

# The Devniad, Book 9

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## Signing Bonus.

To attend a book signing or other personal appearance by a favorite author is to ignore the really quite profound advice of the Great and Powerful Oz: "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain."

Because unlike what we are told about this dynamic Godwise, in writing it's quite possible for the creation to surpass the creator. In fact, it's what any decent creator strives for.

So a signing is a chancy thing for all concerned. The reader hopes the writer won't have bad breath and as a bonus will exchange a few intelligent words with him. The experienced writer knows better than to hold his readers to standards that high, but prays that at least a few warm bodies will show and that the police will not have to be summoned at any time.

In direct contradiction to all the above, there was the November 11 signing by Joe Haldeman and Alexander Jablovkov at Pandemonium off Harvard Square. Amazingly enough, I'd say a good time was had by all.

Attendance during my stay -- the first 45 minutes of a 2-hour event -- was somewhat light, and Jablovkov arrived late. So I got to hang around chatting with Joe Haldeman and his wife Gay.

They're famous for not being too stuck up to enjoy the company of fans. For still being fans themselves.

It's fun to watch them together. She's his portable memory bank. "Honey, what's the name of that guy in Virginia,

the fan who did *The New Newport News News?*" [Ned Brooks].

Also a good raconteur in her own right. Gay Haldeman told a story about attending a secret speech at her college by Salman Rushdie, and about the Secret Service's (almost) flawless plan to have Rushdie arrive beforehand without attracting attention: the limo sped noiselessly up to her department chairman's driveway, they raised the garage door by remote control, purred smoothly and covertly inside, the door quietly glided down behind them -- until, that is, it crashed onto the back of the stretched-out limo, which stuck a full three feet out into the driveway.

The Haldemans mentioned with quiet pride that they'd been married 30 years. As far as record SF marriages go, I wonder if they have L. Sprague and Catherine deCamp looking nervously over their shoulders?

Half the time, you can hardly see Joe Haldeman's eyes, because they're narrowed to slits by his smile.

But you can't shake the knowledge that this guy has carved out some of the true monuments in the field. From *The Forever War* to his great *Worlds* trilogy, I think Haldeman's work deserves even more acclaim than it's received.

What's a tad intimidating when you meet him, friendly as he is, is your memory of the tough mind, unblinking vision, and level, fearless voice that comes across in his prose and poetry.

Maybe it's his degree in astronomy and physics, his teaching post at MIT, and the effortless way he can reach back

into a wide store of professional and other kinds of knowledge.

Maybe it's Vietnam. He went, served, was seriously wounded, came back. War is not always Haldeman's subject, but he knows the nature and uses of conflict in a way that must be very helpful to a writer.

Like that other authentic heir of Hemingway, Tom McGuane, Joe Haldeman seems like a man who's done hard things in unforgiving places with great skill. Other things than just setting words on paper.

All this probably intensified the extremes of my fan-at-a-book-signing style. You know the formula, don't you? Cycle from babbling, content-free logorrhea to shyly paralyzed catatonia in a 3-minute span. Repeat frenziedly until led away or forcibly ejected.

Don't know how writers stand it.

Maybe there's a class at Clarion on it (must ask Michael Burstein). Because the Haldemans and Jablovok were all patience and goodwill personified.

We talked of "Seasons," Haldeman's ferocious novella about a human xenology team hunted across an alien landscape by the intelligent predators they came to study.

Haldeman said that when "Seasons" came out, literary SF writer Gene Wolfe wrote him a letter. Since he thinks highly of Wolfe, it pained him when Wolfe said the novella offended him when he first read it.

Then Wolfe reread it, liked it more.

Tyler Stewart, the owner of Pandemonium, asked what part of the story put Wolfe off in the first place?

I said, "The *eating* parts."

Because the story also offended me, at a basic level as a human being. Same way that *Jaws* did. Hey, I'm supposed to

be on top of the food chain here! Suddenly I'm a prey animal? "Seasons" is a punch in the face. (In a good way.)

Haldeman said that "Seasons" has been optioned for a movie -- but that this means nothing, of course.

He'd love to do the script, he said. Told the Hollywood people he'd done other movies. (I heard him talk on another occasion about a movie script he'd done once: *Robot Jox*. A fun project, but not exactly a critical success. And then there was the time Steven Spielberg fired him off *Poltergeist*...But Haldeman is nothing is not game.) Anyway, he knows they usually don't like to have the author do the script.

"Unless you're Steven King," he noted wryly.

Not sure if he knows King personally. But *Dealing in Futures*, a great Haldeman short fiction collection that includes "Seasons" and "A !Tangled Web," has a handsome blurb from the It Boy himself:

"Haldeman is the only writer of science fiction I've felt really comfortable with since the heyday of Robert A. Heinlein."

Well said, sire!

Haldeman commented that he doesn't do much short fiction. About a book's worth every ten years. Has two collections now: first *Infinite Dreams* (1978), then *Dealing in Futures* (1985).

Good news! His third collection is due next year. Will have several award-winners -- I think two Hugos, a Nebula, a World Fantasy. But who's counting?

Since we were on the subject of his short stuff, I told him how much I loved "A !Tangled Web."

It's the one about an interstellar translator trying to outbid a rival in a

land deal on a distant planet. The natives have elaborate business protocols and courtesy forms you must observe while negotiating -- including an apology formula in which you describe, as imaginatively as possible, the catastrophic consequences of your own hypothetical death from shame.

Example: "I die. I breathe in and breathe in and forget to exhale. I explode all over my friends. They forget my name and pretend it is dung. They wash off in the square and the well becomes polluted. All die. O the embarrassment."

Haldeman said he liked the story a lot too, had fun doing it. More good news: he's thought of doing several more stories about that guy.

He also told a wonderful side-anecdote. It seems that strangely enough, after "A Tangled Web" was accepted for *Analog*, the story ran but the check never came. So Haldeman finally sent a polite note of reminder to Stan Schmidt, the editor.

Turns out there had been some clerical mix-up; Schmidt had simply forgotten to have the payment made. He promptly sent Haldeman a check along with a ten-page note which began, "I die. I fall off the Empire State Building," etc., etc.

I still wasn't being elbowed aside by throngs of rabid fans at this point. Occasionally there would be three or four of us gathered around the little table, schmoozing while we pushed our backs up against bookcases to let less gabby customers squeeze by. But the crowds certainly weren't overwhelming. (Where were you all?)

So I decided to push my luck and stay longer. But not push it so far as to relate the story about book signing popularity that fantasist/funnyman

Terry Pratchett told an audience during ConFranciso in 1993.

However, I can tell it now...

Pratchett had once been part of a three-author signing with fellow British humorist Douglas Adams -- then at the peak of his *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* fame -- and the perhaps lesser-known American SF author and TV scriptwriter George R.R. Martin.

By the time the event officially began, the lines stacked up waiting for Pratchett to sign books were already large. For Adams, galactic.

For Martin, nonexistent.

Since Martin was seated next to Adams, most people seemed to assume he was Adams's chauffeur, and gave him extra *Hitchhiker's Guides* to hold.

Seeing Martin's plight, a concerned book signing functionary decided to intervene. And promptly betripled the poor bastard's agony.

Acquiring a bullhorn, this well-meaning boob strutted around bellowing, "NO WAITING FOR GEORGE R.R. MARTIN! NO WAITING FOR GEORGE R.R. MARTIN!"

Elizabeth Carey showed up at the signing around this point, and ended up staying longer than I did, talking to both the Haldemans and Jablovok.

When I was trying to decide what to buy as my first Jablovok novel, she steered me firmly to *Carve the Sky*. And since the Haldemans had not long ago been to Paris attending a Hemingway and Faulkner conference, she discussed her recent business trip there (again, tough duty, Elizabeth!), and they all heaved reminiscent sighs about the joys of French cuisine. (I've been to Au Bon Pain -- does that count?)

We talked about fanzines. I had just come up for air after weeks of reading

googol pages of fanspeak -- my first real encounter with the zine beast, purposed by having to write a fanzine review column for the December *Proper Boskonian* (NOTICE: UNPAID ADVERTISEMENT) -- and I was full of it. The fanzine experience, I mean.

Haldeman said he liked fanzines, but the only one he still finds time to read is *Ansible*. Plus the two prozines (presumably *Locus* and *SF Chronicle*). Oh, and the *New York Review of Science Fiction*. (This was gratifying to hear, since I read all these too.)

Had I ever seen any of Mike Glicksohn's fanzines? No, but I had heard the name.

Yes, well some years ago Glicksohn was doing some wild ones. Would bind in all these weird things from different places. Save them up until he had 150, enough for the mailing list. Bus tickets from different cities, or from different sporting events. His own unique little constructs, like performance art on paper. Great stuff, saith Haldeman.

Jablokov and I discussed the anthology *Future Boston*. I mentioned his dining hall rules story, and the one about Caius the builder early in the volume. He said it had been tough getting it ("Nomads") in because it was one of the few stories there that didn't really have any overt science fiction.

Apparently, every story in *Future Boston* represented a political struggle among the contributors. It wasn't as though editor David Alexander Smith had the final word.

**Everybody** had the final word.

Definitely no sequel planned or likely. Because the book just didn't sell that well, except in -- you guessed it.

At this point, Haldeman suggested that Jablokov hook up an algorithm to delete "Boston" and other geographic

details wherever they appear, and insert the names of some other city, any city you want, to guarantee local sales. *Future Akron*, at the touch of a macro.

We talked about a hot new picture book, John Clute's *Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Tyler didn't have a copy. But both authors were interested. Jablokov told Haldeman he should seek it out because he probably had a *big* photo in it. A centerfold at least.

I went away at last, clutching *Carve the Sky*, plus *1968* (Haldeman's new hardcover mainstream novel and the only one on his table I didn't already possess), plus a handful of happy memories. I guess ultimately my advice would be, pay no attention to the man who says pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.

Yours sincerely, Bob....

### **Backchat on last time's APA:NESFA (# 305, October 1995)**

#### **To Paul Giguere**

I saw one episode of *Voyager* and bid it *mal voyage*. To start with, Kate Mulgrew -- talk about Katherine Hepburn in drag.

Re "John Thomas": when I first read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, having already read *Star Beast*, I kept waiting for Constance to call Mellors a "big lummo." Lovingly, of course.

Genuinely exciting news about nearing completion on your first SF novel. May I be the first to nominate *Innersense* for a Hugo.

#### **To Anna Hillier**

Hope you made your *PB 36* illo deadline. Who knows, perhaps your art and my words will meet in there somewhere, *pace* Ken Knabbe.

Thanks for the Stanley Asimov obit. I remember reading about him in brother Isaac's memoirs. There's even a photo of him in *I. Asimov*. Proves that bolo ties **didn't** run in the family.

### To Leslie Turek

You're right about most TV debate's being a shouting contest, of course. There's always Lehrer's *News Hour* -- and Maureen and I like *The Group*. Have you caught it? On WGBH-TV (Ch. 2), 7:00 p.m. weeknights. A different subject every night -- politics, current events, books, movies, sports, etc. -- with a diverse group of locals picked for some knowledge of the subject, sitting around a table holding blue water glasses and firm opinions. Actual civilized discussions. Once or twice, they've even mentioned science fiction.

I love Connie Willis's speechifying too. Billy Crystal meets Christine Lavin.

No cold cola in Britain? That's it, I'm not going.

We keep having similar comments and reactions in the APA. Let's start a rumor that we're the same person. After all, has anyone ever seen us together? Since you've been in NESFA a lot longer, that makes me your recent pseudopod -- er, pseudonym.

### To Tony Lewis

It's hard for me to be partisan about Windows vs. Mac, since I use Mac at work and Windows at home. Thus achieving a state that Dilbert once described as "Nerdvana."

About your fascinating Top 40 Classical Countdown: who'd have believed, say, 30 years ago that Mozart would only get as high as No. 8 -- and

that Johann Pachelbel would be No. 6! Quick, everybody -- name **another** work by Pachelbel....He's truly the Walter M. Miller, Jr. of the classical pop charts.

### To Michael Burstein

Congrats again on your *Mimosa* article about life at Clarion workshop. I lead with it in my *Mimosa* review for *PB 36*. Liked it a lot. What with your name plastered all over the review plus your own *PB* article on your first short story sale, perhaps Ken Knabbe should just bow to fate and call the whole thing The Michael Burstein Special Issue.

About your Jane Chord comments, nice to see another poor wretch lugging this fardel. Believe I've also vectored the dread JC virus over to my sister Darcy and to our friend Cassandra Boell-Anderson, who pointed out a really fine JC specimen in Bugliosi's book on the Manson murders, *Helter Skelter*. About finding retrospective meaning in the Chord derived from your article "The Clarion Call," that's easy. "I...lifetime." Your Clarion experience has turned you into a lifetime SF writer. Or, Clarion was the experience of your lifetime. Or, it just seemed to **last** a lifetime....You did say it was 6 weeks long and there was absolutely no sex.

I don't usually catch *SF Age*, but did pick up the September issue for editor Scott Edelman's appreciation of Martha Soukup, the magazine's first short story Nebula winner and (as far as my brother Michael and I are concerned) America's Sweetheart. Then I picked up the November issue for an Honor Harrington review and other goodies, and was surprised and gratified to see your letter. (If NESFA had club nicknames, yours would have to be Ubiquitous Boy.) Now I read in *SF Chronicle* that *SF Age* just raised its short story rates to 10¢ a word, presumably to

suck great stuff away from *Asimov's*, *Analog*, and *F&SF*. It's certainly aging well; becoming a magazine to watch.

See you soon at Cabot's -- maybe after these kamikaze holidays are over?

**To Joe Ross**

Hope your OS/2 experience hasn't permanently WARPed your outlook.

Your meeting with Michael Dukakis marks the second time this week someone has mentioned him. (First time was in a review of *The American President*, whom the reviewer said had a touch of Dukakis. Funny flick, especially if you're a besieged liberal like me.) Comeback coming? You heard it here first.

**To Tom Endrey**

Here's to 50 more issues!

Thanks for the *Economist* piece on the Glasgow worldcon. Maybe the best con coverage ever in the mainstream media. But then, how many mags use vocabulary such as "paraliteratures" and "emotional obverse," or describe the setting of *Babylon 5* as an "entrepot"? Even if they did have GOH Samuel R. Delany as "Delaney."

Plenty of insight there, though. And they pick up Delany on another thought I've had for years: that fandom has more than a few parallels with gaydom.

**To Mark Olson**

Fascinating book reviews, as usual. Anti-mountains...new Uplift and Alvin books...only 13 weeks of actual fighting in the 80-year span of the War of the Roses...great stuff.

I **did** like Canada, but as you say mostly saw Toronto. I wasn't in the APA last year; if you had a copy of your less-than-thrilled cross-Canada trip report handy, I'd love to see it.

Quite insightful comments on Iain Banks and the Culture society he's building in his SF novels. Agree that there's something funny about the Culture's feel. And I see the justice of your basic premise, that humans and mechanicals must function as pets to the super-AI Minds. Although don't rare humans such as Fal 'Ngeestra in *Consider Phlebas* attain some parity with the Minds in data integration, planning, and the vision thing?

**To Mark Hertel**

Good thought about not slavishly devoting one's Boskone programming planning to timelines and other codified routines. Remember the Niven story wherein a long-lived character in a singleship gets so deep into a rut that an alarm throws off his routine, and he's still obsessively trying to get things back to normal weeks later when the collision finally cuts his ship in half? Personally, I'm developing this **thing** about all the labels in the medicine cabinet having to face outward....

Thanks for explaining that the British road sign "CAT'S EYES REMOVED" refers not to any bizarre rural pastime but to small circular roadside reflectors. Had me chewing my whiskers there for a moment.