

# The Devniad

## Book 45

un zine de Bob Devney

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*[Last month (November), my sister Darcy and her husband, Bob, went to Florida and all I got was this lousy (OK, actually pretty good) trip report. — Bob Devney]*

### Disney Whirled

by Darcy Devney

QUESTION: “Bob Kuhn and Darcy Devney, now you’re *both* unemployed, what are you gonna do?”

ANSWER: “We’re going to Disney World!”

Also known as “If Orlando Had Been Picked for Worldcon, This Is What Your Vacation After Worldcon Could Have Been Like.”

[Darcy’s note: to avoid confusion with Bob Devney, Bob Kuhn is hereafter referred to as RMK.]

### INTERNET RESEARCH

For our last big (meaning expensive) trip (to England, in 1996, with siblings), RMK did all the advance prep. He was inhuman (in a good way). He chose 12 B&Bs, 34 attractions (combining four separate lists of Ten-Sites-I-Can’t-Miss with absolutely no overlap), intricately plotted into a logistical map that surpassed the D-Day Master Plan. Wherever we went in England, he knew every A-road, every objet d’art, even what kind of sheep we were driving past at any given moment. My sole contribution was to read Mark Olson’s trip report in my big brother’s APA.

So, I owed spouse points bigtime. Since I was unemployed this time, I surfed the net beforehand for days on end.

It may surprise you to know that there are 300+ sites devoted to Disneyania, including the heartbreaking “Minnie is my role model”-type, the banal “another 5

blurry pictures of me in front of person earning minimum wage by dressing in fur (!) in July in Florida”-type, and the downright spooky “At 0100 hours on Day 2, lunch (9.7 minutes) was 1 med. choc. shake, served by ugly 5 ft. 10 in. waiter wearing cross-garters. Straw broke. Cost, including .27 tip for lousy service, \$55.20.”

However, two personal sites, <http://www.wdn.com/dwills/> and <http://members.aol.com/DVClubber/dvchome.htm>, were unbelievably useful. There were also several commercial travel/tourist sites, including Frommer’s and Fodor’s, that came in handy. Using these sites, I sifted and clipped hundreds of pages of commentary into a 20-page, personalized guide for 2 picky adults to a week of fun in Disney.

Like most information on the net, the Disney info is always personal (some might say too-o-o-o personal), sometimes boring, sometimes very funny. And always way overboard on the use of acronyms (it took me ages to figure out that CM meant Cast Member, i.e., Disney employee).

Here’s a sampling of some random comments from those Disney sites:

“Remember what the guidebooks say about how far it is from guest parking to the [hotel] lobby? I measured it at over ½ mile to the \*closest\* spots. We decided against it, parked at the **Polynesian**, and took the monorail. You’d think they really didn’t want us off-property riff-raff coming to eat!”

“If you want your picture taken with **Chewbacca** at MGM, he is HUGE! I’m not kidding - 7 ft tall, at least. Kids were terrified.”

“**WDW** is getting more [handicap] accessible all the time. [But] I’d still like to break both of Michael Eisner’s legs and turn him loose there in a scooter for a couple of weeks. I bet the new doors would be in

place before the paint dried on the new ramps.”

“[At the **Animal Kingdom**] I had mentioned I was unhappy about being lost all the time and [a Disney employee] told us that the theme of AK is adventure. They didn’t draw the maps to scale, there aren’t a lot of signs and they were built small just for the fact that they wanted us to get lost. Huh? Was my response. I didn’t like being lost and I certainly told him so....”

“The flamingos between the **Odyssey** center and **Mexico** are bad boys. They do not get along with the other flamingos on **Discovery Island** and have been sent to Disney’s Flamingo Big House. There’s only one way out for them, and it’s not parole.”

## HOUSING

Back to Darcy and Bob’s excellent adventure.

We wanted to stay on Disney property, because we’d never done that before, but first we examined prices. Kudos to whoever did the **Swan & Dolphin** negotiating for the failed Worldcon-in-Orlando bid — I now know exactly how amazing that deal was. Then we examined availability. Zilch. Then we settled for an off-site B&B, **Perri House**.

Wow, was that lucky! **Perri House** is an Audubon-recognized bird sanctuary, away from the madding crowds and very inn-like.

Breakfast at **Perri House** was usually taken out on the terrace while RMK bird-watched and I sipped Pepsi. Cereals, fruits, muffins, Danish, coffee/tea, etc. started the day off right. By the end of the week, RMK said, “That ‘early bird catches the worm’ stuff is nonsense. The birds weren’t awake yet when I was out there.” Nonetheless, he did manage to see many birds he’d never seen before, and I loved the swimming pool.

**Perri House** is also basically at the “back door” to Disney property, so no I-4 or Route 192 traffic to contend with. I swear, I don’t know how anyone manages to get in or out of hotel parking lots on those highways - it’s *insane!* Rather than subjecting you to anguished paragraphs ... okay, just a few.

OK, I’m a brand-new driver (had my license 111 days on arrival in Orlando). I got *so-o-o-o* lost so many times in Florida!

It didn’t help that the main highway (I-4) runs north/south but is labeled east/west. Don’t ask, no explanation I was given made sense. My crowning achievement was, on the way back from **Ocala**, I hit the **Orlando** city limits (approximately 6 miles from my hotel) at 2 pm. By 3:30, I had missed the hotel — you could sort of see it from the highway — three times, and was getting hysterical. (In my own defense, the exit I was supposed to take, No. 27, was actually not on the highway. You had to know to take Exit 26 to *get to* both Exits 27 & 28. I just kept hitting Exit # 29 and thinking I was blind.)

About 5 pm, I finally spotted a state trooper, batted my tear-swollen eyes, and got decent directions at last. I got back to my hotel at 5:30 pm!

And yes, before you ask, I had three maps spread out on the seat next to me, but: (1) apparently two major mini-highways had recently been renamed, (2) there are no places to pull over in **Orlando** (unless you count swamps), and (3) I have not yet fully mastered the advanced Massachusetts driver technique of reading a map while driving 60 mph in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

However, on all trips where I had RMK as navigator, everything went just fine.

## HELL ON WHEELS

I’m overweight, suffer from inflamed plantar tendons, and sport ankles that have been fractured so many times my X-rays look like the LA highway system seen from the air. Remembering my last experience (and blisters) at Disney World — when I was in my energetic 20s *and* had a regular exercise program — we decided to rent me a wheelchair (\$5/day) for our first day in the biggest park. That was **Epcot** (Every Person Comes Out Tired, according to the net).

RMK jogged me around so fast my hair got windblown. I alternated between yelling “beep, beep” and just covering my eyes.

After a short discussion, we decided to do most parks this way. With RMK's enthusiasm (and biceps and whatever -ceps calf muscles are), we managed to see and do just about everything we wanted to.

### HELLTA EXPRESS

Speaking of inflamed suffering, one more digression: We will never fly **Delta Express** again. It's the airline that AAA seems to keep using, and it's *awful*.

To Florida, our flight was overbooked and people were offered vouchers for bumping. Then it was late. Then it was cancelled.

Our flight back was overbooked. Then people were bumped. Then it was late.

They offer no real meal service of any kind, no matter what time or how long your flight is. I usually get an aisle seat anyway, but on Delta Express, if there's an emergency and you're in a window seat, there is NO way you will be able to exit the plane. Give up and say your prayers sitting in your seat, 'cause you're toast. The seats are narrower than any woman's behind, and the backs are narrower than any man's shoulders. The overhead bins hang so low that it took the window seat person 5 minutes to extricate themselves by twisting like a pretzel — and we were co-operating. I don't know why the FAA allows these dangerous situations. No one but the passengers in the first row behind the pilots could possibly evacuate the plane. Enough ranting ... sorry, but it was such an unpleasant way to start and end a vacation.

### SUSTENANCE

Last time we were at Disney, we ate fast food, mostly outside the parks. This time, RMK's birthday present from his parents was a nice check, with encouragement to skip the hamburgers and have some real sit-down meals on vacation.

So we did, including several meals at Disney resort hotels. It was one of the best parts of our vacation. Below is just a sample:

**Red Lobster** is a well-known chain restaurant, so we weren't expecting fabulous food. Let me tell you, that was the best virgin strawberry daiquiri I've ever had. Seafood gumbo and red snapper went down easily for RMK, and I decided on just an assortment of side dishes, including wonderful mashed potatoes with garlic. (Total: \$28.)

At **Epcot**, we had the lunch buffet in **Norway**. It's a beautiful building, with arched doorways, stone floors, whitewashed walls, linen tablecloths.

But you know what's even prettier? The waitresses! Peach-skinned redheads and blondes, unbelievably nice to us, speaking in soft, accented voices — and dressed in the most adorable (and modest) ankle-length skirts, laced-up vests, snowy shirts. As for the men, I always think redhead men look like peeled frogs (nothing personal), and I'm sure Epcot should be paying them extra for dressing in the ugliest tied-at-the-knee breeches, shirt, and vest outfits.

The food? Oh, it was good, too. The "koldboord" included mac n cheese, enough herring varieties (five plus, including cream, mustard, tomato) to satisfy RMK's craving, and various exotic things I don't eat, including many, many meats prepared in many different ways. We added a fruit pastry tart to die for, and a chocolate mousse decorated like a Viking ship, complete with chocolate sail. (Total: \$48, including RMK's Ringnes beer and those desserts.)

The **Sci-Fi Café** at **Disney/MGM Studios** served probably the least impressive hamburger I've ever had - and the french fries were substandard, too.

But who cares when the drive-in movie theme is this well done? You're seated side-by-side in a real car, served by carhops on skates, while watching classic trailers of *very bad SF* and horror films of the 50s. Hint: keep an eye out for the UFO that appears in the sky above the fence. (Total \$30 — the meal, not the UFO.)

After an **Animal Kingdom** morning, we met Florida friends Jack and Lisa for lunch at **Pebbles in Lake Buena Vista**. RMK's grilled duck salad oriental, with mandarins and noodles, was a hit. My vegetable quesadilla was just light enough for the hot weather. We had a very loquacious 3+ hour lunch, and enjoyed ourselves immensely.

Another hot afternoon, we left a crowded park and drove over to the **Grand Floridian**. That's Disney's serene Victorian-themed hotel complete with fretwork balconies, stained glass, and songbirds in the lobby (RMK says to say they were Aussie lorikeets!). Tea was a multicourse 3-hour experience, complete with attentive waitress (in costume, of course).

First, the tea (with tea strainer, cozy, and sugar lumps, of course) was excellent. I chose English Breakfast and ended up sipping down four-plus pots of it; RMK had lovely iced raspberry tea. We started with tea sandwiches — smoked salmon, pear and Gorgonzola, spicy chicken salad with cherry, egg salad, cucumbers hollowed out and filled with roast vegetables. For the second course we had tarts and very good scones with jam, and imported Devonshire cream. The third course was dessert, a choice of cookies or pastries, and a huge bowl of strawberries and whipped cream.

We love afternoon tea, and this was one of the best tea meals we've ever had.

Lunch at **Wolfgang Puck's Café** near **Pleasure Island** was terrific. Darcy's "kid cheese pizza" (no, not goat) was exceptional, and RMK indulged himself with a Sam Adams and the sushi sampler: eight sushi rolls California-style with spicy tuna and five sushi (tuna, salmon, crab, shrimp, octopus). (Total: \$30.11 plus tip.)

We also visited the **Ghiradelli Soda Fountain and Chocolate Shop** one afternoon. RMK asked for "extra-thick" frappes, and what we basically got was hard ice cream ... whipped to the consistency of soft ice cream. Mmmmm.

Once we lunched lightly at **Seasons**, the restaurant of the **Disney Institute**. The huge green-and-white room features an ivy-and-trellis décor. RMK had salad Nicoise with grilled tuna and a very nice dressing. Scaling my Tower of Fruit, I discovered I really like mango. The rolls were, as always at Disney, warm and delicious. Also, any place that gives you a carafe(!) of Sprite is on my side.

Our meal on the last night at Disney was at **Artist's Point** at the **Wilderness Lodge**. Definitely the best meal of our vacation.

The restaurant is beautiful and large, northwest-themed, with an hourly geyser eruption as tableside entertainment. The waiter was positively obsequious. It was all like being millionaires for a night. (By the way: eerily, like every other waiter we had at Disney, ours was named Kevin or Keith, and had just moved there from New England.)

I had prime rib and extra portions of au gratin potatoes (lovely and creamy).

After serious consultation with K, RMK ordered a Northwest wine sampler (2 Cabernets and a Merlot). His meal started with the Taste of the Northwest (buffalo marinated with apples, chanterelle mushrooms, and blueberries — subtle and interesting), variety of heirloom tomatoes and onion salad, mixed field greens, smoked-in-house-salmon, shrimp, and goat cheese with cracked peppercorns. He also finished off my prime rib leftovers.

But wait, there's more. Breads (walnut and sunflower) were served with salmon butter, apple butter, and sweet butter. RMK's dessert (free because I had mentioned to the waiter that this was RMK's birthday present) was berry cobbler. That's wild blueberries cooked into a light shortbread with fresh blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, and raspberry sauce with cinnamon ice cream. My chocolate silk bread pudding pie sounded weird, but was unbelievably good. I overtipped our friend K. (Total: \$ 75.) "Wow" was RMK's review; the only part of the meal not overstuffed.

## DISNEY QUEST

Before this trip, the last (actually, the only) video game I'd ever been able to score anything at was Ms. Pac Man. So I'd thought that **Disney Quest**, the electronic playground/video arcade/virtual reality (VR) club, would be just for my husband and similar computer-addicted folks with testosterone.

Well, I was wrong. RMK had a terrific time, but I really enjoyed it, too.

Just watching the folks on the VR **Jungle Cruise** raft ride bounce up and down (and hearing them scream over the waterfalls) was tremendous fun. I didn't even realize that they actually got spritzed with water, too, until I saw RMK's shirt (he rode twice).

The **Hercules in the Underworld** game was true VR. Standing in a chariot, looking at a wrap-around screen, using a joystick to catch and throw lightning bolts, all as part of a four-person team (Hercules, Megara, Philokles, Pegasus) was really, really cool. I actually scored highest once, unheard of for someone who actually *cannot* chew gum and walk at the same time.

My husband's favorite **Midway on the Moon** skill test was **Whack-an-Alien**. The "aliens" pop out of the person's stomach, an ickier variation of our local Whack-a-Mole. I got a real kick out of Rescue Dumbo from the Fire, a silly water game for kids.

The only ride we didn't try (and probably should have) looked like so much fun it should be illegal: **Buzz Lightyear's AstroBlaster**. Think two-person bumper cars on rollers. Rubber balls on the arena floor are picked up by driving over them. The driver steers while the shooter loads the balls into a cannon and fires them at other bumper cars. If your car is hit, it spins around in a mad circle (made me motion-sick just to look at).

But **Disney Quest** could be even better.

First, change the admission structure. We paid \$20 each for admission, which includes game tokens. Many folks, like me, were in a party of two — frequently an adult and child — where one person was

much more adventurous (and less motion-sick) than the other. So a "spectator" card would probably sell well. (You could always buy game credits inside to add to your spectator card.)

Second, provide ways for single folks to pair up for attractions that are more fun for crowds. For example, if, at less-busy times, rides and games started on the half-hour, things like **Mighty Ducks Pinball Slam** (sort of VR hockey) and **AstroBlaster** would be much more entertaining with every vehicle in play. For the **Jungle Cruise**, **Hercules**, etc., offer a pair-up line option or something. (RMK did the **Jungle Cruise** once by himself, but it's hard for one person to paddle straight on both sides of the raft simultaneously.)

Third, please provide a range of VR helmets. RMK spent the whole of **Ride the Comix** whaling away with a "sword" that had to be held with both hands while continually putting a hand up to adjust his helmet downward. (He actually got an abraded scalp from it - I bet either of my Big Head Brothers would be marked for life.)  
*[Thank you, my Pinhead Sister — Editor.]*

The employee's response to RMK's complaint was "Yeah, the kids always complain that they don't fit right, too," which is pitiful customer service. At the very least, try the helmets on in advance and check to make sure that the fit will work. (After **Ride the Comix**, we tried the **Aladdin's Magic Carpet Ride** helmets on before paying - and yep, RMK's helmet slipped right up again.)

Last, please have more signage or brochures or *something* to explain a game, and maybe play for 30 seconds, before you start. While it may make economic sense to force payment for the first game (during which you figure out how to play), the second game (you try out your idea) and the third game (you actually just play), it's kind of frustrating.

## PLEASURE ISLAND (COMEDY CLUB AND ADVENTURER'S CLUB)

The quote from the net about the **Adventurer's Club** was irresistible: "Visualize the concept of an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century British 'Explorer's Club,' mix well with 'Mad Magazine', and toss in a bit of 'Calvin and Hobbes.' " We were hooked.

RMK actually dressed up, complete with pith helmet, safari vest, and bow tie, as a 1930s adventurer for our visit. The club manager was so impressed he took us privately through the back entrance and seated us right up front in advance of the show! Of course, for the rest of the evening, the audience was convinced RMK was one of the actors.

Both of the clubs we went to really depend on the audience. The improv comedians at the **Comedy Club** were very good — and *so* quick on the adlibs — but given good suggestions from the audience, were phenomenal. (RMK notes that the CC actors concentrated on the musical improvs, which are usually avoided elsewhere 'cause so hard to do well. For example, an actress interviewed a member of the audience via a phone planted in advance, and then, after about a minute, the entire company sang a several-stanza song about the audience member.) Live wire audiences at the **Adventurers' Club**, ready to be interactive and play along with the slightly abusive comedy, can make a night to remember. As when the wives volunteered their husbands to get up on stage for some "dirty dancing."

We, the original "lights out by 10pm" couple, danced back to the B&B at 2 am!

## CHILDREN

So, you're thinking of taking your kids to Disney?

Let me be blunt: out of the thousands of children we saw every day, I'd say 10% were experiencing the "magic." Maybe 20% were having about as much fun as at a local amusement park back home. Another 30% were asleep or too tired to care. And 40% were having total meltdowns.

Honestly, I understand that you're spending a lot of money and effort, but anyone under 10 (or a very mature 9) is just

too young (mentally and physically) for most of what Disney offers.

Yes, again, some of my nicest memories of Disney are of a 6-year-old's smile and amazement. But I still wonder why the parents who dragged 5-year-olds right past the warning signs to the show "**It's a Bug's Life**" aren't up for child abuse charges. This is a loud 3D *and* tactile show where wasps sting your back (you actually get poked), audio-animatronic black widow spiders the size of basketballs drop from the ceiling, and "acid" spits at you (you actually get wet). Bee-phobic as I am, I waited outside while RMK went in.

Like clockwork, 1,2,3,4 — another crying child led out, 1,2,3,4 — another screaming child, 1,2,3,4 — another hysterical child ...

Oh, I forgot - most of the show happens in the dark! It was sad and funny at the same time.

We tried **Fort Wilderness** for the campfire/sing-along/marshmallow roast, offered nightly, and were sorely disappointed. RMK waited in line for 20+ minutes to buy the marshmallows, then waited in line to toast them at the tiny campfire surrounded by zillions of bored yet screaming children. The sing-along guy was awful, and had no idea what children like to sing.

But all was not lost. We left early, and went on RMK's first **hayride** ever. (*Perhaps in his native Australia they have sheepdips instead — Editor.*) The horses clopped along in the dark, we chatted with the driver and the other passengers, and felt the cool breezes from the lake. It was lovely.

## BUT WHAT ABOUT THE RIDES AND ATTRACTIONS?

Oh, yeah, we did everything on our list - and more. The live theatre shows, which we missed entirely last time, were like mini Broadway spectaculars, with full staging, costumes, and quality voices.

Keep in mind that we're not roller-coaster enthusiasts. RMK went on a few "motion simulator" rides and decided he's just not impressed (and they make me sweaty and nauseated).

Of course, I had to go on Disney's version of a log flume. Although nothing is quite that simple at Disney: **Splash Mountain** is an 11-minute ride, complete with audio-animatronic singing puppets and a five-story drop (!) at the end.

Oh — as you begin your final descent, a flashbulb pops right in your face. It turns out you can buy the picture immediately after the ride, but my eyes were closed and RMK's face was completely hidden by his hat ... Although just after the flash went off, said hat succumbed to the G-forces and came right off his head. The man in the back seat of the log caught it!

We would both vote for **Disney/MGM Studios** as our favorite park. Although it's the smallest, we spent 2 days there and enjoyed almost everything.

The **Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular** (a half-hour live-action show of the stunts from the first Indiana Jones movie, including the rolling ball, the spikes in the floor, the propeller fight in front of the airplane, etc.) was probably the high point for us. RMK volunteered as an extra and got picked right away.

I hope that the photo I took of the moment after the casting director said to RMK, "Scream as loud as you can!" came out. I was laughing too hard and had one hand over my ear, so I think the camera was jiggled. I bet the volunteer next to him jumped 4.5 feet straight up. Plus RMK was hoarse for the rest of our time at Disney ... but it was worth it.

In the **Magic Kingdom**, we loved **Buzz Lightyears' Space Rangers** ride, which opened 1 week before we came. You're a space cadet suddenly recruited to help defend the galaxy against its worst enemy, Emperor Zorg. You ride in an open-face space capsule, with two guns and one joystick trigger that rotates the capsule to

give you a better angle. Your mission is to shoot the "Z" targets.

Trust me: you do not want to share a car with your beloved — you'll keep missing your shots when s/he moves the joystick.

At the end of the ride, your score is added up, and you receive your rank (Space Pilot, Galactic Commander, etc.). The graphics in the queue are great, and inside is a wonderful, neon/phosphorescent environment.

We did it three times straight in a row.

My first score was 6,000, RMK's was 192,000. I was kidding about this in line, and the Disney employee pulled me aside for secret tips to better my score. Second game, I got 100,000+ points, but RMK was still just under 200,000.

I shared some tips with him (turn around completely and hit the backs of things as you leave an area and, once you've hit something, keep the trigger pressed to keep racking up points) before the third game. He broke 200,000; I got distracted working my joystick and only got 73,000. But it was great fun!

**Fantasmic**, the newest Disney nighttime extravaganza, opened the week before we arrived, too. We had both thought that the **Sorcery in the Sky** fireworks were amazing, with music and fireworks well-matched. But **Fantasmic** blew us both away.

We sat front row center, even though we were warned we would get wet. The pre-show was terrific, with jugglers, characters, and one of the funniest ad-lib comics I've ever seen. I can't describe the show, other than to mention that it includes fireworks, acrobats, water floats, dancing, lasers, fire, music, and so much more. Including famous scenes from Disney movies projected onto a screen made by fountains of water.

RMK was awestruck, and that's hard to do. We were covered with fine ash and a mist of water, but went home well content.

## AND OF COURSE ...

And have I mentioned my lovely trip to **Ocala**, which is the southern version of

Kentucky Bluegrass horse country? Or my **Arabian Nights** dinner theatre experience? Or the drowsy, sunny morning we spent on **Discovery Island**, studying the native birds of Florida and walking on the sandy beach? Or that I saw the movie *Antz* for \$4 in the most comfortable theater seats I've ever encountered, with the clearest sound and the biggest screen, at the AMC theaters on **Pleasure Island**? Or the free, surprise Trisha Yearwood concert at the **Magic Kingdom** one night?

But then, I don't want to make you all *too* jealous ...