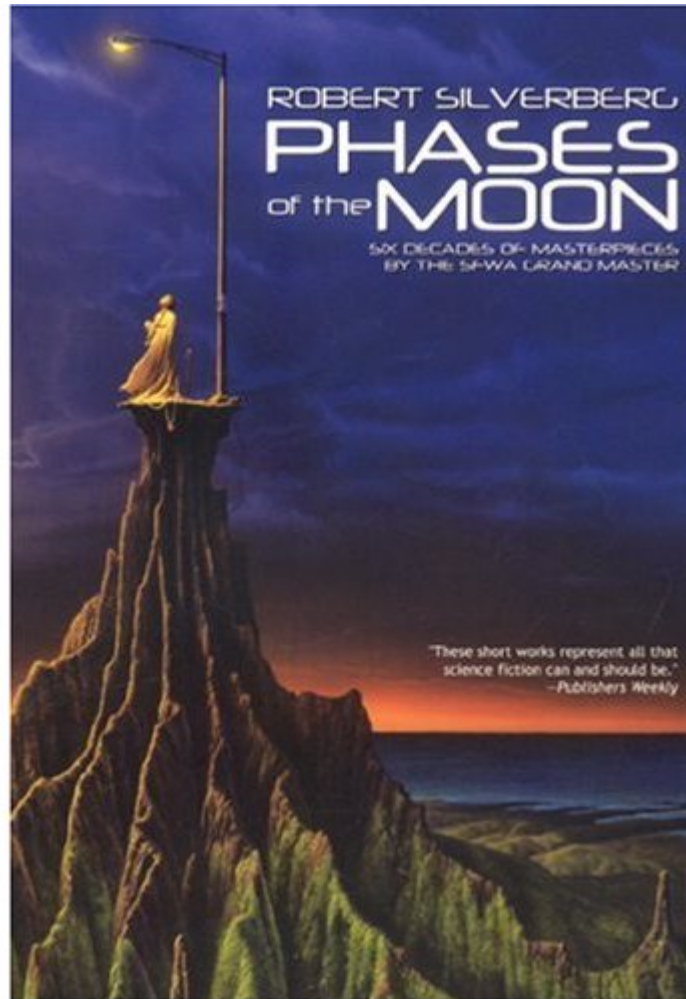


# Visions of Paradise #146



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# The Passing Scene

School has gotten very stressful this year for various reasons I dare not put online, but in a way that has confirmed the decision I made this past summer to retire at the end of this school year. There are pros and cons toward both teaching and retiring, so I'll list a few of them here:

## Pros:

- I have committed to write a book with my photographer friend, and doing the research and writing during school is almost impossible;
- Fei Fei has been encouraging me to write my book about immigrant students settling in America, and while I did my initial round of "interviews" for it about five years ago, I have not begun the book at all;
- Our friends Alan and Denise have been retired for about 10 years already, and they have been encouraging Jean and me to go on extensive cross-country camping trips with them. Jean would like to visit many of the national parks, and I could easily bring a laptop with me and work while traveling;
- Fei Fei is now living in Palo Alto, California, so we will not be able to see her as regularly as we did the past few years when she was at Princeton. She recently bought a three-bedroom condo, with the third bedroom devoted to visits from Silvio's parents and Jean and me, and she is anxious for us to spend time with her;
- I have been putting off many things I wish to do for several decades (write books, learn Chinese, practice both guitar and drawing, learn more history, read!), and if I wait too long I might be denied the chance to do them.

## Cons:

- I really love working with my students in the Math Lab which I do mornings, during my free periods, and after school. That is probably the greatest joy of teaching, and one of the greatest in my life, and nothing I do afterwards can possibly replace it;
- I had a great class of sophomores last year with which I developed a wonderful rapport, and they are anticipating having me next year for A.P. Calculus. The problem is that no matter when I decide to leave, there will always be a group of my sophomores expecting to have me again as seniors.

I sent a general email to my former students, whom I knew would be upset that I am retiring, although for different reasons than my current students. The reaction to the letter was incredible. Within twenty-four hours I received congratulations (and regrets) from Foram, Isis, Preeti, Susan, Yun, Brian, Tino, Eric, Aish and Gabriela.

I also told the juniors who expected to have me next year for A.P. Calculus. First I told Shah, who is in my AP Statistics class this year, and she was very distraught. Then I told Wei and Nicole, and Nicole cried inconsolably for 10 minutes. When Kevin found out, he followed me around trying to talk me out of it. Other students have also been begging me to reconsider. Kevin started a Facebook group dedicated to convincing me to change my mind entitled *The Official I Love Robert Sabella and Want Him to Stay at PHS Group*. Within a week, 104 members joined it, including my second year teacher Briane!

I never expected this type of reaction, and I must admit it is very flattering. Fortunately, Jean, Fei Fei and Alan will keep reminding me of the pleasures of retiring next year, so my students will not talk me out of it. But yes, I do feel a bit guilty about abandoning my children.

# Wondrous Stories

My collection has 48 sf books written by Robert Silverberg, and another 36 sf books edited (or co-edited) by him. That seems like a lot, but in some ways it barely scratches the surface of his career output. His website <http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/lists> over 100 sf books Silverberg wrote and more than 80 sf books he edited or co-edited. And I suspect those totals are somewhat short of the true total.

Recently I bought a Silverberg book not in my collection, his retrospective collection **Phases of the Moon**. It contains 23 stories (in 622 pages) selected by Silverberg himself as representative of his entire career, as well as long story introductions which, collectively, serve as an in-depth overview of Robert Silverberg's writing autobiography. The book is divided into decades, so I started reading with *The Fifties*.

From everything I have read about Robert Silverberg, his writing in the 1950s were pure pulp writing, having no loftier goal than selling sufficient stories to the prozines to make a living from writing. He apparently had no artistic ideals, but was the quintessential hack writer. Reading the four stories from that decade, and Silverberg's introductions, that assessment was fairly valid. He knew his best chance of making a living was to aim for the secondary markets, rather than spend unnecessary time and effort aiming for the Big Three prozines of **Galaxy**, **F&SF** and **Astounding**. And yet, none of the stories he selected from that era were bad at all, well-written pulp adventures which were probably in the upper half of the stories published at that time.

The fourth story, "Warm Man," was Silverberg's first appearance in the prestigious **Fantasy & Science Fiction**, and showed a touch that had not yet appeared in the previous stories in the book.

Onto *The Sixties*, which begins with Silverberg's discussion of how much of the prozine market vanished at the end of the 1950s, along with his guaranteed paychecks, so he virtually dropped out of the science fiction field in favor of writing nonfiction and erotic fiction. True there was the occasional sf story, but it seemed as if Silverberg would join the ranks of promising pulp writers who found better ways to spend their writing time.

Until Frederik Pohl took over the editorial reins of **Galaxy** and made Silverberg a now-famous offer: Pohl would promise to buy every story which Silverberg submitted to him, so long as each story represented the best writing Silverberg could do, no writing down to a pulp market for the sake of guaranteeing a sale. As soon as Silverberg submitted a less-than-stellar story, Pohl would still accept it, but the deal was then terminated. This freed Silverberg from the necessity of "dumbing-down" his stories to guarantee publication, while at worst requiring Pohl to publish one pulp-level story. But Pohl was confident it would guarantee **Galaxy** a slow-but-steady stream of top-notch stories.

The first story Silverberg wrote under his new-found security was "To See the Invisible Man," which, ironically, was the first Silverberg story I ever read. It appeared in the debut issue of **Worlds of Tomorrow** just after I discovered the prozines. It created a future society which Silverberg explored through one introspective character who not only reflected that society, but

grew emotionally through the story. It was the type of sf story which immediately resonated with me, and had two effects on me: first, as Silverberg perfected that type of story he immediately became my favorite science fiction writer, whose career I followed closely from then on, giving me many, many hours of pleasure; and second, it probably ruined me as a prospective author. Unlike Silverberg, who honed his skills writing pulp-level stories for a half-dozen years, I immediately began writing the type of stories which I enjoyed most, introspective studies of future societies, which are probably among the most difficult type of stories to write. Nearly forty years of failure have made it obvious that my writing talent lies far below that Silverberg level, and while there is no guarantee I would have had more success had I aimed for pulp-level adventures (probably the most popular type of sf on the market), at least I might have had a better chance of succeeding.

Next were two stories which were basically horror stories, “Flies” (which appeared in the anthology **Dangerous Visions**) and “Passengers” (which appeared in **Orbit** and won Silverberg his first Nebula Award). While they were interesting stories, as horror stories they were mostly dependent on their punchlines, and were not “major” stories per se.

Next came “Nightwings.” For over forty years this has been one of my very favorite stories, and remains just as powerful on its most recent reading. In one of his introductions in **Phases of the Moon**, Silverberg described a “masterpiece” as “a piece of work which is intended to demonstrate to a craftsman’s peers that he has ended his apprenticeship and has fully mastered the intricacies of his trade.” That is my opinion of “Nightwings”. It truly deserved its Hugo Award as Best Novella, and probably the Nebula Award as well (which it lost to Anne McCaffrey’s “Dragonflight”).

The story creates a vivid far future age long after Earth civilization has passed its peak, an age in which people belong to specific guilds based on their roles in life. The main character is a Watcher, who four times each day uses his ancient machine to search the skies for a long-awaited invasion by distant aliens who have “claimed” Earth, an invasion which many people, including some Watchers, now disbelieve. He is accompanied by a Flier, a teenaged girl so slim and weightless that her butterfly wings enable her to fly under cover of darkness when the solar winds do not force her down. Their third companion is Gormon, a guildless “changeling” whose barely-human appearance and lack of guild make him a virtual outcast in society.

The story begins as the trio reach the ancient city of Roum (following the story’s classic first line “Roum is a city built on seven hills”). Silverberg uses the visit as an excuse to examine the far-future city itself, the civilization of the people who inhabit it, and also the history of the city, both in our own future and its classical past. We are given a glimpse of the numerous Guilds and how they were originally formed during a time of crisis on Earth. This is the first Silverberg story I read which was preoccupied with history, both our past and our future, and it spoke to one of my loves in reading fiction (both science fiction and historical). The story was definitely bittersweet, as it examined the Watcher’s relationship with the Flier, as well as her own relationship with Gormon and, after entering the city, the young but powerful Prince of Roum.

And, of course, the invasion finally comes, which changes all the relationships, as well as the very civilization itself. The ending of “Nightwings” was as much conclusion as beginning of the

Watcher's further adventures, and it urged me to put aside **Phases of the Moon** briefly and spend a weekend reading the three novellas which formed the fix-up book **Nightwings**. This is the second time I have read the entire book in this decade, and it stood up as well each time I reread it. I will not review the entire book here, except to make an observation: there is very little plotting per se in "Golden Age" Silverberg fiction. His primary concerns are exploring future worlds and the emotional and philosophical growth of its characters. Consider **Thorns, The Masks of Time, Nightwings, A Time of Changes, The Book of Skulls, Dying Inside**. It is not surprising how much I have enjoyed reading such deliberate world and character studies over the years, and why my favorite authors other than Silverberg include Michael Bishop, Ursula K Le Guin and Kim Stanley Robinson.

Rounding out *The Sixties* came "Sundance," which Silverberg admits in his introduction was an attempt to push himself to his limit (this was the story which he considered his masterpiece in the sense discussed above). He succeeded very well in a story of Earthlings who are exterminating millions of animals which live on an alien planet, for the purpose of providing space for incoming human settlers. Then one of the exterminators mentions to the main character what if the animals are actually intelligent? This sets off thoughts of genocide in his head, and the story seems to be headed towards a confrontation between the main character and his companions until Silverberg veers the story very effectively in an entirely different direction.

"Sundance" has grown in stature in the years since it was published, and is now considered a classic of science fiction, rightfully so. Silverberg mentions that it made the Nebula ballot that year, but he withdrew it "somewhat cynically" because he "calculated that the more accessible 'Passengers' had a better chance of winning the award," which it did. Then he comments that he won "a Nebula with my second-best story of 1969." I agree with him, although any Nebula Award is worthy, so he probably made the wise decision.

In *The Seventies* we encounter "Capricorn Games," which was a disappointment. Silverberg called this story one of his personal favorites, but it never really struck a chord with me. A rich, bored woman encounters an immortal at a party who announces that at the forthcoming new year he will select a handful of people who will receive immortality from him. Obviously the protagonist is anxious to be included in that group, but after a telepath at the party enables her to enter the immortal's mind, she becomes disgusted by his extreme age and changes her mind. That's it. No growth as I had expected in a Silverberg story of that era, on top of several unlikely premises strung together almost randomly.

In his introduction to "Capricorn Games," Silverberg discusses how at that time jaded he was becoming with writing science fiction, partly due to his extreme diligence the past decade, and partly due to stresses in his own life. His growing boredom with writing science fiction seemed to fill "Capricorn Games." In the introduction to the next story, "Born With the Dead," he tells how his personal trauma had grown so much worse that it took him nearly three months to finish the novella, while previously he had finished most of his novels in less than half that time. Under the circumstances, you might expect "Born With the Dead" to be similar to "Capricorn Games" in its lack of involvement, but somehow exactly the opposite occurred.

The protagonist Jorge is a recent widower, his dear wife Sybill having died three years earlier. But in this world, set twenty years in the future of the story's publication, some dead people are

revived in a state somewhere between that of the living (called “warms” in the story) and that of traditional fantasy zombies. They do not shuffle, they do not have hazy thoughts, but they are largely unemotional and choose to live mostly isolated from “warms”.

Jorge has mourned his wife’s death for three years, and has not yet fully-healed. So where normally he would have forcibly begun the process of healing emotionally, the fact that his wife has been reborn has caused him to become fixated on her, wanting desperately to rekindle some semblance of their former relationship. Sybill, however, is so unemotional that she has no interest in him, nor any desire to see him. But the more she rejects him, the more obsessed Jorge becomes, and each rejection only drives him more determinedly on. While his fixation is emotionally pathetic, a living reader can understand his obsession, and feel empathetic to his quest, futile though we know it is.

Where “Capricorn Days,” a story about the living, was cold and largely unemotional, “Born With the Dead,” a story about the dead, is emotionally-charged. The scenes of the dead on a safari shooting extinct animals is the most chilling, since the animals are, like their predators, revived in a way from the dead, only to become the prey of other dead. And whenever Jorge breaks one of society’s biggest taboos that the living avoid the dead who have no desire to intermingle with them, the story’s tension heightens.

This is a strong story with an inevitable conclusion, yet it succeeds well. Coming on the heels of two of Silverberg’s finest novels **Dying Inside** and **The Book of Skulls** (and he comments in his introduction on the pattern of death in all three stories, including their titles), it proves that even as he found himself pulling away from the science fiction field per se, his talents remained at their highest peak.

One other comment in the introduction to “Born With the Dead” seems worth mentioning. The story won a deserved Nebula Award, and was runner-up for the Hugo Award. That near double coup should have pleased the story’s author, but Silverberg was becoming more and more alienated from the science fiction field. He first rose to prominence during the New Wave period during which a handful of sf writers had tried to move the genre away from its pulp roots in the direction of more literary fiction. The early-to-mid 1970s saw a resurgence of traditional sf, adventure fiction and space operas, a trend which became overwhelming when *Star Wars* burst into the public consciousness a few years later. Like Silverberg, I was very disappointed in this turning away from the advancements of the past decade, and at the time I considered much 1970s sf inferior to that of the 1960s. Silverberg’s disillusionment combined with his being burnt out for several reasons, so he saw the Hugo runner-up for “Born With the Dead” as a rejection of his type of science fiction by the genre readership, advancing his growing alienation from them. At this point, it is not surprising that his second retirement from the field lay only a few years ahead.

Knowing all this, it is easy to read “Schwartz Between the Galaxy” as autobiographical. Its protagonist is growing increasingly disillusioned with the homogeneity of Earth’s cultures, dreaming of riding on a gigantic spaceship filled with diverse alien races, as he becomes increasingly distressed and dominated by emotional turmoil. It was a strong story then, and perhaps a stronger story in its position in **Phases of the Moon**, serving as a coda to Robert Silverberg’s personal Golden Years as a writer of science fiction.

In 1979 Silverberg returned triumphantly to science fiction with the publication of **Lord Valentine's Castle**. In many ways it harkened back to a simpler Silverberg, less composed of interior monologue and growth in favor of traditional storytelling. At the time I recall thinking the novel might have been influenced by the recent republication of several 1950s Silverberg Ace Doubles in solo form, which might have elicited some fond memories in him of when writing was pure pleasure and science fiction was a joy rather than a chore. While I still do not know if that opinion is true or not, there was surely more pure fun in 1980s Silverberg science fiction than there was in most of his 1970s output.

The first story in *The Eighties* shows that. "The Far Side of the Bell Curve" is a pure romp as its two characters jaunt through history, visiting famous event after famous event, seeing such notables as Shakespeare, Robespierre, Charlemagne, Kublai Khan, a history lover's delight. The story also drips love of culture in its fictional references, and was an absolute delight to read. Not surprisingly, it reminded me of Silverberg's earlier time travel romp, the 1969 novel **Up the Line**. If nothing else, this story on the heels of **Lord Valentine's Castle** seems proof that Silverberg had indeed returned to writing and his talent was no worse the wear for his angst-driving retirement.

"The Pope of the Chimps" is a very atypical Silverberg story. It reminded me of one of Greg Benford's stories about the workings of modern scientists. It tells the story of scientists working with a group of chimpanzees who communicate together via sign language. These studies have been going on for several chimp generations, so the chimps are getting progressively brighter each generation.

Although chimps have died during the studies, they have no knowledge that humans are also mortal, until one scientist develops leukemia and uses the opportunity to show the chimps the gradual decay and dying of a human. This has profound effects on the chimpanzees, as indicated by the story's title, but what they choose to do with their newly-developed religion is very disturbing and leaves the scientists in a dilemma both practical and philosophical. A very thought-provoking story.

"Needle in a Timestack" is another time travel romp. A malicious time traveler changes the past life of the protagonist repeatedly with the goal of eventually winning his wife for himself. Nothing too profound, but fun stuff.

Which brings us to "Sailing to Byzantium," a story of which Silverberg is justifiably proud. What he has accomplished in this novella is a full-scale historical epic à la Cecil B. DeMille but in print and at considerably shorter length, an astounding feat. It tells the story of a contemporary man who is somehow whisked millennia into the future when Earth is sparsely-populated by immortals who spend most of their time recreating 5 historical cities in random sequence and exploring them at length. Silverberg delights with travelogues to Alexandria, Mohenjo-Daro, and a futuristic New Chicago, all of which were absolutely delightful and worthwhile in themselves. But it is also an emotional story about the relationship between the contemporary Charles Phillips (ironically the name of my father-in-law) and the future Gioia, and their evolving relationship which is based somewhat on their differences, not only from each

other, but from the other immortals. This story ranks with “Nightwings” as one of Silverberg’s finest stories, as well as one of the most evocative sf stories I have ever read.

The last story in this section has the unwieldy title “Enter A Soldier. Later: Enter Another.” Silverberg’s introduction explains how he wrote it as the opening story in a “shared world” series which was devoted to pairs of historical personages having dialogues. This story shows the science behind the pairings, and matches the conqueror Pizarro versus the philosopher Socrates. The story is cute, and their interaction is interesting, but as a story it never really struck me as more than a well-done curiosity.

Which brings us to *The Nineties*. Silverberg spent a lot of time in his introductions discussing his reduced production the past 20 years, and only 5 stories represent the recent two decades, while he selected 18 from the first 4. However, there has been no noticeable lack of quality in the recent stories, so while he might be semi-retired, he has matured nicely from young Turk to grand master. “Hunters in the Night” is a brief but interesting story about a time traveler who visits the Cretaceous age with hopes of encountering danger and jolting himself out of his too-comfortable life. While there he meets another time-traveler who has abandoned her vehicle with the intention of living in the age of dinosaurs permanently, and who encourages Mallory to do the same. This is an interesting look at a man from a privileged existence who claims to want to live dangerously, and how he faces the ultimate offer to do so.

“Death Do Us Part” is one of Silverberg’s frequent musings on life and death in the form of a thirtyish woman’s marriage to a three-hundred year old near-immortal. The story’s main concern is the woman’s dealing emotionally with a husband who is so much older than she is and who has seen and done so many things in his centuries of life that she feels like a mere child by comparison. This is one of Silverberg’s stronger character studies, and while it is told exclusively from the point of view of the woman, he also shows us some of the emotional trauma the husband undergoes because his wife is so much younger than he is. In some ways this story is a counterpoint to the earlier “Sailing to Byzantium” and it might have been more thought-provoking because of its emotional similarities to the earlier story.

The last story from this decade was “Beauty in the Night,” which was one of several stories Silverberg carved out of his novel **The Alien Years**, which I reviewed in 2008 and called middle-level Silverberg, not one of his major novels (which differs from the author’s opinion, since he calls it “one of the most successful novels” of his post-retirement period). This small excerpt is an interesting look at life on Earth under the heels of an alien conqueror, more interesting as a character study than as part of the bigger novel.

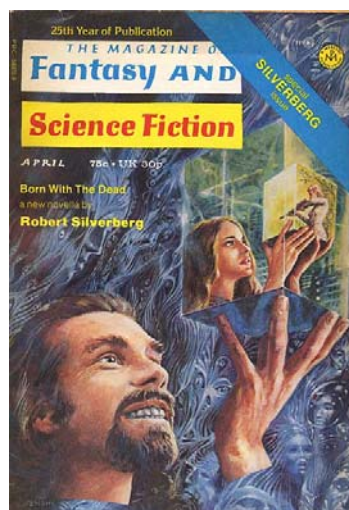
Finally we go to *The 2000s* and “The Millennium Express,” a story set in the year 2999 when cloned versions of Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso and Ernest Hemingway are international terrorists determined to destroy all cultural vestiges of the past. A police investigator follows them around the world as they blow up the Washington Monument, Mount Vesuvius, the Sistine Chapel, and many more famous monuments, until he finally confronts them as they are plotting to destroy the Louvre. Other than the illogic of his watching them destroy a good number of the world’s artistic heritage before trying to stop them, the story’s eventual theme is questioning whether humans can actually progress culturally or artistically living in a perfectly safe, perfectly

comfortable environment, or whether progress is innately connected to chaos. I have actually considered this question myself and have wondered is there a perfect balance between comfort and growth, something which Silverberg himself considers in this story as well.

The last story in the book is “With Caesar in the Underworld,” one of his *Roma Eterna* series, which shows one of the crucial points of divergence from our history. It is set during the mid-6th century (our calendar) when barbarians are threatening the northern borders of the western Roman Empire, but Emperor Maximilianus is old and dying, and neither of his two sons seems qualified to assume the throne and repel the expected barbarian 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. On its surface the story 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 the Roman Empire. This is one of the finer stories in Silverberg’s last “novel” (although a mosaic novel), and a fitting capstone for his entire collection.

Some final observations on **Phases of the Moon**. This is definitely a major collection, one of the handful of finest single-author collections I have ever read. It shows one of my favorite sf writers at the top of his form, but it also shows his growth and maturing through the decades. The story introductions are very extensive, and serve as a mini-autobiography of Robert Silverberg, which themselves are very interesting. I recommend this book very highly, even for readers such as myself who have most of Silverberg’s output over the decades. I am sure even such readers will find some undiscovered gems in addition to the biographical material.



# Answers to Baby Boomer Quiz

What is the claim to fame of Ned Morgan of Cincinnati, Ohio, and Judith Owens of Schenectady, New York? <i>They were the all-time champion contestants on Call My Bluff</i>
What was the name of Joe Namath's bar in NYC which Pete Rozelle forced him to sell his interest in? <i>Bachelors Three</i>
Who played the Joker, Penguin and Riddler on the original <i>Batman</i> series? <i>Cesar Romero, Burgess Meredith, Frank Gorshin</i>
Who was the original host of <i>Jeopardy</i> ? <i>Art Fleming</i>
In the original <i>Hollywood Squares</i> , who was the most common celebrity in the center square? <i>Paul Lynde</i> Who mostly sat in the lower left square? <i>Charley Weaver</i> What was his real name? <i>Cliff Arquette</i>
Who were Dick Van Dyke's fellow staff writers on <i>The Dick Van Dyke Show</i> ? <i>Buddy and Sally</i> What was the name of the star of the show they wrote for? <i>Alan Brady</i> Who played him? <i>Carl Reiner</i>
In one famous episode of <i>The Dick Van Dyke Show</i> , Dick dreamed that Earth was invaded by aliens who had eyes in the back of their head. What famous comedian played the alien? <i>Danny Thomas</i>
Who had a sore throat when the Beatles first appeared on <i>The Ed Sullivan Show</i> ? <i>George</i>
What was the name of the two-part episode of <i>Star Trek</i> which was the series' original pilot? <i>The pilot itself was entitled "The Cage," but when it was incorporated into an episode of Star Trek it was called "The Menagerie"</i>
How do you really pronounce Joe Theisman's name? <i>Joe Theesman</i> Why did he change it? <i>Notre Dame's athletic department wanted it to rhyme with Heisman</i>
Who was George McGovern's original running mate in 1972? <i>Thomas Eagleton</i> Why was he removed from the ticket? <i>He had previously seen a psychiatrist</i> Who replaced him? <i>Sargent Shriver</i>
Paul Hewson is to David Evans as Gordon Sumner is to whom? <i>Paul Hewson is Bono; David Evans is the Edge; Gordon Sumner is Sting. So Bono is to the Edge as Sting is to Andy Summers</i>
What famous rock star originally titled one of his albums <i>Ol' Pink Eyes is Back</i> ? <i>Elton John</i>
There are two famous rock stars named David Jones. One was a Monkee. Who is the other? <i>David Bowie, who changed his name so as not to be confused with the Monkee</i>
What iconic movie role was originally played by Buddy Ebsen? <i>The Tin Man in The Wizard of Oz</i> Why did he quit the role? <i>He was allergic to the makeup</i> Who replaced him? <i>Jack Haley</i>
Several decades later Buddy Ebsen played the sidekick of a legendary American in a tv series. Who was that legend? <i>Davy Crockett</i> Who played him? <i>Fess Parker</i>
What Beatle song did Chicago regularly play as one of their encores in the 1970s? (Think about it; it's a very logical choice) <i>Gotta Get You Into My Life</i>

# Halcyon Days

**Tara Wayne**

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August 1, 2009

I guess if one is a "serious reader of science fiction," rather than someone who reads it for pleasure when he feels like it, then **Locus** would be the greatest fanzine of all time and everywhere in the universe. For the rest of us it was a trade magazine with little resemblance to *Banana Wings* or *File 770*, and giving it the Hugo every year did little but spoil the party. Eventually the worldcon felt it politic to create a separate category for **Locus** to win all by itself (initially anyway). That way a fanzine that was not indistinguishable from a professional magazine could win. Each to his own taste in fanac.

**Rich Dengrove**

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August 2, 2009

VoP #142: I was going to say: so that's what you look like? However, I just received #143 and saw an even better depiction. In my mind's eye, I pictured you as fat. The reason is you like food so much. It's an obvious pleasure to you. But you are average weight, maybe even a little thin. You're certainly thinner than I am.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS. some things are harder to tell than weight. I'm just wondering how seriously we should take the Hugo Awards. Aren't they often comparing apples to oranges. Works are completely different. I guess we could rate the pleasure we get from them. But would that be the criteria for whether something wins the Hugo?

WONDROUS STORIES. There is one criteria I agree with you about. If there is anything I am nostalgic for, it is novels (and stories and movies and TV shows) that tell an exciting story that dispenses with violence. Like Jenkins' *Med Ship* series. I saw a *Dragnet* recently, from the early '50s. I have to admit it did contain some violence -- a ten second scuffle. That was it.

VoP #143: THE PASSING SCENE. I recently decided to become a member of Facebook. It is great that I am connected now with relatives and friends. However, I hope I am not missing more.

I refuse to confirm as friends people whose names I don't recognize. I hope the problem isn't my ever porous memory rather than people I don't know.

WONDROUS STORIES. If I was able to travel back in time, maybe I would know. However, as I have perhaps said too much, you can't go back in your timeline, only in alternate timelines. Maybe the people who are claiming to be friends now were friends in an alternate timeline. So time travel wouldn't be good for Facebook. However, it would be good for novels like **The Time Ships**.

HALCYON DAYS. Also while my memory may never have been too good, I am satisfied with my exercise. And that's true even though, like **Eric Mayer**, I better not run. The problem isn't my back; it's with arthritis in my knee and hip. However, I walk; and I seem to get my heartbeat up enough for my health. So I'm satisfied.

**John Purcell**

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August 4, 2009

Even though I know you're probably up in Montreal by now, whooping it up a storm with the gathering of the tribes at Worldcon, here's a loc on your latest *Visions of Paradise*. It is the least thing that I can do right now that resembles fanac of some sort. Many, many congratulations and happy returns to the happy couple. It certainly sounds like Kate and Mark's wedding went off very well, and I am glad for you that that ordeal is now over. In a couple years - or less, depending on how they plan it - our daughter Penny (24) will probably be marrying her boyfriend Eric; they've been dating steadily since the end of their senior year in high school, and I know Penny has been looking at wedding magazines, bookmarking wedding websites, and so forth, for about a year now, so they've been obviously thinking about this possibility. It would be a good match, and it makes me feel all warm-fuzzy inside just thinking about it. Besides, once that happens, Josie will get moved into the room we're in right now, then Val and I get the master bedroom. (It's only a three-bedroom, 2 full bath house, so the girls share the biggest room.) Oh, the joy!

I have always enjoyed H. G. Wells' SF novels. Indeed, they are seminal works that explored the major themes of the genre. That being said, I may have to check out **The Time Ships** by Stephen Baxter. I know this name, but totally unfamiliar with his work. Thank you for the heads-up.

Speaking of classic SF writers whose work has influenced modern SF writers, I have been reading S.M. Stirling's **The Sky People**, and thoroughly enjoying it. Once I'm done grading final papers in the next couple days the plan is to get back to the book; it certainly won't take long to finish it. A very enjoyable novel, even more so since I read **Carson of Venus** a couple months ago. Read in that order, **The Sky People** is even more fun.

Notes from the loc column are next. **Lloyd Penney** lists out some good books and authors. One of my more recent reads was Simak's **City**; haven't read that in a long time and really liked it. Of course, Simak is one of my all-time favorite authors. And I believe you are right in that **Tales from Planet Earth** is by Arthur C. Clarke. My goal is still to read more current sf writers - I do like Alastair Reynolds, Tim Powers, and now S. M. Stirling - in order to be more in tune with what's being published. There is no way, like you noted in your editorial, that anyone could keep up with all that is being published in the field, but a broader knowledge base would be A Good Thing at this time in my fannish life. Thank you, **Knarley**, for the word on **Jose Sanchez**. If he does more art again, let it be known he has a fan in me. He is very good! With that, after chuckling at the jokes, I sign off. Have fun at Anticipation. Sure wish I could go, but them's the breaks.

[I did not attend Anticipation, but not through lack of interest. I stopped attending Worldcons after 1980 when my then new-wife Jean was basically bored the entire weekend. Leaving her all

weekend to sightsee alone all weekend while I attend a con seems unfair, so I don't do it. Perhaps sometime there will be a convention near some friends that Jean can spend the time with, but unless that happens, conventions remain an elusive dream for me.]

## **Lloyd Penney**

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August 23, 2009

Thank you for issue 143 of *Visions of Paradise*. You're on the front cover.....I think this is the first picture I've seen of you. Comments on the issue will follow as I get to wind up the weekend in a relaxing fashion.

It is perhaps not unexpected that Charlie Brown might have passed away at his age, but at least he knew that at his age, the magazine should be able to carry on without him, so he was wise in that regard. I also know that there were some people Brown didn't like or at least wouldn't profile in **Locus**; Rob Sawyer's never been able to figure out why **Locus** would largely ignore him. I have seen early copies of **Locus** when it was still a fanzine; I wish it has kept more of its fannish connections, but by then, it had become a business.

I have read some of Stephen Baxter's work, especially the work he did with the late Sir Arthur C. Clarke. There seem to have been a number of sequels to **The War of the Worlds**, one of which is Garrett P. Serviss' **Edison's Conquest of Mars**. It was written in 1898, one year after **The War of the Worlds** was published. This novel was commissioned by Hearst Newspapers, and Serviss enlisted Thomas Edison to create some of the ideas in the novel.

The local.....trying to get enough exercise is difficult. If only reading and watch TV and movies were exercise, we'd all look like Arnold. Yeah, if only..... **Locus** may soon have the full voting breakdown for all the Hugos, if they aren't there already. For me, it was good to see that three Hugos went to *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, **WALL-E** and the *Girl Genius* webcomic.

I've got most of the zines listed here, but I wouldn't mind seeing **Michael Waite's** *Trial and Air*. I get kidded that I must get every fanzine out there, but this is one I don't.

The Montréal Worldcon was a great time. I got to run the fanzine lounge (there were a few issues of **VoP** there), we attended the Aurora Awards banquet (I was a nominee, but I did not win), and best of all, we got to hand out a Hugo Award (for Best Fan Writer, won by **Cheryl Morgan** this year), and be a part of the usual Hugo Awards spectacle. Great fun, saw so many good friends.....Worldcon is always fun for me, and we do intend to go to Reno in 2011, if it's affordable.

All done for the moment.....this is the fourth loc today, mostly because we are still cleaning up from Worldcon, and slowly but surely putting things away. Also, yesterday was a BBQ and pool party, where some friends gave me their own version of a Hugo Award, bless their hearts. So I have a trophy with a silvery rocket on it, of my very own. Take care, and see you next issue.

[Out of room this issue ... I'll have more letters in the November issue...]

# On the Lighter Side

Jokes by Lloyd Penney

Buddy and his wife Edna went to the state fair every year, and every year Buddy would say, 'Edna, I'd like to ride in that helicopter.'

Edna always replied, 'I know Buddy, but that helicopter ride is fifty bucks, and fifty bucks is fifty bucks'

One year Buddy and Edna went to the fair, and Buddy said, 'Edna, I'm 85 years old... If I don't ride that helicopter, I might never get another chance.'

To this, Edna replied, "Buddy that helicopter ride is fifty bucks, and fifty bucks is fifty bucks."

The pilot overheard the couple and said, 'Folks I'll make you a deal. I'll take the both of you for a ride. If you can stay quiet for the entire ride and don't say a word, I won't charge you a penny! But if you say one word it's fifty dollars.'

Buddy and Edna agreed and up they went. The pilot did all kinds of fancy manoeuvres, but not a word was heard. He did his daredevil tricks over and over again, but still not a word. When they landed, the pilot turned to Buddy and said, 'By golly, I did everything I could to get you to yell out, but you didn't. I'm impressed!'

Buddy replied, 'Well, to tell you the truth, I almost said something when Edna fell out, but you know, "fifty bucks is fifty bucks!'

\*

A bagpiper was asked by a funeral director to play at a graveside service for a homeless man who had no family or friends. The funeral was to be held at a cemetery in the remote countryside and this man would be the first to be laid to rest there. As the bagpiper was not familiar with the backwoods area, he became lost and, being a typical man, did not stop for directions. He finally arrived an hour late. He saw the backhoe and the crew who were eating lunch but the hearse was nowhere in sight.

He apologized to the workers for his tardiness and stepped to the side of the open grave where he saw the vault lid already in place. He assured the workers he would not hold them up for long but this was the proper thing to do. The workers gathered around, still eating their lunch. The bagpiper played out his heart and soul. As he played the workers began to weep. He played and he played like he'd never played before, from *Going Home* and *The Lord is My Shepherd* to *Flowers of the Forest*. He closed the lengthy session with *Amazing Grace* and walked to his car. As he was opening the door and taking off my coat, he overheard one of the workers saying to another, "Sweet Jeezuz, Mary 'n Joseph, I never seen nothin' like that before and I've been putting in septic tanks for twenty years."

\*

A husband and wife are shopping in their local Wal-Mart. The husband picks up a case of Budweiser and puts it in their cart.

'What do you think you're doing?' asks the wife.

'They're on sale, only \$10 for 24 cans,' he replies.

'Put them back, we can't afford them,' demands the wife, and so they carry on shopping. A few aisles further on along the woman picks up a \$20 jar of face cream and puts it in the basket.

'What do you think you're doing?' asks the husband.

'It's my face cream. It makes me look beautiful,' replies the wife.

Her husband retorts: 'So does 24 cans of Budweiser ... at half the price.'

On the PA system: 'Cleanup needed on aisle 25, we have a husband down.'

\*

A man walks into a bar with a paper bag. He sits down and places the bag on the counter. The bartender walks up and asks what's in the bag. The man reaches into the bag and pulls out a little man, about 9 inches high and sets him on the counter.

He reaches back into the bag and pulls out a small piano, setting it on the counter as well. He reaches into the bag once again and pulls out a tiny piano bench, which he places in front of the piano. The little man sits down at the piano, and starts playing a beautiful piece by Mozart!

'Where on earth did you get that?' says the bartender.

The man responds by reaching into the paper bag. This time he pulls out a magic lamp. He hands it to the bartender and says, 'Here. Rub it.'

So the bartender rubs the lamp, and suddenly there's a gust of smoke and a beautiful genie is standing before him.

'I will grant you one wish. Just one wish... each person is only allowed one!'

The bartender gets real excited. Without hesitating he says, 'I want a million bucks!'

A few moments later, a duck walks into the bar. It is soon followed by another duck, then another. Pretty soon, the entire bar is filled with ducks and they just keep coming, duck after duck after duck!

The bartender turns to the man and says, 'Y'know, I think your Genie's' a little deaf. I asked for a million bucks, not a million Ducks.'

'No sh\*t!!' says the man. 'Do you really think I asked for a 9 inch pianist?'