

# The Devniad, Book 11

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## **Orbita Dicta Heard in the halls of Arisia, January 1996**

*[Shaggy fan arriving festooned with backpack, parka, blankets, maybe a garbage bag or two, about to shatter the expensive hush of a stylish Park Plaza restaurant]*

Shall we add a touch of class to this place?

*[Fan Nomi Burstein at the Boston in 2001 bid party Friday night, babbling the typical airheaded bimbopeak that fangirls spout as they party heartiest]*

English doesn't **have** split infinitives. They're really just perfectly proper phrasal infixes.

*[Observer admiring fetching fan Becca Henry's transcendent party headgear]*

Now, that's a hat! Sort of like The Grinch That Gave Back Christmas meets Glitter Period Elton John.

*[At breakfast Saturday, writer Greer Gilman points out the forest despite the trees]*

The wonderful Emma Thompson movie of *Sense and Sensibility* isn't set in England, you know. Not the real, historical England. It actually takes place in Arden...

*[Fan Kris Page brings the subject to the film version of what few realize is Jane Austen's lost classic, Death and Decomposition]*

The only movie I ever walked out on was *An American Werewolf in London*. I'm a Vietnam veteran, and let me tell you,

those horribly gory special effects looked much too real.

*[Proper Boskonian editor and NESFA stalwart Ken Knabbe is the first to inform me that I won't be spending a weekend in wonderful Worcester this summer]*

They've moved Readercon to the Marriott in Westboro.

*[New Jerseyite first-time-Boston-area-congoer Jeff Wendler on why he was thoroughly familiar with almost every single work discussed in the Postmodern Classics of SF panel]*

You can get through a lot of books if you just come home from work and do nothing else but read until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning.

*[Reviewer Dan Kimmel on Neal Stephenson's cyberclassic Snow Crash]*

You've got to love a book whose main character is named Hero Protagonist.

*[Editor and rock star lookalike Warren Lapine at Roger Zelazny Memorial panel]*

Yes, Roger Zelazny saved me from a life of crime. I was a really messed-up kid when I somehow picked up *Nine Princes in Amber*. When I put it down, I knew this was what I wanted to do from then on. It changed my life.

*[Editor Darrell Schweitzer about when it was advisable to catch some of Z's work]*

Roger Zelazny was a really great writer for about 6 years, from "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" through *Isle of the Dead*.

After that -- well, it's like Joanna Russ said, "Here's this really magic writer slowly putting his tricks back in his hat."

*[Schweitzer waxes nostalgic]*

In those days, we had a radical concept, now long forgotten: the one-volume novel.

*[The Hero Schweitzer on one writer who was not a Zelazny fan]*

Zelazny early on sometimes used his pseudonym, Harrison Denmark. Which really pissed off Harry Harrison, who at the time was living in Denmark.

*[Writer David Alexander Smith on the problem afflicting a number of Zelazny heroes]*

You become the god you're masquerading as.

*[Warren Lapine succinctly defines the Zelazny difference]*

His were the first literary novels I could read without thinking, "This is a pretentious piece of shit."

*[Local writer Craig Shaw Gardner defines why]*

He could make the fantastic colloquial.

*[Gardner again, in the Writing in More Than One Genre panel, on making those tough marketing decisions]*

Why are Guy Gavriel Kay's books in the fantasy section when they may have only trace amounts of fantasy? Because historical fiction doesn't sell bubkes.

*[After quick objections from lotsa interlocutors]*

Okay, history sells -- but only if it's a multigenerational epic.

*[Half-of-the-writer-known-as-J.V.-Rivkin, also on making those tough marketing decisions]*

Several publishers have told me this about my still-unpublished mystery novel: "Loved it; great read; couldn't put it down; can't sell it."

*[Hemi-Rivkin again, who despite this and above **has** sold quite a number of things, thank you]*

I did more research for my unsold historical novel on Lewis Carroll than I did writing my dissertation.

*[If you think Tony Lewis is proud of his ancestors, how about Craig Shaw Gardner, who boasts]*

I'm a direct descendent of Billy the Kid's stepfather.

*[Gardner on an early -- and notably unsuccessful -- example of toughlove]*

When he was 14, they took Billy out West to get him away from the bad elements in his neighborhood.

*[Urbane cowboy/writer Gary Bowen on genre diversification, or slicing the baloney increasingly thin]*

One of my books is a gay supernatural military SF novel.

*[Bowen applauds an unsung force for -- well, if not for good, then for good hot stuff]*

Circler Press single-handedly invented SF erotica. If you'd mentioned the term 5 or 10 years ago, people would have laughed and said, "SF erotica. Nerds doing **what?**"

*[Former Aboriginal Sandra Hutchinson with an insight guaranteed to appall teenage boys everywhere]*

Think about the fantasy scene a while back. There was kind of romantic

high fantasy, and there was swords 'n' sorcery. The joke used to be that fantasy appealed chiefly to teenage boys and their mothers.

*[NESFAn Deb Geisler (host throughout the con to the mother of all head colds) at dinner Saturday, on what she'd had to eat earlier in the day]*

Nyquil.

*[Relentless salesman Darrell Schweitzer to unwary guest at the Boskone 33 party Saturday night, drawing a small box full of old Roman coins from his pocket while beckoning his victim closer]*

How would you like to own the treasure of the ancients?

*[My brother Michael, who had to attend a bachelor party all Friday night and a wedding all Sunday]*

This con seems kind of short to me.

*[Fan waiting in the brunch line Sunday, on why he had chosen to don on this bright, sunny morning a black t-shirt bearing the cheery Nine Inch Nails song lyric, GODDAMN THIS NOISE INSIDE MY HEAD. GODDAMN THIS NOISE INSIDE MY HEAD. GODDAMN THIS NOISE INSIDE MY HEAD, etc.]*

I was up late.

*[Comix writer and editor Ken Gale indulges in wishful thinking during the After the Book Is Sold panel]*

You'd **think** in comix, communication between the artist and the writer would be an absolute necessity.

*{Gale shows how it works when it works}*

So I got this idea. And I said to the artist, "Do you know about a Surinam Toad?" And the answer was, "Oh. You mean -- right, perfect!"

*[Writer Sarah Smith imparts advice on do-it-yourself photo ops]*

There's the weekly, *Bookselling This Week*, that's always trying to feed their insatiable appetite with stories. Particularly stories with pictures. So you 1) Get a bookseller who will do something really weird to help you publicize your book, and 2) Get somebody who will take a picture of it for you.

*[Smith refuses to take preemptive contracts sitting down]*

Here is where I jump up wild-eyed and say, "At all costs, retain your electronic rights!" Consider that a dealbreaker clause.

*[Smith reminds us who really won World War II on this timeline]*

Make sure the contract lets you keep foreign rights. The Japanese and the German are usually the two biggest sets of rights economically.

*[Rising NESFAn and hot new writer Michael Burstein on the Babylon 5 Is Really X in Disguise panel, about why the show is a cut above the usual]*

Most TV writers have been raised not on books but on TV, and they're putting into TV what they got out of it. Nothing more.

*[On the other hand, netmeister Colin Roald offers proof that Babylon 5 producer J. Michael Straczynski may have cracked a book once or twice]*

He quoted from Kierkegaard: "I'm being nibbled to death by ducks!"

*[Burstein on the open-mindedness necessary to appreciate the hanging gardens of Babylon 5]*

If you can only present this to somebody who's willing to get beyond the costumes and not think, "Oh this is Lizard Man fighting Bad Hair Day Man."

*[Guess which Boskone this fan was reminiscing about]*

For me, the final straw was the pillow in the ladies room toilet.

*[Fanzine writer Barnaby Rapaport during the Good Fanzine Writing panel, on the average fanzine half-life of approximately 0.5 ish]*

Something like 90% of all fanzines never make it to a second issue....Most of my submissions to fanzines have never been published, because the fanzine folded.

*[Classic fanzine writer Lee Gold on how fanzine flamewars can flare up]*

"Tone of typer" is one of the most difficult things to "get" as a reader. Especially when the tone is supposed to be humor or disagreement.

*[Film reviewer Dan Kimmel in the Bad SF Films panel, raising a lonely voice in qualified defense of the movie Breakfast of Aliens]*

I got paid to see it and review it. So there **was** something good about it. To that extent only, of course.

*[Videomancer and fanzine writer Peter Maranci applying a rigorous critical standard]*

Oh, *Stargate*? I didn't see it, so I'll give it a 5.

*[Non-Arisian in elevator whose question about what "Arisia" means had just elicited a brief historical overview]*

Say, I read a little sci-fi from time to time. This Lensman book sounds interesting. Would I like it?

*[Smiling hotel guy at checkout Sunday afternoon, when asked if he had held up OK while spending the weekend with all us weird fannish people]*

Oh, I've seen weird before. And we need the money.

**Orbita Dicta**  
**Heard in the halls of**  
**Boskone, February 1996**

*[Guest of Honor Lois McMaster Bujold musing on her wildly popular Miles Vorkosigan books before reading Chapter 1 from Memory, due out in October]*

This series is spanning **fractal** sequels. More possibilities than one author could possibly do in a lifetime.

*[On where her muse might carry her next]*

I'm fascinated by Venice. Either a sequel to *Spirit Ring* set in Venice, or a fantasy Venice of my own devising. Not sure what I'll actually do when, though. These projects are duking it out in my brain with the Miles Gets Married book.

*[My mild-mannered sister Liz, the Stealth Devney, who hadn't been to a con or indeed much outside the house since the Boskone from Hell and was lured to this one only by Bujold and the promise of a serene, blissful con experience -- on her somewhat inauspicious start]*

After 3 hours of driving here at a slow crawl with a broken wiper in a snowstorm, I found the hotel gave away my promised room on the 1st floor and had me booked for one night, not two. I was ready to kill.

*[Fan waiting interminably in Molly Malone's for his mediocre Irish stew]*

Is there another pub restaurant in America where they don't have burgers?...Interesting service ratios here. Fifty tables, but never more than two waiters. Or menus.

*[Placing first in the "I wuz robbed" category, NESFA President Tony Lewis explains his whisker-close third-place finish in the Trivia Bowl (behind your orbiting reporter and big winner Tom Galloway)]*

I was only there for the last 20 minutes.

*[Good sport Lewis when asked about standing in front of the banquet audience and reading aloud a letter from Mike Resnick which had as its chief comic engine the device of heaping abuse and ridicule on Lewis himself]*

It's all in good fun. Besides, I'll get him later.

*[Bujold on the rewards of successful imagination]*

I feel especially good when a military person writes to tell me I captured the feel of the military, or an engineer tells me I got the engineering right, or a gay person says I did a good job with Ethan of Athos. And when someone who'd been abused as a child told me I'd captured that, I really cherished it....You don't have to be one yourself. You just expand on a little bit of experience.

*[My brother-in-law and major fantasy fan Bob Kuhn on how **not** to impress an author]*

I must have talked about the book nine times today, and told people it was her only fantasy and the one of her books I really responded to, and I used the correct name every time, no problem. But naturally when I meet Bujold face-to-face I immediately compliment her on *The Serpent Ring* and she has to tell me no, it was *The Spirit Ring*. Great.

*[Since he's last one in, panelist Daniel Hatch gets stuck with attempting a précis of the Generations panel's springboard book, Generations: The History of America's Future, by Strauss and Howe]*

Basically, the authors see a pattern in American history of four different types of generations that follow sequentially in a repeating cycle. There's the idealistic generation, like the Puritans, the New Dealers, the Boomers. Then the Xers, who are kind of losers and pragmatists like Truman, Bogart, or Twain. Then the civic-minded team spirit generation, like those who lived during the Depression and all pulled together to get through. And the conformist/adaptive generation, like the Eisenhower people. And this all repeats in a four-part cycle with a two-stroke overlay of first secular crisis, then spiritual awakening.

*[Generations Moderator Michael F. Flynn bites off a smaller piece]*

What accounts for the change that has overtaken old people? They're not the **same** old people. Those other old people -- they died.

*[Author Melissa Scott explains that sometimes the grass really is greener]*

In the Civil War, New England farmboys went south and made a great discovery: there is land that doesn't have rocks in it.

*[Audience member on one of God's more inspired twofers]*

Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin were born on the same day.

*[Tee shirt with a quote attributed to Marx -- Groucho, that is]*

Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside a dog, it's too dark to read.

*[In the Hard Fantasy? panel, scholar Faye Ringel deconstructs the Sheraton Tara Framingham]*

We're having this conversation in a postmodern building where a half-timbered cottage had a terrible accident with an Irish castle.

*[Ringel on shifting literary definitions]*

A trilogy has become any collection of four or more books.

*[Bujold interviewed by editor Toni Weisskopf, on how science was bred in her bones]*

My father would have taken a certain physics course from Robert Oppenheimer, except that he'd taken it the previous year from Enrico Fermi.

*[On the early years]*

Baycon [Oakland, CA, 1968] was my very first encounter with fandom....

My first pregnancy was the first time I ever completed something I started....

Why do I write SF? Because I read it when I was young. I was imprinted like a baby duck....

I started reading romances in my 20s, just after I got married. I was trying to figure out, "What's wrong with this picture?"

*[On romancing the reader]*

The idea of writing should be like a dance. You draw out of the reader half the book....

*[On the methods to her madness]*

“Write what you know” is a tautology. Write what you know as opposed to what other choice?...

Doing female viewpoint is almost harder, because [in this culture] you’re so soaked in the male viewpoint....I may do a female viewpoint thing next....

People who read for style are for me a mystery -- it’s an utterly alien way of reading. You mean, some people see the **sentences**?...

Story is biologically based. “Boy meets girl” is an emotional core story. So are the revenge story and others. Across different cultures -- tap into one of these and your reader will respond....

You write a novel linearly, but you must make it up globally....

In high school, I never got the difference between plot and theme. “Plot is what it’s about, and theme is what it’s about.” Huh? Now I think plot is what happens, theme is what it means....

Levitate the table, and then put the legs under it. Get the solution, then make a problem to fit. As Toni says, it can be a brilliant way to write hard SF....

*[On her sources]*

I usually do my research **after** writing the book....

*Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is a book I read every decade because it keeps changing on me....Miles certainly owes something to Lawrence of Arabia....

A friend sent me Liddell-Hart’s *Strategy*. I got *The Vor Game* out of that book....

I have a PBS/*Nova*-level knowledge of psychiatric subjects....

Arising out of my East African trip, in the planet in *Shards of Honor*, actually they land on Mount Kilimanjaro and walk to Mount Meru....

When they ask where do I get my ideas, I always want to say, where do you **not** get any ideas? Having ideas is not the abnormal state, it’s the normal state for all of us.

*[On her characters]*

What makes a hero? Sometimes it’s just desperation. Like Cordelia in *Barrayar*....

I love Ivan. [To get exposition in], you need someone to ask, “What does this mean, Miles?” Besides other things, Ivan is the consummate straight man. I’ll never kill him off....

Which character would I want to be marooned on a desert island with? Probably Miles. Because that would be my best chance of getting unmarooned....

*[NESFAn eminence Mark Olson, ending countless whispered speculations involving professional fútbol tryouts for late bloomers, a foot-first management style, or bizarre fetishistic maneuvers gone painfully awry -- as to why the cast and crutches]*

I was climbing a ladder at Tropicon trying to get at some old treasury records.

*[Veteran David Pelz wouldn’t say half what he knew at the Gimme That Old Time Fandom panel, except to intone]*

Fans do stupid things when they rise up in righteous wrath.

*[In Doppelgangers: The Character as Reflection of Self panel, author James Patrick Kelly demonstrates that every writer is a high-function schizophrenic]*

When I write a story, I’m the boy and the girl **and** the man-eating plant.

*[Fantasy writer Greer Gilman agrees that the map is not the territory, she is]*

Really classic fantasy is turning yourself into a world and walking through it.

*[A more modest view from SF and mystery mistress Rosemary Edghill]*

In my mystery books, I'm not the main character. She has good hair and is desperately cool. I'm the murder victim.

*[Gilman takes a Revenge of the Nerds slant]*

If it happens that the best-dressed person in your story is always the villianness, you're revealing something about yourself.

*[Kelly makes a comparison to which the only proper response is "That's Mr. Heinlein to you, pilgrim!"]*

Heinlein is like John Wayne. You always know you're reading a Heinlein book.

*[Discussing another writer's unique authorial persona, Kelly searches for exactly the right word]*

Barry Malzberg's world is, well --

*[Greer Gilman joins in with humour]*

Atrabilious.

*[Departing from the panel subject, Moderator Hartwell goes his own sweet way and probably succeeds in tripling Swanwick sales to the readers of this fanzine]*

My favorite sex scene of the last decade is in Michael Swanwick's *Vacuum Flowers*, wherein essential exposition is delivered in bursts over 20 pages while honey is being licked off the body of a naked woman.

*[Bob Kuhn from the audience, answering a Hartwell question]*

What's missing from the SF of the 90s? Heterogeneity. We still have whole planets thinking the same.

*[According to Edghill, sales figures don't reflect the whole of an author's audience]*

All writers are engaged in winning arguments with the dead.

*[Bujold gives some advice to the 10 people who signed up for her intimate little kaffeeklatsch, plus the horde of nervy partycrashers who swinishly jammed the room (he observed atrabiliously)]*

If you write yourself into a corner, paint a door on the wall.

*[Turns out that miles and miles of Miles was created the old-fashioned way]*

I only started writing on a word processor in Chapter 20 of *Mirror Dance*. Before that, it was all handwritten.

*[My sister Darcy Devney praises the discernment of her friend, amateur artist and distinguished disher Cassandra Boell]*

You haven't **seen** the Art Show until you've seen it with Cassandra. She'll give you a running commentary....Just try to make sure that none of the artists are in earshot.

*[In the Build an Alien panel, writer David Alexander Smith warns colleagues against the warm and fuzzy]*

Aliens often fail because you make them too humanoid -- you give them smile-equivalents.

*[Artist Bob Eggleston recalls some wisdom an editor once imparted on the subject of marketing choices for book cover art]*

Don't you know that aliens don't sell books? **Spaceships** sell books.



*[Completist collector Jeff Rogers being totally paranoid about what your orbiting reporter might quote him on]*

What are you going to put in for my quote this year, that thing today where you happened to be hanging around the dealer when I bought the Ballantine *Best of Eric Frank Russell* and you said "I thought you already had a complete set of the Ballantine bests?" and I said "Yes but this is a first edition"? People are going to think I'm obsessive....

*[My brother Michael, clever creator of ChronoCollisions, the trivia game for time travel fans, after weeks of preparation and anxiety as to whether the game would be a success at the con]*

Over 40 contestants already! We made it!

*[She may be a combat veteran and chief engineer of the Navy's newest missile destroyer, but this is E. J. McClure's first con and that has a certain effect on a trufan]*

I can't believe how fast my heart is beating. Incredible. This is all so exciting!

*[McClure reverently describes her first con party]*

We sat at the feet of Lois McMaster Bujold.

*[McClure sums up]*

I learned more in two days of listening to writers talking about writing than I did during an entire semester of creative writing in college.

*[Netborne SF Reviewer and Sci-Fi Talk FREQUENCIES newsletter editor Ernest Lilley, in the con suite, recalls one of Tom Swift's swifter rivals]*

Remember the books about the boy scientist Rick Brant? They were my favorite. He lived off the coast of New Jersey -- on Spindrift Island.

*[New author Katya Reimann gets the Books We Love That Aren't SF panel off to a disturbing start by dishing one of your orbiting reporter's favorite historical series]*

I find Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin stories irritating. Because I'm an 18th century scholar.

*[Mark Keller applies balm by praising another favorite series, by George MacDonald Fraser]*

Flashman is a lecher, a cad, and a bounder. But he **looks** good.

*[Although your orbiting snoop thought this recent book had a great subject but spotty writing and uneven coverage, reviewer and new author Peter J. Heck disagrees]*

Perhaps the most interesting nonfiction book I've read in the last couple of years is *Longitude* by Dava Sobel. It's the story of the quest for a reliable method of determining longitude. Who finally solved it was not some aristocratic scientist but a British clockmaker -- a mechanic.

*[Children's writer Bruce Colville discusses his grown-up tastes]*

This is the printout of my last couple of years of reading. Of **course** I list every book I read onto the computer. Doesn't everybody?...

*Beloved* by Toni Morrison is one of the best American novels of the last 50 years....

Bruce Maguire, who's in the audience, did something unique with *Wicked, The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*....

Twain's *Christian Science* is one of his most entertaining books, though most people don't know about it....

William Goldman's *The Color of Light* is the best by one of the best. The

**second** time I read it, I stayed up until 3:00 a.m. to see how it came out...

Then there's another subcategory, books with which I've embarrassed myself by laughing while on public transportation....

*[Faye Ringel makes a timely point]*

One pet peeve is that people don't read anything written before their time. Once they get out of school, anyway.

*[With the exception of Little Friend of All the Con Mark Keller]*

A writer named Murari was so annoyed by Kipling's India that he wrote two sequels to *Kim*, giving the character's later life. By 1915 he has Kim getting involved with the Congress Party and starting to doubt the rightness of the British Raj.

*[Keller doubts the rightness of a choice of subject made by the great writer of Westerns, Louis Lamour]*

He did a historical once. Not good. There's one line in a scene where some Christian knights have just driven off a band of horse nomads. One knight says, "Those were the Pechins?" or whatever tribal name he used. The other knight answers, "Yes, in about 200 years they'll become the Mongols."

*[Dyspeptic fan answering the question, "Who's on this panel?"]*

Oh, the usual -- Worst Voices in Science Fiction.

*[In the Why Do SF Fans Love Jane Austen? panel, writer Debra Doyle indicates that one possible reason for our wistfulness about Miss Jane Austen's vanished world is the economy, stupid]*

In her novels, the people who are broke only have two servants.

*[The exquisite tortures you suffer with Austen's characters are described by Rosemary Edghill]*

No one's going to die, but it's agonizing anyway. It's like suspense, but it's not suspense --

*[Esther Freisner]*

It's social suspense.

*[Teresa Nielsen Hayden reveals a little-known aspect of Austen's career]*

You're all aware of that fine alternate history book, Jane's Fighting Ships?

*[Nielsen Hayden reminds us that Austen took no side in the great Mac vs. PC debate]*

She composed all her novels in the front parlor. On little scraps of paper she could shuffle quickly under something. Because she wrote while on more important duty, waiting to see if any visitors arrived.

*[Rosemary Edghill's version of car talk circa 1811]*

That fast carriage that Willoughby drives Marianne around in in the *Sense and Sensibility* movie was a family model compared to the notorious "high-perched phaeton." This baby had the seat 3 feet higher and further forward, and if you ran it with a unicorn hitch it was an invitation to death. Specifically designed to be the Ferrari of its time. Totally buffed equipage.

*[Dr. Nielsen Hayden demonstrates her reassuring bedside manner]*

Smallpox is called “small” back then because it’s so much less serious than the **real** pox. Which is syphilis.

*[When you’re an editor, everything looks like a submission, as shown by Proper Boskonian editor Ken Knabbe’s reaction when handed a poem purely for his enjoyment that happened to contain a bad word -- well, several bad words]*

I can’t publish this!

*[Hot new writer, Clarion graduate, and NESFAn Michael Burstein at his reading (in front of the largest crowd ever gathered for a Burstein reading), as he deftly takes a sip of water to indicate a scene break]*

I learned that from Howard Waldrop.

*[Incandescent new writer Maureen McHugh about to read the gentlest erotic ghost story ever told, In the Air]*

My family says this is the most autobiographical story I’ve written, except that I have no ghosts in my family and am happily married. But I do have a golden retriever.

*[McHugh terminates the Death in SF panel with her favorite tombstone quote]*

“I TOLD YOU I WAS SICK.”

*[Chairing the Miles groupies panel, Suford Lewis hath her privileges]*

Wait a minute -- everybody gets to tell their story of why they love Miles Vorkosigan. But I get to go first.

*[And later]*

We read one Bujold and we want to go on and read and reread all her other books, forever. That’s a very good effect for an author to have on a reader.

*[Bujold has groupies in even odder places than Boskone, per this audience member]*

*Falling Free* is cataloged in the library of the American Welding Society.

*[As does even Ivan, according to Bujold]*

A friend of mine wants a book entitled, *Ivan Vorpatril Explains It All for You*.

*[Bujold wasn’t always in such a commanding position, she says]*

I didn’t start out having a say in the cover art. *Warrior’s Apprentice* was supposed to be a Keith Laumer cover, and they recycled it. Originally, the command chair Miles is in was empty.

*[But her publisher was fond of Miles from the beginning]*

I think Jim Baen kind of enjoys putting out a book whose hero is shorter than he is.

*[Bujold has her own perspective on marketing Miles]*

People recommend the books to one another. Like literary Amway.

*[Not that it hasn’t been an uphill struggle]*

Until recently, most of the fans who wrote to me had better laser printers than I did.

## **Backchat**

**on APA:NESFA #307, December 1995;  
and APA:NESFA #308, January 1996**

### **To all**

Please note my new on-line address on the first-page masthead. E-mail at least, at last! Now if I had more than 4 MB RAM, I could actually take a spin on the web....

### **To Tony, Suford, and Alice Lewis For December**

Sounds like wonderful news on the health front. Don't think I've had the pleasure of meeting Alice; will she be at Boskone? Guess I'll find out.

Suford, can't wait for the Bujold book. Congratulations in advance. The crowds will line up for Miles.

Tony, so you're a technical writer. That makes us related, since I'm a technology advertising copywriter for a small agency. I don't need a BS, just know how to.

Wasn't aware you had so many stories written and published. Thirteen of sixteen and counting. I abase myself. Is yours a NESFA record? Maybe among current active members?

### **For January**

I remember seeing Admiral Grace Hopper on TV. Grand old dame, and one of the more colorful computer pioneers. So they've named a destroyer after her. Quite a tribute. Wonder what the crew will call the ship privately, in their respectful way: "When I was aboard the old *Slopper*...the old *Hopped Up*...the old *Hophead*."

Looking forward to the Bova-Lewis hit *The Science in Science Fiction*. Especially your snide footnotes.

### **To Mark Olson**

### **For December**

Couldn't agree more with your rave review for Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age*. Definitely my choice as best SF novel I read in 1995 (still haven't got to your other contender, Baxter's *The Time Ships*). I've been thinking of a review of the Stephenson for months, but feared I couldn't do it justice.

It's got the sociological insight, the technology, the characters, the fine writing, the excitement and adventure salted with Big Ideas that we all want and so seldom find in one book. It's a bildungsroman, a political thriller, several love stories; a book about war and wealth and nanotechnology; China and England and America; engineering and group sex and theater and crime and the fall and creation of empires. My message to all: read it or miss a big one.

Mark, don't think I put Haldeman's *Worlds* trilogy up with *The Forever War*. But it's definitely a first-class work -- about which one hears little these days. More attention should be paid.

### **For January**

Re Bujold's *Cetaganda*, her latest Miles Vorkosigan adventure, think I liked it less than you. Struck me as only middling Miles.

Thanks for the Jack Vance recs. I'll try to look for some Demon Princes books in the dealers' room at Boskone.

Have just started the first of the Harry Turtledove WorldWar/Lizards series per your earlier recommendation. Pretty good so far. Very droll Lizards.

[Late note: scoffed the whole Vance Demon Princes set at Intergalactic Book Works! Will try to read, report soon.]

### **To Ray Bowie For December**

Interesting how you and I, as a conservative and a liberal, jockey for the honor of being in the besieged group, the underdogs.

An old thought, but ever increasingly valid: everybody wants to be seen to be the victim. We all rush to boast of being the most disadvantaged, the most overworked or underpaid.

Well, OK, maybe not the most undersexed or humor-deprived or socially inept. (Although some fans would certes be in strong contention.)

Still, it all has the zany tilt of the Bizarro World, doesn't it? Or perhaps Niven's Puppeteer society, where all are led by the Hindmost....

*Lawrence of Arabia* was a masterpiece. One of my all-time favorites. Did that letterbox version you saw have the restored scenes they put back in for the theatrical re-release a few years back? As my friend Christopher Dean would say, David Lean is a god.

#### **For January**

I have trouble remembering the blizzard of last week, let alone years ago. So your compilation of all-time worsts was quite interesting. My story about the Blizzard of '78 is that if it had happened 24 hours earlier, Sunday instead of Monday, I would have been "marooned" for a week at Mont Orford, a beautiful resort in the Laurentians, with nothing to do but ski, slurp the world's most delicious soupe l'onion gratinee, and chase lovely dark-haired Quebecoise waitresses around the lodge. (Or, to be brutally realistic about my chances, at least ski, slurp, and get some reading done.) Instead, I went home Sunday and spent the week shoveling out scenic Mansfield, Massachusetts. C'est la vie.

**To Michael Burstein  
For December**

These congratulations on new achievements every ish must be getting boring for the audience. OK, OK, congrats on recognition (of the sterling qualities that have been obvious to us for months) by NESFA, SFWA, Barnes and Noble, the Hugo voters, and the Swedish Academy. (So maybe I'm a little premature with these latter -- just trying to keep up by keeping ahead.)

We'll have to work on superhero costume ideas for your Ubiquitous Boy persona. By definition, need something that would "go" anywhere. Pearls and a little black dress? Maybe with a rumpled tweed jacket thrown over, to show you're a SFWA member now.

By the way, as Ubiquitous Boy, you now have no excuse for not attending a single NESFA meeting or event. Or calling in sick to work.

#### **For January**

Great to see you and Nomi at Arisia and to meet your mother-in-law Eleanor plus friends Elka and Becca and Colin etc. Man, talk about party animals! Especially that Eleanor. It's always the quiet ones....

Love that witspeak definition re Magic from your friend Harold Feld. Positively Wildean.

Arisia marks the first time I'd seen you as a panelist. Thought you made an excellent one. (Ghod knows they gave you enough practice.) Enough ego and energy to get your opinions out there, but not so much you hog the show. Leaven with wit and a quote from J. Michael Straczynski.

Per your question on *The Day That Locus Lost*, I was at Confrancisco in 1993 as the loooooong *Locus* winning streak for best semiprozine Hugo was broken when Andy Porter's *SF Chronicle* won by a single vote. The story I remember -- which I believe Charlie Brown subsequently confirmed in print -- was

that the one "staff member" who neglected to vote for *Locus* was Editor-in-Chief Brown himself. Was Brown's face red....

Now, Brown's missed vote would merely have resulted in a tie. But since I was there and personally voted for *SF Chronicle*, I've always privately given myself credit for the upset. Of course, any one person who so voted could say the same. By the way, I like, respect, and subscribe to both magazines.

[Late note: great reading you did at Boskone, Michael. The crowd went wild.]

**To Paul Giguere  
For December**

Great to meet you on AOL! Yours was the first screen name I encountered on AOL's SF boards that seemed to be somebody I knew.

Terrific squib about Alfred Bester's bartender/executor. I always thought of Bester as kind of Doc Smith on methamphetamines, but maybe it was just whiskey.

I envy your new computer setup: new LaserJet, Power Mac, CD-ROM. Now all you need is a new 20" monitor and souped-up multimedia sound system and you can -- well, contribute to the APA every month.

[Late note: Thanks for being my charming, witty, informative dinner companion at Boskone banquet. I **told** you we should have filled up on bread.]

**To Leslie Turek  
For December**

Re your ancestry (related to Turok Son of Stone?), I've had a soft spot in my ghoulish heart for the Carpathians since reading Saki's "The Wolves" at an impressionable age. Forget Dracula and co., it's the image of those damned

Carpathian wolves that howls in the nighttime terror-forest of my dreams.

Groveling thanks from the bottom of my omphalos for accepting me as your unworthy pseudopod. Thanks also for the kind words about my writing. Think your own style is beautifully clear, entertaining, informative -- as proved by our first taste of your Glasgow world convention trip report.

Great-looking piece. Professional-quality format, typeface, layout -- complete with slick visuals. Made many of the rest of us look like, you know, amateurs. If not a trade secret, could you name your software application(s), typefaces, etc.? Did you do the art yourself?

Re the place-name in your title, "Rubha Mór." How would you pronounce that in American?

Lucid verbal snapshots of the layouts of the city and the convention spaces. Hadn't had as clear a picture before.

Thanks for the new term: a rectangular stone paving block is not a "cobblestone" but a "Belgian block." Also a phrase for what too much Belgian chocolate does to your heart....

Re the Scottish designer Charles Rennie Macintosh. Always thought that, had he lived later, he would have been the perfect illustrator for Ursula LeGuin; always somehow associated the two in my mind. Looking at his lovely stained glass tea room doors in your visual, occurs to me that the link may simply be that the Dillons' beautiful cover art for the 1969 Ace paperback of *Left Hand of Darkness* might have been influenced by Macintosh. One more note: hope the tea room people didn't actually make you **sit** in the chairs CRM designed. Beautifully neo-Gothic, but **really** uncomfortable-looking.

Always interesting to hear about the convention from a con-runner's point of view. Sounds like the trick is to blend organization with a good helping of creativity. Come to think of it, that's the trick to a lot of things.

**For January**

Loved Mel Gibson's movie *Braveheart* -- as I assume you did, although I couldn't quite make out your attitude -- but was amused when I read up on the historical background. One big fight you allude to was known as the Battle of Stirling Bridge, and famously involved lots of pushing the English into the river and butchering them. The way I recall Gibson staging it, there was nary a bridge or drop of water in sight. Instead of the Battle of Stirling Bridge, would have been called the Battle of Stirling Big Flat Open Field.

Your stuff about the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders regiment at Stirling Castle sent me to my favorite reference book in all the world -- *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* -- for its section on Regimental Nicknames and stories. Unfortunately, no luck with your regiment. But I did revisit items such as how the Royal Scots regiment came to be nicknamed "Pontius Pilate's Bodyguards." When in French service a few hundred years back, they disputed with the Regimente de Picardie as to seniority, and a French officer claimed that his regiment was so old it stood guard the night of the Crucifixion. To which the Scots officer replied, "Hud **w**e been on dutie, we wouldna hav sleppt at our post."

Must show your Dunain Park room service menu bit to my brother-in-law Bob Kuhn, the Australian Fred Lerner lookalike I introduced you to at the Boskone Art Show reception. Two pages of snacks and 11 of malt whiskeys

would strike him as the right and proper ratio.

Practical question: at these British bed-and-breakfasts, do you get a choice in the dinner menu, or is it eat what you get? For example, I'm benighted enough not to care for seafood. Will I have lots of hungry nights?

Finally, lovely to finally meet you at Boskone, Leslie. Only confirmed all the good impressions I got from your writing. Also nice to meet Alex. Although I was disappointed that he didn't actually read through any manuals or play with his camera in front of me.

**To Anna Hillier**

**For December**

So you say you've snuggled up to Hal Clement. Are there photos?

**To Joe Ross**

**For December**

Great quotes, as usual. And like you and Ray, I still have trouble with the Channel 4/Channel 7 swap. One particularly loathsome consequence is that, to be able to keep the *Today* show on and not have to fiddle with channels during our morning ablutions, Maureen and I are forced to endure news breaks from the Channel 7 staff, who strike us as ratings-hungry sleazebucket airbags.

**For January**

Fascinating report on Speaker Bulger's departure and Thomas Birmingham's swearing-in.

So Birmingham wants a new convention center. I know this will instantly mark me a dolt with the con-running core of NESFA, but what's wrong with the Hynes? I don't mean this antagonistically; just a request for info. Haven't followed the debate on this issue. Noreascon 3, for instance, seemed to me to go off wonderfully. And those

large, dark Hynes rooms and hallways had a certain brooding, magnificent futurity that impressed me as perfect for an SF con, for one. Are the hotels the problem?

Thanks also for clarifying that you don't have to repeat an oath word-for-word to take it. I should have thought of the examples of courtroom "I do's" that you mentioned; plus marriage.

**To Tom Endrey  
For December**

Wonderful to finally meet you at Arisia, Tom, in that noisy, crowded party room. I know I'd seen you around at previous cons and wondered who that distinguished-looking gent was, but never actually spoke to you. Wish we'd had a chance to talk longer this time. But as I recall, Darrell Schweitzer dragged me away to sell me something....

**For January**

Thanks for telling us about veteran space art master Robert McCall -- famous to art connoisseurs like yourself, but new to me. If he goes all the way back to the poster art for *2001*, it's just another proof that I haven't paid enough attention to the art side all these years. We wordpeople can be so blind. Well, I'll try to keep an eye out for him now.

Sounds like your work group handles retirements with some old-fashioned grace -- expensive sit-down dinner, plus drinks party. In many corporations these days, you only get a drink if the guard escorting you allows a sip from the bubbler on the way out.

Wonder how you're bearing up to retirement? The English essayist Charles Lamb, after working for more than 30 years at the East India Company in London, wrote to a friend, "Yesterday I came home forever." A strange feeling, people who have done it tell me. And I understand you're also going to move,

get a new computer, and so on. But since you've already uprooted yourself at least once (leaving Europe), I know you've got the courage to do it all smiling.

Once you get a computer -- if you don't return to the APA or LOC to *Proper Boskonian* too often, but do get on the net, please drop me a line at my new e-mail address in the masthead. And if you start up your own fanzine as threatened, I'd love to be on the list. It feels sad to lose touch just when I was getting to know you. Oh, and at least I hope to see you at Readercon, Arisia, Boskone, or all the above.

You brought a whole other viewpoint that I very much enjoyed. Good to know you, Tom. Stay in touch.