

The Devniad Book 47b

un zine de Bob Devney
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For APA:NESFA #345 February 1999
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Orbita Dicta **Heard in the halls of** **Boskone 36** **Sheraton Hotel, Framingham,** **Massachusetts, U.S.A.** **February 12-14, 1999**

OK, as usual, people (SEE "fen" or "pros") that I or my spies overheard at a recent science fiction (SEE "SF") convention (SEE "con") furnish the quotes. I supply the stuff in brackets, adding context (SEE "sarcasm") or personal narrative (SEE "egotisticalism"). If you prefer smoother, less fractured textuality, may I suggest Charles Dickens, Marcel Proust, or Evelyn Leeper?

[At my office job Friday afternoon, colleague Craig Sullivan offers the traditional smirking send-off]

Well, have a good time this weekend ess-effing.

[Seconds after my arrival at the hotel, author Michael A. Burstein, Emperor of the Ego Scan, spots this reporter and pounces]

Bob.

Bob.

Quote me.

[Weary NESFAn Tom Endrey at door, after long hard trip up from NYC, doesn't buy my complimentary greeting about his looking dapper]

I don't feel dapper.

[In the Green Room, Boskone programming co-captain Jim Mann anticipates the next panel]

The last year and a half of *Deep Space Nine* have been the best SF ever on television.

[At the panel on SF TV, fan Guest of Honor Teddy Harvia allows he's not much of a media fan]

I don't watch television ... To me, the last great sci-fi on TV was *The Jetsons*.

[Film critic Dan Kimmel snaps up the topic like Astro fetching a space biscuit]

Matt Groening's long-awaited follow-up show *[after a little number called The Simpsons]*, *Futurama*, will be premiering this spring ... This is his *Jetsons*.

[Writer Josepha Sherman prefers her satire with more bite]

Structurally, *Buffy* has got to be the most difficult show to write. It's an anthology show ... an ensemble show ... and it has to be dark and funny every minute.

[Kimmel beats the rap]

In the TV industry, it used to be the rap was, "SF doesn't last." What changed was, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* went to syndication. And was hugely successful. At its height, its numbers were equaling stuff like *Wheel of Fortune*!

[Burstein agrees: SF rules]

Star Wars Special Edition opened in 1997, the number one show that weekend — even though everyone knew how it came out.

[It's not quite king of the world, though, as I point out from the audience]

— Oh, not like *Titanic*.

[Kimmel responds with an absolutely uncalled for remark]

— Watch, he'll quote himself in his newsletter!

[Not as much as I'll quote Burstein]

I really like the show *Early Edition* ... Although I keep imagining a crossover between *Early Edition* and *The X-Files* where Scully says, "Come on, Fox, are you saying this guy is getting tomorrow's newspaper?"

[Kimmel plugs work in progress]

I'm currently writing a book on the history of the Fox channel. So I did some research on *The X-Files*. Its creator Chris Carter grew up watching *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* [where Darren McGavin as a hard-boiled reporter keeps encountering paranormal stories]. And he said, "Let's do a show like that now." But the problem was, how can the heroes keep meeting, like, vampires? "I know, we'll have them be investigators!"

[Kimmel's acuity crumbles before a cutie]

Voyager I'm still watching because, well, first of all, there's Seven of Nine. [Audience catcalls] I just love how they've developed ... her character.

[Burstein keeps watching the skies]

As far as new movies go, everybody here has to go to *October Sky*. It's based on the book *Rocket Boys*, about teenagers in the 50s building rockets ... just wonderful!

[At the panel on Fanzine Futures, Teddy Harvia reminds us that many have none]

Some people put out what I call "conceptual fanzines" — they ask you for art; you give them art; they never publish.

[As in most panels he's on, Fred Lerner has to explain where the hell he got his fanzine title]

"Lofgeornost" happens to be the last word in *Beowulf*.

[And speaking of noshing in the mead-hall]

... For me, fanzine writing is like a dinner party. I might want to have a few people I know over for a meal ... Put a fanzine on the Web and I don't know who's coming over.

[For Harvia — O fanzine, thy beauty art art]

Flip through print, you get instant access to the art. I don't care about the text. On the net, it takes *forever* for the art to load ...

What the Internet has done for me is give me more people who want my postcards.

[Even his sightless condition can't protect Ed Meekys from Harvia the Horrible]

I pay high school kids to read fanzines and so on out loud to me. Except the time when I got one of his postcards from Teddy, which I finally found out said, "Dear Reader, Laugh hilariously when you see this postcard, but don't tell Ed what it's about."

[Could Harvia be brewing postcard lawsuits?]

When you send somebody a letter, they own the physical object. But you own the copyright.

[From the audience, Brit fan Alison Scott joins Lerner in the Give Your Fanzine A Weird Name And Suffer Eternal Torment Club]

It's *Plokta*. Not *Plotka* or *Polkta* or any of that. It's an acronym. Press Lots Of Keys To Abort? ... The first 10 or 11 issues are now up on our Web site, at www.plokta.com

[Writer Daniel Dern promptly plugs in]

— Which by the way reminds me of my Web site, at www.dern.com ...

[From Lerner, not necessarily a comment on the previous comment]

Trivia is a minor fact that has some emotional meaning. If it doesn't, it's minutiae.

[Make that Harvia the Merciless]

— Like if I was interested in this discussion, it would be trivia.

[Czar Harvia declares death to revisionists]

I get fanzines done in both media, paper and electronic. I don't trust the ones on the Web. I'll print out a version that has a mistake, and notice later they've *[silently]* fixed it on the Web ... It's like Russian history!

*[An audience member brings another dispatch
from the long-smoldering Age Wars]*

They did a Web survey ... the older
people print it out, the younger people read
it off the screen.

[Lerner makes a point with a plug in it]

Your screen is 72 dots per inch ... *[Holds up his new book, The Story of Libraries]* This is 1200 dots per inch. [... And, later, a few stapled sheets of paper] See this? It's a damned sight more portable than my Macintosh.

[Scott, in audience]

— But my notebook computer's a lot more portable than my library!

[NESFA Master Letterhack George Flynn considers the future: threat or menace?]

When virtual reality is developed enough, you'll be able to duplicate the experience of holding up and reading your fanzine ...

[Scott agrees the circle may be unbroken]

We got from Mae Strelkov in Argentina, some fanzines from the 70s in hecto. We can't reproduce that look in our paper versions, but go to our Web site and you can see those hectos in all their glory!

[But is it worth the wait? Maybe not for Lerner]

— You know what they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. On the Web, a picture had *better* be worth a thousand words.

[At the Works of Willis panel honoring writer GOH Connie Willis, Aboriginal editor Charley Ryan buries the lead]

Are we here to attack Connie or to praise her?

[Writer James Patrick Kelly pledges allegiance]

She's one of my oldest, dearest friends and literary allies ... She's also one of the best short stories writers of our generation, and I wish she'd write more short stories. Though I would hate to lose *To Say Nothing of the Dog* or *Doomsday Book*.

[Willis keeps her balance, notes Ryan]

Look at even something serious like *Doomsday Book*. The plague scenes are horrific, but back in the modern world it's a Capra screwball comedy.

[The loveliest image of the con comes with magic ease from writer Sarah Smith]

A magician has a rabbit come out of a hat. Most magicians will stop there. Connie Willis has a *hat* on the rabbit — and out of *it* comes another rabbit ...

[Kelly feels Willis' success is a tribute to her readers, too]

One of the things that's a little surprising about her popularity is how much she *expects* from her readers ... She'll ask you to hold your understanding in abeyance for a good while.

[For a second, I thought Kelly was going to talk about "Even the Queen"]

For me, her early period ends with "Fire Watch" and "Letter to the Clearys." She won Nebulas for both, in the same year *[1982, for Novelette and Short Story]* ... One of the things a writer fears most is to be known forever for doing one thing. But Connie wrote "Fire Watch." And then she wrote "The Last of the Winnebagoes." And then *Doomsday Book*, and on and on ...

[Kelly picks among the runts of the litter]

One of my favorites is "Chance." Gardner Dozois and I have talked about this story a *lot*. It's in the *Fire Watch* collection.

[Smith's choice reflects a different taste]

The Connie Willis story I like the most: "The Sidon in the Mirror," also in *Fire Watch*.

[Ryan reveals a really dreadful Secret]

Then there's *The Story That Dare Not Speak Its Name*. "The Secret of Titicaca" ... actually her first published.

[Kelly seems to agree "caca" is about right]

— I happen to know that Connie Willis is willing to spend big money for somebody who is willing to find one of the few remaining copies and *destroy* it in front of her.

[At the Trivia Bowl, past winner/current judge Mike Scott of Britain's Plokta Cabal unholsters a sinister huge stack of cards that will all too soon prove to contain some horrendous stumpers — all delivered with the twisted smile of Rowan Atkinson channeling Hannibal Lector]

I jotted down a few little questions on the plane coming over ...

[After the Bowl is over (before the break of dawn), organizer Mark Olson ponders the Big Question]

The best trivia question is the one where everybody in the audience hears the answer and goes “Oh shit, I knew that!”

[Saturday morning in the hallway, Jim Mann feels programming is going well, although —]

We actually get somebody in the Gripe Session from time to time who thinks they're *complaining* about programming by saying there were too many good items all at once.

[At breakfast, his miraculous diet/exercise program has made NESFA's Paul Giguere a bitter sight for this reporter's flabby, bloodshot eyes]

I used not to be able to get to the third floor without gasping ... This morning, I zoomed up 6 flights and barely broke a pant.

[Paul's also bubbly about the success of the brand-new Monty Wells Project, wherein NESFA honored the memory of our departed teacher/friend by bringing in educators for how-to-teach-SF seminars right before the con]

Several teachers said it was really worthwhile. Looks like we'd definitely do it again.

[Like me, APA:NESFA mainstay Anna Hillier languishes in a mixed marriage]

No, I can only stay for the day, not do the whole con. My poor husband, who's not into all this, said this morning, “Am I going to get fed tonight?”

[Dan Kimmel stops people in the hall for a late-breaking film update]

The big movie I'm looking way ahead for should come out around the end of the year. They're doing Isaac Asimov's *The Bicentennial Man!* With Robin Williams ...

[At Tor editors Teresa and Patrick Nielsen Haydens' kaffeeklatsch, writer Brenda Clough drops by to whisper one hot message to Teresa]
OK, 1 p.m. at the front door: SEX!

[Though Teresa promptly stifles steamy dreams of lobby lesbo demos]

— SEX. Meaning “Stash Enhancing Expedition.” We're going shopping for yarn.

[As an editor, Teresa sometime suffers fools]

So this new writer seriously asked me why he had to bother with plot.

Why put in plot, I said? Because you want to give readers a reason to read the next page.

[Since all 800 people at the con have asked him why Vernor Vinge's new novel, announced for February, isn't out yet, Patrick issues a statement for the record re A Deepness in the Sky]

I don't *know!* That's the production people, and I can't get them to return my calls ... We're printing 17,500. Which is four times more than we printed of *A Fire Upon the Deep*.

[Patrick offers a salute — or at least a finger — to the noble ideal of the gentleman editor]

I'm sick of hearing about fucking Max Perkins ...

... My title is Managing Editor. Which doesn't mean I run the science fiction line at Tor, it means I run *alongside* the science fiction line at Tor. You know, between Tor and Forge, we publish 200 to 300 books a year.

[Though some are dearer to his heart]

I've got to talk about Ken MacLeod. We're releasing a new U.S edition of *The Cassini Division*, and then I think going back for *The Star Fraction* ...

You'll like Ken MacLeod if you like Iain Banks or Vernor Vinge. Tech writers who

can actually write. He's a boyhood friend of Banks; they grew up together ...

... He's also a lifelong Trotskyite who's fascinated with American libertarianism. In fact, he's the only Communist I can think of who's won two Prometheus Awards, which usually go to people like Poul Anderson or Jerry Pournelle.

[And some other writers are close at hand]

Everybody should read the Mageworld books. Oh, and here at the end of the table is Jim MacDonald, co-writer of the Mageworld books.

[MacDonald points out his daughter]

And this is Katherine, first reader of the Mageworld books.

[Fred Lerner, if you'd been at the table you might have taken this lesson from Patrick]

I believe in Vonda McIntyre's rule that the title of a science fiction novel should never be difficult to pronounce or embarrassing to say aloud.

[Aspiring writer Sara Beth Durst just may have a hidden agenda with this question]

What really happens with unsolicited manuscripts?

[Teresa has an indirect answer, though perhaps not the one desired]

— People are always saying, "How can you judge my book from three chapters?"

[Sly smile] Three?

[I'm even more cynical]

— Chapters?

[Teresa fondly lists things not to say in your submission letter ... that people have actually said]

"I think you'll find this a cut above the usual crap Tor publishes."

[Patrick closes with his favorite example]

"I'll bet you won't dare to publish this novel." I'll bet you're right.

[The Bad Science panel gets off to a bad start as I forget to note who says the first interesting thing]

"Microns" is not an SI unit; "micrometers" is.

[Writer Jeff Hecht says that for some SF technoids, writing about, say, genetics isn't rocket science — and that's the point]

The average engineer last took biology in the tenth grade.

[Writer and Analog reviewer Tom Easton has a good bad example]

I saw a story recently, set in the next century, where the characters get smallpox.

Now, we've recently eradicated that disease from the earth. The only samples are in a lab somewhere. If you want to write the story explaining how the samples got out, that's fine. But if you just give your people smallpox, that's not.

[At the NESFA sales table, welcome news: Helmuth lives again!]

As George Flynn said, "Let the record show that the Chairperson managed to fix the Gestetner by a laying-on of hands."

[SF bookseller Art Henderson, whose e-mail address I screwed up in a previous issue (try HndrsnsBks@aol.com), is crazy about cartoons too]

In a book I've already sold out on, *Beck's Fifty Greatest Cartoons Of All Time As Chosen By 1000 Animators*, the number one animated cartoon was that Wagner takeoff by Chuck Jones — Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd in *What's Opera, Doc?*

[As the Wells to Willis time travel panel foregathers, famous fanwriter Evelyn Leeper indicates me and, all unknowing, hints why my readers have more fun]

Putting down the *mishegaas* before the panel is *his* job.

[Paul Levinson, newly risen SFWA president after some mishegaas with Robert Sawyer, thinks it's good to be king]

I'm enjoying this job, contrary to some predecessors ...

[Connie Willis shows her serious side, though paraphrasing (OK, stealing) a line from L. P. Hartley]

I think the past is the ultimate forbidden country that we would all like to travel to ...

It's tied up with really strong emotional feelings we have ... If we could only go back to where things really started to go wrong.

... We are not three-dimensional creatures; we exist in other dimensions, like time.

[Michael Burstein blinds us with science]

Richard Lott, a physicist at Princeton, said basically that a kind of time travel might be possible if two superstrings looped around each other ...

So if you did something impossible with two nonexistent things, you'd have time travel.

[If some future dude could recede back to the nowness and mess up my notes so I amn't sure exactly who said this, is it epistemologically verifiable they could maybe did will have?]

Then there are the philosophical possibilities of time travel. As in Kit Reed's "Great Escape Tours, Inc." — about elderly people in Florida who get to travel back to the past, with unexpected results. Or Philip K. Dick's "A Little Something for Us Tempunauts," the finest story on the subject. I think both are in an old anthology, *Final Stage*.

[Is Levinson calling Herb chicken?]

In H.G. Well's *The Time Machine*, there's a little of all the themes we've been talking about. That was the egg from which all this hatched.

[In some alternate timeline, perhaps Levinson never said this, thus escaping his post-Boskone assassination by alt hist fanatics and avoiding the entire tyrannical Burstein Ascendancy and bloody War of the Nebulas]

I confess to thinking of alternate history as kind of *lazy* time travel stories.

[Willis demonstrates that SF writers keep peculiar holidays]

Then there's *Groundhog Day*, which we see every year on February second. Every time I hear that Sonny & Cher song, I get very nervous.

[Watch for Willis' next book — or have you?]

I'm writing a book on near-death experiences, so I'm doing brain research. *Deja vu* is located in the temporal lobe.

... People say to me, why don't you just write histories?

I'm not interested in the *past*. I'm interested in the parallax vision — how people in the past can look at the future, and how people in the future can look at the past — and us looking at both of them.

[At the Mysteries & SF panel, writer Alexander Jablovkov sees a kinship]

Tony Hillerman's mysteries have just as much overhead *[as any worldbuilding SF book]* in describing the Hopi and Navajo worlds.

[The similarity often extends to disguised pandering to the contemporary audience, according to writer David Alexander Smith]

In Brother Cadfael, when the monk says "I know he did it but can I prove it" — that's a 20th century question.

[Smith thinks science — DNA tests, for instance — sometimes affects mysteries as much as SF]

Means, motive, and opportunity don't matter if it's 1 in 7 million ... That's helped eliminate a lot of the classic whodunit forms.

[As a new writer (but with several novels sold already), Barbara Chapaitis is filling in the puzzle]

The biggest mystery of all is how publishers decide what advance you get —

[A sympathetic audience member (presumably an author) chimes in]

— That's not mystery, that's horror!

[And Jablovkov sounds a related note later]

Do not ask authors why their book covers look so bad.

[Meanwhile, out in the hallway, some South Park fan has stuck a cardboard placard beneath the hotel sign labeling a meeting room the "Kilkenny"]

THE BASTARDS.

[Starting a panel on new or unsung writers, Evelyn Leeper fancies the word wizards of Oz]

... General rule: If you find a book that's written by an Australian and published

here, it's pretty good. It had to make it over that great big ocean ...

Today's entrant in the Australian Writers Named Sean Sweepstakes is Sean McMullen. I read *Centurion's Empire* — sort of Poul Andersonish.

[Editor Ginjer Buchanan touts another dark horse]

Dark Sleeper, by Geoffrey Barlough. He's a veterinarian in his 40s or 50s, who desktop-published 100 copies for his friends and family — then submitted it to some publishing houses. If Charles Dickens wrote fantasy, it would be this book ... It's out in trade in the fall.

[Patrick Nielsen Hayden is going Gray]

An author I've never published and who goes against the grain of what I tend to like is a Scottish writer named Alasdair Gray. He's elderly, self-pitying, alcoholic — and those are his *good* qualities.

... But you should try to find his *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*. Stories like "The Great Bear Cult," about a forgotten element of British history in the 30s where everybody joined a Fascist movement, and gathered in public squares and chanted "BEARS ARE STRONG BUT BEARS ARE GENTLE!"

... There's a sort of alternate world where Alasdair Gray and Howard Waldrop are guests of honor at the Weird Worldcon.

[Laura Anne Gilman of Penguin Putnam has a prescription for future good reading]

Stephen Burns — *Flesh and Silver*. It's basically about the horrible evolution of health care in America, through the eyes of a doctor in the future.

It's coming out as a mass market original. Why? To get people to buy it.

[Nielsen Hayden on an reclusive talent who won Nebula and Campbell awards in the early 90s]

Remember Ted Chiang? He did three stories in two years, like "Tower of Babylon," and won all sorts of awards. Then nothing. Which you can understand if you've seen him at a con. This tall,

ectomorphic Oriental guy who basically looks terrified.

I just published his fourth story, in *Starlight 2*.

[Think Buchanan said this, but darned if I can find other references to this book by one of my favorites]

Nina Kiriki Hoffman — Avon brought her first two books out. We're now publishing a third in the fall, *A Red Heart of Memories*.

[No panel can go by without more from Gilman]

No panel like this can go by without my mentioning Anne Bishop, one of the finest writer to come along in years. Her first book, out now, is *Daughter of the Blood*. It's a malevolent story of the redemptive power of love.

[For Buchanan, art and literature intertwine]

Sharon Shinn did her series with *Archangel* and *Jovah's Angel*, with those great Jude Palencar covers. But it turns out they were not great *mass market* covers. They're not selling that well in mass market ...

But any second now, in May, we've got her new one coming out: *Wrapt in Crystal*. It's a new, freestanding novel.

[Gilman feels the other Joyce repays study]

I want to mention someone else. You can pick up every damn book he's written ... and that's Graham Joyce.

[Gilman talks up one of my picks from last year]

Island in the Sea of Time — S. M. Sterling is buckling down and taking himself more seriously. The island of Nantucket is transported to the Bronze Age.

[Nielsen Hayden says wait, there's more]

— Yes, that's a really breakthrough book for Steve Sterling. The second book, the sequel, comes out in May: *Against the Tide of Years*. And the third later, *On the Seas of Eternity*.

[At her kaffeeklatsch, Laura Anne Gilman again leads the choir praising the new Bishop]

Anne Bishop. In her first book, *Daughter of the Blood*, Satan is the protagonist. In fact, he becomes kind of the humane father figure ... On amazon.com, there're 43 reviews, only 1 negative. The rest were four or five stars.

And her next book, *Heir to the Shadows*, is coming out in March.

[Ink vampire Gilman flits around — editor by day, writer by night]

My *Buffy* novel ... I was forced to watch my favorite episodes over and over to get the voice right ...

I get two and a half cents a copy for every one sold.

[Gilman on the job and its joys]

Being a book editor is not a job. It becomes who you are, and how you spend all your time.

... The joke is, you don't learn an assistant's name until after the first 6 months.

... No one has ever walked up to a brain surgeon and said, "I always wanted to be a brain surgeon, but I never had the time."

... When I read a manuscript, what am I looking for? To stop thinking.

[What advice would Editor Gilman give Writer Laura Anne?]

My strength is in character and voice. But Warren Lapine of *Absolute Magnitude* will never buy my stuff. Because my stories don't have enough action. They're always set in the aftermath of something happening. "The Aftermath of Something Happening" — that's a title I wanted to use for something ...

[Writer Faye Ringel's quote may explain a lot]

Tom Monteleone says some books are published so the sales force can say, "Don't bother to take this one." Give themselves more credibility selling the rest of their list ...

[In our room before the banquet, I fold a \$20 bill and fork it over, singing "Happy birthday to you, happy ..." etc. to my brother Michael, who's suitably moved by my extravagant gesture]

Thank you, Bob. I'm — I'm deeply touched.

[At the banquet, dealer Chris Edwards of Tiger Eye Books is still starstruck]

I got to be an extra recently in a movie filmed in my part of the country. I read for a

speaking part, but didn't get it ... It's *Girl Interrupted*, with Winona Ryder ... She's just what you'd expect. Really pretty, and really petite.

[After the actually pretty good eats, Boskone Chairbeing Deb Geisler starts the speechifying]

If we do this Southern banquet menu next year, Jim Mann has agreed to donate his collection of hot sauces.

[Announcing NESFA's short story prize, Michael Burstein does his usual lunge for the limelight]

I see a microphone, I see fans, I feel like accepting a Hugo.

[Moving back to their seats after she and Patrick are named NESFA Fellows, Teresa Nielsen Hayden proofreads their name on the plaque]

— Hey, it's spelled correctly!

[Artist Bob Eggleton gets, obtains, and procures his Skylark nice-guy award]

I don't know what to say. I can't talk. I'm speechless —

[Unable to help myself, I catcall from the audience]

— You're Fanthorpe!

[After Jane Yolen tells her traditional Skylark Award lens mishap story, Eggleton responds]

I've got 6,000 plastic Godzillas in my house, and I *have* to put them where the sun doesn't shine ... or they'd melt.

[In her GOH speech, Connie Willis starts by considering current events — what I believe future histories will term The Matter of Monica]

The most used word was not, as you may have thought, "proportionally." Or "rule of law" (which is one word) ... but "besmirched."

... Now I'll give my speech — [breaks off] What is Trent Lott's hair *made of*?

[Willis enjoys every bit of the lit'ry life]

The number one advantage of being a writer: You get to make up stories and not be subpoenaed by Ken Starr.

... I had the flu, and went to see my doctor ... Whereupon I took the opportunity to ask him what the symptoms of scrofula are.

... You get to ask questions like, "If you had the plague and had to lance one of the buboes, what exactly would come out of it? And how far would it spurt?"

... When I wrote *Remake*, I had to lie on the couch watching Fred Astaire movies.

... Ovid said of writing, "The very toil gives pleasure and the growing work glows with the writer's heart."

[Deb attempts to follow Connie's act]

And since we know that no speech can adequately follow Connie: we're gonna sing.

[During a terrific SF-themed ripoff of the improv/game show Whose Line Is It Anyway? (here starring not Drew Carey but Esther Friesner, Josepha Sherman, Keith DeCandido, and Rick Cleary, with Michael and Nomi Burstein as moderators/judges) — for one bit, DeCandido plays an editor giving a party and Cleary a mystery guest who just might be Harlan Ellison, given that Cleary enters the scene by swaggering in on his knees, screaming]

YOU COULDN'T EDIT YOUR WAY
OUT OF MY ASS!

[And in another bit, DeCandido comes up with a great name for his superhero sidekick Cleary]

Glad you could make it, Mucous Membrane Man.

[In the Art Show, drooling unattractively in front of Morrissey's Resort at Tau Ceti, NESFAn Peter Grace explains art market economics to his 2-year-old]

Edwin, shall we bid on this or do you insist on a college education?

[For NESFAn Priscilla Olson, editing the con newsletter has been a joyous learning experience]

I wanted to do *Helmuth* on my Mac laptop, but ended up doing it on this damned PC with Word *[for Windows]*. I have to keep stopping and learn new command keystrokes.

[At breakfast this bleary Sunday morning, Lisa Hertel shares refined girl talk with fellow fanmom Cassandra Boell (as brother Michael and I fall silently off our feeds)]

No, labor wasn't all that bad. You know, after a couple of hours of screaming, the second epidural kicked in ...

[NESFAn Gay Ellen Dennett comes to the table bearing lollipops for dedicated volunteers like Lisa]

I just gave the chairwoman one of these. If I'd given her a flamingo pop, she would have had a bird.

[In the Green Room, SFRevu editor Ernest Lilley just zero-costed his weekend]

So Steve Sawicki and I have discovered the golden rule for making reviewing pay: Sell Review Copies.

We resisted it for a long time — mostly because it is, of course, wrong. But now, we've gone over to the dark side.

[Three people insisted I write down what Seth Breidbart said to his growing party at the door to Witherspoon's restaurant on Saturday, so here]

We have to go in before we absorb more people.

[Browsing around the Intergalactic Book Works stand, artist Cortney Skinner reveals why sketchers often look happier than scribblers]

Sometimes I'm glad I'm an artist, not a writer. If you're a midlist author, the advance for the book may be no more than what the illustrator will get for the cover.

[At his bookstall, Chris Edwards shows off new pix of young Hannah Susan]

Have you seen Lorna's and my new edition? ... A first edition, of course ...

And definitely limited.

[The State of Fantasy panel wanders from soft fantasy to hard publishing reality, as writer Craig Shaw Gardner considers the seamy side of stuff]

Then there's the ultimate sleazy move:
blurbing your own book under a
pseudonym.

*[Writer/publisher Cecilia Tan offers an instant
example]*

— "Writes better than me ..."

[So does writer/bookseller Glen Cook]

— A guy named Fitch, who wrote for a
porno line under several pseudonyms,
blurbed his own book like that: "I wish *I'd*
written this!"

[Josepha Sherman has more dark news]

The scariest thing, Barnes and Noble is buying Ingram, the big distributor ... Be kind to your independent bookstore while it's still around.

[In the audience, NESFAn Davey Snyder sneaks in some fantasy talk anyway]

Mary Gentle's book *Grunts* — it's absolutely spectacular. About what happens when the Orcs get AK-47s ... The hobbits are *not* cute.

Oh, and Sharon Shinn's *The Shape-Changer's Wife*: unbelievable.

[While Sherman stays with the (non)topic]

Say Barnes and Noble buys 10 copies of each new book. They track it all on computer. And if they sell only 8 of those 10 copies, for the writer's next title they order 8. And if they sell only 6 of *that* ...

It's called the Death Spiral. And it's why you're seeing so many people writing under other names.

[Gardner's been there]

With one book, my publisher was ecstatic. "Craig, this is the breakthrough book from you we've been waiting for.

"So we can't sell it under your name."

[Cook wanders back on topic]

I tell a lie when I said earlier I don't read fantasy. I do read some British fantasy ... They don't tell the same story over and over again.

Well, Tom Holt does.

[Gardner agrees]

— But it's a *good* story.

[Cook has the capper]

I was on a panel somewhere where we recommended Tolkien, and a kid jumped up in the back of the room: "You don't want to read Tolkien. It's a knock-off of Terry Brooks." But real slow, you know?

[Cook starts naming newer names]

Matt Ruff's *Fool on the Hill* is really terrific ... and I've never been able to read

his *Sewer, Gas, and Electric*, because I can't keep it in stock long enough.

[Sherman ends with a new entrant from last year]

Brown Girl in the Ring, by Nalo Hopkinson. I was an editor of the contest it won. And most of the submissions were terrible; you wouldn't believe them. And then you start to read hers, and it's wonderful, and you're saying "Oh God, don't let her screw up." And she didn't.

[Writer, screenwriter, and bon vivant Steve Sawicki helps me prep for my upcoming panel debut]

If you want to think whether new readers are having trouble with, you know, Heinlein or that generation, think about your own attitude, when you were coming up, to Verne and Wells.

[At the panel on *Rediscovering the Classics*, I firmly take charge]

... It — it's my first panel, so please. Be gentle.

[Jim Mann is deeply into Verne]

The annotated *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* is not only annotated, it's a restored edition!

[NESFAn Mark Olson congratulates a teenager in the audience]

You like Bradbury and Ellison. They're good writers — which none of the SF writers I read when I was your age were.

[But he attempts to eschew the "C" word]

In our NESFA Choice books at NESFA Press — we're trying to avoid the use of the word "classic." It sounds like it means "dull."

[Wise fan Nancy Armstrong, from the audience]

As there are comfort foods, there are comfort books. In your personal life — here comes unemployment? OK, let's go to *The Lord of the Rings* again.

[Mann brings a fresh heart to every reread]

I somehow think the character won't die this time.

[Ernest Lilley, in the audience]

— Yes, there's that willing suspension of predestination.

[A face in the crowd rediscovers (OK, steals) a classic line]

I read *The City and the Stars* when I was 13 — which is the real Golden Age of Science Fiction.

[Writer Steve Miller rediscovered something just recently]

We went across the country by train, and I realized that Andre Norton's spaceships are all train stations. She has all these analogs for oil tanks, and colliers, hoses and connections.

[NESFAn Craig McDonough, in the audience]

— I think they're more seaports.

[Miller brings the memory of one short story classic back with a fresh angle]

I was fortunate enough to know Roger Zelazny. I was speaking to him as the first Mars flyby was taking place, and he said, "Now 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes' is a fantasy story."

[Fanzine maniac Mark Leeper to wife Evelyn, in the hall]

Did you use my line in the panel on Julian Jaynes and that bicameral theory: "I'm of two minds about this"?

[In the panel on Graphic Novels, Teresa Nielsen Hayden throws us the comic book *Bone*]

It's as if somebody crossed *The Lord of the Rings* with *Pogo*.

[A Q from the audience]

Why do so many of the fantasy publishers look down on fantasy comic books?

[And an A from Brenda Clough]

— There are ghettos within ghettos.

[Writer Madeleine Robins plays *I Remember Mama*]

My mother said, "If you read comic books, you'll never read anything else."

[Clough also suffered maternal depredation]

— My mother threw out the issue of *The Legion of Superheroes* where Lightning Lad died. Do you know how much that issue is worth now?

[Keith DeCandido also]

— That's because everybody else's mother threw it out too.

[In fact, Robins has some motherly advice for us]

Do not give your 10-year-old kid *Watchmen*, or *Dark Knight*, or *The Invisibles*.

[Nielsen Hayden sits up with a bang]

Ooh, *The Invisibles* had the first on-screen orgasm I ever saw in comic books.

[At the Gripe Session, Deb Geisler reveals why some hucksters are all wet]

The hotel 2 weeks ago installed a new HVAC system, and the general manager is not well pleased. He said he paid \$200,000.

I said he could have paid \$50 more and got one that didn't leak all over the dealers' room.

[And as the con draws to a close, Priscilla Olson shows why some people love *Boskone* and some not, for the same reasons]

At any one time, 50% to 75% of the people are in the program rooms.

Our Man in Tegucigalpa

The Devniad's Central American correspondent (our nephew Jarrod Ferrara, just posted to Honduras for a Peace Corps stint) has filed his first report of breaking news from that country's still storm-torn, flood-ravaged capital. However, due to

circumstances in-country, the briefing comes indirectly, via unofficial channels. (Phone call to his mother Kathy Ferrara, then casual chat with *her* sister Maureen which was passed on to your editor while Her Majesty was falling asleep on the couch.) Details are sketchy.

Here's what we know for certain:

The weather so far is actually kinda cool, since Jarrod's staying in a house in the hills above the city. Also, there was a mouse in his bed one night that woke him up. Man, he almost freaked for a minute.

Further details to follow.

From "Deep Thoughts"

by Jack Handey

(on TV's old *Saturday Night Live*)

"When you're riding in a time machine way far into the future, don't stick your elbow out the window, or it'll turn into a fossil."

Words from all over

ecesis

The establishment of a plant or animal in a new habitat

locket

A patch of light-colored fur under a cat's neck

perruque

A French idiomatic expression meaning work one does for oneself in the guise of work done for an employer, as when one photocopies personal material on the office account

AND SOME COOL AUSTRALIAN VERBALISMS

as scarce as rocking-horse manure

Rare

bluey

A redhead! Or a swag

crumbles

Elderly parents

duck's dinner

A drink of water, with nothing to eat

Esky

An insulated cooler box

— All from *Aussie Slang Dictionary*, at <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Plains/9740/slang.html>

FlimFan

EXCELLENT:

Life Is Beautiful — See this one for yourself, because afterward you'll have a big decision to make. *Life Is Beautiful* was co-written, directed by, and stars the gifted Italian comic actor Roberto Benigni. The question is, with this film does he prove himself an insensitive, exploitative monster of vanity or a brave artist who dares anything? Right now I'm leaning for the second choice, which might make this movie a masterpiece. It's certainly got a great movie's daring simplicity and jaw-dropping riskiness. Can't recall many other films you'd file under "concentration camp comedy." (OK, there's Lina Wertmuller's amazing 1976 flick *Seven Beauties*. Man, these Italians have got balls. Sorry, Lina.) The first half is a beautiful little love comedy set in the late 1930s, where clownish Guido (Benigni) woos beautiful schoolteacher Dora (winningly played by his off-screen wife, Nicoletta Braschi) by taking brilliant advantage of a series of silly coincidences. Even through this genuinely charming, Chaplinesque material, we catch glimpses of the fascist cauldron that public life in Italy has become; yet they're mostly played for laughs. (Early on, Guido is delicately inquiring after a new acquaintance's political views when the guy starts barking orders at his two rambunctious sons, Benito and Adolfo.) But with the second half of the

movie, you'd think the laughter would stop: it turns out Guido is Jewish, and late in the war he, Dora, and their little son fall into the hands of the Nazis. Yet Guido keeps on clowning, trying to protect the boy by explaining this is all a game, and the Nazis — "those big mean guys who keep yelling at us" — are just playing their parts ... I'm still thinking about this movie. To be honest, I didn't laugh much in the second half. But maybe I should have. What am I afraid of, big mean guys might yell at me?

GOOD:

Waking Ned Devine — This leisurely character comedy (Queen Maureen says slow, I say leisurely) showcases the havoc hatched in an Irish village when it's learned someone in Tullymore (pop: 53) has won a big lottery, but no one comes forward. A donnybrook of busybodiness and scheming instantly commences, much of it authored by shrewd Jackie O'Shea (Ian Bannen) and his easy-going friend Michael O'Sullivan (David Kelly). You know you're not in Hollywood anymore when you realize these longtoothed lads — Bannen and Kelly were both 68 during the filming, if we can believe anything actors tell us about their ages — are going to be the heroes. Don't worry, there's still lashings of action and sex. Like when Jackie leaps into action and puts on a chicken dinner. And the sex scene I'm thinking of involving Jackie's wife bringing him dessert. (Fionnula Flanagan practices an exasperated tough love that long-married couples should find familiar.) But I quickly bought into the film's unforced pace. It's no *Local Hero* or *The Commitments*, yet a satisfyingly Celtic night at the flicks nevertheless. The scenery alone was worth the ticket price. My heart soared with gladness at sight of the homeland I have never seen, the emerald swales and lovely wee town, the russet sea cliffs and golden strands of Ireland, my Ireland! Oh, all filmed in the Isle of Man? Never mind. Just go to *Waking Ned Devine* and bask in the quiet joys of nosy neighborliness, city-fella hoodwinking, fruity soaps, and buck-naked motorbiking.

October Sky — Based on the recent memoir by Homer Hickam, *Rocket Boys* (a much better title), this drama recalls how the launch of Sputnik in October 1957 galvanizes four high school guys in a hardscrabble West Virginia coal town to take up rocketry. When an early runaway projective heads straight for a population center like — well, a rocket, the boys take to their heels, one yelling over his shoulder "I told you we didn't know what we were doing." Not so the filmmakers, who know exactly how they want us to feel at every moment. OK, I laughed, I cried, I admired the fine period visuals, evocative hill country locations, and strong, simple storytelling. I was moved by the willpower young Homer (Jake Gyllenhaal) shows in striving for the stars to escape the mines; and by his stubborn warfare with his no-nonsense father (Chris Cooper, who in the film's only complex performance projects innate decency even while being a gruff prick). And look, it's cool they've chosen a subject like *Boy Engineers* instead of just trying for *Porky's IV*. Plus I liked the early humor, as when scores of classmates gather to watch a launch — one RB establishes the immensity of the stakes: "That thing had better fly or you can kiss your chances of losing your virginity goodbye." But this movie is way over-obvious in spots. And you get only the briefest possible sketch of young minds actually engaging with the scientific method; you spend more time watching miners mining than students studying. Also, brief home movie clips of the real junior scientists reveal the filmmakers didn't have the guts to give hunky Gyllenhaal the actual Homer's glasses. And most distressing of all: the heart of every SF fan must sink when a librarian's proffer of Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* is scorned by Homer in favor of math and engineering textbooks. Holy priggishness, Rocket Boy ...

Backchat

on APA:NESFA #344, January 1999

Aaargghhh. No time!

Look, you were all brilliant. See you next time.

FlimFan Agin
(oh, well, if I've got
room for two more ...)

EXCELLENT:

The Thin Red Line — Poetic, intimate, mystical, intense; windy, slow, and shot with greatness, this story is a meditation by someone who's done a little fighting and a lot of waiting and thinking in between. Which describes novelist James Jones, who fought as a grunt at Guadalcanal and survived to write about it. And also director Terrence Malick, who fought Hollywood to give the world *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heaven* (1978) but made no more movies until this current brave adaptation of Jones' 1962 book. You could say the story follows some individuals in an Army squad and their officers before and during World War II's 1942-43 battle for Guadalcanal, a Japanese island stronghold in the South Pacific. That's factual, but not true. The movie actually focuses, not on the soldiers, but on their souls. You get dialog and exterior action — although action fans be warned, there's not a shot fired for the whole first part of the film — but you feel Malick's greatest attention on a series of lyrical interior monologues ... nature shots ... flashbacks ... reveries. There's more here of Virginia Woolf than Stephen Ambrose. The soldiers' thoughts resound with questions: Is nature our killer or our savior? Do all men really have the same face? She and I, will our love ever die? Does any spark of us survive death? Death comes eventually to the movie, beginning with a beautiful and terrifying battle that rages around one well-defended ridge in the grassy highlands. *The Thin Red Line* is one of the most stunningly photographed movies of the decade, and the folds of land in those highlands look like nowhere else on earth; I think I'll remember the struggle pictured there forever. The cast is also memorable: Sean Penn as Sergeant Welsh and Nick Nolte as Lieutenant Colonel Tall have the showiest, standout roles. They're not exactly heroes, though; Jones was not fond of

authority. The closest thing to a hero here would be relative newcomer Jim Caviezel as Private Witt, the conscience of the movie. Who gazes at a dying bird and says, "Some people see the pain, but some see past that to the glory." Tellingly, it's Witt who looks with the clearest eye on the trees and the birds and the sky and the water. And above all, the grass. O the grass! It waves unendingly in the winds of those highlands, sheltering both enemy and friend, life and death. I remember John Savage's character, returned from a murderous firefight, trembling, tearing up blades of grass and thrusting them at some white-faced infantrymen, crying: "That's us! That's us!" Us too, we know ...

GOOD, COULD HAVE BEEN GREAT:

Rushmore — What's wrong with Max Fischer is he tries to do too much. That's also what's wrong with this movie, to the extent that anything is. A smart, unnervingly self-assured scholarship student at Rushmore prep school, Max (Jason Schwartzman) hustles to be on every team and take a central role in every extracurricular club the mind of Max has conceived, but he also manages to write dramatic extravaganzas for the school's drama squad (the Max Fischer Players), to fall in love with pretty new teacher Miss Cross (Olivia Williams, and I see Max's point), and to wow a rich visiting parent, Mr. Blume. After meeting Max, Blume asks Dr. Guggenheim, the headmaster (Brian Cox), about this truly impressive prodigy. Guggenheim sighs a deep sigh and looks after Max with haunted eyes: "He's one of the worst students we've got." Since Blume is played by Bill Murray, he and Max immediately become great friends, and the movie develops from there. The comedy bits are great: the scenes from Max's plays, Blume's horrible sons and his wondering revulsion at the way they've turned out, Max pitching woo to Miss Cross over the first's grade's aquarium. But this movie tries to do more; it has real pain in store for all the major characters. These darker revelations are a little unexpected, and not

as deftly handled as the comedic stuff. Still
... see it, enjoy the many laughs, and expect
more next time from young director Wes
Anderson.
ZINE END.