

# REVENANT #19



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I was semi-expecting this letter, but that didn't make it any less frustrating when it arrived. On the Saturday before Memorial Day when I got home from work, I found a sweet little note from the Graduate School at LSU in the mail. I was being dropped from the program. Never mind that my average (according to any rational accounting) was 3.5; I hadn't with two courses wiped out a 20-year old grade. I called the Library School Dean on Monday, and she said she'd get on it. I still haven't heard from them as of late July, so I may not be going back.

## ALA vs SARS

The annual American Library Association Conference and Canadian Library Association held their annual conference together in Toronto this year in June. The specter of SARS in Toronto made some people nervous about attending; on the library list-serve I subscribe to, various jittery librarians were saying, "The risk of bringing back the plague to wipe out my community is probably not worth it." Well, not *quite* that extreme, but I did think people were being overly alarmist. SARS cases were almost completely confined to people who had been to China, to those who had had close association with them or to health care workers who treated the ill before they realized what was going on. There was talk of isolating people after they got back from Toronto and a fair number of people decided not to go and some exhibitors canceled. Despite all that, there were about 17,000 who did show up.

This was my first national professional conference, so I was ready to enjoy the experience. The main venue was the Toronto Convention Centre (that Torcon will use), but events were also held in a dozen other hotels in the downtown area. It made for logistical problems in getting from one site to another. (Shuttle busses were provided, but I suspected that with the state of downtown traffic, walking from one place to another might be just as fast!) I didn't attend programs all day every day anyway, though, just two or three items on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. Just as happens at a WorldCon, several times there were two or three items going on at the same time that I wanted to see. And I couldn't panel hop since the events were usually several blocks apart at different hotels.

I kept making mental notes on similarities and differences between this and an SF con; I was disappointed that panelists didn't interact with each other, but just delivered their bit, and passed the floor to the next person. Of course, most of those "panels" were really composed of several people doing a solo presentation of similar subjects; so they can't be compared with a typical SF con panel. I also thought WorldCon's "voodoo message board" a better vehicle than their electronic message board. With this one, you swiped your exhibitor card through a card reader attached to a computer terminal, and you could leave or receive messages. A voodoo

message board has the advantage of letting you just walk by and check for messages. I did like the freebies I was able to pick up though---a t-shirt, an autographed copy of the galleys for *Lunch at the Piccadilly* by Clyde Edgerton, and a new book by Eric Carle to donate to my library's children's collection, and several posters for the children's section.

The highlight of the conference was hearing Clyde Edgerton. If you're not familiar with his books, I recommend them highly. He's from North Carolina, and writes very funny, very real novels set in that area. He also plays music (bluegrass and "other") with two other musicians. For his program, he and the Rank Strangers would play a few songs, then he'd read from his new book, then they'd play some more. Sunday morning or early afternoon, I was walking around one of the exhibitor sections and heard them playing again. They finished up by leading us in a few choruses of "I'll Fly Away". It was a moderately surreal moment---to be in Toronto at the ALA conference singing a gospel song with a guy from North Carolina!

I was also impressed by the number of exhibitors that did make it---lots and lots and lots. Some of them were obviously only interested in talking to people with purchasing ability---I was put off by one who immediately asked what my position was. Maybe a misinterpretation on my part; but it came across as if he was saying, "Are you important enough for me to waste my time with you?" On the other hand, there were several vendors eager to press sample CD's of recorded books into your hands; many others ready, willing and eager to demonstrate their products to anyone. I even talked briefly with one guy representing Torcon!

The only downside of this trip was the small amount of time I got to spend with my sister and family. I'm planning to go back up for Torcon, so maybe I can take a few extra days and see them as well.

## Movies, Movies

One of the local movie theaters is now keeping one or two of its screens for the lesser known and foreign films. It's meant I've had a chance to see some interesting non-blockbuster movies of late. The first was "The Scoundrel's Wife", made by Glen Pitre, a Louisiana filmmaker. It's based on stories he heard while growing up during World War II of German submarines off the coast of Louisiana and rumors of local fishermen selling fuel to them. In the movie, Tatum O'Neal plays the widow of a man accused of doing something terrible (we're given a hint at the beginning, but don't learn the truth until late on), and is herself suspected of possibly selling to the off-shore submarines. The local priest (Tim Curry) is a lush with secrets of his own; there's a refugee doctor who is not what he seems; and some of these outcasts ally against the townspeople. It's a diverting, if not outstanding movie. The accused are not totally innocent, and don't totally trust each other.

Another diverting movie was "L'Augerge Espagnole" (which they translate as "Euro Pudding"). A young Frenchman spends a year in Barcelona studying economics so he can get a job back home. He moves into an apartment with five other students who are a real European melange of British, Italian, Spanish, Danish, and Belgium. They behave like college students the world over arguing over who will clean the bathroom; divvying up the shelves in the fridge; hassling with the landlord who doesn't like students; eavesdropping on each other's phone calls; hanging out together and going out to party. There's a bit in the movie that struck a real resonance with me. The Frenchman is having an affair with the rich wife of a French doctor he

met on the trip over. She is stuck at home bored and afraid of this strange city where she doesn't speak the language. They are walking around the city and she marvels at how he's learned to adapt and get along in what she sees as a poor, dirty place. He retorts that she's seeing it too judgmentally; that the city should be accepted on its own, for its own particular beauty. In a way, it's like the way I feel about Louisiana and Baton Rouge in particular. Yes, it's poor; in many ways it's backward and can seem like a third world setting. But this place has its own particular appeal that not everyone can see. I can't properly articulate it, but it's one reason I still live here.

Getting back to the movie, the dialogue is mostly in French and Spanish with a few lines in English, so be forewarned if you don't like subtitles. I'm usually fine with subtitles, though in this case I found myself looking at the scenery and missing a few lines.

If you fell in love with the New Zealand landscapes in "Lord of the Rings", "Whale Rider" will give you more to love. You don't see as many different scapes, but the beautiful green hills and blue skies on the screen made me want to investigate air fares over there! Apart from that, though, it's still worth going to see. Pai, a 12-year old Maori girl is the granddaughter of the local chief. Her twin brother might have been the heir, but he and her mother died at his birth. Pai's father is an artist who spends most of his time in Europe and has refused to be the heir. Pai wants to learn the sacred ways that her grandfather is teaching the boys of the village, but she's a girl, and forbidden (or so the grandfather says). She does what she thinks she has to do though the grandfather refuses to let her join the classes; her grandmother is sympathetic if not openly helpful; and there is a happy ending (though I was afraid there wouldn't be toward the end). This is one of those movies that makes you want to see the place first hand. I can't afford the air fare over there but I may get to have a second-hand experience. My brother-in-law's sister and family live there; and when I was up in Toronto, my sister and brother-in-law were trying to figure out when they could go. With all the travel Don does for work, they have the air points; it's just a matter of trying to co-ordinate when he could take off work and when Alison is out of school. They may try for Christmas, possibly, if his other sister and family don't go then. I wish I could stow away in one of their suitcases!

## Harry Potter and his Latest

My niece had her 14th birthday while I was up in Toronto---and part of her observance was getting up early enough to get to the local bookstore when it opened at 8 a.m. so she could get her copy of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. She's not the ferociously avid reader I was at that age (just remembered---my favorite 14th birthday present was a copy of *Lord of the Rings*), but she had read a good chunk of it by the time I left; and was enjoying it immensely. I had put my name on the waitlist at the library and had a copy waiting for me when I got back to work. It didn't take me long to read it; I started it on Wednesday and when I hit the last 100 pages late Saturday night I knew I wasn't sleeping until I finished it! I've enjoyed the series, mostly due to their "page turning" qualities. I haven't gone back to re-read any of them, though; and when I really love a book, I want to read it over and over again.

Without going into details and spoiling surprises for those who haven't read it yet; I can say that Harry is well and thoroughly into adolescence in this book. The kid is downright annoying! He feels neglected by Dumbldore and takes it out on his friends. He thinks he knows the right thing to do and ignores what other people tell him. He spends a lot of time feeling sorry for himself and grumpy. Most of his ill-humor is justified by the nasty events; but at times I



wanted to shake him and say, "Shape up, kid; things are coming to a crisis!" I did like the way Rowling expanded the roles of Ginny and Neville; they come across as more rounded and believable characters rather than just background.

## And Another Book

The other really fun book I've read lately was *Red Thunder* by John Varley. It reads a lot like a 50's Heinlein juvenile; and I mean that in a good way. Six people get together and build a spaceship to go to Mars. No, really, they do! One of them is disgraced ex-astronaut Travis Broussard, one is his genius, but odd cousin Jubal, the others are four young people who met Travis one night while he was sleeping off a drunk and they were driving on the beach at Daytona. They get him home and a friendship begins. Then one day Jubal shows one of them this toy he's invented. And it goes from there. Jubal is a little like Leonard of Quirm from the Discworld books---he invents for the joy of inventing without ever thinking of the deadly applications his invention could have. Varley's books have always had a Heinlein feel to them; but this one shows it most strongly. It's a neat book; and it may be on my Hugo nomination list for next year.

## Into the 20th Century I Go Kicking and Screaming All the Way

There are some techno toys I love. I love my computer and internet. I love my VCR and DVD player. I love the "Lord of the Rings" movies with all their CGI glories. But I hate cell phones. I never wanted a cell phone. I now own a cell phone. It was reluctant necessity only. The final impetus toward getting one happened on a trip a few weeks ago. My brother and I were driving up to Tennessee to attend the funeral of our aunt. (She was the last sibling in my mother's family.) His car broke down south of Meridian, Mississippi in the middle of nowhere. Neither one of us had a cell phone, so we had resigned ourselves to walking when a car stopped and a nice couple offered us a ride into Meridian. Having a cell phone wouldn't have kept the car from breaking, but it would have made the delay much shorter. Once I got home, I looked at a few plans and selected one. So now I have this expensive (not really) thing I don't really want; but I now have fewer worries about what happens when I break down or when I need a phone. Currently, I plan to leave the thing off unless I'm using it; I much as I hate hearing other people's phone ring everywhere anytime, I don't want to inflict that on anyone else!

## Mailing Comments

**New Port News:** Ct me on whether the Patriot Act would apply to you: I'm not familiar with all its ramifications, but if you sell books to anyone; I suspect that would put you in the category of "bookseller" and be subject to seizure of records if the FBI decides you've sold something to someone they want to investigate.

**Variations on a Theme:** Thanks for running the obit for Harry Warner, Jr. I knew he was a newspaper man, but didn't know much about what he wrote. I don't suppose his columns on local history were ever collected and published. If he wrote for the paper anywhere near as well as he wrote for fandom, his columns would be very readable.

**Tyndallite:** Thanks for including that bit on the Lensman books. A while back I was trying to get the Lensman books for a patron. He wanted to read them in order, and I couldn't tell from the cataloging how they should run. I checked online, and found two different methods of numbering them. Sort of like the Narnia series, in which the first story chronologically was published mid-way through the series; so you can find some editions with one way to number them and other editions with another way.

**Nice Distinctions:** I discovered Patrick Dennis' books when I was in college and managed to find and read most of the ones he wrote under that name. They were a lot of fun. I'll have to look for *Uncle Mame*.

On the desirability of fashionability in women: could that be related to the concept of the trophy wife (whether first or second or third or...)? "Look how successful I am. I can afford to dress this women in expensive clothes."

**Twygdrasil and Treehouse Gazette:** You have been having a rough time! My condolences on the loss of your father. Linda sounds like she was indeed an angel of mercy. If the morphine helped your father by easing him; I don't think it hastened his death. I'm not a health professional, but I'd think that his discomfort would work against prolonging his life. And as you said, "The idea was that my father die peaceably." Your father being disappointed in you is unfortunately not unique to your family. I think a lot of us have had to go through active parental disapproval. I may not have gotten a great deal of active disapproval from my parents, but I never felt like they were proud of me once I became a teen-ager.

I'm sorry to hear of your mother's Alzheimer's. I hope the place she's staying continues to be good for her.

Ct Gary Brown on letter columns and who reads them: other letter writers read them! Isn't that how SF fandom started? The readers of the early magazines wrote in and read each other's letters when they appeared and stared corresponding with each other.

Ct me: thanks for the kind words, but I've been shortchanging other SFPAn on comments while frittering away time on frivolities like writing papers and studying.

Ct Jeff Copeland on Copeland's Restaurant: The chain was founded by AL Copeland; but why the food should be inedible, I don't know. They probably adjust their recipes for local tastes; so maybe that's why your friend from Baton Rouge doesn't like the gumbo. It may taste all right to a local; but to someone who has a definite idea on what gumbo should be, it may not make the grade.

**Frequent Flyer:** Congratulations on moving in! Not too traumatic, I hope?

The Harry Potter hype has been fascinating to watch. Even the library got a little excitement out of it. Most of the branches had a drawing on the day to give away two copies each. The children or teens had to come into the library that day to register, then the drawing was held that evening just before we closed. The security beforehand was amusing; the copies came in

wrapped up and sealed the day before and had to be locked up until the day of the drawing; only the winner of the drawing could break the seal.

Ct Richard Dengrove on SFPA slash; as others have explained; no, you can't have scenes with Halle Berry. If it's slash, you get Bruce Willis and Anita gets Halle Berry.

Ct Don Markstein on spam blocks: I was trying to figure out the obscene connotations of "mortgage"; and it finally dawned on me that you were referring to plain old spam, not just the obscene variety. (I realize I've led a sheltered life, so if there is a, um, "interesting" definition of mortgage I'm not aware of, I'd just as soon not know.)

**The Sphere:** So, why did rr.com put toonopedia on its blacklist? Did they have some sort of reason or was it just confusion on their part?

**Peter, Pan & Merry:** Ct Richard Dengrove on the commercials connecting smoking dope and auto accidents: Are they going to run commercials bemoaning the fact that someone was talking on their cell phone when they crashed? Or yelling at the fighting kids in the back seat? Distractions are bad, no matter what form they take; but the feds have apparently decided it's time to re-demonize marijuana. I think cell phone abuse is more common than the smoking type; I shudder every time I see someone wheeling through a turn with a cell phone in one hand and no eyes on the road

If I lost a stick of butter, I'd be looking at which one of my cats seemed to be licking its chops a little too thoroughly!

**Avatar Press:** And just why is why is Julie wearing a fork down the front of her shirt? Minds with too little to do want to know why. I see you refused to appeal to our purient interests by being very discrete and not describing exactly what those furry fans get up to. I've heard of furry fandom; but that's about it; I know nothing of what they, er, "do". (Of course I could check some web sites and find out; considering some of the people I've met in fandom, I doubt I'd be shocked.) You have a furry name, I see. So are you familiar enough with them to know whether furry fandom is big around there? Are they are sub-set of SF fandom in general or more of an overlapping group?

**Yngvi is a Louse:** Enjoyed Charlotte's review of "Pirates of Penzance". I loved that movie; it was probably the first video I ever bought. It had abut worn out the last time I watched it and I, too, would love to have it on DVD. Okay, I'm convinced; I'll buy this poor copy one while we're waiting for the good one.

**Oblio:** Beautiful cover, very nice photo of the heron? egret? Egret and herons live on the Louisiana coast, but about the only ones we get around here are the cattle egrets that you see in fields following (or sometimes sitting on the backs of) the cows.

One of the things that worries we about this current administration is their seeming determination to alienate all our allies. We don't have that many to begin with and when those clowns in Washington go around with an attitude of, "To hell with all of you, we want ours!" it gets scary. The arrogance and insular chauvinism I see is troubling.

**It's Because We're Proud of You:** Congratulations to Allie for being a good enough student that she had lots of choices as to where to go. I hope she has a wonderful time up there in the Great White North (eh?). The experience of living in a foreign country ought to be an added educational bonus.

The mint julep letter was a classic. I seem to remember that this or a similar piece was read into the Congressional Record one year along about Kentucky Derby Day. I wouldn't swear to it, though it's the sort of thing that should have happened in the old days during a filibuster.

I agree with your assessment of "Let Me Sleep on It" as a bad choice for a commercial theme song. I keep waiting for the car to shriek back at him, "I gotta know right now!!" I haven't seen it lately, so maybe someone in authority noticed as well.

**Home With the Armadillo:** I can wince in sympathy with your tales of hospital horrors. After my bout of hospitalizations several years ago, I learned that while hospitals are a good place to be when you're seriously ill, they are no place to get any sleep once you're off heavy drugs. I didn't get woken up for pain pills, but to have my blood pressure and temperature checked, every two or three hours it seemed like. And I had a backache because I couldn't lie on my side very well with the IV in my arm. Yuck. I'm glad you're feeling better by now and hope the recovery continues.

**Spiritus Mundi:** Very nice DUFF report; I'm looking forward to the full length version. Glad to hear the hypnotism to make the trip easier. So, would you go again? I know I'd love to see that corner of the world, but the long air flight makes it seem less appealing.

You mentioned SARS in Toronto; let me pass on a statistic I heard at ALA. At a talk on methods of gathering reference statistics one man started out with some SARS stats. He told us there was a 1 in 40,000 chance of us coming in contact with anyone who had or had been exposed to SARS. We had an equal chance of being hit by a car, and were twice as likely to be shot if we were in the US. He concluded, "I want you not to be afraid of coming to Toronto, but to be afraid of *leaving* Toronto!" And by WorldCon time? I'd be more worried about getting West Nile Virus from my back yard than SARS in Toronto. See you there.

**A Little Behind, I'm Afraid:** What can I say? You are having more than your share of bad times; I only hope they improve very soon.

**Passages:** I'm glad to hear your problems are on their way to being resolved fully. In a way, you're one of the lucky ones for learning what was wrong and being able to get something done about it. Who knows how many other women are suffering the same problems, but won't be diagnosed and will just keep going on in a miserable fog? I hope things go well with Samantha and her speech therapy.

**Trivial Pursuits:** I see we synchronized in reading the new Fforde book. The next one is just out in Britain: I suppose it'll be next year before we get it here.

Ct me and the Columbia explosion. If I had known where they were when the accident happened; I wouldn't have thought of sabotage, but having been reminded of the Israeli astronaut that morning; I heard "shuttle", "explosion", and all my half-formed fears pulled together.

Stephen does well to be horrified at some of those examples you mention. Except....well, my mother did make a very good congealed salad that I like who didn't like most Jello salads.



She combined Jello with cranberries, pecans, and cream cheese. It was sweet and tart at the same time ( as well as being horribly fattening, no doubt).

**My Month of Fame:** I was amused by your account of Baycon's attempts to accommodate you. It seems like they didn't get it just right---that their intentions are good, but the outcomes were less than outstanding. You know, I think you should have taken up Baycon's offer of a button pusher for the weekend. Just think how useful he would have been lugging your flowers (though they didn't get him there early enough for that, did they); sleeping on a pallet outside your door so he could shush the noisy fen. As you said, he didn't know quite what his job was supposed to be; I wonder what they told him: "We'd like you to push Janice's buttons for the weekend"?

The panelist who ate her toast in front of everyone needs to read up on etiquette for humans, not just panel moderators! Isn't it considered rude to eat in front of others unless you provide for them as well? At the very least, apologize profusely and explain how you've been up for 12 hours without having had a chance to eat and are rushing off immediately after or are trying to ward off an insulin reaction or some such.

**Tennessee Trash:** Interesting to read about the mountain hike. I occasionally read about people hiking the Appalachian Trail and think it sounds like a neat thing to do. Then I realize how much I would dislike being outside all day (the sun gets to me) and how crazy I would go not being able to take a shower every day, and I get rational again. I also read about the dangers of bears and decide the only place I want to see bears is with a nice strong fence between me and them.

#### **And to All:**

I made a last minute decision to attend DeepSouthCon, so I hope to have seen some of you by the time you read this. I decided Chattanooga was really too far to drive in one day so I'll leave Thursday and spend a night on the road coming home. I don't know what to expect from this con. The hotel set-up seems a bit odd; three hotels and I'm having to stay in another because there aren't enough rooms. If the con is a total write-off, though, I can always go sightseeing. I haven't been to Chattanooga since I went to a couple of ChattaCons in the early 80's.

Others of you I hope to see at TorCon. I've made my plane reservations and requested vacation time from work. It's getting close! I'll have to start deciding which of my Terry Pratchett books I want to haul up there to get autographed---unfortunately, his next one isn't due out until October.

See you in sixty.