

The Devniad

Book 53a

un zine de Bob Devney

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Another Stunning Stephenson

Which would you rather read, the secret history of World War II as seen through the titanic, hyperintellectual, frequently funny efforts of a small band of dedicated and crazy code-breakers and their keepers, or the hot-off-the-net story of how modern-day computer nerds are transforming the southern Pacific Rim with the sheer force of their insatiable appetite for bandwidth, data security, and startup bucks? Well the beauty part is, you don't have to decide!

Neal Stephenson's *Cryptonomicon* gives you both, in parallel streams of exciting, funny, thoughtful, meaty, idea-strewn, intensely kinetic story. It's the best time I've had between the covers this year ...

Let's admit immediately that I actually have no business writing a stem-to-stern review at this point. Truth is, I'm only on page 352. So if the whole thing dive-bombs into the toilet around page 400, I can't warn you about it. But somehow I doubt this. And besides, I can't wait another month to get you started. Don't worry, you won't catch up. The thing is 918 pages long.

And as usual with Stephenson, you get neat stuff on every page.

The current-day sections deliver delights ranging from exotic descriptions of modern-day Manila, where "the sidewalks are nothing more than lids on the sewers" ... to the dunderheadedness of the term "Information Highway" ... to the hilarious mutability of the modern (cyber)business plan ... to submersible treasure-hunting techniques.

The 1940s stream gives us everything from a description of a periodic polyalphabetic cipher machine like the

German three-wheel Enigma using as extended metaphor Alan Turing's slip-happy bicycle chain ... to a tour of the incredible, enigmatic palace of the code kings at Britain's Bletchley Park, where "demure girls, obediently shuffling reams of gibberish through their machines, shift after shift, day after day, have killed more men than Napoleon" ... to the intense eroticism, on an icy Fantasy Island named Qwghlm, of a woman's removing one heavy woolen glove to the amazing Galvanick Lucifer. Oh, and let's not forget that extremely one-sided battle between the Japanese machine-gun nest and the giant man-eating lizard.

The 1940s stories also give Stephenson the chance to go *Ragtime* on us. Early computer theorist and key cryptoanalyst Turing is a fairly important character, and there are vastly entertaining appearances by such personages as General Douglas MacArthur, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, and a minor movie star/propagandist named Lieutenant Ronald Reagan.

In his cover-story interview in the August *Locus*, Stephenson (who's written two of the great SF books of the 1990s, *Snow Crash* and *The Diamond Age*) confirms that he grew up reading SF; Heinlein and Norton especially were authors he returned to again and again. (He also says *Cryptonomicon* was originally supposed to present parallel stories of the past, present, *and* future; but he broke off the future chunk for another, separate book. Oh goody, there'll be more!) But is this current novel science fiction?

Well, the content here may not have many actual sfnal elements (at least so far). But I'd argue that it's so saturated in SF thinking (for instance, a major character classifies people as dwarves, elves, hobbits, etc.) and so attentive to subjects of central

interest to SF audiences (such as science and technology and their interface with warmaking, whether military or economic) that the distinction doesn't matter. Most fans will enjoy this one.

It's more amusing than *Catch 22*, more exciting than *Red Storm Rising*, and a lot more accessible than *Gravity's Rainbow*. Intercept *Cryptonomicon* today.

Hearing from Harlan

"This is Harlan Ellison, calling from Los Angeles."

These are words to send a thrill — or is the word chill — up any fanwriter's spine. Especially, say, mine, after I've just pubbed 16 pages (last ish) on July's Readercon SF literary convention. Pages chockfull of opinions and quotes from and about Guest of Honor Harlan Ellison ... some nice, some not so.

After all, in the encyclopedia we all carry in our heads? The entry many fans keep describing Ellison might begin something like, "Award-winning, gifted, leading science fiction writer and rabid barking-and-foaming chain-chewing mad dog controversialist."

So when the call came on the afternoon of Saturday, July 31, 1999, I had several reactions.

First, enormously flattered chuffedness. After all, on a literary level in *la cosa de SF nostra*, this event is something like hearing the following:

"Honey, it's Ernie on the phone for you."

"Who?"

"Ernie. Ernie Hemingway."

Fine. But, on the other hand: I was scared. You hear that this is a guy who can hold a grudge longer than a soaked Serbian. And who, for instance, denies he once brought a gun to a script conference and pointed it at a producer.

Ellison is said to insist he didn't *point* it. He just *cleaned* it whenever the editor talked about story changes.

However, no one is more aware of Harlan Ellison's reputation than Harlan Ellison. As we began to converse, one of the first things out of his mouth was, "This is *not* a negative call." And he went on to be most gracious and complimentary about the fanzine issue he'd received.

Once I recovered from my swoon and focused on what else the guy was saying, it turned out he did have a few concerns and corrections. For instance, the hilarious story he'd told about precocious little Harlan's first day at school, which I'd pegged as occurring in first grade, was actually kindergarten. Of course, this makes it even funnier.

And it was obvious he was struggling at some points, not always successfully, against being irritated ... or indeed, hurt ... by what he'd read reporting my and others' opinions of his performance at Readercon. As he put it, "To do 37 hours of programming, knocking myself out, trying to be totally available — and then to hear that it was because I have a big ego. And that it's a cult of personality thing."

Why *did* he go to all that trouble, then?

"Most science fiction writers are really dull in person ... I try not to be."

However, all this was not the main point of the call. Much of his concern focused on one particular *Orbita Dicta* quote, which I'll repeat here:

[Ellison besmirches one of my sacred SF idols]

Jim Schmitz — James A. Schmitz, whom most of you have virtually never heard of. He did a trick in one book — *The Witches of Karres*. And you all liked it, and he ended up doing it again and again and again.

So that was the offending quote, and especially the offending intro. We'll get to *why* it was offensive in a minute. But anyway, we talked about it. I got Ellison's permission to note his concerns next ish (that is, right here) and pass along the fuller context of his quoted remark.

Which task got a lot easier when, a few days later, a letter arrived from Ellison on the same topic.

Two pages on gray letterhead covered with thick, black typewriter script. (Ask Ellison about e-mail or writing on a computer and he makes a gesture of absolute contempt.) Featuring not one cross-out, erasure, or other sign of a writer not perfectly in control of every word he's saying. Besides, you don't employ gray paper if you think you might be using white-out much.

The letter begins and ends with some truly graceful courtesies and thanks for sending him the Readercon ish. Then, here's the heart of what Ellison had to say:

... As for the content of The Devniad, on the whole you got my words correctly. I fear much of the purport of what I say--not that Socrates need be concerned about losing his crown--is contained in the nuance and inflection and patois and cadence. So through no fault of yours, a minim of my remarks do come off sounding arch or disrespectful or smartass, when I didn't intend them to be so. But that's not your fault. It's the risk one takes when one puts everything on the line in full view and full voice.

One small use of a word, however, does unsettle me. I'm not angry about it, please hear my un-angry tone of voice here, but I need you to know that I would never "besmirch" (your word) Jim Schmitz, who was a friend. I admired him enormously, and the context in which I said what you have labeled "besmirch" was that many good writers have been subtly coerced by fan approbation (or editorial fiat) into repeating early successes, to the detriment of their growth as artists. I was lamenting that sorry reality on a panel questioning the concept "Should Art Be Difficult?" I cannot remember how the conversation skewed to reach the place where we were equating a writer's repetition of literary devices s/he had used to build the rep and some degree of success, with self-referents that were easier than struggling for innovation every time out. But in groping for an example, I used Jim, who had expressed the same concerns in conversations many years ago. Both Campbell's need to control writers, and his steering of Jim's work into that frequently-repetitious

channel...and the adoration of fans who wanted him to write The Witches of Karres and "Lion Hunt"...over & over... combined to stunt (in my view) Jim's opportunities to write even more outstanding, and different, stories. He concurred.

In short, what I was saying, and said it at some length, was that one should strive to make Art more difficult, that an artist in any genre, who cares about his/her growth, should make a conscious effort to reject the adoration of the readership--with all of its unspoken but pressure-filled subtext to repeat the trick till it becomes a dog&pony show--at peril of having that fickle beast turn on you, but at glory of possibly reaching a new height of one's talent.

Schmitz, sadly, never got a chance to break away from fan love to experiment. I think...to our enormous loss. He was a fine man and an excellent writer. I liked him, and I admired him, and I felt sorry for him at last moments...for what might have been.

So you can see why the use of the subjective term "besmirched" gave me a frisson of unhappiness. I wouldn't want to give those in NESFA who already have an irrational dislike of me, yet another bogus reason to fertilize their bitter crop.

I see I've gone on at greater length than I'd intended. This was meant to be a simple thankyou for your good offices. Please log in my verbosity to a real and deep concern that someone might think I meant Jim's memory ill ...

The first thing that strikes you is amazement at his *output*. Let's not kid ourselves that this was the only letter Harlan Ellison wrote on 30 July 99, or anywhere near the most important. But look at how effectively — and elaborately — the guy uses the language in this tossed-off little memo.

The second thing is about the substance of his complaint. He's genuinely concerned about any mere possibility that you could think he was abusing Schmitz's memory.

On the phone, I told him his alarm was simply the result of my own shortcomings as a writer. Regretted that I couldn't make my tone known and my import clearer.

Friends, have you conversed with me personally? Or slogged through multiple issues of *The Devniad*, soaking up my attitude in those little bracketed intros to con quotes? Then you might suspect that I don't say "Ellison besmirches one of my sacred SF idols" — don't load heavy words like "besmirch," "sacred," and "idols" onto one frail sentence — with an entirely straight face.

I'm trying there instead for, oh, a rueful acknowledgment that maybe I take or used to take SF too seriously. That Schmitz was a writer I uncritically admired in my childhood but whom I'm now aware wouldn't stand in the first rank of any adult true believer's SF pantheon. That the quote you're about to read maybe has Ellison pricking my balloon a little but that it's hard to deny his truth.

Besides, as any *Devniad* veteran would know, for better or worse you get lightness or self-mocking irony in the Devnian *oeuvre* far more often than you get true outrage or authentically righteous indignation.

But as Moliere murmured despairingly, "Tragedy is easy. Comedy is hard."

For at least one intelligent reader with great reason to unpack my meaning, this time, the light touch fell like a lash.

What can anybody who writes anything say when that happens? It's a fanwriter's worst nightmare, actually. Somebody you respect actually *reads* your stuff and *cares* about it ... but doesn't get what you meant.

And look what else is happening here. Harlan Ellison, the supposed Sultan of Self-Involvement, the acclaimed Emperor of Ego, really doesn't make much of any slams aimed at him. His single sizable problem comes where he feels the setup for a *single* quote in an obscure fanzine might, just *might* ... give its few measly readers (no offense, friends) the idea that he was speaking ill of a dead friend. You've got to admire that.

What can I say?

I'm sorry, Mr. Ellison.

I'm glad you called.

Our Man in Honduras

No direct word from our nephew the big-shot Peace Corps correspondent this month. Guess his official duties are heating up. Along with the weather, of course.

Or maybe he's just staying in his living quarters — the Cholera Room of the fabulous Centro de Salud in La Florida de Opatoro, La Paz, a hilltown 50 or 60 miles west/northwest of Tegucigalpa. You know, up by Comayagua? Staying in his room and admiringly flicking the light switch on and off. Because his mother Kathy Ferrara says that in a recent voice link dispatch to her North Attleboro headquarters, Jarrod reported excitedly that *la electrificación* has finally come to that quarter of town.

Let's give silent thanks for a moment that Thomas Edison was born in our part of the world ...

Bee afraid. Bee very afraid.

From Arlington, Mass, U.S.A., my sister Darcy reports on her own little sideshow in the real, ages-old War Against the Chtorr.

"Every year, we have to get The Bee Guy out to our house. Now the bees — he tells us they're carpenter bees this time — have invaded some unpainted windowsills.

"Look at it from the bee's point of view,' he says. He's always talking about the bee's point of view, the Bee Guy.

"You're one of only two or three houses in a four-block radius that's still wood; all the others are vinyl-sided now. So you've got all this wood, yum. Some unpainted wood, even better. And flowers, and so on ...

"From the bee's point of view, it's paradise."

"My husband has a simpler explanation for why the bees love to torment us.

"He says they can smell my fear."

Ego Scanners (Shall Not) Live in Vain

Constant correspondent **Gary Dryfoos** barraged the e-mailbox with tons o' cogent stuff, of which I'll abstract only the merest minim. (Thanks for the cool new word, Harlan.) First, he was amused by Brett Cox's displeasure with one editor's tenure at *F&SF*:

"A far worse insult to a magazine than shaking one's fist at it, of course, is to let issue after issue stack up unread. I did have that happen once ... with a subscription to a fairly recent glossy-covered SF pulp with too many stories that just were not worth the trouble of finishing. Endothermic, like celery: they used up more energy than they provided."

But Gary's really ga-ga over another recent favorite of mine:

"Let me recommend a delight of a book: *Lost Pages* (brand new I think) by Paul Di Filippo ... I won't even list the historical and artistic figures that pop up in each [story] like the surprise in a box of Cracker Jacks (back when CJs were still fresh and tasty in the box and the prizes were truly cool and worth looking for) ... How can one guy handle so many different styles so deftly, in affectionate pastiche and not cruel parody? He must love the fiction he's embroidering on, and that affection shows throughout."

Yes, Gary, I've got and read *Lost Pages*. Especially liked "Anne"— Anne Frank survives and goes to Hollywood? Have met and talked with Paul at numerous Readercons — he's a tremendously nice guy to boot. Lives in Providence, RI, so you may catch him around sometimes if you try.

From her post high in the U.S. Navy command structure, fanfriend **E. J. McClure** signals:

"Imagine my delight when I got back from the Baltic junket (England, Denmark, Poland, Germany and Sweden) and Halifax (two-week NATO course on coordinated maritime warfare) to find the latest edition

of *The Devniad*. What a treat to be reminded that there is a world out there in which people care passionately about ideals and imagination. I deal with way too much of this reality crap ..."

Why do you think the *rest* of us go to cons, E.J.?

Long-time fan and friend **Cassandra Boell** liked the Readercon ish:

"Very nice Bob! I learned 4 new vocabulary words."

Cassandra, about those four new words you learned from last month's All-Harlan-All-The-Time issue of *The Devniad* — I assume "mother fucker" wasn't two of them.

Stalwart Southern fan **Tom Jackson** responds with two meaty memos, of which I'll grab only a few chunks. He answers my call last time for help in spelling a deceased editor's name:

"The *Playboy* fiction editor praised by Harlan Ellison was named Victoria Chen Haider. As Ellison noted, she was apparently a very smart editor and she was killed with three other *Playboy* editors in a May 1979 airplane crash."

Tom also makes to me his moan:

"I wanted to write briefly and tell you that I was sorry we didn't talk at Readercon. That's my biggest regret about the convention. Well, no, my biggest regret is that I didn't make a new female friend. But I never meet anyone at these things, so not talking to you is my biggest *doable* regret."

Tom, I'm sure you won't mind my making this public if the ends justify the means. OK, folks, here's somebody who (by my standards anyway) is a good-looking guy, an SF fan, and obviously someone with great taste in e-mail perzines. So, ladies, let's get going ... I want those offers and photos to pour in to Tom at thomasejackson@usa.net

Fanwriting queen **Evelyn Leeper** is not amused by the prices people pay for first editions:

"Five hundred dollars for a library copy of *Snow Crash*? Some people are nuts."

Evelyn, I'd just say some people are *fans*.

From Ontario, ace letterhack **Lloyd Penney** takes a hack at Harlan:

"I am impressed with his writing, but not impressed with him as a person ... However, he inflicts himself and his attitude upon a fandom who worships him as a great SF writer, and is willing to stand his crap in order to be in his presence. The sad thing is that he knows all this, and does what he can to his admirers just to see how far he can go.

"However, he is right about perspective and nostalgia. There are no more original ideas, and movie remakes of television series are one reason I seldom go to the movies. I shake my head at Hollywood's stupidity, and save my shekels. But Ellison takes it personally. No wonder he's had heart bypasses ... Ellison has always turned my crank with his Queen Bitch attitude and blasting cap temper."

Lloyd, I think I like Ellison better than you do, and at any rate forgive him a lot more. Guess I ultimately lean toward William Faulkner's opinion that the writer's highest responsibility is to his art, so "If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the Ode on a Grecian Urn is worth any number of old ladies."

When I made this same point recently in re Harlan, my sister Darcy said, "Of course you feel that way, because you've always wanted to be counted on the side of the writers. Nice deal for THEM." Guilty, your Honor.

Old family friend and new subscriber **Margaret Rice** writes from Washington, D. C.:

"Enjoyed reading the newsletter. I must admit that reading the conference stuff [on Readercon] was like reading a foreign language. I hope some of the terms make sense as I continue to see them in context ..."

No promises, Margaret ...

**From "Deep Thoughts"
by Jack Handey**
(on TV's old *Saturday Night Live*)

"I wonder if angels believe in ghosts."

FlimFan

EXCELLENT:

Wandafuru raifu (After Life) — If you could take only one memory of your whole life with you, what one moment — trivial or profound, happy or sad — would you choose? Take a minute to think about that ... If it seems to merit further consideration, advance your thought process by seeing this quiet little Japanese film. (Although maybe you'll have to wait for the rental — I only caught it during its 1-day showing on the Recent Raves schedule at the Brattle Theater in Cambridge, Mass, thanks to a heads-up by thoughtful NESFA movie maiden Claire Anderson.) *After Life* is written, produced, and directed by Hirokazu Kore-Eda, who created 1997's *Maborosi* to similar rave reviews. Here, a small team of dedicated social workers/therapists/filmmakers (angels?) conducts several days of interviews with a small cross-section of people in what seems a shabby little former school building in some Osaka suburb. First, they give you the bad news: "I think you already understand the situation. But I need to inform you officially: Mrs. Tanaka, you died yesterday. I'm sorry for your loss." Then they explain the rules about deciding on one memory for when you move on (destination unspecified). And how you won't really take the actual memory — you've got three days to pick it out, by the way — but a filmed reenactment they'll make, with you as sort of a technical consultant. Sounds loony, I know. But what's so reasonable and unarbitrary about the life and death you and I think we know? Anyway, the charm in this slow, thoughtful,

beautifully shot, completely unflashy fantasy lies in watching and listening to people (including some nonactors recalling their real lives, incidentally) talking about their special moments: An older woman recalls a childhood dance recital. An older man confides that “for men, it’s when you’re doing it.” A retired middle manager had a life so dull he can’t decide. A girl chooses a trip to Splash Mountain, at Tokyo Disneyland — which pains the young woman interviewing her, because that’s what the last 30 girls picked, too. A middle-aged man had a life so painful, he’s glad to take little with him: “You can forget? Then that really would be heaven.” A young rebel refuses to decide at all ... And how about you, my friend?

The Blair Witch Project — Both people I went to this with hated this flick. They weren’t frightened for a minute, and the truly crappy production values just annoyed the hell out of them. To quote them exactly, Steve Kennedy complained: “It was all just, woods-camera-tent, woods-camera-tent.” And Marty Johnson sneered: “I thought it was the worst movie I ever saw. I wasn’t scared at all, ever ... Haven’t you ever been in the woods at night, Bob?” I saw one report on the Internet that about 60 percent of viewers in one poll agreed with these dismal reviews ... On the other hand, count me into that frightened 40 percent. I thought the movie’s premise — as it says in the ads, “Three student film makers disappeared in the woods near Burkittesville, Maryland. One year later, their footage was found.” — was a simply brilliant judo move to turn bad film quality and inexperience into strengths, not weaknesses. You’re purportedly watching what three novices filmed as they stumbled around in the woods, getting increasingly lost and scared and cold and hungry and perhaps hunted by something inexplicable. I was at least tense and anxious, and often flat-out scared, throughout the entire thing. Of course, some kids early in the release cycle actually were so taken by the film’s cheap anarchic realism they thought it a record of real events. Co-directors Daniel Myrick and Eduardo

Sanchez will reassure you about that, at least. “Everything is fiction,” Myrick says. “The actors are fine. They have agents.” Now, that’s *truly* scary.

The Sixth Sense — Horror movies we’ve had with us since Méliès’ short *Le Manoir du diable* in 1896. But it’s rare to find one with a new idea about how to scare us. This — probably the best film of the summer; truly driven by character and ideas; more Hollywood but ultimately more successful even than *The Blair Witch Project* — has got at least one. You’ve probably heard it in the clips. Whenever 9-year-old Cole (Haley Joel Osment) talks to child psychologist Malcolm (Bruce Willis) about the ghosts only Cole can see or hear, he *whispers*. Like, “*You ever feel the prickly things on the back of your neck? And the tiny hairs on your arm, you know how they stand up? That’s them.*” This is brilliantly simple and effective. As is the ghosts’ disincorporate culture — the rules they haunt us by. Writer/director N. Night Shyamalan does some subtle tweaking here. For instance, it turns out ghosts don’t know they’re dead. They only see what they want to see ... and they all want Cole to *do* something. Willis nails his most restrained, intense performance ever. A trauma victim, he perversely suffers terrible guilt, in fact feels dead inside and helpless to prevent the death of his marriage. But he must help the kid, to make up for a past fatal mistake. A world away from her Aussie frump in *Muriel’s Wedding*, Toni Collette also does a beautiful job as the single mom whose son won’t open up about what’s bothering him. And Osment is a real find — the rare child actor who deserves that second word — as the kid gamely dog-paddling in a scary sea of ectoplasm. Speaking of promising young careers, Shyamalan’s first big feature, 1998’s *Wide Awake*, was seen by about five people. But he didn’t let failure haunt him, and *The Sixth Sense* instantly catalogs him as a fresh creative star ... At the end, you’ll be surprised how much this film affects you.

GOOD:

Dick — Think *All the President’s Men* meets *Clueless*. Although it’s not crisply

enough shot or written to get my vote over the latter, *Dick* still piles up poll points for a good story idea. Kirsten Dunst (of *Drop Dead Gorgeous*) and Michelle Williams (of TV's *Dawson's Creek*) star as two naive Washington, D. C., teenagers who in 1972 become President Nixon's Secret Youth Advisors. They witness and often precipitate key events in the Watergate scandal, without quite realizing what's going on. *Dick* is being marketed to teenagers. But I doubt they — unless they've rented *All the President's Men* for a Political Films Retrospective in Soc Stud 003 — will get all the jokes based on taped doorknobs, the initials of a re-election committee, or the tender conscience of a White House counsel. However, geezers should find it all even funnier this time around. Saul Rubinek is properly pompous as swinger/statesman Henry Kissinger. And there's a scathing fashion critique of journalists Woodward (Will Ferrell) and Bernstein (Bruce McCulloch): Bob's shirts feature windowpane checks big as picture windows, and Carl's twin obsessions are stealing scoops and fluffing his hair. But Dan Hedaya (the father in *Clueless*) gets most of the laughs with his darkly comic portrait of Richard Nixon, assuring his advisors he can hoodwink the girls because "I have a way with young people. They trust me." Or explaining away a frenzied shredding party: "Papier-mâché. It's a hobby of mine." But I like his subtle moments best, as when alone one evening and eating off a little tray, he spots on his TV screen the logo for *Love American Style*. Muttering: "Oh, it's starting," he's awkwardly galvanized.

Mystery Men — A great comic book flick (say, *Batman*; maybe *Barbarella* or *Spawn*) remembers that comics are, first, a visual medium of great imaginative impact. Like movies. A merely good comic book flick is like this one, about wannabe superheroes taking their shot at the big time. It resembles something I might have made myself: messy, lotsa dead spots, tons of trif sarcastic gag lines but not a single beautiful frame. Maybe the problem is too

many cool actors: William H. Macy, Janeane Garofalo, Ben Stiller, Geoffrey Rush, Greg Kinnear, Wes Studi, Hank Azaria, even Paul Reubens, Ricky Jay, Tom Waits. So they had to write too many neat lines and it kinda etiolated the visual poetry. Still, it's a fun romp. And the gags are *fondly* sarcastic, with real affection for dumb comics traditions. As when Macy's The Shoveler instructs Stiller's Mr. Furious why (Kinnear's) Captain Amazing's secret identity can't possibly be Lance Hunt the billionaire: "Lance Hunt wears glasses. Captain Amazing *doesn't* wear glasses." Or when Furious is eponymously pissed that his partners The Shoveler and the Blue Rajah (Azaria) can't stay up fighting crime past bedtime, and calls them "Lazy Boy and The Recliner!" The most well-done scene is the barbecue, which our threesome throws to attract fresh talent. Aided by Invisible Boy (Kel Mitchell) (who has a problem: "I can only become invisible when no one's watching"), they weed out everyone from The Waffler and Ballerina Man to the PMS Avenger (she shrills, "I only work 4 days a month. You got a problem with that?"). Until they finally find the great Garofalo as The Bowler. Whose disguise seems to be heavier eyeshadow, and who must avenge her father's murder so she can get back to grad school ...

And, for our ran-out-of-time-to-finish-the-review section, here are hints about more flicks I've seen.

DECENT:

Eyes Wide Shut
Bowfinger

BARELY DECENT:

The Haunting

Backchat

on APA: NESFA #350, July 1999

This is pathetic.

Again I've failed miserably to get to my sworn — and pleasurable — duty of replying to everybody's comments last APA. I've happily read them all, had good intentions ... but my so-called life has stolen every nanosecond of my time away.

Next month, people. Love to you all ... Please forgive me.