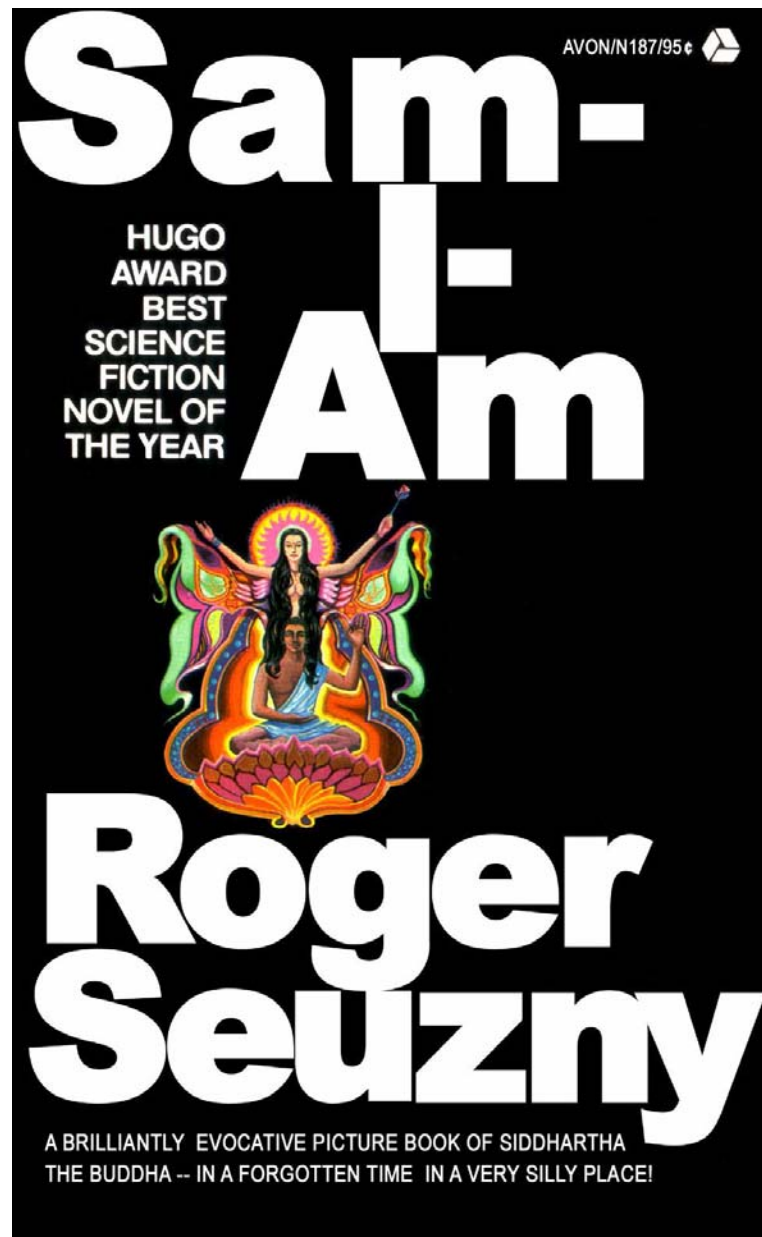


Visions of Paradise #147



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Out of the Depths

The Best Science Fiction of the Decade

This is the fifth time I've picked my favorite books of the preceding decade, and I cannot help but wonder how many more chances I will have to do so in the future? Twice more? Three times perhaps? Scary thoughts. Before I begin, here is the *crème de la crème* of my selections from past decades:

The 1960s		
Best Novel	Lord of Light	Roger Zelazny
Best Short Fiction	The Star Pit	Samuel R. Delany
Favorite Authors	Samuel R. Delany / Robert Silverberg / Clifford D. Simak Jack Vance / Roger Zelazny	

The 1970s		
Best Novel	Gateway	Frederik Pohl
Best Short Fiction	The Girl Who Was Plugged In	James Tiptree Jr.
Favorite Authors	Michael Bishop / C.J. Cherryh / George R.R. Martin Robert Silverberg / John Varley	

The 1980s		
Best Novel	No Enemy But Time	Michael Bishop
Best Short Fiction	Her Habiline Husband	Michael Bishop
Favorite Authors	Michael Bishop / Marion Zimmer Bradley / Orson Scott Card George R.R. Martin / Kim Stanley Robinson	

The 1990s		
Best F&SF Novel	Brittle Innings	Michael Bishop
Best Historical Fiction	Stones From the River	Ursula Hegi
Best Short Fiction	Story of Your Life	Ted Chiang
Favorite Authors	Michael Bishop / Andrea Barrett / Toni Morrison Kim Stanley Robinson	

Here are my complete selections of the favorite books I read (not which were necessarily published) in the 2000s. The selection in boldface is my overall favorite work in each category:

Best F&SF Novels

Look to Windward	Iain M. Banks
Resplendent	Stephen Baxter
The Etched City	K.J. Bishop
The Last Light of the Sun	Guy Gavriel Kay
Seeker	Jack McDevitt
Perdido Street Station	China Miéville
The Shadow Year	Jeffrey Ford

Best Historical Fiction

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay	Michael Chabon
The Yiddish Policemen's Union	Michael Chabon
The Time It Never Rained	Elmer Kelton
An Instance of the Fingerpost	Iain Pears
The Dream of Scipio	Iain Pears
The Judgment of Caesar	Steven Saylor

Best Short Fiction

The Potter of Bones	Eleanor Arnason
The Fluted Girl	Paolo Bacigalupi
The Chop Line	Stephen Baxter
The Rabbi's Holiday	Peter Beagle
Hell is the Absence of God	Ted Chiang
The Empire of Ice Cream	Jeffrey Ford
The Cosmology of the Wider World	Jeffrey Ford
Good Mountain	Robert Reed
Zima Blue	Alastair Reynolds

Favorite Authors

Science Fiction & Fantasy	Historical Fiction
Stephen Baxter	Michael Chabon
Jeffrey Ford	Iain Pears
Jack McDevitt	Steven Saylor

Of the 16 f&sf selections, 8 are sf and 8 are fantasy, which surprised me somewhat since I generally prefer science fiction to fantasy. Overall, this was a good decade for fiction, although it has become a bit harder to find the best short fiction since I read fewer prozines the past decade than anytime since I discovered **Worlds of IF** and **Galaxy** in the early 1960s.

Next issue I'll discuss my favorite works of 2009. Since one of the books I read this year showed up on the above list, you can expect to see it mentioned again.



The Passing Scene

November has two four-day weekends, which are good opportunities to get some work done. Early in the month is the NJEA Convention weekend, which is held in Atlantic City in South Jersey, too far to be convenient for a day trip, and two expensive to stay at a hotel there. Thus fewer northern teachers attend it than southern teachers. I spent the weekend catching up on writing and editing *Ride the Lightning*, plus doing a lot of grading and test-writing.

Sunday afternoon Mark and Kate came for dinner, so we made chicken parmigiana with penne. Afterwards Kate went to a meeting at Panera's of people who signed up for the annual November *Write a Novel* contest. This is the third consecutive year Kate has participated in it, and naturally I was jealous. I do not have the time to write a novelette this month, much less a 50,000 word novel! Ah, retirement... (

November is the annual *Indian Culture Club Diwali Family Dinner* at school, which went well with lots of people, tons of food, and enjoyable activities. At the end of it, Neelam (the president) announced that this is my last year at PHS and “we’re all going to miss him,” which initiated a rousing applause from the parents. A few even told me that they will miss me. Naturally I was flattered at it.

In the adjacent cafeteria was the *Asian-American Club Game Night*, and when I visited them I saw a table filled with my Honors Algebra 2 sophomores doing their homework. I scolded them, of course! (

I stayed up one night until midnight watching the Yankees win the World Series in a great game highlighted by a record-tying 6 runs-batted-in by Hideki Matsui, one of the two best clutch hitters on the team (the other being Derek Jeter, of course). This is the 5th world championship for the team’s core four players who all joined the team as rookies in 1995: Jeter, closer Mariano Rivera, pitcher Andy Pettitte and catcher Jorge Posada. It has been a fun season to watch, highlighted by a fabulous postseason. (Eat your heart out, **Eklund**)

One weekend we went with our friends Frank and Marilyn to West Orange where we visited the *Thomas Edison Museum*, which consists of his laboratory complex where he and his huge staff of employees did experiments and developed many of Edison’s thousands of inventions. We saw a replica of the original “Black Maria,” the rotating movie set where Edison’s company made the first motion pictures. It was a fascinating tour.

Afterwards we visited Edison’s nearby mansion, then went to dinner at Ricci’s, a very good Italian restaurant where Jean had chicken parmigiana and I had baked ziti with eggplant.

There are now 129 members of the “I Love Robert Sabella” Facebook group. (Several of my former students have told me they plan to visit at Thanksgiving because they want to make sure they see me before I retire. They are certainly swelling my ego, haha, but that will end in June when I slowly lose contact with nearly all of them. Fortunately, a few will stay friendly with me after they graduate college.

Jean has been researching *Hi-Lo Campers*, which are roomier than our popup, and more convenient because they raise and lower with a push-button and have much less drag while towing than traditional campers. The price is relatively high—about \$17,000 for the lower-range models she is looking at—but if they are as good as they seem when we go visit a dealer (the closest one is a few hours away in Pennsylvania), they will make it much nicer for us to go on longer camping trips with Alan and Denise after retirement. So we’ll see.

Every November the school cafeteria has a turkey dinner two weeks before Thanksgiving, so Jean and I both bought it and ate lunch in the Faculty Dining Room with Briane and Carol for the first time all year. Usually the four of us eat in the Math Lab. It was delicious: roast turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, baked applesauce, gravy, cornbread, a drink, and dessert (I selected boston cream pie), all for a mere \$4.00! Obviously we did not make dinner that night but had leftover pea soup and a half-meatball sandwich.

I got 17 issues of **Worlds of IF** from 1952 through 1961 in the mail. That leaves me 23 issues, short of the complete collection from 1952 through 1974, all prior to 1962 when I started buying it originally. The issues I just got contain stories by Poul Anderson, Gordon R. Dickson, Robert F. Young, Raymond F. Jones, Philip K. Dick, Walter M. Miller, Jr. and James Blish's famous novella "A Case of Conscience." Now I need to start reading them, haha.

Friday, 11/17 was a particularly big eating day. I was invited to the school cooking class's dessert party where my two AP Statistics students Vanessa Ho and Oan Ly gave me 2 huge pieces of pie (lemon meringue and key lime) to eat. They were delicious. Then at night we went to the Chinese Buffet with Alan & Denise.

The math lab has been crowded with students all day this year, even more so than usual. When I arrive in the morning, senior Hua (the valedictorian who is in AP Calculus, plus learning AP Statistics in her spare time) and sophomore Fabio (Honors Algebra 2) are either waiting for me, or arrive shortly afterwards. Six-to-ten sophomores converge a short while later and, after they leave, 6 AP Calculus students spend 1st period there.

5th period is when 6 math teachers eat lunch in the Math Lab, including me, and occasionally two students also work there, Hua and Shah. 6th period, while I am teaching my smaller section of Honors Algebra 2, Guo—who is part of the 1st period Calculus group—sits in the back of my room, so I help her when the students are doing a problem.

During 7th period Sana comes to work, her second consecutive year doing so (last year she was in my Honors Algebra 2 and this year in my AP Statistics, but we also work on Honors Precalculus). Several sophomore boys (Shohm, Adwit, Hersh, Shiv) usually work there too.

After school Guo and Shah usually return, as well as the usual crowd of sophomores. Frequently a few juniors whom I had last year comes to visit as well.

It got so busy in there recently that I was unable to finish inputting my marking period grades until right before the deadline when I told my students they had to leave me alone one period so I could do it. This has been one of the busiest years in the math lab ever, and it only makes me dread losing my students even more.

Saturday, 11/21, Jean and Kathy walked the trail at Schooley Mountain State Park which they maintain as volunteers for the park commission. Meanwhile Ceil (Jean's aunt who is spending her traditional two weeks with us for Thanksgiving) and I were home alone all morning. I wrote AP Calculus and Honors Algebra 2 tests, as well as writing college recommendations. So far I have written 33, and I do not expect to come close to my all-time record of 117 two years ago!

I have already received my Christmas presents in the mail: a DVD containing the complete run of *National Geographic* magazines since their inception 100+ years ago (including all photographs and maps), and Baen's three-volume hardcovers (through the SFBC) of Poul Anderson's Polesotechnic League stories: **The Van Rijn Method**, **David Falkayn: Galactic Trader** and **Rise of the Terran Empire**. I already had 4 of the 6 original books in my

collection, so I gave my brother David **The Earth Book of Stormgate** and listed the other 3 for trade on *Paperback.com*. Since the SFBC was having a *Buy One-Get One Free* sale, I also got Jack McDevitt's new novel **Time Travelers Never Die** in the bargain.

Thanksgiving weekend was mostly busy, but very enjoyable. It started Wednesday night when Mark and Kate stayed overnight in preparation for Thanksgiving, and Drew (our "third son") and Tommy came visiting, so we had people chatting in three rooms much of the night. Thanksgiving morning, Mark and Kate awoke at 6:00 and went into NYC to see the parade. Jean took Mark and Andy to it about twelve years ago, while I would never submit myself to such crowds on a holiday! (

We went to my brother David & Karen's house for Thanksgiving dinner. Kate made a cake, Jean made cabbage salad, and I made a pumpkin pie. Andy was working during the day because his stupid boss scheduled him from 7 am-5 pm, which is too many hours on a holiday. Andy has always worked holidays, but he managed to leave at 3:30 today and arrived in time for dinner.

Karen's sister Rosemary and Marty were there as well. I enjoy talking with Marty since we share many interests, including science fiction, so he and I spent most of the afternoon and evening chatting.

Mark stayed with us overnight Thursday night while Kate stayed at her family's house in preparation of going shopping *very* early "Black Friday" morning. Afterwards, Jean, Andy, Mark and I met Kate's family at Jefferson Diner at noon. Then Mark & Kate stayed overnight with us again Friday night before returning home Saturday morning.

Saturday morning I mostly spent writing college recommendations. After lunch we went to the YMCA, then shopping at the farm store for produce and B.J.'s, returning home in time to shower and take Ceil to mass. After that we ate at Panera's, then did more shopping at Shop-Rite. I barely read for an hour before grading Honors Algebra 2 tests the rest of the night.

Sunday was an easy day. I finished the November **VoP** in the morning, then spent the afternoon finishing my grading and vacuuming. We cooked a turkey breast for dinner, since we wanted our traditional turkey leftovers, *especially* turkey soup, which Ceil and I both love. (



Wondrous Stories

My friend George reads a lot of science fiction, and we have regular discussions about the genre. Recently he was raving about how much he loved the *Gateway* trilogy: **Gateway**, **Beyond the Blue Event Horizon**, and **Heechee Rendezvous**. I replied that **Gateway** was one of my favorite sf novels ever (I picked it as my best novel of the 1970s), but that I had never read the concluding novel in the series, nor any of the three follow-up books: **Annals of the Heechee**—a fairly disliked book—and the two collections of *Heechee* stories, **The Gateway Trip**—which includes “The Merchants of Venus,” the first Heechee story I ever read, and a very fine one at that—and **The Boy Who Would Live Forever**.

The next day in my school mailbox was a paperback copy of **Heechee Rendezvous**, so I decided this was as good a time as any to read the entire trilogy. I actually read **Gateway** twice, first in serial form in **Galaxy Magazine** (one of the last great stories in it before it fell apart after Jim Baen quit as editor), then again a few years later when the paperback version came out. But while my memory of the book still considers it a masterpiece, we all know how thirty+ year old memories have a way of letting us down.

Fortunately, **Gateway** held up very well. The novel has two simultaneous storylines: one tells about Robinette Broadhead’s weekly trips to a psychiatrist to deal with his depression. His discussions with his machine psychiatrist gradually reveal that he is repressing a deep secret from his past, and that it likely has something to do with the time he spent at Gateway.

Gateway is an asteroid which was hollowed out millennia ago by the mysterious race known as the Heechee, and then filled with survey ships. Humans have not yet learned much about either the survey ships or the Heechee, except how to launch a ship. Volunteers then travel in the ships to wherever they are programmed to go. If they are very lucky, they discover some ancient Heechee artifacts for which they are paid generously, but those are rare instances. In the majority of cases, they either return empty-handed or, a large percentage of the time, die.

So Gateway mostly attracts the down-and-out, people unable to succeed either on Earth or Venus, and whose desperation takes them to a place where they are more likely to die than to get rich. Such as Broadhead. After he reaches Gateway his fear of death delays his actually signing up for a survey ship for a long while, but that gives us a chance to follow his interactions with other fortune hunters, as well as his exploration of Gateway itself.

Gateway is an intriguing place. Broadhead’s time there is fascinating, and many of its inhabitants truly come to life. The survey trips, both Broadhead's and those of others, are also fascinating. Pohl has successfully created a locale which is rich in sense of wonder, yet serves as a launching site for a gripping yarn. The scenes between Broadhead and the psychiatrist are also interesting and form a very involving mystery.

After thirty years, I still recommend **Gateway** highly, and consider it one of the finest sf novels I have ever read.

There is probably nothing more difficult in writing than following a classic, and I can cite numerous examples where the author's next work, although good objectively, still suffered by comparison to the previous one: China Miéville's **The Scar** (following **Perdido Street Station**), Roger Zelazny's **Creatures of Light and Darkness** (following **Lord of Light**), Samuel R. Delany's **Dhalgren** (following **Nova**), Ursula K Le Guin's **The Lathe of Heaven** (first "adult" novel following **The Left Hand of Darkness**), and the list goes on...

An even more difficult challenge for an author is writing a direct sequel to a classic novel, because then he or she is not only competing with greatness, but trying to "continue" it to some extent. I enjoyed Frank Herbert's **Dune Messiah**, but it was nowhere near the quality of **Dune**. Philip José Farmer pulled off a rare near-coup in that **The Fabulous Riverboat** was very nearly the equal of **To Your Scattered Bodies Go**.

And then along came Frederik Pohl, a journeyman writer in the 1970s best known for his 1950s collaborative novels with Cyril M. Kornbluth whom many readers assumed was the "senior" member of their writing partnership. Pohl's main acclaim was as an editor, first of the seminal original anthology series **Star Science Fiction** in the 1950s, and then as editor in the 1960s of the *Galaxy* stable of magazines: **Galaxy**, **Worlds of IF** and **Worlds of Tomorrow**. So when he retired as a prozine editor and returned to fulltime writing, few people had high hopes for his fiction. His first splash was with the novella "The Gold at the Starbow's End," and the short story "Shafferty Among the Immortals" in 1972, followed by a surprising Nebula Award for his novel **Man Plus** in 1976. But what really blew the socks off sf fandom was the serial **Gateway** in **Galaxy Magazine** in late 1976. It swept all the major awards and was instantly considered a classic, an opinion I agreed with since I selected it as my favorite novel of the 1970s.

But **Gateway** was not a singleton. It was a sequel to the very good novella "The Merchants of Venus," which was published in 1972 but was largely lost among the acclaim for "The Gold at the Starbow's End," and "Shafferty Among the Immortals." What Pohl had in mind was even more stories and novels which would continue the story of the quest to find the missing Heechee.

Beyond the Blue Event Horizon was the direct sequel to **Gateway**, and it is actually a very fine novel. Its primary concern is an expedition to a Heechee artifact orbiting slowly at the edge of the solar system which produces enough food to virtually end poverty on Earth, except its discoverers cannot figure out how to move the artifact out of its orbit and bring it to Earth. They also encounter a boy Wan who lives in another Heechee artifact where he is advised by the minds of former **Gateway** explorers, one of whom was apparently his mother.

This is a considerably faster-paced novel than **Gateway**, and it features a somewhat more-mature Robin Broadhead, who was the protagonist of the former novel. There are political and personal tribulations in addition to the mission of exploration, as well as alien beings who might or might not be the Heechee. It all comes to a very satisfying conclusion. What is most fascinating about the novel though is that the search for the Heechee actually succeeds, and while the secret is held out until the very last pages of the book, there is still the novel's title to consider.

If you have not read **Gateway** yet, then you definitely should. And once you are finished reading it, you can do worse than reading **Beyond the Blue Event Horizon** soon afterwards.



Halcyon Days

Alexander R. Slate

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I was frankly a bit disappointed by the Best Novel Hugo. Of all the nominees I read, **The Graveyard Book** was my least favorite. Which is not to say that it is necessarily a bad book. But it just didn't really catch me. On top of that I found the plot to be quite predictable. Now, I have no beef with a supposed fantasy book winning the Hugo. I really don't distinguish between SF and Fantasy, at least in terms of the larger sense of the genre and the Hugos. While SF and fantasy are two different genres, sometimes it is difficult to tell them apart, and they are part of the larger meta-genre.

Sheryl [Birkhead] asks about the bedding with regards to my unfortunate event with bed bugs. The mattress and box spring were discarded and new ones were bought. In the meantime, I slept on the daybed that resided in the living room. Fortunately the bugs restricted themselves to the bedroom and not the rest of the apartment. Which further helps me believe that they got in from the attic through the ceiling fan (one in the bedroom, but nowhere else). The pillows and linens got placed in plastic bags and taken to a local Laundromat, which had commercial sized washers and dryers. The hot did the trick.

Meanwhile, I really enjoy the *Lighter Side* jokes.

[I have no problem with a fantasy book winning the Hugo Award, but I have grown steadily weary of fantasies pushing much sf aside both in the marketplace and in original anthologies and best-of-the-year volumes. I prefer reading sf about 3-1 compared to fantasy, and it seems like the opposite ratio is becoming the norm. According to **Locus**, there have been 259 fantasy novels and 142 sf novels published this year as of September.]

Steve Stiles

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Sept. 5, 2009

A rare instance where I actually have the time and inclination to write a letter of comment of

sorts; we're about to go off and see *District 9*, followed by a few hours' time that I can use on this before leaving for a friends' barbeque.

You are spoiling my reputation as a cynical cartooning curmudgeon by printing that "space cat" cartoon of mine on the front cover of #144 (I had thought that it would be buried, much reduced, somewhere in **VoP's** interior): most of my cartoons stay well clear of cute, and you'll never ever see a cartoon of mine with, say, a unicorn, unless there's also a chainsaw in the drawing. But I've never tried to do something endearing before, so I thought I'd give it a whack. My only other quibble is my bad, I'm afraid, as I really should've done some touchup in Photoshop to have gone rid of the uneven blacks, et cetera.

I've always appreciated your thoughts on written science fiction as I've still managed to keep up an interest in it. My sense of wonder doesn't burn as brightly these days inasmuch as, for example, I know now that exploring and colonizing the solar system will take more than a will to know c/w advances in technology, and that (thanks to the realities of economics and politics) it is highly unlikely that I'll see a manned Mars landing in my lifetime—and, perhaps, in someone else's grandchildren's.

So the Stephen Baxter heads-up on **The Time Ships** was appreciated, as was the brief commentary on Harry Harrison. I enjoyed the first few *Stainless Steel Rat* stories but like you, I've always regarded him as a B writer. The one novel of his I particularly liked was the first **Bill, The Galactic Hero**; I had just gotten out of Basic Training when I found a copy at Ft. Leonard Wood's library, and it so beautifully parodied all the wonders of military life that it became a much sought-after book on post, with a long waiting list, once word got out to all the other draftees about it.

My main problem with acquiring sf is that the book company that I work for has an extremely generous freebie policy, but not that much science fiction, so that my reading tends towards nonfiction, with a smidgeon of mysteries, and an even smaller portion of science fiction. When I do splurge, as I did with paying full cover price for Rudy Rucker's **Spaceland** at Torcon, Daedalus will inevitably get it, usually on the day I return from my vacation (I have the same problem with the library when it comes to CDs).

Like **Eric Mayer**, I try not to think of our senior cat getting older, but it's getting harder and harder to ignore and a day I'm dreading is coming closer. It's hard to believe that the wild & crazy feline who used to ricochet off the walls is now just shuffling along. By the time our two younger cats reach that stage, I'll be shuffling along with them.

Your Listmania has inspired me. Here's mine, with a list of my new favorite female pop vocalists—an interest that just came over me in the last few months, and some are, in themselves, not "new" at all (after the first five, no particular order):

Inara George (The Bird and the Bee)
St.Vincent (aka Annie Clark)
Abby DeWald & Amanda Barrett (The Ditty Bops)
Grace Potter (and the Nocturnals)

Eleni Mandell
Amanda Palmer (Dresden Dolls)
Etta James
The Boswell Sisters
Sharin Foo (The Raveonettes)
Georgia Hubley (Yo La Tengo)
Jenny Lewis

[I must admit that I have only ever heard of 2 artists on your list: Etta James and Yo La Tengo. Since I am not particularly a fan of pop music per se, that is not surprising.

[Sorry for ruining your image as a curmudgeon, but maybe the sweet Stiles inside is trying to get out, and you need some encouragement to do so. Feel free to think of **VoP** as your “sunny” outlet. {}

Rich Dengrove

September 12, 2009

Passing Scene: I too have had to regret having parted with books. Unfortunately, there is only so much room and you have to set priorities; and you can't tell which book will be important in advance. Not even fiction. Fortunately for you, you live in a house and, I presume, have a lot more room than this apartment.

I agree with you that lobster is too much work. That was why I used to like Lobster Thermador. The lobster was out of the shell in a decent sauce. Of course, it was ridiculously expensive.

I am sure my late mother was a hundred times worse than the Gilberts when it comes to keeping up a car. I inherited a car from her, and I noticed the brake light was on. I told her about it, and she said: "Is that what it is?" ...Not good.

Wondrous Stories: You mention how Dan Brown doesn't handle the pseudo-historical thriller that well. However, he is astronomically popular. And I hear he has a recent imitator, a Tom Knox (a pseudonym), who has written the *Genesis Secret*. Like Dan, it does the popular thing of mixing the unmixable. The plot was hatched 11,500 years ago at Gobleki Tepe, which was ruled by a Gigantopithecus. Don't ask. The Yezidi enter into it as does the Hell Fire Club. Believe it or not, the novel wasn't meant as humor. Instead, on its own demerits as serious fiction, I hear it is astronomically popular too.

[I assume Dan Brown has dozens, perhaps hundreds, of imitators, but most of them are so untalented as not able to sell their books even on the heels of Brown-mania. Thank heavens.]

Steve Stiles

September 16, 2009

Thanks for another issue of **Visions of Paradise**. I note there's a slight greenish tinge to my cover illustration, and I must admit that the fault is mine inasmuch as I neglected to make the

proper adjustments using the Black and White slider bars; at least I *thought* I had, but evidently not. Photoshop is a still learning process for me.

Sheryl Birkhead has more than once helped me out with Photoshop questions, so her article “A Trip Or Two” especially provoked a few sympathetic wincings on my part. Getting lost is always my nightmare situation, literally--it's a regular feature of my Nightmare Closet, and in waking life I've been in a few situations behind the wheel when I've found myself soaked in sweat when it has dawned on me that I have no idea where I am. There's no rational reason for this funk; at most, I've just lost a bit of time--there's no emergency, no one is going to chastise me or fine me. I've wondered where this near-phobia about getting lost came from. Of course, spending over half my life in Manhattan, where most of the island is laid out in a neat and logical grid pattern, might explain my perception of most road maps as being the visual equivalent of a plate of spaghetti (and I am *very* grateful that our new car comes with a GPS), but there *was* an incident when I was a very young child in New York that might explain my negative reactions to this situation.

I was about six years old and had somehow wandered away from my familiar Yorkville neighborhood. When it dawned on me that I was lost, however, there was no panic because halfway down the block I spotted a policeman idly standing on the corner: salvation! You see, at the time, there was an early morning children's television program called *Policeman Fred* with a theme song that went something like this: "Oh, the policeman is your friend / He'll help you to the end / Yes, the policeman is your friend!". With this cheerful ditty in mind, I approached the Public Servant and tearfully explained my predicament. To which my friend replied: "Get outta here, you little #*!#!#*, or I'll kick your #*!#!#* ass across the street!"

This was the beginning of the process that resulted in the cynical and twisted curmudgeon I am today. But it's a shame that it's unlikely that we'll ever see **Sheryl** in Baltimore (or in Baltimore County, where I live) because, aside from those parts where citizens regularly shoot other citizens, whether they deserve it or not, Baltimore can be a pretty nice place to visit.

[A friend of mine was told by a psychiatrist that if your earliest memories are unhappy ones, then you are basically a pessimistic person, while those whose earliest memories are happy tend to be optimistic. If this is true, it also says a lot about my personality as well.]

Lloyd Penney

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September 16, 2009

Thank you for **VoP** issue 144. While the kitty in the spacesuit floats past, not trying desperately to claw onto something, I will formulate a letter of comment, and see if I can fill a page. I wish that past Worldcon locales like St. Louis and Detroit could host Worldcons again. I guess it's an indication of places where fandom has either mostly dried up, or in the case of Detroit, where there's lots of fandom, but they have no interest in ever staging another Worldcon. My first Worldcon was in 1982, Chicon IV, and I've gone to as many as I could afford. Just five or six weeks ago was Anticipation, the 2009 Worldcon in Montréal, and it was great fun indeed. I

like a dealers' room with a good selection of books, but I also like the handicrafts, too. The Hugos this year were great, mostly because Yvonne and I got to hand out the Best Fan Writer Hugo to Cheryl Morgan. And yes, I was only one nomination off the final ballot. The great times with the Hugos, the Aurora banquet and the fanzine lounge made up for it. Well, almost.....

So many different chains of restaurants, and I've been in so few of them. I like Cracker Barrel, Bob Evans, and a few others, but the only American chain that has restaurants up here that I can think of is Appleby's. Fuddrucker's, ChiChi's, Ponderosa, Olive Garden.....they all failed up here. Perhaps we just like our own restaurants, not sure.

Hmmm, the Baby Boomer Quiz. The original Joker, Penguin and Riddler were Cesar Romero, Burgess Meredith and Frank Gorshin respectively. The original host of *Jeopardy!* was the Reverend Art Fleming. Few people remember that about him. Charley Weaver, aka Cliff Arquette, was mostly in the Hollywood Squares' centre square. The two-part episode that served as Star Trek's original pilot was *The Menagerie*. I always thought Joe Theisman's last name was pronounced like thighsman.....Joe was the quarterback for the Canadian Football League's Toronto Argonauts before he made it big in the NFL. Warren Moon also came up through the CFL. The other David Jones is actually David Bowie. Buddy Ebsen was originally slated to be the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, and he was replaced by Bert Lahr. How did I do?

To go with this theme, I found out that on October 2, it will be the 50th anniversary of the premiere of *The Twilight Zone* on CBS. It's been submitted for my approval ever since I was a kid, and the opening of the show used to scare the hell out of me. Now, I think it's one of the best shows that's ever been on television, and I hope someone will make another movie or series of good stories. The stories have always been my favorite, by Rod Serling and Charles Beaumont and Richard Matheson, and *Twilight Zone* stories are now considered a sub-genre by some.

[Based on your answers above, you got 6 correct and 3 wrong. Not bad. (

[I prefer not finding American franchise restaurants when I visit other countries. I prefer local flavor and all that. I can always eat American food here at home.]

Rich Dengrove

Oct 12, 2009

You're the first person to admit that personality and readability wins awards, like the Hugo. I don't know about readability, though. If you can impress, it doesn't matter whether someone can read your work or not.

On the other hand, the SF crowd is becoming restive. They don't like the idea that the Hugo for best fiction can go to a Fantasy, like Neil Gaiman's. There probably should be two awards. One for the Science Fiction and one for Fantasy. Maybe three, one for Soft Science Fiction, one for Hard Science Fiction and one for Fantasy. I have heard people protest that awards shouldn't

proliferate. But what can you do when fandom proliferates?

People want more action in a thriller than Arthur C. Clarke provided in "A Fall of Moondust." However, maybe we have too much action already. Maybe additional jolts aren't doing anything for us.

Sheryl Birkhead laments that she is out of the mainstream, even in the fan categories of the Hugo. With all the fandoms, is there a mainstream anymore?

Sheryl's orthotic may not have worked. However, I had an orthotic, only not prescribed by a chiropractor but an orthoped. It did work. It got rid of my bone spur. What can I say? However, I stopped wearing it before it could affect my gait.

[I am much more interested in slow-paced thriller where all the action takes place in people's minds trying to solve a problem rather than physical action where running around shooting people seems to be some writers' idea of thrills. We watched the movie *Angels and Demons* last night, and it did not impress either of us at all. Too many thrills, not nearly enough logic.

[How about a Hugo for hard science fiction, then another for soft science fiction, then a third for urban fantasy, another for high fantasy, then what about alternate history and steampunk and historical fantasy and...well, you get the idea. Let's just leave it at one Best Novel award.]

Lloyd Penney

Oct 17, 2009

You're right about two different groups doing the nominating and voting for the Hugos. While this year's Worldcon members vote, both this year's and last year's do the nominating. Also, some will nominate friends, but vote for whomever they really like. I've read some Stross and Scalzi, both e-books, but I did not nominate or vote on any of the pro Hugos this year—I just was not knowledgeable enough to vote credibly. The fan awards were controversial, but the wins of *Wall-E* and *Dr. Horrible's SingAlong Blog* were welcomed by most.

Arthur C. Clarke has long been one of Yvonne's favourite authors, and last week, while giving the shelves the tidy they so desperately needed, we found out how many Clarke books we have, enough to fill a shelf and a half. There must be few ACC books we don't have. His passing was a great loss.

I still don't really read the pulps, as they are too expensive for me, but in my most recent foray into a local used book store, I found one of the precursors to the SF pulps, a copy of **Argosy**. To be exact, the April 1952 British edition of **Argosy**, and in my readings about the magazine, the British editions at this time were like pulps, but smaller than a pulp and slightly bigger than a paperback. The colour scheme was black and white with blue highlights, with a Spanish armada-style ship on the front (basically, the definition of an argosy), with a list of contributors. Of those, the SFnal contributors included Ray Bradbury and Will F. Jenkins. Others included D.H. Lawrence and James Thurber. The magazine cost me \$4, and while I couldn't find out

anything more about this issue on any website, it will have a place of honour on my shelf. (I couldn't find a British price, but in Australia, it cost 1/9, or one shilling, ninepence.)

I understand **Sheryl Birkhead's** feelings of being an outsider. Our family was never close to any of our neighbours, and it wasn't for a lack of trying. One day when I was a kid, I was delivering papers on my route when I saw one of my customers bringing furniture out of his house; it was on fire. I came to help, I could hear the fire engine in the distance, and while we were busy, the neighbours gathered to watch, but not to help. The house sustained some damage, and the family eventually moved away, but the fact the neighbours watched, but did not help, shocked me, but did not surprise me, given the community we lived in.

It's good to read that **Terry Jeeves** is getting this zine, and still drawing cartoons. Please stay well, Terry!

Lloyd Penney

04 Nov 2009

Many thanks for **Visions of Paradise** 146. Congratulations of your impending retirement! May you have time to relax, but get to all the things you want to do. There's a **Silverberg** book on the front cover I don't have, and I have a lot of them. More once I get past the cover and this first paragraph.....

There are pros and cons, as you say—just because you are retiring, doesn't mean to say you can't teach. If you registered with your local school board as a substitute teacher, you can teach, and your time would be your own. It will be difficult to leave your favourite students behind, but none of us is getting any younger, and there's lots we all want to do, and too much we have to do.

Robert Silverberg is an author I'd like to meet, not sure what I'd say, but I'd like to see him at a convention as a main GoH. Unfortunately, I am certain there's many SF readers out there who may not know who he is, and only a Worldcon would have him as a guest. I reread **Nightwings** recently...it's never gotten old.

To **Rich Dengrove**...Facebook has gotten me in touch with lost relatives, lost friends, and even people I remember from high school. The games and other applications are pure time-wasters, but I ignore them, and use the parts of Facebook that give me what I want.

This coming weekend is a convention in Rochester, New York, Astronomicon. I expect we will have a good time, but in 2010, we've made a decision to cut back on convention attendance. They are great fun, but they are getting more expensive than ever.

[Being a substitute teacher in the U.S. is akin to being a babysitter, not what I would enjoy doing. I would prefer either adjunct teaching in a local college, or helping out in the Math Lab, since the teachers who take over my courses will need some mentoring, and the honors/AP students can always use some tutoring.

[I also use Facebook as a convenient way to stay in touch with people I would likely lose touch with otherwise. Except for playing Scrabble with Rabbit, I ignore their games and other apps.]

On the Lighter Side

Sign over a Gynecologist's Office: "Dr. Jones, at your cervix."

In a Podiatrist's office: "Time wounds all heels."

On a Septic Tank Truck: "We're #1 in the #2 business"

On a Plumber's truck: "We repair what your husband fixed."

On another Plumber's truck: "Don't sleep with a drip. Call your plumber.."

On a Church's Billboard: "7 days without God makes one weak." At a Tire Shop in Milwaukee: "Invite us to your next blowout."

On a Plastic Surgeon's Office door: "Hello. Can we pick your nose?"

At a Towing company: "We don't charge an arm and a leg. We want tows."

On an Electrician's truck: "Let us remove your shorts."

In a Nonsmoking Area: "If we see smoke, we will assume you are on fire and take appropriate action."

On a Maternity Room door: "Push. Push. Push."

At an Optometrist's Office: "If you don't see what you're looking for, you've come to the right place".

On a Taxidermist's window: "We really know our stuff."

At a Car Dealership: "The best way to get back on your feet - miss a car payment."

Outside a Muffler Shop: "No appointment necessary We hear you coming."

In a Veterinarian's waiting room: "Be back in 5 minutes. Sit! Stay!"

At the Electric Company: "We would be delighted if you send in your payment. However, if you don't, you will be."

In a Restaurant window: "Don't stand there and be hungry, Come in and get fed up."

In the front yard of a Funeral Home: "Drive carefully. We'll wait."

At a Propane Filling Station: "Thank heaven for little grills."

And finally, the sign at a Chicago Radiator Shop: " Best place in town to take a leak"

*

Lawyer: And you check your radar unit frequently?

Officer: Yes, I do.

Lawyer: And was your radar unit functioning correctly at the time you had the plaintiff on radar?

Officer: Yes, it was malfunctioning correctly.

Lawyer: So you were gone until you returned?

Lawyer: The youngest son, the 20-year old, how old is he?

Lawyer: Were you alone or by yourself?

Witness: He was about medium height and had a beard.

Lawyer: Was this a male or a female?

Lawyer: I show you Exhibit 3 and ask you if you recognize that picture.

Witness: That's me.

Lawyer: Were you present when that picture was taken?

Lawyer: She had three children, right?

Witness: Yes.

Lawyer: How many were boys?

Witness: None.

Lawyer: Were there girls?

Lawyer: You don't know what it was, and you didn't know what it looked like, but can you describe it?

Lawyer: You say that the stairs went down to the basement?

Witness: Yes.

Lawyer: And these stairs, did they go up also?

Lawyer: Have you lived in this town all your life?

Witness: Not yet.

Lawyer: What is your brother-in-law's name?

Witness: Borofkin.

Lawyer: What's his first name?

Witness: I can't remember.

Lawyer: He's been your brother-in-law for years, and you can't remember his first name?

Witness: No. I tell you, I'm too excited. *rises and points to his brother-in-law* Nathan, for heaven's sake, tell them your first name!

Lawyer: Are you married?

Witness: No, I'm divorced.

Lawyer: And what did your husband do before you divorced him?

Witness: A lot of things I didn't know about.

Lawyer: Did he pick the dog up by the ears?

Witness: No.

Lawyer: What was he doing with the dog's ears?

Witness: Picking them up in the air.

Lawyer: Where was the dog at this time?

Witness: Attached to the ears.

Lawyer: And lastly, Gary, all your responses must be oral. Ok? What school do you go to?

Witness: Oral.

Lawyer: How old are you?

Witness: Oral.

Lawyer: Could you see him from where you were standing?

Witness: I could see his head.

Lawyer: And where was his head?

Witness: Just above his shoulders.

Lawyer: Any suggestions as to what prevented this from being a murder trial instead of an attempted murder trial?

Witness: The victim lived.

*

A precious little girl walks into a pet shop and asks, in the sweetest little lisp, between two missing teeth,

"Excuse me, mither, do you keep widdle wabbits?"

As the shopkeeper's heart melts, he gets down on his knees so that he's on her level and asks, "Do you want a widdle white wabbit, or a thoft and fuwvy bwack wabbit, or maybe one like that cute widdle bwown wabbit over there?"

She, in turn, blushes, rocks on her heels, puts her hands on her knees, leans forward and says, in a tiny quiet voice, "I don't think my pytho weally gives a thit."