

A WRITER'S DIARY

I've never kept a diary, which I often regret when I try to reconstruct the details of some event of my early life. (Isaac Asimov kept one, and it stood him in good stead when he wrote a huge two-volume autobiography, another thing I've never felt the urge to do.) But people often ask me what the life of a science fiction writer is like, since they find the idea that I have put in more than fifty years writing SF very strange indeed. (I don't. I'm used to it.) So, just for the fun of it, a few diary-like notes on my life as a writer in the early weeks of 2011.

January 11. A newspaper article today about the discovery by archaeologists of what seems to be a six-thousand-year-old winery in Armenia. A column idea here? The ancient past is almost as science-fictional as the future, after all. And I do like wine. Put this aside to think about.

January 15. My birthday. We go to one of our favorite San Francisco restaurants, and I bring along a bottle of one of my favorite wines. The sommelier, as she pours it, says "Welcome back." Does she remember us from our last visit? We have been seated right opposite the kitchen door; she notices that I don't like it, and arranges for us to move to a better table. Later she brings us an extra course, and then some additional wine. It turns out that she reads SF and loves *Lord Valentine's Castle*, and indeed remembers me from my last visit here. Wants to talk about my current work—I tell her that I've just written a new Majipoor story—and about my neighbor Jack Vance. It becomes a delightful evening, thanks to her extra attention. I'll send her a signed copy of my newest book; it's the least I can do.

January 18. First copies of *Musings and Meditations*, the new collection of

Asimov's columns published from 1996 to 2010, arrives. They've done a handsome job with it. I start leafing through it and find myself reading my own columns with deep interest, even pleasure. The book, I think, is more than the sum of its parts, not just a bunch of scattered essays but a work that projects a coherent world-view. I hope the critics agree.

January 19. Sheila Williams sends me a link to her new anthology, *Enter a Future*, made up of stories from *Asimov's*. It contains my "Enter a Soldier. Later: Enter Another." I love to see the rows of anthologies on my shelves here, going back more than fifty years, with my stories in them. But I will never see this one: it is available only in an electronic edition. Oh, well. I'll get along without it. I tell Sheila that I'm an old-fashioned guy but I'm doing my best to adapt to the current century.

January 20. Filing some of my Russian editions that a new correspondent in St. Petersburg has sent me. In Soviet days the Russians pirated dozens of my novels and stories, and the piracy went on into the early and wild post-Soviet days. For years I've been trying to collect copies of them, hampered by the difficulty I have reading Cyrillic script. An Amazon-like Russian bookselling site called *Ozon.ru* lists 129 different Silverberg items, and, scrolling through, I see that I already own about half of them. But some are new to me and aren't even included in the bibliography of my Russian publications that the Polish scholar Zyta Szymanska compiled for me two years ago. With the help of Google's translation function I manage to identify one of them: an attractive book from 1994 that couples my early novel *The Seed of Earth* with L. Sprague de Camp's *The Tower of Zanid*. It's in Russian, but it was pub-

lished, I discover, in Estonia, which in Soviet times was forced to use Russian as its primary language. I'll be in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, in May. Maybe I can find a copy there, or in St. Petersburg, which I'll also be visiting.

January 24. I've closed a deal for U.S. electronic rights to my ten-volume Collected Short Stories series and the first five volumes will be available on Kindle later this week. (Malcolm Edwards' Orion Books has already acquired British e-rights.) This is very exciting news. Bill Schafer's Subterranean Press has done a beautiful job with this series, but he's done them only as limited-edition hardcover books that go quickly out of print and become collector's items. Now, though, Malcolm and Bill will be making them permanently available in e-versions, and thus, with a little help from my friends, I acquire a twenty-first-century platform for my work. So long as I'm still around, I want my books and stories to stay around also, and Kindle and its competitors have gone from being interesting science fictional novelties to being absolutely essential media for the writer who wants his work to survive.

January 25. Got a fast start on the short story I've promised for Gardner Dozois' book in honor of Poul Anderson. I agreed to write a Time Patrol story for it, and so I was rereading Poul's splendid series all last week to refresh my memory of his concept. (I am staying away from my own *Up the Line*, which in some ways was a parody of the Anderson series.) Had a lot of trouble working out the resolution of the plot for this one, because once you give all your characters the ability to move freely in any direction in time and space, it's like giving them all magic wands, and any plot resolution can too easily be canceled out by someone else's opposing move. But I think I have it nailed down. We'll see next week.

Feb 1. I seem to have finished the Time Patrol story pretty rapidly, with a ten-page flourish on the final day that harkens back to the wildly prolific days of my youth. Rough draft, of course. I

need to read through it carefully and see whether it make sense, now. But I think it does. Gardner will be pleased.

Another Gardner Dozois item today. Sean Wallace of Prime Books has asked me to do an introduction to a collection of Gardner's stories that he's publishing to be distributed at Readercon next summer, where Gardner is guest of honor. This will be the third time since 1977 that I've done an introduction to one of Gardner's story collections. Can I find anything new to say about him? Well, if not, I'll say the same old things. They were good enough to use the first two times around.

Feb 2. From Vince Gerardis comes the outline for the pilot show for the miniseries HBO is planning to make out of *The World Inside*. I'm pleased to see that the screenwriter has remained completely faithful to the concepts of my novel while introducing some interesting and appropriate new plot twists. If the show does get made—and in Hollywood that's always uncertain until the cameras finally start rolling—it should be terrific, a sexy *Blade Runner* sort of thing that attracts a wide audience.

Vince has been my agent for film rights for a decade or more, as smart and aggressive as you would want your agent to be, but never before has he had so many different Silverberg projects going. If even half of them materialize as movies or TV shows, I'll be all over the place a few years from now. But I know better than to put much faith in the likelihood that Hollywood stuff will actually happen. Most projects disappear somewhere along the way—even *Dune* came and went half a dozen times before finally being filmed.

Also some documents from Vince pertaining to the proposed filming of my 1968 story "Passengers." It was bought for filming a dozen years ago, but the movie was never produced, and somehow Vince has regained the rights and sold them all over again. Nice. I wonder if they'll manage to make it this time around.

Feb 3. And now my New York agent, Chris Lotts, closes a deal with Tor Books

for a reissue of my 1971 novel, *Downward to the Earth*. I wrote that one after coming back from a trip to Africa, so it's not surprising that one of its main themes is post-colonial life, and that it features a race of intelligent elephant-like beings. It includes a significant bit of homage to Joseph Conrad, a writer who has had great influence on me—the first of many Conrad homages of mine. (In this one I tip my hat to *Heart of Darkness*.) I'm glad to see the book returning to print. Chris tells me that another, much bigger reissue deal is in the works, but nothing is definite yet. My fingers are crossed for this one.

These past few weeks have been very busy, all sorts of deals happening and even more pending. I'm not unhappy about that, of course, but so much action is starting to tire me—dozens of e-mails buzzing back and forth between various publishers and me, discussions with my agents Chris and Vince, terms to haggle over, contracts to sign! Poor me! I guess there are worse problems for a writer to have. My teenage self, who so desperately wanted to get a story published anywhere he could, would surely find all this self-pity very amusing. But I haven't been a teenager for close to sixty years and fatigue is an issue for me, even when caused by torrents of good news. That ambitious kid of 1952 would never understand.

Feb 6. A glorious California weekend, record-breaking warm temperatures. On Saturday we saw the new London production of *King Lear* with Derek Jacobi, one of those worldwide theater telecasts. I spent much of sunny Sunday reading a biography of Georges Simenon. The juxtaposition of Lear and Simenon had me considering the concept of retirement, theirs and mine (because I am semi-retired as a writer and constantly thinking about deleting the “semi”).

Lear bungled his retirement, angrily

and foolishly alienating his one ally as he gave up his kingship, and undergoing terrible suffering as a result. His rough and ultimately self-destructive treatment of Cordelia made me wonder whether he was already beginning to lose his mind when he abdicated, rather than (as I had long thought) going mad under the pressure of the events that followed. As for Simenon, he and I had very similar writing careers, the one difference being that he became vastly more famous and wealthy than I did. But we both began writing professionally in our late teens, enormously prolific writers quickly turning out reams of copy for pulp markets, then began to produce more ambitious material in our thirties, and, in our late sixties, gave up writing novels altogether. (Simenon, in fact, stopped writing fiction entirely, though he spent his last years writing a series of memoirs. I've done no novels in the past decade, but I've continued to write short stories and the occasional novella.) Do even the most prolific writers eventually reach a point where they'd just like to kick back and let the new generation take over? Simenon did in 1972. I've been feeling that way since about 2002. At least he made a better job of his retirement than Lear did. I hope I do.

Anyway, it's been a busy few weeks—unusually busy. I hope these notes don't give the impression that every day of the year brings me some new contract to sign, as it has seemed since mid-January. Believe me: there are lulls, plenty of them. But this has certainly been an active time, and it's time to take things a little easier. So off we go on a little holiday, now—a few days down in San Diego, enjoying that city's lovely weather and prowling its marvelous zoo in search of wombats and koalas. And then I'll see what March holds for me. ○

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