

# Variations on a Theme #20

from Rich Lynch • for SFPA 234 • written in April 2003

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## **And so, another tourist season begins...**

The official start of spring was about two weeks ago, but here in Washington, the *true* start of spring is when the cherry blossoms appear – this week, in other words. That's also the official start of Tourist Season. Personally, I think the cherry blossoms are a bit overrated – they only last about a week or so, and the flowers aren't even fragrant. But when they're in bloom, down by the Tidal Basin, the tourists are shoulder-to-shoulder. I suppose this is good for the local economy, but it usually makes the commute home from work an aggravating experience – they clog up the escalators in the middle of rush hour with their baby strollers and snatch up all the Metrorail train seats when they're only going two or three stops. I'd like to think I wasn't that way myself the first time I visited Washington back in the mid 1970s, but on the other hand, there wasn't a Metrorail system back then.

Now *there's* a concept – do you suppose the city subway system is a magnet for cluelessness?

## **No Foolin', It's Rachmanonoff's Birthday!**

It's April Fool's Day today which somehow just seems a risky time to me, from a cosmic conspiracy standpoint, to start a SFPazine, but there you are. I've managed to make it through the day so far without noticing anything at all out of the ordinary, but maybe I just had my blinders on.

At any rate, the great Russian composer and pianist Sergei Vassilievitch Rachmaninoff was born 130 years ago today and the local classical music station celebrated by playing one of his compositions every hour. I was an avid listener. The one they played during commercial-free ten o'clock hour this morning was one of his best; it was the grand 3rd Piano Concerto, which is kind of the holy grail for concert pianists – some regard it as the most technically difficult piano composition in current repertoire (it was featured in the movie *Shine*, where pianist David Helfgott was told that anyone who wanted to learn it must be insane). Much of classical music can be described as “variations on a theme” and the Rach3, especially its opening movement, is a good example – it starts out as a simple melody, and gradually becomes more and more complex, almost to the point where the melody is no longer recognizable, and then resets and starts over with a different set of variations. It's a very complex piece but yet, it's a also thing of beauty, with a very powerful ending. Seeing a performance live (and I've only done it once, in Estonia in 1999) is a special event – it's an intense experience and you can see that it's almost a contest of wills between the pianist and the music, if such a thing would be possible.

No less intense was Rachmaninoff himself, born into a wealthy Russian family but the money didn't last – Sergei's father squandered most of his wife's inheritance and the family was soon reduced to selling off their estate to pay off the debts. Sergei had shown a talent as a pianist and was enrolled in a St. Petersburg conservatory, where he failed most of his exams and was sent off to Moscow to live with a music teacher who attempted to bring a bit him more discipline. It

worked, and Rachmaninoff's skill as a pianist grew even as he started becoming known as a composer. By the time he was 24 he had completed his first symphony, which unfortunately had a disastrous debut (mostly because the orchestra conductor was drunk). This put Rachmaninoff into a depression which lasted several years, and was broken only when his therapist suggested that he write a new piano concerto and hypnotized him into believing it would be world famous. It was all of that and more – the result was the Rach2, his second piano concerto, which is usually considered among the top dozen or so best classical compositions of all time. (The melody from the middle section was much later ~~stolen~~ borrowed and made part of the pop music song "All By Myself".) Rachmaninoff later toured extensively as a pianist, coming to America in 1909 and liking it here so much that he later settled here (in New York City, on Riverside Drive) after the Russian revolution of 1917.

Following his move to America he found that had a choice of careers – he declined an offer to be conductor of the Boston Symphony, and composed very little after that, choosing instead the life as a concert pianist to support his family. He had previously debuted the Rach3 himself in Carnegie Hall, but it had received somewhat uneven reviews, partly because the music critics thought that only Rachmaninoff himself would be capable of performing it! He himself was never quite sure he made the best choice – about 10 years before his death he looked back on his career and said, "I have never been able to make up my mind as to what was my true calling – that of composer, pianist, or conductor ... I am constantly troubled by the misgiving that, in venturing into too many fields, I may have failed to make the best use of my life."

Rachmaninoff was once described by the composer Stravinsky as "a six-and-a-half foot scowl," a reference to his intensity as a pianist. But there are some anecdotes to the contrary. Once, during a concert recital with his friend, violinist Fritz Kreisler, in the middle of the recital Kreisler lost his place and urgently leaned over and whispered to Rachmaninoff, "Where are we?" To which Rachmaninoff calmly whispered back, "Carnegie Hall!" Rachmaninoff died in 1943 and perhaps should have been buried in Carnegie Hall; he was one of the performers that made it such a famous place for classical music. But he's really no less famous today than he was when he was alive – his music has made him immortal. Would that we should all be able to aspire to such heights.

## More About Harry Warner

It's not really a reach to predict that the late Harry Warner may well be as famous to future generations of science fiction fans as Rachmaninoff has become for those who appreciate classical music. But, as we all suspected, nobody in Hagerstown, where he lived, had much of an inkling of his fame within fandom – the obituary that appeared in the Hagerstown *Herald-Mail* in mid-March was as bare-bones as possible, and that's probably the way Harry would have wanted it. After he died, though, the firewall he built between his fan activities and the mundane world soon started to come down, and soon another article appeared in the *Herald-Mail* about him:

Monday March 31, 2003

Harry Warner's Parallel Universe

By Arnold S. Platou

*Herald-Mail* newsman Harry Warner spent 40 years reporting on our community, but it was not until he died last month at age 80 that his significance to an

entirely different world came to light.

Warner had told few local people, if anyone, that for most of his life his fascination with science fiction and science fiction fans had led him to write volumes of magazine articles and books on the subject, and that he was known to thousands of sci-fi aficionados throughout the world.

Warner "has been one of the primary founders and mainstays of the science fiction field since the 1930s," said Charles N. Brown, editor and publisher of *Locus*, the nation's primary trade magazine for science fiction and fantasy publishing.

"His contributions have been enormous and his two books, *All Our Yesterdays* and *A Wealth of Fable*, are the standard historical chronology of science fiction fandom. His tireless correspondence and feedback over the last 65 years have been amazing. He will be missed," Brown said.

Warner, born in 1922 in Chambersburg, Pa., started working at The Herald-Mail Co. in Hagerstown on May 17, 1943, as a reporter. He covered several governmental agencies and the farming community, and he wrote obituaries and general news.

During World War II, he translated letters from Dutch and German families who wrote parents of American soldiers they'd met overseas. Warner had taught himself seven foreign languages - an accomplishment all the more amazing because health problems had forced him to drop out of Hagerstown High School by the 10th grade.

As a youngster, he grew to love the emerging world of science fiction. "Harry was like a number of other teenagers in the 1930s," said Joe Siclari, a New York teacher who chronicles science fiction history as a publisher and through his Web site, [fanac.org](http://fanac.org). "A lot of these youngsters were very interested in our future and looked at science fiction as a way to speculate and see possibilities," Siclari said.

In 1938, before his 16th birthday, Warner began writing and, using an old mimeograph machine, publishing *Spaceways*, a magazine for science fiction fans. In its four years of publication, *Spaceways* became "one of the most important fanzines of its period and had articles from some of the most important names in the field," Siclari said.

Less than a year after launching *Spaceways*, Warner began producing *Horizons*, a personal opinion fanzine - a word meaning fan magazines in science fiction circles. "Race relations, dangers of the atomic bomb, the speculation about whether atomic power could be used for good - there were discussions in *Horizons* about many, many of these things," Siclari said.

Like *Spaceways*, *Horizons* had only small circulation at first, reaching a few friends in addition to the 75 copies Warner circulated through the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. Warner continued to write *Horizons* every three months until he died, and it is still being published, Siclari said.

In 1969, Warner's first book, *All Our Yesterdays*, was published in hardcover. It was an informal history of science fiction fandom (essentially, conventions, publications and other activities involving fans) during the 1940s. It was reprinted in 1971 in both hardcover and paperback editions. In all, about 4,000 copies were printed, Siclari said.

Warner's second book, *A Wealth of Fable*, which covers fandom in the 1950s, first appeared as a three-volume mimeographed edition in the late 1970s. Siclari, who was the publisher, was working with Warner on an illustrated edition that's to come out soon.

Warner also wrote science fiction stories, but most fans knew him for the "interesting and extensive" letters of comment he wrote to fanzines throughout the world, Siclari said. "It was a fan maxim that your fanzine was not complete without a letter from Harry Warner, Jr."

For his work, Warner won several top science fiction awards, said Tim Pratt, an editor at *Locus* headquarters in Oakland, Calif. In addition to a *Locus* award for best fan writer in 1971, Warner was nominated repeatedly for the World Science Fiction Society's Hugo awards - "one of the biggest awards in science fiction given annually by fans," Pratt said.

Warner won the Hugo in 1969 and 1972 as a fan writer, and a third time in 1993 for Best Non-Fiction Book, *A Wealth of Fable*, which had been published in hardcover in 1992. In 1995, he won a First Fandom award, a lifetime achievement honor for service to science fiction.

Until he retired in 1983, Warner continued working at *The Herald-Mail*, seldom, if ever, mentioning these achievements. Longtime Women's section editor Gloria Dahlhamer, who started on *The Morning Herald* in 1947 and retired in 1991, said she was surprised when she learned from her brother-in-law, a science fiction fan in California, about Warner's fame. "He never talked about any of that," she said of Warner.

Dahlhamer, who lives near Hagerstown, said Warner was accomplished in the newsroom, too. A rapid-fire typist and writer, Warner would take the call from a local weather observer "and be writing the weather story as he took down the information. He was amazing."

She also remembers him having a "really dry sense of humor. Harry was a lot of fun," a quality that often emerged on the one night of the week the boss was away and he was in charge. On those nights, she said, Warner excelled, doing page layouts and writing "some really great headlines."

Like others, Dahlhamer recalled that Warner loved classical music. He played the piano and oboe at home, in the community and in recitals on radio. And so, he became a regular reviewer for the newspaper of local groups' performances.

He also wrote a frequent column that became an authority on local history and happenstance. Topics included the passing of the porch stoop, the coming of neighborhood yard sales, and, 40 years after World War II, the number of primary airplane trainers built at Fairchild's Hagerstown plant that still existed.

So, it followed that Warner became the media representative on the county government's Historical Advisory Committee. For 10 years, he keenly followed local historical discoveries and events, and promptly wrote about them in the newspaper, said John Frye, who chaired the committee.

For his work, Warner received the county's Historical Preservation Award for 1982.

But Warner never told Frye about his other awards in science fiction. Indeed, after hearing that the newsman might have written a book, Frye recalled, "I had an awful time getting him to admit it, and then getting him to give me a copy."

Now, *All Our Yesterdays* is at the Washington County Free Library as part of the special collection in the Western Maryland Room, where Frye is curator.

"He is the Harry Warner that none of us knew," Frye said.

Historian Siclari has a theory to help explain why Warner kept it a mystery. He thinks part of the reason is that back in the early years of



science fiction, much of the public equated it to Buck Rogers stuff.

But Warner was "into more serious discussions than about Buck Rogers," Siclari said. "So maybe, it was that he never lost that feeling about bias."

Regardless, it is remarkable that Warner achieved success in so many areas, and that he bridged them all through writing.

"Always liked writing, monkeying around with words," he wrote in 1962. "You meet a lot of people you'd never know otherwise. It's given me a chance to express my talents."

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The obituary I wrote that Jeff printed in SFPA 233 mentioned that Harry's huge fanzine accumulation (it was way too disorganized to be called a 'collection') would become the property of the Eaton Collection at the University of California at Riverside. Hopefully that will still happen, but a complication set in when we discovered that Harry had not incorporated that bit of information into his will. There were some copies of correspondence found with the will that did unequivocally confirm Harry's intentions to bequeath all his fanzines to the Eaton Collection (as well as earmarking \$10,000 for making that happen), but they were not attached to the will, and were thus not part of the will. What the will *did* state was that his house and all of its contents would become the property of the Lutheran Church in Hagerstown that he attended.

That's pretty much the way things stand now; the official reading of the will be sometime later this month (but this issue of *Variations* will be finished and in Jeff's hands by then); it will be up to the church to decide if it wants to honor Harry's wishes (the best outcome) or to just sell the house and its contents with an estate sale. I'll include an update if I find out anything further before I finish this apazine.

### **John Foyster, 1941-2003**

I got news today, via one of the listserves I subscribe to, that Australian fan John Foyster had died. It wasn't unexpected; he'd been ill with terminal brain cancer for about a year and had been in gradual decline over the past few months.

I regret that I do not have very many memories about John I can share. We had a common interest in fan history, and that was our connection – we'd exchanged many e-mails about Oz fandom, and I was impressed by his encyclopedic knowledge of Australian fandom of the 1960s, a topic of particular interest to me. The only time we'd met, in 1999 when I was in Melbourne for that year's Worldcon, we'd spent a few hours talking about that topic (well, he was doing most of the talking and I was doing most of the listening). I told him that he was the most qualified person to write a history of Oz fandom, and I truly think that I'd convinced him to accept that calling. But alas, it's not to be.

He was an excellent writer, and he was entertaining and outgoing, both in print and in person. The world will be a less friendly place without him; we are truly diminished.

### **In Amongst the FOSE Lemmings**

It's now coming up on mid-April (next week), and it finally looks like warm weather is on the way. This past week was the grand opening of the new Washington Convention Center – the place is *huge*! *Much* bigger than the old one, which was pretty large itself. A worldcon would get lost in the new place.

The first exhibition at the new convention center was FOSE, a large computer trade show that's a COMDEX wanna-be. I was there because I had a free pass; that only got me into the vendor exhibits, but that was quite enough – I was worn down after about an hour and a half of it. The big exhibit hall of FOSE is a huge kaleidoscope that assaults all the senses. I don't really know why I come back each year; I guess I must have a fascination with people-watching. It's actually entertaining in a vaguely perverse way to see people act like lemmings. Why else would they be queueing up in a line half an hour long for the chance to win a mythical "grand prize" when it was obvious the most anybody was coming away with was a t-shirt with a "Get It from Micro Warehouse" logo?

There were many such schemes designed to get you onto exhibitor's mailing lists without the exhibitor putting up anything of worth in return. At the Plexton booth, for instance, they had a dart board set up: three chances to hit the bullseye and then you'll get a raffle ticket for a chance to win a DVD player – but first they swipe your FOSE name badge/card (which is encoded with your mailing address) in their card reader. I passed it by – they could have given me a hundred chances and I probably couldn't have done it. Some of the people who did ~~try~~ were bouncing darts off the wall and otherwise making it hazardous for bystanders to linger there. Another booth wanted to swipe my card for a chance to win a free course on "ethical hacking." (I'm not making this up!) And whenever somebody asked if they could "swipe my card," I found I was checking to make sure my wallet was safe.

The most interesting floor exhibit actually had very little to do with computers – the Segway Company was there and it was letting people take their high-tech Segway scooter for a short ride around a roped-off course. There looked to be about a half hour line for that too, but at least it wasn't another deceptive come-on – the ride itself was the prize.

I decided early on that I wasn't going to be a lemming; I even turned down offers of complimentary plastic tote bags so that I wouldn't be tempted to collect a bunch of pens, buttons and other vendor tchotchkas. But that didn't stop them from trying – during a restroom stop I saw, with some amusement, that **barcoding.com** had supplied bottles of soft soap prominently displaying their company logo and had put a post-it note over each urinal with instructions that we lemmings should come to their booth to get our very own post-it pad. It was the first time I've ever known a vendor to sponsor the Mens Room.

## To Florida and Back

I suppose I should write something about the annual Lynch Family Reunion. This was our fourth annual, once again held in the northern Tampa suburbs. We were there because it's a fairly central location for many of the major league baseball spring training sites. We only went to two games this year – the Phillies and Pirates in Clearwater and the Yankees and Blue Jays in Dunedin. No foul balls were hit our way this year, but on the other hand, the seats were out of the sun. *More* than a fair trade!

Nicki made the trip this year; it was her first time to a reunion – one of the few silver linings from a job lay-off is that you no longer have to ration annual leave. The first three Reunions were luxuries her three weeks of leave couldn't afford. Anyway, the drives down and back were uneventful, though very, very long. According to my car's odometer, it's 580 miles from the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. down I-95 to the Georgia state line. The first day of the

drive south covered 575 of those miles; we elected to stop (after a successful hard-sell by the South Carolina welcome center lady) at Hardeeville, South Carolina, which actually had more and cheaper motels than any of the Savannah, Georgia exits a bit farther ahead. And it also had one of the World's Great Restaurants, as it turned out – the Cripple Crab, where we had a meal of grilled shrimp that was just excellent. Or maybe it was just that after a long day of travel, *any* good restaurant meal would seem larger than life. The meal was by far more memorable than the motel where we stayed – a very inexpensive place that was quiet enough but not a place we'd be willing to go back to. Really, the best thing you could say about the place was that it was cheap – the restaurant meal was more expensive than the hotel room!

Nicki and I weren't the farthest travelers to the Reunion. My brother flew in from Phoenix, Arizona, and this year one of his five daughters came with him. I'd last seen her about nine years ago, and remembered her as a sweet little girl; she's now grown up into a nice young lady. And so a new set of memories will now supplant the old ones.

Spring training baseball games are always a featured event of the Reunions because my mom is a major baseball fan (always has been, actually); she's a fan of both the New York Mets (yay!) and Atlanta Braves (boo!). She subscribes to the Braves tabloid publication *Chop Talk*, and even has had two letters of comments published in it! Who would've thought my mom was a letter-hack?

At any rate, both games were fun and it was interesting to get a look at future major-leaguers. The star of the Phillies-Pirates game (though in a losing cause) was a Phillies infielder named Buzz Hannahan, who had three hits, drove in two runs, scored twice himself, and even stole a base. This, from a player who apparently didn't have enough pull to get the Phillies to give him a uniform with his name on it, like the rest of his teammates had. Nobody even knew who he was at the beginning of the game, but after his final at-bat he received a long, loud ovation. Based on a sampling of one game, this guy could be a future Hall-of-Famer! (But it turned out that he didn't make the Phillies opening day roster. Oh well.)

It was kind of the same situation the next day, at the Yankees-Toronto game. I don't know enough about the Toronto Blue Jays to tell if they were playing any of their non-roster players, but the Yankees certainly weren't – at least, at first. The Yankees started all their big-name (and big-salary) regulars, and for about four innings it was like a real regular-season game, with some good power hitting and some *really* good fielding plays. But after that, they all came out of the game in favor of a bunch of no-names (for me, at least – maybe I'm not as big a baseball fan as I thought I was), and the most entertaining thing was one of the stadium beer vendors.

Anyway, that's spring training for you – a chance to see big-league players close-up, without having to pay the elevated prices that those seats would cost in a major league stadium. But you usually only get that for the first few innings in a spring training game; after that, it's an entirely different ballgame as team managers and coaches try to see what other players have the talent and desire to make the team. Many who attend spring training games only stick around for that "first" game; in Florida, the days are hot even in March and the stadiums are filled with retirees who tire easily. By the middle innings, there's a steady stream of people heading for the exits. This apparently included middle-age people sitting next to me; they left their seats in the fifth inning and never came back. Or maybe they found that the stadium's beer garden was much more interesting than watching the "second" game.

We did the drive home in one day – the thought of spending the night in our own bed was the, er, driving force. It turned out to be a 900-mile trip, and we made it in just about 17 hours, including all stops. It was a bit of an ordeal, not only because of a nasty cold I'd picked up, but also because of the weather – there was rain from about the middle of Georgia to about the middle of North Carolina. I think that maybe the most discouraging moment of the trip was when we'd stopped in central South Carolina, at the rest stop just south of Lake Marion, and realized that we were still not quite halfway home.

How best to summarize the event? It was, in some ways, not unlike a small convention – there was a hospitality suite and even some rudimentary programming (one event of which was me and my brother facing-off in a music trivia contest, which he won on the third tie-breaker question, the dirty rat. He got all the easy questions, I'm telling ya!). My baby sister, as usual, was the star of the Reunion. She's a humorist, whether she knows it or not, and her job as receptionist at an Ocala medical office gives her lots of stories to tell, and she's never failed to cause great amounts of laughter when she does.

We're going to do it all over again next year, of course.

## **Mailing Comments on SFPA 232**

### **Jeff Copeland/SFPA OO**

Some of the "Miscellaneous Business" items seem like they're holdovers from the previous mailing, especially the one about the TAFF deadline approaching: "Note that the voting deadline is 10 February, so even if this reaches you by then, you'll need to vote quickly." But only if you have a time machine. (Randy Byers was elected the TAFF delegate, for those who hadn't heard.)

### **Norm Metcalf**

On Verne's pseudoscience: "You point out the fallacy of using electrolysis to distill sodium and mercury with which to operate his batteries. But Nemo was trying to be completely independent from the nations of the land. Thus instead of using electrolysis to distill his supplies of sodium and mercury he used coal, which he mined from the inside of a volcano in the Canary Islands." Verne wasn't much of a geologist; coal cannot occur inside a volcano, as it's not an igneous mineral (it was formed the same way sedimentary rocks were, by layering over the eons, not by being spewed from out of the earth's innards). Also, I guess I'll have to re-read the novel to see how coal can be used to directly obtain mercury from seawater, because it's not any chemistry I'm familiar with. You *can* combust the coal in a boiler to make steam, which you then can use to run a generator and use the electricity for electrolysis (to obtain sodium, but not mercury), but that requires a huge amount of infrastructure (way too much to fit in a submarine).

On *Fantasy Commentator*: "It was a top fanzine [in the 1940s] and incredibly enough it still is. It's also long overdue for a Hugo." It doesn't seem to be published every year any more, but the times that it is, I do nominate it.

### **Ned Brooks**

On John Fahey: "I love John Fahey's music. I have seven LPs and several CDs." That may be more than I do – I think I have one or two LPs and I just counted nine CDs. There was a CD released just recently, I think, but the older stuff seems more interesting to me.



### Steve Hughes

On SFPA and its content: "In all candor, one of the reasons I don't read [SFPA] is the rising level of nasty, unsupported, political mud slinging. I like political discussion but I hate it when people simply mindlessly repeat the last headline they saw on some talk show. Real life is nasty enough without my hobbies having to become equally so." You say you'll have more to say on this next mailing and I hope so, because this throw-off line reads like only an ill-tempered backhanded swipe. Please provide some cites or other content that would allow us to take you seriously on this. (I think that things are actually pretty mild here, for the most part.)

On taxes and taxation: "We have an interesting tax system in this country that requires anyone whose income is not subject to payroll tax withholding to predict what their income will be a year in advance." As you say, it's not always easy to do this, but: "[The IRS has] a neat little rule that encourages overpayment [in advance]: if you pay 110% of last year's taxes in the form of 4 equal payments, you will not be charged a penalty if you still owe taxes at the end of the year. So you have a choice, accurately predict your income a year in advance or give the government free use of your money." Not exactly – the government only gets free use if you actually do overpay. If you still owe taxes at the end of the year, then it's you who has come out ahead of all the people who have 'withholding' done to their paychecks. "It means paying out money I haven't earned yet and losing income I would have had from interest." Not much of a loss, though, as the going interest rate at banks is, at best, only a bit more than 1% nowadays. Even if you've overpaid by an egregious amount (say, by \$5,000, which is an extra \$1,250 each quarter), that only amounts to about a \$31 loss at an interest rate of 1%. I'm surprised that your tax accountant, whom you describe as one of the best in the country, has not explained this to you. And speaking of accountants: "Accounting and tax law has gotten so complex even the best people can't know it all." No doubt. On the other hand, it keeps them in business; if doing taxes was easy, we wouldn't need them!

On the Antipodes: "Our trip to New Zealand is going to be very different from our other trips. For one thing, we are going to be away for 4 weeks." Sounds very nice! The only thing I've ever seen of New Zealand is the inside of the Auckland airport, back in 1999. Maybe someday I'll be able to see more than that, but it won't be any time soon. Hope you had a nice time.

### Richard Dengrove

On books: "I coughed up the money for this book from Cat Yronwode." By the way, she was (and possibly still is) part of sf fandom. She's even mentioned in my 1960s Fan History Outline, in Chapter 1 (in the "Counterculture and Fandom" section).

On John Fahey's music: "I bet Fahey played a nonelectric guitar." Correct. He played around with a slide guitar as well, but his "American Primitive Guitar" style was six-string acoustical. If you're looking for a definition on exactly what that is, I'd say it combines folk, jazz, and down-home country. Very pleasant to listen to.

On the "DC Party Animals" exhibit: "Now that you've told me where they are, I may get out and see them – if the spirit moves me." Assuming it does, there are *still* eighteen of them (as of a week or so ago) in the Shops at 2000 Pennsylvania Avenue. That's only about three or four blocks from the Foggy Bottom Metrorail Station, so there's no excuse for not getting to see them if you're at all interested.

### David Schlosser

On fuel-efficient automobiles: "On my recent trip to L.A., [my hybrid car] was averaging 38 mpg while generally tooling along at 70 mph." Heck, my Toyota Corolla was doing just about that well on the trip to Florida and back, so I guess I'm unimpressed, no disrespect intended. They've got to do better than that if they want these cars to be popularly accepted.

### Guy Lillian

On your "new" used car: "Finally the goddamned thing simply stopped, cold ... and refused to re-start. Can you say 'lemon'?" Assuming you'll be in the market for *another* used car in the foreseeable future, you should consider doing a background check on the next car you're considering buying. You can do this at the Carfax web site (<http://www.carfax.com>) – pay the service fee (around \$15, I think), enter the vehicle's VIN, and get a complete vehicle history report. That will tell you if the vehicle is a salvage job, if it's a rebuild, if it used to be a fleet car, if it was previously damaged in an accident, if the odometer has been rolled back, etc. I wish something like this had been available the times in the past that I'd purchased used cars.

### Gary Brown

On current reading: "Have you read any of Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* comic book series?" No, my current reading is pretty much limited to the hour or so before bedtime, and I usually end up reading a chapter or three of a mystery/crime or sf paperback. I haven't read a so-called graphic novel in probably 15 years. My reading speed has slowed so much that I've probably got a five year backlog right now, even if I don't buy another book. It's caused me to become a lot more selective on what I'm reading.

### Janice Gelb

On the Oscars: "The big surprise of the night probably was Adrian Brody winning Best Actor for *The Pianist* over such stalwarts such as Jack Nicholson and Daniel Day-Lewis." Maybe so, but Brody had a huge, powerful performance in *The Pianist*, and he even had to play the piano. As for Nicholson and Day-Lewis, each has previously won Oscars, which may have counted against them with the voters. As for Best Song: "I thought the Academy showed some unexpected backbone in giving Eminem the Best Song award." His was the only one that wasn't performed during the show (he apparently had a prior commitment?), which makes me wonder how something can be a Best Song if only one person is capable of performing it. On the other hand, this seemed to be a weak year for songs – the other four nominees were really mediocre and forgettable.

On potential Hugo nominees: "There is a movement afoot to get the MTV Council of Elrond Easter Egg nominated in the new Best Short Dramatic Presentation Hugo category." I heard that too, and I'm interpreting it as an "in your face" gesture at the new category. The MTV short is kind of a "funny once" and is more than a bit juvenile in the humor department. If that's the best we can do, maybe we *should* rescind the category.

On *The Two Towers* movie: "I agree that changing Faramir's character being a problem." One of the benefits of not having read the Trilogy in more than 30 years is that nuances like that go pretty much right over my head.

### **Randy Cleary**

On possible threats to personal safety: "Brave of y'all to go out with a sniper around. I would have had room service." The Beltway Sniper shootings had been going on for about a week and a half at that point, I think, and by then we had pretty much figured out the *modus operandi* – the shootings (after the first day) always occurred near where there was a major highway to facilitate escape. Downtown Silver Spring, where the convention was held, did not have any means of rapid escape – a police dragnet would have trapped them. So we weren't really all that brave – we had all figured that we were pretty safe there (even though the very first of the shootings had occurred less than a mile away). And, as it turned out, we were right – the shooting that occurred during CapClave was a long way away, down near Richmond. I felt much more exposed standing in line waiting for the commuter bus each work day morning, as the park-and-ride was located right next to Interstate 270.

### **Gary Robe**

On 1970s technology: "We no longer have the expertise or manufacturing capability in place to even replace the [space] shuttles should they fail." Well, probably they could, for a price. I think the replacement they built for the *Challenger* came in at several billion dollars – about the cost of an aircraft carrier. If manned space flight is ever to become cost-effective (and I'm doubtful it ever will), the cost-to-orbit must come down. The shuttle is basically 1970s technology that's been upgraded. What's needed is a new approach.

### **Jeff Copeland**

On the war: "We may be doing the right thing for all the wrong reasons." That's pretty much my take on it. Probably the Middle East can't ever hope to be a stable place with Saddam's regime right in the middle of it, and it really appears that this war was fought just on General Principles. (That, and the appearance that W had a hard-on about Saddam because he'd outlasted his pappy.)

On how pre-1959 Hugo Award winners were chosen: "I suspected that the early few Hugos were chosen by committee fiat, rather than voted, but was unable to find confirmation anywhere." Prior to 1959, the Hugo voting process apparently consisted of a single page fill-in-the-blank ballot – as there were no nominee listings then, there was no Australian ballot tabulation. Winner was chosen by plurality, rather than majority. As for a possible committee fiat selection of the winners, you're partly right – it's been documented that some Worldcon committees waited to see how the voting was going before casting theirs, in a bloc, for a story or novel they wanted to win.

On movies by the Wachowski brothers: "You're not the only one who pointed that out to me [that they made the movie *Bound*]." They were also the screenwriters for a guilty pleasure movie for me, *Assassins*, with Sly Stallone, Antonio Banderas, and Juliette Moore (but no Joe Pantoliano). A month or so ago, TBS seemed to be showing it about every other evening.

On the Oscars: "I was disappointed that *The Two Towers* did so badly." Winning three Academy Awards is 'doing badly'?? The competition against it was better this year, so I'm not surprised it didn't win any of the 'big' awards. And it's hard to fault the movies that did.

### Eve Ackerman

On novel opera productions: "*The Magic Flute* [was] staged in a church basement hall and [was] produced by people who thought Mozart's vision needed to be seriously tweaked." I'm reminded of the movie *The Goodbye Girl*, where the director of *Richard III* had Richard Dreyfuss' character play Richard, um, a bit out there." Lumberjacks in *The Magic Flute* must have been entertaining, at least?

### Liz Copeland

On gardening: "The other fun thing is I get to use acid-loving plants. I haven't lived in an appropriate place before so I'm unfamiliar with rhododendrons and heathers." Rhododendrons are pretty much indestructible – we've got a couple on the north side of the house, and they've survived many winters without any trouble, and without us doing anything to help them out (like acidifying the soil). They also don't grow out of control – and they resist deer (which apparently hate the taste), but I'm guessing that's probably not a problem where you are.

### Toni Weisskopf

On taking responsibility for one's actions: "If your political statements alienate your primary audience, you may lose that audience. I suspect that the [Dixie] Chick ... who made the remark [about W] did it without thinking. She and her mates will have to live with the consequences." I do not think any such consequences will be dire or long lasting – if anything, they've gotten name recognition with the rest of the populace who don't listen to country music. And in the end, their music, good or bad, will decide how well they will do in the future. Remember back to John Lennon's comment that the Beatles were more famous than Jesus (or something like that). There was a short-lived backlash, but the group is still doing pretty well, I'd say, more than 30 years after the break-up.

On subjective perceptions: "[Hank:] I have to confess that I find Liberals as a group to be the most mean spirited and contemptibly vicious as any group I have ever encountered." This, from what is truly an unbiased observer. I disagree. Mean spirited and contemptibly vicious are terms I'd expect to see used to describe such right-wing nutbars as Bob Barr and any number of the conservative talk radio rabble rousers. If you'd like to make the claim that there are left-wing individuals who seem mean spirited, perhaps so, but otherwise this is just another over-the-top throw-off comment that we've come to expect from you.

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No more room! I was going to describe one of my visits to the Libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, and how there really *is* such a thing as a free lunch, but I guess that'll have to wait until next time. Take care, stay healthy, be safe.

