

The Devniad, Book 39

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A Crabwise Glance at Baltimore.

During our long vacation weekend in Washington, D.C., in May, Queen Maureen and I briefly crabbed sideways to spend a fast afternoon and evening in Baltimore.

Along with my brother Michael, sister Darcy, and half the SF world, I'll be spending more than a week there in early August for Bucconeer, the 56th World Science Fiction Convention. So I wanted to get the lay of the land. Besides, knowing how it goes at a worldcon, I may be so submerged in what Nomi Burstein dubs The Vortex that this will end up having been all the tourist time I get.

Below are some impressions garnered from research and that May pilgrimage. Now, some might feel that spending about 6 hours in the city leaves me unqualified to say much about it. Crabcakes. After all, that's 6 hours more than Kim Stanley Robinson ever spent on Mars.

Facing Backwards.

First, a brief dip into the guidebooks. Baltimore was founded in 3,666 B.C. by pyramid-powered molluscanoid alien mound-builders warming up for the big dig in Egypt — ulp, sorry, I was channeling Tom Endrey there for a moment. Actually Baltimore first existed as an idyllic Native American settlement on the banks of the Patapsco River, "Patapsco" being a local term for "place where hydrogen and oxygen combine." Around 1729, all the indigenes were forced to live in row houses by one Lord Baltimore, whom I take from his nickname to be a jazz musician.

However, and in light of the above Endrey passage a bit disturbingly, by the 1860s Baltimore was the oyster capital of the world. Also, somewhere in there, Edgar Allen Poe spent several years drinking in the city's highways and byways. It was here that he penned his famous verse about that ill-omened ornithofaun, the Oriole.

Then the Civil War came and everything changed.

Later the place apparently became home to a rather pathetically bargain-basement amusement park, since one keeps encountering references to an "economic roller coaster." Seems things got so bad the city mothers considered changing the name officially to "Baltiless." But, perhaps inspired by the immortal words of Baltimore's Bard of the Booboisie, H. L. Mencken, that "no one in this world ... has ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of great masses of the plain people," developers realized that all they had to do to save the decaying city center's inhabitants was throw them out and build pseudo-classy indoor strip malls to suck in lots of outsiders with money to burn (thank goodness this could never happen in Boston) and, maybe, someday, propellers on their heads.

Thus the World Science Fiction Convention came and everything changed.

Harboring Suspicions.

Returning, however briefly, to reality: Maureen and I did spend a little time strolling around Harborplace, developed by The (same) Rouse Company that got the whole "yupper's market" movement rolling in the 1970s with Boston's Quincy Market. Harborplace is a bit smaller, and wrapped around two sides of a corner. The corner of Pratt and Light, to be exact — which I

propose we Bucconeers rechristen Fletcher and Photon for the length of our stay. Just to confuse the natives. Of which there are very few down there anyway.

On the bright side, though, that corner is an edge of the Inner Harbor itself, so you're right on the water instead of being separated from it by an unlovely elevated expressway as here in the Hub. Result: besides nice water views and cool breezes, there are kayak rides, boys and girls! Right, as though most fans want (or are capable of) exercise during a con.

But Harborplace is actually a nice enough venue. Feels awfully familiar, you know? All just 2 short blocks from the Convention Center, too, so I have a strong suspicion that we may all be seeing quite a bit of it during the con.

Rushed for time, Maureen and I dined right there at Harborplace. A quick supper at a local branch of that hallowed Boston institution, Pizzeria Uno. They must have branches from here to, I don't know, Chicago.

There's a huge guitar on top of one of the buildings across Pratt Street from the waterfront. Evidently some kind of temple to Eric Clapton.

Another spiffy modern construction right on the harbor was we were told The National Aquarium. The day we were there, it featured a huge advertising banner bearing the single eye-catching word "VENOM." Wow, does Harlan Ellison have a great advance man or what?

Some sights I wanted to take in but just didn't have the time, yet hope to catch during the con: the houses and/or graves of Poe and Mencken. Fort McHenry, which inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner" and torment generations of ballpark singers. Roland Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, who also did Boston's beautiful Fens "Emerald Necklace" parkland system, plus some big overgrown lawn thing in New

York City. The Baltimore Maritime Museum, housing the World War II submarine *USS Torsk* — how can you *not* visit a vessel nicknamed "The Galloping Ghost of the Japanese Coast"?

And, naturally, my brother Michael will drag me to the Baltimore Public Works Museum. Mike has a thing for public works, especially those involving water and what the Brits refer to as "the drains." My theory is, Mom left him too long in the tub one day and his brain got all wrinkled. More than most people's, I mean. Anyway, once I told him this museum is housed in something called the Eastern Avenue Sewage Pumping Station, he wanted to call up and put advance tour reservations on my credit card ... I *don't* expect a problem.

Beholding Visions.

To be serious for a few rare paragraphs: Maureen and I did manage to check out one sight in Baltimore at length. I thought it was fascinating: easily the equal of my other two favorites of the entire trip, Arlington, Virginia's Newseum and Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Baltimore's American Visionary Art Museum is just the other side of the Inner Harbor, beyond the Maryland Science Center. Maybe 7 or 8 blocks from the Convention Center.

I've never seen anything like it.

Opened in 1995, this place takes you into the world of the self-taught or "outsider" artist. Its literature describes it well: "All seven galleries hold wonders created by farmers, housewives, mechanics, retired folk, the disabled, the homeless, as well as the occasional neurosurgeon — all inspired by the fire within."

I also like what one of their captive visionaries, Clarence Schmidt, is quoted as saying: "Look! Look! Look! Look! God Almighty, has anyone living or dead done anything like this? Would you believe I done all this?"

Let's take a look around, shall we?

A woman named Sandra Doggett is exhibiting a "divorce quilt." Probably a format with a big future. One square shows a (surprisingly undemonic) patchwork portrait of her ex-husband, who (the signage cheerfully explains) left her and the kids for a younger woman. Another has a little real, sewn-in silver sword, poised over a cloth heart that's carefully torn in half. And yet another square spells out comforting New York advice from a friend: "FACE IT, HE'S A JERK."

Upstairs, Alex Grey will wipe that smile off your face, rounding your mouth into a little "ooo" with his incredible take on crossing medical illustration with yogic kind of kundalini diagrams, all shot with light. Look at his "The Sacred Mirrors": "translucent bodies, their X-ray anatomical systems interwoven with glowing subtle energies." (Says here that Grey's been affiliated with Harvard Med School — anybody know him?)

Over there's a technique I'd never noticed before, but take to at once. *Word salade* — "a partially coherent text mixed up with random words, accusations, and names ..." Sounds like *The Devniad*.

The NESFA sewing circle will love "Myrllen's Coat." Though they may cry. I did, some. This woman depicted her whole life on one jacket, picking through scraps of cloth and sewing them in over years of therapy sessions, only a few hours a week, at the mental hospital ... How do those tiny flecks of blue yarn show me so clearly her sister's sad eyes?

Then there's Paul Darmafall, the Baltimore Glassman. To my science fictional eye, his jagged art looks like close-ups of fractured planetscapes.

And even more so Frank Bruno's "Behold the White Horses, 1970" — with its staring crowds, volcano gods, and world-encircling tentacles. It would make a great SF cover illustration for the work of

somebody, well, crazy. Say Paul Di Filippo. I mean that in the best possible way, guy.

There's a big hangar on the grounds outside. In the corner rests a 1963 Corvair. But it's been a long time since this object transcended its status as a mere car. A man named Jay Battenfield spent years completely covering it with gem stones, jewelry, and man-made pearls ... to mourn the death of his wife in a car crash.

And on the top floor, outside the gourmet/ultra-organic Joy American Cafe, dangle the world's coolest coat hangers ...

OK, let me be honest here. Some of this stuff looks like shit. You could do it yourself, but why would you?

Some of it looks like, call it "regular" modern art. You wouldn't be surprised to see it on Newbury Street. And a little even resembles fairly traditional art, whatever that is. What's an "outsider" artist, you think: just someone who doesn't have an agent this week? Isn't plugged into the mainstream art biz?

But a lot of the art here has this specific ... intensity. These people are just crazy, you say. Yet you keep looking. Compared to a regular gallery, you feel that a higher proportion of these artists just can't help it. There's less of the usual gallery feeling of "look at me," more of "look at *this!*"

Now, is this art? Do these people have talent?

Many times, yes. But one lesson this museum teaches is that you don't necessarily need talent if you have obsession. (By the way, imagine this whole discussion were about fanzines. How many words would I have to change?)

On the other hand, it turns out ... a light heart works pretty well too. Sometimes there's an unselfconscious playfulness here. Work that seems like it was fun to do. And is certainly fun to look at. So you see a lot of attendees wondering around with these little pleased or half-incredulous smiles.

The American Visionary Art Museum.
Be there or be square.

(Closed Mondays. Phone 410-244-5858.
Adults \$6, groups over 10 only \$3 per
person. Let's envision taking the *whole con* at
once?...)

CD of the Month

What's been playing hard in my head on
the pillow after midnight is *The Parish
Notices*, by Jez Lowe and The Bad Pennies.
(Green Linnet Records, 1998. The label's on
the Web at <http://www.greenlinnet.com>)

Lowe's is a strong voice, with a stronger
accent from his northeast corner of England
— Newcastle Upon Tyne country. I read
him as a bit of a chip-on-the-shoulder
regionalist, and no cheerleader for today's
music biz. On the album cover, he looks like
a cross between Norm MacDonald and
Daniel Day-Lewis, only darker and
broodier.

The sound is, oh, call it urban folk Celtic
kitchen sink singer-songwriter pub music.
Very modern, with very old roots. Dark,
catchy, maybe a little sweet until you take in
the words.

For instance, here's how Lowe describes
one charmingly titled song: "SOD ALL is a
warning, to never fall in love with a
musician, especially one who plays the
'diddlee-dee' music, or 'Riverdancing
music,' as our local pubs call it these days.
They used to throw us out for playing it, at
one time."

To which I say oh, fiddle-dee-dee; Jez
Lowe's music never for one minute reminds
me of *Riverdance*. This is sterner stuff. His
topics in *The Parish Notices* include drinking,
unemployment and poverty, cold welcome
for a returning immigrant, sad memories,
homesickness, more drinking, one village's
persecution of a pair of lesbian lovers, more
despair and poverty, oh and then there's
"The Limping Drinker's Polka."

He does make sure his music stays
accessible (accent aside — lucky for us
Yanks the liner notes print the lyrics), and
there are melodic hooks here aplenty. Like I
said, I've spent several nights trying to get
to sleep and instead hearing over and over,
say, the twist he puts on the chorus of "Glad
Rags Again," about an old, patched-up coat
and the memories it brings: "Just tell me
when / And I'd be GLAHD to wear
GLAAHD raaahgs again ..."

I also quite like "Tom-Tom," which
argues that the Internet and the satellite dish
aren't all that different, perhaps even no
better, means of communication than more
primitive media: "And the world was
wrapped in waves and wires / And the old
and the young tuned in / But all the while
there were those who sang / To the beat of
an ancient skin ..."

Besides lead vocals, Lowe himself plays
cittern, harmonica, mandolin, dulcimer, and
banjo here. Others throw in everything from
electric stand-up bass and saxophone to
whistles and accordion to what's described
as "tappy-lappy dulcimer." They never
overwhelm the vocals, though: that's one of
the promises we implicitly make when we
call something "folk."

The Parish Notices has stayed with me
more than any music I've played in a year.
My Webhead friend Forrest Trenholm,
who's a dark-hearted, broody musician-type
himself, has also already pronounced it
"good stuff." That's one *Devniad* reader.
C'mon, everybody. Shall we try for two?

The Male Sensitivity Pledge

(From a promo for the TV show *Red Green*,
showing a regular guy standing nervously at his
podium during one of those male self-help
sensitivity groups our wives and girlfriends force
us to attend)

"I am a Man. I can change.

"If I have to.
"I guess ..."

FlimFan

Movies I've experienced since last time:

EXCELLENT:

The Last Days of Disco — If you're an action/adventure fan, you'll be throwing popcorn and yelling at the screen within 15 minutes. Because this movie traps you tight within the characters' hermetic little very-early-80s, twentysomething world. Which consists of their disco club, offices, and apartments, plus the New York City streets, cabs, and corridors that connect them. And it's all talk. Fairly uniform talk, too: most of writer/director/producer Whit Stillman's characters speak exactly the same language. Call it Preppiesh, or Yuppiarian, or just pure Stillmanese. With a total lack of irony (on *their* part, anyway), they utter earnest, intellectual-sounding, perfectly formed sentences containing absolutely unoriginal insights, like "It's been my observation that many people really don't like to be criticized." Or they extrude elaborate theories of cultural revisionism. There are several beauts here — all, you gradually notice, from some perversely Disney-centric worldview, like the argument that the entire modern ecology movement arises from baby boomers' horrified reactions as 6-year-olds to the 1958 death (in re-release) of Bambi's Mom. Anyway, in case you haven't gathered by now: I love this stuff. As in his first two films, *Metropolitan* and the sublime *Barcelona*, Stillman raises deadpan satire to a high art. Just as his characters — bitchy Charlotte (Kate Beckinsale) and nice Alice (Chloe Sevigny) who work in publishing, despicable Des (Chris Eigeman) with his "management position" at the disco, Josh

(Matthew Keeslar) the young prosecutor and religious loon, and Jimmy (Mackenzie Astin) from the much-reviled netherworld of advertising — all turn self-involvement into a hilarious sacrament.

The Truman Show — Aside from experiencing religious transport, making love, and witnessing birth or death, watching TV may be our most philosophically fraught experience. We know the difference between real life and the movies; no existential dilemma there. But between real life and TV? Things can get a little blurry. *The Truman Show* exists on that flickery boundary. If you're so promotion-proof you haven't yet heard the movie's story, I won't (quite) spoil it. But this is a rare Hollywood movie in that it *has* a central idea, and it's a big one, and the movie explores it with a decent amount of intellectual rigor. Yet, though simple, the idea is not simple-minded. The damn thing packs all this *resonance*. Your mind keeps making associations with the ancient Greeks' "crystalline spheres" cosmology and Christ symbolism and Kafka and the Solipsists and Heinlein's "They." And, yes, other movies: *The Truman Show* is *Forrest Gump* meets *Dark City* meets *Real Life* meets *28 Up*. It's very well made. We stay focused on what's happening, constantly surprised and delighted at the little details of how the theme's grand illusion works. Then, this movie has Jim Carrey. (As Truman Burbank. True man, get it? Burbank, the TV city, get it? Although, by the way, *The Truman Show* was filmed in the centrally designed, unnervingly pretty real-life village of Seaside, Florida. It's kind of an American Portmeirion without much whimsy ... and of course this movie, too, could easily be titled *The Prisoner*.) Carrey is excellent here as a nice guy gone a little crazy, a tad paranoid from frustration; a man who's a bit of a naïve dreamer and who sometimes acts as though the world revolves around him ... Which isn't such a big list of flaws for a

character who, as the movie reveals, could have an excuse for being the most spoiled individual in human history. When you think about it, Carrey has now starred in two of the more interesting science fiction/fantasy idea films of the last decade. You know, this and 1994's *The Mask*. Yes, in other vehicles he's been less an actor than a Force, and for a vocal minority of people a resistible one. But it turns out that, in the service of the right idea, the energetic and flexible super powers of this unholy child begat by Woody Woodpecker upon Elastic Man can be contained and harnessed purely for Good. A strong director probably helps, too. *The Truman Show* has a fine one: Peter Weir of *The Last Wave*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Witness*, and *Dead Poets Society*. And, with all deference to J. Michael Straczynski — the best current crafter of science fiction for the screen may now be Andrew Niccol, who scripted the similarly intelligent *Gattaca* before writing *The Truman Show*. He, Weir, Carrey, and all others concerned do a marvelous job keeping this movie funny, exciting, and thoughtful.

GOOD:

Bulworth — It's messier than *Wag the Dog*, riskier than *Primary Colors*, and ultimately braver than both. They were films about how politicians lie. This is about how one tells the truth. Now, *there's* news. Warren Beatty (who wrote, directed, and stars) is Jay Billington Bulworth, an old-style liberal California senator with no ideals, constituency, or money left. A nervous breakdown and a belief that he has one weekend to live transforms him into that rarest of political animals, a free man. Perhaps the funniest, smartest bits here — and the ones featured in clips — are his speeches telling audiences of poor African-American churchgoers, rich Jewish movie mavens, fat-cat corporate contributors, and TV watchers respectively some most unpalatable truths about themselves and

their political roles. What the commercials are too chicken to mention is how much the last half of the film is about black culture. (WARNING: SPOILERS AHEAD.) To a relentlessly rap-heavy soundtrack, Bulworth pursues a phat young woman (the fabulous Halle Berry) into her hood, the black L.A. suburb of Compton, and gets down with the brothers and sisters in a dance club, a mean street, and a drug ganglord's HQ while staying with his new inamorata's more than slightly stunned family. "Stunned" is also a good description of how most of my fellow audience members here in North Honkyboro, Massachusetts, reacted to the sight of 60-year-old Warren Beatty wearing baggy banger shirts 'n' shorts, a rave cap, and mean little Puff Daddy shades — while, yes, rapping. And, by the way, proposing a *solution* to racial hostility: everybody should copulate with everybody else until racial divisions disappear. I told you this movie was risky. But I like that last idea especially. Forget "Can't we all get along?" Me and my man Bulworth say, "Can't we all get it on?"

The X-Files: Fight the Future — The few times I've seen the TV show of which this movie is an episode (injected like a mediatronic Methadone booster shot into hollow-eyed fans strung out between the fifth and sixth seasons), it's struck me as surprisingly atmospheric, moody, and classy for the boob tube. But look, the charms of both show and movie are those of a soap opera for paranoiacs. You cycle again and again through the same shadow-government plots and somewhat predictable paranormalities while hoping that low-key FBI agents Scully and Mulder will any minute take a break from the investigating and realize they're *made* for each other. For god's sakes, grab her and kiss her, Mulder, willya? So maybe it's actually good news that the movie manages to pack about five seasons of repetition and hazy story points into 122 minutes. And the fact that, after all that, there's not all that much *here* here

means that moviegoers who have never seen the show can get the idea pretty easily. Plus, I'll be honest, there are numerous good points. Gillian Anderson's Dana Scully is indeed babelicious in her retro ice-queen, hard-to-get way: a yuppie Garbo or Dietrich. David Duchovny brings his famous lightweight intensity to the role: he has one very funny bit self-mocking Fox Mulder's patented expressionlessness. Neither of these loose-cannon bossbusters would survive 6 minutes in any law enforcement bureaucracy in the world, of course; but some other characters pack plenty of verisimilitude. For instance, Martin Landau certainly *looks* like a gynecologist who's also an expert on sinister government plots involving ETs. And William B. Davis as The Cigarette Smoking Man is no drag either. There's plenty of stylish direction, too, and some moments of genuine horror. Also great locations, from deserts to ice fields. Actually, my favorite part of the whole movie was the opening, which evokes a feeling of perfectly primordial horror as man battles monster in a dark ice cave. My least favorite: one really stupid chase scene. Here's a free hint for all heroes: if you ever find yourself on foot, being chased through a cornfield at night by sinister helicopters? Whenever they get close, *lie down*. And for villains: instead of chasing somebody trying to make it back across the field to the only getaway car within 100 miles? *Hover over the car*.

FORGET IT:

Dirty Work — It's always reassuring once you've seen the unmistakably worst movie of the year. You can relax; the cinematic trend line has nowhere to go but up. Comedian Norm MacDonald, famously fired from TV's *Saturday Night Live* revue a few months back, cooked up this turkey — about two guys who decide they're good at playing stupid revenge tricks, so why not make money at it? — with a bunch of his

former friends. I say "former" because you've got to assume that all involved will henceforth avoid each other like open-sores lepers at an Ebola convention. The story is enormously lame, the production values pathetic, and almost every joke falls flat. OK, I laughed at hearing what one elderly character tenderly treasures in a heart-shaped locket about his neck — an obscene snapshot of Norm's Mom — but that's about it. Also in the interests of full disclosure, I should note that I actually used to like MacDonald's work as *SNL*'s "news anchor." And even appreciated his standup act, which was considerably rawer and more sophomoric. I even laughed at some jokes he reportedly made as MC at some big TV sports award show recently, for instance remarking that the costumes on the women figure skaters were so tight, he could see the East German woman's "entire penis." There. This review is now undoubtedly funnier than the entire 80 minute span of *Dirty Work* ... Last year, Norm was asked what he'd do if he ever left *SNL*. Thinking of the careers of quite a few of the show's alumni, he replied, "Make bad movies, I guess." Norm, honest, we wouldn't have *held* you to that.

Backchat

on APA:NESFA #336, May 1998

To Mark Hertel

Regarding your toting-up of yearly contributions to this APA: my ghod, I *do* go on, don't I? One hundred six pages of fannish blather in a mere twelvemonth. So much to say, so few people who want to hear it ...

To Tony Lewis

Bright daughter you and Suford have got. (See reply to Alice below.)

By the way, I ordered my second on-line book ever this month. *Space Travel: A writer's*

guide to the science of interplanetary and interstellar travel. (Trade paper, about \$17 at www.amazon.com.) By Anthony R. Lewis and some geek named Bova. I can see *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* faces stiff competition for all our Hugo "best related work" votes. Beautiful job. And pitched at a level that even I, a simple country English major, can grok. If I ever get the guts to actually write some sci-fi, I'll check all my sci in your extremely useful cheat sheet.

I did note that Bova probably did at least *some* of the work. Because one hand here believes in the final serial comma and the other, not.

If it's not under the seal of the confessional, why not tell us behind-the-scene stories of how *Space Travel* got written, what juicy parts were left out, why you omitted mention of the Mars Face, etc.

To Anna Hillier

The "lost sock" theory from your daughter's MIT newspaper postulates that lost socks go to Sock Heaven. I heard an alternative explanation years ago that I'll bet half the people in NESFA know: "Socks are the larval form of coat hangers."

By the way, in your zine's banner head, what meaneth the tiny "T.N" inserted under your name? Should we start referring to you as Tennessee Hillier?

To Ray Bowie

So, from your admission about New Hampshire's less-than-stellar public assistance record, you'd agree that a Democrat is a Republican with some semblance of a heart.

Now wait: reading Antonia Fraser's *Mary, Queen of Scots* "literally drove [you] up a wall"? Wow, that new wheelchair must be more full-featured than you'd said.

Thanks for the kind words on my Hugo nomination. IAHJTBN.

To Paul Giguere

That pre-Elizabethan-England time travel first novel you reviewed, *In the Garden of Iden* by Kage Baker, sounds great. Just the sort of thing my sister Liz would *really* enjoy, if she chanced to read this note and buy a copy she could subsequently pass on to her beloved older brother ...

Loved your comment about not actually reading my comments about not actually reading books. You have an amusingly twisted mind, guy. Must be all that philosophy training. NESFA membership helps, of course.

I'd say that listening to an unabridged audio tape is honorably equivalent to reading the book. Abridged versions, sorry, not quite. And of course, reading a book in translation is kind of like phone sex. I hear.

To Mark Olson

Loved your reports about car trips and cons in Maryland and San Francisco. When reading Olson, one is for an enchanted time quite interested in ferries and the failings of con committees, tourist site realism and roses ... Thanks, Mark.

Yes, *Kim* is really a great and entertaining read. I'm sure you've heard it described as "the best book ever written for a 12-year-old boy." (I've heard the same about *The Once and Future King*, too. OK, they're both right.) When you finally get to it — which I'm confident you will — see how often you think of Heinlein.

To Joe Ross

Lovely quotes, as always. Do you collect them throughout the month, or just in a mad flurry the day the APA is due? I've told your Dave Barry one about women and baseball several times already. ("If a woman has to choose between catching a fly ball and saving an infant's life, she will choose to save the life without even *considering* whether there are men on base.") Although, as I usually point out, it's actually more about *men* and baseball.

Thanks for the pointer to the Winston SF Classics Website; found it easily even with the glitch. Really brought back memories. In my case, I read many Winstons sitting in that magnificent building, the Crane Library in Quincy, Massachusetts, U.S.A. Kindling my love of SF and of architect Henry Hobson Richardson simultaneously.

To Tom Endrey

Thanks for the enthusiastic Hugo puffery. Genuinely heart-warming to hear from all my friends, no matter how the voting goes.

I dug out that 6-page college geology paper I wrote on Atlantis. Whew. Probably didn't deserve the B plus it got. Basically, since I'm much more of an historian than a geologist, it's more history than science.

The paper simply recapped the late-1960s work by Galanopoulos of U Athens and Mavor of Woods Hole establishing that the modern crescent-shaped Greek resort island of Thera or Thira or Santorini is the rim of a submerged volcano, with the caldera now subsumed by a bay — and suggesting confidently that the volcano underwent a giant eruption, around 1500 B.C., five times greater than Krakatoa in 1883. That this event drove ash and huge tsunamis around the entire Mediterranean area. That the waves (700 ft tall at Thera) still would have been 200 feet high when they hit Crete. And that basically, they would have washed away much of the culture of Minoan Crete— and accounted for Plato's later story (with allowance for errors of scale and location) of a sunken civilization of Atlantis. My main source was Mavor, *Voyage to Atlantis* (New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), if you care.

One more thing: will be too late by the time I read any reply you might make, but for the interest of it: how would you rate the two art books up for "best related work" Hugos, the DiFate and this year's *Spectrum*? I've got both (bought the DiFate on your rec,

actually), like each a lot, and respect your opinion as a long-time art maven.

To Alice Lewis

Trif overview of works on comics and "sequential art." I love a bibliography with juice and pulp left in. Two random points: a look at Dad's and Mom's copy of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* will reveal to you that "Simon Hawke," author of one of the worst books you've ever read, is indeed a pen name. Nicholas Yermakov has done a bunch of stuff as Hawke, including some decent SF adventure in the Timewars series.

And I agree with your assessment of Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* as a total treasure. As you said — a serious treatise, but in the form of a "comic book" itself! One of the most original and intelligent reference books of *any* kind that I've ever encountered.

To Elisabeth Carey

Not surprising that I got flak from SF fans for indicating that some people who may own something like *A Brief History of Time* or *The Inferno* haven't actually read the books in question, yet may feign to have done so in conversation. Guess Olson's Observation ("Fans Know Everything") should be accompanied by what I'll now term Carey's Corollary ("Fans Read Everything"). After all, at a convention once I heard a speaker make a joke about Avogadro's Number that had three-quarters of the room guffawing ... followed 10 minutes later by someone asking who had read *Le Chanson de Roland* and getting a good show of hands plus a lively discussion of "does in English count?"

But I stand by my guns that the phenomenon is widespread. Maybe you and some other fans have too little vanity or too much personal integrity to understand such sinks of moral corruption as me and Paul Giguere. (See his reply last issue.)

To George Flynn

You're another one who boasts he's read Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. Oh, you thought I meant *Stephen* Hawking!

Actually, I was just trying to stir things up. That's what fandom needs, don't you think? More controversy.

Hope you're completely healed after being struck by a car and executing an involuntary moon landing. (Those buttock bruises can really throb, no?) You say you hobbled your extensively bruised and battered bod to work only an hour and a half late? Hope they named you Employee of the Year. Somebody like Paul Giguere would *still* be convalescing with his legal advisoress on the beach at Cap Ferrat.

To Jim Mann

Sadly (since I love his work and respect him so much), I agree that the second part of Joe Haldeman's *Forever Peace* — dealing with a sort of scientifically based “peace conspiracy” — was rushed and implausible. In fact, found it a whole lot sillier than you did; didn't believe it for a minute. While the first bit, with the remote-control soldierboy units, was nicely worked out and wholly successful. Hope it's not just that we find war exciting and peace a yawn ...

Another Nero Wolfe fan! And in the same ish as my own paeon to the Widebody Wonder of West Thirty-fifth Street. Satisfactory. Eminently satisfactory, sir.

Although pfui, our likemindedness is becoming egregious. I, too, loved the HBO series *From the Earth to the Moon*. And, like you, especially the episodes about the geologist and the engineering of the lander. The one about Al Bean, the Aw-Shucks Astronaut, was also a treat.

Haven't seen and didn't know about a sequel to that sublime angel flick *Wings of Desire*. Called *Faraway, So Close*, you say? Gotta get it.