

Visions of Paradise #142



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Artwork

cover ... Susan Yee

a caricature of ye editor by one of his students

Out of the Depths

If I Selected the Hugo Awards

Several years ago, Richard Lupoff edited two volumes entitled *What IF?* in which he selected stories which were worthy of winning the short fiction Hugo Awards but did not. The books were most interesting for their great contents (Theodore Sturgeon's "The Golden Helix," Shirley Jackson's "One Ordinary Day, With Peanuts," Poul Anderson's "The Man Who Came Early," Alfred Bester's "The Pi Man," and Thomas Burnett Swann's "Where Is the Bird of Fire?" are just a few of the stories included), but they also laid the groundwork for some speculation.

Like most critics, I don't agree with many selections the voters have made for the Hugo Awards. And why should I? Winners of awards are made for various reasons, not all of which have to do with the overall quality of the nominees. For example, the Australian voting system which distributes votes to the second, third, fourth and even fifth choices of most voters guarantees that hardly any voters' first choice wins the Hugo Award. The winner often represents the story which has alienated the least number of voters, rather than excited any of them.

And what about all the voters who select winners based on name recognition, choosing authors whose stories they have enjoyed in the past, or even authors whom they have met at previous worldcons and like personally? Authors' coattails can be an important factor too. In the 1960s **Worlds of IF** won three consecutive Hugo Awards as Best Prozone in spite of the fact that its companion magazine **Galaxy** dominated the short fiction categories in that decade. So why did **IF** win instead of **Galaxy**? Because **IF** had the good fortune to publish three Heinlein serials in that decade, and Heinlein's children are about as loyal a group of fans as you will find.

Obviously I am not adverse to a bit of speculation myself, so here is my fantastic premise: what if the Hugo Awards were not voter-selected, but selected by committee, as the World Fantasy Awards are selected? I will allow the voters to select the nominees, but I will represent the committee in choosing one winner each year. Since nobody is on the award selection committees every year, I will only choose a winner in years in which I attended the Worldcon.

1967 (Nycon III). This was my first convention at which I only spent a single day, driving into NYC to see what the heck a "worldcon" was all about. The fiction winners were Heinlein's **The Moon is a Harsh Mistress**, Jack Vance's "The Last Castle," and Larry Niven's "Neutron Star."

I have no problem with Vance or Niven, but although I enjoyed **Mistress**, I thought two nominees surpassed it in quality: Samuel R. Delany's **Babel-17** and Daniel Keyes' **Flowers For Algernon**. Much as I loved early Delany, I will give the edge to Keyes' masterwork as my choice.

1969 (St. Louiscon). I thought three of the nominees were deserving: John Brunner's **Stand on Zanzibar** (although I personally preferred Delany's **Nova**, the two novels were both award-worthy), Robert Silverberg's "Nightwings" (one of my favorite all-time stories) and Poul Anderson's "The Sharing of Flesh."

But I feel that Harlan Ellison won several Hugo Awards for reasons of personal popularity and the fact that his over-the-top writing style appeals to many fans. "The Beast That Shouted Love at the Heart of the World" was not nearly as good a story as either Terry Carr's "The Dance of the Changer and the Three" or Damon Knight's "Masks." Either one would be a good winner, so I will select "Masks."

1971 (Noreascon I). Two good winners here: Larry Niven's **Ringworld** and Theodore Sturgeon's "Slow Sculpture." But Fritz Leiber won Best Novella for his sword-and-sorcery tale "Ill Met in Lankmar" which, quite honestly, was enjoyable but nowhere near the top of his form. My choice among the nominees was Clifford D. Simak's "The Thing in the Stone," a much stronger, emotion-packed story.

1973 (Torcon II). Four good winners and one of the worst Hugo choices ever. The good ones were Ursula K Le Guin's "The World For World is Forest," Poul Anderson's "Goat Song," and a tie for Best Short Story between R.A. Lafferty's "Eurema's Dam" and Pohl & Kornbluth's "The Meeting."

But Isaac Asimov's comeback novel **The Gods Themselves** won the Hugo Award, in my opinion, for a single reason: it was his return to science fiction after many years of writing only nonfiction, and the voters were so thrilled to have the good doctor back that they rewarded him in the only way they knew, give him a Hugo Award. Any of three nominees would have been a much more deserving winner: **The Book of Skulls**, by Robert Silverberg, **A Choice of Gods**, by Clifford D. Simak or **Dying Inside**, also by Robert Silverberg. **Dying Inside** was Silverberg's masterpiece, and one of the most unfairly-unawarded novels in Hugo history. I select it happily for my imaginary Hugo Award.

1974 (Discon). One outstanding winner (James Tiptree's masterpiece "The Girl Who Was Plugged In," which beat out two wonderful novellas by Michael Bishop, "Death and Designation Among the Asadi" and "The White Otters of Childhood") and three so-so winners: Arthur C. Clarke's **Rendezvous With Rama**, Harlan Ellison's "The Deathbird" and Ursula K Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas", evidence of the Hugo Awards' predilection towards BIG NAME WRITERS.

Of the non-winners in those three categories, probably the most deserving were Poul Anderson's novel **The People of the Wind** and Vonda N. McIntyre's novelette "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand." In a close choice, I'll give the Hugo to Anderson.

1976 (MidAmericon). Unusually, I have no major gripes with any of the winners, Joe Haldeman's **The Forever War**, Roger Zelazny's "Home is the Hangman," Larry Niven's "The Borderland of Sol" and Fritz Leiber's "Catch That Zeppelin!". My only gripe is with the fact that three of the novellas were slightly better than Zelazny's winner (and it hurts me to admit that, since I really love Zelazny's fiction): "The Custodians", by Richard Cowper, "The Silent Eyes of Time", by Algis Budrys and "The Storms of Windhaven", by Lisa Tuttle & George R.R. Martin. Probably the best of them was Cowper's "The Custodians", so give it the imaginary Hugo Award.

1980 (Noreascon II). This was my last worldcon, so this is the last time I'll bug you with my Hugo choices (for now!). I actually disagreed with three of the Hugo winners, only agreeing with George R.R. Martin's novelette "Sandkings." I disagreed with Arthur C. Clarke's **The Fountains of Paradise** (Clarke won more Hugo Awards for career recognition than any other author), Barry Longyear's overemotional "Enemy Mine" and George R.R. Martin's "The Way of Cross and Dragon." Probably the two most sadly-overlooked nominees were John Varley's **Titan** and "Options," so I'll give the Best Novel award to Varley for **Titan**.

The Passing Scene

The start of June means summer vacation is around the corner, preceded by numerous enjoyable activities at school. The Valedictorian-Salutatorian Dinner is one of my favorite events, and I've been fortunate to have been invited 15 times in the past 18 years (although I only actually attended 13 dinners since twice I was invited by both the Valedictorian and the Salutatorian). This year I attended it with Li Li. Unfortunately, her parents did not consider the dinner important enough to attend, nor does Li Li drive, so I picked her up at her house and was flabbergasted at the size of it. We chatted both in the car and at the dinner, which is the most talking we have ever done since Li Li is very introverted and does not talk much, so it was a very enjoyable evening. Ironically, my brother David was also at the dinner with the salutatorian Chrissy, so the two of us teased the principal all night. At one point he suggested that David and I should get a radio talk show. (

Next was the senior awards breakfast where I gave Li Li the Mathematics Student of the Year award, which was well-deserved. I told the audience that I gave the first such award in 1995 to "a student whose equal I never thought I would ever see, but 14 years later I have." Longtime readers can guess that Fei Fei was that first winner 14 years ago.

The following week was the *Target Teach* annual celebration, which went very well. The highlight, as usual, was a slideshow of the 28 student apprentices in their classrooms. They each worked with a mentor teacher one period a day in a class ranging from kindergarten through high school.

Next was the equally-enjoyable *Senior Award Assembly* (which differs from the in-school assembly in that it consists primarily of scholarships rather than in-school awards). I gave the Faculty Scholarship to Tino (who is an immigrant from Denmark, one of two non-Asians in my AP Calculus class) and Li Li, both of whom told me they were very surprised to win it. They were both very deserving winners though.

There were also several non-school activities this month. We went with Alan and Denise to the Chinese buffet in the nearby International Trade Zone. We had gone there when it first opened but had not been impressed by it. But now that our favorite buffet has closed, we tried it again. Not only has it improved tremendously, but it has gotten better than the other one was, as indicated by the large number of Chinese patrons there. Afterwards we came home and Alan

installed my new external hard drive, which I wanted for more secure backup storage.

Jean and I went to my niece Jillian's (David's daughter) dance recital, which was enjoyable and interesting to compare to the Indian dance shows my club puts on at school each year. Afterwards we all went to a diner where we ate and chatted for two hours. Between the plethora of diners and pizzerias in New Jersey, I should never move out of this state. (

The next day my former student Joy Lee came and did a knife demonstration for us. She had told me she needed to practice on some non-Chinese people since they will be her primary customers, so I agreed to be her guinea pig. We actually bought a set of 6 table knives.

As June neared its end, so did classes, followed immediately by final exams. They were much less stressful for me this year than previous years because my classes were smaller than usual, thus decreasing the amount of grading I needed to do during the four-day period. And we had lots of typical end-of-the-year activities. One of which was the *Target Teach* grading session, after which the six of us went out for pizza to say farewell to Kathy, the assistant superintendent who heads *TT* and who is retiring this year. The following night was Kathy's retirement dinner, at which 150 people showed up, including nearly every important person in the district from the past 20 years. I chatted with several people I have not seen in awhile, including my former (and best) supervisor Tom, my friend Renato, who is a retired Italian teacher, and Angelo, a principal whom I befriended several years ago.

The Math Dept had its annual barbecue at Megan's house. Because of the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the teachers, we brought a lot of good food from Italy, China, India, and the Middle East.

Early in June a mother mallard laid her eggs in the courtyard at school, and all the faculty and students watched her baby ducklings grow from hatchlings. The custodians used a water hose to create a pool for them and also fed them daily. However, after two weeks the mother abruptly flew away, abandoning her babies. Sue did some research and learned that occasionally the mom gets frightened and abandons her babies, who then have nobody to teach them how to find food or how to fly, so they seldom survive. I spent most of two days trying to contact the ASPCA for advice, but could not get through to them. So I contacted my friend Tom, a former science teacher who now devotes himself to the Audubon society. He suggested I contact the *Raptor Trust* which raises orphan birds on a preserve in the nearby Great Swamp until they are ready to go into the wild. I did so, and they told me they would take the ducklings, and that I should contact the local Animal Control to transport them. I phoned them and a representative came immediately, spending over an hour chasing the ducklings across the courtyard while a group of us watched them run away from her in a pack. We were a bit worried since baby ducklings can have heart attacks from such terror and exertion, but all ten of them survived and she took them to the preserve where they should be happier now among other birds, and will learn how to fly and live in the wild.

My swapping continues strong. So far I have mailed 15 books and 7 cds and will have received 18 books and 7 cds in return when all the swapping is finished. These include cds by Chris de Burgh, Tom Petty, Paul McCartney, Chicago, Bruce Springsteen, and the Waterboys, as well as

books by Andre Norton, Kim Stanley Robinson, Poul Anderson, Murray Leinster, A. Bertram Chandler, James White, Jack McDevitt, James H. Schmitz, Stephen Baxter, Stephen Lawhead, Robert Silverberg, Lois McMaster Bujold and Cecilia Holland, with two more books to select. I'm leaning towards Peter Beagle's **The Innkeeper's Song**, and W. Michael Gear & Kathleen O'Neal Gear's ancient historical epic **People of the Raven**.

Marwa came the morning of Father's Day to give Jean, Andy and me massages, which was very enjoyable. Afterwards the three of us met Mark & Kate in Bridgewater for dinner.

Fei Fei phoned from Newark Airport on her way to a vision conference in Florida. She has been in Stanford most of this month setting up her lab and finding an apartment to rent. After the conference she is going to China for another conference and meeting. While my relaxing season begins, hers gets busier and busier.

I chatted with Sun Hee who is working full-time at Walgreen's this summer and also tutoring two boys she was tutoring when in high school. She is saving all that money for college, since her parents cannot afford to pay her tuition, but she has applied for a weekend job at a nearby mall so she can have spending money. She is very excited since she and 16 of her friends have rented a house at the shore for a week in July.

Exams ended on 6/22 and the next day many students came for their grades and to give their final farewells to their teachers. I was flattered the most by letters from Tino, Priscilla, Foram, Yun and Li Li saying how much I helped them during their high school years, how much they learned from me, and how important I was to them. Equally important was that they all gave me their email addresses to stay in touch.

Graduation was, as usual, both a joyous and a sad occasion. I had my picture taken with many of my students and talked with older siblings whom I had previously. Afterwards was the retirement banquet and, as usual, the math department sat together at a table and had a very enjoyable time. I was the only speaker at the banquet, so I talked about the school year as well as about the 6 retirees. My brother David checked my speech ahead of time, and thought it was fine. The comments I got from teachers the next few days assured me that I achieved my aim of both flattering the retirees and entertaining the attendees with humor.

Now, in the immortal words of Alice Cooper, *School's Out for Summer!* It is indeed, and I am looking forward to lots of reading and writing as well as many other activities which I cannot do during school. My major goal is to get together with my photographer friend Frank to go over his pictures and start doing research and first-drafting our book.

I have started watching the first series of DVDs I ordered from *The Great Courses*, 24 lectures by a college professor on the topic *The History of Ancient Greece*. I also ordered a companion series of 48 lectures on *The History of Ancient Rome*. My dentist actually told me about this company several years ago when he lent me *Astronomy*, and my friend George told me recently that he has dozens of lectures which he really likes. Besides the two I ordered, they also offer such fascinating topics as *>From Yao to Mao: 5000 Years of Chinese History*, *Human Prehistory and the First Civilizations*, *The History of Ancient Egypt*, *The Early Middle Ages*, *The*

High Middle Ages, Ancient Empires Before Alexander, and those are only some of the history lectures. They also have Science, Literature, Philosophy, and Religion as well as other less interesting (to me) topics. The prices are normally high, but all their series go on sale for 70% off once per year, so I bought my two (36 total hours) for a cost of \$170.

Wondrous Stories

I enjoy reading a good mystery, preferably not a routine crime story but one concerned with something more interesting, such as a historical mystery or a medical mystery such as James White's series set in a futuristic hospital in space. So when I learned about The Virginia State Legislature declaring June 27, 2009 as *Will F. Jenkins Day* (the real name of sf author Murray Leinster), I decided there was no better way for me to celebrate it than by reading Baen's complete collection of his **Med Ship** series.

Leinster's series is set in a galaxy in which all the a loose union, a cross between Poul Anderson's *polesotechnic league* and Jack Vance's *galactic cluster*. The main character Calhoun is a doctor who represents the Med Service by traveling from planet to planet, sometimes on routine surveys of their medical status, other times to investigate a specific medical crises. He is accompanied by an alien *tormal* named Murgatroyd who on the surface resembles a monkey who worships Calhoun, follows him around obsessively imitating every action of Calhoun, and whose vocabulary is limited to the single word, "Chee!" But tormal are invaluable to the Med Service since they possess an immune system which immediately develops an immunity to any disease it encounters, thus serving as a living laboratory making serums Calhoun can use on his missions.

"Med Ship Man" is the first story in the book and the only one I have read previously when it was originally published in **Galaxy** in 1963. In it Calhoun is sent to a planet whose entire population has been herded out of their homes by a mysterious wave of energy. It seems a totally useless form of attack until Calhoun figures out both its purpose and how to disable it without resorting to any violence which would have likely been the climax of most stories of this type.

In "Plague On Kryder II", a planet is afflicted by a strange plague which previously devastated two other planets in very suspicious manners. When a murder attempt takes place against Calhoun himself, he connects the two together. Another enjoyable mystery.

The Mutant Weapon is one of two full-length novels in the book. It involves a planet which has been selected for colonization by the inhabitants of the over-crowded world Dettra, but when Calhoun arrives there for a routine survey a murder attempt is made on his life, and he discovers that all the original settlers have been infected with a mysterious plague that was apparently caused by another group of invaders hoping to kill them off and take over the planet themselves. So Calhoun has the joint problem of curing the plague and ridding the planet of the invaders, a difficult task for a doctor who is representative of a loose federation of worlds which has no military forces at its disposal.

The other novel is **Pariah Planet** (which was previously released in book form as **This World is Taboo**) which tells the story of two planets in the midst of a Cold War. The inhabitants of Dara are suffering from a plague which leaves them tattooed with blue markings, thus they have been given the derogatory name “blueskins” by the inhabitants of Weald. On Weald the Darans are treated like bogeymen who are apt to invade Weald and spread their plague at any time. In fact, Dara is suffering from a deadly famine and they are desperate to obtain food, of which Weald has such a surplus they have stored tons of grain in orbit about their world. If this scenario seems the least familiar, you might not be surprised that it was written in 1961 at the height of Earth’s Cold War.

Along comes Calhoun who is mistrusted by both sides and takes it upon himself to try to cure both the plague and also deal with the famine. He does so, of course, in a way which is non-violent but which require a bit of suspension of disbelief.

The stories in **Med Ship** are all clever medical mysteries whose solutions are never obvious, if a bit on the simplistic side, but none are either *deus ex machina*, based on mindless violence, or so far-fetched as to be unbelievable. Calhoun rarely does anything stupid that artificially inflates the drama. The stories are all primarily cerebral: Calhoun arrives on a planet which is undergoing some medical crisis, he spends time investigating and analyzing, eventually realizing the cause of the situation and devising a solution to solve it. Any villains in the stories are always handled by Calhoun without any stereotypical physical action.

The farther I read into **Med Ship**, the better I liked the stories. I planned my reading in anticipation of finishing the book around June 27th in time to celebrate Will F. Jenkins Day, although I actually finished the book a day earlier. The stories gave me enough enjoyment that I am anxious to read either Leinster’s **Planets of Adventure** or **A Logic Named Joe** collection from Baen Books—or both.

Listmania

Favorite Classic Rock Artist

- 1 The Kinks
- 2 The Beatles
- 3 Chris De Burgh
- 4 Bruce Springsteen
- 5 Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers
- 6 U2
- 7 Van Morrison
- 8 Creedence Clearwater Revival
- 9 Dion DiMucci
- 10 The Waterboys
- 11 R.E.M.
- 12 John Hiatt

Favorite Prog Rock Artists

- 1 Pink Floyd
- 2 The Moody Blues
- 3 The Strawbs
- 4 Yes
- 5 Emerson, Lake & Palmer
- 6 Renaissance
- 7 Supertramp
- 8 Electric Light Orchestra
- 9 King Crimson
- 10 Frank Zappa
- 11 Dream Theater
- 12 Flower Kings

Favorite Folk-Rock Artists

- 1 Richard Thompson
- 2 Simon and Garfunkel
- 3 Jethro Tull
- 4 Bob Dylan
- 5 The Band
- 6 Steve Forbert
- 7 John Sebastian

Favorite Hard Rock Artists

- 1 Led Zeppelin
- 2 Iron Maiden
- 3 Metallica
- 4 Slade
- 5 Smashing Pumpkins
- 6 The Offspring
- 7 Alice in Chains

On the Lighter Side

Summary of Life

GREAT TRUTHS THAT LITTLE CHILDREN HAVE LEARNED:

- 1) No matter how hard you try, you can't baptize cats.
- 2) When your Mom is mad at your Dad, don't let her brush your hair.
- 3) If your sister hits you, don't hit her back. They always catch the second person.
- 4) Never ask your 3-year old brother to hold a tomato.
- 5) You can't trust dogs to watch your food.

- 6) Don't sneeze when someone is cutting your hair.
- 7) Never hold a Dust-Buster and a cat at the same time.
- 8) You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk.
- 9) Don't wear polka-dot underwear under white shorts.

GREAT TRUTHS THAT ADULTS HAVE LEARNED:

- 1) Raising teenagers is like nailing jelly to a tree.
- 2) Wrinkles don't hurt.
- 3) Families are like fudge..mostly sweet, with a few nuts.
- 4) Today's mighty oak is just yesterday's nut that held its ground.
- 5) Laughing is good exercise. It's like jogging on the inside.
- 6) Middle age is when you choose your cereal for the fiber, not the toy.

GREAT TRUTHS ABOUT GROWING OLD:

- 1) Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional.
- 2) Forget the health food. I need all the preservatives I can get.
- 3) When you fall down, you wonder what else you can do while you're down there.
- 4) You're getting old when you get the same sensation from a rocking chair that you once got from a roller coaster.
- 5) It's frustrating when you know all the answers but nobody bothers to ask you the questions.
- 6) Time may be a great healer, but it's a lousy beautician.
- 7) Wisdom comes with age, but sometimes age comes alone.

*

On hearing that her elderly grandfather had just passed away, Susan went straight to her grandparent's house to visit her 95 year old grandmother and comfort her.

When she asked how her grandfather had died, her grandmother replied, he had a heart attack while we were making love on Sunday morning."

Horrified, Susan told her grandmother that for 2 people nearly 100 years old having sex would surely be asking for trouble.

"Oh no, my dear," replied granny. "Many years ago, realizing our advanced age, we figured out the best time to do it was when the church bells would start to ring. It was just the right rhythm. Nice and slow and even. Nothing too strenuous, simply in on the Ding, and out on the Dong."

She paused, wiped away a tear and then continued, "And if that damned ice cream truck hadn't come along, he'd still be alive."

*

Advantages and Disadvantages of Getting Older....

In a hostage situation you are likely to be released first.
It's harder and harder for sexual harassment charges to stick.
Kidnappers are not very interested in you.
No one expects you to run into a burning building.
People call at 9 p.m. and ask, "Did I wake you?"
People no longer view you as a hypochondriac.
There's nothing left to learn the hard way.
Things you buy now won't wear out.
You buy a compass for the dash of your car.
You can eat dinner at 4:00 and get the early_bird special.
You can live without sex but not without glasses.
You can't remember the last time you laid on the floor to watch television.
You consider coffee one of the most important things in life.
You constantly talk about the price of gasoline.
You enjoy hearing about other people's operations.
You get into a heated argument about pension plans.
You got cable for the weather channel.
You have a party and the neighbors don't even realize it.
You no longer think of speed limits as a challenge.
You quit trying to hold your stomach in, no matter who walks into the room.
You send money to PBS.
You sing along with the elevator music.
You talk about "good grass" and you're referring to someone's lawn.
Your arms are almost too short to read the newspaper.
Your back goes out more than you do.
Your ears are hairier than your head.
Your eyes won't get much worse.
Your investment in health insurance is finally beginning to pay off.
Your joints are more accurate than the National Weather Service. But you still watch the Weather Channel anyway.
Your secrets are safe with your friends because they can't remember them either.
Your supply of brain cells is finally down to a manageable size.
You see your doctor so much you get to call him by his first name.
You get to buy state of the art pill containers for your daily medicine.
You are no longer considered eccentric.
You finally get to take advantage of those Senior Citizen discounts on Wednesday.
You can wear any old clothes in your closet, because no one expects you to be fashionable anyway.
Have another drink! Hey, you can't chew the food without teeth anyway.
You don't have to change the clothes in your closet each season, because you'll wear that sweater all summer anyway.