-600 pages give ample room for all the interwoven complications to stretch and be both comprehensible and reasonable. It ends up being a thriller which is neither mindless nor too fast-paced to be absorbing.

Large portions of **Donnerjack** are typical Zelazny. *Verité* is inhabited by a banshee and various ghosts, while *Virtù* can be accessed from *Verité* through a strange region of underground caves beneath Donnerjack's castle. There are wonderful scenes of pure Zelazny, and it is obvious throughout the novel that this was not just another throwaway, but a novel of serious intent.

Donnerjack's plot is considerably more complicated than typical Zelazny, which I credit—perhaps erroneously—to Lindsfold. But the combination of wonder and story-telling is very effective, and makes this the most interesting Zelazny book I have read since 1976's **Bridge of Ashes**. I definitely plan to read **Lord Demon** sometime, and perhaps even Zelazny's collaboration with Alfred Bester **Psychoshop**. It's nice to know that even after years of Zelazny squandering his talent, it was still there when he needed it.

*

Awhile ago I read the anthology **The Solaris Book of New Science Fiction**, and it contained a story entitled "The Farewell Party," by Eric Brown. It was a very slow-paced, deliberate story about Earth being visited by an alien race called the Kethani who offer all humans the option of being implanted with a device which will enable them to be resurrected after death, at which time they will have the choice of either returning to life on Earth or serving as emissaries of the Kethani to distant stars.

I learned soon afterwards that "The Farewell Party" was part of a series of stories about the Kethani which were recently released in book form as **Kethani**. All the stories take place in the same English village where a small group of people meet every Tuesday night at a local pub. Each of the group gets their own story in the book, which is a traditional fix-up which works very well. One man is a "ferryman," the name given to humans who work for the Kethani transporting deceased people to the "stations" where they are revived. Another lost his wife shortly before the arrival of the Kethani, thus she was never implanted or revived. He buried his grief in an affair with a student who planned to study philosophy in college but had no intention of being implanted herself. Another member of the group was never implanted himself, and we learn why in a long story about his falling in love for the first time at middle age.

All the stories in **Kethani** are slow-paced character studies examining how the lives of typical humans have been affected by the arrival of the Kethani. Although we have glimpses of the Kethani in human form, they still remain mysteries to us as well as to the people in the book. But it is not their identity which is the issue, but rather their effect on humans. As the stories accumulate, gradually we get a stronger picture of how life on Earth has changed due to the miraculous intervention of the Kethani.

Kethani is far from being a classic, with several obvious flaws. The individual stories tend to have a sameness about them. People who refuse implants gradually become alienated from those who have them. Divorces among the core group in the pub are all too common, and they demonstrate very few strong emotions other than love. But still **Kethani** is a very interesting book, resembling fix-ups such as **Pavane** and **A Canticle For Leibowitz** in its structure, although not in its theme, being a much more optimistic book than either of the others. While it is not on the level of those two classics, it does compare favorably in enough ways to make it highly-recommended.

Halcyon Days

Gregory Benford

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Mar 3, 2009

Good issue. The award stats told me new stuff, especially that I have 16 nominations total for Hugo (4) & Nebs (12). I never counted them. I haven't even counted how many books or short stories I've written. I just don't care. Nor do I reread my work after publication. Life is short! I guess I'm more a writer's writer. This doesn't include my new nom for Nebula Novella?

Illuminating. While I like Connie Willis's writing, she's not an A rank author. To me Clarke & Heinlein are the giants, with those like Poul Anderson and Le Guin close behind. Maybe I just can't see my contemporaries as giants? Could be... I've reached the age where the Presidential science advisor is the guy I shared an office with at Livermore Lab, and the head of the Naval Research Lab is a guy I tutored in quantum mechanics in grad school (who flunked out!).

[The award nomination list should eventually be updated for 2009.

[I agree with you that writers of the 1970s are too recent to be considered "giants," but that might be more a consequence of our ages rather than an absolute fact. SF readers 30 years younger than us probably consider writers who achieved fame in the 1980s giants, such as Gibson, Robinson, Shepard. There is probably a correlation between whom we consider "giants" and who was popular during our respective Golden Years.]

Julia Morgan-Scott

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Mar 3, 2009

Thanks for publishing my painting on the cover of **Visions #136**. It will probably be my fan-art swan song--just last week I wrote **John Hertz** a note letting him know that I'm not planning on doing any more fan art. He wrote back that the door is always open, and I should know as well as anyone that I'm always changing my mind, but for now, I'm just completely burnt out. But thank you for publishing my work over the years.

I enjoyed reading "Slick Willie's Used Car World." I wrote an alternate history/time travel SF story about Clinton myself once--called "Me and Monica--The Top Secret File." Just like in your story, Bill could end up President or a used car salesman in Arkansas!

It was published online somewhere--I wrote it with absolutely no political motive, but because people kept teasing me about how much I looked like Monica Lewinsky. OK, Monica was born about 1974 while I lived in Memphis with my first husband, and Bill Clinton was in college, and he could have driven through town in his hippie van on his way home to Arkansas, and we could have ended up eating biscuits and gravy in a motel restaurant in West Memphis, and I could have given birth to a little girl and given her up to a nice family in California, then jump twenty years. Throw in time travel machines in the Pentagon and a team of top-secret black ops under the direction of Hillary who brain-wipe my character and dump her in the Ozarks. Gosh, a psychiatrist could say plenty, no doubt, about my unconscious motives for writing such an Electra-fying mess! But it was fun.

[I will miss seeing new art from you, although I still have a backlog of illos on your disk, so your retirement does not mean your future absence from these pages. And obviously I will keep you on my mailing list as long as you still want to receive it.]

Eric Mayer

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Mar 4, 2009

That's fascinating about the co-authored story. Don't sell yourself short. Ed Byers, with his success, wouldn't have wanted (or dared!) to write with you if he didn't think you had talent. And your contribution might have been proportionally greater than you think. Mary and I often can't recall, looking at one of our co-written stories after years, who came up with what. We argue. "That was your idea!" "No, it was yours!" Then too, here's the factor that, for example, I might come up with something but wouldn't have except that Mary wrote something else that set me on a track I wouldn't have seen otherwise. It is difficult to "allocate" co-written material between the authors. Besides, what matters, ultimately, is whether the story turns out well.

I probably don't have to tell you that your name should have appeared on "Misfits." It would have given you a professional credit for future use. I admire your integrity though.

As you probably know I am a lowly co-author. Period. I have never sold a piece of fiction on my own. I would say that Mary and I contribute equally to our books and we both engage in research, writing, rewriting, plotting etc etc. However, Mary sold several mystery stories to **Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine** all by herself in the late eighties, long before we were married. She had to coax me into writing with her because I don't consider that I have much of a knack for fiction.

Whether I have learned enough during our years of collaboration to sell a story or novel myself I don't know because I haven't tried. So I actually share some of your regret about never having fiction published (And, of course, you have been published which is more than most can say). I have had all the fun of writing stuff and seeing it in print and seeing my name on a book cover. And I am not trying to play that down, but I have never experienced the personal validation (is that what I'm getting at?) of knowing, I - myself - me - managed to *win* the publishing game.

By the way, if Harlan Ellison told me to give up writing I'd take it as a sign to keep writing until I croaked! (Hey, they don't accept just anyone at Clarion do they? I doubt I'd get accepted even today.)

If you still want to pursue publication it isn't too late. Quite a few of the authors who write for Poisoned Pen Press started writing books as a retirement project. That's very, very common. The only reason I have had a little time to even co-write books is because I got caught in the layoffs and have worked on contract since the mid-nineties, which has meant that I can occasionally decline an offer or take a smaller project to free up a few days. No way could I write much if I were still regularly employed. I'm not fast enough. The fact is, most books are by people who don't write full time.

Having said all that, few, if any, writers are ever going to change people's lives the way teachers do. I love books. But how often is a book going to affect you like a good teacher does? My dad gave up high school teaching (although he still taught private classes) in his forties to pursue painting and he was an excellent painter—won awards, has watercolors in museum collections, written up in *American Artist*. But when he was dying a few years back all he wanted to talk about was his students and how much he'd loved them and teaching, which is what he wanted to be remembered for.

I commend you on your favorite rock artists. Well, you should have stopped at the Kinks but Richard Thompson is wonderful too.

And I noticed also, on your that, like me, you were a fan of Tom Swift Jr. Ah, yes, those books started me on my downhill course into years of sf reading.

As for in-person fanac, I'm no good at it. I don't even know if there are a lot of regular conventions in the east. The ones I see mentioned most often seem to be in the west and midwest. I'd think, considering population, there would be more in the east, but I will remain a fanzine fan, and these days an electronic fanzine fan. However, for someone who hasn't made

personal connections with fandom, you're making some kind of connections being OE of FAPA. That sounds pretty cool. I don't know FAPA's history but you must be filling some interesting shoes. Make FAPA electronic, I say!

We escaped the latest coastal storm except for an inch of snow, but that froze solid to the hill by the house what with temperatures below 10°F the last two nights so I just took the taxi to the Post Office. Now I guess I should do some work. Good hearing from you again.

[A co-author is better than not being published at all. I was co-editor of **Nanking 1937**, but it was Fei Fei who convinced the scholars to write for it, and she wrote the introductions which were much better than the drafts I wrote for a few of them. I think I did a good job editing all the essays—especially the translations from Japanese and Chinese which were pretty poor when I first got them—but I have no doubt the success of the book was due more to her talents than to mine.

[Harlan did not bother me much, since I got more optimistic advice from Terry Carr and Bob Silverberg who, surprisingly, still remembers what he told me 37 years later. And I have every intention of continuing writing when I retire. I will try to sell what I write, but I will not be devastated if my audience continues to consist entirely of myself.]

Robert Kennedy

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March 6, 2009

#137—Excellent cover by **Brad Foster**.

Michael Dukakis was a Liberal and I don't see where "Republicans have targeted all Democrats as 'Far Leftists'". (By the way, I am not a Republican.) "Obama is only moderately liberal"—You're joking, right? By his voting record he was the most Radical Left member of the Senate. He was further to the Left than the avowed Socialist from Vermont, Bernie Sanders. I truly hope that Obama does good for our country. But, after the "Stimulus Package", his Budget, and the Omnibus Spending Bill proposed by Congress (filled with Pork/Entitlements), that hope appears to be forlorn. It's "business" as usual. By the way, where does our government get the money for all these grandiose plans? How many generations will be paying for them? We need a Constitutional Amendment giving the President Line Item Veto like we have here in California where the Governor can veto individual items. It isn't always used like it should be; but it's better than nothing.

I believe that it was in the **Los Angeles Daily News** that I read that the Constitutional problem with Hillary involved the pay she would receive as Secretary of State. The relevant section of the Constitution is Article I, Section 6—"No Senator or Representative shall, during the time for which he was elected, be appointed to any civil office under the authority of the United States, which shall have been created, or the emoluments whereof shall have been increased during such time..." The newspaper article indicated that the problem had occurred in the past and was

solved by reducing the pay of the person appointed to the cabinet. It appears that Hillary's Constitutional problem involving pay as Secretary of State was solved by doing the same as was done previously.

Several of Obama's nominees had to withdraw because they cheated on their taxes and/or for other ethical problems. So, how do you feel about the Secretary of the Treasury being a tax cheat? Yes, I know the excuses he gave, claimed it was inadvertent, and blamed it on the tax program he used. His explanation doesn't hold water. (Even I do not do my own taxes.)

Good jokes from **Lloyd Penny** (*On The Lighter Side*).

#138—Another excellent cover, this time by **José Sanchez**.

Interesting about your early collaboration with Ed Byers. My major reading interest from about the age of 13 has been SF. My father read westerns and my mother read mysteries. I do not read any Dean Koontz and Vince Flynn. I will sometimes read a mystery and recently read several mysteries given to me by a friend. But, on a regular basis SF is it. That's for fiction. I also read a lot of non-fiction and receive a number of magazines and two newspapers. I receive so much to read that I can't keep up with it all.

Your "Listmania" was interesting. "Humpty Dumpty Was Pushed" by **Steve Stiles** was great. Excellent LoC's, but no comment on my part. "On The Lighter Side" was hilarious.

[Like you, I get too much reading material to keep up with all of it, which is why I have cut back drastically on my buying recently. It was working until I joined *Paperback Swap* and, while I have not increased the size of my collection, the percentage of unread books has gone up slightly. So it goes...]

Lloyd Penney

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March 16, 2009

After a hectic weekend, I get to do a little writing before the fannish pub night tonight. It's time for a loc on Visions of Paradise 138.

After a lingering glance at the cover, it's off into the text. Years ago, I was part of a writers' group called The Bunch of Seven. This group also had as members Tanya Huff, Karen Wehrstein, Shirley Meier and S.M. Stirling. Steve never showed up for the meetings, but seemed to meet with Karen and Shirley from time to time. I was a science fiction short story writer in a room of fantasy novelists, and I wasn't getting much critique on my work, other than it was "nice". I was the first person to leave the group, and the others certainly went on to various levels of literary fame.

I think the desire to collect and preserve the older pulps is often curbed when storage space isn't readily available and dedicated to such fragile items. Perhaps someday the entire run of these magazines will be available on a set of CDs. I own a few pulps, but realized long ago that I'd never have the money or facility to keep a full collection.

Congratulations of being the new OE of FAPA. I have been approached to join in the past, but at this point, loosing zines fills the small snippits of time I often have available, and putting together apazine would take the time I really need right now for job hunting. I was laid off a couple of weeks ago, so the never ending job hunt continues. SGS did not offer an extension to my tenure there, mostly because of a lack of work.

As with my LiveJournal page, an archive for my letters, my Facebook serves my own purposes, and I will not be led into the various applications and games that Facebook offers. I just don't have the time or inclination.

I didn't grow up reading Heinlein, but it was Asimov instead. Just recently, however, I read **Starman Jones** for the first time. It was an interesting adventure, marred by the unrealistic idea that a passenger starship would get so easily lost, and its passengers would so readily accept the idea of starting a new city/civilization on a hostile planet.

From this past weekend in Seattle, the FAAn Awards were handed out. Best Fanzine: *eI*, edited by Earl Kemp; Best Writer: **Bruce Gillespie**; Best Artist, Dan Steffan; Best Letterhack: **Lloyd Penney**; Best Website: eFanzines.com; Best New Fan: (tie) Jean Martin and Kat Templeton.

This page is finishing as I am reminded that the evening's festivities will begin soon, so I'll wrap it up and fire it off to you and my LJ. Take care, and I shall always be looking for more.

[I'm not sure congratulations for becoming OE of FAPA are in order; more likely condolences! But so far it has not been as work-intensive as I feared—and other members warned me—so I'll keep doing it until it becomes a burden.]

John Purcell

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Mar 22, 2009

A rather provocative pose on the cover page is always a good attention grabber. I have never heard of Jose Sanchez before, but I do like his style. This lady is definitely plugged into the ship, or the ship is plugged into her, which is definitely a nasty way of phrasing their connection. Maybe I should stop there before my brain gets any other bad ideas...

That story about almost getting published in **Analog** was interesting and well-told. The name Ed Byers is vaguely familiar, but during the 80s my reading habits veered mightily away from the pro magazines and into novels. Nowadays I'm back into the habit of reading short stories in magazines (sometimes) and on-line. I may have to keep my eyes open for that 14 Sept 81 issue of **Analog**; the Half-Price Bookstore now carries a couple shelves of the digest sized pro-zines from the 70s and forward, so I might go there and check to see if that issue is in their stash. At only a dollar a copy, that's a pretty good deal, even for well-thumbed magazines. Sad to hear that Ed Byers died so young. That's tragic, especially for a talented writer. Again, I will have to do some digging for his stories.

Speaking of sf collections, mine isn't that big right now. I have a half-dozen or so magazines, and maybe a couple hundred books. When I was much, much, MUCH younger—today's my birthday, by the way, so I'm keenly aware of "age" this morning—my book collection was well over 2,000 and my fanzine collection was probably at about a thousand or so. The vast majority of those paperbacks and hardcovers were sold to Uncle Hugo's Bookstore in Minneapolis when I moved to Los Angeles in 1985, and the fanzines were probably tossed by my parents when they packed up the house and moved to Arizona for retirement the year before. *grumble* The zine collection is the more tragic loss of the two, in my mind. Can't complain, though, about how things turned out. I realize that there were some mighty fine books and zines lost to the ages, but I console myself with the knowledge that I Was There when they were pubbed and enjoyed them.

Like you, my first presidential election was 1972. Two terrible choices, and I hate to admit it, but that was the only time I voted Republican. If I had known more about Nixon's personal characteristics and all that rot, I might have gone for McGovern, but I doubt it. My decision rested on foreign policy experience, which Nixon had in spades over McGovern. Oh, well. Can't change history.

Staying with your list, your changing tastes in music are commendable in that the Beatles have remained as my over-riding all-time favorite band, but I do enjoy listening to Richard Thompson and Chris DeBurgh, too. Last night on Austin City Limits I enjoyed Ray Davies in concert, taped live a few months ago. Great music! Then I was really impressed by the next show on PBS: "Live from the Artist's Den" which featured Alanis Morissette. Her voice gets a bit grating at times, and some of her songs sound the same, but the selling point for me last night was her band. Very tight, energetic, and kept changing tonalities to make the music more aurally distinctive. She is what can best be described as an acquired taste, but it was still a good show.

Before I forget, I also feel the same way you do: how could I retire when I love what I do so much? This teaching thing really gets into you, especially when your students are totally awesome. When that retirement day comes—in a decade or so—that is going to be a gut-wrenching decision.

Which leads me back to your points about people, their professions, and mediocrity and excellence. Hopefully, others see me as one who does very well at my job (my performance reviews certainly sustain this assessment), but I really don't seek a position of leadership. I have been in management positions before and didn't like them much. Do I want to blend into the crowd? No, not really. Recognition is good, so I pursue professional development and all that required stuff, plus put in time on committees and co-edit our new Humanities Division newsletter (thinking of it like a professional fanzine helps) besides being the poetry editor for the Blinn College Literary Journal. As it turns out I do more than my job requires, but I truly enjoy working there. Outside of when I worked at a music store in the early 90s, this is the only job that I have had where I actually look forward to going in to work. That says a lot.

A couple things to wrap this loc up are in order. First, I don't read westerns. Never have. Mysteries are my other major reading vice besides science fiction and fantasy. After that comes literature in general (Melville is my favorite American author, but T.C. Boyle is fast-becoming my current writer of choice) and history. It's a good blend.

The other loccol item is **Eric Mayer's** comment that he drops in on efanzines.com to see what's going on in fandom. I actually have bookmarked a bunch of sfnal and science websites that I peruse every few days to more or less keep tabs on things, but not to a great extent. Trying to

keep abreast of the entire science fiction field would be stupid and extremely time-consuming. I try to limit myself since I have so many other things to do. Having a family and career will do that to a fellow.

[When I graduated high school, my family moved from the city to the suburbs, and my father did not want to spend more moving my book collection. So the last time we visited our new house while it was being built, I brought several boxes of books there. When we arrived the day of the moving, one of the boxes had vanished, never to be seen again. While I have replaced several of those books over the years, I am not even sure what the other books in the box were.]

Rich Dengrove

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Mar 29, 2009

VoP #137: *Halcyon Days*. This is for **Eric Mayer**. We have a hard time considering the Ottomans an extension of the Roman Empire. I gather mostly for reasons we can't articulate. For the same reason, we don't consider the Byzantines an extension either. If we used the criterion of what people considered themselves as, the Ottomans wouldn't have been an extension of the Roman Empire. They didn't consider themselves as one. I bet more likely an extension of the Caliphate. On the other hand, as you say, the Byzantines would have considered themselves an extension of Ancient Rome.

Another comment for **Eric Mayer**. He was saying how he just prefers old-fashioned SF. That is all well and good, but I have been reading science fiction a lot older than that. Recently I read Wells' **War of the Worlds** (1897), Serviss' **Edison's Conquest of Mars** (1898), Griffith's **Honeymoon in Space** (1901), DuMaurier's **The Martian** (1897) and Burrough's **Chessmen of Mars** (1922). Of course, it hasn't been because I am that old fashioned, but because of a research project.

R. Graeme Cameron gives his compliments to **Julia Morgan-Scott** on her cover. I wish I had been able to see it. I understand that because you need to save on production costs, you often send by email a zine without the illos. However, if you're game, I know a way I can receive the whole zine and it wouldn't cost you a cent.

VoP #138: *Out of the Depths*. I doubt I would have been as virtuous as you in giving up my moment of fame, even though someone else was responsible for it. I probably would have cheerfully allowed my name on that story. On the other hand, I can't fault you: you did the right thing.

About the stock market, I would hang tough. The temptation is too great to buy when the stock is high and everyone is saying Buy. Also, to sell when the stock is low and everyone is saying Sell. Of course, that's the wrong way to go about investing. You want to buy low and sell high. If I were you, I would hang tough. That is unless the companies look like they are going to fold. I imagine we have reached the nadir of the depression recession; and stocks may be doing better

in a year. Who knows, eventually you may recoup and then some.

I am following my own advice. In fact, I am buying. However, I am invested in Municipals, which is another kettle of fish entirely.

Halcyon Days. Another comment to **R. Graeme Cameron**. He says that the Aztecs and Mayas had a different attitude toward skeletons than we do. For them, they are symbols not of death but of renewal and reincarnation. Could be. Attitudes toward death are not universal. Even contiguous Ancient civilizations disagreed. The ancient Romans and ancient Jews believed that the dead were polluted and we should keep away from them. It did not matter that the ancient Jews venerated Patriarchs and 'Saints' at their graves. However, the ancient Greeks believed there was magic power in relics, and liked to collect them and parade them around. That apparently is where the early Christians got the idea of relics from; and where the Catholic Church and, let's face it, the Protestant churches, got their idea of relics.

[Cost has nothing to do with deleting the covers when I attach **VoP** to email. Some of my readers cannot receive so large an attachment and have asked me not to send it. A free way for you to receive the whole zine with cover is by going to efanzines.com where you can see and/or download the cover if you wish.

[I have no intention of selling any stocks at this point. I rid myself of several before the crash, and whatever I have now I will stick with until they recoup the damages.]

Eric Mayer

Mar 31, 2009

Another enjoyable issue of **VoP** even if I don't read much sf. I was particularly interested in **Tom Sadler's** article because I've been trying to read a bit more "great literature" and, in fact, just finished **Moby Dick**, having read **Crime and Punishment** last year. So now I've read all the books on your cover except Vonnegut. Obviously I am not knowledgeable about Kurt Vonnegut but I suspect that his comment that "...all great literature is about what a bummer it is to be a human being" was meant to be facetious. I think a lot of great literature explores the human condition and thus, necessarily, deals with what a bummer life can be. What is important in such books though is the exploration, not the message that life's a bummer. As Tom says, we don't need to be told that.

It's the mark of the worst and most pretentious writers to suppose that the awfulness of it all is an important revelation which needs to be broadcast to the world, that somehow only they, the gifted artistes, have realized this great truth and must relay their wisdom on to the rest of us poor fools. No doubt, a little of this attitude does seem to creep into what our society considers to be literature. Dark and pessimistic art is more likely, so far as I can see, to be taken seriously by critics than brighter and more optimistic works. Rather like medicine, if it tastes bad it must be good for you.

When I was in college I had a discussion by a fellow who wrote for the school literary magazine and who found my taste in rock bands to be lightweight (Beatles, Kinks, Doors). What I liked simply wasn't art, he insisted. Well, I finally asked, what's your definition of art? He didn't hesitate. "Art's something, that when you listen to it or read, afterwards you feel like shit." A book that seems to run contrary to the tendency to paint things in dark colors is John Steinbeck's **Tortilla Flat**. The events recounted are often tragic if you stop to think about them but somehow Steinbeck casts it all in an idyllic light. A wonderful book.

Now as for your personal news, I like your iPod selections. If I had an iPod I would certainly put the Kinks on it. There are a lot of hidden gems amongst the Kinks' songs too. Stuff that got buried on albums many years ago and have rarely been heard. I once made a tape (remember them?) consisting of 90 minutes of totally obscure Kinks' songs and it was darned good, but then I am a fan. I think Ray Davie's *Working Man's Café* is better than his first solo effort. Not vintage Kinks, but some of the songs are kind of subtle and creep up on you.

You mention the student who is tired during the day and needs a better schedule. Teenagers can be terrible at scheduling things, particularly sleep. I wonder whether school days shouldn't start later to accommodate students? I'm not sure the hours high school kids keep aren't just what's natural at that age.

Glad you will have a contract to work under. Right now it is good just to have a contract. Perhaps you won't have to worry about the next one. Ignorant people do, of course, hate teachers. They are too stupid and ill-informed to even understand what the job entails and they tend to be the sort who have no respect for knowledge, curiosity, creativity or anything else that makes life worthwhile. You teachers need to do a better job knocking some sense into these idiots when they're kids!!

Things here are quiet as ever. Got through winter. I even got out to an orienteering meet (Big O club in New Jersey you know!!). Mary and I are been fussing with the rewrite of our eighth mystery, which still doesn't even have a title. Hope everything is going well at your place.

[Studies have shown that the sequence of having secondary schools begin earliest in the morning, followed by middle schools and finally by elementary schools should be reversed, since younger students tend to awake earliest in the day. Schools have ignored those studies though for the sake of sports, since having secondary schools start later will cause practices and games to run into darkness. And since when is schooling more important than sports in this country?]

Robert Kennedy

April 4, 2009

As for the Hugo Nominations for *Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form* my votes will be in this order: *Iron Man*, *The Dark Knight*, *WALL-E*, *No Award*.

I agree with you concerning **Challenger** being the Best Fanzine. For a number of years I have nominated it and voted for it as #1. Last year at Denvention 3 I told **Guy[Lillian]** that he was going to win. No such luck and he came in 3rd.

Good commentary by **Tom Sadler**—"Great Literature".

Listmania—I have read exactly one of the 26 listed.

On The Lighter Side had me laughing harder than in months, maybe a year.

Lloyd Penney

April 4, 2009

Thank you for **VoP** 139. Great literature? If you can get a message out a novel, or even some entertainment value, I'd call it great. Unfortunately, there is a bias against science fiction. If the books can't be called great, the authors certainly are.

I still have to sit down and examine the Hugo ballot, as do all of those who are going to the Worldcon. I have to make my vote count here...I wish I'd been able to read more of the nominees, but so much to read and so little time.

Literature is comprised of stories about how human beings deal with their humanity, and the events that happen within that short allotted time span; bummers and joys and pain and grief and everything else in between. I think Vonnegut was somewhat pessimistic with his own definitions.

The big list on page 9...it will be interesting to see which of these books almost made it onto the ballot, but not quite. Same goes for every other category, I guess...

I have read a lot of Harry Harrison's stuff, including **The Stainless Steel Rat** and *Eden* series. I think Harry's not quite an A-lister, but higher than the B-list. He's written some fine material, so I'd have no problem with his being the 2009 Nebula Grand Master. I also have read a lot of anthologies, and have plenty of them edited by Horace Gold, Terry Carr and Don Wollheim.

Ad Astra is our local SF convention, held just last weekend, and we had a great time there this year. Not only is it a good cure for cabin fever, but the best place to advertise the rest of the cons for the year. Much fun, parties, good times...I need the human contact. Next con in town is July.

On The Lighter Side

Jokes by Robert Kennedy

Three women go down to Mexico one night, get drunk, and wake up in jail, only to find that they are to be executed in the morning, though none of them can remember what they did the night before.

The first one, a redhead, is strapped in the electric chair, and is asked if she has any last words. She says, "I am from Grace University, and believe in the almighty power of God to intervene on the behalf of the innocent." They throw the switch and nothing happens.

They all immediately prostrate themselves, beg for her forgiveness, and release her.

The second one, a brunette, is strapped in and gives her last words, "I am from the Creighton School of Law and I believe in the power of justice to intervene on the part of the innocent." They throw the switch and again, nothing happens.

Again, they all immediately prostrate themselves, beg for her forgiveness, and release her.

The last one, a blond, is strapped in and says, "Well, I'm from the University of Iowa and I just graduated with a degree in Electrical Engineering, and I'll tell you right now, you ain't gonna electrocute nobody if you don't plug this thing in."

*

At a high School in Montana, a group of students played a prank on the school. They let three goats loose in the school building.

Before they let them go they painted numbers on the sides of the goats: 1, 2, 4.

Local school administrators spent most of the day looking for goat #3.

*

A husband and wife were at a party chatting with some friends when the subject of marriage counseling came up.

"Oh, we'll never need that. My husband and I have a great relationship," the wife explained.

"He was a communications major in college, and I majored in theater arts. He communicates really well, and I just act as if I'm listening."