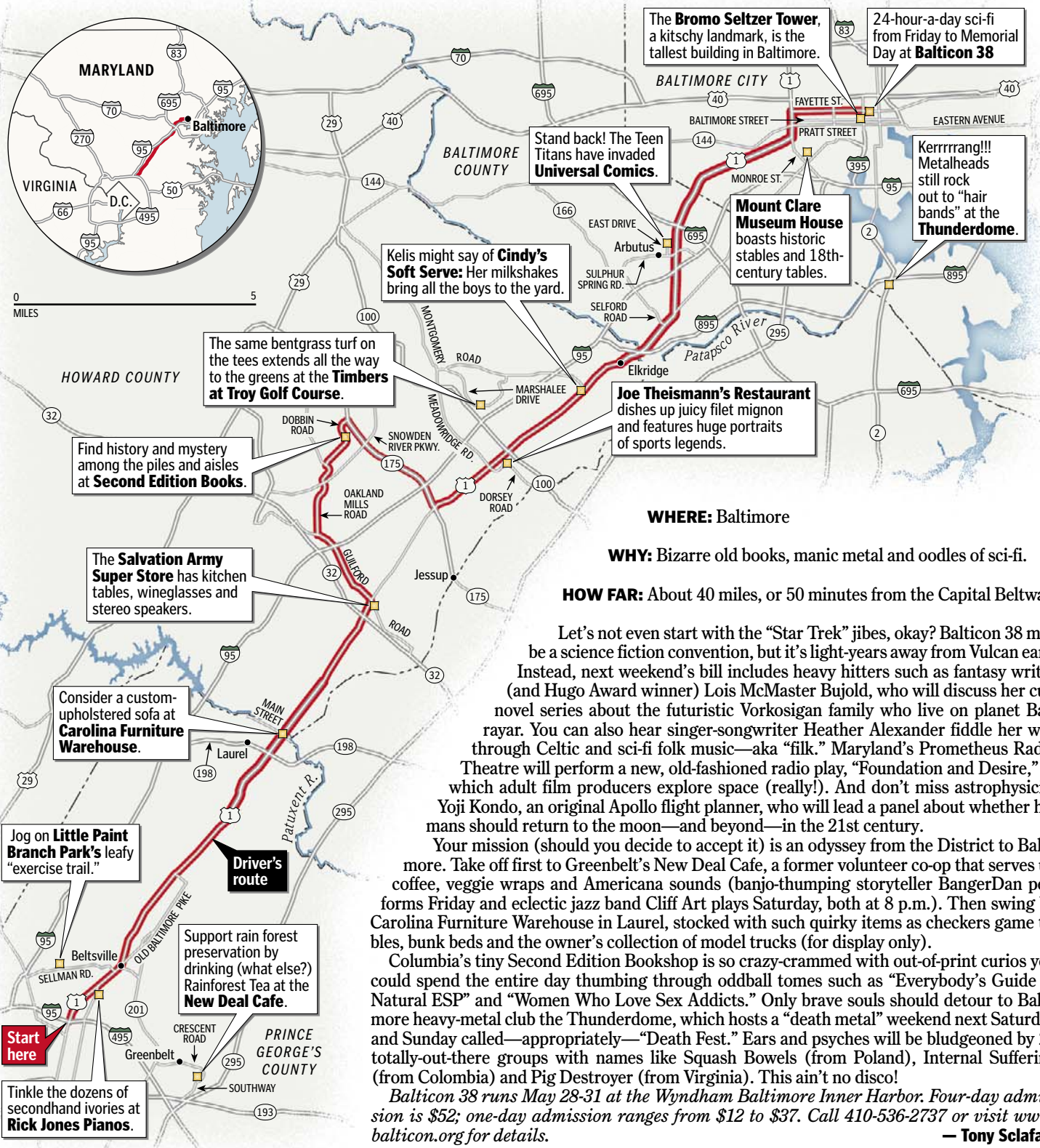
ROADTRIP | Sci-Fi Confab: Balticon 38



WHERE: Baltimore

WHY: Bizarre old books, manic metal and oodles of sci-fi.

HOW FAR: About 40 miles, or 50 minutes from the Capital Beltway.

Let's not even start with the "Star Trek" jibes, okay? Balticon 38 may be a science fiction convention, but it's light-years away from Vulcan ears. Instead, next weekend's bill includes heavy hitters such as fantasy writer (and Hugo Award winner) Lois McMaster Bujold, who will discuss her cult novel series about the futuristic Vorkosigan family who live on planet Barrayar. You can also hear singer-songwriter Heather Alexander fiddle her way through Celtic and sci-fi folk music—aka "filk." Maryland's Prometheus Radio Theatre will perform a new, old-fashioned radio play, "Foundation and Desire," in which adult film producers explore space (really!). And don't miss astrophysicist Yoji Kondo, an original Apollo flight planner, who will lead a panel about whether humans should return to the moon—and beyond—in the 21st century.

Your mission (should you decide to accept it) is an odyssey from the District to Baltimore. Take off first to Greenbelt's New Deal Cafe, a former volunteer co-op that serves up coffee, veggie wraps and Americana sounds (banjo-thumping storyteller BangerDan performs Friday and eclectic jazz band Cliff Art plays Saturday, both at 8 p.m.). Then swing by Carolina Furniture Warehouse in Laurel, stocked with such quirky items as checkers game tables, bunk beds and the owner's collection of model trucks (for display only).

Columbia's tiny Second Edition Bookshop is so crazy-crammed with out-of-print curios you could spend the entire day thumbing through oddball tomes such as "Everybody's Guide to Natural ESP" and "Women Who Love Sex Addicts." Only brave souls should detour to Baltimore heavy-metal club the Thunderdome, which hosts a "death metal" weekend next Saturday and Sunday called—appropriately—"Death Fest." Ears and psyches will be bludgeoned by 28 totally-out-there groups with names like Squash Bowels (from Poland), Internal Suffering (from Colombia) and Pig Destroyer (from Virginia). This ain't no disco!

Balticon 38 runs May 28-31 at the Wyndham Baltimore Inner Harbor. Four-day admission is $52; one-day admission ranges from $12 to $37. Call 410-536-2737 or visit www.balticon.org for details.

— Tony Sclafani

Road Trip maps are available online at **www.washingtonpost.com/roadtrip**, as are addresses and hours of operation (be sure to check before you go). Have an idea for a trip? E-mail **roadtrip@washpost.com**.

BY JEROME COOKSON FOR THE WASHINGTON POST