

A surreal, golden-hued landscape. In the sky, a large, bright white sphere is partially obscured by a white ring. A small, rocket-like structure is attached to the ring, emitting a bright red laser beam. On the ground, a lone astronaut in a white suit stands near a large, dark, rocky mound. In the background, several tall, stylized, golden structures with red and white bands are visible. The overall atmosphere is dreamlike and otherworldly.

STRANGE DAYS

FABULOUS JOURNEYS
WITH GARDNER DOZOIS

"Lyrical, haunting, heartbreaking,
this is science fiction at its best."

—George R.R. Martin

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Strange Days

Fabulous Journeys with Gardner Dozois

Edited by Tim Szczesuil & Ann Broomhead

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- “Flash Point” by Gardner Dozois appeared first in *Orbit 13*, edited by Damon Knight, 1974.
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- “A Knight of Ghosts and Shadows” by Gardner Dozois appeared first in *Asimov’s Science Fiction*, Oct./Nov. 1999.
- “The Storm” by Gardner Dozois appeared first in *Future Corruption*, edited by Roger Elwood, 1975.
- “The Last Day of July” by Gardner Dozois appeared first in *New Dimensions III*, edited by Robert Silverberg, 1973.
- “Afternoon at Schrafft’s” by Gardner Dozois, Michael Swanwick, and Jack Dann appeared first in *Amazing Science Fiction Stories*, Mar. 1984.
- “Playing the Game” by Gardner Dozois and Jack Dann appeared first in *Rod Serling’s The Twilight Zone Magazine*, Feb. 1982.
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- “Passage” by Gardner Dozois appeared first in *Xanadu*, edited by Martin H. Greenberg and Jane Yolen, 1993.
- “Community” by Gardner Dozois appeared first in *Asimov’s Science Fiction*, Sep. 1996.
- “The Visible Man” by Gardner Dozois appeared first in *Analog Science Fiction—Science Fact*, Dec. 1975.
- “A Cat Horror Story” by Gardner Dozois appeared first in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, Oct./Nov. 1994.
- “Executive Clemency” by Gardner Dozois and Jack C. Haldeman II appeared first in *Omni*, Nov. 1981.
- “Strangers” by Gardner Dozois appeared first in *New Dimensions IV*, edited by Robert Silverberg, 1974.



Introduction

The Strange and Fabulous Journey of Gardner Dozois

Imagine you're at a party in Gardner's apartment. It's not large, but he's invited swarms of people, so it's very crowded. Gardner keeps his awards on a little table not far from the door. People who have never been there before, young editors and the like, will eventually drift over to admire the thicket of Hugos for his work as an editor, and while there notice two Nebulas gleaming in their midst. Inevitably, someone will say, "I didn't know Gardner was a writer."

"Oh, yes," one of us Old Hands will reply (we linger near the trophy table for this very purpose), "Gardner's a *much* better writer than he is an editor!"

Just to watch their faces, you see.

But it's true. I bow to no man in my estimation of Gardner as an editor. He does a brilliant job of it, and we're all better off for his being at the helm of *Asimov's*. Still, his special gift is as a writer, and his gift finds its truest expression at short length. Gardner is a consummate writer of short fiction.

Gardner Dozois sold his first story when he was seventeen. "The Empty Man" appeared in the September 1966 issue of Fred Pohl's *Worlds of If*; he learned of its acceptance while he was in boot camp. That story isn't reprinted here, and it's doubtful he'll ever allow it to be reprinted anywhere. But immediately after his years in the Army, he made a name for himself with wonderfully original and literate stories like "A Special Kind of Morning," "Machines of Loving Grace," and "Chains of the Sea." Between 1970 and 1975, he produced nineteen stories, including much of his best work, as well as a novel written with George Alec Effinger, *Nightmare Blue*, which was intended as a potboiler but ended up being something rather better.

Unfortunately, the above-mentioned stories could not be included in this collection because they are currently available online, and NESFA Press required exclusivity. However, this book does include five works from Early Period Dozois. "The Visible Man," written, in part at least, in order to sell a story to *Analog*, shows the transformative power Gardner brings to a traditional SF dilemma-story. "The Storm" and "Flash Point" are both horror stories in the original sense of the term,

narratives that evoke horror and awaken the reader to terror and pity. The spooky-beautiful “The Last Day in July” begins as a horror story, but opens out into something richer and more optimistic. As a special treat, Gardner’s stunning novella “Strangers,” which he later expanded into a novel of the same name, is collected here for the first time.

There is a long gap in Gardner’s bibliography between 1975 and 1981. He was, though it became evident only in retrospect, suffering from writer’s block. It wasn’t perfectly obvious at the time, though, because he was still writing constantly. The stories never *did* come easily, and the fact that he couldn’t finish any particular one at a given time was nothing unusual. Moreover, Gardner was living in extreme poverty and as a result he was constantly assembling theme anthologies, working on his best-of-the-year volumes, and engaged in the various writerly and editorial scut-work a working writer must undertake to keep from actually starving to death. And he spent one long summer writing *Strangers*, that beautiful, heartbreaking and neglected novel whose virtues you can sample here in shorter form.

Nevertheless, there is a six-year period in which he published no new short fiction.

Part of the problem was medical. I unhappily remember walking to lunch with him and Susan one day and realizing that something was dreadfully wrong. It took Gardner an enormous effort to make his way down the sidewalk. He was walking slowly, oh so slowly, and talking very matter-of-factly about how the darkness was closing in around him. “You see that mailbox on the corner? I can’t read the words on its side. I know it says U.S. Mail, because that’s what mailboxes *say*. But I can’t make out the letters.”

This story has a happy ending. The next day, Susan managed to bully him into seeing a doctor, who immediately slammed him into the hospital. He was diagnosed as a diabetic and kept there for some time. I vividly remember how on New Year’s Eve a tipsy orderly giggled, “Whoopsie!” and switched syringes after Gardner delicately pointed out that he’d picked up the wrong one.

The close brush with the Angel of Death invigorated Gardner. He put out a sudden burst of energy and became prolific again. He published six stories in 1981 alone! Sure, four of them were collaborations (more on this soon), but the others were strong stories and “Executive Clemency” is, I hold, a *tour de force*, one of Gardner’s core works, and a story that people will be reading with admiration a hundred years from now.

Another stand-alone story from Second Period Dozois included here is the truly horrifying “Dinner Party.” As a literary fiendish device, as a constant turning of the screw that raises the ante with every word right to the very last line, there’s just no beating it.

Of the twenty-one stories published between 1981 and 1985, thirteen were collaborations, most with Jack Dann, some with me, a few with his wife and fellow-writer Susan Casper, in various combinations of bylines. So a word has to be said about those wonderful starry nights when Jack Dann breezed into town with a cigar stuck in the corner of his expansive grin, and Susan called to ask if I wanted to come over, and we all stayed up late, talking about everything, and spinning out ideas for

stories and plotting them out on the spot.

Those were good times and they only get better with the passing years. Nostalgia will do that. I was one of the writers for “Touring” and “Snow Job,” for “The Gods of Mars” and “Afternoon at Schrafft’s” and “Golden Apples of the Sun.” It was more than a privilege for me to work so closely with Gardner and Jack, particularly since I was just starting out on my career. It was more than a thrill to see how the Big Boys did it, to observe their craftsmanship on a line-by-line basis as the stories were being written. It was my post-graduate education.

In this same period, Gardner also wrote, among other stories, “Down Among the Dead Men” and “Playing the Game” with Jack Dann, “Send No Money” with Susan Casper, and “The Clowns” in collaboration with both of them. This constant back-and-forthing of manuscripts and consultations helped enable his solo fiction by creating a buzz of energy and a recurrent feeling of accomplishment. It didn’t hurt that during this period, Gardner was selling steadily to the “slicks”—to high-paying markets like *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, and the less reputable *Oui* and *High Times*, as well as to the late and sorely missed *Omni*.

The upshot of all this prolific and market-savvy output was that Gardner remained as poor as a church mouse.

Because writing is hard work, and a harder business. If all you write is short fiction, it doesn’t matter how upscale the markets you sell to are, you can’t make a living at it. Of necessity, over the years, Gardner had kept himself alive by doing various editorial chores, taking the occasional assistant editor job, learning the business from the bottom up. He got a quiet but pervasive reputation as being one hell of a story doctor.

So it was startling but strangely logical when in 1985 Gardner was given the editorship of *Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine*, as it was then called. He threw himself into the job, and the trophy table covered with Hugos tells the rest.

But that wasn’t the end of his writing. Every year or two, Gardner manages to squeeze enough time from his schedule to craft a new work of fiction. Third Period Dozois, which covers 1987 through the present, contains nine stories so far, five of which are collected here. “Solace” can be read as his response to the Cyberpunk-Humanist wars, going down into the trenches to battle the young Turks on their own territory. “Passage” is an evocative mood piece inspired by a dream. “Community” is the kind of dark social extrapolation Gardner did so often in his early work. “A Cat Horror Story” is ... well, exactly that. Gardner *hates* it when I point this out, but how good can it be? It’s a cat story!

Those capable of appreciating cat stories will love it, I’m sure.

“A Knight of Ghosts and Shadows,” Gardner’s most recent work (which, incidentally, just lost a Nebula Award one week ago as of this writing), pays for everything, even the inherent sweetness of writing a cat story. It’s a chimerical hybrid of literary DNA from Early Period Dozois and the hot new generation of hard SF writers currently tearing up the place. It shows off. It dances right on the edge of a Vingean singularity. It embraces the future.

Short fiction writing is, for the most part, a young person’s game. It takes enormous energy and it pays not at all well. Newer writers enter the field with newer

ideas, and you have to scramble just to keep up. It takes ambition. It takes *zest*. That's why there are so few who have been writing the stuff for thirty years. That's why it's so remarkable that Gardner is now entering his fifth decade as a writer.

A collection like this, coming as it does in year one of the new Millennium, is inevitably a summing-up, a look back on a lifetime's writing. But it's also an opportunity to anticipate what is yet to come. Look at the old stuff, then look at the new. You'll see growth and evolution, but no failing of powers or ambition. I can only repeat what I've heard Gardner say so many a time, upon encountering a promising story by a writer nobody's heard of yet:

Keep your eye on this guy. I think he's got more good work in him.

Michael Swanwick

Author's Preface to Introduction to Travel Diary

To anticipate the critics, yes, I *am* aware that it's self-indulgent to print one of my trip reports in this collection, especially as many, if not most, of the readers will probably find it quite dull. However, since this may well be the only opportunity that will come up during my lifetime to get one of my trip reports into print, I figured that I'd allow myself to be self-indulgent for once, and take it. After all, there's still plenty of fiction here as well, so I hope that the readers will feel as if they're getting their money's worth, even with a certain number of pages devoted to the trip report rather than to stories.

If there are any publishers out there who are feeling suicidal enough to consider a collection of trip reports, as George R.R. Martin suggests, I have about 100,000-words worth of this piffle in my files.

Gardner Dozois

Introduction to Travel Diary

In his novel *Glory Road*, Robert A. Heinlein wrote that the typical American male is convinced that he is a great warrior, a great statesman, and a great lover, and is usually wrong on all three counts.

There seems to be a similar delusion in SF fandom, where every fan and his sister are convinced that they can write a great trip report. All they need to do is go on a trip, keep a diary, and write it all up when they return home, regaling the world with a detailed account of every place they went, every sight they saw, every meal they ate, and how much fun they had (or not). In the old days, you could find these fannish trip reports in fanzines and APAs. Nowadays they have proliferated all through cyberspace, initially on bulletin boards like GENie and Prodigy, more recently on listservs, home pages, and newsgroups. No one goes anywhere any more without producing a trip report afterwards (except for the vast majority of TAFF and DUFF winners, that is).

Unfortunately, the experience of reading the majority of these outpourings is much akin to the experience of watching your Uncle Walter's slides of his visit to the Grand Canyon, complete with pictures of the gas stations where he stopped along the way, and the inevitable shot of Aunt Hilda straddling the continental divide.

The sad truth is that the majority of trip reports are not worth the paper they are printed on, even when they're posted on the Internet. When confronted with one, I often find myself skimming rather than reading, looking to see if I was mentioned anywhere. I rather suspect that's the way most fans read trip reports. We're all looking for our own names . . . because we have given up on the prospects of stumbling on an amusing anecdote, a poignant observation, an insight into a distant land or culture. Instead we learn what the writer had for dinner on Tuesday.

Thankfully, Gardner Dozois does not write *that* kind of trip report. Oh, he tells us what he had for dinner on Tuesday too . . . but he never fails to serve up amusing anecdotes and poignant observations along with the neeps. Gardner writes far and away the best trip reports in fandom, as far as I'm concerned, and I am still hoping that one day some enterprising small press will realize that and collect them all together in a book. Of course, the Great Gargoo has some unfair advantages. He has always been a hell of a fine writer, for one thing. He knows how to bring a scene vividly to life, and he takes care to show us his trips where others only tell us about them. He is also the best editor in the field, as the Hugo voters keep insisting year after year after year after year. And every good editor knows not only what to put in his trip reports, but more importantly what to leave out (mainly the dull stuff).

Gardner's accounts of his travels remind me of the work of the top best travel writers. He can describe the sights and smells of a foreign land as vividly as Paul Theroux, and he make his own adventures as funny as P.J. O'Rourke. If *Asimov's* ever

goes out of business, Gardner should make a second career as a correspondent for one of the big travel magazines before settling down on that hot air vent he'd reserved for his golden years. But don't take my word for it, read Gargy's account of his travels in Scotland in 1995, before and after the Glasgow worldcon. It's one of his best, I think.

Like any travel writer, he tells us about the hotels and restaurants he visits, and that alone would make the report worthwhile reading for anyone planning a similar trip. But his trip reports offer many other delights above and beyond haggis and neeps (even above and beyond his frequent mentions of me). Humor, as in his discussion of the Viking contribution to Scotland's cultural heritage, and my encounter in the bar with the Scotsman intent on ripping my head off (much more enjoyable to read about than to experience). Some lovely character sketches of folks met along the way; my favorite is the pretentious young Oxford student that he discusses with such warmth and insight. Sadness, in the death of John Brunner. Vivid evocations of Tarbert, Glasgow, Cawdor, Dumbarton, and other lochs, castles, and steak pies encountered on the road. A clear-eyed discussion of the troubled state of SF publishing in Britain. And of course, his musings on life, time, and human mortality. When you actually travel with Gargoo, you never notice this melancholy pondering, mostly because you're laughing too hard at his latest penis joke. But read Gardner's sad, sweet, beautiful account of his final bus trip back to Glasgow, where he ponders the passing lights in the night and the lives that hide behind them, and you'll begin to understand the depths of the man, and to realize that when he shoves a chip up one nostril, as he so often did in Scotland, it is only his way of grappling with a deep sense of cosmic loveliness and existential despair.

George R.R. Martin

Another Introduction to Travel Diary

Look at him, and you'd never think Gardner Dozois was a world traveler. (Of course, you'd never think he had a dozen or more Hugos stashed away either.)

I don't look much like any more of a world traveler than Gardner does, but I've traversed even more of the globe than he has, and have placed about a dozen trip reports of my own in various magazines, so naturally I pounced at the opportunity to introduce Gardner's pale imitation of my work.

Except, he said bitterly, it's neither pale nor an imitation. It is the true, essential Dozois, than which nothing is more unique. If you first encounter him in public, you wonder why he didn't go into a more lucrative career as a nightclub comic. If you first meet him through his very best stories, you could be forgiven for wondering why he doesn't take an occasional antidepressant. If you meet him one on one, you quickly find that he is so deeply committed to excellence as both a writer and an editor that his passion is almost palpable.

But here, in his diary of his trip to England and Scotland in the late summer of 1995 (culminating in the Worldcon, where we each won a Hugo—but where I also lost three, while he finished the evening undefeated), you get perhaps the truest picture of Gardner Dozois that you're likely to get in this lifetime. He notices details; you'll rarely get better descriptions of the places he visited and the things he saw. He's honest; when he chooses a lousy restaurant or entertainment, he doesn't blame the travel agent—and he tells you *why* it was lousy.

Mostly, as with any good travel writer, he puts you there. I felt that I was in the Wigham restaurant when the eight French guests decided they didn't like the food. A few pages later I sat on the lawn with Gardner and Susan, cold drink in hand, watching the stars just outside Oxford. A bit earlier I'm there with them, sharing their awe at the zoo's display of falconry.

Gardner, you will notice, remembers every meal he ever ate and every bed he ever slept in. He's a lot less grouchy than V. S. Naipaul and Paul Theroux, probably the two most famous of the current crop of travel writers, which would certainly seem to make him a better travel companion. He can keep you interested describing a relatively uneventful day in the British hinterlands, while Theroux needs corrupt islanders or Chinese militarists and Naipaul requires top-to-bottom racism to grab and hold the reader's attention. (Think hard: would anyone read a *happy* Theroux, or a *contented* Naipaul?)

Trust me: this kind of travel diary, one that can captivate readers even when the author isn't facing charging elephants or exploding volcanoes, is a lot harder to write than it looks. I mean, hell, he was never even arrested by the local gendarmes and I kept reading it. And wondering which of his approaches and techniques I could use to improve my own trip reports, than which there is no higher compliment, at least from

me.

One final note: you cannot help but be aware of Gardner's fascination with food and restaurants. The last time I was flown into Philadelphia to speak to the local science fiction club, Gardner invited Carol and me to dinner at his favorite restaurant and promised to show us a hot time.

He did.

Literally.

We were seated, studied our menus, and ordered appetizers—and, so help me, the goddamned restaurant burned down before they arrived. Honest.

Mike Resnick

Travel Diary

Sunday, August 6th, 1995—Philadelphia

Packed, did last-minute stuff.

Bob Walters and Tess Kissinger come over, give us a lift to the airport, dropping us at Terminal A a bit before 5 P.M. We check our bags with British Airways, go upstairs to the coffee shop and wait for an hour or so; finally go through the security gate, visit the Duty Free shop, look at the Rube Goldberg-like kinetic sculpture in the waiting room near the gate. On to the plane, a 747, settle into our seats, Susan asleep almost at once. Long delay ensues, during which the plane taxis out to the runway and then has to come all the way back to the gate because the internal PA system (as they inform us through a bullhorn) is not working. Then, after that is fixed (sort of; you never can get the sound to work right on the audio channels for your earphones, which, since the movie they're showing is *Tommy Boy*, is no great loss, and may even be a benefit), there is another long delay because a plane up ahead of us has run over a dog on the runway, and we must wait while they clean up its remains—what a strange death that must have been for the poor dog, death falling suddenly from the sky; I wonder if he had time to think in angry protest that he'd never seen a car coming from *that* direction before? Finally airborne. Uneventful flight during which I read and doze fitfully, although I get little sleep overall; after we're airborne, Susan wakes up and can't get back to sleep, so her plan to sleep all the way to London is frustrated. Nice sunrise over Europe, deep sullen red below with bars of black over it, later changing to orange that ranges up into peach and lemon. They turn on the lights at what is about 1:30 A.M. by our body clocks, and feed us a croissant for breakfast. Land about 8 A.M. local time.

Monday, August 7th—London

Get off the plane, long walk down the corridor at Heathrow, then wait in line to show our passports. Waved through customs, then into the terminal, where we find out that we have to pick up our Heritage Passes downtown near Piccadilly Circus. Take a traditional black taxi into the city, winding through Hogarth and Earl's Court, past Hyde Park, seeing the Horseguards go by in the middle distance, then by the top of Soho and past the British Museum to Russell Square. It's overcast in London, but not actually raining. It strikes me during the early stages of the cab ride how many horses we see grazing in fields within only a mile or two of the airport, something that certainly would not be true within a similar distance from the Philadelphia airport, where only oil refineries and other similar examples of industrial desolation would be found; the horses don't seem to pay much attention to the huge airplanes roaring overhead—I guess they get used to it, although what they think the planes are is, I suppose, unknowable.

Check into the Hotel Russell, but find, to our dismay, since we're both staggering

with fatigue, that our room is not available yet. Leave our two immense suitcases (which will grow ever heavier and ever more of a logistical problem as the trip progresses, particularly as mine came down the luggage carousel with its handle broken off) with the concierge, take a short dispirited walk, buy some postcards, and sit in the bar of the Russell, refamiliarizing ourselves with how bad most English coffee is, filling out postcards, and half-heartedly talking about what shows are in town. Finally get into our room about an hour later, dragging our suitcases behind us down labyrinthine corridors of a sort of faded shabby-genteel grandeur. Our room is small, and very hot, but we go to sleep immediately, and nap for about two hours.

When we awake, we grab a disappointing lunch at the Night and Day coffeeshop (a place that attracts me because its name reminds me of the Night and Day Joint in *Silverlock*, showing you that you should never allow literary resonances to guide your choice of eating establishments) in the Imperial Hotel next door, take a cab to Lower Regent Street to the British Tourist Authority Office, the cabdriver mentioning in passing that he had been born in 1968, the date of my first visit to London (God!). Looking out of the cab window, note that London has been even more taken-over by American fast-food joints than it had been during our last trip here in 1988; when I first came to London in 1968, you couldn't have found a slice of pizza in London if someone had held a gun to your head and threatened to kill you unless you guided him to one—now, American fast-food places are *everywhere*, and it seems like every street-corner boasts a freight of Pizza Huts, Burger Kings, Kentucky Fried Chickens, Baskin-Robbins, and, especially, McDonalds; there must be hundreds of McDonalds now in London alone, and we were to encounter them almost everywhere else we went in Britain, except for the very smallest of villages. Having eaten what passed for fast-food in London in the old days, where the best you could hope to find was some moderately palatable fish-and-chips or pub grub, I can understand why the American fast-food chains have filled this particular ecological niche so explosively here—compared to the hamburger I had here in 1968 in the closest English equivalent of the time to a McDonalds, the Wimpey Bar chain, where the hamburger was charred black all the way through, like a charcoal briquette you were supposed to *eat*, and the milkshake was warm chocolate milk with no ice-cream at all in it, the food at McDonalds is a treat fit for the gods—but that doesn't make it any more tolerable to see one of them every few hundred feet along the street; as a tourist, I want *foreignness*, something different and exotic and strange, and it's hard to maintain the feeling that you're really in a foreign country when the streets are filled with McDonalds and Pizza Huts. (As an unfortunate side-effect, the success of the American chains also seems to be killing off the traditional pub-grub such as Shepherd's Pie and Bangers & Mash and Steak & Kidney Pie—very few pubs we went into were serving anything like that anymore, having switched over to pizza and lasagne and hamburgers in imitation of the American fast-food fare; the word "chips" may be dying out, too, as several pub menus listed "fries," instead; it may be that the younger generations of English people, because of the popularity of McDonalds, will grow up calling them "fries" instead, which I suppose is not a great tragedy, but which *is* yet another part of their cultural heritage gone.)

Stand in long lines at the Tourist Authority, finally get our Heritage Passes, then take a cab to the Tate Gallery. Tour the Turner exhibition there—Turner having been