

The Devniad, Book 18

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APA:NESFA #316, September 1996

Becoming a Quaker.

It's awfully dark in here.

As always, you lead with your shotgun. Poking it ahead. Easing it and yourself around turns in the shadowy stone corridors. (What's that red stuff spattered in the corner? Bagfull of it.) Pointing the muzzle quickly around as you enter any new space that might hold a threat.

Which means every new space.

Low ominous music fades in and out. Water is dripping somewhere. Dim torchlight catches highlights in a wall decoration, the edge of a corner, a zombie gliding into sight and hurtling its bloodbomb as you BLAM! fire and miss and TWO MORE ZOMBIES BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM! get them and move slowly down toward where they lay.

You remember hearing multiple squishes as the bloodbombs splashed around you. Some scored, because your health indicator has gone from a perfect 100 down to 42 but what's that noise/movement/threat in the gallery way beyond?

You register that it's an ogre raging back and forth behind stone bars and throwing grenades that are falling way short so far. But postpone that because one of the zombies now two are stirring and rising up, now the third — that's BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM! why they call them zombies, you guess, as you put them down again and bull past before their next creepy resurrection.

You're closing fast on that ogre but getting within HIS range too BLAM BLAM BLAMBLAMBLAM . . .

This is the world of *Quake*.

That's right, I've finally broken down and bought a big-time 3D action game to run on my nifty new Pentium personal computer. *Quake* is the hot new successor by id software to *Doom* and *Doom II*, previous fabulous successes in this category.

About the name: it's a good game, but the earth doesn't actually move.

"Quake," the instructions explain, is the code name of the chief villain who killed all your comrades and populated your military bases with monsters before the game began. You spend the game roaming via mouse click and keystroke around said bases — rendered in splendid 3D art with awesomely good sound effects and music — trying to find your way through mazy corridors, picking up secrets and keys, ammo and health points stored here and there, and killing everything in sight while it tries to get you first. Sort of like *Myst Goes Macho*, or chess for serial killers.

Down these mean corridors a simulation of a man must go....

Part of the genius of the designers of these 3D games is in realizing that the grain and blur of a monitor's resolution (only about 72 dots per inch for the average screen) can actually add to the realism. And really juice up the mood, too, as I tried to indicate above.

Propelled by fear and aggression, you move through a dark, demonstrably hostile environment with stuff leaping out at you all the time — and you cannot quite SEE clearly. And things SHIFT a little when you examine them closely.

You've got to keep fighting this damned sense of UNREALITY if you're going to get out of here alive, you think. Then realize that it's not the sense of unreality that's unreal here.

It's this reality that's unreal, remember? Oh sure, I knew that.

The game's instructions are very well-written, with just a touch of grim fun. You know, like Timothy McVeigh in a light moment.

At one point they're describing the pros and cons of a favored weapon, the grenade launcher. Followed by a succinct description of the next weapon up, the rocket launcher. "For when a grenade positively, absolutely, has to be there on time."

Even a sedentary peacenik like me can pick up the right attitude fairly quickly. The designers try their damndest to evoke the proper — let's call it Quaker — spirit.

Example: every once in a while you hear a low, angry, dangerous growl on the soundtrack from somewhere close nearby. At first I kept spinning around looking for another attacking Rottweiler, but there was nothing there.

Then I realized. It was me.

I may not have gotten across how much of a mystery game *Quake* is. In my first session, I was held up for eons in front of a door that would not open. Because, a message said, "You need the silver key."

Okay. So where was it already?

Spending 40 minutes in fruitless search of a dimly lit (and, remember, nonexistent) room with a locked door, four dead bodies, the drip of water, low-level ominous music, and occasional far-off echoing clangs is not a pleasant experience. Near the end, before I

brilliantly intuited that perhaps the key was somewhere OUTSIDE the room, I was literally — well, virtually — hacking at the stone walls with my axe.

The blurbs on the CD-ROM sleeve proclaim that *Quake* shakes up the 3D game world. Takes things to a higher pitch of art direction and realistic movement, "a terrifying new level of immersive interactivity." Despite frustrations such as the above, I concur that *Quake* is a whole lot of (seriously demented) fun.

Addictive, too. I find myself coming back for more and more abuse at the hands of my little *Quake* friends — subjecting myself repeatedly, with a big grin, to various hacking, bleeding, boiling, drowning, sliming, and exploding deaths several nights a week.

All at the horrid claws of various vivid virtual monsters like Rottweilers, Grunts, Enforcers, Knights, Zombies, Scrag, Ogres, Fiends, and even the dread Shambler itself. (Kind of a parent-friendly naming agenda here. You've got descriptors on hand that are severally evocative of animalism, brutality, murder, and flesh-eating. But the worst monster of all has a name that vilifies bad posture.)

Though all frightful-looking enough in their own smeary, freakish ways, there's a certain comic-book quality to the monsters' animation still. In fact, with the all-too-real perils of repetitive motion disorder always waiting to pounce on us poor addicted victims, the most dangerous creature associated with *Quake* is undoubtedly your Mouse.

Let's talk about the V word. Although not previously an especially violent person, I've discovered that it can indeed be curiously satisfying to bounce two grenades off the wall ahead

and around a darkened corner, hear the explosions blend with a loud yell, and then see the bloody arm of a ogre — a monster you'd **suspected** but not known was there — flying around the turn and landing on the stone floor.

After all, nothing so rouses the spirit like the sheer intellectual enjoyment of solving puzzles.

But the game is really not as bad as I was led to expect on the violence front. In my opinion, anyway.

Of course, my violence-evaluating credentials were forcibly revoked in 1984, when I assured my squeamish sister Darcy that there was absolutely no violence in the light, fun adventure movie *Romancing the Stone*. Only to have her phoned-in counter-review afterward begin, "How about when the ALLIGATOR ripped off the guy's ARM???"

However, with *Quake*, they're not wholeheartedly going for truly disgusting, make-Clive-Barker-puke violence. Besides, at 72 dpi, how gory can it really get? No, they have more subtle effects in mind.

It's not the V word but the F word that obtains here. In *Quake*, the only thing you have to fear is . . . fear itself.

It's not the monsters but the scenes and the sounds of the world of *Quake* that can inspire real fear. Because they effectively suggest a little something and leave it up to your own paranoid reptile brain to fill in the blanks.

The big scare does not eventuate when a monster leaps unexpectedly at you from a dark doorway. As many soldiers say about real combat, you're too busy dealing with the issues of the moment (BLAM BLAM BLAM, etc.) to be noticeably afraid.

But when you're rolling up a dark corridor. And you hear mostly silence, maybe a little dripping water and a low moan of wind or music and echoey metallic unspecified sounds in the distance. And you can almost feel the chill coming off the clammy skin of this fatal place. And you look far up out a high opening in the roof and see the purple mists streaming by too fast overhead, and the sky looks . . . pitiless. And everything all around you is calculated for maximum effect to get that deepdown dread deployed and floating free.

That's when *Quake* comes into its own as a true masterpiece of the gamemaker's art.

They want you to be afraid. Be very afraid.

And I be glad to oblige.

Of course, for you moms and dads out there, *Quake* is also quite a learning tool. For instance, since the initial encounter recounted at the beginning of this report, I've learned that slaughtering zombies with shotguns is ineffective because they keep getting up after a minute.

The solution, in a principle that I'm sure kids of all ages can apply to many of life's dilemmas, is to switch to your grenade launcher. That way, you can permanently blast those annoyingly undead dudes into what the instruction manual refers to as "chunky kibbles."

Apparently, veteran action games fans may prefer to experience *Quake* in a mode called Deathmatch. Here, you play over a network against your friends — or, more probably, coworkers — hunting down and cheerfully slaughtering each other in a castle where, as in much of real life, the only monsters are you. However, the single-

player game is all that's practical for me, and it's got every bit of excitement and ultraviolence I need.

Quake by id software. You need a Pentium, probably at least 16 MB RAM, 40-75 MB of hard disk space to burn, a sound card, and a CD-ROM drive. Call 1-800-ID-GAMES and pay \$50 for a full registered version, or download a FREE yet surprisingly hefty starter version at www.idsoftware.com

After my name and ship location and all-important credit card number, the idiot on the phone from whom I ordered the game wished to elicit only one other key demographic datum: What was the age of the individual for whom this game was being purchased?

I should have replied, "Eternally adolescent."

FlimFan

Noteworthy movies I've seen since last time include *Gotti* (on HBO), *Escape from LA*, *Cracker* (last original episode; on A&E), *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *Emma*, *The Spitfire Grill*, *Ace Ventura II: When Nature Calls* (on HBO), *Trainspotting*, *She's the One*, *Crime of the Century* (on HBO), *Kansas City*, *I'll Fly Away*, *Last Man Standing*.

The two SF entries, *Escape from LA* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, were mediocre. But several other flicks were of first quality this month.

Like its heroine uncommonly warm, pretty, and high-spirited, the new production of *Emma* continues the winning streak of films quickened from the quill of the most underpaid genius in Hollywood today, Jane Austen. As Emma, Gwyneth Paltrow is luminescent.

(You know you're old when you develop a crush on a hot babe like Gwyneth only to recall you felt much the same on first seeing her mother — that smart, husky-voiced Southern charmer Blythe Danner.) It's not easy to play silly without casting into doubt for a moment your character's high intelligence. Yet Gwyneth manages this effortlessly, in period costume and with an English accent yet. She's also the most vulnerable (and at one point quite deeply hurt) Austen heroine we've seen recently. Which may be helped by her being 23 playing 20, not 36 playing 19, as with Emma Thompson for instance. But for me, there hasn't really been a bad Austen movie yet.

Trainspotting is just like *Emma* except that it's about twentysomething heroin addicts leading lives of crime, physical and emotional violence, and total effing heedlessness in Glasgow and London. The insight here is that heroin addiction aside, the characters have to cope with being young and lower-class in modern Britain; *Trainspotting* suggests that one plight may be about as challenging as the other. But for the most part they show you a surprising amount of energy, as does the film. Be sure not to consume mass quantities of movie food until **after** the scene featuring the worst toilet in Scotland. Directed with grit and loud music by Danny Boyle, whose *Shallow Grave* was one of my favorites last year and is now ripe for rental.

Kansas City was directed by Robert Altman. In the eponymous tough town of the 1930s, tough young skirt Jennifer Jason Leigh kidnaps politician's wife Miranda Richardson to get pressure put on gambling boss Harry Belafonte before he kills Leigh's boyfriend Dermot Mulroney for robbing a gambling

customer. But good acting aside, and despite Altman's career-long genius in furnishing his stories with little surprises and loop-de-loops, the emphasis here is setting, not plot. From white mansion to black jazz joint, every car, dress, gas station, slang saying, tie, bureau, nightclub, cigar box, and attitude looks and feels just right in this smart period piece. For years, Robert Altman was my favorite director. I haven't so much replaced him as retired his number. A little too soon, it seems.

Backchat

on APA: NESFA #315, August 1996

To Ian Gunn

Forgot to mention your beautiful July cover, with the magnificent CALL OF ETHULHU piece. Also like your horror comics cover this month. Fearfully good.

Must say I thought your little devil might look more Tasmanian. (I know, I know, Tasmania is 254 miles from your home outside Melbourne, and we bloody Yanks know damn-all about any geography but our own.)

Anyway, as I've said elsewhere, really like your stuff. Glad you deigned to grace our APA.

To Nomi Burstein

Great to see you at the Other Meeting at the Olsons'!

Agree that we could easily take terrorism more seriously, say at the airport, without suffering as a society. Although it causes a vanishingly small number of deaths compared to other causes. Even in the year of the Oklahoma City bombing, I doubt that 700 American citizens died of terrorism, however defined.

Compared to, let's say, accidents. According to this year's almanac (which always really means last year's, or in the case of the stats I'm going to talk about actually 1993), accidents are the fifth leading cause of death in the U.S. And the winning categories are: motor vehicle, falls, poisoning by solids or liquids, drowning, fires & burns, suffocation, firearms, poisoning by gases, or other. That motor vehicles are first with 42,000 of a total 90,000 accidental deaths annually should be no surprise. But what's second?

Answer is, that list is in descending order. So it's falls, with 13,500 deaths. (You'll notice firearms are way back, but that's another essay.) This seemed extremely high to me. Then I noticed the breakdown by age. Of those 13,500 falling victims, more than 9,400 were over 75 years old.

If age doesn't get you, gravity will.

To Ray Bowie

Although it sounds like you're having problems with it, I congratulate you as an SF fan on the cool brand name of your motorized wheelchair: "21st Century Bounder." Sounds like it would make a good SF movie, maybe starring Johnny Depp as a caddish Neo-Victorian jump pilot with a gril in every wormhole.

I, too, love those adventure flicks *Captain Horatio Hornblower* and *The Guns of Navarone*. Especially the latter — first as a book and then as one of the first "adult" movies I got to see, *Guns* blew me away. Don't think I'd ever really paid attention to foreign locations before, they were all just images on the screen . . . but I felt I could have dived right into that wine-dark Aegean Sea.

From about age 11 to 16, I read everything Alastair MacLean (author of *Guns*) had written, two or three times

each. A huge bestsellermonger then, but nearly forgotten these days just a few decades later. . . . Take note, Tom Clancy and Steven King.

On another response: boy, if you haven't read *Kim*, you've got a treat coming. I think almost any SF fan would love it. Still holds up. Get to it soon; you'll be glad you did.

To Mark Olson

Thanks for the book and tree tour at your house during the Other Meeting. Great to see Olsonghast at last.

Independence Day was generally an exciting movie, with some good set-piece scenes and effects, plus a few moments of interesting acting. It kept up the pace, and much of the crowd left the theater chattering and upbeat. I was swept up a tad myself.

But you're quite correct about its abysmal level of intelligence. More sheerly dumb stuff than any other major motion picture of the decade. (Including the risible *Stargate* by the same team.)

My favorite example: In the middle of the greatest international security threat the world has ever known, you're in a top-secret government research facility. Present are America's top brass, hundreds of other military personnel, and scores of scientists. A killer alien escapes and is loose in the basement lab. From all the personnel available, whom do you detach from other duties and send down in the dark to poke around?

Why, a couple of grunts — plus the President of the United States and the Secretary of Defense, of course.

Do have a quibble about one of your quibbles, Mark. You say a fighter-launched air-to-air missile couldn't take out the aliens' 15-mile-diameter spaceship; agree most definitely. But you build up to this by saying such missiles "can just take out a small plane;

it's doubtful one could knock out an airliner." Unfortunately, the passengers and crew of Korean Airlines Flight 007 might disagree. You know, the one knocked out of the sky in the Far East in 1983 by missiles from Soviet fighters?

Thanks for the kind words re my collection of Readercon quotes. (Although don't mix me up with my brother Michael; we get equally offended.) About how I manage to record them all on-site, I do write fairly rapidly. But from years of interviewing for marcomm writing, I also seem to have a good buffer memory. Hear a line or paragraph I like and then spend the next minute or two spooling it down on paper, while the conversation goes on. Gets difficult when lots of interesting stuff is said rapidly and close together, of course. In which case I punt.

Your guess that my handwriting must also be legible will have my friends and family falling all over themselves laughing. Au contraire, it's so bad that I have to hurry home from the con and quickly type the notes up within a day or so at most, before I lose any hope of guessing what all those blurred squiggles might mean.

To Joe Rico

While I don't agree with some of your asides (attacking liberals and holding conservatives up as the only ones who bother to "get the facts"), I like your main point about evenhandedness, making sure as a liberal that I defend abhorrent conservative views, and so on.

And I'll defend to the death (well, at least to the serious inconvenience) your right to say this.

To Paul Giguere

So you're going (or, by the time you read this, will have gone) to L.A. after all. Then I hate you, too. Lucky dog.

Good to see you at the Other Meeting. This way, I'll have a recent picture of you in my head to compare to the Post-L.A. Paul, with his shades, surfboard, and bicoastal lingo.

About your new and worthy indexing project, the smuttiest SF novel I've ever seen would undoubtedly be Samuel R. Delany's *The Tides of Lust*, which came out in the early 70s. From Lancer, maybe? Alternate title, *Equinox*? Extremely literary and a beautifully crafted work by a gifted writer who's a giant in the field, but certainly hard core. Straight, gay, necro, etc. Whew.

Love your description of most fantasy and SF series, where the first volume is merely "part one of ∞."

Liked your short-short "Mr. Rope." Although something that compressed — all plot, with no description or dialog — reads a bit more like a synopsis of a longer story than a true short-short story. However, in the space of only six paragraphs it did manage to invest me with a feeling of creepy disquiet, which I assume was the idea.

To Tony Lewis

Great to see you at the Other Meeting and actually have an opportunity to chat a bit. I knew either you or Mark Olson would know who the Remillardards were; I asked you together, and it was a dead heat.

Just thought you should know that Paul Giguere apparently nurses a secret sorrow that you never pronounce his name correctly at meetings. It's "Juh-GARE." Now if I could only get that "BUR-stine" or "BERN-stane" or "BREW-steen" guy right myself. . . .

So Alice will dig ditches in France for a "quango." Quickly rejecting the notions that this might be the embassy of an alien species of whose arrival I had not heard, or alternatively a French word for women's prison warden, I looked it up and was delighted to find its origins in "quasi-nongovernmental organization." Like the Post Office, right? Fine word; thanks.

To Michael Burstein

Great to see you at the Other Meeting ó despite your constant whining about how many pages I thumped onto the collation table. Can't help it if my sisters are long-winded. You're just jealous, wishing you could do a fun 20-page APA instead of an agonizing billion-page novel.

Congratulations again on your close Hugo results, Michael. I'll bet that pesky Maureen McHugh got her golden retriever and millions of her Chinese friends to stuff the ballot box. And as for David Feintuch, if he's such a new writer how come he's got three novels? Does he think paper grows on trees?

Also a thousand thanks for being the first to tell me about my actually getting six votes for best fanwriter Hugo. And for being one of the Sacred Six yourself. And for waiting a beat before you let slip that you'd got seven votes yourself in this category, among your many other accolades.

My reaction? I'm terribly pleased, proud, and grateful for the honor.

And also, now, terribly self-conscious. Like this sentence — can I really say it's Hugo-class? Maybe "honestly" would be better than "really"; I think I actually say really too much, really. And how about "Hugo-worthy" instead of "Hugo-class"? And people are always telling me that they enjoy my writing because it's funny —

no, really — but so far Pauly Shore, Martin Lawrence, and Gallagher all make a whole lot more money from their subtly satiric comic stylings than I do, so obviously I've got a ways to go. Maybe if I work in a joke about Harlan Ellison's heart attack, or Gregory Feeley's winning personality . . . I've got to THINK. What would David Langford do?

To Anna Hillier

You're definitely becoming the Astronomy Lady for this fanzine. Thanks for the little sample of your Sky Appreciation Corner.

There's an Australian fanzine I reviewed for *Proper Boskonian* a few months back called *Gegenschein*, but beyond knowing it was an astronomical term I wasn't clear about what the name actually meant. Could you go through it slowly one more time for us sky dunces?

I know you belong to an astronomy club. Do you have some big Mount Palomar size telescope at home yourself? Are optical telescopes completely passé? Do you have to know a lot of math? Do you have to stay up all night?

To Jim Mann

Nice, meaty, wide-ranging APA contribution.

About David Hartwell's *The Year's Best SF* anthology, I'd also pick Silverberg's "Hot Times in Magma City" by Robert Silverberg as a top-flight story. Mentioned to Hartwell at Readercon that I thought this was a very strong addition to the book. Interesting characters (halfway house inmates recovering from breakdowns etc.) in an interesting situation (L.A. with mini-volcanoes erupting all over the map daily) doing an interesting job (diverting lava flows). Good, solid technology SF, with character. Hartwell indicated that

he liked it a lot also, but that I was about the only other person who had mentioned it so far. Care to join our exclusive club?

As one of the knee-jerk anti-censorship types you disdain, I nevertheless think you make good points about the need for some improvements on the Internet. Certainly your example — explicit phone sex ads appearing daily in the baseball newsgroups your friend's kid was reading — states a good case for governance, if indeed this happens a lot and in many Internet sites frequented by kids.

But if laws or regulations must be created, let them be drawn slowly, carefully, narrowly, painfully — after study and statistics on specific problems too awful to bear. And created more in sorrow at the least infringement of free speech than in anger at anecdotes heard by legislators of either party who wouldn't know the Net if it dropped on them.