

ARCHAEOLOGY IN FICTION; *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*

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More than 15 years ago I stood before a group very similar to those assembled this evening to speak briefly on works of fiction – primarily mysteries and thrillers—that use archaeology as a backdrop or main focus of the story. I return this evening to up-date you on this burning issue.

Actually I'm going to approach this topic in a fairly serious way—if for no other reason than that reading these books has given me a great deal of pleasure over the years, and I'd like to share some of these pleasures with you. So by and large I'll be talking about books I've really liked, in the hopes that you might find one or two of them worthy of a relaxing read—whether it be in front of a crackling fireplace in winter, on a sandy beach in summer, or during a long airport layover.

To avoid simply listing a bunch of books that I've enjoyed reading, I've tried to establish some categories or sub-categories of archaeological fiction and thus give at least a semblance of order and thought to this presentation.

Therefore I'll begin our discussion with series books, or those that have a central character or protagonist who is the hero or heroine of the series. Very often these books will have a continuing cast of supporting characters, and sometimes even a continuity of plot.

Then I'll talk about some of the stand-alone novels I've enjoyed over the years—novels in which archaeology plays a major part in the storyline, more often than not there is an heroic protagonist, but alas! No sequel. I will finish with a few words about some real stinkers of the genre. I consider this to be the public service portion of my talk this evening. We live in a hurried and harried world and God knows none of us can find enough hours in the day to get all the things accomplished we must accomplish, much less those things we would merely like to accomplish. So if I can save any of you from wasting precious moments of your lives reading a truly dreadful novel that has hijacked archaeology as an element in its plot, I consider it my moral obligation to do so.

While some of the books we'll talk about can be categorized as horror tales, romances or adventure stories, most will be mystery fiction. Mysteries are big business in the book world, with even the New York Times Book Review including a "Crime" section and often one of the single largest areas of a book store will be the mystery section. Those of you who stalk the mystery shelves at book stores or libraries will have found in the last decade or two a rather singular manifestation: the proliferation of sub-genre or "interest group" mysteries. There

are mystery series for antique collectors, for knitters, for crossword puzzle fans, for tea lovers, for do-it-yourselfers, for dog lovers, for cat lovers, ad infinitum. But I believe that long before this recent trend in niche novels began, authors were using archaeology as a back-story for their plots. The attraction is evident: archaeologists are, in fact, time detectives, using scattered and often unrelated bits of evidence and clues to piece together the story of a band, a tribe or even an entire civilization. In addition, there has been, since the first antiquarian put spade to dirt, an undeniable romance to archaeology—long before Indiana Jones and Lara Croft—that has captured the public’s imagination. Therefore we have early examples of the genre represented by the likes of Louisa May Alcott and her short story, “Lost in the Pyramid, or the Mummy’s Curse,” written in 1869; Edgar Allan Poe’s “Some Words with a Mummy” from 1845; Mark Twain’s “The Majestic Sphinx,” from *Innocents Abroad* in 1869; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s “Lot No. 249,” published in 1892; Bram Stoker’s novelette, “The Jewel of Seven Stars,” from 1902; Sax Rohmer’s “The Death-Ring of Sneferu,” in 1918 (Rohmer was better known for his fictional creation of the evil Dr. Fu Manchu!); and Sir H. Rider Haggard’s “Smith and the Pharaohs,” in 1912. And some of Agatha Christie’s best-loved early mysteries, *Murder in Mesopotamia* and *Death on the Nile*—both Hercule Poirot novels—had archaeological themes. Of course, Agatha Christie knew her stuff when it came to archaeology – she had been married to British archaeologist Archie Mallowan, with whom she participated in several Middle East digs. But more on writers who actually know something about archaeology later.

So on to some of the archaeology series that I’ve discovered and grown very fond of over the years. I believe most readers and reviewers would place Elizabeth Peters’ Amelia Peabody novels at the top of the class. Peters is also a wonderful example of the aforementioned writer “who knows her stuff.” In real life, Elizabeth Peters is Egypt scholar Barbara Mertz, who also writes romance novels under the pen name of Barbara Michaels-- many of them with an archaeology theme. The Peabody series, soon to be seventeen in number, patterns the indomitable heroine after the remarkable Victorian-era adventuress, Amelia Edwards. The stories are subtle in plot, rich in the atmosphere of turn of the Twentieth Century Egypt, and stocked with colorful and literally unforgettable characters, not the least of whom must be numbered Amelia’s bombastic archaeologist/husband Emerson and their irrepressible son, Walter, better known throughout the series as Ramses.

I don’t especially want to present a “Bill Gresens’ Top Ten” archaeology mystery series, but if the Amelia Peabody’s *were* my #1 favorite, then the Gideon Oliver mysteries, authored by Aaron Elkins, would rank a close second. For over twenty years, Elkins has graced the mystery book shelves with eleven novels starring his “Skeleton Detective,” Gideon Oliver. The plots are unfailingly cunning—always playing to Gideon’s strength as an internationally renowned physical anthropologist; the characters are always engaging; and Aaron Elkins has a wonderfully puckish sense of humor. Once again, the author’s academic training

lends credibility to his writing—Elkins received a degree in anthropology from the University of Wisconsin—and not surprisingly, his hero, Gideon Oliver is a Badger Alum. Each of the novels is a delight to read, but I highly recommend his early entries, particularly *The Dark Place*, *Murder in the Queen's Armes*, and *Curses*. His more recent *Skeleton Dance* and *Good Blood* show an author still at the top of his game.

Lyn Hamilton's Lara McClintoch "Archaeology Mysteries" provide great reading for armchair travelers. While Lara is not an archaeologist, and few of the characters in the thus-far eight volume series are, the plots inevitably revolve around valuable archaeological artifacts, as one can deduce from some of her titles: *The Maltese Goddess*, *The Moche Warrior*, *The Etruscan Chimera*, *The Thai Amulet* and *The Magyar Venus*. Lara is a Canadian-based antique dealer, who often finds herself enmeshed in danger and mystery as she seeks out antiques for her shop or when she's leading archaeological tours to exotic ports of call. Once again, fiction and reality blend as Lyn Hamilton does in real life lead tours to archaeological sites described in her books—described, I might add, with a wonderful eye and sense of place. With each new volume, I find myself thinking, "Hmmm, I'd *really* like to go there someday!"

One of my favorite series featured the exploits of Penny Spring, a 50s-something New England born anthropologist (Ph.D. from Columbia) who is serving as a lecturer at Oxford, and her friend and companion Sir Toby Glendower, an Oxford-trained archaeologist and a few years older than Penny. Together the two bicker through twelve wonderful murder mysteries of the traditional "cozy" type. Beginning with *Exit Actors, Dying*, which takes place during a tour of ancient Greek sites in modern day Turkey, these little gems (they're mostly about 200 pages in length), take readers to France, Italy, and Scotland, among other European settings, as well as plots set in New England, Hawaii, and one particularly memorable escapade in New Orleans at Mardi Gras in *Death of a Voodoo Doll*. Author Margot Arnold's plots are not always the most complex or scintillating, but Penny and Toby quickly become comfortable old friends to the reader and her sense of local color and descriptions of exotic locales can once again be delightful for the armchair travelers among you. The last Penny and Toby novel – *The Midas Murders*—was published in 1995—perhaps Author Arnold has passed away or merely retired—but I do wish there would be another mystery or two that would bring these wonderful characters back together.

I'm going to link together two series,--both by authors from the UK, both with rather unique protagonists, and both of which employ a certain convention in common as their stories are introduced.

The first is the Arnold Landon series, written by Roy Lewis. Landon is an archaeologist who works for Northumberland Department of Museums and Antiquities—in other words, he's a bureaucrat. He has established a reputation as a very good archaeologist, not due to academic training or credentials, but as a

self-taught avocational expert in the field. As his name seems to imply, Arnold Landon is a rather quiet, self-effacing, perhaps even a bit of a boring professional, who, when faced with daunting and dangerous situations, finds the courage to rise to the occasion. The Arnold Landon series is a wonderful example of an author steadily growing surer of himself and improving book by book. I especially recommend some of the more recent entries in the series, among them *Bloodeagle, the Cross Bearer, the Shape-Shifter, and Headhunter*. Many of the Landon mysteries are introduced by an episode from the early history of the northeast of England that bears some relationship to the contemporary chicanery that Arnold confronts.

It is this convention of introducing the plot with a vignette from the past that, in my mind, links the Arnold Landon mysteries with the Wesley Peterson mysteries by Kate Ellis. In the first novel in this series, *The Merchant's House*, readers are introduced to Detective Sergeant – an academically trained amateur archaeologist—Wesley Peterson, who has recently transferred from the mean streets of London to the more bucolic environment of the South Devon coast. Wesley is quickly embroiled in some decidedly un-bucolic cases, including the case of a missing boy and the bludgeoned body of a young model. He also encounters Neil Watson, an old friend and classmate from college days and now an archaeologist for the County of Devon—similar to the position held by Arnold Landon in Northumberland. Neil and his crew are excavating a 17th Century merchant's house and come upon the skeleton of a newborn and adult, both apparently murdered some 400 years earlier. The strands of evidence and clues link these crimes that are separated by more than four centuries, and in subsequent novels Wesley and Neil often join forces to solve contemporary crime by learning lessons gleaned from the past. These fine mysteries are also deftly-drawn character studies as Wesley is a black policeman in a decidedly un-diverse South Devon, and he's married to a white Englishwoman who, before becoming romantically involved with Wesley, was at the very least worshipped from afar by Neil.

I would like to turn our attention to two new authors—the first has two novels now to her credit, and the second has one in print and a second due to hit the bookshelves this next summer.

Erin Hart is a talented young writer from the Twin Cities, a St. Olaf graduate, and the former communications director for the Minnesota Arts Board. First in *Haunted Ground* and then in *Lake of Sorrows*, her heroine Nora Gavin, an American-born (Minneapolis, in fact) pathologist teams up with Irish archaeologist and her sometime-lover, Cormac Maguire, to solve mysteries both ancient and contemporary that are indelibly linked to the land and mythology that is Ireland. Both books deal with the discovery of bog bodies—in *Haunted Ground* it is the head of a beautiful young red-headed woman dead for some 1,000 years; in *Lake of Sorrows* it is an Iron Age victim of the “triple death”—by garroting, throat-slitting and drowning—to appease the demands of ancient gods.

A second bog body is soon discovered nearby—garroted, throat slit, and drowned—and wearing a wristwatch!

These are two very good mysteries. The characters are complex, the plotting is carefully constructed, and Erin Hart's prose evokes the beautiful starkness of the Irish bog country and her ear for dialogue captures the rhythm of Irish speech.

Another new author that I'm very excited about is Mary Anna Evans. Her first novel, *Artifacts*, introduces us to her heroine, Faye Longchamp. Set in the panhandle of Florida, Faye is a young, attractive biracial woman who stubbornly clings to her metaphorically heritage by living in a deliberately run-down ancestral plantation mansion. To sustain her solitary existence, she works by day as a supervisor on a university-sponsored archaeological excavation and by night she is driven to pot hunting to make enough money to pay property taxes on the mansion. As if this were not enough stress in the life of one young woman, Faye is suddenly caught up in a deadly game of cat-and-mouse when the body of young woman, killed some forty years earlier, is discovered at the excavation and it quickly becomes apparent that the murderer is still alive and well and willing to kill again.

I look forward to the next Faye Longchamp mystery, to be entitled *Relics*, and I look forward to reading more of Mary Anna Evans marvelous prose style. She set the bar exceedingly high in her initial novel and I'm hoping she will exceed that in novels yet to come.

The next series I'd like to mention is quite different from any mentioned thus far. They are not mysteries and they do not (with one possible exception) have continuing characters. There is no official name for this series other than possible the "First Peoples" or the "People of..." series. It is at this time a 12-volume series, written by a husband and wife team, Kathleen O'Neal Gear and W. Michael Gear, both of whom are trained archaeologists. The books are fictionalized accounts of Native Americans living through the various epochs of pre-history. The plots evolve out of the myths, legends and life ways of prehistoric cultures, and are solidly based in the archaeological record. The series begins with *People of the Wolf*, and follows the migration of early peoples down through the Alaskan and into the Canadian Northwest during Paleo-Indian times between 13,000 and 10,000 BC. The leader of this small band of pioneers is Wolf Dreamer, a charismatic messiah figure, who returns in subsequent novels as a tribal memory, a quasi-mythical figure also called First Man. The series tells the tales of future prehistoric cultures, including Early Archaic bands in the Central Rockies and Great Plains, Archaic and Woodland peoples of the Northern Plains, upstate New York and the Great Lakes, and the Mississippian culture.

A spin-off of this series was a mini-series entitled the "Anasazi Mysteries," a wonderfully spooky trilogy written by the Gears between 1999 and 2001. It seamlessly integrates the story of modern archaeologists excavating a mass grave

at an Anasazi site in New Mexico, c. 1150 AD, with the story of the Anasazi band through their eyes, and explaining the mystery behind the burials being excavated almost 1,000 years later. It is a masterful example of great storytelling by the Gears, once again based on lessons from the archaeological record. The titles of the individual books of the trilogy are *The Visitant*, *the Summoning God*, and *Bonewalker*.

There are a number of series I won't have time to mention, but there are two final ones I'd like to mention briefly—for quite different reasons. The first is the Tempe Brennan series, written by best-selling author Kathy Reichs. Most of the series I've mentioned thus far, with the possible exception of Elizabeth Peters' Amelia Peabody series, are relatively unknown. Kathy Reichs' Tempe Brennan series has been a top seller since her first book, *Deja Dead*, was published in 1997. Dr. Temperance Brennan is a professor of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and moonlights as a consulting forensic anthropologist for the Laboratoire de Sciences Judiciaires et de Medecine Legale in Quebec. It is in this latter role that Tempe faces most of her challenges and quite often danger to her person. The plots are uneven, sometimes a little shaky but more often downright mesmerizing. But regardless of plotting, the forensic science is always described with great care and accuracy. And well it should, for Kathy Reichs is. In essence, writing about herself! Kathy Reichs is a professor of anthropology at UNC-Charlotte and she does consult for the same Quebec forensic laboratory—and she is also forensic anthropologist for the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the state of North Carolina. Make no mistake, she does know her stuff!

The last series I'd like to mention is light years away from the reality of Kathy Reichs. This is the Indiana Jones series, an opus of twelve volumes, written by three different authors between 1991 and 1999. They range from quite good, for example, *Peril at Delphi* and *Dance of the Giants* by Rob MacGregor to the downright awful *Indiana Jones and the Sky Pirates* by Martin Caidin. The series is only for die-hard Indy fans who want to know what happened to him between the time period of the last Young Indiana Jones Chronicle – a TV series that deserved a larger audience than it received—and *Temple of Doom*, the first movie (in chronological order—not movie release order) in the original film trilogy. You will learn absolutely nothing about archaeology from these books—Kathy Reichs novels they ain't—but they can be very much a guilty pleasure!

Now, as our time grows shorter, I would like to highlight a small number of stand-alone archaeology novels that I really like—and then a couple of real stinkers.

First, but in no particular order, is Aileen G. Baron's *A Fly Has a Hundred Eyes*, published in 2002. This atmospheric novel is set in 1938 Palestine, and in fact, it is the location, rather than the human characters, that is the main player in this tale of stolen artifacts, murder and international intrigue. Palestine in general and

Jerusalem in particular, provide the metaphorical nutrients required to grow shoots of hatred, violence, and suspicion among and between Jews, Arabs and Westerners.

Beat Not the Bones, by Charlotte Jay, was first published in 1952 and then re-issued by Soho Press in 2001. It was, in fact, the first recipient of the “Edgar” Best Novel award. The Edgar—named after Edgar Allen Poe --is among the highest awards for distinction in crime and mystery writing. The setting is Post World War II Papua-New Guinea and the novel follows the odyssey of a young widow, Stella Warwick, as she seeks answers to the mysterious death of her anthropologist husband, who has been studying the indigenous people of the island of Marapai. The death, officially reported as a suicide, is so out of character for her husband that Stella becomes obsessed in her search for the truth. This a wonderfully subtle novel that is part mystery, part psychological study and part a treatise on the impact of the terrible beauty of untamed jungle and its indigenous inhabitants on the psyche of Western man. This is a beautifully written book that will stay with the reader long after the last page has been read.

Beachcombing for a Shipwrecked God, by Joe Coomer, is the kind of book I would not have read had the back cover blurb not mentioned that Charlotte, the narrator of the story, is an archaeologist who “joins a local excavation to uncover an ancient graveyard.” The rest of the blurb describes the plot as follows: “Nine weeks after losing her husband, Charlotte escapes to a wooden motor yacht in New Hampshire, where her shipmates are an aging blue-haired widow, an emotional seventeen-year-old, and the ugliest dog in literature. A genuine bond develops among the three women, as their distinct personalities and paths cross and converge against a backdrop of emotional secrets, abuse, and the wages of old age.” Now, this is not the kind of blurb that will make me grab the book and race to the cash register to buy it, but if I had not read it, I would be the poorer for it. This is an absolutely wonderful book! I won’t go into great length about the plot, but suffice it to say that just when the cares of the world seem too overwhelming for these three women, they set off on a literal voyage of discovery that is alternately funny and heart-rendingly tragic, but always poignant and sensitive. Yes, it is a novel about the “triumph of the human spirit,” but it’s a damn good novel and the archaeology is pretty good and important to the plot-line development.

Romance novels – the genre that outsells all others by a gazillion to one, I think—have long used archaeology and archaeological settings as the back story for their bodice-ripping tales. Many of these are really pretty dreadful—not that I have anything against dreadful story-telling. After all, I’ve ready most all of the Indiana Jones books at least twice! But there are exceptions to the dreadful rule concerning romance novels with archaeology backdrops. Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels is certainly the best example of this exception. But a lesser-know writer, Susanna Kearsley, wrote a brief archaeological romance in 1999, entitled *The Shadowy Horses*. Her heroine, Verity Grey (what a great name

for a romance novel heroine!), is an archaeologist working on an excavation on the North Sea coast of Scotland. The encampment they're digging dates back to the time of the Roman occupation of Britain—it might possibly even be the encampment of the legendary Ninth Legion that mysteriously disappeared in the mists of time. This is a romance-- make no mistake about it-- as lengthy portions of the book deal with the tempestuous relationship between Verity and David Fortune, the darkly handsome broody boy archaeologist of uncertain parentage, who is obviously attracted to Verity for more than her skills with a trowel and skim shovel. But it's a darn good read, and the description of excavation procedures, including such high-tech device as ground-penetrating radar, makes me believe Susanna Kearsley did her homework before writing this little gem.

The last stand-alone novel I'd like to talk about – well, promote actually, because I really like this one—is a return to the swash-buckling Indiana Jones-type adventure novel that I really love. And I didn't want to leave the impression, especially after talking about *Beachcombing* and *Shadowy Horses*, that I had succumbed totally to my feminine side. In Paul Sussman's *The Lost Army of Cambyses*, we are introduced to Tara Mullray, a tough but vulnerable heroine who is seeking answers to the death of her archaeologist father at Saqqara, Egypt; Daniel Lacage, a daring young archaeologist and former lover of Tara's; and Inspector Yusuf Khalife of the Luxor police, who is hunting the murderers of a Cairo antiquities dealer and a suspected tomb raider from Luxor. The "Lost Army" of the title refers to a Persian legion of 5,000 soldiers that mysteriously disappeared in 523 BC when the mad king Cambyses sent them on a fools' journey into the desert wastes of ancient Egypt. The story takes off at break-neck speed and doesn't stop until the last page. It is obviously derivative of Indiana Jones, including the joining of former lovers on a hunt for buried treasure and Daniel's obsessive fear of snakes, but the denouement is most un-Indy-like, and makes for a great leisure-time read.

And now to wind up with a couple of real stinkers! Now that may sound a bit arrogant, especially since none of the books we've discussed this evening have been exactly runners-up to *War and Peace* or *The Sound and the Fury* as great works of literary art. And bear in mind that I have read these next few books—all the way to the end, so take all of this with a grain of salt. And remember that these next three guys (and they are all guys!) have made more money from writing these books than I've made talking about them here tonight!

So let's saddle up! First we have *The Lost Testament*, by Alan Gold. This is a thriller that takes up the theme used by quite a number of authors posing the question: What if the unearthing of new Dead Sea-type scrolls or other archaeological discoveries in the Holy Land cast a new and radical light on the teachings and life of Christ? This has been used to great effect by such talented writers as Piers Paul Read in *On the Third Day*, Lionel Davidson's *The Menorah Men*, or Richard ben Sapir's *The Body*. Unfortunately, Gold's not quite as good as these guys and he's given birth to a 600 page opus – it could be a good novel at

about 1/3 the length—that asks what would happen if a last will and testament of Jesus were discovered—a document that would define His understanding of his teachings? This is a great premise for a novel and rather than using a literary scalpel to seek out possible answers, he uses a sledge hammer. His characters are one-dimensional stereotypes and his treatment of the responses to such a discovery by representatives of various organized religions? Well, to say they were one-dimensional would be unwarranted praise.

Next on my bookshelf of shame (or pain) is Bentley Little's *the Return*. This is probably the only archaeology fiction I've ever read that made me angry. Not because it was depraved or unduly pornographic, but because it seemed to promise so much and delivered so very little. The hours spent reading this turkey can never be recovered! But I read it through to the end—sort of like watching two trains approaching head on the same track. You know this will end very badly, but you can't avert your eyes. The premise, while not original, was interesting: yet another theory on the "mysterious disappearance" of the Anasazi. In reality they've only disappeared if you refuse to acknowledge the existence of the Navajos or Hopi—or have never read a Tony Hillerman mystery! But I digress. The hero, a computer nerd who has an early mid-life crisis, hits the road and joins an archaeology excavation crew as a shovel bum close to Springerville, New Mexico. It turns out that Springerville is built on a sort of hellmouth that spews forth various phantasmagorias that somehow explains the fate of the Anasazi. Civilization as we know it, or at least civilization as we know it in Springerville, is endangered and our hero sets off to save the world and find meaning to his otherwise meaningless life—all the while remaining the complete doofus he was on page 1. It gets a little murky at times as to what is actually happening, and I think it best to let the author speak directly to you from page 21:

Vince told the rest of the story. He explained how his nephew had seen something outside the window of his bedroom after returning from the scout ranch and had drawn a picture of it; how one friend's cat turned strange and spooky; how another friend's dog had killed a neighbor; how people and animals had started disappearing into the ruins... and then what had happened today: missing people, the monster in the bedroom, dust devils with his own parents' faces, ceramic carrots that looked like the dust devils.

Missing people, spooky cats, even monsters in the bedroom I could handle. But I drew the line at the ceramic carrots!

And now the last among the least. Gary Goshgarian's *The Stone Circle*, which tells the tale of archaeologist Peter Van Zandt, recently widowed archaeologist, who is trying to live down a reputation for getting involved in fringy archaeology projects. He is hired to direct a major cultural resource management project on Kingdom Head Island, a mythical piece of real estate in Boston Harbor. This

could be the project that rescues his professional reputation and gives him a reason to continue living, given the tragic loss of his wife. Despite hostility from the construction crews building a major casino/hotel complex on the island, Peter and his ragtag crew of Earthwatch volunteers discover three large stones in a circular pattern—a totally anomalous array of artifacts for the area. The discovery of the stones set off a weird progression of occurrences, including Peter's recurring nightmares of witch trials and witch burnings, a runaway backhoe that nearly kills his young son Andy, visions of his deceased wife morphing into a burning witch. Now all this actually sounds pretty cool—this ought to be the makings of a good beach read. But unfortunately, Gary Goshgarian cannot write for sour apples! His similes, metaphors, and other figures of speech simply hit the printed page with a painful *thunk!* As I did with Bentley Little's *The Return*, I will let the author speak (or write) for himself. He writes of "feeling the perspiration lubricating his joints," and there's lots of "humming" going on, as in "the dream had hooked him, and he was humming with curiosity about where it was going," and "He did not believe in karma, but the moment started humming with rightness." On page 67, he writes of "The cold feather (of fear) brushed across the base of Peter's skull." Unfortunately, the "cold feather" simile reappears several more times during the course of the study. Later we read that "Someplace in the center of his brain a node opened. And the thought pistoled out..." Now this may appear as if I'm unfairly piling on Mr. Goshgarian, but I will note one more bit of deathless prose to demonstrate what I had to endure for nearly 300 pages. On page 143, we read that "An electric rocket shot up from his testes and exploded in his head.(!)." It should be obvious by now that reviewing these books is not for the faint of heart!

And with that, I will wind up this little jog through the landscape of archaeological fiction—my God! I'm starting to talk like Gary Goshgarian writes! I hope you've enjoyed the trip and now we have a few minutes for questions or observations—as long as they're not critical of the reviewer!