

# Visions of Paradise

## #121: Wondrous Stories



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### Contents

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Shapers of Science Fiction.....   | page 3  |
| <i>Poul Anderson</i>  |         |
| Wondrous Stories .....  | page 6  |
| <i>Ilium ... Olympos ... Inheritor ... Roma Eterna ... Crystal Rain</i> |         |
| <i>... Rosetta Codex ... Helix ... The Judgment of Caesar</i>           |         |
| <i>... The Engines of God ... Children of the Thunder</i>               |         |
| The In-Box .....  | page 22 |
| On the Lighter Side.....  | page 23 |
| <i>including a joke from Sally Syrjala</i>                              |         |

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### Artwork

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Steve Stiles .....  | cover   |
| <a href="http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk">http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk</a> ..... | page 3  |
| I books .....   | page 5  |
| Trinlay Khadro .....  | page 23 |

# *Shapers of Science Fiction*

## *Poul Anderson*

Ever since life evolved on Earth our planet has been within range of a vast galactic cloud which has inhibited the development of intelligence. Recently Earth has begun moving out of the cloud's influence. The effect on life has been startling and immediate. Animals are developing rudimentary intelligence. Retarded people are becoming normal, while normal people are becoming geniuses.

This was the plot of Poul Anderson's 1953 novel **Brain Wave**. Following the initial premise, the novel examined in great detail what effects such increased intelligence would have on culture, religion, and society as a whole. In one of the best scenes a ten-year old schoolboy playing with algebraic equations begins developing differential calculus in much the same way it was originally developed by such mathematical giants as Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz.



If there was a prototypical science fiction writer of the post-Golden Age era it was Poul Anderson. He was a student at the University of Minnesota, majoring in physics, when he published his first story "Tomorrow's Children." After graduating he published a few more stories each year until 1953. That was the breakthrough year for Anderson. Besides the classic **Brain Wave**, he published 19 pieces of short fiction and two other novels. Demonstrating his mastery of all aspects of the science fiction genre, one of the novels was a highly-regarded alternate world fantasy **Three Hearts and Three Lions**.

During the next forty+ years, Anderson published hundreds of science fiction stories and dozens of novels. Refusing to be typed, he tackled virtually everything the genre had to offer: adventure, "hard" science, space opera, problem-solving stories, farce, sociological and political science fiction, heroic fantasy, high fantasy, and undoubtedly a few I've left out.

Among science fiction writers and aficionados Anderson was regarded as one of the most highly-regarded authors in the field, winning seven Hugo Awards and three Nebula Awards. In keeping with his overall output his award-winning stories ran the gamut of science fiction: "The Longest Voyage" is a melding of medieval saga and science fiction; "Goat Song" is a retelling of

the Orpheus legend; "Saturn Game" is pure science fiction used to study the basis of mythology; "The Sharing of Flesh" has a shocking beginning which evolves into a classic problem-solving story.

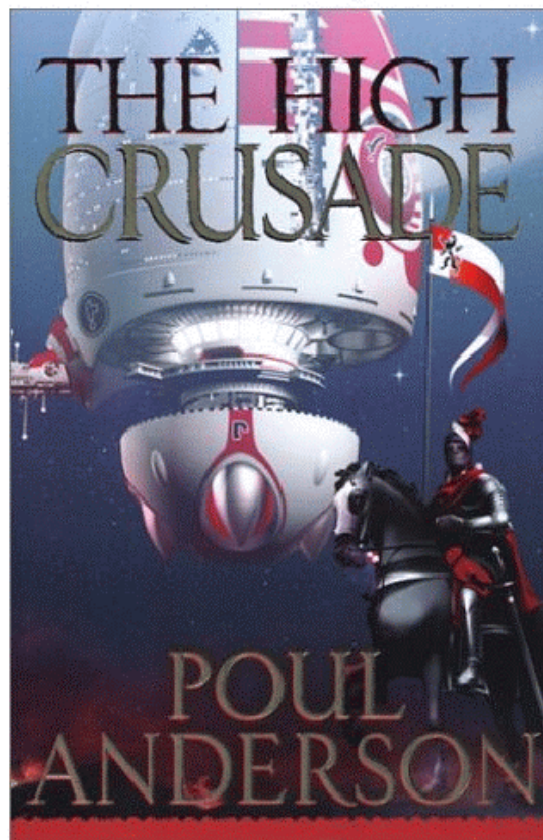
Influenced by such writers as Robert A. Heinlein and Isaac Asimov, as well as by his interest in history and Scandinavian culture, Anderson developed his own "future history" which was the setting for many of his novels. His future fell into several distinct eras. First was the Polesotechnic League, a loose alliance of merchants based on the Renaissance-era Hanseatic League. After its collapse came the Terran Empire, a future version of the Roman Empire. As representatives of these eras, Anderson created two memorable characters: Nicholas van Rijn, a colorful Renaissance merchant, and Dominick Flandry, an aloof military man.

Perhaps Anderson's best novel was **Tau Zero**, the story of a long distance spaceship which experiences mechanical difficulties and is unable to stop its acceleration. As the ship's speed approaches the speed of light external time passes faster and faster. This has the effect of sending the ship far into the future.

### Chronology

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1926 | Born November 25 in Bristol, Pennsylvania   |
| 1947 | First story, "Tomorrow's Children," collaboration with F.N. Waldrop, is published in <b>Astounding</b>  |
| 1952 | First novel <b>Vault of the Ages</b> published  |
| 1953 | <b>Brain Wave</b> published   |
| 1959 | Guest of Honor at Detroit World Science Fiction Convention  |
| 1960 | <b>The High Crusade</b> published<br>Publication of collection <b>Guardians of Time</b>   |
| 1961 | "The Longest Voyage" wins Hugo Award as Best Short Fiction  |
| 1964 | "No Truce With Kings" wins Hugo Award for Best Short Fiction  |
| 1969 | "The Sharing of Flesh" wins Hugo Award for Best Novelette   |
| 1970 | <b>Tau Zero</b> published   |
| 1971 | <b>The Byworlder</b> published  |
| 1972 | "The Queen of Air and Darkness" wins Hugo Award as Best Novella and Nebula Award as Best Novelette<br>Elected president of Science Fiction Writers of America |
| 1973 | "Goat Song" wins Nebula and Hugo Awards as Best Novelette<br>Voted 5th best All-time Science Fiction Author in <u>Locus</u> poll                              |
| 1976 | <b>The Best of Poul Anderson</b> published  |

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1978 | <b>The Earth Book of Stormgate</b> published  |
| 1979 | "Hunter's Moon" wins Hugo Award for Best Novelette  |
| 1982 | "The Saturn Game" wins Nebula and Hugo Awards as Best Novella                                   |
| 1989 | <b>The Boat of a Million Years</b> published.   |
| 1991 | Publication of <b>The Time Patrol</b>   |
| 1993 | <b>Harvest of Stars</b> published   |
| 2001 | Dies in Orinda, California<br><b>Genesis</b> wins John W. Campbell Memorial Award as Best Novel |
| 2002 | Publication of <b>Going for Infinity: A Literary Journey</b>                                    |
| 2007 | <b>To Outlive Eternity: And Other Stories</b> published   |



# *Wondrous Stories*

When I first read that Dan Simmons, after concentrating on bestselling horror and mysteries for most of the past decade, was returning to far future science fiction with a pair of novels about the Trojan War, I immediately assumed it would be a novel based on the Trojan War. Imagine my surprise when I began reading **Ilium** and saw that it was about the historical Trojan War, complete with ancient heroes and Greek gods. Surely this must be a fantasy novel, no?

No, **Ilium** is pure science fiction, and fairly successful science fiction at that. The novel begins with three alternating storylines:

- The Trojan War itself, populated by characters from *The Iliad*; early in the novel the Greek gods are revealed to be *posthumans* enhanced by futuristic technology reminiscent of **Lord of Light**; this portion is narrated by Thomas Hockenberry, a “scholic” resurrected from the 21<sup>st</sup> century by the gods to observe the Trojan War and make sure it follows the “traditional” pattern observed by Homer;
- a far-future Earth in which the inhabitants are bored humans reminiscent of Michael Moorcock’s **An Alien Heat** trilogy or Damon Knight’s “Dio”; the author’s concern is centered on four of these humans: Harmon who is 99 years old and has only 1 year to live until he reaches his “fifth Twenty,” after which he will be spirited away to the afterlife; two younger women Hannah and Ada; and young cynic Daemon whose main concern in life is seducing as many women as possible, in this case, Ada. This portion of the novel is mainly a travelogue taken by the four innocents which seems illogical based on their shallow lifestyles, but serves the needs of the author; on their way they encounter Savi, the legendary “Wandering Jew,” and Odysseus, who was somehow transported from the historical *Iliad* to the far-future;
- a group of moravecs, cyborg-like beings created by humans millennia ago, traveling to Mars for some clandestine mission whose purpose they do not know, and which seems more thriller-like than sfnal.

The three storylines seem totally unrelated at first, being separated by both distance and time, but gradually they merge into a single story, aided by some stunningly unexpected scenes. The novel improves as the storylines weave together, since initially the far-future Earth travelogue seems little more than a recreation of such end-of-time stories without much purpose, while the Trojan War scenes are mostly violent recreations of *The Iliad* with seemingly nowhere to go but the pre-ordained climax of the epic. The novel’s pivotal scene is when Hockenberry seduces Helen of Troy, changing from a mere observer of the Trojan War to an active participant in its progress.

As he tends to do, Simmons gradually morphs the novel from a wide-ranging examination of literary history to a fast-paced thriller. At times he succumbs to the weaknesses of thrillers, primarily during the far-future Earth sequence when the bored future humans encounter deadly voynix and the evil Caliban (whose presence in the novel is one of many unexplained

occurrences) and rise to the occasion by resisting them more rigorously than seemed possible earlier.

Simmons excels at springing surprises at the reader which keep the novel interesting and also serve to forward its plot while weaving the various threads together. The arrival of the historical Odysseus on the far-future Earth is an effective device. Even moreso is the sudden appearance of the Greek gods in the Martian portion of the novel. When these moments occur, the novel begins building steadily to two rousing climaxes which, while they stretch credibility, never go totally over-the-top and remain satisfying overall.

The novel does raise numerous questions which are never answered: why are the scholics observing the Trojan War, seemingly at the behest of the gods? Why does Hockenberry survive nine years observing the war while all the other scholics eventually annoy the gods enough to be killed? Why does Aphrodite choose him for a mission more suited to one of the gods? And Savi is a cheat, since she knows most of the history of the future Earth related to the novel's events but when asked, she keeps putting her questioners off, never providing any information which we, the readers, need to know. And how and why is the historic Odysseus—if indeed he is a real person and not just a literary creation—on the far-future Earth at all?

Knowing **Ilium** is the first novel of a pair, these unanswered questions require patience, although they remain a bit frustrating. Simmons is a strong storyteller able to combine wondrous ideas with futuristic color, and he writes a fast-paced novel which does not strain credibility beyond the point of believability. The main problem though is just when it seems as if the novel is nearing its ultimate conclusion, with all the strands about to be answered, it crashes to a halt, leaving 700+ pages remaining in its sequel **Olympos**. To be continued...

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**Olympos** is the story of the war between the mortals and the gods. Normally such a war would be a one-sided, one-day affair except the Greeks had some serious help. First it was the moravecs with their force shields and advanced weapons on the same level of technology as that of the gods; next certain Greek heroes who were half-gods themselves, such as Ulysses who fought single combat with a different god each day, always winning because of his invulnerability.

Just like **Ilium**, much of **Olympos** consists of two mysteries, the first being the root of the gods' amazing powers (which was not difficult to figure out early in **Ilium**) and the second being what the heck is going on with all the overlapping threads? The moravecs are equally-interested in solving both mysteries, and the most important of the book's several narrators is Mahnmur, a cute little moravec with a fascination for William Shakespeare. Of course politics are important too. Agamemnon was the Greek king until he was defeated by Ulysses who, upon taking power, formed a truce with Trojan leader Hektor to fight against the gods. Now Agamemnon wants to regain power and make peace with the gods, resuming the war against Troy. He finds surprising support from a group of Amazon women who arrive at the scene determined to kill Ulysses.

While all three portions—Greek heroes, struggling humans, moravecs—of **Olympos** are

interesting, it is all a bit confusing at times. For much of the book I was never sure if the Greek gods lived on Olympos Mons on Mars or Mount Olympus on Earth, or how they were able to flit back and forth between planets. And were the ancient warriors futuristic recreations of the original Greek and Trojan heroes, or somehow transported from the past into the future, or was their battle actually taking place 3,000 years ago? These did not seem part of the mysteries waiting to be solved, but were supposedly explained during the progress of the book but not very successfully.

Simmons also wallows in much more blood and gore during the war between the mortals and the gods than I enjoy. My eyes tended to glaze a bit during those scenes which did not add to the rest of the story.

The Earth portion of **Olympos** reads like a post-apocalyptic thriller, as it is primarily concerned with the struggle for survival of a group of humans (led by Ada and Daemon) against the apparently attempt of the world's voynix to kill all humans. With the failure of the ancient and mysterious technology, life on Earth has become virtually neolithic as the pampered humans learn to survive on their own, a struggle which becomes considerably more difficult when the voynix, their former robotic-like servants, become predatory.

Meanwhile the moravecs are speeding to Earth on their mysterious mission to save the solar system while Daemon goes on another travelogue with mysterious supernatural-seeming entities who, like Savi, seem to know a lot more about what is really happening on Earth and Mars, but are unwilling to reveal much to him.

**Olympos** takes much of the myth out of the Trojan War as the true nature of the gods becomes apparent, but life and civilization on Earth has become so altered from our era that it takes on a mythological quality itself. Beings such as Ariel, Caliban, Prospero, and Sycorax are totally inhuman beings who are somehow pulling all the threads in the novel, as Daemon and the moravecs strive to learn why and, in the case of the evil ones, how to stop them. At times Simmons' tendency to spring surprises on the reader overwhelms the story as if he has created them purely for their emotional effect and has not planned out any logical framework for the novel, but instead is making the story up as he goes along. This is not necessarily a bad thing, depending on whether he can actually pull all the threads together in the end. But by halfway through **Olympos** there were so many dangling threads—such as what happened to Hockenberry who mysteriously disappeared a few hundred pages ago?—that I began wondering if a satisfying conclusion was even possible.

The least satisfying part of **Olympos** is the second journey of Harman—Ada's husband—whose activities are manipulated totally by the mythological group of beings—Prospero, Ariel, the mysterious Moira—for their own purposes in an almost senseless manner. Why does he need to walk all the way from the Mediterranean to North America through the "Atlantic Breach," which is a parting of the ocean a la *The Ten Commandments*? And why for Christ sake does he spend time investigating a sunken nuclear sub, knowing it is radioactive and that spending too much time inside it will kill him, so that—sure enough!— he becomes radioactive and spends much of the book's climax undergoing a painful, messy death?

As **Olympos** nears its climax, Simmons attempts to pull all of his dangling threads together in a scene in which one of the moravecs racing toward Earth suddenly realizes what everything means. And it does explain the overarching storyline somewhat, but too many of the little threads are still left hanging. We never really learn the motivation of Earth's mythological beings, nor the reasons behind a lot of what happened previously. For example, why did the voynix go berserk abruptly? Simmons concocts something about all surviving humans having some Jewish blood, which they had for millennia without the voynix previously getting into a snit over it. And the manner in which both the Greek and Trojan warriors are rescued from the warring gods and titans (yes, the war shifted halfway through **Olympos**) and how the few surviving humans are rescued from the voynix, calibani, and evil Sycorax are all blatant examples of *deus ex machina* which might be fitting in a novel totally devoted to humans' dealings with gods, but not necessarily satisfying.

And the last chapter showing the aftermath of all the numerous characters who crowded **Ilium** and **Olympos** is a bit too suburban normal to feel comfortable.

In spite of all these complaints, I enjoyed reading these two novels overall. They held a lot of surprises, a lot of wonder and exotic characters, but they would have been ultimately more satisfying if Simmons had repressed the special effects a bit in favor of a more coherent storyline.

\*

I reviewed C.J. Cherryh's **Foreigner** in **VoP** #103, followed by a review of **Invader** in **VoP** #106 in which I said:

*Anybody who likes carefully-developed alien races, well-thought-out cultures, and a slow-paced, thought-provoking look at human-alien relations should enjoy **Invader**, and its predecessor **Foreigner**, as much as I did. I await the third volume **Inheritor** eagerly, and hopefully will not wait an entire year to finish this wonderful trilogy.*

Well, it has taken me fourteen months to read the third and concluding novel in C.J. Cherryh's first *Foreigner* trilogy **Inheritor**. Of the six main characters in **Invader**, four of them play major roles in **Inheritor** as well:

- Bren Cameron, the *paidhi* who serves as intermediary between the human-populated island Mosphiera and the nonhuman native atevi who, while humanoid in appearance, are totally nonhuman in philosophical outlook and emotional makeup;
- Ilisidi, Tabini's grandmother who was overlooked for *aiji* twice, the second time in favor of her grandson. She resents that double slight enough to be a wild card whose loyalties are uncertain to the other main characters who wonder whether she supports Tabini or the rebels struggling to overthrow him;
- Jago and Banici, Bren's bodyguards who are totally loyal to Tabini and hence to Bren as well, since Tabini considers Bren's position utterly important to his rule;

The original story was set forth in **Foreigner**:

*A colonizing starship from Earth jumped into normal space and realized that it was totally lost and in dire trouble. Eventually most of the would-be colonists decided to emigrate to the nearest habitable world, which was already inhabited by a race called the atevi. The atevi did not welcome the humans, and the unexpected invasion eventually lead to war between the two races. The atevi won, but the humans had considerable negotiating chips in the form of advanced science which they agreed to dole out to the atevi slowly and carefully in exchange for the humans being allowed to live autonomously on a secluded island.*

In **Invader**:

*The original colonizing human spaceship returned after two hundred years and begin negotiating both with the humans and with the atevi through Bren. Much of **Invader** concerns plans for the ship to send two emissaries to the planet, one to negotiate on Mosphiera, and the other with Bren and the atevi.*

This brings the fifth important character into **Inheritor**, Jason Graham, the emissary to the atevi from the ship who is having a very difficult time dealing with being away from his spaceship for the first time in his life with no way to return home. The ship had no space-to-surface capabilities, so the two emissaries parachuted to Earth and are now waiting for the atevi and humans to build their own spacecraft to enable the two emissaries to return to space.

As is typical of this series in particular, and a C.J. Cherryh novel in general, much of the novel consists of inner dialogue on the part of Bren Cameron. The reader learns from his thoughts the political and cultural situation on the planet, as well as both his and Jason's personal growth and emotional crises. The politics is very complicated indeed, and has grown more complicated since the first book:

- ▶ the atevi are always on the verge of civil war, with various lords forming alliances against others. Tabini is the most powerful lord, equivalent to planetary ruler, but some lords are determined to overthrow him, while others, such as his grandmother, inhabit the vast twilight zone where their loyalties are undetermined;
- ▶ the human government has been take over by an arch-Conservative group which is determined to overthrow Tabini and install another atevi lord friendlier to their interests. One of their cronies is Deanna Hanks, who replaced Bren as *paidhi* briefly in **Invader** after he was shot. Eventually she was exiled back to the human island by Tabini, but human public opinion has so turned against the atevi that Bren's family have been the targets of harassment. Bren does not dare return to the island fearing he will be arrested by the government [**Inheritor** was published in 1996, so this is in no way a statement about our current federal government];
- ▶ none of the people on the planet, atevi or human, feel secure about the motives of the

spaceship and the dealings of the two emissaries to the planet.

The first half of **Inheritor** is a bit overwhelming: too much politics, too much inner dialogue, not much happening. But as in the first two books, as events begin happening, the characters develop into people and the tension grows steadily. By far, the finest character in the entire trilogy is Ilisidi, Tabini's tough old grandmother who reminded me of Kate Hepburn when she was a senior citizen. Her loyalties play a very large factor in the political outcome of the book, perhaps the largest factor overall, but she was such a likeable old coot that I had no doubt where her loyalties would ultimately reside.

I realized that Cherryh had completely won me over when I got to **Inheritor's** climactic scene. It was corny, somewhat *deus ex machina*, but I found myself so emotionally involved in what was happening that I went back and reread that scene twice, something I almost never do. Halfway through the book I had been questioning whether I was willing to follow up this trilogy with another long, slow *Foreigner* trilogy, but by its conclusion I was ready to jump into my car and drive to the book store (which I did not do, knowing it would take me another year to fit the book into my reading schedule anyway!). If you enjoy well-developed alien cultures with strong characters, I recommend the *Foreigner* trilogy highly.

\*

If Robert Silverberg has truly retired from writing novels, intending only to write occasional short fiction in the future, then **Roma Eterna** will in some ways stand as the capstone of his career, being the last volume of new fiction he published. If that is true, Silverberg has definitely ended on a high note since **Roma Eterna** is vintage third-career Silverberg (his first career being his "learning years" from 1956 through 1965; his second career from 1966 through his "retirement" in 1976; his third career began in 1980 and continues today).

**Roma Eterna** is a classic "fix-up" or "mosaic" novel, which is a literary form well-suited to science fiction. It consists of ten independent stories, each set in a different era in Silverberg's imagined history in which the western Roman Empire never fell, lasting into contemporary times. What is good about this format is that rather than being restricted to telling one story in one setting, a "fix-up" enables the author to set stories throughout the entire created world, thus broadening the world-building without sacrificing plotting. Silverberg used that approach successfully in **Majipoor Chronicles** and employs it again here.

A "fix-up" is also an ideal format for alternate history, since it allows Silverberg to zoom in on a variety of key points where his history veers from the "real" history. Too many attempts at alternate history take some minor point of divergence and then tell a routine adventure or human interest story which has little to do with the historical divergence. That is not true in **Roma Eterna** where Silverberg's main concern is examining his version of the Roman Empire, how it diverged from the real one, why it diverged, and what changes that engendered in historical events further down the line. Like most vintage Silverberg, **Roma Eterna** is not routine storytelling—although Silverberg is certainly one of science fiction's best storytellers ever—but also speculations on how people adapt to specific historical development. The first story "With Caesar in the Underworld" shows one of the crucial points of divergence in

the year 1282 *ab urba conditia*—“from the founding of the city”—which corresponds with the mid-6th century A.D. Barbarians are threatening the northern borders of the western empire, but Emperor Maximilianus is old and dying, and neither of his two sons seems qualified to assume the throne and fight back the expected barbarians incursion. An emissary of Justinianus, the Eastern Emperor, has recently arrived in Rome to negotiate the marriage of Maximilianus’ older son with Justinianus’ younger sister, in return for which the Eastern Emperor is expected to send troops to aid in the defeat of the barbarians.

Much of the story centers around Faustus, a mid-level Roman official, who has been given the task of escorting the emissary while the older son has fled to his northern estate for hunting in lieu of his responsibility negotiating. In his place, the younger son, also named Maximilianus, a noted wastrel and party-goer, escorts Faustus and the emissary into Rome’s notorious underworld.

“With Caesar in the Underworld” on its surface seems like a travelogue into the seediest parts of early-medieval Rome, but beneath that it examines the transfer of power and how important a role the quirks of chance played in the survival of Silverberg’s Roman Empire.

Religion was a major factor in the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, both Christianity in the Western Empire and Islam in the Eastern Empire. While Silverberg eliminated Christianity quickly in the Prologue, “A Hero of the Empire” is the story of why Mohammed does not become a factor in Silverberg’s alternate Roman Empire.

“The Second Wave” moves to the early 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (A.U.C. 1861) when his Roman Empire enters the Age of Exploration. This is somewhat earlier than in our history, but since the Dark Ages did not occur in **Roma Eterna**, it is logical to assume that much of post-medieval history would have moved up. This is the story of the first meeting between European conquistadors and the empires of Peru and Mexico. Since Silverberg’s Roman forces encountered the New World armies when their empires were still strong, his results are considerably different than happened in our world. This story is a perfect example of how using the “mosaic” format deepens the alternate history considerably.

“Getting To Know the Dragon” is the story of an 18<sup>th</sup> century historian (our dating) who is writing a history of one of the greatest Roman emperors whom he practically worships. When he is fortunate to discover the emperor’s personal journal, we see how difficult it is to admire somebody unconditionally who lived centuries earlier and whose philosophy and ethical beliefs so differ from our own. This story is recommended reading for people who blithely reject heroes from centuries ago because of their failure to have adopted 21<sup>st</sup> century values in their own lives.

“The Reign of Terror” takes place during a period when a series of incompetent and insane emperors created a situation very similar to France in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (our dating), and a First Consul named Torquatus begins a series of moves similar to the French Reign of Terror destined to “save” Rome, but which actually drive the empire closer to dissolution. Silverberg is unable to tell a story without some thought-provoking premise, and here he shows how two men driven by noble motives drift into evil without realizing what they are actually doing.

“Via Roma” moves into recent times, when all the component parts of the empire have

developed their own identity independent of the Roman Empire, including developing their own languages. Reading this story set in Italy, I could definitely see modern Naples. This is the story of 19<sup>th</sup> century nation states, during which monarchies either fell or became mere figureheads. “Via Roma” also shows us the excesses caused by inherited wealth and the inevitable fate those excesses lead to.

“Tales from the Venia Woods” is the first *Roma Eterna* story I recall reading many years ago, and I wonder if it might have been the first story written, intended as a meditation on the fate of overthrown monarchies and those few relatives who somehow manage to survive the killing of all their relatives. It is a sad, contemplative story reminding us that what one man considers evil another man might consider necessity.

The book ends with “To the Promise Land,” the story of the Jews whose exodus from Egypt was foiled three thousand years earlier, and who have stewed under the Egyptians for centuries until a small group of radicals plan a new Exodus. The details of that exodus are concealed from the reader for much of the story, but a glance at the book’s cover is a spoiler to the secret of the last story. Still, it was a strong story about the need of people to determine their own fate.

Overall, **Roma Eterna** was vintage Silverberg, making me appreciate even more a man who after 50 years is still among the top writers in the field. Hopefully he will return to writing fiction as he has done the last two times he retired from it.

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A lot of attention in recent years has been focused on “New Space Opera”, which is supposedly a modernization of traditional space opera. However, much of it also consists of planetary adventures, and Tobias Buckell’s debut novel **Crystal Rain** reminded me in several ways of A. Bertram Chandler’s *John Grimes* adventures. The world is a bit more exotic overall, and the lifeforms more varied, but the major difference is that while Grimes was a pessimistic cynic, he was still basically likeable and reliable. Four of the six focus characters in **Crystal Rain** have major skeletons in their background, while a fifth makes a major decision in the novel which would totally shock Grimes. But other than that, there is nothing in the novel that A. Bertram Chandler would disapprove of.

The world of **Crystal Rain** consists of two civilizations separated by huge mountains. Nanagada contains emigrés from Earth trying to build a world as traditional immigrants generally do. Many of them are from the Caribbean, as is author Buckell, which adds a bit of color to the setting. The other civilization are the Azteca, based on the worst stereotypes of Aztec civilization, complete with human sacrifices and constant warfare. The Azteca have been trying to cross over the mountain for decades, urged on by their priests and their gods, the *teotl*, who are living beings, warlike aliens with incredible super-human powers.

The main plot of **Crystal Rain** is the story of how the Azteca complete a tunnel under the mountains and invade Nanagada. They are brutal, and immediately begin sacrificing prisoners to their gods. The novel follows five viewpoint characters in the struggle against the Azteca:

- **John** is an amnesiac father in the village of Brungston, trying to recall his past while protecting his family. What John does not realize is that he possesses a deep secret called *Ma Wi Jung* which could prove vital in the fight against the Azteca, so two other viewpoint characters are seeking him because of that secret: **Pepper**, who unbeknownst to John was his ally prior to his amnesia, and who wants the secret to defeat the Azteca; and **Oaxyclt**, an Azteca spy who has been ordered by one of their gods to torture the secret from John. It is a bit of a cheat how many people know John's past better than he does, but that's a common tool used by thriller writers which, when done successfully as it is done here, actually keeps the reader's interest as he or she gradually learns along with John the truth about his past;
- **Haiden** is the leader of a military force in Capitol City, called the Mongoose-Men, who are leading the fight against the Azteca; it is obvious that the Azteca are far superior militarily, so the defense consists primarily of keeping the invading horde away from the walls of Capitol City and, if they do reach it, prevent them from penetrating its walls;
- **Dihana** is the prime minister of Capitol City, having recently inherited the position from her late father; her difficulties include the fact that she has not won the support yet of the Councilmen, who are "old fathers," original settlers from hundreds of years ago, or the *loas*, aliens who have been fighting against the *teotl* since before any humans settled the world. Her greatest strength is her relationship with Haiden who trusts her abilities as she trusts his honesty;
- **Jerome** is John's son who is separated from his family after the Azteca overrun Brungstun. His exploits are unimportant to the rest of the story, intended to deepen the characterization of both John and Jerome, but not really succeeding in that regard.

Part of the plot of **Crystal Rain** is a mystery—what secret does John possess? What is his connection to Pepper? What is the relationship between the *loa* and the *teotl*? The most interesting part of the novel is when Haiden orders the building of a ship which John captains to the frozen north to find the secret of *Ma Wi Jung*. The voyage is exciting, complete with Azteca spies on board and an attack by Azteca ships. Pepper is too superhuman to be believable, and he serves almost as a *deus ex machina* whenever the author needs to overcome the Azteca somehow. Fortunately, Buckell does not overuse Pepper, keeping him somewhat in check by his relationship with John.

Buckell does make occasional attempts to flesh out his culture. There is mention of various religions in Nanagada, the most interesting being one revolving around the alien *loa*, although he does not spend much time delving into it. Capitol City has a Tolteca Town, a ghetto of Azteca who have fled their own harsh civilization. Naturally there are conflicts between the other residents of Capitol City who do not trust the tolteca, a situation which is exasperated after the invasion through the mountain, but Buckell hints at this more than examines it. If this were a C.J. Cherryh novel, its entire emphasis would likely have been on the *loa* religion and Tolteca Town, but Buckell is primarily writing an adventure story, and taken on those terms it is a successful one. Its climax is mostly satisfying, if a bit easy once John and Pepper find *Ma Wi Jung*, but it does contain some thoughtfulness rather than a simple wrapping-up-and-wiping-of-

the-hands ending.

Buckell's next novel is entitled **Ragamuffin**, which is the name of Capitol City's police force which had an uneasy relationship with the military Mongoose Men. Hopefully he will delve a bit further into Nanagada's culture in that novel while continuing to tell a rousing adventure story.

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Sometimes a novel with a horrendous title conceals a small gem inside. Richard Paul Russo's **The Rosetta Codex** is obviously a title intended to remind people of **The DaVince Code**, so I had visions of bogus scientists chasing elusive nonsensical historical mystery. But the novel got very strong reviews when it was released, and some of them intrigued me about what was basically a far-future historical mystery.

Cole is a five-year old boy accompanying his father on a dangerous interstellar mission. When their ship is attacked in orbit around a planet, his father places Cole and his caretaker Sidonie onto a shuttle and sends them to the planet's largest city Morningstar where Cole's uncle lives. But the shuttle never reaches the city, instead crashing on the other side of the Divide. The Divide is an immense trench similar to the Grand Canyon which can only be crossed by two bridges. On one side lives the majority of the planet's population; on the other side are criminals and political dissidents who were exiled there by the authorities. Exiles and their immediate first generation descendants are forbidden to recross the bridges. Anybody else may cross in either direction.

After the crash, Cole is found by a group of criminals who rape and kill Sidonie, then take Cole as a slave. Eventually Cole escapes, but he ends up in a community which treats him only slightly better: he is still a slave, but at least he is not beaten regularly. His only friend is a traveling trader named Blackburn who takes a liking to Cole, and each time he passes through he tries to convince Cole to accompany him. Having been kicked nearly his entire life, Cole is naturally suspicious of any friendship and rejects the invitation.

Eventually Cole makes the mistake of falling in love with the daughter of one of the community leaders. He is beaten and exiled from the community. He spends the next few years traveling alone through the land of the exiles, finding some people who are considerably nicer than those with whom he lived. He finds an *anchorite*, a woman living a solitary religious life as a hermit; a community of Resurrectionists seeking an ancient race of aliens who supposedly lived on the planet millennia ago; and a strange pair of an elderly man and his simpleton brother who has visions of the future, one of which seemingly involves Cole.

Eventually Cole crosses the Divide and reaches Morningstar where he finds Sidonie who amazingly survived the rape and beatings, and has been seeking Cole ever since. He falls in with a group of Resurrectionists who believe that the aliens' ancient city lies beneath the surface of Morningstar. And Sidonie tells Cole that his family was very powerful on their homeworld. Eventually they both leave the planet and return to claim his legacy.

**The Rosetta Codex** is a strong novel which combines Cole's coming-of-age with the quest of the Resurrectionists. Cole stumbles onto the key to the aliens' disappearance, which is the

Rosetta Codex of the title, so he undertakes the quest himself. The latter half reads like an outtake from a Jack McDevitt novel as the quest heads through space, where Cole's group is pursued by a group of human-cyborgs who seek the aliens for their own purposes. Eventually, the quest is successful, which pleased me since I have grown a bit tired of endless series of novels which seek lost aliens but never actually find them (such as Frederik Pohl's *Gateway* series).

The weakest part of **The Rosetta Codex** is the codex itself whose purpose is illogical. It was created by the aliens to enable humans to resuscitate the entire alien race. But the codex was hidden so that first humans had to find it, then decipher it, and finally follow its directions. I cannot imagine any less logical way for a superior race to resuscitate itself, nor why that was even necessary since the entire alien race seems to have died in an orderly fashion, with thousands of bodies placed in an endless series of coffins in a silo holding interstellar spaceships. Surely such an advanced race would have saved itself more logically, and less subject to the luck of whoever found their secret instructions? This whole portion of the novel was more of a construct for the reader's sake than logical development from what was otherwise a smart and sensible novel set in a well-developed universe.

About two-thirds the way through **The Rosetta Codex**, I thought it was going to be a great novel on the level of **The Etched City** or **Perdito Street Station**, two of my favorite novels of the past decade. But the codex ruined a bit of the novel for me, although that logical flaw is its only failing, and I still enjoyed reading it tremendously. I just cannot recommend it as unconditionally as I had anticipated doing.

\*

Greg Brown is one of several British sf writers who have not had much impact in America, but whose names I have seen in the pages of **Interzone**. Several of them appeared in the anthology **The Solaris Book of New Science Fiction**, writers such as James Lovegrove, Eric Brown and Adam Roberts. Brown's "The Farewell Party" was one of the highlights of the book, so when his novel **Helix** was published recently, containing one of the most wondrous sf big concepts since Robert Reed's "great ship" or Larry Niven's "ringworld," how could I resist it?

The novel's begins in a new-future dystopic Earth on the verge of total dissolution. A group of scientists in Switzerland are preparing a secret mission to send a colonizing ship to a distant star system. The mission almost fails before it even begins as a group of terrorists tries to destroy the starship. But they escape Earth successfully and travel to what they expect is a distant world but which turns out to be a helix containing thousands of individual barrel-shaped planets.

Most of the intended colonists are in suspended animation, so the point of view characters are five people who serve as the preliminary explorers for the colonists. They have considerable emotional issues, particularly Hendry who is mourning the death of his daughter who was one of the colonists whose pod malfunctioned before arrival at the helix; and Sissy who hates another member of their group Olembe who, in addition to being an arrogant bastard, raped her at a costume party when they were freshmen in college many years ago, but because of the costumes he has no idea she was his victim.

The first worlds they reach are ice worlds lying on the lower levels of the helix far from the sun. They encounter a civilization of small, lemur-like people which is rigidly-controlled by an autocratic religion who, because of the perpetual haze which totally shields their city from the sky, believe that theirs is the only world and they are the only intelligent people. Thus a crisis occurs when two religious skeptics leading a group of explorers in a dirigible encounter an alien visitor from an adjacent barrel world almost simultaneously as a group from the church captures the four explorers from Earth.

Although this world has enough potential for an entire novel, Brown realizes that the wondrousness of the helix demands his explorers escape the church's grip and travel to other helix worlds. Which they do, discovering a variety of exotic worlds populated with wondrous alien beings and their fascinating societies. Brown could not resist a bit of thriller aspect though as minions of the repressive church use the alien's spaceship to chase the four explorers to other worlds with the intention of killing them and any other evil beings they might encounter.

While this description seems over-the-top, Brown generally controls it well. **Helix** never descends into the helter-skelter illogic of a thriller, and the pursuing Church militia are dispatched fairly easily at the novel's end. The book does have a few other flaws though. Brown's anti-organized religion fervor is too black-and-white, making all true believers either fools or evil. And Brown's attempts at characterization are a bit heavy-handed, especially in Hendry's memories of his dead daughter and Sissy's dealings with Olembe.

But these weaknesses are more than made up for by the book's sense of wonder which compares favorably with Reed and Niven. While I was not totally convinced by the novel's climactic meeting between the humans and the builders of the helix, overall the novel was fascinating and mostly believable. When I finished reading it, I was anxious to read more novels about the helix, which I guess is enough recommendation for any book. I also wanted to go back and read the latter *Ringworld* novels, which I have not done, as well as Bob Shaw's *Orbitsville* novels, another big-concept world. Sometimes a big concept populated with exotic worlds and aliens is one of science fiction's grandest moments.

\*

I tend to shy away from genre mysteries because I rarely enjoy books whose entire *raison d'être* is solving a puzzle about crime, usually murder. There are exceptions, such as my favorite mystery Josephine Tey's **Daughter of Time**, which was primarily historical fiction involving lots of historical research about the true nature notorious King Richard III.

Stephen Saylor's *Roma Sub Rosa* series has gotten strong reviews which treated it as much as historical fiction as genre mystery. **The Judgment of Caesar** is probably the most acclaimed book in the series, and since I have been reading a lot of Italian history recently, it seemed a logical place for me to dip my toes into the series.

The novel is the tale of Gordianus-the-Finder who has left Rome with his ailing wife Bethesda, his adopted son Rupa and two slave boys. Bethesda is a native Egyptian who is returning to swim in the Nile, while Rupa, another native, wants to scatter the ashes of his deceased sister in

the waters. Gordianus travels in high circles though, so when he encounters the fleet of Pompey, fleeing from a defeat at the hands of Julius Caesar, Gordianus' life is threatened since Pompey is his sworn enemy. After Pompey is killed by the Egyptians—in a fashion faithful to his actual historical death—Gordianus joins the retinue of teenaged king Ptolemy who is engaged in a civil war with his sister and wife Cleopatra for control of Egypt, countering the wishes of their dead father who wished them to serve as joint rulers.

Shortly afterwards Caesar's fleet arrives, causing great consternation through Alexandria. Does he intend to conquer Egypt as he has done so many other countries? Or will he take the side of one of the warring siblings and raise that person to the title of ruler of Egypt and sworn friend of Rome at the expense of the other? Caesar is another old ally of Gordianus, although the Finder disapproves of his conquering ways and its inevitable slaughter. But what Gordianus resents the most is that his older adopted son Meto has become Caesar's closest companion and a partner in his conquest.

**The Judgment of Caesar** is pure historical novel chronicling the events in Egypt following Caesar's arrival. Saylor has the knack of immersing the reader in the country, making Alexandria breathe and its citizens live. Throughout the book I felt that his Egypt was real, as were Caesar and Cleopatra. Although Caesar was not the viewpoint character of the novel, he was surely the most important character. This was historical fiction at its best, telling a fascinating story around real history. Several times I was curious enough to check the real history and I always came away convinced that Saylor always told the truth whenever real historical characters were involved in **The Judgment of Caesar**. The civil war between Ptolemy and Cleopatra was real, and similar to how Saylor viewed it, as was its outcome and Caesar's involvement in the war.

Perhaps the thorniest issue in writing a novel about Caesar and Cleopatra is dealing with their relationship as honestly as possible without being overly-influenced by the many dramas and movies about them. Saylor did a good job, wherever possible following Caesar's own journal and histories written at that time. Their relationship involved the infatuation of the 52-year old Caesar with the 21-year old queen who, in his own words, made him feel like a boy again. But they were both too much the quintessential politicians, and too pre-occupied with their own power and places in history, to let passion override their other concerns. Saylor realized this and his novel reflected that belief, which I feel was appropriate.

I actually enjoyed the mystery itself, which began 200+ pages into the novel but never distracted from the historical events surrounding it. Instead Saylor used the mystery as a way of deepening the characterization of the people involved, especially that of Gordianus and his estranged son Meto. The mystery's denouement, revealed in a conversation between Gordianus and Caesar, fit the book's accuracy so well I was more pleased with it than I expected to be. This, for me, is how a mystery should be.

I have every intention of reading more Saylor historical novels, probably starting with his recent **Roma**, which treats the entire history of Rome with no attempt at genre mystery. But I am also curious about reading more novels detailing the give-and-take relationship between Julius Caesar and Gordianus-the-Finder. This series might go a long way toward improving the image of

genre mysteries in my mind.

\*

I have read a lot of Jack McDevitt novels recently, enjoying both his *Alex Benedict* series (**A Talent For War**, **Polaris** and **Seeker**) and his standalone **Infinity Beach**, all of which were based around solving historical mysteries. So I decided to read his *Academy* series of novels next, beginning with **The Engines of God**. Immediately one difference was obvious: instead of being purely based on history, the *Academy* series is based on far-future archaeology. That is a subtle difference, since archaeology is one of the gateways into history, also involving research but of a different type. Other than that difference, all these books use research to solve sfnal mysteries infused with exciting plots set in a wondrous universe. I've seen comments that McDevitt is the "natural heir to Isaac Asimov and Arthur C Clarke," but his plots are better developed than either of those two writers, so I think it is fair to throw in Poul Anderson for comparison as well.

A group of archaeologists are studying an alien world which they believe was the home for an extinct race known as the Monument-Makers. That designation was because they created giant structures on several worlds and moons which seemed to serve no purpose other than as giant nonfunctional monuments. In the first half of the novel, we learn a lot about the race's history along with archeologists in a race against time. Since the world under study is the most Earthlike world ever discovered—except for one other world which is inhabited by an intelligent race already—and since Earth is creeping ever closer to destruction, permission has been given to another group to begin terraforming the world. The first step in that terraforming consists of melting the icecaps, causing vast tidal waves and raising of sea levels that would destroy all the remaining artifacts of the Monument-Makers.

The search for valuable information about the Monument-Makers, especially why their entire civilization vanished seemingly overnight, was fascinating, as was the search for a "Rosetta Stone." The political struggle with the corporation scheduled to begin the terraforming was well-done except for the fact that some of the employees were a bit too heartless to be totally realistic. The final scene on Quraqua was very exciting and, overall, logically done.

The second half of **Engines** moves into deep space where another set of monuments has been found, similar to those on Quraqua. At this point the novel develops its main focus when the archaeologists discover that different worlds related to the Monument-Makers all experienced civilization-destroying cataclysms in a pattern of eight thousand year intervals. The main concern of the archaeologists now becomes the search to uncover the cause for those cataclysms. McDevitt punctuates this search with two exciting sequences. The first occurs when the scientists' spacecraft literally stumbles upon a giant structure in space which resembles a wafer-thin football but seems to be some type of galactic telescope. Contact with the structure causes irreparable damage to the ship, threatening the lives of all the scientists aboard while they await rescue. The second adventure takes place on one of the worlds being searched when the scientists are totally unprepared for alien crabs which, while not intelligent, are still highly-organized and almost military-structured and attack the scientists in force. So the race against time in the novel's first half gives way to a struggle to survive and a planetary adventure in the second half, all of which are adjuncts to the cosmic mystery which remains the novel's primary

importance.

McDevitt's imagination is certainly fertile, and he keeps conjuring archaeological wonders through **The Engines of God**, all of which come together as the scientists' research steadily bears fruit throughout the novel. The novel's ultimate wonder, giant Omega clouds moving steadily through the galaxy destroying all signs of highly-intelligent life in their path, leads to the novel's climactic moment, but also leaves openings for more novels to follow as **The Engines of God** concludes with the knowledge that those civilization-destroying clouds are heading for Earth.

In many ways Jack McDevitt is an old-fashioned writer whose stories combine the best of 1950ish pulp writing with sense of wonder, intriguing mysteries, and lots of future history. Because the literary aspects of his novels tend to be weak, nor his fiction particularly groundbreaking, he will never be considered a "great" writer, but nobody writes more absorbing sf mysteries than he does. Even though I am a rabid New Waver, Jack McDevitt is still one of my favorite current writers.

\*

*This next review contains spoilers!*

The last book I read this summer was John Brunner's 1988 novel **Children of the Thunder**. This novel was written a decade after Brunner's famous series of near-future dystopias (**Stand on Zanzibar**, **The Jagged Orbit**, **The Sheep Look Up**, **The Shockwave Rider**), but it shows as much influence from those books as it does from his more traditional science fiction. The setting is a near-future England which, along with the rest of the world, is slowly sinking into economic and environmental chaos which neither politicians nor regular people seem to be trying to rectify as they pursue their own greedy agendas.

Much of the book combines two alternating sequences. In the first, a group of evolved youngsters gradually realize that they are able to coerce people into doing precisely what they want them to do, and they each use that power differently, generally for selfish reasons. One of them, a boy named David, is also a genius who realizes others like him exist, so he sets out to bring them all together with his family.

The other storyline involves Peter Levin, a news journalist who, along with an American scientist Claudia Morris, realizes from their researches that these evolved children exist and they set out to learn why so many evolved youngsters have suddenly appeared.

Intermingled with these storylines is the growth of fascism worldwide as a reaction to the rapidly-spreading chaos. Brunner shows snippets of the fascism, but does not really explore whether it is a natural human trait which manages to stay suppressed during times of plenty, or whether it is a reaction to the chaos as people instinctively point fingers at "others" for the growing problems rather than admit they are part of the problem themselves. A decade earlier, before Brunner felt obliged to write more "popular" novels for the sake of marketability, he might have explored that issue further rather than merely use it as a framework for what is

basically a thriller.

Much of the novel consists of both David and Peter striving to find the mysterious L. Parker whose sperm donations to an artificial insemination clinic are the most likely root of the evolved children. However, it was fairly obvious to me early in the novel that Parker is really not the father of the children, a fact which becomes more obvious after Peter's estranged daughter Ellen shows up at his doorstep.

Early in the novel Brunner strives to show the evolved children as evil, outside the mainstream of humanity. However, I could not help but think of the food chain which humans have sat atop for several millennia. We have no qualms slaughtering all forms of life beneath us, whether for food or for sport (hunting, fishing, bullfighting). If these children are indeed the new "top" of the food chain, should they feel any more protective of we lower lifeforms than we feel of, say, dolphins? Does that make them more evil than humans are, or merely embracing their role in the food chain?

As the novel progresses, it becomes obvious that Brunner's intent is not to create a race of evil mutants, but to explore, if briefly, the drastic measures which must be taken to save humanity in the form of the children of the thunder. He does not succeed totally in that regard, although he does tie up the various storylines rather nicely. What this book really needs is a sequel to explore the intentions of David and the evolved children to see what, if any, steps they actually take towards reclaiming the planet from the human-induced chaos. While I enjoyed reading this book, my last book read during summer vacation, it was definitely not a case of *last but not least*.

#### Ratings

| Book                          | Author             | Rating |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|--------|
| Ilium                         | Dan Simmons        | B+     |
| Olympos                       | Dan Simmons        | B-     |
| Inheritor                     | C. J. Cherryh      | B+     |
| Roma Eterna                   | Robert Silverberg  | B+     |
| Crystal Rain                  | Tobias Buckell     | B-     |
| The Rosetta Codex             | Richard Paul Russo | B+     |
| Helix                         | Eric Brown         | B+     |
| <b>The Judgment of Caesar</b> | Steven Saylor      | A      |
| The Engines of God            | Jack McDevitt      | B+     |
| Children of Thunder           | John Brunner       | B-     |

# *The In-Box*

**Alexiad** / Lisa & Joseph Major / 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204-2040 / very regular reviewzine concerned with sf, nonfiction, horse racing and candy

**Argentus** / Steven Silver / 707 Sapling Lane, Deerfield, IL 60015-3969 / available at [shsilver@sfsite.com](mailto:shsilver@sfsite.com) and <http://www.efanzines.com> / annual genzine

**Askance** / John Purcell / available at <http://www.efanzines.com> / very good new genzine

**Ben's Beat** / Ben Indick, 428 Sagamore Ave., Teaneck, NJ 07666 / personalzinewith an emphasis on plays and books

**brg** / Bruce Gillespie / <http://www.efanzines.com> / 59 Keele Street, Collingwood VIC 3066 / Bruce's ANZAPA personalzine

**Celtic Seasons** / Rita & Richard Shader / 2593 Chapparal Drive, Melbourne, FL 32934-8275 / articles on Lews Castle, the Roman invasion and the Picts

**Challenger** / The Zine Dump / Guy H. Lillian III / P.O. Box 53092, New Orleans, LA 70153-3092 / [www.challzine.net](http://www.challzine.net) / one of the finest genzines being published

**The Drink Tank** / Chris Garcia / [www.efanzine.com](http://www.efanzine.com) / perhaps the most regular online personalzine. Always interesting reading

**File 770** / Mike Glyer / <http://www.efanzines.com> / 705 Valley View Ave., Monrovia, CA 01016 / fannish news and reviews

**For The Clerisy** / Brant Kresovich / P.O. Box 404, Getzville, NY 14068 / perhaps the most interesting book reviews of any current fanzine. Highly recommended

**In a Prior Lifetime** / John Purcell / <http://www.efanzines.com> / last issue of an online personalzine, soon to be replaced by a bi-monthly genzine

**The Knarley Knews** / Henry Welch / 1525 16<sup>th</sup> Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017 / ever-faithful genzine; Knarley spumes, Sue Welch travels, and Terry Jeeves' memoirs

**Lofgeornost** / Fred Lerner / 81 Worcester Ave., White River Junction, VT 05001 / personalzine with a penchant for international travel

**Opuntia** / Dale Speirs / Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E7 / reviews, articles, and letters by one of the finest current fanwriters

**Peregrine Nations** / Janine Stinson / <http://www.efanzines.com> / PO Box 248, Eastlake, MI 49626-0248 / genzine

**Pixel** / David Burton / 5227 Emma Drive, Lawrence, IN 46236-2742 /available at <http://www.efanzines.com> / genzine

**The Resplendent Fool** / Tom Sadler / 422 W. Maple Ave, Adrian, MI 49221-1627 / welcome return of a long-dormant genzine

**Some Fantastic** / Matthew Appleton / available at <http://www.somefantastic.us/> / zine devoted to reviews of f&sf

**Southern Fandom Confederation Bulletin** / R.B. Cleary / 470 Ridge Road, Birmingham, AL 35206-2816 / clubzine with news, conreports and reviews

**Steam Engine Time** / Bruce Gillespie and Janine Stinson / P.O. Box 248, Eastlake, MI 49626-0248 / <http://www.efanzines.com> / genzine with lots of reviews

**Vanamonde** / John Hertz / 236 S. Coronado St., No 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057 / two-page APazine with brief comments on a variety of interesting topics



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## *On the Lighter Side*

George Phillips of Meridian Mississippi was going up to bed when his wife told him that he'd left the light on in the garden shed, which she could see from the bedroom window.

George opened the back door to go turn off the light but saw that there were people in the shed stealing things.

He phoned the police, who asked "Is someone in your house?" and he said no. Then they said that all patrols were busy, and that he should simply lock his door and an officer would be along when available.

George said, "Okay," hung up, counted to 30, and phoned the police again.

"Hello I just called you a few seconds ago because there were people in my shed. Well, you don't have to worry about them now cause I've just shot them all."

Then he hung up.

Within five minutes three police cars, an Armed Response unit, and an ambulance showed up at the Phillips residence. Of course, the police caught the burglars red\_handed. One of the policemen said to George: "I thought you said that you'd shot them!"

George said, "I thought you said there was nobody available!"

\*

*Here's a joke from Sally Syrjala:*

There were three country churches in a small Texas town: The Presbyterian church, the Lutheran church and the Catholic church.

Each church was over run with pesky squirrels.

One day, the Presbyterian church called a meeting to decide what to do about the squirrels. After much prayer and consideration they determined that the squirrels were predestined to be there and they shouldn't interfere with God's divine will.

The Catholic group got together and decided that they were not in a position to harm any of God's creations. So, they humanely trapped the squirrels and set them free a few miles outside of town. Three days later, the squirrels were back.

It was only the Lutherans who were able to come up with the best and most effective solution. They baptized the squirrels and registered them as members of the church.

Now they only see them on Christmas and Easter.

\*

A young Italian man excitedly tells his mother he's fallen in love and that he is going to get married. He says, "Just for fun, Ma, I'm going to bring over 3 women and you try and guess which one I'm going to marry."

The mother agrees.

The next day, he brings three beautiful women into the house and sits them down on the couch and they chat for a while. He then says, "Okay, Ma, guess which one I'm going to marry."

She immediately replies, "The one on the right."

"That's amazing, Ma. You're right. How did you know?"

The Italian mother replies, "I don't like her."