

The Devniad, Book 27

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For APA:NESFA #325 June 1997

Of Plimoth Vacation

When William Bradford wrote *Of Plimoth Plantation*, his history of the struggles of the Pilgrim Fathers and Mothers in the first (1620) permanent European settlement of New England, he may not exactly have had my wife Maureen and I in mind as his ideal successors on that sacred ground. Nevertheless, for the middle of the last week in May (1997), we two tardiest explorers plunked ourselves down and colonized the Governor Bradford Motor Inn on the harborfront.

We like Plymouth. Have been there a number of times before, though always on day trips. This time, its middle-class lack of pretension appealed to our wish for a quick 3-day getaway. And to our pocketbook.

The town has a completely ordinary appearance, including a main drag so average it's called "America's Main Street," until you get to the water. There you face a slightly tacky seafront facing a very pretty harbor. It's anchored by seafood palaces and a fun-to-walk breakwater at one end. On the other: the beautifully done replica ship *Mayflower II* — and Plymouth Rock.

Plymouth Rock may be the most laughable monument in America. Which is saying a lot in a country which draws hordes to attractions such as Dollywood or The World's Biggest Chocolate Bar.

There's a "tradition" (booster talk for "no evidence") that a young lady of the colonists' ship *Mayflower* alighted during their Plymouth landfall at or just possibly on a big rock at the water's edge. OK, maybe a rock played some part in that first landing. Maybe the rock still on the beach is even

that same stone. Though a lot smaller than it used to be, because so many tourists chipped away pieces after it came to fame.

In any case, they've now surmounted it with a big granite-columned portico and walkway. So you gaze downward upon its magnificence: a gray rock about the size of a lawn tractor, lying on the sand. Surrounded by tourists trying to muster up reverence and schoolchildren still young enough to be honestly and completely bored.

No wonder so many kids grow up hating history.

While I'm in a debunking mood, why do we make such a big fuss about the Pilgrims anyway?

First, the religious separatists who made that 1620 voyage called themselves "saints" (as opposed to the *Mayflower's* sailors and to the secular majority of the colonists, who even after living with them for 3 months in that cramped little tub the religionists called "strangers"). The saints weren't commonly termed Pilgrims until the 1870s.

Second, they didn't exactly found America or anything.

Never mind the Vikings and the whole history of Spanish settlement in the South and West. (OK, I will mention that the first true American Pilgrims — defined as Europeans who came to this continent seeking religious liberty — were probably Spanish Jews who settled in New Mexico in the late 1500s). There were Englishmen living in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. Plus Dutchmen in what is now Albany, New York, by 1614.

So why such Pilgrim primacy in the history books? Maybe because the Virginians were such money-grubbing,

Indian-cheating, gold-digging shiftless lazy losers that even our early historians didn't have the heart to canonize them. Or maybe it's just that a lot of American history was written by Northeasterners. Not of Dutch descent, either, presumably.

Whereas the Pilgrims were seeking freedom, albeit mostly their own Calvinistic freedom from ever having a good time. Their relations with the Indians were reasonably cordial for the first 30 years or so. And they made an early form of democratic governance in their Mayflower Compact, for whatever pragmatic political reasons. Besides ... to be serious for a sec ... they were genuinely tough people who faced a real struggle, and survived.

The sea trip was bad enough. There were close quarters, and storms, and the beginnings of scurvy. One man died at sea.

The first landfall — which they fell to their knees and gratefully named Provincetown, on the tip of Cape Cod — wasn't much better. Four people died there. Including William Bradford's first wife Dorothy, who drowned. (To balance things out, Oceanus Hopkins was born at sea, and Peregrine White in Provincetown Harbor ... These Pilgrims had some cool names.)

Then came the welcoming harbor at Plymouth. They landed December 11, and within a few days decided to settle there.

That first winter was ... indescribable.

The scurvy got worse. There was nowhere near enough food. Then the weakened, starving, frightened people started contracting pneumonia.

To imagine what that must have been like, consider soldiers in battle. In a modern infantry company, it's my understanding (from Clancy, Pournelle, et al.) that 25 or 30 percent casualties, dead or even seriously wounded, means commanders pull the unit back to the rear for a long rest and refit.

If casualties go much higher than that, you may well disband the unit. Because it's usually a broken thing and can't be fixed. Not just a matter of sheer numbers. Unit cohesion and pride come apart. Every individual suffers deep psychological scars.

The Pilgrims had nowhere to retreat, and no relief for the saints but prayer.

Perhaps the strangers cursed.

In 3 months of bitter combat against disease, weather, fear, and despair, the Europeans at New Plimoth took 50 percent casualties.

Not just sick — *everybody* was sick.

Killed.

Of 102 passengers who landed in December, 52 were dead by the end of March. Men, women, children. Goodwives and husbands, daughters and sons.

Saints and strangers.

Maybe the fact that they held together through all that, and survived, and prospered ... is why we make such a fuss about the Pilgrims, and Thanksgiving.

And even their silly rock.

Still, my native cynicism about all this is immeasurably strengthened by James W. Loewen's 1995 masterpiece *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. It's a gold mine of up-to-date revisionism. A must-read for anybody who values his or her reputation as a niggling smartass.

Between Loewen and my other readings and observations, there are a thousand fascinating historical questions my SF-reading friends would just love that we don't have time to go into right now.

Did the Pilgrims, rather than missing their avowed destination (Virginia) because of contrary winds or navigation errors, actually hijack the *Mayflower* to avoid Anglican religious supremacy in Virginia?

What if the Pilgrims had gone instead to one original destination they considered in northeast South America: Guyana, of Devil's Island and Jonestown fame?

How come nobody ever tells us that one ultimate reason the Pilgrims were able to survive and flourish — with what turned out to be a nice harbor for fishing and beautiful fields already cleared for planting — is that they were squatters on the site of a prosperous Wampanoag Indian village of 2,000 people that had been wiped out by bubonic plague (brought by European fisherman) 3 years before? Talk about an ironic First Contact story. (You may have heard about the sole survivor of that village — Squanto — although it's less likely you read the rest of his story in 8th grade history. Especially the plague part. Loewen has great material on this. As he put it, the Pilgrims' land was "not a virgin wilderness but recently widowed." This whole issue may someday make another whole essay for me, entitled either "What Happened to All the Indians? or, We Are the Nazis Only We Won.")

What's awry with this typical grade-school handout about the Pilgrim's first Thanksgiving? "They served pumpkins and turkey and corn and squash. The Indians had never seen such a feast!"

Finally, after seeing the *Mayflower* passenger list: why would a guy with a perfectly nice name like William Brewster christen his sons Love and Wrestling?

But enough history. Let's leave the Plymouth of Bradford and Brewster for the Plymouth of Bob and Maureen. These two periods coexist only in my mind ...

It's early — really before the season — and midweek, so the crowds haven't yet arrived. A glorious time. And we have glorious weather.

Every morning very early, Maureen makes coffee in the little setup in the room and takes a chair out on the balcony. There,

she watches the harbor come to light and life before her, as the fishing boats set out to sea and the first of the tourists waddles onto the waterfront.

At least, so she says. I slept through this part, usually. OK, always.

When I finally get going, we wander around the town.

Up on Front Street — you know, America's Main Street — the Trolley Stop and the All-American Diner are engaged in a duel to the death. The prize: "Best Breakfast in Plymouth" honors from local newspaper and magazine reviewers. For our money, the All-American wins with pretty, friendly young waitresses; a smaller place with tables closer together; and a cosier feel. And of course their special Crunchy French Toast.

We walk around, stroll all the way out on the breakwater for a great view of the harbor, drive around, visit museums.

We've visited the incomparably re-created Plimoth Plantation before. So this time, it's the Pilgrim Hall Museum on Front Street, "the oldest public museum in continuous operation in America." A little gem, with everything from Pilgrim shoes (except for having two tongues you lace together at top, one pair looks like a modern men's blucher with a sloppy welt) to Myles Standish's sword to a sad map tucked away in a corner of the basement. It shows the red spread of European settlement and the green shrinkage of Indian population progressing like lightning in the decades after the *Mayflower*.

The graveyard on the hill behind the main street — an obligatory stop each time we come to town — is another kind of museum. There among the trees you find familiar names and quirky inscriptions and an incomparable outlook above the harbor that no real estate developer will ever possess. In Plymouth, the dead have the best view of the sea.

Down on the waterfront one early evening, Isaac's restaurant also has a killer view, a casually elegant atmosphere, lots of people dressed in white. The food is not bad. This is nice of them, since with their ocean view they could serve raw chum and people would still make reservations early.

Come to think of it, for a great ocean view Maureen would probably *eat* raw chum. She's always liked seafood more than I do.

We dine on the porch upstairs, out of the direct sunlight. Maureen directs my attention to the two blondes out on the corner of the balcony, and indulgently lets me watch the wind and sun toss their hair. You know your marriage is solid when your wife points out pretty women for you.

Down the street is Mama Mia's, our old hangout. It's cheaper and family-place friendly and also has great harbor views from tables upstairs along the front window. Unfortunately, the food has declined in recent years. Only the pizza has stayed above that raw-chum line.

Also avoid the Peaceful Meadows ice cream place on the waterfront. Weak-Ass Flavorless Meadows is more like it.

One fine day, we drive north. Duxbury has a great plethora of the wonderful shingle-style places by the water that I consider one of America's great unsung contributions to world architecture. We motor around town wishing we lived here in one of them. Lovely, lovely. Sigh.

Another unmatched American contribution: friendliness. Drifting up to Marshfield and its little blue-collar seaside villages of Brant Rock and Ocean Bluff, we pull in to a small grocery store. The lady behind the counter soon involves her friend and I, her new friend, in a conversation about that big sweetie, her husband. It was their (25th, I think) anniversary last week; he

brought her a huge bunch of roses. She felt like a teenager again.

I like to collect maps wherever I go. Just as I'm asking if she has one of Marshfield, who should arrive to bring her lunch but Big Sweetie. He looks something like Theodore Kozinski the day he went to jail, only not as well groomed. But kinder.

There are no maps. The Chamber of Commerce printed some up a year or two back, but they're long gone.

Big Sweetie tells me he thinks he has one in the truck. Come with him and he'll see. I'm not sure this is really the thing to do (for several reasons). But he insists and I follow him. Better to be killed and eaten than impolite.

He rummages around in his huge, beat-up old truck. There's a lot of stuff lying around back there in the darkness, so it takes awhile. Wonder what he uses those big lopping shears for? I think I see bomb wire ...

Eventually, he gives up. I thank him, shake his paw, and escape gratefully back to the car where Maureen can protect me.

We drive up the beach road a mile to the next promising shop, a liquor store, and I go in looking for a map.

Stupefyingly, history repeats itself. Only this time it's a short, broad, tough-looking Italian customer who has one in the car.

He looks like a less stylish John Gotti the day *he* went to jail. Only kinder. I follow him out, resigned now to my fate, thinking of Joe Pesci movies and what mobsters like to put in car trunks ...

This all happened. Honest. Ask Maureen.

Anyway, Gotti Guy is shaking my hand and saying sorry he couldn't find one when a familiar truck roars up.

It's Big Sweetie. He found the map.

He gives it to me. Dazed, I thank him, using simple words more for my sake now than his. I get in the car and we drive away, as he stands there fondly waving goodbye.

Later that evening, we ended up north of Cohasset, in a favorite restaurant of ours that food fans believe has the best Italian dining on the South Shore. And is possibly the most romantic restaurant in the state. I'd tell you where it is, only then you'd all go there and ruin its exclusivity.

Maybe if you contact me and beg.

One last touristy thought: for a different day trip, arrive in Plymouth by 10:00 a.m. in season and take the express ferry across Cape Cod Bay to Provincetown's famous art colony / gay haven / tourist mecca.

Sure, it's expensive (\$23 round trip per person), but the wages of wage slavery should include some fun before you die. You alight before noon, fool around all afternoon, and zip back across the water at 4:30. (Phone 508-747-2400.) You still have time in Plymouth for an evening walk out the breakwater, then late dinner on the harbor. It sure beats the 3-hour slog by car up the entire length of the Cape.

And there's something magnificent about visiting Provincetown — usually so difficult of access via the landward route — by this nautical approach. You just stroll in off the pier, a sunscreened conquistador.

All the usual geography is reversed. You're starting right in the exciting center of the town, not threading in through the boring outskirts. You don't need to find a parking space. Just a nice place to eat lunch.

Maureen and I couldn't actually take the trip this year, you understand. We were in Plymouth at midweek, and until June 14 the ferry only runs on weekends. But the pleasant memory lingers from other years.

So remember Admiral Devney's advice. Wherever possible, take a town by sea.

Let's talk briefly about something else we saw on vacation: the Leonardo da Vinci exhibit at the Boston Museum of Science.

Here until September 1, it's the only stop in the U.S. for this European exhibition, originally from Malmö, Sweden.

Promisingly enough for SF fans, the exhibit specifically aims to highlight Leonardo the inventor/scientist/engineer as well as the artist. And for the most part, it fulfills that promise. There are actual-size replicas of his flying machine and his water pump (the thing is 10 feet high, pumps real water, and shows you where Rube Goldberg got his start). Lot of scale models and little hands-on science demos that teach kids (and big kids like me) principles he fathomed. Copies of drawings for machine guns and a tank and a steam cannon and a parachute. Computers scattered around that let you tap into CD-ROMs containing many of his incredible notes (he wrote 15,000 pages; 5,000 survive) in his mirror-image Italian, plus English translations.

One of my favorite little discoveries: until Leonardo, no scientist noticed that the human spine is curved. Or if they did notice, they didn't draw it that way in skeletal studies; Leonardo was the first.

Another gem: a letter/resume to Ludovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan. Leonardo more or less says, I can make a pontoon bridge a couple of your soldiers can easily carry and use. I can show you how to build impregnable fortresses. I can make an equestrian statue of your father bigger than any other bronze ever cast. I can sing and make pageants and music for your court. Oh, and I also paint a little.

You also come away realizing that Leonardo, so fertile with ideas and projects, actually completed very few. And that he was so out of the mainstream of thought that no later scientist or engineer ever built on any of his work, but had to reinvent things he'd conceived centuries before ...

Lastly: I'd say it's a safe bet Leonardo was a gifted child, right? Then he'd have enjoyed the spring *Boston College Magazine*,

with its article on BC psychologist Ellen Winner and her book *Gifted Children:: Myths and Realities* (Basic Books, 1996).

Here's a paragraph from the article that's sure to disappoint as many as 99.9% of us, not-quite-Leonardos all.

"Gifted children have three telltale characteristics, Winner says. First, they begin to master an area of knowledge, or domain, such as math, drawing or chess, at an extremely early age, before starting school. Second, they need little help from adults in that domain, solving problems in often-novel ways, with each discovery fueling the next step. And third, they have what she describes as a rage to master their domain, working at it intensively and obsessively, often isolating themselves from others in order to pursue it. These children push themselves, achieve "flow states" in their work, and beg their parents for the books, musical instruments or art supplies they need to feed their passion. They need stimulating environments to develop their talents, Winner says of these children, but the demand comes from them, not the parents."

Her examples include Michael Kearney, who read signs and labels out loud at the supermarket aged 10 months. (He's now the country's only 12-year-old graduate student in anthropology.) Or KyLee, who divined the existence of prime numbers on his own at age 5.

Sorry, friend. She's not talking here about when you begged Mom for books on horses or Tom Swift when you were eight.

Or, sad to say, even about me.

FlimFan

Here are my totally subjective ratings of movies seen since last issue. Nothing cried out for its own long review this month, so let's go the short-form route.

Excellent:

Blue (video) — This complex, moody, beautiful film from 1993 is the first in the late Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Red, White, and Blue* thematic French-language trilogy. Lovely, solemn Juliette Binoche (the nurse in *The English Patient*) deals with the traumatic death of her child and her famous composer husband in ways that are drastic, mysterious, and moving. *Blue* is the very color of grief and memory and forgiveness.

Good:

Addicted to Love — The role Meg Ryan was born to play: a black-draped, hateful, motorcycle-riding jilted-woman revenge freak. Well, maybe not. But she and Matthew Broderick are pretty appealing in this dark comedy about two people spying on their respective ex-fiances, now infuriatingly in love with each other.

Con Air — A whole cargo bay full of the U.S. prison system's baddest bad boys get loose and hijack their plane. Nicholas Cage vowed to play his star turn—the unjustly convicted ex-Army Ranger on his parole flight home — as a character part in the midst of a macho mayhem milieu. He does, and it works. Also lots of slick serial killer shtick here from John Malkovich, Ving Rhames, and my cinematic soulmate Steve Buscemi.

The Lost World — Better than the last one, because this Spielberg guy picks up the pace a bit from his *Funday in the Park with Rex*. Jeff Goldblum carries more of the nonchomping moments, and has even more sarcastic things to say, which helps. They'll be studying the windowpane scene in Building Tension 101 at Screen School for years to come. And take all your bathroom breaks before the last half hour; trust me.

Romy and Michele's High School Reunion — Two airhead Angelenos — Lisa Kudrow and Mira Sorvino — attend their 10th

reunion attempting to look more successful than they are. There's some fairly predictable stuff here, but at least four genuine bits of inspiration: 1) the back brace and the refrigerator magnets; 2) Kudrow's lecture on adhesives manufacturing; 3) the three-way dance with the Bill Gates clone; 4) every scene with Janeane Garofalo.

Night Falls on Manhattan — This is a Sidney Lumet movie about the justice system and law enforcement in New York City. That's really all you need to know. You're guaranteed a profane, sophisticated, morally complex experience. This one may not be his best — I think Ron Leibman as the DA overacts, I've never warmed up to Lena Olin, and it was tough to buy Andy Garcia as someone named Liam Casey — but Ian Holm is great as usual, and this movie is worlds better than almost anything else playing at your multiplex.

Decent:

Austin Powers — Be afraid: my friends Michael and Alice McWilliams called this one of the worse movies they've ever seen. But I rather enjoyed Michael Myers' cascading sendups of every single silly trope from every James Bond movie ever made. Very hit-or-miss, of course. But even some of the simplest stuff worked. When Myers steals the obligatory golf cart every villain provides for transport in every villainous underground complex, he gets it viciously stuck trying to execute a K-turn in the villainously narrow tunnel. On a scale of 001 to 007, this rates at least an 004.

Speed 2 — A terrorist hijacks a cruise ship, causing passenger Sandra Bullock and cop boyfriend Jason Patric to throw overboard any attempt at interesting or appealing characterization. The sound mix is really lousy (machine or wind noises drown out dialog) and you know nothing in this movie could ever happen this way. Director Jan de Bont made *Speed*, then *Twister*, now this; the drift is definitely bottomwards for

scriptwriting and reality quotient. But there's still entertainment here. Admit it, you've never seen a cruise ship do *that* before ...

Extreme Measures (video) — Hugh Grant jilted romantic comedy long enough to make this medical thriller, playing a NYC ER doc who loses a homeless walk-in patient due to complications from mysterious prior treatment. Tracking down his patient's history almost makes Hugh history himself. Gene Hackman is a senior doc; Sarah Jessica Parker is a friendly nurse. Nothing new here, but fairly well done.

Trial and Error — Michael Richards (*Seinfeld's* Kramer) as an LA actor swaps roles with best buddy Jeff Daniels as a successful lawyer in this mildly successful courtroom comedy — and I wish I could have swapped theaters because several clusters of 14-year-olds in mine kept talking loudly, swapping seats, etc., for most of it, despite two warnings by me and two threatening visits by an usher who couldn't quite catch them at it. Finally I leaned over and told one bunch that everybody else in this theater hated them and thought they were jerks. They sulked for a while, then got up and left; several people cheered. Kids today. Why, when I was a boy, we couldn't afford popcorn at the movies, we had to eat *mud!* ...

Awful:

Weapons of Mass Distraction (HBO) — This made-for-cable movie about two warring media tycoons was written by Larry Gelbart, who wrote *MASH* and *Barbarians at the Gate*. It stars Ben Kingsley of *Gandhi* and Gabriel Byrne of *Into the West* and *The Usual Suspects*. Superior talents all, but what have they done for us lately? I saw this movie only a month ago. It was so forgettable that I already have.

Batman and Robin — Please, somebody send up the bat signal for Tim Burton. His first two movies in the series were dark,

purposeful, neurotically exciting works of art. Hack director Joel Shumacher has drained all blood from this poor little billion-dollar franchise, leaving only huge, empty effects and cute quips. It flutters like a dead thing.

Music of the Month

Musical Evenings with the Captain by Philharmonia Virtuosi (ESS.A.Y Recordings, Dobbs Ferry, NY, 1996; phone 1-800-97-ESSAY). A fine CD of chamber music pieces mentioned in the Aubrey-Maturin sea stories of Patrick O'Brian (who provides an introduction here). Including works for violins, cello, and fortepiano by Haydn, Handel, Boccherini, and Leclair — plus that certain “sonnet of Locatelli” at whose performance Lieutenant Jack Aubrey of the Royal Navy met and quarreled with the penniless Irish surgeon Stephen Maturin on a Mediterranean island in 1801, in the prelude to an immortal friendship.

Backchat

on APA:NESFA #324, May 1997

To all

See y'all at Readercon in July, I hope?

To Ray Bowie

Sorry I left you out while I was assigning top APA contributors to different metaphorical body parts. OK, Mark Olson is the heart, Tony Lewis is the spine — how about if I'm the liver and you're the kidney? I'm the epiglottis and you're the uvula? I'm the left armpit and you're the tops of both feet, the philtrum, and a patch of skin just above the buttocks? You know, Mrs. Hart in senior English always told me I pushed metaphors too far ...

Glad you like my using the name Bob. Say, if we got together, would we be Bob and Ray? You may remember them; a comedy team from the 1950s through perhaps the 1970s. They were originally from Massachusetts, I believe — started out in local radio. (Joe Ross could tell us.)

My favorite bit of theirs was on the old *Ed Sullivan Show*. One played a worm farmer, the other was a newsman interviewing him. Went something like this:

“And where is your worm farm located, sir?”

“Seekonk.”

“Uh-huh. And perhaps you could tell our national viewing audience just where Seekonk might be?”

“Well — y'know Rehoboth?”

To Mark Olson

Of the books you review, sounds like Forester's *Gold from Crete* is the one I must pick up. Plus Bank's *Against a Dark Background*, which I've owned for 2 years and still haven't got to.

Do certain books have vivid associations for you, because they bring back incidents that occurred while you were reading them? *Bridge of Birds* — the Barry Hughart book you reviewed, set in a mythic ancient China — is something I began in about 1976 and will never finish. I started it in the Wilkes-Barre Airport, and closed it forever half an hour later, trying just to hang on to life and lunch as this little 10-seater commuter plane bounced from storm to air pocket all over the PA hills.

I must have bad judgment in airborne reading matter. Once I tried to take my mind off imminent motion sickness by diving into Anthony Burgess's fine 1960s novel *Enderby*, about a fat, ridiculous little middle-aged Brit who happens to be a great poet. (And who incidentally is visited by time-traveling lit students from the future.)

Anyway, as I'm reading on the plane, Enderby is honeymooning in Rome. Fine. But as I continue with mounting horror, his wife eats something that disagrees with her, becoming violently ill.

I slammed the book shut on page 124, at a point where his wife vomits. The text:

"That's your lunch coming up,' said Enderby, watching. 'A bit fatty, wasn't it?' With a roar more came up."

Re my "in the bubble" essay, can't be quite sure from your response if you agree with its thrust or not. I'm aware, of course, that a neat little paragraph on global distribution of wealth — especially one that I get off the net x-handed from an unfamiliar research group — may not be wildly accurate. You make excellent points with perhaps better statistics that the U.S. is not so fat as all that, and that the whole world is getting better. Which last part leads back to my meta-point: we live in a bubble of affluence around here ... whether compared to current conditions elsewhere on Earth or to past centuries.

To George Flynn

Glad to hear they've loosened up the Hugo rules for Best Dramatic Presentation and we can now vote for movies (or, if we must, TV) on "related subjects." Hope we don't take this too far, and start nominating "Friends" because any show wherein NYC residents with those jobs can afford those apartments must be fantasy ...

To Paul Giguere

It's not true that "if you've gone to one such party standing with a bunch of fans in a small hotel room eating chocolate, you've gone to them all."

Sometimes we *sit* and eat chocolate.

If Iain M. Banks is going to give up on Culture novels after one more, the only thing to do is get him a TV offer. Then soon they'll be hundreds of sharecropped Culture

books, etc. Although can you imagine the SFX budget for an Orbital?

To Tony Lewis

I didn't know Stanford was near Chelsea. New satellite campus perhaps?

Sorry to hear about the death of your mother, Tony. A daughter graduates, a mother dies ... here many of us are, stuck in the sandwich years.

To Joe Ross

Enjoyed your quotes as always.

The Passover pickup lines were also fun, except the two I didn't get. Sadly, one of those was billed as the Number One line. So tell me, if you dare in a family publication: what's an afeikomen?

To Anna Hillier

So your daughter spent an entire year in the Utah desert establishing tortoise coordinates via a global positioning system (GPS). That sounds absolutely fascinating; tell us more. Does she have great stories about sunstruck prospectors, lurking snakes and scorpions, serendipitous finds of dinosaur bones or Coronado's gold? (If it was all just Mormon shopping malls and government office politics, though, maybe we don't want to hear about it.)

To Tim Szczesuil

Thanks for sharing some of the seamier Kornbluth anecdotes you didn't feel right about including in *His Share of Glory*.

You should feel really proud about the rave reviews. I've just dipped into my copy so far, and already found stuff of superb quality I'd never read before. Starting with the first story, "A Share of Glory," a great entry in one of my favorite microgenres: tales of alien languages and translators.

The *NYRSF* review, though, did have a few minor reservations amidst its overall approval and enthusiasm. Do you have any rejoinder to its points — about eschewing a

scholarly introduction, non-chronological arrangement of stories, etc.?

To Jim Mann

Some of my family were upset over my raking up stories of childhood semi-poverty. I notice that nobody else in the APA commented on that part either. Hate to cause any bad feeling. And don't worry, everybody, it's not something I feel called upon to write or talk about very much. Rather get a laugh than jerk a tear anytime.

But Jim, you and I seem to feel the same regarding our, let's say, imperfectly advantaged backgrounds: They're part of the record. They helped make us who we are. They're worth mentioning when they bear on an issue at hand.

I'm not as happy about Elizabeth Moon's *Remnant Population* as you. A decent story, nothing more. Certainly don't see why it got a Hugo nomination. Guess she's a Texas author, so that may figure in the voting for a San Antonio worldcon. There's some interest in the character's being an elderly woman; ditto the Iberian culture background; and the alien viewpoint material isn't bad. But Le Guin has done all this with ten times the impact and originality in a short story or two.

To Nomi Burstein

Hope you guys are well moved into your spacious new Park Street, Brookline, digs. Enjoyed your moving party, and the kosher noshing. But still think tongue looks too much like, well, tongue.

Say, your new place is only 2 blocks from the Alden Merrell cheesecake bakery on Comm Ave. Although — come to think of it, maybe cheesecake isn't kosher. Talk about sacrificing for your faith ...

To Elisabeth Carey

I'll check into a Lowell connection for my Carey relatives. Pending positive results, can I anyway call you cuz?

I agree that Iain M. Banks is not rewriting the SF lit'ry landscape. Wolfe, Delany, or even Aldiss or Brunner he is not. But I find his stuff as enjoyable as, say, Bujold's, while denser and more literary.

Sorry to hear that you're unemployed. I was out for 9 months a few years back. It can be rough. But if you need any tips about exactly what angle to hold the bonbon at while popping it into your mouth from a reclining position, call me.