

The Devniad, Book 16

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Orbita Dicta Heard in the halls of Readercon 8 July 12-14, 1996

[In a well-worded web page notice 3 days before the convention kicks off, the Readercon committee handles an example of every concom's nightmare]

Due to a death in his immediate family, Guest of Honor William Gibson will not be attending in person. He will have a virtual presence at Readercon via fax over the weekend and plans to attend a future Readercon.

[In discussing Gibson's nonpresence, a fan refers to a writer more predictably absent, the con's official Dead Guest of Honor]

Well, at least Alfie Bester hasn't changed his mind about coming.

[Punky/funky author Paul Di Filippo, moderating the panel on Neologisms in SF/F, hands an "aw-shucks" moment to a fellow panelist]

We have here tonight the inventor of perhaps the most famous science fiction neologism of recent times: Bruce Bethke, creator of "cyberpunk."

[Bethke, modestly]

Mea culpa.

[Panelist and prizewinning Quebec SF author Yves Meynard avers that a neologism ain't necessarily so]

Gene Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun* series contains not a single new word.

They're just words we don't see that often.

[NESFAn and burstin'-with-pride Hugo nominee Michael A. Burstein makes a nice distinction]

The nice thing about a neologism is if you can find a word close enough for people to understand, but used in a way that opens up new worlds.

[Although Di Filippo feels sometimes it's appropriate to pull a smeerp out of the hat]

C. J. Cherryh has probably invented more alien terms than most writers. She wants this density of new language to render her world more tangible.

[Burstein manages to work "When I was at Clarion" into yet another conversation with fiendish ingenuity; they must teach this to everybody the last week of the course]

I have a strange example. When I was at Clarion, they were running a Klingon language summer camp nearby.

[Di Filippo on how doing the neo thing makes your prose pop]

With the right neologism, all of a sudden a hazy concept can SNAP into reality.

[According to Canadian writer/editor Glenn Grant, you never know what'll catch on]

Even with Gibson, the word "cyberspace" occurs only once in the landmark story "Burning Chrome." Throughout the story, he refers instead to "the simulation matrix." The one reference to "cyberspace" is oblique.

[Burstein shows that even for a giant in the field, TANSTAAFL]

One famous neologism never works for me – “tanj” in Larry Niven’s stories. It’s supposed to stand for “there ain’t no justice,” but it falls flat.

[Grant cuts it short]

In California, there’s been a new tendency to lop off the ends of words. So “’rents” for “parents,” “’hood” for “neighborhood.” And Neal Stephenson has picked up on this. In *The Diamond Age*, you have “racting” and “ractor” both from “interactive.”

[Meynard looks back]

In Quebecois, we invented no neologisms. Maybe because we were already speaking a different language than the English around us.

[Fan Michael Devney sounds off from near the door, prepared to run for it]

You want to think about new words that everybody’s using – or’s been forced to use – how about “Ms.”? I don’t like it myself. If you want equality, I think everyone should have been called “Mister.”

[On he/she, Grant could go either way]

I tend to think a new gender-free pronoun WILL enter the English language, but only if 1) we get a large population of hermaphrodites or 2) if we have artificial intelligences. What gender is an AI?

[Di Filippo sees new names in high places]

Drug names are one place where we have a constant large supply of neologisms being created. We actually have professionals making them up, carefully crafting every single syllable.

[Grant offers a health tip]

Just make sure you never mix up Zanax and Zantac.

[Bethke thinks there’s still hope in our ‘hood]

Neologism is a vital sign – tells you that a language is still living.

[And Grant climaxes the discussion]

Neologism is what you get when language has an orgasm.

[What’s in a name anyway, say one like NESFAn Paul Giguere’s]

It’s actually juh-GARE, but nobody ever pronounces it correctly. It took me until I was 7 years old to learn how to pronounce it myself.

[Then there’s netspeak, as in this joyous dealers’ room encounter]

Oh, are YOU MJWalsh? I’m Klaatu001! Greetings!

[NESFAn and history fan Mark Olson states the obvious at dinner Friday]

William McNeill postulates that governments are a form of macroparasite. Do I need to explain that?

[Brother of Honor Michael Devney, having recently returned from a marathon road tour in England, displays a jaundiced view of English highways and byways]

In America, we build a road on the high ground, and fix it so the water runs off. In England, they find a ditch, pave it over, put hedges on each side so there’s no escape, and call it a highway.

[Proper Boskonian's Ken Knabbe, handing a new fanzine to a groaning, overburdened fanzine reviewer]

I didn't say you had to DO this one. Just thought you might enjoy it. You don't have to review absolutely every single thing I hand you, you know.

[At the Meet the Pros(e) Party, New Jersey fan Jeffrey Wendler snapshots his first Readercon so far]

I'm really enjoying myself a lot. There are lots of pros, and everybody seems more relaxed. But some of the people on these panels are just going off the deep end of obscurity...

[Protean Tor editor David G. Hartwell at breakfast Saturday, when complimented on a story – Robert Silverberg's "Hot Times in Magma City" – in Hartwell's new Year's Best SF anthology]

I'm glad you picked that. It's one of my favorites in the collection. I haven't heard much about it from anyone else, but it's the kind of story that stays with you. I read it, and thought it was good. And then realized I was thinking about it the next week. And even later, I thought, hey, that was REALLY good. So it went in.

[When told that with the anthology, he was resurrecting old-fashioned virtues]

Thanks. I hope I'm not so much being old-fashioned as resurrecting virtues.

[SF Book Club editor Ellen Asher addresses the panel on Fortitude and Character Growth in SF – fortitude being a necessity at 10:00 a.m. Saturday]

In any kind of fiction you've got to have movement, of character and so on, or you're writing an essay.

[Old pro Algis Budrys scopes the field]

In about 1938, we began to leave behind the science-and-nothing-else stories and see stories about characters. Heinlein said the chief character was The Man Who Learned Better... In this and other ways, so many of our understandings of modern SF are based on things Heinlein said.

[Budrys gets precise]

By modern SF, I mean SF written from 1938 to about 1950 – it's a delimited school.

[Kit Reed – long-time short-form doyenne – indicates that some lessons must be relearned each generation]

I work with student writers at Wesleyan. Usually when someone says he wants to be an SF writer, look out. They come in with a story that has the flying saucer and the giant tomato, and leave everything else out. There's description, but no character, no action. Who's there to watch the saucer land? Do they do anything else but run away?

[Writer Jeffrey Carver also wants more "who" than "what"]

Even a good plot isn't necessarily where to start. Building your story out of the characters is more satisfying than a plot that's designed and then just – populated.

[Budrys see current stories where the characters don't have much character; it bugs him]

Too many stories now are about an ant going from point A to point B.

[Asher agrees]

And you've got to be an awfully good entomologist to make that interesting.

[As the editor of Tomorrow magazine, Budrys can't put off until etc.]

I read 10 or 20 slush manuscripts a day – and that's on a sparse day.

[Naturally, this can make a guy testy and opinionated]

I can't stand cover letters.

[According to Reed, editors are like that]

"Dear Mr. Gold, how does this grab you?" And he wrote back, "Right down the throat and by the lunch."

[Budrys looks ahead]

I think we're going to see some kind of new prozine. Maybe not a print magazine. Obviously, there's a lot happening on the net now that could bring changes...The magazine will fade out of existence.

[Beyond this horizon, Reed sees vast fields of couch potatoes]

TV fulfills people's basic need for stories. The public gets it by just lying there.

[In the panel on Space Opera Reconsidered, veteran writer Hal Clement laments that other arts get all the breaks]

People complain in SF and space operas about elderly scientists stopping the story to lecture. But nobody complains when the elderly soprano stops the opera for 15 minutes to sing. This is not fair.

[From the audience, author John Crowley sings a different tune]

Actually, the term comes first from "horse opera," not "opera" itself.

[Absolute Magnitude editor Warren Lapine opines that the form is certainly a popular one]

Star Trek and Star Wars are space opera, after all.

[Distinguished Canadian writer Jean-Louis Trudel makes a distinction]

Star Trek is space adventure; Star Wars is space opera.

[A Fire Upon the Deep deeply het up eminent Canadian/British critic John Clute]

Vernor Vinge is the best living space opera writer, on the basis of one book.

[After general agreement that breakneck pace and dizzying scale are essential for space opera, Clement tackles the latter]

In dealing with any kind of astronomy, people underestimate the sheer scale. Remember, if the Sun is a tennis ball, Earth is a speck of glass – like the stuff in glitter paint – 22 feet out. Pluto is a smaller speck 800 feet out. And the nearest star system is 2 golf balls in St. Louis, Missouri!

[Clute cautions that accuracy may ruin all the fun]

Perhaps you can't have a space opera universe if the science is right.

[Holding up hit Australian SF book The Unknown Soldier, Peter McNamara points out that formulae aren't just for science]

We set out to find the formula and write directly to it. And it's worked bloody well.

[The panel on New Grand Masters opens with author/editor Darrell Schweitzer laying some ground rules]

To be a true SF Grand Master, in SFWA or otherwise, you have to have had both a long AND a distinguished career.

[Science Fiction Age editor Scott Edelman gets more personal]

Grand Masters are those writers I have trouble even talking to when I meet them face to face. Like A. E. van Vogt, they're the people I read and worshipped when I was younger.

[Tor editor Patrick Nielsen Hayden suggests prize proliferation may be a bit out of hand]

The field is absolutely bugfuck crazy about awards....Now every SFWA president can give out a Grand Master award every year. Pretty soon Jack Chalker will be a Grand Master.

[And the criteria suffer from insectile reproductive derangement also]

If you're talking merit and influence, I think you can make the argument that William Gibson deserves one right now. Compared to ever giving it to Lester Del Ray.

[From the audience, Paul Di Filippo refers to yet another new honor]

How about that Science Fiction Hall of Fame they're inaugurating this weekend in Kansas? What are the criteria for getting into that?

[Nielsen Hayden answers with clear wit]

You have to be willing to stand in a big Lucite case.

[Future shoe-in for Editorial Hall of Fame David Hartwell reminds us that a small

number of great personalities can make a huge difference]

As David Shapiro said once, it only takes five great poems to make a great poet. It only takes five great poets to make a Renaissance.

[Schweitzer points out that you also need depth on the bench]

Maybe there should be an intermediate award for Pretty Good Novelist Who Never Gets Appreciated. That's the award that someone like Wilson Tucker would get.

[Nielsen Hayden isn't bugfuck crazy about this idea]

I don't know, for 20 years people have been telling me how really good Wilson Tucker is. I think he's the field's Most Appreciated Unappreciated Writer.

[Editor Gordon Van Gelder recalls The Award To End All Awards (At Least For The Recipient)]

Some years ago, Ed Bryant wanted to give out the Golden Bullet Award. You bring some venerated, antiquated figure from the field to the head table with much applause and put a golden bullet in the back of his head.

[In a kaffeeklatsch, Jeff Wendler finds Warren Lapine vying for the Patrick Nielsen Hayden Kick Ass & Name Names Award]

Warren Lapine is honest, but he's blunt as hell. Which can be very entertaining.

[Writer Paul Park warns his kaffeeklatsch of one seduction more perilous than drink or coke or even three-book contracts]

Metaphors can be dangerous. Often the better the metaphor, the more distracting it is.

[Park's visionary new historical novel, The Gospel of Corax, features Christ as a major character – which is causing a real rushdie to judgment in certain quarters]

I went on radio shows talking about the book. And religious people calling in would always take me to task by asking, “Are you aware of Verse So-and-So in Paul’s Letter to the Colossians?” The dogma really begins with Paul. They never read the Gospels. They read Paul and the Book of Revelations, but not the Gospels based on the words of people who actually knew Jesus.

[Since most of Park's SF books have also touched issues of faith, is he religious himself?]

Do I believe in God, is that what you’re asking? I find these questions very interesting, certainly.

[His faith that there might be a place for him in SF came from three works Park read as a young man]

They were books that I read about the same time. They convinced me that I could be a writer, and could write about things I was interested in, and get published if what I wrote was good. They were George R. R. Martin’s *The Dying of the Light*, Gene Wolfe’s *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*, and Ursula Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*...Many people know the other two, but I’m not sure even George R. R. Martin knew how great a book *The Dying of the Light* was.

[And what’s parked on his shelf these days?]

In the genre, among other things I read the books of friends of mine who also happen to be very good. People like Michael Swanwick, Liz Hand, and Terry Bisson.

[In another kaffeeklatsch, Angela Kessler, editor of Dreams of Decadence (a “vampire digest”), casts a bloodshot eye on the typical new-pub arc]

I’m sure that as my magazine gets better, the reviews will get worse.

[At the Saturday night barbecue (held indoors to avoid the now-traditional Boston-area-con meteorological disaster, in this case a hurricane), Ken Knabbe proves there’s more to his library than his 138 Perry Rhodan books]

If I could pick one author no longer living whom I’d most like to meet and talk to, it would be C. S. Lewis.

[Tokyo SF scholar Takayuki Tatsumi introduces his onstage interview with the Actually Attending Guest of Honor, avant-pop culture guru Larry McCaffery]

Larry grew up in Okinawa, Japan, which explains why I am here.

[McCaffery explains his own choice of college thesis subject in the 1960s]

I hated my father, I resented authority...So naturally I decided to write about contemporary American fiction.

[Like most con attendees, it seems that McCaffery has always been, well, strange]

At 15 or 16, instead of getting interested in girls or rock music, I got interested in duplicate bridge.

[McCaffery supposedly explains what the hell the next hour of his GOH interview will be about, although in retrospect who can be sure]

Tonight, let's bury Post-Modernism once and for all.

[At the Boston in 2001 party Saturday night, hatefully fit fan Joe Petronio tells Ore-eating, Pepsi-swalling listeners how he maintains his schwarzeneggerian physique]

Just exercise 2 hours a day. That still gives you plenty of time to read 3 books a week.

[Petronio discovers that coincidentally, about 9 books back...]

You read Paul McAuley's *Pasquale's Angel* 3 weeks ago? Hey, I read *Pasquale's Angel* just about 3 weeks ago, too...Yes, I was disappointed also, a little anyway...Although the stuff about Michaelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci was good. If you want the big Leonardo SF novel, try *The Memory Cathedral* by Jack Dann.

[On Sunday morn, after long partying, Michael Devney greets the numinous dawn around 8:45 a.m. with his own unique song of prayer]

I'm opening one eye...O God...Now the other...One leg over the side of the bed...OK, shields up...Good morning...O God.

[During an otherwise carefree al fresco breakfast on the hotel terrace, Paul Giguere offers his own unique brand endorsements while sorting through sweetener packets]

Let's see. For brain tumors, Equal; for cancer, Sweet & Low.

[NESFAn Lisa Hertel reports on the Saturday night Tor Books party]

Authors and editors talk about what you'd think they talk about: deals and careers and markets. Money, basically.

[With judicious equanimity, NESFAn Mark Hertel reacts to an earlier discussion]

Maybe Jack Chalker **DESERVES** to be a Grand Master someday. He says himself he doesn't write great literature. But a lot of us read him and enjoy him. He was a significant fan writer before he was an author. And he founded a publishing house – Mirage Press – that's still around and has produced some good stuff.

[In a panel on new young authors, their critical reception, and phenomena like Granta's Best Young U.S. Novelists awards, author Rebecca Ore relates that an SF prophetess is sometimes without honor in her own country]

The culture vultures in my part of the world once wouldn't even cover a book I did that was reviewed in the *New York Times*.

[We feel writer Shariann Lewitt's pain too]

I was a college teacher for a number of years until I was eased out of the department for writing SF. Well, maybe for the way I dressed, too....I'm a recovering academic.

[Author/publishing worker bee Lisa A. Barnett tells the awful truth]

You have to **PAY** to submit authors for the *Granta* awards. At Heinemann, we were thrilled that a terrific young writer of ours named Patricia Powell was a finalist. But we were also thrilled she didn't win, because you agree to send a winning author on a huge, expensive book tour.

[It gets worse]

We just paid to submit two books for the National Book Award and one for the Pulitzer. Now we're going, gee, where's the money to publicize ANY of our other books this year?

[Ore digs the depression even deeper]

Booksellers in my part of the country say the Nebula Award is a stigma in terms of sales.

[The pit definitely yawns, so don't try any of your happy endings on us, Rebecca]

Young people aren't reading us. One way out is to write just young heroes and happy endings, to attract youngsters. The other way is to somehow reach out again to the audience for things like *Dangerous Visions*, that we had in the 1970s and somehow misplaced....Maybe that lost audience can save us.

[Lewitt ends by declaring that not only are awards insignificant, so is everybody reading this]

Organized fandom is not the readership of SF. It's at most 5% of that readership.

[In the dealer's room, Michael Burstein imparts a secret with ironic recursiveness]

At his reading in 10 minutes, you may hear A New Story By Michael.

[Then slugs your reporter for asking]
Swanwick?

[Burstein is torn]

I suppose I should go to my own reading. But I'd also really like to hear what goes on at the Alfred Bester panel.

[You asked for it, you got it....First, David Alexander Smith issues a non-introduction]

Bester is the Dead Guest of Honor at this convention, and thus has an excellent excuse for not showing up.

[Writer Daniel Dern gives the advertising world way too much credit]

Bester's prose is rich with complex wordplay and synesthesia – knowing he was in the advertising world explains some of that.

[In more than one of Bester's readers, tension, apprehension, and dissension have begun and never bloody stopped, according to editor Gordon Van Gelder]

My father read *The Demolished Man*, and he said, "I can never get that damned jingle out of my head."

[Master Van Gelder must have been a Ringo fan, whereas his roomie liked Paul]

In college, my friend loved *The Demolished Man* and thought *The Stars My Destination* represented a serious decline in Bester's powers. My feelings were exactly the opposite.

[Dern detects An Influence; all right, more like A Barefaced Steal]

The Stars My Destination is The Count of Monte Cristo.

[But the guy had style]

Like Delany and Malzberg later, a great deal of the pleasure in reading Alfred Bester is him as a stylist – the energy pulls you along.

[Writer Alexander Jablovok found the man's coolness to be the best of Bester]

As a Midwestern boy, what got to me was that his people were sophisticated. Living the very high life in New York. You know, these were the kind of people who wouldn't read science fiction.

[Smith likes Bester's dingbat approach to typography]

You'll see this typographical experimentation consistently throughout his prose. He'll name somebody Sally @kins - with the @ sign - or run the type in weird-shaped columns. Always something new.

[Dern points out th@ this can go too far]

To see this carried to wretched excess, see Randall Garrett's review of *The Demolished Man*. It has all those type tricks, and also rhymes.

[Unfortunately, Alfie didn't get bester as he went along, according to Dern]

At the risk of trashing our Dead Guest of Honor, I have to say that his later stuff - after his 19-year hiatus going into the 1970s - is so unreadable that he competes with Heinlein for the He Should Have Quit While He Was Ahead Award.

[Although Smith did manage a feat few could equal - or envy]

I read *Golem*¹⁰⁰ twice.

[Jablokov voices the only possible response]

Wow.

[But Bester's earlier work was a revelation to people like audience member and SF giant Samuel R. Delany]

Absolutely he was a major influence. My reaction when I read him was, gee, I wish I could write something like that.

But there was an interesting generational difference. With *The Demolished Man*, what was exciting to Judy Merrill, Pohl, Blish was that Bester had somehow brought SF and the detective story form together. Whereas my generation thought *The Demolished Man* was a little strained because it tried to merge these two genres, but what was exciting was that it raised space opera to new heights....

He had a tragic last 10 years. He got involved with a young woman named Judy. I went to high school with her, and anybody who got involved with her had a tragic life, believe me.

[Speaking of tragic lives: Dern makes the obligatory Readercon genuflection in the direction of Philip K. Dick]

Bester wrote ideas, Dick wrote themes.

[Dern said one thing, Jablovok says another]

Bester loved reality, Dick was suspicious of it.

[Waiting for a panel, NESFAn Claire Anderson brings sad news from the 'zone about the author of my favorite novel last year]

In an *Interzone* we saw yesterday, Neal Stephenson says he never goes to these cons. They throw him off. He doesn't WANT feedback.

[Starting off a Future of the Arts Underground panel that soon proves itself worthy of a Devney Four-Squirrel Award as an Instant Nutball Classic, Paul Di Filippo confides the real reason why the Guest of Honor is represented on the dais only by a large fax machine]

Bruce Bethke says the actual physical Bill is getting his blood changed in Switzerland.

[Author Liz Hand explains why we should all go home now]

I think there WAS an underground, but not now. Now there's no lag time at all to the larger culture's co-opting the underground.

[This thought doesn't stop anybody, least of all moderator and editor Stephen P. Brown]

The media has too many channels that are hungry for content.

[But Di Filippo may be joining Hand's position]

The underground is all about form and content. Some of the content has been permanently subverted. Like S&M. It used to be the fringe. Now Rosie O'Donnell and Dan Ackroyd are dressing in leather and doing S&M in a movie from, what, Disney?

[Writer/artist/leatherguy Richard Kadrey disagrees, contributing virtually his last thought to the discussion that doesn't include the fuckin' f-word, man]

But that's definitely not the end of interesting sex, anyway. They can take the surface, but not the guts.

[It's difficult to recall in what context Di Filippo said this, but with this panel it hardly matters]

There's a saying in the Arabian Nights: Ink is the strongest drug.

[Let's take it that artist Joey Zone may not entirely agree]

When I think of Seattle, it's not freaking Nirvana. It's the Sonics. Pearl Jam – very much in need of that twelve-gauge tonsillectomy.

[Di Filippo feels the underground's becoming way too clubby]

Underground used to be the silence, exile, and cunning trip. Now, hyperbolically, it's degenerating into nightlife and duplicity among the *chicest* people.

[GOH Gibson is reading typed descriptions of the panel discussion and replying by fax with a time lag – and subsequent mondo contextual fuzziness – equivalent to communications from, say, Phobos]

You can't co-opt genitals.

[Brown, thoughtfully, to fax machine]

Well, you may have a point, Bill.

[Hand plumbs further depths]

What's happening on the underground scene right now?

[Don't worry, Kadrey is hip to it]

Eastern European hip-hop music. They're cutting up old Stalinist work songs into these hip-hop mixes....Also, I've been talking to people considered very much on the cutting edge, and there's a lot of underground gardening going on.

[At least one icon of the electronic culture makes Zone see red]

This real shit CEO spreadsheet called *Wired* had an article saying the important people aren't the creators but the people who develop an idea further. Of course *Wired* would write that.

[Gibson phones another one in]

One of the attributes of any Bohemian viewpoint is that all the really cool shit has already happened.

[Movies are always cool, of course, as Kadrey agrees]

People think Quentin Tarantino rips off Hong Kong movies. I like that because THEY ripped off older American movies. But this is not the fucking Quentin Tarantino panel. We don't want to go there.

[Which is fine with our cool Hand]

I hate Quentin Tarantino.

[As the editor of critical zine Science Fiction Eye, Brown looks to the ways electronic life may make geography irrelevant to the underground map]

I like the idea of a distributed underground, because my readership IS one. I have three readers in Cincinnati, three in Paris, lots in New York and LA, and so on.

[Even retail is going underground]

Things are really changing. In my local record store, the biggest section is the alternative section.

[In a surprising bid for relevance, Zone circles back to the topic for just a sec]

We haven't really mentioned the role of SF in all this.

[Uh-oh, we should have known]

Which is good. We're finally concentrating more on the punk, not the cyber.

FlimFan

Noteworthy movies seen in the last month or so: *The Cable Guy*, *The Rock*, *Congo* (on HBO), *Fargo* (again), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Nelly and Monsieur Arnaud*, *Tank Girl* (on Showtime), *Phenomenon*, *Independence Day*, *Stealing Beauty*.

Fargo, you betcha. Real good.

Okey-doke, what am I saying here?

I'm saying [in Minnesotan] that *Fargo* is my favorite movie of the year so far. So go. Then we'll talk about it.

Backchat

on APA:NESFA #313, June 1996

To Joe Ross

Doesn't sound like the Democratic state convention you attended was all that exciting. (Insert snide comment here from Ray Bowie.)

In high school, you thought Greenwich was pronounced "greenwitch"? I sympathize. When elected yearbook lit editor, after my colleagues had just finished assuring the faculty advisor of my verbal brilliance, I promised all assembled that one thing we would not have this year would be a "medicore" yearbook.

To Ken Knabbe

Sorry to hear that your Star Trek BASH was canceled, and about all the political wrangling. Well, at least now you can dream fantastic visions of The BASH That Could Have Been.

Congrats on becoming the NESFA membership chair. What's this I hear about your planning a negative option recruitment mailing to the entire list of the SF Book Club?

To Paul Giguere

I'm thrilled that you've published a short story in a Lovecraft horror magazine. Unspeakably so.

To Elisabeth Carey

Sorry for the "z" in the middle of your first name last time. Guess that puts an "o" in the middle of mine.

So you hadn't read *Kim* until now. Lucky are you to be reading it for the first time, O Friend of All the Cats.

To Ray Bowie

Sounds like you could write a fair history of modern medicine just based on your own treatment — and travails.

You were "crogged" the first time you saw South Shore Plaza? Interesting word. I like it. What's it mean?

To Nomi Burstein

So — what are your ten favorite entries so far in *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*?

To Tony Lewis

At your daughter Alice's part-time supermarket job, she "should make enough money to buy the books she is looking for"? How can anyone? Ever?

To Mark Hertel

I read the first Ken Grimwood book you mentioned — that would be *Replay*. The story of a "repeater" a la *Groundhog Day*, except this repeats over many years. A World Fantasy Award winner. Quite good, well worth reading, but probably not what the catalog said, "one of the best SF books of all time."

When I'm trying to jump-start a non-SF reader, I often use James H. Schmitz's *The Witches of Karres* for youngsters. For fogeys, *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin, or now *The Diamond Age* by Neal Stephenson. And I've had great success with a Terry Bisson classic,

the humorous SF short "They're Made of Meat."

To Mark Olson

Hope others share our mutual interest in the Age of Sail and cough up the hardcover ransom for Patrick O'Brian's *Men of War*.

Thought your analysis of Niven's *Ringworld Throne* was most insightful. Just disagree with your basic feeling of disappointment. I was glad to be back on the Ringworld again, and found the whole thing quite satisfying. This softheadedness could be why you're now a big-shot book critic and I'm not.

To Michael Burstein

All three dictionaries I've consulted agree with my opinion that high school starts at 9th grade. Or 10th. You say when you went to Hunter College High School from 7th through 12th, even in the lower grades you all considered yourselves high school students? Hheck, at that age you also probably considered you were smart enough to go to Harvard and talented enough to get on the Hugo ballot with your first short story. Whadda kids know?

To Joe Rico

Welcome to the APA!

I favor completely free speech on the Internet so that kids can read NESFA's home page and steal their parents' credit cards to order multiple copies of books from NESFA Press. Is that the practical reason touching our interest you were thinking of?