

The Devniad, Book 4

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Ten Reasons Why Toronto Is the City of the Future.

My wife Maureen and I just came back from a 9-day vacation in Canada. Stayed several nights each in Niagara Falls and Toronto, plus one night in Kingston below the St. Lawrence.

Maybe it's just that I don't get out much. But it seemed to me that Toronto has a real feel of tomorrow about it. So I thought I'd explore why and how.

Besides, this is a convenient science fiction bag to slip over the ugly head of "What I Did On My Vacation, Folks."

1. They've got the restaurant of the future.

Considering the hearty appetite of the average NESFan, I'm going for the jugular right off the bat. Or the gullet.

We loved every Canadian meal we had, compared to gagging down the sludge they slop to captive crowds at pit stops on the New York Thruway. But the Toronto restaurant we most want to start a trend is Marché.

It's in the BCE Place office complex downtown, off a glorious, soaring, white-metal-and-glass six-story atrium.

If you're a neo, the hostess explains the restaurant's "free-flow" system at the door. Basically, Marché is the Food Court of the Gods.

Inside is a big, low-ceilinged space with the pleasingly complex look of a European market. Plants and food and merchandise hang from every wall, column, and ceiling. You wander dazed and happy in serpentine paths among wagons and bars and stands, with

smiling people standing behind each station ready to customize your meal.

At breakfast time, they make to order everything from omelets to fruit to Rosti (a Nordic potato frittata) to espresso. Everything is first quality, and absolutely fresh. The whole place is clean but not plastic or antiseptic.

Once your wooden tray is piled high enough for a first course, you bear it slaving to your table. You reserved this personally on the way in, with a tent card they gave you that says "HEY, THIS IS MY TABLE." It explains you're browsing in the market and will be back soon. (This innovation alone deserves the Nobel Convenience Prize. Or maybe someday a special-category Hugo?)

We chose a table on the sunlit atrium patio by the entrance. But scattered around are also a French country dining room, a bierstube, and so on. Did I mention the men's room walls are decorated with soft-core French postcards from the 19th century? I tell you, they think of everything.

You can make multiple trips back into the market unmolested; just present your card and pay on the way out the door when you're done. We had breakfast for two for a mere \$40. If that seems a little high, consider the exchange rate, taxes, and that Maureen liked her giant coffee cup so much she bought it. Besides, you didn't see what we ate.

Mövenpick, the Swiss restaurant chain behind Marché, runs several other good but conventional places in Toronto. They're opening another Marché in Ottawa. Worldcon selection committee, hope you're taking notes.

Personally, I shall not rest until they open up in the Emerald Square Mall, North Attleboro.

2. They have a museum named after a computer component.

It's called ROM. Pretty techno-trendy, eh?

Actually, it's the Royal Ontario Museum, and has nothing particularly to do with computers. Instead, it combines extensive art, archaeology, and life sciences collections.

So we saw a Koran dripping with gold. A replica Jamaican cave with 4,000 glued-on fake bats. A proposal by a curator to remotely probe the bottom of Loch Ness for skeletons of large unknown animals. A black lady's riding habit called in French an "amazon." A 3,000-year-old naturally mummified Egyptian craftsman who died routinely at age 19 of three different internal parasites plus cooking fire pollution. And a 19th-century Ottoman living room, complete with, yes, an ottoman.

3. They're so multicultural it's like the bar in Star Wars.

Except with an all-human cast this time.

I could be wrong, but I'd say we witnessed a more even -- and even-tempered -- admixture of ethnics than I've seen in Boston, New York, St. Louis, or San Francisco. And they couldn't all be fellow tourists. I understand that in recent years Canada has allowed more legal immigration than the U.S., and it shows.

More French talking heads than a Rohmer film. More Germans than the beach on Majorca. Even -- believe it or not -- more Asians than MIT.

The sign in the window of a small bank branch out towards the suburbs said they'd be pleased to take your

money in Cantonese, English, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Mandarin, Portuguese, or Spanish. When I inquired of the exotic beauty clerking in a government-run Native People's craft store if she were herself Inuit, she said no, Bengali-Chinese. And when I asked some Torontonians where they were from originally, answers ranged from Ontario to Brisbane to Cremona to Kampala.

Yet everybody seemed to get along fine. The vibes were good. Boston -- and Bosnia -- could do with a lot more of this spirit.

4. They keep their sense of "humour."

Example: among all the vigorous figures of industry and commerce marching in a frieze around the second story of an office building downtown, look carefully. You'll notice that the artist has carved the Banker with his hand in the pocket of the Working Man.

Another: the Canadian dollar bill has been all but supplanted by a coin that on one side bears a nice rendition of an important native fauna, the loon. The coin's universally used nickname: the "loonie."

However, when a merchant was making change and wanted me to help, asking if I had a loonie -- and I, King of Comedy, pointed to Maureen -- the lady behind the counter just smiled wearily. If she only had a loonie for every time she's heard that one...

5. They're metric.

Canada is not a place for Americans who are the least bit numerically challenged. (Next time, I bring a calculator.) Between highway distances, temperatures on the weather channel, currency exchange rates, and 8 percent General Service Tax refund potentials (for tourists only, on certain expenses only), we spent much time staring

blankly into space while surreptitiously wiggling fingers and toes. But in this matter, it's simply that they measure up to the future -- and we don't.

6. They're secretly way ahead in genetic engineering.

All the squirrels are black. OK, it's not obvious why you'd select for that. But also, I deduce that all their pets must have cunningly altered digestive tracts. Proof: we didn't see a single pile of doggie doo in the entire city. (Although could it be that we just didn't recognize it in reengineered form? The ice cream *did* taste funny.)

And here's the real clincher. All the service people who wait on you are -- ready for this? Friendly and helpful.

7. They think big.

Humanity isn't exactly shrinking, so an ability to integrate the large scale is necessary for a city that looks ahead.

Toronto has 3.8 million people, compared to the Boston Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area with 2.8 million. But I'd say they do a similarly good job up there of keeping the city manageable with bite-sized 'hoods, etc. It's not by any means LA-on-the-Lake.

So what do they have that we haven't got which is truly big-time? The CN Tower.

Maureen and I are now members of an exclusive club (only a few jillion tourists per year) who have enjoyed a drink in the bar, then stood upon the topmost observation deck of this, the world's tallest freestanding structure.

Maureen is a member of an even choosier club, those who have walked out onto the newest attraction up there. It's a Glass Floor in one section of the world's highest public observation gallery, 1,465 feet above the ground.

And I'm a member of perhaps the most exclusive club of all: those who have actually opened their eyes and *looked down* while walking out onto etc.

The tower's antenna mast tops out at 1,815 feet. Word is the Japanese have a taller anthill in the works. So the Canadians are scheming to add an attic or something. Stay tuned.

8. They've gone underground.

There's a whole subterranean city up there, linking subway stations to shopping malls to entertainment venues. They say you can eat, sleep, dance, shop, and go to the theater without donning a coat. My guess: this may have something to do with winter, which we did not experience. But when the glaciers return, Toronto's up for it.

9. They realize that all life is a quest for moisture.

Toronto handles water well.

First example: we drank out of several *working, public* water fountains.

Second example: the Islands.

You catch a nice little two-decker ferry from a lakeside dock (right in front of our hotel, the Harbour Castle Westin.) A 12-minute ride takes you across the water to one of the most unpretentiously magnificent "urban" spaces I've ever experienced.

There's a crescent of islands arcing across from the center of the downtown lakefront. The islands in the middle are a public park. With piers and restaurants, playgrounds and small amusement parks, trees, lawns, flowers, walkways, bike paths, footbridges, boardwalks, lagoons, fountains...and all else that pleaseth the soul.

As Mark Olson would say, highly recommended.

10. They can get there from here.

The whole transit system is clean, fast, efficient, and safe. If that's not science fiction, what is?

Listen to this: once *I used a clean, safe subway station bathroom*. I'm not sure Clarke even had those in Diaspar.

In many respects, Toronto is becoming the way we hoped the future would be. You remember, when we all worshipped Progress.

Clean. Friendly. Efficient. Safe -- maybe even safe enough to be a little dull.

Great Ghu, the town ballfield even has a retractable dome!

A livable city. What a concept.

And Ten Things to Work On.

I don't want to say that Toronto and Canada -- at least based on our tiny slice of experience -- don't have their old-fashioned, dark, or downright weird sides. So here are just about the only reservations we had:

1. Nonsmokers often get the worst seats, sometimes separated from smoking sections only by imaginary lines.

2. They name things funny. Like the major Toronto thoroughfare named Avenue Road. (Which might make a good address for Calvin Trillin's least favorite restaurant, The La Maison de la Casa House.) Or Yonge Street.

Pronounced, of course, as in *The Yonge and the Restless*. And I'd be embarrassed to tell you the rhyme I used to remember how to say "Spadina" Road.

3. There are several magazines on the racks devoted exclusively to coverage of British royals and aristocracy. *Favorable* coverage.

4. I like slang dictionaries, and own a number for English English, American English, and various national, regional, and occupational subvarieties, plus

several slang phrase books for other languages. But though I dragged Maureen to seven general and specialty book shops -- including The World's Biggest Bookstore, a downtown branch of the Coles chain -- I could not find a single book on Canadian language or slang. The Albert Britnell shop *thinks* there's one, and will try to order it for me. Not much linguistic pride up there, eh?

5. Again, their ice cream doesn't quite make it.

6. In a related development, and despite their vaunted bilingualism, nobody knows what a frappe is.

7. The historic Niagara-on-the-Lake homestead of perhaps the most famous Canadian heroine, Laura Secord -- who overheard advance details of a dastardly American attack and trudged through snowdrifts to warn the British in the War of 1812 -- seems to be run by a company that makes the Canadian equivalent of Fanny Farmer candy. Reason: the company's big brand name is Laura Secord Chocolates. So the gift shop whence you repair after your tour of the historic house contains approximately 9,000 boxes of candy -- plus, in a cobwebbed corner, four measly typewritten sheets of historic information on Laura and her times. Info copied almost verbatim from the plaques displayed outside the house.

The chocolate-covered cherries are quite delicious, though.

8. One of the most popular tourist spots in Toronto -- Casa Loma, a kind of Babbitt Gormenghast built by an eccentric millionaire -- closes at 4:00 in the afternoon on weekdays. Not 5:00, like any decent attraction. We know this because we arrived at 4:00:01.

Did I mention that, by the route we took, Casa Loma stands at the top of one of the tallest hills overlooking the city, a

hill climbed by an agonizingly endless ziggurat of steps that Albert Speer might have regarded as a tad overdone? Did I mention that this was the hottest afternoon of our trip? Did I mention that *I'm* the one who didn't feel I had to check every fiddling little fact in the guidebook in advance because nothing ever closes before 5:00?

Let the record show that Queen Maureen was not amused.

9. Southern Ontario dips down lower into the U.S. than any other part of Canada. So, naturally, this area was known in the old days -- and is often referred to in historical sketches and plaques -- as...Upper Canada.

A tour guide finally explained to me that they meant it was *up* the St. Lawrence River from the original French settlements near the Atlantic coast. Which I guess squelches a theory I had begun to develop involving a Lost Colony from the Bizarro World...

10. They like hockey. A lot.

Backchat

on recent APA:NESFAs
(#298/299/300, March/April/May, 1995)

To all

I get distracted for a few months with work, taxes, jury duty, a car crash, vacation, so on, and you all stage a veritable mini-Renaissance of zinehood. I'll try to react to the high points.

To Ray Bowie

You mentioned *The Longest Day*, most beloved war movie of my youth. Can still whistle the theme song. How about the later, less-appreciated-but-better *A Bridge Too Far* -- even stronger cast, tighter story, not-so-happy ending.

To Tom Endrey and Monty Wells

It's always enjoyable when folks in the APA write about their jobs, families, homes in addition to all the usual stuff about books, movies, club biz. Give you a warm little window into their lives. After all, the main points of interest on many of our personal space voyages will probably continue to be things like daughters, neighbors, vet bills, apartments, and beloved old cars....

To Lisa Hertel

Let me be the last to say the Bajoran Bunny cover (in March already) was great. The best cover I've seen in all my years (well, weeks) of reading the APA. It made me very hoppy.

To Ken Knabbe

The art you chose *did* zing up my PB piece; thanks, O Emir of Editors. Regarding taking stuff out: as someone said about *My 4½ Years of Struggle Against Lies, Stupidity, and Cowardice* (original title for *Mein Kampf* [*My Struggle*]), "Everybody needs an editor."

About your new job in Franklin, here's hoping you get that daytime position. My theory is Bruce Wayne just worked nights a little too long, and look what happened to him....

The Franklin Zoetrope in the center of town is a big, dirty, wonderful revival moviehouse. Will your schedule fit in a flick sometimes before work?

To Tony Lewis

An upcoming Bujold, Leinster, Kornbluth, a complete Lensmen, *Silverlock* -- if there's a God of Science Fiction, surely everyone associated with NESFA Press is going straight to heaven.

To Ed Meyer

Are APAs called zines? As a veteran neo, I don't know, either. Plus in the Instant Message, what does "MSP" mean? Expiring minds want to know.

An hour's worth of effort per APA page seems low for me. I know, it may not look it. But remember what Vonnegut said of writing: that it "allows mediocre people who are patient and industrious to revise their stupidity, to edit themselves into something like intelligence." Words to live by, I say. Says I? I believe? Words I live by?

Nature break

Hey, Maureen just pointed out a big bird with black-streaked brown back, red nape crescent, and black chest patch, hopping around eating ants in the backyard. The invaluable Mr. Peterson informs that it's a Common Yellow-Shafted Flicker. Don't know what's so common about it -- it's the first ever noticed in our demesne.

Well, that's about the extent of my links this week to the great beating heart of nature all aroundst me. Note: try to get out more.

To Mark Olson

You're right, the Jane Chords in my March piece weren't randomly selected. As I said, sometimes the result is gibberish. See August *Proper Bostonian* for an expanded discussion.

Yes, I've been a fan of Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin series for some years. I'm sipping it slowly; have finished 13 books, now 4 to go counting the newest, *The Commodore*. I love Forester too, but think they're oceans apart. O'Brian is clearly trying for literature, and I think succeeding. As if Jane Austen's seagoing brother had retired to write stories with adventure, comedy, and the family gift for observation of character and society.

Sought out Dean King's *A Sea of Words*, which Jim Mann put you onto. Had a delightful surprise when I found the Royal Navy Napoleonic Era essays and glossaries you described, but all specifically tied into the O'Brian books! Many thanks to you both. More thanks, Mark, for starting my brother Michael on Weber's Honor Harrington books last Boskone. Now I'm on 'er as well.

To Joe Ross

Why do I recall some faint link between Tom Corbett and Heinlein? Was he a consultant? I never saw the TV show, but treasured the books.

Your Quotes Without Comment section was terrific, as ever.

To Robin Trei

I wallowed in all your comments about the piggy joys of bibliophilia.

Not that I suffer from this dread psychosis. I just buy and hoard books. My wife Maureen, a nonreader with a tiny, desperately overstuffed house, does all the suffering.

To Leslie Turek

I don't watch any SF TV, now that *Prisoners of Gravity* is gone. I'm not snobbish, just slothful. If I could watch one current series, which would you recommend? Anyone else care to comment?